UDC 821.111.09 Шекспир В.

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SHAKESPEARE STUDIES, PHILOSOPHY AND WORLD LITERATURE**

Abstract
This paper presents introductory considerations of two new books of Shakespearean criticism: *The Demonic. Literature and Experience* by Ewan Fernie and *Free Will. Art and Power on Shakespeare's stage* by Richard Wilson, both published in 2013, and both remarkable for encompassing Shakespeare studies, philosophy and world literature within their respective critical scopes. In *The Demonic*, Shakespeare is considered, along with Milton, Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, Kierkegaard and other authors, in the context of demonic transgression, paradoxically close to the mystical knowledge of what is beyond self-experience. This book is an audacious step away from the current literary criticism in so far as it insists on responding to the crucial ontological and ethical questions by passionate spiritual engagement with art, literature and philosophy. In Wilson's *Free Will* the focus is on Shakespeare's demystification of the ruse of power, based on both truthful experience and careful performance of nonentity, which produced a specific form of early modern creative autonomy. *Free Will* is as provocative as *The Demonic* because it mediates, directly or indirectly, awareness of the aporetic nature of weakness and power – of the *weakness of power* and the *power in weakness*.

Key words: Shakespeare studies, literature, experience, art, aesthetics, the demonic, freedom, power

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** This text has been written as part of the *Književnstvo* project (No. 178029) of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

Two important books of Shakespearean Criticism by two outstanding Shakespeare critics delineated the year 2013 and greeted Shakespeare's 450th anniversary with sharp, lucid and provocative thinking worthy of the Bard himself. At the very beginning of year 2013, Routledge published *The Demonic. Literature and Experience* by Ewan Fernie, and at its end, Manchester University Press brought out *Free Will. Art and Power on Shakespeare's Stage* by Richard Wilson. Although Shakespeare studies have been saturated with theory, philosophy and comparative criticism of world literature for more than three decades, ever since the postmodern critical approaches to literature were brought into Shakespearean scholarship with deconstruction and new historicism, these two books and their authors distinguish themselves by the particularly wide arrays of the involved philosophical perspectives and exceptionally diverse literary works from non-Anglophone traditions. In these two books, two Shakespearean polyhistors offer their most exigent, but at the same time most gratifying thinking.

1. Observingly distilled

There is some soul of goodness in things evil
Would men observingly distil it out

W. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, 4.1.4-5

Ewan Fernie, The Demonic. Literature and Experience London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 312 p.

The critical and theoretical trajectory which precedes *The Demonic. Literature and Experience* began with Ewan Fernie's first monograph *Shame in Shakespeare* (2002), and continued with articles and chapters in books on presentism[1] or in the context of the spiritual turn in Shakespeare studies,[2]

[1] Ewan Fernie, "Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism", Shakespeare Survey 59 (2005); "Terrible Action: Recent Criticism and the Questions of Agency", *Shakespeare* 2 (2006); "Action: *Henry V*", *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. by Hugh Grady and Terrence Hawkes, London and New York: Routlegde, 2007.

[2] Ewan Fernie, ed, *Spiritual Shakespeares*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

editorial and authorial work within the series *Shakespeare Now!,* published by Arden,[3] and collections of essays *Reconceiving the Renaissance: A Critical Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2006) and *Redcrosse: Remaking Religious Poetry for Today's World (Bloomsbury*, 2012*)*. In 2004, Gary Taylor and the Hudson Strode Program selected Fernie as "one of the six most brilliant scholars of Renaissance drama in the world under 40". Presently, Ewan Fernie is Chair of Shakespeare Studies at the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The arc which could be drawn between *Shame in Shakespeare* and *The Demonic* would show that in his first book Fernie had already developed a complex, ethically and politically alert enquiry into the spiritual extremes in Shakespeare's works. The intensity of shame as related to two lost traditions – the heroic and the Christian – and as manifested in identity (de)formation and the sense of responsibility in *Richard III*, *Hamlet, Othello*, *King Lear, Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* was the focus of his first monograph. In *The Demonic*, however, Fernie's interpretative scope is significantly wider (its span reminds one of the comparative literature criticism and hermeneutics practiced by Erich Auerbach or George Steiner) and his philosophical scrutiny is more extended than in the first book, at the same time daring and exigent, conscientious and refined. *The Demonic* is divided into three major parts: "Demonic negativity", "Turnabout and dialectic" and "Possession", with two subdivisions "The agony in possessing" and "The possessed", thus encompassing the phenomenon of the demonic in literature, philosophy and experience. "Like all important works of criticism," writes Jonathan Dollimore in the Foreword, "this book unobtrusively involves us in larger metaphysical considerations – about human individuality, social being, and especially our relationship to others and other cultures." (Fernie 2013: xvii)

The opening chapter "Dark night of the soul" evokes the famous poem *Noche oscura del alma* of St John of the Cross, as well as the corresponding Catholic metaphor for spiritual crisis, but none of the two is explicitly mentioned. It introduces a number of urgent contemporary questions

[3] Eric Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare*; Amy Scott Douglas, *Shakespeare Inside*; Philip Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking*; Douglas Bruster, *To be or Not to Be*; Henry Turner, *Shakespeare's Double Helix*; Michael Witmore, *Shakespearean Metaphysics*; Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare's Modern Collaborators*; Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*; Philippa Kelly, *The King and I*; David Fuller, *The Life in the Sonnets*; Will McKenzie and Theodora Papadopoulou (ed.), *Shakespeare and I*; Graham Holderness, *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare*; David Schalkwyk, *Hamlet's Dreams*.

regarding literature, experience, aesthetics and ethics, which will be dealt with in hermeneutic focusing on the demonic in the works of Shakespeare and a number of other authors of world literature – Marlowe, Milton, Donne, Dostoevsky, Mann, Melville, James, Huxley, and Coetzee, as well as of theology – St Paul, St Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius the Arepoagite, Martin Luther, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth, and philosophy – Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, and Arendt. A distinctive line of Fernie's thought comes out of his response to the writings of Georges Bataille and to Jonathan Dollimore's criticism. Fernie distances his own position from new historical criticism, because the latter obliterates the subjectivity of aesthetic experience. At the same time, he sees theory/philosophy as "abstraction from experience", and political criticism as a position which provides comfortable distance from the painful ambivalences of moral life. It seems as if the editor of the series *Shakespeare Now*, in which the volume *Shakespeare and I* appeared, is confronting us with the urgency of an intense personal response to the 'real presences' of literature. Like George Steiner in *Real Presences*, he discusses Rilke's *Archaic Torso of Apollo* (Steiner 1989: 142-143) as a metaphor of art which can and should change our life. Even without Kafka's well-known image of "an axe which should break the frozen sea within our being", Fernie's arguments that literature matters are as compelling.

Fernie believes that new intellectual and spiritual engagement with art should involve looking – eyes wide open – into the liminal area between life and death, into the controversies of the tragic, into the spheres of transgression and transcendence, and, there within, into – the demonic. With Richard of Gloucester, Macbeth and Iago's famous statement *I am not what I am* (*Othello*, I, 1, 65) at the centre of his attention, Fernie sees Shakespeare as foretelling demonic modernity. God's anchoring self-identification from *Exodus* (3. 14) – *I am that I am* – serves as an essential opposite to the Devil's 'snap', as Fernie puts it, of *I am not what I am*. Along this dangerous and highly elevated tightrope between the two ultimate ontological positions, Fernie exploits his arguments by way of interpreting literary works of art. What happens when the rejection of the self involves the undoing of one's own being, as in *Coriolanus*? The annihilation of the self without physical distraction is tragic, says Fernie, but at the same time, the self without natural and social predicates is deeply stirring in its purity. "As if a man were author of himself and knew no other kin" (*Coriolanus* 5. 3. 36-37) is the starting point for understanding Richard of Gloucester's doing and undoing himself as a king, for Macbeth's as well, and for Lady

Macbeth's 'unsexing' and subsequent auto-destruction. The negative form of life is then, in Fernie's hermeneutic dialogues, considered in Milton's Satan, in Byron's, Shelley's and Blake's works and their echoes in the twenty-first century counter-cultural voices (with a tendency to become the mainstream). Stable identities are rare in modernity and post-modern times and Fernie explores the gnoseological potential of understanding *I am not what I am*. The undermining of the self or its evacuation is approached from a wide range of positions such as existentialism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and a number of postmodern eclectic perspectives.

Demonic literary characters like Macbeth or Stavrogin are personal possibilities of evil. Fernie investigates the negativity turning into mysterious positive power and searches for arguments in theology and philosophy. Contrary to the postulates of the *privatio boni* theory, associated with St Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Fernie accentuates places in both thinkers' works[4] which express, substantiate and perhaps even glamorize evil (Fernie 2013: 14). On his way to articulating the paradoxical (and alluring) indivisibility of good and evil, the author looks for arguments in Hegel, Schelling, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but his methodically responsible discussion pays due attention to Kant's qualification of evil as an ultimate dedication to self-interest, or Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil'.

Some of the instances of the demonic Fernie will understand as merely evil and nothing else, whereas in some cases he will find that negativity carried into the self can produce "an ecstatic openness to others where eros and ethics merge; and where, though it risks possession, the demonic even acquires a touch of sainthood" (Fernie 2013: 17). A polemical dialogue emerges from Fernie's consideration of the equally generally and philosophically entitled book by Terry Eagleton – *On Evil* (2010), and differences become clear: Fernie wants to investigate the *subjective* possibilities of evil, not evil in the conceptual abstraction, but the demonic as a form of life mediated by art. And that he finds in Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Mann, but also in the criticism of another contemporary critic – Jonathan Dollimore. Georges Bataille leads Fernie towards the central argument of this book – that demonic literature "represents a revolutionary challenge to traditional ethical ontology", that

[4] St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 2, 3-4, pp. 28-31; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, trans. Colin Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 85.

good and evil are "mutually intensifying and inextricable" (Fernie 2013: 24-25).

Later on in the book, Karl Jaspers provides more vivid arguments: the demonic is the failure of being, but on the other hand it is an alternative to being. It is vacant and infinite, says Fernie, following Jaspers, *because* it is vacant, it is infinite. It is an abyss of nothingness, says Jaspers, dragging everything into its whirl. Finding stimulation for his own thoughts in Jaspers, Bataille and Dollimore, Fernie is, on the other hand, skeptical towards the tendency to sacralize negativity in various ways in Levinas, Derrida and Žižek, rather than to demonize it. Closest to Bataille, he is interested in the possibility of both sacralizing and demonizing negativity.

In the conclusion of the chapter "Dark night of the soul", Fernie investigates negativity and darkness in the deity and turns to theologians Paul Tillich and Karl Barth. In Tillich, he finds the demonic without the acknowledged darkness, and in Barth –religion described as an abyss, a terror, where demons appear. Evil, for Barth, is a great negative possibility which, just like true religion, has the power of transforming the world. This offers Fernie a starting point for his interpretations of literature: "Reading Barth, good and evil start to look like opposite sides of what in fact is a Möbius strip, even though nothing can be more important than distinguishing them. Here is an agony of soul to bring us in contact with the terrors of existence that, according to Kierkegaard, moral systems don't reach." (Fernie 2013: 31)

The sequence of interpretations begins with Luther and his potent and long lasting contribution to the vivid and influential presence of the Devil in the minds of Protestant believers as well as in the creative imagination of Western literature, from Marlowe to Thomas Mann. Spirituality which involves sinfulness is what Fernie highlights as Luther's gift to the playwrights of the Elizabethan age, who, in his opinion, dared to go further than Luther, the first of them being Marlowe in *Doctor Faustus*, whose Faust is not only an antitype of Luther, but, in a way, a metaphor of Luther. If one abandons oneself to sin and negation, i.e., gives oneself temporarily to the Devil, and hopes for God's grace, one is like Faustus, says Fernie, and vulnerable to being damned like him. He stresses that sainthood is perilously close to damnation – hence, the tragic allure of the Faustian figures. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, however, there is at least a hint of the possibility of redemption, whereas in *Macbeth*, demonic negation excludes the God of redemption and shows God's "bloody Stage".

The questions Fernie detects in *Macbeth* are terrifying: "what if the demonic in fact is the last rung on the ladder, what if this is human personhood at its highest?" but his analysis – minute and painstaking – is persuasive. Macbeth's ambition to exceed himself is not realized by the mediating power of a Mephistopheles, nor is he a servant to Satan (on the contrary, his servant is Seyton). *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's 'Faustus' as Fernie calls it, emerges as the most radical artistic exposure of the vertiginously destructive heights of human ambition, which doesn't settle for life humbly accepted as mere givenness. Milton's Satan, next in Fernie's focus, is introduced as "Macbeth – raised to cosmological significance", "the demonic in pure form" (Fernie 2013: 69). Satan is someone who wants something else, and something more than God's creation. What makes him grand is that he is not self-deceiving; he turns away from "the debt immense of endless gratitude so burdensome" (*Paradise Lost* 4. 53) and steps into uncreated, autonomous selfhood, says Fernie. The two points that Fernie is making are that Satan is the primordial sufferer, the first created being to feel pain, which makes him akin to humanity, and the first being to have sex as known to humans, involving fantasy, perversion and cruelty, since in *Paradise Lost*, demonic sexuality precedes natural sexuality. Thence an analogy: Adam and Eve become fully human with the integrated experience of "demonic desire [...] to be someone else in and through desire", says Fernie. For the demonic – *being*, as God's creation, is not enough.

Interpretations of *Macbeth* and *Paradise Lost*, along with those that follow of Dostoevsky's *Demons* and Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, stand out as a book-within-a-book. Whereas in Fernie's readings of *Macbeth* and *Paradise Lost*, the accent is mainly on the universal human condition, in Dostoevsky and Mann, symbolic representations of the demonic related to the cultural conditions of the Western world, Europe, Russia, Germany, and Christianity in its Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant variants prove themselves equally, if not more, pertinent. The philosophical import of Fernie's interpretation of Stavrogin, as the most alluring personification of the demonic in Dostoevsky, a distant and infinitely more intensified kin of Shakespeare's Hal and Hamlet, lies in the consideration of a state "*beyond identity*". Not only is he, in his amoral conduct, in his pride and haughtiness, on the other side of the *human* condition of being – understood as humbly accepted givenness fulfilled in love – or, furthermore, on the other side of good and evil, Stavrogin is, along with being recklessly unfaithful to

others and to God, incapable of fidelity to himself, as is well shown by Fernie. His constant self-negation is what, according to Fernie, brings him close to the spiritual self-negation of the saints, and makes him a negative, demonic variant of such an ontological *ek-stasis*. The philosophical aspect of Fernie's reading of *Doctor Faustus* belongs to ethics and aesthetics at the same time, like the philosophical aspects of the novel itself. The demonic is again related to Shakespeare, only more so, in persuasive parallels between early modern recognition of the barrenness of parody and self-subversion in *Love's Labour's Lost*, on the one hand, and in the eponymous modern opera written by Mann's central character, composer Adrian Leverkühn, on the other. The extremes of heat and cold in the music of the German composer, with their infernal and apocalyptic echoes, symbolically reflect the artist's existential aloofness, chill, and absence of love, conditioned by modern Faustus' contract with the Devil in exchange for the groundbreaking artistic expression. The motivational lines of the novel are polyvalent in representing the demonic in modern art, in German Nazism, in Lutheran Christianity and in Western civilization. All these semantic potentials receive adequate elaboration in Fernie's interpretation, along with the major challenge of the novel: the paradox of art, which is at the same time demonic and serene. Leverkühn's new musical system (the metaphorical representation of Schönberg's dodecaphony) is perfectly organized and rational, like a magic square, and Mann uses it as a symbolic parallel to the demonically destructive politics of Nazism. Nevertheless, Mann's modern artist is a cold transgressor, but he is also a self-chosen *pharmakos*. Leverkühn's final composition is his most infernal work, but, oddly enough, it brings the possibility of beauty and of harmony, of an art being on intimate terms with humanity: *auf Du und Du*. The demonic transgressor and demonic transgression bring us to the other side of good and evil once more. Parallel to that and concerning form as a carrier of meanings – demonic transgressions require generic transgressions: neither *Demons* nor *Doctor Faustus* can be seen as exemplary novels in terms of their form. In fact, it is the contrary, just like Goethe's demonic masterpiece *Faust*, especially *Part II*, which is generically indefinable and utterly (diabolically) shape-shifting, as if the artistic structures, and not only the characters, signify – *I am not what I am*.

Part Two brings philosophical support to Fernie's audacious advocacy of the demonic as a paradoxically positive transgression which, like 'the dark night of the soul', can lead to intensely pure spiritual states comparable

mutatis mutandis to those of the saints. Kierkegaard comes first with his insight concerning different forms of self-expressive non-conformity in the demonic and the religious. After Kierkegaard's responsibility and intensification of true faith in the demonic aspects of fear and trembling, as a superlative of intensity comes Nietzsche with his affirmative, albeit ambivalent and agonized recognition of the demonic. Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* serves both as a poetic equivalent of Nietzschean enthusiasm for the demonic and an introduction to the ensuing dialectic in the works of Boehme, Schelling and Hegel, where the ecstatic freedom of demonic energy is balanced with the holiness of existential and spiritual peace.

Part Three deals with the relationship of the demonic and desire in the ambit of possession. Again, between Tillich, in whose theology Fernie finds a clear distinction between demonic possession and religious ecstasy, and Barth's understanding of religion as a fearful thing in which human opening to the absolute implies sacrifice, suffering and giving up the rational structure of the mind, the author follows Barth. Upon entering the most disturbing, tormenting and intimate area of being – the paradoxes of demonic possession – be it on the side of the possessing or the possessed, Fernie is determined to give it an openly personal approach. A version of the essay previously published in the collection *Shakespeare and I* (McKenzie and Papadopoulou, eds. 2012: 19-39) entitled "Mea culpa", now appears under the title "Angelo" and elucidates the "sin in loving virtue" of Shakespeare's Angelo from *Measure for Measure* as demonic profanation dependent on deep awareness of the Good. Fernie manages to interweave a critical reading of the play with an ethical analysis, focusing not only on the characters of the play: Angelo and Isabella, but on his very own self as well, thus powerfully drawing the readers into a whirlpool of self-examination. As in a natural vortex, our attention is whirled to the bottom of the problem and, after a memorable experience, released back to the academic decorum of reading literary criticism. An impressive accomplishment!

The ethical transgression inherent in possession is then examined in Melville's Claggart from *Billy Budd*, in James's Miss Jessel from *The Turn of the Screw*, and in a thrilling analysis of Yeats' *Leda*, with a double focus on Leda's human subjectivity of subjection and on the indifferent possession of the supernatural rapist Zeus. The closing counterpoint of this section is both a disturbing and comforting consideration of Christ as possessor in the contemporary novel *The Sparrow,* by Mary Doria Russell, and in Christian authors such as St John of the Cross and St John Chrysostom.

The final section of the book, at the other end of the phenomenon of possession, deals with the radical receptivity of the possessed. The third Shakespearean climax of this book, after *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure*, comes with the reading of *King Lear* focused on Poor Tom – not Poor Tom as Edgar's 'fraudulent, histrionic performance' from Greenblatt's famous essay "Shakespeare and the Exorcists" (Greenblatt 1988: 127), and not Edgar of 'cheerful and confident endurance', as described by Bradley (Bradley 1920: 306), but Poor Tom as Edgar's demon-afflicted, utterly deprived, egoless alter ego. Fernie asserts that Poor Tom's voice is more alive and more truthful than Edgar's sane clichés. The multifarious demons possessing Poor Tom embody "the existential recognition that, far from being masters of our own fate, we are, in multitudinous ways, mastered by them," claims Fernie (2013: 227). The subjectivity of subjection in this instance involves giving one's self to many possessors. Like the possessed man from St Mark's Gospel who says 'My name is Legion: for we are many' (Mark, 5. 2), Poor Tom is also – many, *he is not what he is*, but oddly enough, he is, according to Lear, "the thing itself" (*King Lear*, 3,4, 104), and according to Bradley, "in the secret of things" (Bradley 1920: 289). The painful experience of unwilling (or willing) susceptibility and openness, of spiritual nakedness is, stresses Fernie, inseparable from a fully experienced life. The radical example of Poor Tom prompts the author to juxtapose his interpretation with the Levinasian theory of the primacy of the Other, and to juxtapose, once more, the demonic and the sainthood, on the common ground of self-abandon which, in both cases, "extends into mystical knowledge of what is beyond self-experience". (Fernie 2013: 236)

Two more literary texts – Huxley's *The Devils of Loudon* and J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* – are paralleled with two personally related experiences of possession unmediated by art. As suggested in the subtitle: Literature and Experience, the book ends with a thoroughly disturbing personal record of the experience of possession by Daniel Paul Schreber, famous for his psychiatric case history. The artistically unmediated experience of 'real' spiritual nakedness makes the ending bitterly memorable and irrevocably unsettling.

Throughout the book, just as in the final section, which ties up various lines of intellectual elaboration of the demonic, one feels the presence of a self-subverting undercurrent reminder not to place too much confidence in intellectual formulas, but to feel disturbed by literature and responsible to experience. *The Demonic* seems to have been written with

the Kierkegaardian intention to keep "the wound of negativity" open and with a refusal to derive "positive, cozy joy from life". Thus, the author lets the two closing lines of the book create lingering awe for the readers: "The most gruesome time of my life was the most holy time of my life." and "I am not what I am."

2. The Aesthetics of Freedom

Richard Wilson, *Free Will: Art and Power on Shakespeare's Stage*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Richard Wilson's intellectual and critical atlas is a complex diagram which offers a creative and provocative consideration of several theoretical fields. In *Will Power*: *Essays on Shakespearean Authority* (1993), he positioned himself as a new historicist and defined his methodology as a Foucauldian dialogue between theory and archives; this was followed by *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in theatre, religion and resistance* (2004), which approached Shakespeare's reticence regarding religious questions in the manner of postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion, sensitive to "the unsaid/unwritten", and the dynamic interchange with Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu, Deleuze, Lacan, Levinas, Hélène Cixous in *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (2007). In his latest book *Free Will: Art and Power on Shakespeare's Stage* (2013), Wilson expands the demanding theoretical horizon of his works towards Kant's and Adorno's aesthetics, the intricacies of the political theology of Ernst Kantorowitz and Carl Schmitt, and the political and cultural theory of Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Rancière. From the initial research of the material conditions of Shakespearean authority in *Will Power*, via his detailed inquiry into the "resistance to resistance" and "*politique* respect for the secrecy of the human heart" of *Secret Shakespeare*, Richard Wilson has arrived at the point from where he offers an insight into the paradoxical nature of the "power of weakness" on the one hand and the "weakness of power" on the other. In *Free Will*, the readers will find a thorough, refined and precisely developed analysis of the artist's desire for "powerful powerlessness", the power in self-irony, passivity and creative unselfing.

Having chosen to reiterate Shakespearean expressions of freedom in plays and poems, with relevant emphases on artistic and political stances, Richard Wilson composes his book by concentrating on the most intriguing semantic knots. In his approach to Shakespeare's dual role as player and playwright, he draws on theories concerned with the meaning derived from both personal presence and symbolic representation. Leaving aside what he calls "the current *doxa* of Shakespeare as the exemplar of either sacred monarchy or monarchical selfhood", he conducts his line of reasoning by showing that Shakespeare's plays untie freedom from royalty and "dismantle sovereignty in all its forms". Richard Wilson's introduction of Simone Weil into the discussion of the Shakespearean subject – real playwright, real actor, fictional king, fictional servant, real king and real servant – is illuminating and thought-provoking. "Instead of a 'subject position', Shakespeare seems […] to fall back to what might be better termed an *abject position*," says Wilson and introduces Simone Weil's conviction that the only way into truth is through one's own annihilation and utter humiliation. Throughout the book, the author detects "politics of presence" and "poetics of representation", showing the rivalry of state and stage in Shakespearean culture. The convolution of dramatic art Wilson concentrates upon consists of the controversial position of "our bending author" – from the epilogue of *Henry V* and numerous other instances – whose ironic resistance depends upon restraint. The straightforward opposition to absolutism, a characteristic of Isaiah Berlin's concept of negative liberty, in Wilson's view, doesn't answer for Shakespeare's authorial attitude. On the contrary, by assuming the predetermined subservient role of the artist, which made so many critics see him as a supporter of absolutism, Shakespeare, "ever the post-structuralist *avant la lettre*", in Wilson's words, knew that entry into the symbolic order is a form of castration. He demystified the ruse of power by the careful performance of nonentity, which, paradoxically, produced a specific form of early modern creative autonomy.

Drawing on Adorno's opinion developed in *Aesthetic Theory* that the social aspect of art is not its manifest position taking, but its immanent advance against society, performed by its form, not by any recognizable social content, Wilson sees Shakespeare as an author who could "hold the mirror up to nature", or "show virtue her own feature", or "scorn her own image" in a far more superior way than Hamlet could have envisioned at all. Later in the book, Wilson traces Pierre Bourdieu's argument that

the self-reflexivity of art is liberating and considers Shakespeare's critical thinking in relation to both political and artistic sovereignty.

Wilson develops Foucault's concept of inverted sovereignty, its infamy and its Ubu-esque strategies, Derrida's notion of *iterabilité* as repetition that at the same time reiterates and brings change, Kierkegaard's insight that no repetition was possible in theatre, and connects them to Judith Butler's psychoanalytic model of foreclosure as the formation of a subject in subordination. One of the contentions of this book is that Shakespeare discovered the Erasmian topos of "the great stage of fools", present in *King Lear* and elsewhere in Shakespeare's works *passim*, as a pattern of showing the dialectical dynamics of determinism on the one hand, and free will on the other. The symbolic order that creates a subject is the same one which the subject opposes. This line of argument brings Wilson to Ernst Kantorowitz and the epochal transfer of sovereignty from ruler to poet, parallel not only in the inherent autonomy, but also in the ritual humiliation – as the symbolic integration of the weakness of power – to which kings were obliged before coronation, and the always already humiliated position of the artist as servant. *Free Will*, according to its author, "is thus a book about the creaturely echo-effect with which Shakespeare strove to minimize the sovereignty of his own writing, and generated a world of difference that exceeds the context of its enunciation not by contradicting, but by answering power back in its own words." (Wilson 2013: 10) Reiteration in the Derridean sense deconstructs and disarticulates the system. Via Derrida, Wilson draws our attention to the paradox of the artistic desire for powerful powerlessness. Ironic perspective and punning are at the heart of it: "How every fool can play upon the word!" Shakespeare, therefore, emerges from *Free Will* as an auto-ironic, auto-reflexive author, both autonomous and subdued to power, involved in distinguishing representation from presence, and language and art from power, all the time being aware of their indivisibility, which Wilson sees as tragic.

The title of the first chapter "Picture of Nobody" recalls the Caliban-Stephano-Trinculo scene from *The Tempest* (3, 2) and Wilson employs its echo as a background on which he develops the thesis that Shakespeare must have been, throughout his life, involved in creating a willed authorial nonentity. Concepts such as pre-Kantian interested disinterestedness, active passivity, dramatics of attention, formula of potentiality, fulfillment in non-fulfillment, epochal divestment of majesty, paperless person, power of attendance and creative unselfing arise in their full complexity

from Wilson's pulsating analyses of Kant, Derrida, Agamben, Lyotard, Kantorowitz, Bataille, and Eliot. Throughout, Richard Wilson is ever attentive to the authorial voices of contemporary Shakespeare scholarship and never misses an occasion to intensify the polyphonic composition of his own text by paying attention to his fellow Shakespeareans' theses regarding the matter he is dealing with (Greenblatt, Lupton, Hawkes, Dollimore, Sinfield, Barker, Belsey, and Fernie). Diverse dimensions of Shakespeare's self-suppressing reticence are approached in this manner: from the introductory scrutiny of his controversial comportment in the Welcombe and Mountjoy cases via numerous lines which express the player's and playwright's self-effacing position, to the liberating refusal of authorial sovereignty that Richard Wilson consequently conceptualizes.

The second chapter "Welsh Roots" takes readers into the dim light of the rabbit-duck type contentious historical understanding of Welsh-English and English-Welsh cultural and political relations, providing them with a post postcolonial inversion of the Tudor state and its dignitaries as Welsh colonizers of England. The new historicist 'thick description' of the introduction flows into a sharp interpretation of the education parody in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* bringing together a multilayered discussion with Terence Hawkes, George Bataille, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Rancière and other interlocutors. Monthy Python's perspective is one of the viewpoints considered as well. In the next chapter "O World", the focus widens towards a more general outlook and encompasses the aesthetic aspects of the "Wooden O" in 1599, at the newly-opened Globe theatre, along with the political aspects of the fictive Roman world from the inauguration play *Julius Caesar* and the intrusions of real Elizabethan politics. The German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt is addressed here, as elsewhere throughout *Free Will*, for the constructive argument regarding the disturbingly unresolved tension between Shakespearean yearning towards the aesthetic purity of a play and the traumatic irruption of real history and politics into the art of theatre. In search of the aesthetics of Shakespeare's freedom and the freedom of the aesthetic, Wilson knowingly insists on conversing with Schmitt, who wouldn't accept the conceptual difference of theatre, forum and the pulpit, but would, nevertheless, concede that Shakespeare represented history as a ground to be negated, which, in certain aspects at least, impels the poetic and theatrical transpositions of the historical and political echoes and repetitions towards the interested disinterestedness of the aesthetic.

In the chapter "Denmark's a prison", the sovereignty of art is under scrutiny in the context of close affiliation with the utterly aestheticised absolutism of the Danish King Christian IV. The lively narrated accounts of John Dowland at the court of King Christian and the touring English theatre companies at the courts of Germany and Netherlands flow into a carefully carried out analysis of *Hamlet* in the light of King James' relations with Queen Anne's brother Christian IV and the Oldenburg dynasty. Read from such a perspective, *Hamlet* as "a tragedy about a system that so dangerously combines the barbaric and Baroque" (Wilson 2013: 212), appears as a daring provocation. Wilson sees Shakespeare as "skating on very thin ice", his symbolically mediated political allusions and premonitions as mad impertinence. Along with an overview of the preceding criticism concerning the meta-theatrical significance of Hamlet's explicit and Shakespeare's implicit poetics of theatre, Wilson brings up Montrose's expression 'meta-theatrical tragedy of state', which in his interpretation becomes a "tragedy of non-cooperation", and winds the text up with a playful quotation from another Dane – Hans Christian Andersen and *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

In peeling the onion of the stage and state dynamics, Wilson reaches its very core without residue in a far-reaching interpretation of *King Lear* entitled "Great stage of fools: *King Lear* and the King's Men". Structural and symbolic analogies with the *Cinderella*-type motives, tales and myths, folkloric or artistic, ascertain the elemental base of *King Lear* so as to discern beneath it not only desacralized royal sovereignty but a specific depersonalization of the playwright's work. The introduction of Kafka's story "The Hunger Artist" and Beckett's poetics symbolically and conceptually support Wilson's hermeneutic turn towards the negative aesthetics. *King Lear*, according to Wilson, touches upon symbolic self-castration, artistic *askesis* comparable to the anoretic passive aggression directed against the surrounding reality, the art of failure and the negative absolutism of the autonomous artwork. In Adorno's analysis of the modernist minimalism of the Dadaist "da-da", Wilson finds confirmation for the radical negative aesthetic potential of the destitution, divestment, linguistic abstraction and semantics of the absurd in *King Lear*. The Shakespeare of *King Lear*, in Wilson's view, is by no means a flattering King's man, profiting from his privileged official position as appointed royal artist, but, on the contrary, a profound, albeit skillfully disguised, provocateur who symbolically deconsecrates the King and deconstructs the abject position of the artist at the same time.

Wilson's interpretation of Shakespeare's implicit focus on the Stuart dynasty requires close and exacting attention in the chapter on *Macbeth* entitled "Double trouble". The mirror from the masque that the Witches set up for Macbeth, carried by the eighth ruler of the same dynasty, reflects rulers with twofold balls and triple scepters, usually interpreted as James VI of Scotland and I of England and perhaps his brother-in-law Christian IV as well. Nevertheless, when Richard Wilson reminds his readers that the eighth Stuart ruler was James' mother Mary Queen of Scots, the meaning suddenly becomes deeply controversial: was Shakespeare, instead of adulation, symbolically mediating – with artistic skill, ruse, freedom and audacity – the accusation of a son who was, more or less indirectly, a traitor to his own mother? Less than a hundred lines later, in the very next scene, Macduff's son, Richard Wilson reminds us, poses a crucial question "What is a traitor?" Interdisciplinary arches are a distinctive trait of Wilson's criticism, and they're always suitably placed. One can hardly see a better instance for a comparative analysis of Caravaggio's *Medusa* painted for the Medici and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* played for James Stuart in the same year – 1606. These contemporaneous works which connect Baroque and barbarity serve as an outline for a dialectically ramified argument regarding the perception of the authorized and unauthorized, 'good' and 'bad' violence. The arguments progress from Schmitt's emphasis on *theology* to Kantorowitz's emphasis on *political* in *political theology,* from Benjamin's critique of violence to Derrida's deconstructive philosophy and in the end lead the reader to the conclusion that *Macbeth* expresses a refusal of the spiritually mystified violence invested in the modern state.

In the continuation of the study dealing with the anxiety of the playwright whose art was not only intended for the general theatre audience, but also a commanded performance at the absolutist court, Wilson investigates an anamorphic reversal in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. The seventh chapter "Your crown's awry" again refers to the poetics of Baroque painting, adjacent to the poetics of Stuart theatre masque. The painter in focus now is Velázquez and the painting is *Las Meninas*, famous for the simultaneous representation of at least three perspectives: that of the central characters, the princess and her maids of honour, that of the hidden royal couple, reflected in a looking glass, and that of the painter, offered to the spectator as a peculiar exercise of the aesthetics of freedom. Velázquez's equally famous paining *Las Hilanderas*, with equally delicate lingering tension between the absolutist power and the power of art, is

another central analogy in this chapter. Wilson's innovative contribution to discussions concerning visual and anamorphic semantics of the play brings into focus the wryness of perspective vision, as well as the ironic position of the artist's own viewpoint and of the democratic gaze. The given arguments bring to mind Friedrich Schlegel's definition of irony as a permanent parabasis, the indispensable element of the Attic Old Comedy, primarily Aristophanes', in which the chorus comments on the action, and provides a special – knowing – perspective to the audience. Wilson begins with E. H. Gombrich's thesis that the idea of art in which the painter's skill of suggestion matches the public's skill in taking hints can be recognized in Antony's words on the polymorphic transformations of a cloud (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4, 14, 3-8). His elaborate debate, duly involving all the relevant authors' viewpoints concerning the play of perspectives, the phenomenon of anamorphosis, the aspects of Mannerism and Baroque in the art of painting and in the Jacobean theatre, ends with the contention that "a lower place" of the *waiting* characters in *Antony and Cleopatra,* and *mutatis mutandis* that of actors, playwrights, artists, physically close to power, but socially and politically weak, is characterized by the uncanny power of weakness.

The *finale* of the *Free Will* symphony deals with *Coriolanus*, the "unperformable play about unperformability". Related to Wilson's two previous texts, "Against the Grain: Representing the Market in *Coriolanus*" from *Will Power* and "The Management of Mirth: Shakespeare via Bourdieu" from *Marxist Shakespeares* (Howard and Shershow, eds. 2001: 159-177), this study penetrates into both the metaphoric and metonymic representation of convoluted relationships between artists and the commercial public, on the one hand, and aristocratic patrons, on the other. A careful deciphering of Shakespeare's hypothetical code of the autonomy of art, disguised in the tragic fate of the Roman general who changes sides in search of a dignified position for his own valour, introduces the specific standpoints of Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* by the German philosopher corresponds with historical reports of the social dynamics at London playhouses in the early modern age. Habermas traces the roots of art as a commodity to the playhouse in which everyone had equal claim to judge and Wilson traces Shakespeare's metaphoric expressions of consumer demand in histories and Roman plays, thus shedding light on the birth of the modern cultural public sphere in which the urban audience becomes a sovereign of a consumer society.

Bourdieu's assertions from *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* fulfill Wilson's theoretical framework by illuminating the fact that the artists who allege creative freedom in any cultural system are always confronted with a double bind of *economic demand* and *political command*. When interpreting *Coriolanus* as Shakespeare's metaphoric/metonymic expression of the aesthetic notion of interested disinterestedness, art-for-art's-sake represented as valour-for-valour's-sake, Wilson widens the picture towards a comparative and diachronic understanding of the works of Flaubert and Baudelaire dealing with the same problem. In between the public sphere and the demands of the powerful patrons, in Shakespeare's case, the Herbert family (brothers William and Philip, with their respective lists of aristocratic titles, and their mother Mary, Countess of Pembroke, Sir Philip Sidney's sister), stands a writer and player, who, like the general he created, faces the complex issue of self-authorship ("As if a man were author of himself/ And knew no other kin" (*Coriolanus* 5, 3, 35-37). The play which was never presented on the public stage, but only for the Herbert patrons and their guests, is, according to Stanley Cavell, Shakespeare's defence of poetry. Richard Wilson reads it as the most noncompliant rejection of feudal livery and an assertion of freedom adroitly conveyed by a playwright aware of the tension between the medieval concept of sovereignty and the modern royalty of literary subject.

The closing movement of Richard Wilson's remarkable composition winds up the preceding discussions – often cynically demystifying and involving *tutti* of postmodern theory, as well as Karl Schmitt and Ernst Kantorowitz, Adorno and Habermas – with the sparkling but serene *andante* of the Epilogue entitled: "No Sovereignty: Shakespeare's voyage to Greece". Elaborate scrutiny of both political and artistic sovereignty and their interactive tensions, in historical reality and in dramatic fiction, has prepared readers for Shakespeare's utopian intimations of the late plays, *As You Like It* and some of the *Sonnets*. Gonzalo's famous utopian fantasy from *The Tempest* is harshly undermined and deconstructed in the play itself. Most of the plays discussed, as well as the romances, confirm Shakespeare's awareness of what Agamben calls "the dark mystery of the sovereign power", and his readiness to show, from play to play, princes who beg for mercy. *The Sonnets* convey the idea of the poet as a superior – sovereign – creator, but the poet of *The Sonnets* is "tongue-tied Will" as well. Sovereignty and No Sovereignty. The Epilogue contains a 'study-within-a-study' on utopia, with Fredrick Jameson, Jacques Derrida, Marx-

via-Derrida, and Marx-via-Jameson, Ernst Bloch, Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Hélène Cixous, and Slavoj Žižek, as Wilson's co-locutors, along with the presentist Shakespeareans: Ewan Fernie and Hugh Grady. Passages with lively responses to the voices of Stephen Greenblatt, Julia Lupton, Gary Taylor, David Norbrook, Simon Palfrey, and Kiernan Ryan confirm the impression one has throughout this book, that Wilson always considers the current issues in Shakespeare studies relevant for his own inquiry, and never leaves them without recognition or creative dialogical expansion.

'No Sovereignty' emerges in the Epilogue from the Golden Age, Arcadian and Utopian trans-temporal and symbolically powerful influences, and from Pauline Christianity, here approached via Alain Badiou's postmodern interpretation, from Heidegger's ultimate disavowal of the sovereignty of all decision making, or Hannah Arendt's inference that renounced sovereignty is a condition for freedom. *Free Will* shows Shakespeare's art as free because it mediates, directly or indirectly, an awareness of the aporetic nature of weakness and power, of the *weakness of power* and the *power in weakness*. At the very end of the *Introduction*, Wilson quotes David Reiff's meditation on Susan Sontag's death and his admiration for a writer who can express human unimportance and remain compassionate, who can take in the real measure of one's own insignificance. Immediately after that, Wilson mentions the "voluntary servitude" of Étienne de la Boétie, Montaigne's friend, and one of the Renaissance thinkers to whom, along with Montaigne and Shakespeare, the ability Reiff admires can be attributed. At the very end of his Epilogue, symmetrically, Wilson highlights the parallel between the *askesis* of modern art and Shakespearean weakness as an assertion of sovereign freedom, which he calls "an *aporia* that literally cries out for endless deconstruction".

Like Cecil Grayson, who compared reading *The King's Two Bodies* to deciphering a kaleidoscope, the reader of *Free Will* reaches the end of the book with the impression that following Wilson's hermeneutic journey has been a challenging task indeed. Nevertheless, virtually every step of this subtle line of reasoning, leading to 'No Sovereignty' as an endlessly deconstructive and paradoxical source of freedom, provides, as with all Wilson's previous books, indelible intellectual gratification and reward.

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Received: 29 November 2014
Accepted for publication: 1 December 2014

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ПРОУЧАВАЊЕ ШЕКСПИРА, ФИЛОЗОФИЈА И СВЕТСКА КЊИЖЕВНОСТ

Сажетак

Овај рад представља уводна критичка разматрања у вези са две нове књиге из области савремених проучавања Шекспира. Реч је о студији Јуана Фернија *Демонско у књижевноти и искуству* (2013) и студији Ричарда Вилсона *Слободни Вил или слобода воље. Уметност и моћ на Шекспировој позорници* (2013). Обе књиге истичу се свеобухватним повезивањем проучавања Шекспира, филозофије и светске књижевности. У студији Јуана Фернија, Шекспирово стваралаштво је, упоредо с делима Милтона, Достојевског, Томаса Мана, Кјеркегора и других аутора, сагледано у контексту демонске трансгресије, која је, парадоксално, блиска и аналогна мистичком познању надискуствене сфере. У студији *Слободни Вил или слобода воље*, Ричард Вилсон се бави односом уметности и политичке моћи. Ка демистификацији тог односа води разумевање искуства и пажљивог приказивања непризнатог уметничког (не)бића, које је ауторима раног модерног доба, парадоксално, обезбедило посебну врсту стваралачке аутономије. У компаративном сагледавању две студије, овај рад приказује и преиспитује књижевно-херменеутичке, филозофске и компаратистичке домете савремене шекспирологије.

Кључне речи: Проучавање Шекспира, књижевност, искуство, уметност, естетика, демонско, слобода, моћ