The Catharsis of Prosecution: Royal Violence, Poetic Justice, and Public Emotion in the Russian *Hamlet* (1748)*

Kirill Ospovat

1 Introduction: The Politics of Catharsis in Early Modern Europe and Russia

Early modern tragedy, and particularly French *tragédie classique* and its imitations across Europe, famously represents a cultural site that brought together the elaborate learned tradition of Aristotelian poetics with visions of absolute sovereignty and their re-enactments in the institutional spaces of royal courts and theatres. Summarising what is for him a distortion of Aristotle in seventeenth-century dramatic theory and practice, Walter Benjamin famously emphasises their political nature. He concludes that the original ‘cultic character of the Greek theatre’ as a background for tragedy is replaced, in the 1600s, by royal politics: ‘it is the single fact of the royal hero which prompted the critics to relate the new *Trauerspiel* to the ancient tragedy of the Greeks.’¹ Aristotle himself (to quote André Dacier’s authoritative French version of 1692 and its English adaptation) required that tragedy should represent the actions of those ‘who are of Eminent Quality, and of Great Reputation’ (‘qui sont dans une fortune éclatante, & dans une grande réputation’), and Dacier insisted on this requirement in his *Remarques*.² Decades earlier, Abbé d’Aubignac, in his professedly Aristotelian treatise *La pratique du théâtre* (*The Practice of Theatre*,

* This essay includes a part of my larger study, *Terror and Pity: Aleksandr Sumarokov and the Theater of Power in Elizabethan Russia*, which encompasses a much more detailed discussion of the issues addressed here in their political and literary contexts. This study was conceived and completed within the DramaNet project and is forthcoming with Academic Studies Press (Boston).

1 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1985), p. 61.

2 *La Poétique d’Aristote, traduite en françois avec des remarques critiques [...] par André Dacier* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1692; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1976), pp. 173, 179; *Aristotle’s Art of Poetry, Translated from the Original Greek [...] Together with Mr. D’Acier’s Notes from the French* (London: D. Browne and W. Turner, 1705), pp. 186–87.

1657), which was conceived under the patronage of Cardinal Richelieu, had written that:

La *Tragédie* représentait la vie des Princes, plein d'inquiétudes, de soupçons, de troubles, de rébellions, de guerres, de meurtres, de passions violentes et de grandes aventures [...] ce terme ne veut rien dire sinon *Une chose magnifique, sérieuse, grave et convenable aux agitations & aux grands revers de la fortune des Princes*.

Tragedy represented the Life of Princes and great People full of disquiets, suspicions, troubles, rebellions, wars, murders, and all sorts of violent passions, and mighty adventures [...] that word, in its true signification, meaning nothing else but a Magnificent, serious, grave poem, conformable to the Agitations and sudden turns of fortune of great people.³

This definition of tragedy as an appropriate medium for the representation of political crises builds upon Aristotle's notion of *peripeteia*, the drastic reversal of a character's fortune that is primarily responsible for the complex emotional effects of tragedy. In his own draft adaptation of the *Poetics* Jean Racine, one of the most prominent tragedians of the seventeenth century, maps *peripeteia* onto political hierarchies of rank and privilege in an almost imperceptible shift of the original logic: a tragic character is now someone 'who through his own fault brings about his misfortune and falls from great felicity and highest rank into great misery' ('qui, par sa faute, devienne malheureux et tombe d'une grande félicité et d'un rang très-considérable dans une grande misère').⁴ The fall from power thus becomes, in early modern Europe, the definition of a tragic plot.⁵

As Benjamin and Stephen Greenblatt agree, in the emotional economy of early modern tragedy 'fear and pity are not seen as participation in the

3 François-Hédelin d'Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, ed. by Hélène Baby (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), pp. 210–11; [François-Hédelin d'Aubignac], *The Whole Art of the Stage* (London, 1684; repr. New York: Blom, 1968), p. 140.

4 Jean Racine, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1962), p. 588. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

5 Hans-Jürgen Schings, 'Consolatio Tragoediae: Zur Theorie des barocken Trauerspiels', in *Deutsche Dramentheorien: Beiträge zu einer historischen Poetik des Dramas in Deutschland*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm, (Frankfurt a.M.: Atheneum, 1971), pp. 30–31; Ronald L. Martinez, 'Tragic Machiavelli', in *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli: Essays on the Literary Works*, ed. by Vickie B. Sullivan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 111–12; Margreta de Grazia, *'Hamlet' without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 52.

integral whole of the action, but as participation in the fate of the most outstanding characters'; it is 'a dread bound up with the fate of particular situated individuals', immediately inscribed into the collective social and political experience.⁶ Further developing this approach, Anselm Haverkamp revives Benjamin's claim that the ultimate tragic figure is the corpse: 'In the *Trauerspiel* of the seventeenth century the corpse becomes quite simply the pre-eminent emblematic property [...] and it is the function of the tyrant to provide the *Trauerspiel* with them.'⁷ In a reading evocative of Foucault's discussion of public executions as spectacular stagings of authority, Haverkamp links the expressive powers of the corpse to a specific conception of sovereignty that is fundamental to early modern drama. According to Benjamin, drama 'makes a special point of endowing the ruler with the gesture of executive power'—'die Geste der Vollstreckung'—which is also the gesture of execution.⁸ As Haverkamp would have it, 'the corpses become emblematic not only physically but as a result and proof of execution, meaningful only in the dismemberment whose gesture is the object of *Trauerspiel*.'⁹ It is from this perspective that Haverkamp addresses the well-known passage from Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) that recounts the story of Ramiro d'Orco, Cesare Borgia's deputy who was brutally disposed of by his master:

E perché cognosceva le rigorosità passate avergli generato qualche odio, per purgare li animi di quelli popoli e guadagnarseli in tutto volse mostrare che, se crudeltà alcuna era seguita, non era causata da llui ma dalla acerba natura del ministro. E presa sopra a questo occasione, lo fece a Cesena una mattina mettere in dua pezi in sulla piazza, con un pezo di legne et uno coltello sanguinoso accanto; la ferocità del quale spettacolo fece quegli popoli in uno tempo rimanere satisfatti e stupidi.

And because he [Cesare] knew that [Ramiro's] recent harshness had generated some hatred, in order to clear the minds of the people, and gain them over to his cause completely, he determined to make plain that whatever cruelty had occurred had come, not from him, but from

6 Benjamin, p. 61; Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 133.

7 Benjamin, pp. 218–19.

8 Ibid., p. 69.

9 Anselm Haverkamp, *Shakespearean Genealogies of Power: A Whispering of Nothing in 'Hamlet', 'Richard II', 'Julius Caesar', 'Macbeth', 'The Merchant of Venice', and 'The Winter's Tale'* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 79.

the brutal character of the minister. Taking a proper occasion, therefore, he had him placed on the public square of Cesena one morning, in two pieces, with a piece of wood beside him and a bloody knife. The ferocity of the scene left the people at once stunned and satisfied.¹⁰

Many scholars have noted that Machiavelli discusses violence and submission in terms reminiscent of the Aristotelian concept of tragic catharsis, a purgation of fear and pity that should be engendered by the tragic plot.¹¹ In fact, this account represents a crucial juncture at which the language of tragic aesthetics was appropriated by the emerging culture of 'absolutist' authoritarian violence. The very notion of catharsis, as Déborah Blocker has argued, was originally singled out as the conceptual centrepiece of Aristotle's *Poetics* by Florentine humanists who constructed an emotional economy of civic appeasement for the Medici principate in the decades immediately following the publication of Machiavelli's *Prince*.¹² In his reading of the Ramiro d'Orco episode, Haverkamp speaks of an 'ironic catharsis' that replaces the moral effect suggested by the Aristotelian language with a public stupefaction as meaningless as the violence itself. In fact, however, this stupefaction does not fall outside the range of legitimate and culturally relevant aesthetic and political emotions. On the political side, Machiavelli himself recommended that authority should be based on public fear. Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) developed both a political doctrine and an aesthetic of fear, amalgamating them in the famous engraving showing the state body to be constituted by a mass of subjects worshipping the sovereign head.¹³ On the dramatic side, catharsis was regularly taken to imply 'shocking' ('percellere') the audience. To quote Gerhard Vossius's authoritative definition from 1647, 'the

-
- 10 Niccolò Machiavelli, *De Principatibus*, in *Opere*, ed. by Rinaldo Rinaldi (Torino: UTET, 1999), pp. 182–83. English translation is from Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince: A Revised Translation, Backgrounds, Interpretations, Marginalia*, trans. and ed. by Robert M. Adams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 21.
 - 11 Steven Mullaney, 'Apprehending Subjects, or the Reformation in the Suburbs', in *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 88–91; Martinez, p. 113; Sandro Landi, "'Per purgare li animi di quelli populi': Metafore del vincolo politico e religioso in Machiavelli", in *Storia del pensiero politico*, 2 (2014), pp. 205–06.
 - 12 Déborah Blocker, 'Dire l'"art" à Florence sous Cosme I de Médicis: une Poétique d'Aristote au service du Prince', *AISTHE*, 2 (2008), pp. 83–88. See also Blocker's essay in the current volume.
 - 13 Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes, der Leviathan: das Urbild des modernen Staates und seine Gegenbilder* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2003), pp. 11–16, 160. See also Blocker's essay in the current volume.

listener is shocked by the dreadfulness [*atrocitas*] of the deed itself, while the dignity of the characters increases the outrageousness of the situation.¹⁴

Informed by both aesthetic and juridical concerns, the parallel between tragedy and public executions as rituals of power remained a central trope in the discussion of dramatic effect and penal practice at least until the late eighteenth century.¹⁵ In 1611, another influential Aristotelian theorist, Daniel Heinsius, mentioned that ancient ‘tyrants’ used to include real and painful executions in the performances of tragedies ‘for the oblectation and pleasure of theatres’ (‘in oblectationem, et ad voluptatem theatri’).¹⁶ Commenting on one of the primeval scenes of absolutist violence, the execution of Egmont and Horn in 1568, Montaigne described it as a ‘tragedy’ staged by the Spanish governor of the Netherlands, the Duke of Alba (*Essais* I. 7). Two centuries later, in the chapter ‘Of the Effects of Tragedy’ from his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke argued that even ‘the most sublime and affecting tragedy’ would not be able to exercise an emotional attraction comparable to that of the public execution of a ‘state criminal of high rank’. Not incidentally, Burke’s definition of the sublime included a Hobbesian vision of royal power associated with ‘terror’: ‘Sovereigns are frequently addressed with the title of *dread majesty*.’¹⁷ Tragedy, with its catharsis, provided an important paradigm for the mode of rule which, in Foucault’s eloquent description, resorted to the ‘atrocities’ of public executions as ‘a certain mechanism of power: of a power that not only did not hesitate to exert itself directly on bodies, but was exalted and strengthened by its visible manifestations [...] of a power which, in the absence of continual supervision, sought a renewal of its effect in the spectacle of its individual manifestations; of a power that was recharged in the ritual display of its reality as “super-power”’.¹⁸

As a ‘scenario of power’, tragedy negotiated between the two contrasting facets of absolutist rule: its aspiration to an all-embracing, ‘civilised’ emotional

-
- 14 Gerardus Joannes Vossius, *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres: Institutes of Poetics in Three Books*, ed., trans. and commentary by Jan Bloemendal with Edwin Rabbie (Leiden: Brill, 2010), I, pp. 510–11; Schings, p. 14.
 - 15 Schings, p. 29; Carsten Zelle, ‘Strafen und Schrecken: Einführende Bemerkungen zur Parallele zwischen dem Schauspiel der Tragödie und der Tragödie der Hinrichtung’, in *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 28 (1984), pp. 76–103.
 - 16 Daniel Heinsius, *De constitutione tragoediae: La constitution de la tragédie: dite La poétique d’Heinsius*, ed. and trans. by Anne Duprat (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2001), pp. 35, 238.
 - 17 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. by J.T. Boulton (London: Routledge & Paul, 1958), pp. 47, 67.
 - 18 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 57.

discipline and pacification of subjects, and its dependence on spectacular 'barbaric' atrocity as a crucial source of legitimacy.¹⁹ As Stephen Greenblatt concludes, theatrical re-enactments of kingship existed to reveal 'paradoxes, ambiguities, and tensions of authority', since 'the enhancement of royal power is not only a matter of the deferral of doubt: the very doubts that Shakespeare raises serve not to rob the king of his charisma but to heighten it, precisely as they heighten the theatrical interest of the play'.²⁰ In Machiavelli's treatise, the notion of 'spectacle' ('spettaculo') evoked to describe the execution of Ramiro d'Orco reappears once again in the author's advice to the prince 'to entertain his people with festivals and spectacles' in order to keep them content.²¹ This ambiguous political appropriation of spectacle also underlay Aubignac's *La pratique du theatre*, whose preface expressly grounds dramatic poetics in a political vision of royally sponsored public diversions:

les Souverains ne peuvent rien faire de plus avantageux pour leur gloire, et pour le bien de leurs Sujets, que d'établir, et d'entretenir les Spectacles et les Jeux publics avec un bel ordre, et avec des magnificences dignes de leur Couronne. Il faut bien certes que les Spectacles soient très importants au gouvernement des États.

Princes can never do any thing more advantageous for their own Glory, nor for their Peoples Happiness, than to found, settle, and maintain at

19 I borrow the term 'scenario of power' from Richard Wortman's seminal work on Russian imperial symbolism: Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Walter Benjamin has linked early modern tragic drama to a vision of sovereignty as originating in spectacular royal violence made possible by a 'state of exception' beyond any law, a vision which 'positively demands the completion of the image of the sovereign, as a tyrant' (Benjamin, p. 69). This conception, which relies on Carl Schmitt's reading of early modern political thought, was later developed by Louis Marin in 'Théâtralité et pouvoir: Magie, machination, machine: *Médée* de Corneille', in *Politiques de la représentation* (Paris: Kimé, 2005), pp. 263–85. In a recent essay, Bernhard Huss has opposed the sombre world of Racine's tragedies to the doctrine of catharsis as appropriated by the 'official' moralism of the court: Bernhard Huss, 'Die Katharsis, Jean Racine und das Problem einer tragischen Reinigung bei Hofe', in *PhiN—Philologie im Netz*, 49 (2009), pp. 35–55, <http://web.fu-berlin.de/phn/phn49/p49t2.htm>. In fact, however, Racine's well-documented success at Louis XIV's court seems to confirm Benjamin's view of *Trauerspiel* as a genre which both forges and builds upon the propensity of early modern elites to pessimistic ('tragic' or 'melancholic') self-reflection.

20 Greenblatt, p. 65.

21 Machiavelli, p. 63.

their own Charges, publick Spectacles, Games, and other Diversions, in the greatest Order, and the noblest Magnificence that their Crown will afford. And without doubt they have always been thought very important to the very Political part of Government.²²

Accordingly, the main reason for writing and performing tragedies is the disciplining effect they can have on the audience of subjects:

Il ne faut pas s'imaginer pourtant, que les Spectacles ne puissent rien donner qu'une splendeur vaine et inutile. C'est une secrète instruction des choses, les plus utiles au Peuple et les plus difficiles à lui persuader. [...] La principale règle du Poème Dramatique, est que les vertus y soient toujours récompensées, ou pour le moins toujours louées, malgré les outrages de la Fortune, et que les vices y soient toujours punis, ou pour le moins toujours en horreur, quand même ils y triomphent. Le Théâtre donc étant ainsi réglé, quels enseignements la Philosophie peut-elle avoir qui n'y deviennent sensibles? C'est-là que les plus grossiers [...] ne doutent point que le Ciel ne punisse les coupables par l'horreur de leur forfait, quand Oreste bourrelé de sa propre conscience, y fait ses plaintes, et paraît agité publiquement de sa fureur. C'est-là que l'Ambition passe devant eux, comme un grand mal, quand ils considèrent un Ambitieux plus travaillé par sa passion que par ses Ennemis, violer les lois du Ciel & de la Terre, et tomber en des malheurs inconcevables, pour avoir trop entrepris. [...] Enfin c'est-là qu'un Homme supposé les rend capables de pénétrer dans les plus profonds sentiments de l'humanité, touchant au doigt et à l'œil, s'il faut ainsi dire, dans ces peintures vivantes des vérités qu'ils ne pourraient concevoir autrement. Mais ce qui est de remarquable, c'est que jamais ils ne sortent du Théâtre, qu'ils ne remportent avec l'idée des personnes qu'on leur a représentées, la connaissance des vertus & des vices, dont ils ont vu les exemples.

We are not nevertheless to imagine that these Publick Spectacles afford nothing but a vain Splendour, without any real Utility; for they are a secret

22 D'Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, p. 43; *The Whole Art of the Stage*, p. 7. For an analysis of d'Aubignac's argument and its political background, see Baby's introduction to the French edition (pp. 496–97) and, more generally, Blocker's insightful study of the political agendas behind the shaping of neoclassical theatrical practices in France under Richelieu in her *Instituer un 'art': Politiques du théâtre dans la France du premier XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009).

instruction to the People of many things, which it would be hard to insinuate into them any other way. [...] One of the chiefest, and indeed the most indispensable Rule of Drammatick Poems, is, that in them Virtues always ought to be rewarded, or at least commended, in spite of all the Injuries of Fortune; and that likewise Vices will always be punished, or at least detested with Horrour, though they triumph upon the Stage for a time. The Stage being thus regulated, what can Philosophy teach that won't become much more sensibly touching by Representation; 'tis there that the meanest Capacities [...] are convinced that Heaven punishes the horrid Crimes of the Guilty with the remorse of them; when they see Orestes tormented by his own Conscience, and driven about by the Furies within his own Breast; 'tis there that Ambition seems to them a very dangerous Passion, when they see a man engaged in Crimes, to attain his ends, and after having violated the Laws of Heaven and Earth, fall into Misfortunes as great as those he had overwhelmed others in, and more tormented by himself than by his Enemies. [...] And lastly, 'tis here that a Man, by Representation, makes them penetrate into the most hidden secrets of Human Nature, while they seem to touch and feel in this living Picture, those Truths which else they would scarce be capable of: But that which is most remarkable, is, That they never go from the Theatre without carrying along with them the Idea of the Persons represented; the knowledge of those Virtues and Vices, of which they have seen the Examples.²³

In his rearrangement of Aristotelian concepts, Aubignac links the dramatic effect of catharsis to catastrophes that claim the legitimacy of divine justice. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle indeed suggested that tragedies should profit from the impression that the events they represent are steered by divine design rather than mere chance, for example when 'the statue of Mitys at Argos [...] fell on his Murderer, and killed him on the spot'.²⁴ The legally trained master tragedian Pierre Corneille suggested in 1660 that Aristotle developed his conception of tragedy as a fictionalised and mystified substitute for a system of political justice that was missing in his age but had been since established: 'la punition des méchantes actions, et la récompense des bonnes, n'étaient pas de l'usage de son siècle, comme nous les avons rendues de celui du nôtre.'²⁵ For Aubignac

23 D'Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, pp. 39–42; *The Whole Art of the Stage*, pp. 3–6.

24 Aristotle's *Art of Poetry*, p. 140.

25 Pierre Corneille, *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique*, ed. by B. Louvat and M. Escola (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1999), p. 100.

even more than for Corneille, punishment of the guilty becomes a paradigmatic tragic action and a central source of the tragic effect: fear. This effect is, in turn, aligned with introspection—conscience—which maps the exigencies of obedience (the opposite of ambition, styled here as the ultimate political sin) onto ‘the modern “soul”’, which, according to Foucault, ‘in historical reality [...], unlike the soul represented by Christian theology, is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint.’²⁶

This vision of theatre shaped the importation of classicising tragedy to mid-eighteenth-century Russia, which was almost single-handedly carried out by the court dramatist and theatre director Aleksandr Sumarokov (1717–1777).²⁷ His plays, which were written from 1747 and staged from 1750 onwards, were intended to inaugurate both the national (or, rather, imperial) ‘classicist’ canon of dramatic literature and a Russian-language theatre at a court that already entertained an Italian operatic company and a French dramatic company. Indeed, such a theatre was officially established under Sumarokov’s supervision in 1756. This institutional development was anticipated by the prominent Parisian actor and theatrical writer Louis Riccoboni, who dedicated his 1743 treatise *De la réformation du théâtre* (*On the Reformation of Theatre*) to Russia’s Empress Elizabeth. In this dedication, which was favourably received by the empress, Riccoboni suggested the establishment of a theatre in Russian that would function as an institution of public discipline, ‘suited to fashion wise politicians, courageous soldiers, good citizens, magistrates upright and zealous in state service’ (*propre à former de sages Politiques, d’intrépides Soldats, de bons Citoyens, des Magistrats integres & zéléz pour L’Etat*).²⁸ This was not the only instance when Aubignac’s politicised interpretation of dramatic poetics was applied to Russian practices. In a lengthy 1750 critique of Sumarokov’s oeuvre, his long-time adversary, the Paris-educated erudite Vasilii Trediakovskii, reiterated Aubignac’s precepts for tragedies:

26 Foucault, p. 29.

27 On Sumarokov, see Marcus Levitt, ‘Sumarokov: Life and Works’, in *Early Modern Russian Letters: Texts and Contexts* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), pp. 6–21, and other essays in this volume. On the early history of Russian court theatre, see V.N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Teatr v Rossii pri imperatritse Elizavete Petrovne* (Saint Petersburg: Giperion, 2003); F.G. Volkov *i russkii teatr ego vremeni. Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. by Iu A. Dmitriev (Moscow: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1953); *Teatral’naia zhizn’ Rossii v epokhu [...] Elizavety Petrovny [...] Dokumental’naia khronika*, ed. by L.M. Starikova, vol. II. 1 (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), vol. II. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), vol. III. 1 (Moscow: Nauka, 2011).

28 Louis Riccoboni, *De la réformation du théâtre* ([Paris], 1743), pp. vii–viii.

Трагедия делается для того, по главнейшему и первейшему своему установлению, чтоб вложить в зрителей любовь к добродетели и крайнюю ненависть к злости и омерзение ею не учительским, но некоторым приятным образом. Чего ради [...] надобно всегда отдавать преимущество добрым делам, а злодеянию, сколько б оно ни имело каких успехов, всегда б наконец быть в поправлении, подражая сим самым действиям Божиим.

According to its most important and primary statute, tragedy is produced in order to inculcate the audience with love for virtue and an extreme hatred for evil and a contempt for it in a pleasant rather than didactic fashion. Therefore [...] one must always give the upper hand to good deeds, and evildoing, however many successes it may have, must always end up defeated, in this way imitating the very actions of God.²⁹

Although Trediakovskii's text was a first experimental attempt to develop learned (and, specifically, Aristotelian) literary criticism in Russian, his newly imported definition of tragedy was not devoid of resonances with the experiences of the Russian court. Twenty years earlier, in 1730, the Spanish ambassador to Saint Petersburg, Duke of Liria, had noted:

Июля 6 <-го> кончили совершенную гибель дома Долгоруковых. Князь Алексей, отец обрученной невесты Петра II, был сослан со всем своим семейством на Березов остров, где прежде его содержался несчастный Меншиков [...] Таков был трагический конец этой ветви дома Долгоруковых, которую любил Петр II, и кажется, что падение оной было справедливым судом Божиим, для наказания их дурных дел, безмерного высокомерия и тщеславия.

June 6 sealed the final ruin of the house of Dolgorukii. Prince Aleksei, the father of the betrothed bride of Peter II, was exiled with all his family to the Berезov island which before that had harboured the unfortunate Menshikov [...] This was the tragic end of this branch of the house of Dolgorukii, favoured by Peter II, and it seems that its fall was effected by

29 V.K. Trediakovskii, 'Pis'mo, v kotorom sodержitsia rassuzhdenie o stikhotvorenii, ponyne na svet izdannom [...] pisannoe ot priiatelia k priiateliu', in *Kritika XVIII veka*, ed. by A.M. Ranchin and V.L. Korovin (Moskva: Olimp, 2002), p. 92. I quote from the translation in Levitt, 'Sumarokov's Russianized *Hamlet*: Texts and Contexts', in *Early Modern Russian Letters*, pp. 86–87.

divine justice, to punish them for their mischief and boundless haughtiness and vanity.³⁰

As do Aubignac and Trediakovskii, Liria associates the concept of the 'tragic' with a spectacular fall from power that is interpreted as divine punishment for excessive ambition. In this case, such language is evoked to justify an ostentatiously arbitrary act of royal terror: Empress Anna's punishment of a noble clan that had all but ruled Russia under her predecessor Peter II. Liria's statement negotiates between the discourses of literature and politics just as it does between local Russian experience and pan-European cultural idioms: as a member of the British royal house of Stuart serving as a Spanish diplomat in Russia, Liria epitomised the cosmopolitanism of early modern ruling elites. His association of the fall of Dolgorukiis with tragedy was not unprecedented: his friend Jane Rondeau, wife of two consecutive British representatives in Russia, concurred that it would 'make a pretty story for a tragedy'.³¹ There is little doubt that the parallel between royal violence and tragedy was still relevant for both Sumarokov and Trediakovskii. The ascension of Empress Elizabeth in the wake of a palace revolution in November 1741 was followed by two spectacular political trials of high-standing courtiers: Russia's most cunning diplomat, Count Heinrich Johann Friedrich Ostermann, and her most famous general, the charismatic and popular Field Marshal Count Burchard Christoph von Münnich. Sumarokov himself had been a client of and adjutant to another convict in that trial, the former Chancellor Mikhail Golovkin. In early 1742 they were sentenced to death and led to the scaffold, where they were granted a royal pardon that substituted permanent Siberian exile for capital punishment.

Accordingly, Aubignac's and Trediakovskii's tragic poetics as well as its kinship with the poetics of judicial terror informed Sumarokov's second tragedy, *Gamlet* (1748), a loose but obvious adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's play, as Margreta de Grazia has reiterated in a compelling study, is a political drama of failed succession that threatens, and eventually destroys, the body politic ('Something is rotten in the state of Denmark').³² Sumarokov, who had access to the 1685 Folio and to the freshly published French adaptation of the play in the second volume of Pierre-Antoine de Laplace's *Théâtre*

30 *Zapiski diuka Liriiskago i Bervikskago vo vremia prebyvaniia ego pri imperatorskom rossijskom dvore* [...] (Sanktpeterburg, 1845), p. 103.

31 Jane Vigor, *Letters from a Lady, Who Resided Some Years in Russia, to her Friend in England* (London: J. Dodsley, 1777), p. 64.

32 De Grazia, *'Hamlet' without Hamlet*; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by G.R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 184.

anglois (London, 1746), adapted *Hamlet's* plot to fit both 'classicist' doctrine (he shared the commonplace criticisms of Shakespeare's 'irregularity') and a political agenda. In sum, he greatly simplified the narrative and, most importantly, provided it with a happy ending.

His Gamlet (Hamlet), informed by his confidant Armans of Klavdii's (Claudius's) crime, is urged by a dream vision of his father to avenge his murder. Gamlet confronts Gertruda (Gertrude), compelling her to confess and repent, but out of love for Ofeliia (Ophelia), he hesitates to punish Klavdii and Polonii (Polonius). Meanwhile, the two of them plan the murder of Gertruda, which would allow Klavdii to marry the virtuous Ofeliia. Dispatching assassins to kill Gamlet, the conspirators stay behind to execute Ofeliia for refusing to comply with their plan. The palace is stormed by the triumphant Gamlet, backed by the populace. He kills Klavdii off stage and, after a long hesitation, pardons Polonii at Ofeliia's request, but Polonii takes his own life.³³

It has long been noted that, with this outcome, *Gamlet* could easily be recognised as a dramatic re-enactment of Empress Elizabeth's *coup d'état*.³⁴ Indeed, the plot of Sumarokov's play aligns well with other festive theatrical productions commemorating this event: the Novgorodian Baroque drama *Stefanotokos* (*The Crown-Bearer*, 1742); Voltaire's tragedy *Mérope* (1743), that was staged by the French company to celebrate the anniversary of Elizabeth's coronation in 1746; and the Italian opera *Bellerofonte*, that was produced for a similar occasion in 1750. As Louis Marin has argued, since the exceptional act of violence that lay at the foundation of royal authority—the *coup d'état*—was beyond the regulation of any theoretical discourse, an absolutist 'theory of politics' was in

33 For the first in-depth interpretation of the play that rightly emphasises its religious overtones but downplays its political resonances, see Levitt, 'Sumarokov's Russianized *Hamlet*'. On Sumarokov's direct acquaintance with Shakespeare's text, see Levitt, 'Sumarokov's Reading at the Academy of Sciences Library', in *Early Modern Russian Letters*, pp. 25–27, 33. On knowledge of Shakespeare in Russia see the monumental study edited by M.P. Alekseev, *Shekspir i russkaia kul'tura* (Moskva: Nauka, 1965). I quote from the following edition of *Gamlet*: A.P. Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii* (Moskva: Univ. tip. N. Novikova, 1787), vol. III; I also consult Maksim Amelin's re-publication of the play, which takes into account Sumarokov's list of corrections to the original edition: *Novaia lunost*, 4 (2003), http://magazines.russ.ru/nov_yun/2003/4/amel.html. For English translations, I use where possible A.P. Sumarokov, *Selected Tragedies*, trans. by Richard and Raymond Fortune (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), providing page numbers in parentheses.

34 V.N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Politicheskie idei russkoi klassitsisticheskoi tragedii*, in *O teatre. Sbornik statei*, ed. by S.S. Danilov and S.S. Mokul'skii (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1940), pp. 110–12.

fact provided by the 'practice of theatre'.³⁵ In what follows, I will address the structure of *Gamlet's dénouement*, Sumarokov's most crucial deviation from Shakespeare's plot, as a culminating moment that amalgamates dramatic poetics with a scenario of royal authority and reveals their common dependence on a carefully forged emotional effect on the audience of spectator subjects.

2 Punishment and Pardon

Gamlet's final triumph over his enemies takes a double form. Behind the scenes he kills Klavdii and overtakes the Danish throne, reappearing on stage for the last time only to deal with Ofeliia's insistent pleas that he pardon her captive father. Only after he does so (out of love for her) will she show an interest in Gamlet's exploits and allow the audience to hear the details of the revolt. Dramatic representation thus inverts both the chronological and the spatial pattern of events. Gamlet's coup, which is never shown to the audience, originates in the public spaces of the city and is made possible by the immediate involvement of the populace, whereas the prince's conversation with his mistress and the decision he makes in secluded royal chambers are exposed to the public eye. This inversion follows the French 'classicist' convention, which did not permit violence on stage. At the same time, the transposition reveals a fundamental logic of monarchic representation: the universally known but questionable origins of royal power in the 'state of exception' and in popular violence are overshadowed by a display of singular royal sovereignty over Polonii's life—and his death. The play's last spark of suspense is provided by Gamlet's verbose wavering between punishment and pardon, which fills an entire scene. Here, Sumarokov's tragedy re-enacts a tension that underlay manifestations of sovereignty in rituals of punishment, as described by Foucault:

Sovereign power [...] never appeared with more spectacular effect than when it interrupted the executioner's gesture with a letter of pardon. The short time that usually elapsed between sentence and execution (often a few hours) meant that the pardon usually arrived at the very last moment. But the ceremony, by the very slowness of its progress, was no doubt arranged to leave room for this eventuality. [...] The sovereign was present at the execution not only as the power exacting the vengeance of the law, but as the power that could suspend both law and vengeance.³⁶

35 Marin, pp. 264–66.

36 Foucault, p. 53.

Indeed, the proximity of dramatic poetics to procedures of spectacular punishment was made evident to the Russian public in the months after Elizabeth's ascension. Her newly acquired sovereignty was displayed in two parallel stagings of royal justice: the pardon and exile of Münnich and Ostermann on 18 January 1742 and, starting in May of the same year, repeated productions of the festive opera *La Clemenza di Tito* (*The Clemency of Titus*) which, according to Jacob Stählin, 'represented a live image of the glorious empress's benevolent spirit' ('worinnen die leutseligste Gemüths-Eigenschaften der huldreichsten Kaiserin nach dem Leben geschildert sind'). Stählin (who himself wrote the prologue articulating the analogy between Elizabeth and Titus) reported that a custom built theatre in Moscow intended for 5,000 spectators was overcrowded during the first three performances, and that the opera enjoyed the general approval of the empire's nobility.³⁷ In Pietro Metastasio's libretto, which was published in Russian translation soon afterwards, Emperor Titus investigates a failed conspiracy against him and, at the last moment, pardons the main suspect. Given its plot, *La Clemenza di Tito* (which was originally written for the Habsburg court and was loosely modeled on the French dramatic classic, Corneille's *Cinna* of 1642), became one of the most popular scripts for festive celebrations of monarchy across Europe. It was also recognised as a dramatic masterpiece: thus Voltaire, in his *Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne*, praised Metastasio as a worthy rival of the Greek tragedians and singled out Titus's profession of clemency as 'an eternal lesson for kings, and the admiration of all mankind' ('l'éternelle leçon de tous les rois, et le charme de tous les hommes'): 'To take the life of a fellow creature is in the power of the vilest being upon the earth; to give it belongs only to the gods and to kings' ('Il torre altrui la vita | E facoltà comune | Al più vil della terra; il darla è solo | De' numi, e de' regnanti').³⁸ Merging dramatic poetics with the workings of royal charisma, clemency functioned as the ultimate 'scenario of power'—the constitutive act of sovereignty in its double status as earthly authority and an incarnation of divine will.

The demand for such a performance no doubt propelled the prosecution on false charges of Münnich and Ostermann, resulting in what an informed eyewitness, the Saxon diplomat Petzold, called a 'drama' ('Schauspiel'), a 'terrifying play' ('schauderhafte[s] Spiel'), and a 'tragic action' ('tragischer Aktus'). In

37 *Beylagen zum Neuveränderten Rußland* (Riga und Leipzig, 1770), II, pp. 94–95; V.N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Teatr v Rossii*, pp. 19–25.

38 Voltaire, *The Complete Works*, 30A (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2003), p. 146; Voltaire, *Dramatic Works*, trans. by Rev. Mr Francklin (London, 1763), v. 2, p. 11; Pietro Metastasio, *The Clemency of Titus, from the Italian by a Lady* (Liverpool, 1828), p. 51.

front of the crowd gathered for the promised execution, it was announced that lethal torture for all offenders would be substituted with 'perpetual banishment' (to quote a report by English diplomat Edward Finch) and the confiscation of their property. The intricate phrasing of the manifesto was reduced by Petzold to a laconic formula: 'God and the Empress grant you your life' ('Gott und die Kaiserin schenken Dir das Leben'). Even before he received a printed copy of the manifesto detailing the official interpretation of events, Petzold was easily able to summarise its contents: the empress has shown her magnanimity and clemency (*Clemenz*) and, in commemoration of her peaceful ascension, has taken mercy on those who have been found guilty.³⁹ In what is simultaneously an emotionally charged first-hand account and a circumspect political commentary, Petzold singles out the same qualities of the empress as did Stählin in his report on *La Clemenza di Tito*.

Important differences between these two performances of royal justice, however, produce a tension that complicates the very notion of clemency. In Corneille, Augustus pardons the guilty Cinna and restores him to his high rank. Similarly, in Metastasio, Titus repeals the painful—and public—death sentence he has ordered for the main suspect because he is at the last moment proven innocent. On the Petersburg scaffold, however, the concept of clemency comes to be identified with a penalty known in Russian judicial practice as 'political death'. In fact, the trial of Münnich and Ostermann was the starting point for Elizabeth's famous suspension of capital punishment and her reinstitution of political death instead as the harshest penalty imposed by the state. As Finch's overtly critical dispatches demonstrate, the outlines of Russian judicial order were at stake from the very beginning of the trial. In December 1741, he reported that the empress herself—just like Metastasio's Titus—was directing the interrogations involving torture and concluded that 'there is nothing in this country, at least on such occasions, which deserves the name of the court of justice', only of 'inquisition.'⁴⁰ After the scene on the scaffold, Finch pointed out the obvious cruelty of Elizabeth's 'clemency': 'If leading a wretched life in perpetual banishment and the remotest parts of Siberia may appear to any of these unhappy persons a more eligible fate, than a speedier end of their misery, it is entirely owing to her Majesty.'⁴¹

39 For Petzold's dispatches see Ernst Herrmann, *Geschichte des russischen Staates* (Hamburg, 1853), v. 5, p. 5; *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* (*SIRIO*), 6 (Saint Petersburg, 1871), pp. 407–08. For Finch's see *SIRIO* 91 (Saint Petersburg, 1894), p. 422.

40 *SIRIO* 91 (Saint Petersburg, 1894), p. 386.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 422.

Elizabeth's handling of Münnich and Ostermann's case relied on the same deeply ambiguous view of clemency that had been explored in drama and theorised in political literature since Seneca's *De Clementia* (*On Clemency*, 55–56 CE), a treatise addressed to Nero and revived by early modern political thought. Praising clemency as the ultimate gesture of domination, Seneca's treatise amalgamated it with its opposite, oppression:

to owe your life to someone is the same as to have lost your life. Anyone thrown down from the heights to his enemy's feet and made to wait for a verdict about his life and his kingdom from someone else increases the glory of the preserver by living on.⁴²

As Hélène Merlin-Kajman demonstrates, in Corneille's *Cinna* (which, just like Metastasio's subsequent *Titus* libretto, closely followed Seneca), Augustus's clemency is similarly styled as an 'extraordinary form of punishment' and, as such, 'a revelation of sovereignty'.⁴³ The same perspective is discernible in the final scenes of *Gamlet*: Polonius is pardoned by the triumphant Gamlet but commits suicide rather than acknowledging Gamlet and Ofelia as his 'sovereigns' ('vladeteli'). At this point his daughter, who earlier had felt obliged to plead for her criminal father's life, sums up the play's action with a formula that could be borrowed from Trediakovskii's or Liria's discussions of tragedy as a staging of divine retribution. She exclaims:

Ты само небо днесъ Полонья покарало!
Ты, Боже мой! ему был долготерпелив!
Я чту судьбы твоей! твой гнев есть справедлив! (v. 6. 119)

Heaven, you have yourself wrought justice on my father!
Your patience has been tried, your judgment slow to come.
I know your wrath is just, I know God's will is done! (134)

The play thus has a double ending: Gamlet's hesitant act of pardon is balanced in the very last lines by Polonius's terrifying and ambiguous death, which simultaneously represents a last doomed attempt at emancipation and an ultimate divine punishment. If Seneca and Metastasio associate the divinity of kingship

⁴² Seneca, *De clementia*, ed. and trans. by Susanna Braund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 133.

⁴³ Hélène Merlin, *Public et littérature en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994), p. 297.

with pardon, in *Gamlet* divine will is expressly assigned responsibility for the criminal's death. Indeed, according to Finch, similar arguments were employed by the Petersburg public to justify the evident injustice of Münnich's fate:

Upon this occasion, those whose humanity and generosity lead them rather to insult than pity people in distress, affect to talk much of the providence of God and His divine judgments, which I believe it would better become them to adore, than to pretend to penetrate.⁴⁴

Polonii's death represents the affinity between the 'political death' imposed after a pardon and the death penalty it ostensibly suspends, as well as commonly held notions of divine wrath as the ultimate reason behind royally sanctioned political prosecution. In his argument with Ofeliia, Gamlet evokes the divine vengeance embodied by his father's ghost as the primary justification for punishing Polonii, so that retribution rather than clemency is exalted as the sacred principle of royal justice. Later, Sumarokov would express similar views in his *Slovo na den' koronovaniia* [...] *Ekateriny II* (*Oration on the Coronation Day of Catherine II*, 1762), which was censored at the time of its original composition. Rearranging the commonplaces of official political theology, he develops a parallel argument against an overreliance on divine forgiveness and in favour of an understanding of royal clemency as leniency: 'clemency, too, imposes punishments' ('i milost' nakazaniia opredeliaet'). To illustrate his point, Sumarokov refers to none other than Titus, the paragon of clemency: 'Titus wept when he had to sign death warrants for the criminals; wept but signed them' ('Plakal Tit, kogda bezzakonnkam podpisывal kazni; plakal, no podpisывal').⁴⁵ Referring to an episode that figures in Metastasio's libretto, Sumarokov makes a point of circumventing the play's famous ending: while Titus could have pardoned the innocent, he still had to execute the guilty.

In *Gamlet*, however, Sumarokov associates the pattern of spectacular punishment unrestrained by clemency with the tyrannical ways of Klavdii and Polonii. As he prepares to execute Ofeliia for her refusal to marry Klavdii, Polonii says, to the guards present at the scene:

Вы воины смотрите
Позорище сие, и в нем пример возьмите,
О правосудии народу возвестить,

44 SIRIO 91, p. 423.

45 A.P. Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii*, v. 2, pp. 230–32.

Которо над собой я вам хочу явить.
 Единородна дочь моя в преступок впала:
 Она владетелю досаду показала,
 Непослушанием устав пренебрегла. (v. 2. 108)

Soldiers, behold this spectacle, and learn from this a lesson.
 To all the people tell of justice that was done
 By one who had to make the judgment on himself.
 My only daughter has into transgression fallen
 By showing the king a heart filled up with anger,
 By disobedience to the imperial will. (125)

While King Gamlet and Empress Elizabeth certainly share Polonii's belief in harsh punishment, they both feel compelled to resort to conspicuous if seemingly pointless gestures of clemency. Their logic, which is explored in Sumarokov's play, has less to do with the fate of particular offenders than with specific 'scenarios of power'—quasi-theatrical patterns of emotional engagement that were evoked by both the fictional and historical monarchies in order to fashion their relationship with the public constituted by their spectator subjects. Sumarokov's Titus has to weep as he punishes in order to make manifest the divine duality of the sovereign who combines heavenly justice with human empathy (as Gertruda reminds Klavdii in II. 2: 'Forgiving enemies is part of our religion', 102; 'Vragov svoikh proshchat' est' dolzhnost' nashei very', 77).

In Ofeliia's argument with Gamlet, the sentimental idiom of love tragedy is used to expose this empathy as an intrinsic attribute of royal politics that merges personal emotion and the strategies of power in the public performance of royal selfhood. In order to obtain Polonii's pardon, Ofeliia invokes Gamlet's love for her and reminds him that Polonii's execution would make their marriage impossible. When Gamlet holds to his notions of duty and vengeance, Ofeliia makes her last argument:

Сего ли для ты жизнь несчастныя продлил,
 Чтоб ты свирепея мя с нею разлучил,
 Чтоб я лютейшее терзание вкусила,
 И очи, ах! в тоске несносной затворила?
 Какое бедство я стране сей приключю!
 Все радости в тебе народны помрачу.
 Никто уже меня без злобы не вспомянет,
 Коль из любви моей толь вредный гром здесь грянет.
 Когда над сердцем я твоим имею власть;

Яви любезный Князь, яви мне ону страсть!
 Иль на Полония железом изощренным,
 Дай прежде смерть вкусить тобою чувствам пленным!
 Отмщай! но прежде ты любовь мою забудь,
 И проколи сперва Офелиину грудь! (v. 5. 115)

Today you saved my life, a life of the distressed.
 Was this to kill me later with more savageness?
 To make me know the taste of unimagined torment,
 To make my eyes to close at last in bitter anguish?
 How great will be the woe I cause to this poor land!
 All of our country's joys will fade and die with you.
 No one will think of me without a flush of hatred.
 Out of my love for you will roar a fearful thunder.
 If I still have the power left to sway your heart,
 Show me, my dearest prince, the love that I once knew.
 And if you will avenge, if your sword has been sharpened,
 Then take your sweet revenge! But first do me this favour,
 Forget my captive heart, forget the love it holds,
 And pierce it with your sword before my father's death. (131)

Commonplace tropes of tragic sensibility are here interwoven with an interrogation of the newly established civic peace. While Ofelia does not question Polonii's guilt ('like you I do disdain in him the villain', 128; 'Ia, Kniaz', *zlo-deia v nem, kak ty unichtozhaiu*, v. 3. 111), she insists on the broader political resonances of his execution that would affect the innocent. In the pathetic evocation of her own near death, a metaphor of amorous longing amounts to a formula of royal terror capable of indiscriminate brutality—that is to say Gamlet's torture and murder of his own faithful bride:

Уже не чувствуешь любезной огорченья,
 И становишься сам виной ея мученья.
 Жалей меня, жалей, не дай мне умереть! (v. 5. 113)

No longer do you feel the grief of your beloved,
 And you yourself become the cause of her affliction.
 Take pity on me, Hamlet, do not let me die! (129)

As will Polonii later in the play, Ofelia uses intimations of suicide as a trope for political resentment, and—in an otherwise obscure threat—styles her future

death as a hopeless yet imposing act of defiance. Invoking the fundamental patterns of clemency, punishment, and domination, she reveals the dependence of Gamlet's sovereignty on public emotion—'joy' or 'hatred'—which can, and must, be steered by extraordinary and spectacular actions. If imputed to Gamlet, as Ofeliia suggests, her death by her father's side would make her an innocent victim of royal terror, undermining the people's attachment to their king and thus producing a political calamity, 'fearful thunder'. Indeed, Ofeliia here draws on an argument commonly made in political philosophy. Frederick the Great, in his famous *Anti-Machiavel* (1740), for instance, advised against royal cruelty:

Je conclus donc qu'un prince cruel s'expose plutôt à être trahi qu'un prince débonnaire, puisque la cruauté est insupportable, et qu'on est bientôt las de craindre, et, après tout, parce que la bonté est toujours aimable, et qu'on ne se lasse point de l'aimer. Il serait donc à souhaiter, pour le bonheur du monde, que les princes fussent bons sans être trop indulgents, afin que la bonté fût en eux toujours une vertu, et jamais une faiblesse.

I conclude then, that a cruel Prince is much more exposed to treason and other dangers, than one that is tender and merciful: for cruelty is insupportable, and people soon grow tired of fear: but goodness is always amiable, and subjects are never weary of being affectionate. It is much to be wished, therefore, for the happiness of mankind, that all Princes were good, without being too indulgent: that so their lenity might always be regarded as a virtue, rather than despised as a weakness.⁴⁶

It is not surprising, then, that Gamlet—after distancing himself from any suspicion of leniency or weakness—succumbs at this point to Ofeliia's arguments and gives free reign to pity and love ('O love, yours is the power [...]', 131; 'Vladychestvui, liubov' [...]', 115), which are—through his very choice of words—inscribed in, rather than opposed to, the logic of rule and kingship. This display of royal emotion does not save Polonii (heaven itself takes care of that), but it does reestablish Gamlet's affective relationship with the rest of the polity. Instead of terror, he now inspires public joy, as Ofeliia exclaims: 'Weeping, give way to joy and laughter!' (131) ('Preobrashchaisia, plach, ty v

46 *Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand* (Berlin: Imprimerie Royale, 1848), VIII, p. 132; *The Works of Nicholas Machiavel* [...] *Newly Translated* [...] by Ellis Farnsworth (London: Thomas Davies et al., 1762), v. 1., p. 630.

radosti i smekhi!', 115). In *Gamlet*, just as in *Cinna* and *La Clemenza di Tito*, the gesture of clemency functions as a theatrical device that grounds sovereignty in a strong emotional affect that is evoked among the publics both on and off stage.⁴⁷

A quasi-theatrical view of royal justice—including both punishment and pardon—was not, however, peculiar to the dramatic tradition: it was also shared by legal and political discourses invoked in the official documentation of Elizabethan political trials. Among the works read in post-Petrine Russia was Justus Lipsius's *Monita et exempla politica* (1605), which was translated into Russian in 1721 as *Uveshchaniia i priklady politicheskiia*.⁴⁸ In this work Lipsius, an editor of and commentator on Seneca, engages in a lengthy discussion of royal justice and its effects on the populace. He first pleads for direct royal involvement in the administration of justice because it allows the king to claim the respect due all judges, so that 'his words, gestures, even his gaze gives rise to fear in the heart of men'. He then elaborates on the workings and effects of royal terror:

неправда то яко грозная казнь раждает царю ненависть от народа, паче же противное видим в человецех правду любящих, иже радуются и благодарят, егда видят грозное и жестокое злым наказание. Самый точию взор жестокия казни умиляет нас и смущает. [...] Аще же царь иногда покажет ослабу согрешившему, не будет то во образ прочим согрешати понеже там велии страх и срам ослабу или прощение предварят. Простит кому царь, обаче страха прежде и безчестие исполнивши, простит кому царь, но царь [...] человеколюбия точию и милости ради, сие убо самое коликую любовь у всех исходатайствует, аще точию благовременне случится.

It is not true that a terrifying punishment instils the people with hatred for the king; on the contrary we may see that people who value justice rejoice and express gratitude when they see the punishment of the wicked. The very spectacle of a severe punishment moves and agitates us. [...] Even if the king does show leniency towards a criminal, that will not be an example for others to sin because in that case pardon will be preceded by great fear and shame. The king can pardon, yet he will first

47 Merlin, p. 297.

48 On early Russian translations of Lipsius, see O.E. Novikova, 'Lipsii v Rossii pervoi poloviny XVIII veka', *Filosofskii vek* 10 (Saint Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburgskii Tsentr istorii idei, 1999).

inflict fear and infamy; the king can pardon but it will be the king [...] [acting] out of sheer humanity and mercy that will evoke general love, if the timing is right.⁴⁹

Like Empress Elizabeth and Sumarokov, Lipsius does not see repression and clemency as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary elements of royal justice. His vision of authority builds upon the strategic manipulation of opposite emotions stirred by the 'spectacle of a severe punishment' (or pardon) which 'moves and agitates us' enough to mould 'fear and infamy' into their opposite, a manifold public affection (love, joy, and gratitude) for the ruler endowed with such 'humanity and mercy'.

3 Inwardness and Terror

Lipsius's definition of judicial authority develops along the same lines as Aristotelian definitions of the tragic effect that were canonised by classicist literary theory. This parallel both illuminates the logic of the trials and explains the functions claimed by the newly imported tragedy in the Elizabethan 'theatre of power'. According to Aristotle, tragedy had to evoke both pity and fear in order to 'purge' the emotions of the spectators. The influential French Aristotelian critic René Rapin wrote on the subject in his *Réflexions sur la poétique de ce temps* (1674–1675), which was well known in Russia:

Car elle [tragédie] rend l'homme modeste, en luy représentant des Grands humiliez: et elle le rend sensible et pitoyable, en luy faisant voir sur le théâtre les étranges accidens de la vie, et les disgrâces imprévues, ausquelles sont sujettes les personnes les plus importantes. Mais parce que l'homme est naturellement timide, et compatissant, il peut' tomber dans une autre extrémité, d'estre ou trop craintif ou trop pitoyable: la trop grande crainte peut diminuer la fermeté de l'âme, et la trop grande compassion peut diminuer l'équité. La tragédie s'occupe à régler ces deux foiblesses: elle fait qu'on s'apprivoise aux disgraces: en les voyant si fréquentes dans les personnes les plus considérables: et qu'on cesse de craindre les accidens ordinaires, quand on en voit arriver de si extraordinaires aux Grands. Et comme la fin de la tragédie est d'apprendre aux hommes à ne pas craindre trop foiblement des disgrâces communes, et à ménager leur crainte: elle fait estat aussi de leur apprendre à ménager

49 OR RGB (Russian State Library, Manuscript Division), fol. 354, no. 233, ll. 277–79.

leur compassion pour des sujets qui la méritent. Car il y a de l'injustice d'estre touché des malheurs de ceux, qui méritent d'estre miserables.

For it [tragedy] makes Man modest, by representing the great Masters of the Earth humbled; and it makes him tender and merciful, by shewing him on the Theatre the strange Accidents of Life, and the unforeseen Disgraces to which the most important Persons are subject. But because Man is naturally timorous and compassionate, he may fall into another Extreme, to be either too fearful, or too full of Pity; the too much Fear may shake the Constancy of Mind, and the too great Compassion may enfeeble the Equity. 'Tis the Business of Tragedy to regulate these two Weaknesses; it prepares and arms him against Disgraces, by shewing them so frequent in the most considerable Persons; and he shall cease to fear ordinary Accidents, when he sees such extraordinary happen to the highest Part of Mankind. But as the End of Tragedy is to teach Men not to fear too weakly the common Misfortunes, and manage their Fear; it makes account also to teach them to spare their Compassion, for Objects that deserve it not. For there is Injustice in being mov'd at the Afflictions of those who deserve to be miserable.⁵⁰

Expressly associating catharsis with the vicissitudes of the political life of the 'Masters of Earth', who are subject to 'disgraces', Rapin's vision of tragedy emphasises its mastery of what Stephen Greenblatt calls 'techniques of arousing and manipulating anxiety'. As Greenblatt argues, the deployment of such techniques in drama was related to the fact that early modern ruling elites, both clerical and secular, 'believed that a measure of insecurity and fear was a necessary, healthy element in the shaping of proper loyalties', and this view pervaded 'public maiming and executions' as well as the royal pardons that might ensue: 'Salutary anxiety, then, blocks the anger and resentment that would well up against what must, if contemplated in a secure state, seem an unjust order.'⁵¹ Similarly, according to Rapin, catharsis provides a remedy against an all-too-strong public compassion for disgraced subjects. This was the emotional pattern that informed the punishment of Münnich and

50 René Rapin, *Les réflexions sur la poétique de ce temps, et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1970), pp. 97–98; René Rapin, 'Reflections upon Poetry', in *The Whole Critical Works [...] Translated into English by Basil Kennet* (London: J. Walthoe et al., 1731), v. 2, pp. 204–05. Of the two slightly differing French redactions, I quote the one that matches the English translation.

51 Greenblatt, pp. 133, 138.

Ostermann and the public's reaction to it, which is construed in Petzold's reports in Aristotelian terms:

Zeit seines Lebens ihm noch nichts so Trübseliges vorgekommen sei, als dieses Schauspiel; einen rasenden Pöbel ausgenommen, würden selbst von den vornehmen Russen wenige ungerührt und sonder Mitleiden den Platz verlassen haben.

In all his life he did not experience anything more dismal than this spectacle; aside from the raging mob, even among Russian nobles there were few who left the square indifferent or without compassion.⁵²

Apparently, differences in emotional reaction corresponded to—and reaffirmed—the distinct positions of various spectator groups in relation to the royal violence being perpetrated. While the populace assembled to witness a public execution was prepared to endorse royal punishment of the powerful, the nobility could not avoid a sense of compassion for the convicts, as nobles could not but feel immediately threatened. Indeed, since the ministers on trial had long occupied the highest positions in military and civil administration, many of the capital's serving nobles (like Sumarokov himself) were their former clients or subordinates.

Finch's sarcastic advice to those who justified the trial 'to reflect seriously on which of them the lot may fall to next' points to a reaction both natural for the subjects of an autocracy and appropriate for the spectators of a tragedy.⁵³ Dacier defines tragic pity as 'a Sense of Pain, which the sufferings of a Man who does not deserve it, produces in us; since that Evil is of such a Nature, that it may happen to us, and which we may reasonably fear' ('un sentiment de douleur que produit en nous le mal d'un homme qui souffre ce qu'il ne mérite pas; lorsque ce mal est d'une Nature à pouvoir aussi nous arrive').⁵⁴ In fact, Aristotle discusses and compares various possible emotional reactions to the public misfortunes of others, and advises against the display of the 'misfortunes of a very wicked Man' because, as Dacier explains,

On peut avoir quelque plaisir à voir un tres méchant homme puny de ses crimes, mais son malheur n'excite point du tout la compassion, parce qu'il n'a que ce qu'il mérite; car jamais un honnête homme ne s'afflige

52 Herrmann, v. 5, p. 5.

53 *SIRIO* 91, p. 423.

54 *La Poétique d'Aristote*, p. 177; *Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, pp. 189–90.

de voir punir un meurtrier ou un parricide, parce que c'est une action juste, & dont, par conséquent tous les gens de bien doivent être ravis. Si son malheur n'excite pas la pitié, il excite encore moins la crainte, et par conséquent il ne purge pas les passions; car les spectateurs qui se reconnoissent moins méchants que cet homme qu'ils voyent punir, ne s'avisent pas de craindre des malheurs qu'il ne s'est attirés que par ses crimes, et ne travaillent pas à se rendre meilleurs.

One might have some Pleasure in seeing a very wicked Man punished for his crimes; but his Misery will never stir us up to Compassion, because he has only what he deserved [...] and consequently all good Men ought to be pleased at it. If his Misery does not excite Pity, it will much less excite Fear, and so cannot refine the Passions, for the Spectators knowing themselves not to be wicked as that Man, will never fear those evils, which he has drawn on him by his Crimes, nor endeavour to make themselves better.⁵⁵

If so, not only pure 'pleasure' at the ruin of the 'wicked', but also compassion and fear of fellow subjects who felt threatened by disproportionate royal violence were proper reactions to public punishments staged with Lipsius, if not Aristotle, in mind. Just like Aristotelian theory, the idiom of judicial terror amalgamated fear and pleasure. When another group of courtiers around Natalia Lopukhina was prosecuted in 1743 for expressions of resentment after the Münnich trial, the royal manifesto read:

мы [...] уповали, что показанное Наше к ним милосердие не токмо им самим и их фамилиям, но и друзьям их за наичувствительнейшее удовольствие быть имело, что и без сомнения целой свет засвидетельствовать может.

We [...] had hoped that the clemency we have shown would be accepted with an utmost pleasure not only by the convicted but also by their families and friends, which the whole world can confirm.⁵⁶

In *Gamlet*, Sumarokov both ignores Aristotle's advice in order to comply with Trediakovskii's criticism and to elicit moral pleasure originating from the

55 *La Poétique d'Aristote*, p. 179; *Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, p. 192.

56 *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii s 1649 g., Sobranie 1. 11 (1740–1743)* ([Saint Petersburg], 1830), p. 881, no. 8775.

ruin of the wicked, and stages the political effects of pleasure originating in the act of false pardon. His Ofeliia seems to be modelled on Lopukhina and her accomplice Countess Bestuzheva, who gave a female voice to the resentment of the convicts' 'families and friends', who belonged to influential noble clans. In this case, Ofeliia's death threat alludes to Lopukhina's publicly known and all but blatantly suicidal defiance of Elizabeth, simultaneously pointing to the dangers for civic peace inherent in the false logic of escalating repression. Ofeliia's reconciliation with Gamlet precisely reproduces the pattern of appeasement outlined in the 1743 manifesto: a suspension of the death penalty is represented as a symbolic gesture strong enough, by itself, to produce 'pleasure' among the political class affected by the trials, just as it was designed to please the audience of *Gamlet's* fifth act.

Sumarokov's tragic poetics relies on the same patterns of public sensibility that were affirmed and explored by judicial terror. Characteristically, in his 1756 madrigal celebrating a court production of his opera, the notion of pleasure (*udovol'stvie*) makes one of its first appearances in Russian as an aesthetic concept describing the fine effects of musical and dramatic performance on the court public and on the author himself.⁵⁷ Neither in the idiom of terror nor in Aristotelian poetics, however, is pleasure considered to be the primary or the best possible effect of the spectacle upon the audience. Aristotle suggested that the sight of another's undeserved ruin is beneficial as it evokes catharsis, a 'purgation of the passions'—which, in Dacier's words, inspires spectators 'to make themselves better'. Dacier inscribes Aristotle's poetics into a Christianised discussion of moral discipline: since it is impossible, he writes, 'to oblige Men to follow the Precepts of the Gospel' ('obliger tous les hommes à suivre les maximes de l'Evangile'), tragedy has been introduced in order to provide spectators with 'Diversions, where there is Order, and Shows, where Truth is to be found' ('divertissemens, où il y a de l'ordre, et les spectacles où l'on trouve de la vérité'). In this way, tragedy is a remedy against moral corruption, and consequently:

La Tragédie ne représente pas seulement la punition que les crimes volontaires attirent toujours fur leurs Auteurs [...] mais elle étale les malheurs que des fautes même involontaires, et commises par imprudence attirent sur nos semblables. Et c'est la Tragédie parfaite. Elle nous apprend à nous tenir fur nos gardes, et à purger et modérer les passions qui ont été la seule cause de la perte de ces malheureux. Ainsi l'ambitieux y apprend

57 A.P. Sumarokov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, ed. by P.N. Berkov (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957), p. 181.

à donner des bornes à son ambition; l'impie à craindre Dieu; le vindicatif à renoncer à la vengeance; l'emporté à retenir ses emportemens, le tyran à renoncer à ses violences et à son injustice.

Tragedy does not only represent the Punishments, which voluntary Crimes always draw on their Authors [...] But it sets forth the misfortunes which even involuntary crimes, and those committed by Imprudence, draw on such as we are, and this is perfect Tragedy. It instructs us to stand on our guard, to refine and moderate our Passions, which alone occasion'd the loss of those unfortunate ones. Thus the aspiring may learn to give bounds to his Ambition; the Prophane to fear God; the Malicious to forget his Wrongs; the Passionate to restrain his Anger; the Tyrant to forsake his Violence and Injustice.⁵⁸

Marcus Levitt draws attention to Sumarokov's direct paraphrase of this doctrine in a 1755 epistle that 'specifically described the action of the tragic poet in terms of compulsion':

В героях кроючи стихов своих творца,
Пусть тот трагедией вселяется в сердца:
Принудит чувствовать чужие нам напасти
И к добродетели направит наши страсти.

Speaking in verse through his heroes, the creator of a tragedy should enter [his audience's] hearts, compel us to feel alien misfortunes and direct our passions toward virtue.⁵⁹

According to Levitt's reading of these lines, 'the tragedian, like the divine Creator, actively "sows" emotions into the hearts of his audience and compels them towards virtue "by means of tragedy", thus "imitating the very actions of God" [as Trediakovskii advised]'.⁶⁰ While Sumarokov's repeated use of the word 'creator' ('tvorets') for author hardly supports a theological reading, a parallel between the effects of faith and those of tragedy is certainly warranted and is particularly relevant for *Gamlet*. Here, it is Gertruda who vividly enacts

58 *La Poétique d'Aristote*, p. xii; *Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, preface.

59 A.P. Sumarokov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, p. 130. I borrow Levitt's translation with slight emendations.

60 Levitt, 'Sumarokov's Russianized *Hamlet*', p. 87.

the alignment of dramatic representation and effect with disciplinary introspection, both divine and judicial.

In a variation of Shakespeare's closet scene with its famous formula of self-knowledge ('Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul', III. 4), Sumarokov's Gertruda is, as early as the first act, confronted by Gamlet and Armans and must admit her crimes:

Покров безстыдных дел Гертрудиных низпал,
Проклятая душа открылась пред тобою. (I. 3. 68)

The curtain that concealed my shameful deeds has dropped,
And you have seen the scars that left my soul accursed. (94)

As for Gamlet, in this first encounter with the crime he is destined to purge, he prefigures his later act of clemency and pardons Gertruda. In an oddly sacerdotal gesture, he and Armans speak in the name of divine justice and lecture her on the political theology of repentance that closely associates divine will with earthly compliance:

Признание вины к прощению успех,
Кто плачет о грехе, тот чувствует свой грех. [...]
Безсмертный милосерд, и гнев его смягчится,
Коль грешник перед ним всем сердцем сокрушится.
Покайся, и коль смерть супругу ты дала,
Превысь блаженными злодейские дела. (I. 3. 68–70)

Confession of one's guilt leads others to forgive,
Who truly rues his sin has won the right to grace. [...]
God's mercy knows no bounds, and his wrath shall be softened,
When sinners truly feel with all their hearts contrition.
Repent, and if you've killed your husband, still repent,
Exceed your evil deeds with deeds of blessedness. (94–96)

In response to these admonitions, Gertruda, in Levitt's words, 'truly engages the issue of whether or not she is in a condition to pray' and 'is able finally to reconcile divine commandment and the voice of heaven with her inner voice of repentant conscience [,] to overcome her passionate self'.⁶¹ While she may indeed embody the 'traditional Russian Orthodox values of kenotic humility',

61 Ibid., p. 91.

as Levitt claims, it is crucial that she only repents when her crime is exposed and she considers herself to be in immediate danger of violent punishment. When Gamlet confronts her, he is armed and raging against his enemies, so that the desperate Gertruda even suggests that he should kill her himself: 'Forget that you're my son and kill me now, at once' (95) ('Zabud', chto mat' tvoia, kazni svoei rukoi', 68). While he does not physically harm his mother (a barbaric gesture reminiscent of ancient Orestes and prohibited by Shakespeare's Ghost), he does exercise his nascent authority over her. Promising her a remission of sins in the afterlife, Gamlet (through Armans) sentences Gertruda to what sounds like perpetual exile ('Leave the world behind forever for some wilderness', 97; 'Ostavi svet drugim, i plach' v pustyniakh vvek', 71)—a punishment that would have reminded spectators of Elizabeth's treatment of her overthrown predecessor, Anna Leopoldovna, who was spared a public punishment but sent away from Petersburg and imprisoned.

Confronted with pardon and punishment, a dual gesture of Gamlet's sovereignty, Gertruda experiences a conversion that simultaneously inscribes itself within several disciplinary paradigms—religious, political, and aesthetic—and showcases their mutual alignment in the symbolic structure of autocracy. Confessing her sins to a legitimate successor to the throne, she re-enacts the crossover of religious discipline and political order found in practices of justice and penitence characteristic of early modern Europe—and, specifically, of eighteenth-century Russia, where obligatory confessions were introduced as a measure of state control over the nation.⁶² At the same time, Gertruda's self-exposure before the retributive gaze of royal and divine authority leads her to experience what Aristotelian criticism understood to be catharsis—a purgation of passions. Excessive fear of a criminal in hiding ('Hell's portals open wide and draw me to my home', 95; 'Razversty propasti, i ad menia pozhret', 69), evoked by Gamlet's account of her crime, resolves itself in a moral transformation associated with the righteous fear of God:

Но все, что ни страшит в смятении меня,
Чего себе ни ждет душа моя стена,
Ни что в толикий страх злочастну не приводит,

62 Viktor Zhivov, 'Handling Sin in Eighteenth-Century Russia', in *Representing Private Lives of the Enlightenment*, ed. by Andrew Kahn (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010). On the link between the disciplinary effects of public punishment and early modern drama, as well as on the amalgamation of dramatic, religious, and judicial introspection, see Mullaney; Debora Kuller Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in 'Measure for Measure'* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

Как то, когда сие на мысль мою приходит,
Что, ах! не буду зреть Творца я своего. (71)

But there's one thing I fear beyond all other fears,
Whatever else my soul may suffer in distress,
And nothing grieves me more in all my tribulations
Than when I sometimes chance to think of what I'd suffer,
If I should never see my Maker and my God. (97)

Conversely, this intimately felt fear of God is inscribed into a vision of moral discipline that embraces political existence along with religious experience. Gertruda's spectacular conversion represents a mode of subjectivity posed equally by judicial terror and Aristotelian theory. The vices that she urges her accomplices, Klavdii and Polonii, to repudiate with her are precisely those that Dacier (and, to some extent, Aubignac) listed in his didactic interpretation of catharsis: 'Thus the aspiring may learn to give bounds to his Ambition; the Prophane to fear God; the Malicious to forget his Wrongs; the Passionate to restrain his Anger; the Tyrant to forsake his Violence and Injustice.' The act of repentance and purgation that is fulfilled by Gertruda on stage is thus also implied in tragedy as its primary effect on its audience. In this respect, too, tragedy was aligned with the political trials that, as can be seen from the Münnich manifesto, aimed to have a similar effect:

И чтоб все верныя Наши подданные, смотря на то признавали, что Бог клятвопреступникам не терпит, и что мудрым Его промыслом скрытыя в сердцах их умышления к временному и вечному их осуждению всегда откровенны бывают, и дабы опасаясь того от всяких таких Богу противных поступок конечно остерегались, и во всем бы так поступали, как то верным подданным и прямым сыновьям отечества по присяжной их должности принадлежит, за что от Бога во всех своих предприятиях благословенны, также и Нашею Императорскою милостию всегда награждены будут.

Let all our true subjects see this and acknowledge that God does not tolerate perjurers and that evil intentions hidden in their hearts are always revealed through his wise Providence to their temporal and eternal blame, and that they [the subjects] should abstain from actions of this kind which are repugnant to God, and should always act as true subjects and sons of their fatherland ought according to their sworn duty, and

they will be blessed by God and will be always rewarded with our royal favour.⁶³

Appealing to the subjects' inner selves in an attempt to impose upon them an orthodoxy of autocratic obedience amalgamated with divine justice, the spectacle of disproportionate repression drew on emotional scripts common to both drama and the 'theatre of power'. The spectacular nature of political trials proved to be an intrinsic element of autocratic domination that could not be dispensed with even when the pattern of constant repression was suspended. With all their exaggerated or outright false accusations and unjustified punishments, the political trials of 1742–1743 functioned as scenarios, or 'fictions', that were carefully crafted to elicit and regulate public anxiety for the benefit of the monarchic order. Emerging after the cessation of high-profile trials in the wake of the Lopukhina case, Russian tragedy, with its plea for mercy, both supplanted them as a performative genre and took over their function as a means of fashioning public sensibilities. The scaffold thus provided a blueprint for the genre of tragedy and furnished the point of departure for the institution of court theatre in Russia. If the protocols of pleasure established on the stage were free from physical violence and displaced suffering into the realm of fiction, theatrical space simultaneously enhanced the ruler's physical and emotional control over her public, which itself literally became—along with the actors on stage—subject to the interrogating royal gaze.

63 *Polnoe sobranie zakonov*, II, p. 575, no. 8506.