



Between Exile and Execution: Shakespeare's Deadly Dance of Sovereignty and Bare Life

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Abstract: This paper examines Shakespeare's dramatization of sovereign power through the concepts of Giorgio Agamben's bare life and Achille Mbembe's necro politics, interrogating the sovereign's ultimate power to decide who lives, who dies, and who remains outside the law. In *As You Like It*, exile renders the Duke Orlando and his companions, by stripping them of their legal sovereign right and reducing them to mere survival in the forest of Arden. Necro politics is illustrated in *Romeo and Juliet* through civic and familial decrees, and the young lovers' fate is sealed by sovereign authority, as their banishment equates to social death. In *The Tempest*, Prospero exercises colonial power by subjugating Ariel and Caliban, the island's inhabitants. They get dispossessed by Prospero and reduced to servitude while fully denied legal recognition. By examining these dynamics, this paper explores how Shakespeare indicates the power of the sovereign as a "deadly dance" between protection and exclusion, dramatizing the political vulnerability of human life under exclusion, exile, and the regime of colonial domination. His plays thus fuel the notion of modern (late 20th century onward) biopolitical lives, portraying how sovereign practices its power through the creation of lives deemed expandable.

Key Words: Sovereignty, Bare life, Necro politics, Exile, Execution, Colonial domination, Biopolitics, As You Like It, Romeo and Juliet, The Tempest.

1. Introduction:

Modern (late 20th and early 21st century) paradoxical sovereign power deals with the inclusion of the individual subject within its protection and excludes others, reducing them to mere biological existence. This is evident in early modern England's anxiety about power and vulnerability, which is strongly illustrated in Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies. In this article, the "Modern Biopolitics" refers specifically to the political theories developed in the late 20th and early 21st century, particularly the works of Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe, which are used as the key theoretical frameworks for interpreting Shakespeare's three early modern dramas (tragedy-*The Tempest*, Comedy- *As You Like It*, and romance-*Romeo and Juliet*).

Shakespeare repeatedly staged the sovereign's deadly control over human life, deciding who lives, who dies, and who is included or excluded from the protection of the law. Giorgio Agamben's concept of "**Bare life**"—life stripped of political, social and legal protection- "**entirely exposed before sovereign power and violence**"—and Achille Mbembe's notion of "**Necro politics**"— where the sovereign plays its ultimate power over people's life of who may live and who must die—provide a useful lens to analyze the "Sovereign power concept" in Shakespeare's plays. According to Agamben, "**The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.**" (Agamben, 1998). This essay will show Shakespeare's strategy of showing the sovereign's power in expelling, banishing, and killing individuals, thereby

turning them into “bare life” and subjecting them to a necropolitical regime through his courts and families in the plays—*As You Like it*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*.

This study asks two central questions: Is the Sovereign's power to execute, abandon, and exile individuals a uniquely modern political phenomenon, or can it be found in the dramatizations of classic prodigious writers like Shakespeare? If it does, then how do Shakespeare's plays dramatize the sovereign's power to exclude, abandon, and destroy life through practices of exile, banishment, and colonial domination? More specifically, this study investigates how Shakespeare investigates the idea of modern biopolitical theorists by staging forms of life that stand on the threshold between banishment and protection. Through the theoretical lenses of Giorgio Agamben's concept of “Bare life” and Achille Mbembe's concept of “Necro politics,” this analysis examines how Shakespeare's dramatic worlds construct spaces where individuals are stripped of legal rights and reduced to only mere biological existence.

The central argument of this essay is that Shakespeare's dramatization of sovereignty is not simply a political authority but a mechanism that produces vulnerable life through exclusion, which is visible in the practice of the modern sovereign power. In *As You Like It*, the exiled Duke and his followers live a precarious life in the forest of Arden outside society's law and control. The feud between the Capulets and Montagues and the Prince's brutal decree in *Romeo and Juliet* show how familial and civic authorities wield life-and-death power over the young lovers, transforming banishment into a form of social death. In *The Tempest*, Prospero plays the role of an exiled colonial ruler who subjugates Ariel and Caliban—embodying the colonial Other—reducing their lives under his sovereign will, creating a structure of domination that anticipates modern colonial biopolitics. Close readings of significant scenes from each play, combined with recent Shakespeare studies, reveal Shakespeare's dramatization of the lethal intersection between sovereignty and bare life: exile, enslavement, execution, and exclusion of humanity.

Recent scholarship on Shakespeare increasingly acknowledges that early modern drama presages contemporary discussions surrounding sovereignty, biopolitics, and colonial power (Loomba 2020; Heffernan 2021; Wilson 2022). Drawing upon these insights, this paper contends that Shakespeare's theatrical worlds serve as political laboratories that render the mechanisms of sovereign violence visible through themes of exile, banishment, and colonial domination.

2. Theoretical Framework: Bare Life and Necro Politics

Modern theorists of power have demonstrated that sovereign rule often depends on certain factors related to the biological nature of its subjects. It emphasizes the production of bare life—human lives excluded from the legal and social protection of the sovereign. Agamben introduces the concept of “**Homo Sacer**,” referring to a person who exists solely as a “**bare life**”—life stripped of political, social and legal protection. Bare life is reduced to its biological dimension, unadorned by rights or political recognition, which Agamben mentions as “**pure vitality denuded to its symbolic significance and political capacity.**” (Agamben, 1998). The figure of *homo sacer* exemplifies how sovereign power can exclude an individual from the realm of law while still subjecting that life to its violence. Fabio Santos observes that “**enslaved and stateless persons in colonial regimes become akin to**

'bare life', living as 'the living dead', reduced to bare life.'" (Santos, 2025). Agamben shows that law functions by drawing a line: it not only provides security but also determines who falls outside its realm— **"Law in its operation, creates a space where life is both protected and objectified."** (Agamben, 1998). Agamben traces back to the roots of modern biopolitics back to ancient legal orders, suggesting a continuity between classical practices and contemporary mechanisms of control. By invoking historical and philosophical sources, Agamben underlines that the paradoxes of sovereignty are not new but have long shaped the relationship between power and life— **"The shadow of ancient legal orders looms over modern sovereignty."** (Agamben, 1998) which we can notice in the sovereign practices in Shakespearean plays.

Achille Mbembe connects to this idea by implementing her theory of **"necro politics"**, where the sovereign decides who must die— **"Sovereignty today is not just about managing life but determining who must die."** (Mbembe, 2020). Necro politics creates **"death worlds"** for its subjects—spaces where life is systematically devalued and certain populations are made to exist in a state of permanent vulnerability. This form of power is most visible in colonial rule, war zones, and totalitarian regimes where entire groups are systematically subjected to violence, exclusion from social life, and annihilation. Mbembe notes, **"Under necropolitical rule, the entire population is subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead."** (Mbembe, 2020). According to Lisa, **"Necro politics in early modern drama is rarely about absolute death, but about theatrical management of threatened life—a suspended state where the body is 'kept alive' only to be governed more fully through fear and spectacle."** (Lisa, 2023), shows how characters like Caliban or even Juliet are kept alive even in a suspended state—biologically sustained but politically erased.

Shakespearean plays illustrate Agamben and Mbembe's concept vividly, both in action and speeches, through the sovereign power of any Duke, King, Prince, or patriarch by their often-exercised arbitrary power to banish, kill, or degrade subjects and kin—creating zones removed from legal safety and reducing life to death. We see Agamben's implementation of bare life through the banishment and expulsion of characters and the treatment of certain figures like Caliban of *The Tempest* and the unwed lovers of *Romeo and Juliet*, where they are counted outside of social and legal order. Mbembe's necro politics is seen in speeches and edicts that threaten life and impose death as the penalty and practice of the ultimate sovereign rule. Throughout *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare dramatizes the modern concept of biological exclusion (Agamben) and necropolitical violence (Mbembe)---where the sovereign controls the bodies and lives.

3. Methodology and Analytical Framework:

This study employs a qualitative literary methodology based on theoretical textual analysis and close readings of Shakespeare's texts. The primary method consists of interpreting selected scenes from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest* by collaborating them with the conceptual frameworks of Agamben's biopolitics and Mbembe's necro politics. Rather than treating the texts as historical documents, the analysis approaches them as a dramatic representation of the political power where questions of sovereignty, exclusion, and vulnerability are staged through dialogues and characterization.

The selection of these three texts is deliberate. Each of the texts illustrates different dramatic genres and political environments, allowing the study to explore how sovereign power operates through multiple contexts. The politics of exile and pastoral displacement are shown in *As You Like It*, urban civic authority and political sovereignty are clearly portrayed in *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest* foregrounds colonial domination and imperial control. Together, these plays illustrate different mechanisms through which individuals may be reduced to “bare lives”.

The analytical method combines close textual analysis combining with theoretical conceptions. Key passages are examined for how they dramatize exile, execution, banishment, and familial sovereignty, where the theories give strong support to interpret these dramatic structures. According to recent scholars, Heffernan and Wilson, “Shakespeare’s plays frequently reveal the unstable boundaries between political belonging and social abandonment.” (Heffernan 2021; Wilson 2022). By examining Shakespeare’s texts alongside contemporary political theory, the study aims to show how early modern drama anticipates modern discussions of sovereignty and biopolitical control.

4. Exile, Violence, and Bare Life in *As You Like It*

Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* centers on the characters who have been crucial victims of Agamben’s bare life and necropolitical subject of the sovereign by being exiled, banished, and relegated to the forest of Arden, where the old social rules are suspended. Duke Friedrich usurped the throne and exiled his brother Senior Duke. On the other hand, Orlando flees his home in fear of his older brother Oliver, who threatens to kill him. Here, the two sets of brothers are seen enacting sovereign cruelty and violence within the family: one brother banishes the other by seizing power, and the other plots fratricide. Shakespeare shows the fragility of life when the sovereign’s safeguarding is withdrawn.

Duke senior, speaking among his fellow followers in the forest of Arden, acknowledges the reversal of fortune- **“Sweet are the uses of adversity.”** (Shakespeare, 1997) The duke praises the life in Arden, saying, **“Under the Greenwood tree/ who loves to lie with me.....find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks.”** (Shakespeare, 1997) Here, their adversity in the shape of exile is compared to a “toad” that **“Wears yet a precious jewel yet in his head.”** (Shakespeare, 1997)—carries a subtle silver lining. But this pastoral sight itself underlines how these courtiers are reduced to death by being stripped of political protection: in Duke Friedrich's reign, they are no longer courtiers at court but bare humans **“among the green forest”**. As Agamben’s theory suggests, they are excluded from the courtly lives and can praise only a simple life because the duke’s sovereign power has rendered them outsiders or included them as subjects to be neglected in political and social life, living on the margins. Matthew notes, **“Shakespeare often presents the forest as a space that contrasts with courtly power: at the duke’s exile, 'life outside of political order is precarious but also instructive.”** (Matthew, 2020).

Shakespeare portrays Arden as an ambiguous site of in-betweenness where the characters experience violence and cruelty, but it also becomes a site of resistance and transformation. The characters suffer from hunger, cruelty, and even the threat of wild animals, but this also helps them achieve freedom from the sovereign’s rude intervention, as Duke Senior’s daughter says their journey is **“to liberty but not banishment.”**

(Shakespeare, 1997), emphasizing that they can at least escape the sovereign's tyranny, living outside the law. According to Moon and Brian, "**Rosalind and Celia's arrival in the forest is marked not by freedom but by hunger—an immediate stripping of noble privilege that reframes the forest not as idyllic but as politically indifferent.**" (Brian, 2021).

The famous line "**Sweet are the uses of adversity**" (Shakespeare, 1997) also needs a deeper political interpretation. Duke senior's statement reflects the paradox of the sovereign's exclusion rather than just signifying the simple pastoral simplicity. The duke is violently expelled from the political order, which leads him to reinterpret exile as political freedom. In Agamben's terms, this state is the ultimate state of ambiguity of life outside the law, where individuals lose their political identity, surviving only with their biological identity. According to Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Shakespeare's exiled figures often inhabit threshold spaces where political belonging collapses into a form of vulnerable life" (Lupton 2019). The forest of Arden thus becomes a space that Agamben calls "**a state of exception**" – a territory where an individual is reduced to death by being banished from the normal legal protection. Shakespeare dramatizes how a sovereign's necro power practice does not just remove them from society but produces a precarious existence for them, which oscillates between freedom and vulnerability.

Oliver's treatment of Orlando provides a parallel of bare life violence within the familial actions. Early in the play, Orlando relates that his brother has "**tended my wounds/ with bare eyes/ Bred the danger of the field.**" (Shakespeare, 1997)—directing Oliver's action in reducing Orlando's life to "**bare bones and bloody rags.**" (Shakespeare, 1997). Oliver's greed for power puts Orlando between life and death, and Orlando's desperate seeking for aid. Later, Orlando's repentance proves how his brother came nearly to death at the hands of his brother. Throughout the play, the family centers the role of the ultimate application of sovereign power, where Oliver as a self-appointed ruler, reduced Orlando nearly to death, and Orlando's escape to the forest can be interpreted as falling into the "**State of exception**", severed from the normal social law and excluded from being a political body rather than a mere biological object. Orlando lives "**naked in the hostile plains**" (Shakespeare, 1997), depending fully upon fate and piety until Duke Senior's courtly sympathy rescues him. Some critics align Orlando's entry in the forest and getting aid from the duke with hunger and hospitality themes: when Rosalind, in disguise, and Celia enter the forest, and Corin tells them that his master "**is of a churlish disposition**" (Shakespeare, 1997) and refuses them any hospitality. This scene dramatizes how the courtly lavishness and protection are lost for the characters, and they have to fend for even the bare necessities of life. This portrays Shakespeare's Forest life as a liminal bare life, under only the protection of nature and detached from sovereign safety, even as Duke Senior emphasizes its moral value.

However, Shakespeare complicates the concept by signifying the duke's gaining of spiritual freedom— "**I am in the midst of them/in country foppish he.**" (Shakespeare, 1997). In his eyes, the forest has taught him humility and truth. But it takes Friedrich's sovereign decree to reduce them in the forest. Thus, the question arises whether the duke's peaceful, bearable life in Arden is the true source of freedom or merely the representation or the outcome of arbitrary sovereign power? In practice, both courts retain brutal power. Oliver twice plots to kill Orlando, once by exiling him in Arden and a second time by

equipping a lion to kill him in the forest, showing brotherly power leading to a murderous dominion. Here, power hides its crime when the duke laments Orlando's state as "**my worthy nephew**" (Shakespeare, 1997) not knowing that the plot was designed by Oliver. In sum, *As You Like It* portrays the concept of bare life through the characters' survival story in the banishment, either by the mercy of nature or criminal kin. Shakespeare thus conveys Agamben and Mbembe's concept of sovereign power, that power can control lives and push citizens into a zone where they are dead to the society's protection but technically alive.

5. Sovereignty, Feud, and Death in *Romeo and Juliet*

Shakespeare shifts the pastoral sovereign cruelty to civic violence in his *Romeo and Juliet* in a violent city. Verona's rulers, the Capulets, the Montagues, and the prince play the feuding houses as sovereign domains of life and death. The prince banishes Romeo as soon as he kills Tybalt, and this banishment is perceived as tantamount to a death sentence: "**There is no world without Verona walls/ But purgatory, torture, hell itself/Hence-banished is banished from the world/And world's exile is death.**" (Shakespeare W. , 1992). In Agamben's idea, this banishment is connected to bare life, where Romeo is alive, but he is beyond the law's reach, unable to return, and treated as dead to society. Rejecting a life reduced to emptiness and sovereign violence, Romeo later kills himself. Juliet, too, is consigned to bare life when her father pressures her to marry Paris, who disowns her and threatens her with execution: "**If all else fails, myself has power to die.**" (Shakespeare W. , 1992) Both lovers confront a sovereign denial of their legal claim over life and death.

The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* also reveals how necropolitical power operates through the control and regulation of young bodies. The prince's decree against the violent attempt to restore civic order, yet the very act of banishment transforms Romeo into a politically abandoned subject. This scene aligns with Mbembe's idea that necropolitical authority often functions by creating zones where life becomes expendable, and the existence of that particular population threatens established authority (Mbembe 2019), which is produced by Romeo's banishment. Rome's banishment removes him from Verona's legal order, and in a suspended state where he cannot participate in social life. Heffernan, in his scholarly article, says that Shakespeare often portrays banishment as "social death," in which characters remain biologically alive but politically erased (Heffernan 2021). Romeo's despair- "**There is no world without Verona's wall**" – reveals the vulnerability of identity where identity is defined by civic belonging.

The institutions of Verona implement necro politics in every sphere of events. Prince Escalus delivers a very classical Hobbesian Sovereign threat at the very first of the play, where he says, "**If ever you disturb our streets again, / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of peace.**" (Shakespeare W. , 1992) The prince here directly indicates life and death as the sovereign's ultimate control, which Mbembe says "**decides who must live and who must die.**" (Mbembe, 2020). Though this decree fails to prevent Tybalt's murder of Mercutio, it underscores the prince's ultimate power, where he banishes Romeo, creating indirectly a 'death world' detached from any legal protection and normal social norms: "**And for that offence, / immediately we do exile him hence.**" (Shakespeare W. , 1992) In the play's logic, exile is as cruel as death for a young man in love, which marginalizes him in action and speech, where he can only perish. Juliet sees it so: "**There is no world**

beyond Verona's walls/ O, 'tis as true as if twere true itself:/ There is no world without Verona walls." (Shakespeare W. , 1992)

The familial authority in Shakespeare's plays is seen in the practice of necropolitical powers over lives. The Capulets and Montague houses play the role of mini-sovereignties enacting long grudges with lethal force. The street brawls of Act 1 portray how the feuding two houses, the Tybalt and Capulet on one side and the Montague on the other, have made the state a lawless site of vendetta. Juliet's rejection of marrying Paris leads her to fall into the rage of Lord Capulet himself, who threatens him with social death: **"Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch! / We have done with thee. Get thee to church o' Thursday, or never after look me in the face."** (Shakespeare W. , 1992) Here, the father's authority is absolute, and Juliet's life is in obedience. In Agamben's terms, Juliet is in danger of being reduced to 'homo sacer' or 'bare life' for not obeying her sovereign father. Capulet also says, **"I will drag thee on a hurdle thither."** (Shakespeare W. , 1992)—suggesting the sovereign's power over life and honor akin to necropolitical sanction.

Ultimately, the prince laments the outcomes of sovereign violence: **"See what a scourge is laid upon your fate/ That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love."** (Shakespeare W. , 1992) In the final scene, he acknowledges his own complicity—**"I, for winking at your discords too/ Have lost a brace of kinsmen."** (Shakespeare W. , 1992), but reinforces sovereign authority by using the tragedy. At the end of the play, power is enacted through death sentences upon Romeo and Juliet as if it were their duty to suppress them by political punishment. In this way, the play's sovereign power enacts the necro politics of Mbembe and the bare life of Agamben on a personal scale, where life is conditioned and controlled and later reduced to a lawless state by enmity and governed by lethal decree.

6. Colonial Sovereignty and Bare Life in *The Tempest*

The Tempest is a perfect example, portraying colonial sovereignty, exile, and colonial violence most overtly. Prospero was himself a rightful Duke of Milan, exiled to an island by his brother, but on that island, he becomes a new kind of self-proclaimed sovereign. He wields magical power to control life and death, to command spirit and air. Prospero was himself an exiled object of sovereign power, but on the island, he captivates Caliban and Ariel, who are the real inhabitants of the island, and regards them as his own property. Modern critics term Prospero as the European colonizer who snatched the lands of the inhabitants from their land and extended dominion over them. Yi Ching Huan says Shakespeare situates Prospero **"as a European subject who has been exiled to an alien island and then becomes the ruler of the people and the creatures there."** (Huan, 2022) and that **"the play's representations of Prospero's relation...with Ariel and Caliban...reveal the significance of the underlying colonial discourse."** (Huan, 2022) In other words, *Tempest* collides with the notion of exile of sovereign power, reducing lives to bare lives and colonialism: Prospero's exile, as explored by Agamben and Mbembe's theory, and later Prospero's play of domination over the island's inhabitants, directs attention to the dominion power of colonial sovereignty.

Prospero's domination on the island can also be seen through the lens of colonial biopolitics. Postcolonial critiques including Loomba has argued that Prospero's invention

can be seen as an early modern European invention with new territories and spreading domination over the indigenous people (Loomba, 2020). In this context, Caliban represents an individual or a subject whose life is fully governed by the sovereign, existing within the colonial death world without any autonomy. Later, Prospero's control over language intensifies the situation. Prospero turns communication into a tool of domination by teaching Caliban language but not giving him any political recognition. According to Loomba, the play simultaneously exposes the "civilizing" and "subjugating" mechanisms of the colonial power, revealing the subjects as both included within the imperial regime and at the same time permanently excluded from political recognition (Loomba 2020). Caliban's famous protest, "**'tis island's mine**"- is not just a claim of territory, but a demand for political recognition that the colonial sovereign refuses to grant.

Caliban, Prospero's unwilling servant, also epitomizes Agamben's notion of bare life. Instead of being the native inhabitant of the island, Sycorax's son, he cannot seek or take any action on his own will. In one of Shakespeare's famous lines, Caliban asserts his claim to bare sovereignty: "**This island's mine, by Sycorax's my mother, which thou take'st from me.**" (Shakespeare W. , 1996). Here, Caliban fails to reclaim his natural right, and that is his island. Caliban replies not by legal language but by staffs and punishment with his magic. One of the academics, Shahabuddin, sums up Prospero's posture that "**Caliban is demonized, dehumanized, and enslaved by the colonial intruder and self-proclaimed sovereign Prospero.**" (Shakespeare W. , 2024). In doing so, Prospero reduces Caliban to a mere biological object rather than treating him as a living entity. Literary critics often note that Caliban portrays the character that Agamben says "bare life" in her theory. Though he is alive, he lives outside any protective law and reason. Caliban's victimization is even illustrated by his own speech: "**You taught me language...my profit on't/ Is I know how to curse?**" (Shakespeare W. , 1996) Though he learned the speech, he is cast outside of claiming any legal right over life. He has no family of his own and no legal rights on that island. Santos observes in a broader context of slavery that such an entity becomes "**The living dead, reduced to bare life.**" (Santos, 2025)- a description that perfectly fits Caliban.

Ariel's life also combines the idea of precarious and bare life. Prospero frees Ariel from Sycorax's imprisonment but captures him for his own service. Ariel lives constantly at Prospero's mercy- "**Remember I have done thee worthy service/Told thee no lies, made no mistakings....my liberty.**" (Shakespeare W. , 1996). Ariel's bondage is ideological as well as physical. Prospero enslaves him for his purpose, and he lives in a liminal state between life and spirit. He is free from bodily needs but bound by Prospero's parole and under his endless service. In Agamben's sense, Ariel's life is also bare- detached from any legal rights and no self-possession, but a precariously earned promise of release.

Numerous scholars read *The Tempest* from European colonial sovereign power. Santos notes that, "**Prospero's occupation of the island and his treatment of Ariel as a servant and Caliban as an enslaved entity mirror the European colonial practices of the time.**" (Santos, 2025). Other postcolonial critics note Prospero's "**hegemonic discourse**" over Caliban and the colonizer's "**lust for power.**" (Shakespeare W. , 2024). This play also accumulates the classical notion of "**the white man's burden**" myth, where Prospero tries to "**civilize**" Caliban, though Caliban retorts that the only benefit he got was a "**curse in learned language.**" (Shakespeare W. , 1996). However, all these concepts are

fully political; the island's sovereignty is usurped, and Prospero leads its native lives (Caliban and Ariel) into bare ones whose lives are administered by Prospero's whim. In Mbembe's statement, Prospero chooses to play the necropolitical master's choice- he could kill Caliban, but spares him, making his life servitude the punishment. One critic observes that Prospero's command amounts to rendering Caliban **“the creaturely preserve of bare life within a system of sovereignty.”** (Meheri, 2023).

Finally, it is to be said that, though Prospero in the final scene reconciles in social life, embraces mercy, and forgives his enemies, when he is about to return to the social order in Milan, up until then, he exemplifies the necropolitical sovereign power. Miranda's exclamation, **“O brave new world, / that has such people in it.”** (Shakespeare W. , 1996) Ironically, a colonizer sovereign's daughter greets a colony. The irony is that this “new world” can only bear two types of people: the sovereign and the bare lives and homo sacres (Caliban and Ariel) whose lives are bound to the threat of being disposable to the powers in authority. Shakespeare thus dramatizes the birth of colonial necro power by illustrating the sovereign's deadly dance with indigenous bare lives.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the observation can be made that, in his three prominent plays- *The Tempest*, *As You Like It*, and *Romeo and Juliet*- Shakespeare deals with the brutal politics of human life. The characters' fate falls into the victimization of arbitrary force, who lack protection, and are exiled from society, caught in a vendetta, or born into a colonized land, and are treated as 'bare lives. In *As You Like It*, the exiled live in the forest of Arden, are caught in a precarious life by Duke Friedrich's vulnerable decision for power, and fall into fraternal violence (when Oliver tries to kill Orlando). In *The Tempest*, Prospero enacts colonial necro politics: occupying the island and reducing the lives of its natives (Caliban and Ariel) to bare ones, claiming right over their life and death by his magic. In *Romeo and Juliet*, young lovers are thrown into a necropolitical trap by the clash between the noble houses and the harsh ruling of the prince- banishment and possible death create a hopeless future for them. In each case, Shakespeare illustrates the ideas of Agamben that sovereign power rests on creating exceptions by reducing life outside of legal protection and rights (bare life) and Mbembe's idea that sovereignty ultimately practices the power to kill.

Rather than suggesting that Shakespeare intentionally talks about modern biopolitics through his characters and dialogues, this study argues that his plays dramatically anticipate the notions of biopolitics that have been described by later biopolitical theorists. The worlds of Verona, Arden, and Prospero's island reveal the sovereign's necropolitical practice and practice of “bare life” that has been accumulated in the ideas of Agamben and Mbembe. Shakespeare's dramas, therefore, illustrate the instability of political belonging; individuals may rapidly move to unpolitical and unprotected belonging from all the privileges through just one decision of the sovereign power.

Modern scholars accumulate these resonances. *The Tempest* is an allegory of European conquest, where Prospero plays the role of a colonizing magician and Caliban

and Aerial his dehumanized subjects (Shakespeare W. , 2024) (Santos, 2025). Many critics note that Shakespeare often depicts ostracized characters in a limbo, dangling between life and death- socially dead but biologically alive (Santos, 2025). Santo's account of colonial statelessness applies directly: "**Caliban and Ariel's lives are enslaved and disposable under Prospero's colonial rule.**" (Santos, 2025). Mbembe's formula- the sovereign decides who lives are portrayed in every inch of Verona's streets and Milan's Sea, where every royal edict (the usurping of the duke, the exiled characters in the forest) wields the ultimate penalty. By portraying exile, colonial domination, and familial violence across different dramatic genres, Shakespeare reveals the fragility of human life within systems of authority.

In sum, Shakespeare's "deadly dance of Sovereignty and bare life" shows that, even in comedy or romance, Shakespeare portrays the political vulnerability of human life. Shakespeare dramatizes how political families control and turn the lives of pure existence into frightened, dehumanized, exiled, and expendable. By staging banishment as a worse plot than death, colonial occupation as enslavement of the living, and familial honor as the right to kill, Shakespeare anticipates the modern biopolitical critique of sovereignty. The violent and murderous potential of power is unmasked in Verona, in the enchanted sea, or the forest of Arden- Shakespeare shows that the sovereign's right to decide life and death- from exile to execution- defines the boundary between belonging and the kingdom of bare life.

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