PART TWO

THE EARLY MODERN LOCUS OF TRAGEDY
This paper is about discursive practices in early modern Europe. It explores the relationships between the conceptualization of political sovereignty—as a typically modern notion of political legitimacy—and elements of theatrical discursivity. More specifically, it concentrates on the relationship between the origins of the concept of modern sovereignty in political theology—as Ernst Kantorowicz has outlined them in his monumental “pre-Foucauldian”\(^2\) study of *The King’s Two Bodies*, the strategies of ‘theatricalization’ in the political regimes that embraced, implicitly or explicitly, the ideology of the King’s two bodies—i.e., France and England—and the theatre and drama practices that took place in these contexts. This subject being too vast, we shall focus on several examples of discursive, political, and theatrical practices, allowing us to formulate some hypotheses about political theatricality in early modernity. A theatricality that could be called ‘tragic’ in the sense of Benjamin’s qualification of the *Trauerspiel*—a play that mourns the ruins of divine utopias.

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1 ‘Sovereignty’ here means: the highest power of a political community conceived in such a way that it cannot, by definition, be present in the actual powers of that community, but only represented by these powers (see Hans Lindahl, “‘Vorst, op God na’: politieke macht en de symbolisering van soevereiniteit,” *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Rechtsfilosofie & Rechtstheorie* 26.2 (1997): 122–136). Sovereignty is the ground for power and authority. The notion of sovereignty differs from the specific use Michel Foucault made of the concept of “souveraineté” as contrasted with “gouvernementalité” (Michel Foucault, “La ‘gouvernementalité’,” in *Dits et écrits 1954–1988* (III, 1976–1979) (Paris, 1994), p. 655).

‘Modern’ is used as a historical notion: early modernity is the period between 1500 and 1700—without implying any premise on the ‘content’ of modernity, e.g., in questions of secularization.

2 Term coined by historian Alain Boureau, the biographer of Ernst H. Kantorowicz and author of *Le simple Corps du roi (The King’s Single Body)*, the mildly provocative title of an essay on cultural-anthropological misinterpretations of Kantorowicz’ theory (Alain Boureau, *Le simple Corps du roi: L’impossible sacralité des souverains français—XV–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2000)).