



## Shakespeare, Renan and Weber: an interdisciplinary study of the violence paradigm and what it means to law and the nation-state

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# Shakespeare, Renan and Weber

An interdisciplinary study of the violence paradigm  
and what it means to law and the nation-state

R.C.G. BROUWER



*Shakespeare, Renan and Weber*



# Shakespeare, Renan and Weber

An interdisciplinary study of the violence paradigm and what it means to law and the nation-state

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*We must not make a scarecrow of the law, setting it up to fear the birds of prey.*  
W. Shakespeare

*Poor humanity! How you have suffered! How many trials still await you!*  
E. Renan





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## 1.1 OPENING REMARKS

This dissertation first and foremost discusses Shakespeare–Shakespearean tragedy, to be more precise. In England, Renaissance drama consistently showcases exceptional quality. As a result, supported by this high artistic standard and cultural context, Shakespeare was able to become the dramatist he was. Thus backed by his contemporaries, he eclipsed them. The mysterious intangibles within his oeuvre, encompassing the entirety of human behavior, make him the greatest literary genius that has ever lived. In this dissertation, I will endeavor to analyze a major theme of Shakespearean tragedy: violence. I will concentrate on the question of whether and, if so, to what extent the Shakespearean depiction of violence is important for law and politics. I will focus in particular on whether Shakespeare's tragedies might be relevant for the formation and maintenance of the nation-state (i.e., the combination of "nation" and "state").

In his drama, Shakespeare sublimely and sometimes hilariously illustrates how our attempts at (peaceful) coexistence are thwarted and frustrated by human failures, ambitions, passionate desires, and power-grabbing. In Shakespearean tragedy, these impulses are staged as violence in a tragic process. In showing the ultimate resultant of these human drives, Shakespeare holds up a mirror to us, painfully showing us how we deal with our societal constructs.

## 1.2 EXPLANATION OF THE TITLE AND DELINEATION OF THE SCOPE OF THIS THESIS

In this thesis, I bring together and interconnect the ideas of three important "master thinkers" of the Western cultural tradition. Firstly, the main figure: Shakespeare, the man of letters. Secondly, Ernest Renan,<sup>1</sup> the philosopher and polyhistor who calibrated the concept of "nation". I will concentrate on Renan in particular in Chapter 2, in which I will also very briefly touch upon Nietzsche's take on nationhood, since Nietzsche is an influential philosopher

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<sup>1</sup> 1832 – 1892.

on the subject; moreover, he was Renan's contemporary and antipode – see chapter 2, paragraph 2.3 and chapter 4, paragraph 4.3. Thirdly, the jurist/political economist/sociologist<sup>2</sup> Max Weber<sup>3</sup> (see also chapter 2, paragraph 2.5) delineated the concept of the state. The nation and the state converge in the “nation-state”. The nation-state thus connects Renan and Weber.

But in what way do the oeuvres of these thinkers touch upon Shakespeare's literary work? What can the literati contribute to the understanding of the nation-state already so convincingly analyzed by Weber and Renan? Decisive is that literature (not just Shakespeare's, but that of every great classical writer) can teach us something about the world in a way that is complementary to discursive discourse. These interconnections form a continuum throughout history and culture. Literature is, therefore, important for law as well. Further down (section 1.5) in this chapter, I will give an impression of the ongoing discussion on Law & Literature, which is a relatively young field of scholarship, represented by several schools of thought. I will clarify what position I take in the discourse.

By illustrating in this thesis (the research questions of which are to be found in this chapter in paragraph 1.8) how Shakespeare incorporates the elements (as well as stages of development) of the nation-state in his tragedies *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*, I hope to contribute to Shakespeare exegesis and also I aim to come to a better understanding of the concept of violence in relation to the nation-state. Violence is necessary for the nation-state, but it is also dangerous. “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” as we know from Lord Acton.<sup>4</sup> *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is a poignant illustration of Lord Acton's words. Violence must also be used to gain and maintain control of the state, as we know from *The Tragedy of Hamlet*. In *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, we find lessons about violence and statecraft worthy of consideration.

Thus the work-scope limitation of this thesis may be described as: the works of Renan and Weber on nation and state and the three tragedies by Shakespeare.

The subtitle of this dissertation reads: “an interdisciplinary study of the violence paradigm and what it means to Law and the nation-state”. In this thesis, I will demonstrate that the process of violence can be clarified by the concept of the “violence paradigm”. The methodology used will be explained in section 6 of this chapter. Below, I will describe in more detail what is touched upon in this introductory paragraph.

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2 Both Renan and Weber are hard to classify and perhaps best described as broadly orientated intellectuals or, when referring to the Renaissance, as homo universalis.

3 1864 – 1920.

4 Lord Acton (1834 – 1902): Catholic English historian, politician and writer. He is best known for the above quote in his letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887.

### 1.3 THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND THE CHOSEN THINKERS/SCHOLARS EXPLAINED IN MORE DETAIL

In this paragraph, I will go into the matter introduced in the above paragraph in more detail. For how exactly does this work and in precisely what way are the three men interconnected, and, much more importantly, why is it relevant to go into this matter? Let me start explaining the concept of violence, more specifically tragic violence.

Tragic violence consists of several stages and forms: from the initial act of violence to tragic crisis, as also described by Aristotle in his definition of the art form of tragedy.<sup>5</sup> Whereas in classical tragedy the crisis eventually results in catharsis, a cleansing of the mind and collective form of mourning and acquiescence, the Shakespearean form of tragic violence is more complex; it dramatically changes in form and character, leading, via a stage of mourning into new hope and the realization that new ways have to be found to avoid the type of destruction just experienced.<sup>6</sup>

#### 1.3.1 The violence paradigm

I call this layered complex of violence (including the pivotal hinging point from mourning to new momentum, brought together in one process) the violence paradigm. It is the unique characteristic of Shakespearean tragedy. This paradigm of violence (especially the last stage of a new awareness of and care for society) has, through time, contributed to advancing insights on violence in society. It initiated, after destruction, new ways of dealing with human fallibility and, I would argue, the capacity of our civilization to achieve progressive improvement and innovation of our cultural and legal constructs.

As already hinted at above, the Greeks had described a tragic process that can be typified as an early form of the violence paradigm, however, with them more emphasis was given to the inevitability of violence and the mourning after the dying down of it: the doom and fate of destruction and downfall came from the gods and there was no remedy save resignation and a purging of the soul. This form of the violence paradigm thus stops at mourning and, at best, an atmosphere of destiny-bonding ensuing from the collective fate humanity has to bear.

Shakespeare develops and enhances this complex of violence-stadia, giving it existential depths. After the last stage of classical tragedy: the bewilderment,

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5 Aristotle, *Poetics*, translation John Warrington, p. 12.

6 Of course, I shall come back extensively and in detail to violence, types of violence, their precise systematics, their influence and their encapsulation in the conceptual complex of the Shakespearean violence paradigm. This will be substantiated in the chapters on the tragedies.

mourning and acquiescence, Shakespeare adds, in yet another stage, hope and the prospect of new beginnings and a new momentum. Here the need for cooperation to avoid further suffering and destruction is born.

### 1.3.2 The conjunction of the Shakespearean violence paradigm and Renan and Weber

It is at these crossroads between tragic violence, all-out destruction, mourning and the realization of what these can bring about, that the encounter between Shakespearean tragedy, Renan and Weber takes place. Here, those involved recognize the need for the creation of social constructs to protect their community against further rampant violence. Together, they, in a joint effort, create the social construct and the robust institutions to protect these social constructs; here, the first signs of nation and state development take shape. Renan points to the importance of the joint will in creating a nation; Weber emphasizes the importance of curbing violence through a well-functioning state apparatus and state-monopolization of violence.

Whereas in the Greek tragedies the violence paradigm stops at showing the inevitability of violence and the mourning for this fate (see above and chapter 3, sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5), and the Romantics emphasize the ethics of guilt and penance for the benefit of a vital and active citizenship (herewith disseminating the role of the autocratic tragic hero over an entire population) – chapter 4, section 4.2 –, Shakespeare discusses the will to form a nation as a community of values dealing with violence in new and un-probed ways. The notion of how to maintain such a nation-state is also discussed (see the chapter on the analysis of *Julius Caesar*).

In these premises lies the relevance of this thesis. Of course I will elaborately explain and substantiate the above claims in detail in the subsequent chapters.

A second important issue, which I would like to broach in this study, is Shakespeare's tragic existential worldview (chapter 9, section 9.6.). This worldview ensues from the proper finalization<sup>7</sup> of the Shakespearean violence paradigm. It entails the realization that, whereas violence is at the basis of every form of human coexistence, it also gives us hope, perspective and the courage to enhance and improve our social and legal constructs; through which its perennial value is proven.

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<sup>7</sup> Which can go terribly wrong too, as we shall see in the chapter on *Julius Caesar*.

#### 1.4 INTERPRETATIVE DIFFICULTIES

The intersections between the areas of interest: literature, philosophy, sociology and law, as above connected around the same theme, seem logically aligned, however, some difficulties should be recognized, especially where interconnections between Shakespearean literature and law are concerned.

First, let me address some problems concerning Shakespeare-interpretation per se. Within the framework of the above topics, Shakespeare can be seen as the protagonist in the drama of nation founding, nation sustenance and nation degeneration. With this description, the difficulty of appropriating his work is pointedly sketched: Shakespeare is a play-actor, a dramatist and a literary writer. He is not a philosopher proper, in the sense of postulating a proposition, defending it, or debating with fellow philosophers in an academic discourse. Neither is he, in contrast with Renan and Weber, a historian or sociologist. We must, therefore, realize that we cannot immediately compare his work to scholars such as Plato,<sup>8</sup> or Aristotle<sup>9</sup> who wrote dialogues to confront certain points of view with each other.

Before we can use Shakespeare's work comparatively, we will first have to interpret it. This in itself is a Sisyphean labor. Within just the academic field of English Letters, the problems have proved manifold. Shakespeare studies have gone through centuries of literary movements and schools (and their favorite fashions of perception) and Shakespearean crazes;<sup>10</sup> interpretations, dissections, analyzes and even re-writings<sup>11</sup> were undertaken. A side effect of these many ways of perception has been that a corpus of established Shakespeare conventions arose, the opinions of which are no longer in question; it being near sacrilege to challenge them. Two relevant examples here are *Macbeth*, whose protagonist is pictured as a psychopathic criminal and the discourse on *Hamlet* being a revenge tragedy. In this thesis, I will dispute both positions in the respective chapters.

The next problem is the huge variety of literary research methods (often coming with a particular literary movement, but not necessarily so). Examples of these techniques are the historical approach (taking into consideration Shakespeare's times, sometimes also the time in which the play is set), and the close reading methods where only the text is leading.

Thus, Shakespeare's oeuvre has been received and appropriated in sometimes widely (or wildly) different ways, as long as they did not interfere with

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8 Admittedly, also Plato took refuge in stories to explain philosophical issues; a famous example being the cave myth.

9 And all other scholars and philosophers mentioned in this dissertation.

10 Including the theory that William Shakespeare never existed: conjectures as to who he really was ranged from Queen Elizabeth I via Francis Bacon to Edward the Vere, Earl of Oxford, to mention only the most conspicuous confabulations.

11 John Dryden and William Davenant – Shakespeare's alleged illegitimate son – did so soon after Shakespeare's death. Many were to follow.

the corpus. Wilson Knight,<sup>12</sup> addressed the problem and illustrated the various difficulties in the perception of Shakespeare's work and especially the elusiveness of its meaning. He distinguished between "criticism" and "interpretation", the latter of which he sees as an "attempt [...] to understand its subject in the light of its own nature, employing external reference, if at all, only as a preliminary to understanding; it avoids discussion of merits, and since its existence depends entirely on its original acceptance of the validity of the poetic unit which it claims, in some measure, to translate into discursive reasoning, it can recognize no division of 'good' from 'bad'".<sup>13</sup> Criticism, on the other hand is to Wilson Knight "a certain process of deliberately objectifying the work under consideration; the comparison of it with other similar works in order especially to show in what respects it surpasses, or falls short of, those works; the dividing its 'good' from its 'bad'".<sup>14</sup> He concludes that criticism is a judgment of vision and interpretation is a reconstruction of vision.<sup>15</sup>

He also observes that the greater part of poetic commentary steers a middle course between the two. "But", he continues, "sometimes work is created of so resplendent a quality, so massive a solidity of imagination, that adverse criticism beats against it idly as the wind that flings its ineffectual force against a mountain rock. [...] The work of Shakespeare is of this [...] order."<sup>16</sup> With the latter, I wholeheartedly agree; to his list, I would like to add: and an analysis could be seen as a deconstruction of vision. Thus, throughout the centuries, libraries have been filled with scholarly Shakespeare research on the meaning of Shakespeare's dramas. Some even attempted to unearth an overall vision and all-encompassing deeper meaning of his entire oeuvre. Thus, Wilson Knight has tried to sum up the inherent structure of all Shakespeare's tragedies within one chart:<sup>17</sup>

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12 George Wilson Knight (1897 – 1985): professor of English Literature at Leeds University.

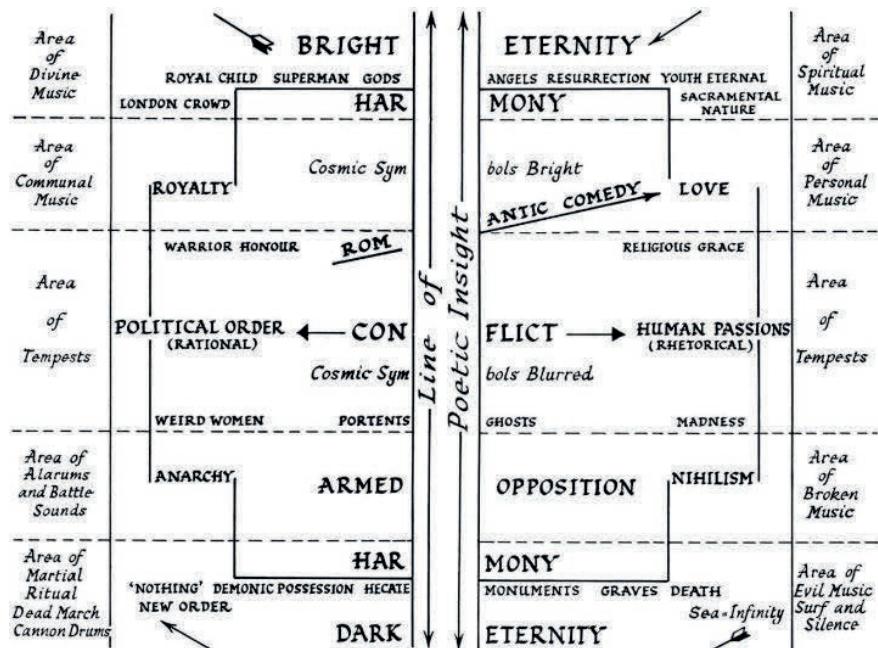
13 G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 1.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid, p. 2.

17 The chart is taken from G. Wilson Knight's *The Shakespearian Tempest*, pp. xvi and xvii.



Wilson Knight explains: "On the right we have personal qualities; on the left, social and political. In the centre is a creative 'conflict' (not exactly 'disorder') related to the clash of individual and society. This conflict is nevertheless mainly inward and spiritual, and most fully experienced within the protagonist. It next tends, like a cyclone or hurricane, to move *down* the chart, developing into 'armed opposition', with the area columns showing a strong divergence of personal and communal symbolism as the rift widens; and so on to a tragic resolution".<sup>18</sup>

Of course, this chart does not cover all Shakespearean plots and protagonists' mental states by a long shot, although it is a brave attempt to chart the psychic development of *some* of the Shakespearean heroes. As Wilson Knight himself realizes: "But our chart should at least serve to indicate the danger of saddling Shakespeare's world with any static scheme whatsoever. Only when these various powers are recognized shall we understand the true process of harmonization at work".<sup>19</sup> In short: this is an illegible chart, mainly illustrating the inability to provide a comprehensive circumferential explanation of Shakespearean drama.

18 G. Wilson Knight, *The Shakespearian Tempest*, p. xv.

19 G. Wilson Knight, *The Shakespearian Tempest*, p. xxii.

## 1.5 LAW AND LITERATURE

The above is an ultra-short sketch of the difficulties in the perception of the bard's oeuvre within one scholarly field. If we want to transpose it successfully and consistently to another field of interest, such as the legal science, we have to not just interpret Shakespeare's work but to interpret it in the Wilson Knightian sense: we will have to reconstruct the vision represented in Shakespeare's oeuvre. We will have to give it meaning. In this context, the conclusion that Macbeth and Hamlet are murderers (with as an added note the revenge crimes by Hamlet) is indeed very useful to exemplify the proceedings of criminal law, but yet, this conclusion would seem too easily drawn, too shallow, and they do not do justice to the richness of these tragedies.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the problem that will then face the discipline of criminology is the fact that in Shakespeare's tragedies punishment of crime through the law is absent. There is no sense of crime, no sin, no guilt, no culprit. In the last act, there is sorrow<sup>21</sup> over loss and, moreover, sorrow is not Shakespeare's final stance as I explained above and will embroider upon again further down.

Before going into this, I would like to give some considerations to the relatively new field of law and literature. This thesis is written within the scope of this domain; it is, however, not a criticism or critique of the movement, nor is it an addition to the ongoing discourse within the discipline on developments, scope, or qualities. Therefore and with some emphasis, I state that I will not participate in the discourse about the utility or even necessity of Law & Literature. Indeed, doing this would produce an altogether different thesis. I will limit myself to giving a bird's eye overview of the discussions within the field and then outline the position I take in these, after which I will continue with the subject at hand.

Bouteligier, in her *Dialoog in recht en literatuur: kritiek van de narratieve rede*,<sup>22</sup> distinguishes two different conceptions of the discipline of law and literature. The first was initiated by John Wigmore (1863 – 1943) and aimed at compiling a list of so-called legal novels: novels having the practice of law and its influence on citizens as their subject and that were therefore considered instructive and/or beneficial for legal students. This can be typified as a didactic/utilitarian use of literature; it being the harvesting of instrumentally and psychologically instructive narratives. "Wigmore stelt dat het opdoen van ervaringen van belang is voor juristen, omdat zij dagelijks met zeer verschillen-

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20 See e.g. chapter 10, section 5, where I discuss several critics on the issue.

21 I will not come back to this issue in this thesis for it is outside the subject in hand, but I do want to remark that sorrow is an extremely important word to describe the tragic wisdom that should come with leadership. The first one to emphasize the importance of this word is Olga Tokarczuk (psychologist, writer, linguistic expert and Nobel Prize winner) in her *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. To this I would like to add that words are the builders of worlds. I imagine that to this, Shakespeare would have ardently agreed.

22 C. Bouteligier, C., *Dialoog in recht en literatuur: kritiek van de narratieve Rede*, p. 16.

de mensen van doen hebben. Een beter inzicht in de mens maakt een jurist volgens Wigmore meer bekwaam. Hoewel hij het niet explicet formuleert, lijkt Wigmore hiermee te impliceren dat literatuur volgens hem helpt om het inlevingsvermogen bij juristen te ontwikkelen en te stimuleren”,<sup>23</sup> as Boute-  
ligier argues.

Another important conception of what the scope of this field should entail is the one that “stijl en het samengaan van vorm en inhoud in het recht benadrukt.”<sup>24</sup> The founder of this school of thought is B.N. Cardozo (1870 – 1923); its philosophy and concepts were continued by James Boyd White (1938).<sup>25</sup> The latter writes: “You will be asked to read a play by Shakespeare, passages from other nonlegal literature, and a series of notes and questions, all of which are meant to help you analyze various relationships that writers and speakers can establish with languages they use. The aim is to begin to define some general notions of success and failure that can be of value to us as writers in the law. You will be asked in a writing assignment to produce examples of legal writing of both kinds and to explain why you regard one as “successful” and the other as not.” Here it becomes clear that, on the one hand, he aims at a meta-reflection on the use of literature as deployed in other fields, rather than a use of literature as inspiration for and reflection on the basic conditions of law. On the other hand, it is a textbook for future lawyers on how to ‘harvest’ figures of speech and quotations. In his later works (*From Expectation to Experience: Essays on Law and Legal Education*), Boyd White tends towards literary inspiration as a source of meaning and ethics.

A small but influential sub-category of law and literature is the hermeneutic approach.<sup>26</sup> This line of thought places emphasis on the meaning of words and their interpretation; a topic that, by the nature of their profession, is also important for lawyers.<sup>27</sup> Gaakeer: “centraal in deze benadering staat [...] de analogie tussen juridische en literaire interpretatie en onderzoek naar de manieren waarop teksten betekenis genereren.”<sup>28</sup>

The approaches sketched above emphasize in particular 1) the harvesting of literary forms and techniques from a work of art, 2) the sensitizing of students of law and jurists for the social world of the citizen, 3) the interpretations of texts in order to serve law.

These views assume only a limited conception of the usability of literature; I cannot but notice that in these interpretations, literature is ancillary to law. However, in my opinion, literature could mean a lot more for the law pro-

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23 Ibid.

24 Ibid, p. 17.

25 James Boyd White, *The legal Imagination*, p. 40

26 A.M.P. Gaakeer, *De waarde van het Woord*, pp. 42 – 45.

27 In a note above, I already quoted the psychologist, linguist and Nobel prize winning Olga Tokarczuk on the importance of words. I cannot help but repeat the importance of her remark.

28 Ibid., p. 44.

fession than the above authors make it seem. It is therefore fortunate that a tendency within this scholarly field seems to develop that has a better understanding of literature as an independent discipline, having inherent value next to (and inspirational to) that of law. The angle chosen by Gaakeer already points towards the emergence of this interpretative direction.

Within this discussion, my argument is in line with Slootweg's position when he asks a very important question in his book *Langs tragische einders*: "Wat hebben recht en kunst, of nader bepaald, recht en tragedie met elkaar van doen?"<sup>29</sup> Reflecting upon this question he notes: "De tragische dimensie is een aspect van het recht, een aspect van het recht zoals het behoort te zijn."<sup>30</sup> This quote reflects not just an equipoise between the two fields, but also the deep affiliation between law and tragedy, with which I can only agree wholeheartedly. Although our focus points regarding tragedy logically differ, this is a shared and important starting point.

To be sure, I would like to start with the question: how does Shakespearean tragedy shape our social constructs and justice? This query posits Shakespearean tragedy as an inspiration and an alternative way to reflect on law and justice, rather than as ancillary to law and exploited in a utilitarian way.

In the following paragraph, I will discuss the methodology of this study. After which the inherent logic and construction of the chapters will be explained; finally, I will provide a brief overview of the content of each chapter, followed by the research questions.

## 1.6 METHODOLOGY

I do not go into the question of the precise criteria for what literature should entail, nor do I touch upon Shakespeare's place herein.

Firstly, because these are not my foci of interest and secondly, Shakespeare has long since his death (even before I would argue) proven his place in the global canon of literature. For the same reason, the art form of tragedy escapes any such debate; it has established its worth since Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus wrote their tragedies.

In order to tackle the difficulties as sketched in the above paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5, I will use detailed text analysis of the tragedies at hand, as well as historical facts of both Shakespeare's life and that of his protagonists. The method will, therefore, be hermeneutic. I will also, where relevant, discuss the diverse then-current situations within the world of law and legislation.

To expose the process of violence in mutually divergent tragedies, it will be necessary to minutely discuss and dissect the three tragedies in full, as a

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29 Timo Slootweg, *Langs Tragische Einders*, p. 27.

30 Ibid.

fragmentary or outline treatment will not unearth the entirety of such an intricate process. I will strictly limit myself to the analysis of violence within the confines of nation founding and nationhood. In chapter 3, paragraph 5, I outline my findings on (the several types) of Shakespearean violence; the substantiation of which will be found in the chapters discussing the tragedy.

I scrutinize violence to discover if, possibly, there are different types of violence within the said confines, how they operate and what consequences these have. As indicated above, I believe that knowledge of such processes has relevance for the law community, for politicians and policy makers. Moreover, in my view it is part of the mission of good citizenship.

The discussion of each tragedy will be followed by an evaluation – reviewing and comparing thinkers and schools of thought and providing an overall analysis of the play. Where relevant, the latter can be found inserted in the discussion of the play itself.

## 1.7 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

Before embarking on a description of the content of all chapters, I will give a short account of the composition and purpose of each chapter. I also recommend to take good note of the summaries of the plays in the appendices, before reading the respective chapters.

### 1.7.1 The chapters: executive

Chapter 2 explores Renan's concept of the nation and Weber's description of the state. Both are primary classical thinkers, to whom I will confine my analysis in this thesis. Additionally, a brief overview is provided of the environment and circumstances in 19th-century Europe, a period marked by significant interest in the formation of nations and nation-states.

Renan focuses on the "ideational" elements of nation-forming, whereas Weber emphasizes the structuralizing of a state; the monopolization of violence by the state is his focus point. Conclusions from this chapter: 1) the will of a group of people to continue living together in nationhood is crucial in forming a nation, as are shared values. 2) Every nation is ultimately based on violence. The state has the monopoly on violence.

Chapter 3 is firstly a description of classical and early modern tragedy, their substance, significance and influence in society. Secondly, the chapter is an explanation of the diverse forms of violence: tragical as well as non-tragical violence. In this chapter, I conclude that – over the centuries – the meaning, significance and form of tragedy changed. Changes in views on concepts of guilt, penance and punishment entered tragedy, fundamentally changing its interpretation and place in society.

Chapter 4 describes tragedies from the Romantics onwards. The changing views on the conceptions of tragedy continue and are reinforced by the idealism of Romanticism. Poets and thinkers see in the art form a way to educate the citizen in a good and firm nationalistic citizenship. In the context of tragedy, attention is paid to Nietzsche's philosophy of violence. Conclusions: tragedy becomes increasingly ethical and the meaning of primordial violence, human fallibility, and man's place and function in society is perceived differently.

Chapter 5 is a minute analysis of *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. Also several critics are discussed and evaluated. The chapter concludes as follows: tragic violence ends the tribal custom of blood-law. Through the excessive all-out violence the will to protect the community against it is born and hence the will to form a nation. Thus, in this play we see the first possibilities for an embryonic development of nation-hood.

Chapter 6 is an analysis of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Also, law and literature critics are discussed. The conclusions of this chapter are: *Hamlet* is not a revenge tragedy. It demonstrates how nations are founded: by an amalgamate of vision and violence. Not only does tragic violence found a nation, plus its adjoining values, but, in this instance, an embryonic separation of powers can be witnessed.

Chapter 7 is ancillary to the following chapter and provides a historical overview of Rome's circumstances and political situation during the time of Julius Caesar. For Shakespeare's audience, these facts were common knowledge, as all educational levels (primary, secondary, and academic) in Elizabethan England were grounded in the classics.

Chapter 8 is an analysis of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. It comprises a thorough account of the complex factors that determine the failure of a nation-state. Shakespeare paints a razor-sharp and painful picture of a deteriorating nation; the dystopian account of protagonists who are not capable of living through tragic violence and complete the cycle of the violence paradigm.

Chapter 9 comprises the conclusions to the previous chapter: when a nation-state construct is not properly maintained, it will crumble and/or be conquered. In this chapter also some mirrors of princes of Shakespeare's time are discussed and compared to Shakespeare's tragic existential worldview. Violence, "good" or "bad," is discussed and some specific comparisons are made between *Julius Caesar* and the two previous plays. The chapter ends with a discussion of the Shakespearean worldview and the warnings, still topical in our times, that it entails.

Chapter 10 answers the research questions posed in chapter 1.

### 1.7.2 Summary of the chapters

In chapter two, I describe Renan's theories on the concept of *nation*; I use Weber's definition to determine what a *state* is, together forming the nation-state. Renan rejects race, religion and language as determinants for the forming of a nation. He subsequently identifies *the will of a group of people* to form a nation together as the important factor in the founding of a nation, also turning his attention to coherence within the value system of the group. Weber defines a state as a society that is defined and regulated by law; as a corollary of this, governmental institutions are established that have the monopoly of violence over a given territory.

As a casual aside, Renan notes that violence lies at the basis of any unity. He does not specify this any further and does not come back to it to clarify the remark. Weber illustrates the state monopoly on violence with Trotsky's revolutionary conceptions<sup>31</sup> of violence. This is remarkable. To me, these two types of violence (state-regulated and the revolutionist type, which strongly leans towards anarchism) seem different in terms of genesis, operation, and characteristics. This set me off and incited me in the first place to explore violence in the way described above.

In the third chapter, I describe exactly what tragedy is and how tragic violence and the violence paradigm work. Aristotle is the first we know of to record a definition of tragedy. Many scholars have since tried their hands at definitions and descriptions of this art form. Leech,<sup>32</sup> in his work on the genre, lists as many as 34 of these attempts in his first chapter, by writers varying from Diomedes (4<sup>th</sup> CE), through Isidore of Seville (6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> CE), up to Chaucer, Kierkegaard, Henry James and Friedrich Nietzsche, to mention just a few. This dissertation follows the universally accepted definition of Aristotle: "A tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself [...] with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions."<sup>33</sup> The description and definition of the violence paradigm read as follows: the specific tragic world view in which human primordial imperfection is exposed to cause violence culminating in tragic crisis; in reaction to which grief over innate human brokenness is staged: the tragic wisdom to be reaped from tragedy. This sorrow is transposed into a joint effort to improve the human condition as long as the influence of tragic wisdom lasts. Ultimately, the result of this scheme is a renewed but precarious balance. In short, the violence paradigm demonstrates the way in which great tragedy copes with tragic destruction, stages a reaction to it and hands us a mode to deal with it.

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31 Trotsky (1879 – 1940): originally a Marxist revolutionist; later on, he advocated a "permanent revolution" and a "proletarian internationalism".

32 Clifford Leech, *Tragedy*, pp. 1 – 12.

33 Clifford Leech, *Tragedy*, p. 1.

Thus tragedy illustrates the inevitability of human imperfection and therewith the inevitability of violence. However, the ultimate outcome of tragedy is not death and destruction. As said and as will be shown in the following chapters: this art form offers us a way to deal with these aspects of life; at the same time rendering us human dignity and self-reliance. Seen from this angle, tragedy offers immanent hope and perspective in the face of violence and destruction; it is therefore the most hopeful and efficacious of art forms.

The first philosopher to address the process of (tragic) violence not as instrumental,<sup>34</sup> but as an entity following its inherent process independently is Friedrich Nietzsche, Renan's contemporary. He thematizes violence in an attempt to filter out – through the tragic process – the intrinsic imperfections that he perceives in man and his constructs. He fears that, with an increase of scale in manmade constructs (in this case the founding of a nation or the enlargement of it), its flaws will proportionately increase if they are not filtered out first. Intuitively, he understands that the format of classical and Shakespearean tragedy holds the solution to this problem. He comes very close to the solution, but before he can find it, he falls ill.<sup>35</sup>

In the same chapter, I distinguish five types of violence:

- Violence on a limited scale.
- Radical violence: spiraling out of control because it can, due to failing legal or social constructs to curb it. This type is subdivided into:
  0. Radical *non-tragic* violence: self-destructive violence that ends when it has eaten itself.
  1. Radical *tragic* violence: the destruction of existing constructs. Because of an awareness of the tragic this type gives a new perspective to society after the violence has died down.
- State-monopolized violence.

Over time the reception of tragedy changed. Tragedy became increasingly “critical”: the tragic aspect of violence came to be perceived in a fundamentally different way. Whereas with the Greeks violence and the resulting destruction were seen as a product of doom and/or the gods and with Shakespeare as a product of human fallibility (also to be considered as a kind of “secularized doom” because we cannot escape our deficiencies), after the introduction of criticizability violence was seen as a product of human ignorance, or guilt; the consequence being that violence became reparable by education or punishment. Tragedy was (from the Romantic period onwards) increasingly used to promote vital and active citizenship. The inevitability of violence (resultant

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34 As in: being used by a certain party for a certain purpose.

35 He had been ill all his life, suffering from migraines from early childhood onwards. In his adult life, he suffered from cluster migraines sometimes lasting a fortnight. Just before his final mental break-down, he was 75% blind.

of our inherent imperfections) disappeared from tragedy and the world became “fixable”. The role of tragedy evolved along with it: from a catalyst of violence to a didactical tool, nudging man towards a robust citizenship.

In chapter four, I describe the history of tragedy from the Romantics onwards up to and including the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Chapter five is dedicated to *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

In this play, we see the effect of the violence paradigm as it puts an end to *sippenhaft*<sup>36</sup> revenge (or blood law) as a principle of law. In the last act, we see the first contours of a development towards the (monarchical) organization of a nation. At the same time, Renan’s main concept for nation-forming is spearheaded by *Macbeth*: the conscious decision, the will, of a group of people to collectively form a sustainable unity – a nation – also becomes clear in the last act. Almost as an aside we witness, in the character of Macbeth, the birth of man as an independent actor in his world, one of the features endorsing the birth of the English Renaissance.

The next chapter, chapter six, discusses *The Tragedy of Hamlet*. In this play, the clash between the old Nordic (Scandinavian/German/Viking) tribal system and the ideas of Hamlet is seen. Hamlet had recently arrived in his ancestral castle Elsinore from the University of Wittenberg, where he had been suffused with the ideas of the Renaissance. This clash between the two worlds causes tragic violence. I will demonstrate that Hamlet’s violence is not just necessary; it is justified. Hamlet realizes that at the basis of a nation, in this case a kingdom, lies violence. No nation can be founded without violence; he is not at liberty to ignore the violence against his father. A nation-state disregarding non-justified (or, in the terms of this thesis, non-tragic) violence will bring about its ruin.

In this play, we see not only that the collective will to form a nation arises from the violence paradigm, but also the corresponding value systems. These are, as Renan asserts, equally important for nation-forming. Furthermore, in act 5, Hamlet dictates in his will a separation of powers. Thus, Hamlet lays the foundation of a legal order. A legal order that is of imperative importance for all states wishing to be constitutional. Thus, in *Hamlet*, we find the first germs of what later develops into a constitutional state, a state under the rule of law.

Chapter seven, eight and nine are dedicated to *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. Chapter seven gives information on Roman history and law, and general information on the world of Rome, set off against Shakespeare’s Tudor/Stuart times. In chapter nine, we find the evaluation of the play. The drama itself is analyzed in chapter eight.

For many years, the play was seen as a “problem play” by various literary scholars; not to be classified as history, nor as tragedy and complex

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36 *Sippenhaft*: the principle of a family or entire tribe sharing the responsibility for a crime committed by one of its members.

to interpret, multilayered as it is. It was seen as an uncomfortable work because of its elusiveness. However, in my opinion, the discomfort does not lie in its classification, nor in its being multilayered – for all Shakespearean plays are multilayered – but in the following facts: 1) the protagonist is not a person but the republic of Rome itself, 2) the complex representation of violence. Focusing on the latter issue, one could ask: in what way(s) is it represented? What type(s) of violence are we confronted with? Is it radical non-tragic violence or radical tragic violence, or state-controlled? These differences have major implications for the outcome.

In addition we have to interpret setting, plot and storyline of the play. In act 1, we are shown a fully developed nation-state in the form of a republic. Is this a good system? Is it the only one or are there more? How do they work? I discuss theocracy, republic and monarchy. Is the inspiring reciprocity between the nation-state construct and its values (still) present in Rome?

This drama visualizes what happens when nation and value system are no longer mutually nurturing, but are used/misused for the benefit of the conniving individual. As Renan has it: a collectivity based on self-interest is not a nation. The entire social construct crumbles during the tragic process. In the final scene of act 5, a status quo is attained, but no real perspective toward improvement can be detected. The only concepts that have survived the tragic crisis are articulated by Marc Antony (which does not bode well). This tragedy is a play of the greatest importance, it has not lost its topicality and can stand as a warning to us all.

## 1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the foregoing, I have identified some problematic issues concerning the interpretation and definition of violence, especially when explained within the framework of the concept of the nation-state. This prompts the following research questions:

1. *What is the precise nature of the relationship between Renan's description of the collective will to form a nation and Shakespearean tragic violence?*
2. *What does Shakespearean tragedy show us in terms of containment and/or the curbing of violence? Are there different types of violence within the focus area of the nation-state? If so, which?*
3. *What is the precise relation of these (this) type(s) of violence with the degeneration of the nation-state?*

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will analyze the concept of nation as presented by Ernest Renan (1823-1892). In his authoritative paper “What is a nation” (1882) he describes some key concepts that have, in his opinion, but secondary significance in the forming of a nation: they may make their appearance in the process of (or as a characteristic in) nation-forming, yet are not of quintessential importance as he duly sums up. This preeminent role is allocated by Renan to a spiritually imbued type of will. A concept he elaborately but equivocally circumnavigates. And of course, my interest in this thesis lies in the careful and attentive peeling off of this concept until its core is revealed. Only then we might understand the full meaning of Renan’s will, but more importantly, we might evince its affinity with what thinkers like Shakespeare and Nietzsche have written on nation and the forming of nations. But for now, we will, in this chapter, address Renan’s concept of nation; yet not before I have given a short overview of Europe’s tumultuous history of his time.

### 2.2 The turbulent birth pangs of 19th-century national consciousness in Europe

The 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe sees political and social upheaval throughout the continent. Parallel to revolutionary developments in the fields of technology and science, the major nations of Europe, as we know them today, through a series of revolutions (either bloody or not), are emerging in the wake of the disruptions caused by Napoleon’s military conquests (unsettling and shaking up the entire continent). And although the sovereign nation as a political entity has figured ever since 1648, it comes as no surprise that the concept of “nation” was not reflected upon theoretically and in depth until the nineteenth century. This, in the opinion of many commentators, did not happen in a convincing way until the classic study by Renan. To get a picture of this turbulent century in which he lived and thereby gain a clear impression of his immediate frame

of mind, I will start with a brief overview of the European revolts of his century.<sup>1</sup>

In the 18th century, the Revolution (1789) had swept through France with the subsequent Terror (1792 – 1795), followed by the period of the *Directoire* (a government of five Ministers; a curtailment of the right to vote was implemented), whereupon Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in 1799. Initially as consul; in 1804, he crowned himself emperor. We have now arrived in the 19th century; during Napoleon's regime, the riots and administrative and social instability did not end. Throughout this period and despite all atrocities and terror, the foundations for democracy, the separation of church and state and the *Trias Politica* were laid in France. Napoleon's administration heralded the definite end of the old feudal relations and the power of the local nobility; central authority had arrived.

In 1808, Spain was occupied by France. This invasion was followed by a particularly bloody war (the Spanish War of Liberty: 1808 – 1814), which left deep marks on Spanish society, with Goya's famous etchings and paintings still testifying to its horrors. During this occupation and war, the Spanish colonies in South America saw an opportunity to break away from their colonizers under the charismatic leadership of Simon Bolivar (nicknamed El Liberator: 1783 – 1830), who founded the young nations of Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and Bolivia.

In 1813, Napoleon was defeated for the first time; after his second defeat in 1815, Napoleon left the European stage for good, whereupon a nationalist wind swept through Europe. The resolutions of the Congress of Vienna<sup>2</sup> saw the re-installment of many pre-Napoleonic regimes, heralding a period of Restoration.<sup>3</sup>

In England, a different kind of revolution took place: the industrial revolution, especially in the first three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; with technological innovations taking place at an unprecedented speed. England had to find new markets for the goods that at ever greater speed left its factories. Since England had not been able to trade with Holland and Germany<sup>4</sup> during Napoleon's *Blocus Continental* (1806 – 1814; a continental boycott of all trade to and from England), new markets were found in the colonies,<sup>5</sup> as a result of which the

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1 The notes that I made during the secondary school history lessons, given by Mr. P. Weiss, are the source for this overview.

2 1814 – 1815. The congress was initiated by some former Ministers and heads of state after Napoleon's first defeat.

3 Not all *ancient regimes* were reinstalled. Thus, in The Netherlands, a kingdom was created, where previously it had been a republic. The former republican *stadholder* dynasty of the Oranje-Nassau's were bombarded to kings.

4 Until the Napoleonic period the main trading partners.

5 England (seafaring country as it was) had been colonizing the new world ever since the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: experiencing the dreaded competition of The Netherlands: the other maritime country.

number of Britain's imperial holdings exploded. These developments left England the most powerful and influential nation in the world.

The Netherlands became a kingdom in 1815, including the Netherlands proper, Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In Germany, the German Confederation (*Deutsche Bund*) was formed in 1815 in which Prussia and Austria were predominant. This union lasted until the Austro-Prussian War began in 1866. Meanwhile, Otto von Bismarck had become Prussian prime minister; he pushed for a united nation of Germany.

In France, the Restoration under the reactionary rule of Charles X of Bourbon lasted until 1830. In the same year, a wave of revolutions swept across Europe: a backlash to the reactionary reigns of the European nations. In France the July revolution broke out after which a more progressive "bourgeois" king came to power (Louis Philip of Orleans) and in August of that year, revolution broke out in Brussels which resulted in the secession of Belgium and Luxembourg from the Netherlands in 1831.

In February 1848, a second revolutionary wave swept across Europe. In France, the second Republic was founded (1848 – 1851) of which Louis Napoleon (nephew of) became the president. In 1851, this Louis staged a coup d'état and crowned himself emperor: Napoleon III heading the second French Empire.

Italy had been dominated by various European rulers in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Under the leadership of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807 – 1882), a series of bloody battles was fought for independence. In 1861 Garibaldi was able to put Victor Emanuel on the throne of a united Italy.

In 1870 – 1871, the Franco-Prussian War erupted; a particularly cruel and impactful war for both nations. An eyewitness, the still young Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), serving as an orderly in this war, writes to his friend Carl von Gersdorff about the horrors he saw (see next chapter). Germany wins this war and France loses quite some territory (e.g. Alsace-Lorraine). As a result of this victory, Prussia and its prime chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, saw the dream of a united Germany under Prussia being materialized.

In France, in the same period (1870/71), there were once again bloody disturbances in Paris (the *Paris Commune* from March to May 1871), as a result of which the Second Empire fell and was succeeded by the 3rd Republic. It is against this background that Renan writes his tracts.

## 2.3 RENAN

Ernest Renan (1823 – 1892) was born in Tréguier, a small fishing village in Brittany.<sup>6</sup> His father was an ardent Republican, his mother and older sister

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6 Biographical details on life and political thought taken from: H.W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan, A Critical Biography*.

Henriette, however, were devout Royalists and Roman Catholics. His father died at sea when the small Ernest was 5 years old.<sup>7</sup> The boy was a bright and quick pupil; at the behest of the local clergy and much stimulated by his sister, he was therefore sent to the seminary of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet in Paris in 1838 to be trained for the priesthood. In 1840, he continued his studies at the seminary of Issy-les-Moulineaux.

He experienced increasing difficulty conforming to clerical rules and thought; slowly but surely, he grew distant from the idea of becoming a priest. Influenced by philosophy and the French rationalists, he became a secularist and rationalist. He decided to break with the seminary and took up a position as a teacher. Later in life, he evolved into an esteemed political thinker, known for his humanistic and liberal approach to religion, advocating for the separation of church and state, inspired by rationalism and the ideas of the Enlightenment. In 1878, he was elected a member of the Académie Française.

As a liberal and rationalist, he saw progress (both technological and an increase in learning and knowledge) as the medicine against political and social ills. He detested the use of violence, both between individuals and countries.

He maintained, however, his elitist stance. Giglioli: "Renan sees little of independent normative value in the concept of equality. Indeed, by developing an ideal-type of nobility defined on the basis of virtue and cultivation, he appears to believe that social stratification is not only inevitable and justifiable but also beneficial *per se*."<sup>8</sup> In this he did not differ from most of his contemporaries; Nietzsche too had a decidedly aristocratic conception of social stratification.

What Renan also shared with Nietzsche was his abhorrence of the French-Prussian War of 1870 – 1871. Renan advocated a united Europe to prevent any future war. In this respect, he may be called a visionary. I cannot but quote Giglioli, who summarizes Renan's reaction and consecutive stance to this (power) balance-tilting war quite adequately: "The unification of Germany through war and conquest [the 1870 -71 war and the subsequent annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany] has essentially altered the status quo of Europe. Renan had the lucidity to perceive immediately that what was at stake greatly exceeded the curtailment of France's role by the appearance of a new, rising state; indeed the capacity of the European balance of power to function in its traditional manner had been fundamentally called into question."<sup>9</sup>

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7 It is remarkable that both Ernest Renan and Friedrich Nietzsche (I will come back to this thinker further down) share a similar background. Both were raised in a small town/village religious milieu and grew up in a household run by women and both lost their fathers at a young age.

8 M.F.N. Giglioli in *What is a Nation and other Political Writings*, E. Renan, Introduction, p. XXIII.

9 M.F.N. Giglioli in *What is a Nation and other Political Writings*, E. Renan, Introduction, p. XXVII.

Renan's concern was so great that he reached out, passing the frontlines of war, to another renowned thinker and theologian, the German David Strauss. In September 1870 Renan wrote him a letter, published in the *Gazette d'Augsburg* in August 1870: "Is it worthy of Germany to absorb by force a rebel, resentful province [occupation of Alsace-Lorraine] that has become irreconcilable, especially since the destruction of Strasbourg? [...] How can one fail to see that the consequence of such a policy will be to occupy France indefinitely with three or four hundred thousand men? So, does Germany wish to rival sixteenth-century Spain? What would become of its great and lofty intellectual culture then? [...] The principle of European federation can [...] offer a basis for mediation similar to what the church offered in the Middle Ages."<sup>10</sup> He thus wanted to remodel Europe into a federalist configuration, ensuring unity in culture and anchoring the possibility of mediation between nations if necessary.

His early thinking about the nation<sup>11</sup> was also influenced by this war. Giglioli on the subject: "Adopting a voluntarist theory of nationality to protest the German annexation required the abandonment – or, at the least, the marginalization – of the categories of race, ethnicity and national character on which much of historiographical work rested."<sup>12</sup>

Giglioli introduces yet another argument regarding why Renan would have assigned a secondary role to the unity of race, religion, etc., in defining what a nation is. This is evident in the fact that European countries eagerly engaged in the colonization of the "unexplored" lands on other continents. Invoking such concepts as essential would have been, of course, inconsistent with the colonialist sentiment and expansionism prevalent in Europe, especially in France, as Giglioli notes somewhat ironically. Most likely, Giglioli refers to the imperialistic and racially outspoken position Renan expressed in his "Intellectual and Moral Reform of France" from 1871, where he writes that the conquest and subsequent governance of an inferior race by a superior one is not shocking at all.

In his later work on nation and nation-building (1882), Renan does not come back to this argument. I hold, contrary to Giglioli, that, should Renan have had the above reasons, he would certainly have mentioned them in the 1882 speech, precisely because at that time it would in no way have been a taboo to argue and defend colonialism. Norwich writes on the subject:

The second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly its last two decades, saw a spectacular growth of the second French Empire. [...comprising] Algeria

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10 E. Renan, "Two Letters to Mr. Strauss" in *What is a Nation and other Political Writings*, p. 166.

11 We write 1871, more than 10 years before his authoritative work "What is a nation" saw the light in 1882.

12 M.F.N. Giglioli in *What is a Nation and other Political Writings*, E. Renan, Introduction, p. XXVI.

[...] Senegal, Tunisia, Mauretania, Mali, Ivory Coast, Chad, Gabon, Morocco (a protectorate), Madagascar and Réunion; on Indochina – Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia; and on the South Pacific – New Caledonia, the Marquesas Islands and much of Polynesia. The Republicans had originally opposed the whole idea of territorial expansion, but when Germany began her own programme they changed their minds; and before long, as trade with the new colonies developed, the empire was seen as a powerful force for good, spreading Christianity, French culture and the French language and generally acquiring prestige for the motherland.<sup>13</sup>

It may, therefore, be concluded that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century European expansion into other continents was not so much incited by the elevation of “inferior races” unto the enlightened state of European (Christian) culture as with mutual prestige and (economic)<sup>14</sup> dominance.

Renan’s intuition (as it was with the altered power balance in Europe – see above) to put aside race as a determining factor in the building of a nation was accurate<sup>15</sup>; as I will argue in the next chapter, be it from a diametrically opposite perspective.

Renan’s contemporary Nietzsche also reflected on Europe and the nation. Unlike Renan, he saw not so much the advantages as he focused on the disadvantages and problems that unification (be it a united Europe or a united Germany) would bring. Accordingly, he was reluctant if not negative to the idea of a unified Germany.

Nietzsche feared that society’s flaws would be magnified with geographical upscaling. Therefore, rather than for political/military unification, he argues for close-knit and vital communities of *freie Geister* to govern country or continent. Only they could, according to Nietzsche, ably handle enlargement of geographical action radius.

In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882)<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche writes on Europe and the Europeans: we displaced<sup>17</sup> no longer feel at home in Europe,

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13 John Julius Norwich, *A History of France*, p. 326.

14 England was, at the time, conquering Africa, partly in a kind of rat-race for that continent; other competitors were France, Belgium (more specifically the Belgian king), the Netherlands and Germany. They wanted to trump each other, to stabilize their power and secure their markets. Sources: G.M. Trevelyan, *History of England*, D. van Reybrouck, *Congo* and R.C. van Caengem, *Geschiedenis van Engeland*.

15 And he was not the only one. Max Weber also disclaimed racialism as an important factor in the forming of nations; typifying it as zoological nationalism as, as a matter of fact, also Renan did – see further down. Max Weber, *Gesamtausgabe*, Abteilung II, *Briefe*, 1911-1912, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1998, pp. 352 – 357.

16 Colli, G., en Montinari, M., ed., *Nietzsche Werke – Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Volume 3, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 377, p. 628 ff. In this thesis, abbreviated as K.S.A., followed by volume number and work.

17 We should bear in mind that Nietzsche had given up his own citizenship in 1870 and remained stateless for the rest of his life.

Wir „conserviren“ Nichts, wir wollen auch in keine Vergangenheit zurück, wir sind durchaus nicht „liberal“, wir arbeiten nicht für den „Fortschritt“, wir brauchen unser Ohr nicht erst gegen die Zukunfts-Sirenen des Marktes zu verstopfen – das, was sie singen, „gleiche Rechte“, „freie Gesellschaft“, „keine Herrn mehr und keine Knechte“, das lockt uns nicht! – wir halten es schlechterdings nicht für wünschenswerth, dass das Reich der Gerechtigkeit und Eintracht auf Erden gegründet werde (weil es unter allen Umständen das Reich der tiefsten Vermittelmaßigung und Chineserei sein würde).

So he does not pin his hopes on some -ism or – ology, but on *zu jeder Verstärkung und Erhöhung des Typus "Mensch"*.<sup>18</sup> In *Jenseits Gut und Böse*<sup>19</sup> he deems Napoleon to be such a strong man: a *freie Geist* who was of a belligerent disposition.

We may conclude that both thinkers developed their ideas from an elitist and socially stratified paradigm. Also, both have a certain type of community/nation/communal federation in mind, but this is where similarities end. Renan wanted a European federation to be achieved through diplomatic and political consultation and referring to a common European culture. His goal was to prevent another war between member states.

Nietzsche advocated a vigorous, robust common culture free from human fallibilities (and therefore also free from cultural flaws); to be achieved by forceful, free personalities. His goal was to form a strong and vital community with a living culture that would have nothing to fear from geographical upscaling since, after all, the flaws had already been removed.

Renan's strategy is motivated by his repugnance for war and violence. Nietzsche's strategy, on the other hand, manifests itself as militant vitality; he does not shun violence (in the next chapter, I will elaborate on Nietzsche's attitude towards violence).

Thus, both thinkers take a (more or less) positive stand towards the unification of nations (be it Europe or Germany), however, their arguments and goals are diametrically different, as are their proposed strategies to get there.

It does not seem improper to posit here that these differences might have something to do with their respective characters<sup>20</sup> and therefore with their reactions to a tumultuous 19th- century Europe full of cruel and violent conflicts. Renan, the man of peaceful means and moderation, driven by the ideals of rationalism and enlightenment, secularity and liberalism and Nietzsche,

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18 Ibid.

19 K.S.A. 5, *Jenseits Gut und Böse*, § 199, p. 120.

20 It is rather peculiar – and also somewhat jocular – that Nietzsche saw in Renan precisely someone who would stand in the way of European unification. He also regarded Renan as a danger to French culture. Renan, according to Nietzsche, has an ailing will. K.S.A. 6, *Götzenämmerung, Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen*, § 2, p. 110 ff. This paragraph is a tasty invective against Renan, as is the whole book against a diversity of persons and (cultural) institutions. One could consider it a compliment that Nietzsche deemed Renan so important that he devoted an entire paragraph to him.

the man of passions and drives, influenced by the ideals of the Romantics and the encounter with Wagnerian music and Periclean Tragedy.

Further down in this thesis, we will see if these two seemingly opposite characters and thinkers have any unexpected similarities.

For now, let us concentrate on what Renan had to say about the genesis of nations when he delivered his famous speech on the subject at the Sorbonne on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1882. This being, after all, foremost on the minds of most citizens.

Renan's text appeared at the time of the Third French Republic. The Third French Republic was said to be the first republic in the world with a true parliamentary system. Also, in this period (1870-1940), republicanism and secularism entered into a close relationship. This makes this period particularly intriguing for those interested in the development of the democratic system.

Renan provides us with the elements of the nation concept in his speech "What is a Nation?"<sup>21</sup> I will now present a discussion thereof. I will also discuss his *ideal* of the nation; as we will need a conceptual framework in order to understand what Shakespeare's tragedies show about the nation and the development of a community into a nation and subsequently into a nation-state.<sup>22</sup>

#### 2.4 THE NATION AND OTHER FORMS OF HUMAN COEXISTENCE

As already pointed out in the introduction, I will use Renan's interpretative scheme of the concept of nation. Now, what is Renan's view on this concept? Renan begins in a comparative vein by saying that he wants to reflect on the "forms of human society."<sup>23</sup> He continues with the summing up of the following forms, dividing them into nations proper, assemblies, agglomerations, confederations, communities and independent entities:

1. "Great human agglomerations," to be found in China, Egypt and in ancient Babylon.
2. The "tribe," as we find among the Arabs and the Israelites.
3. The "city," such as Athens and Sparta.
4. "Assemblages of different lands in the manner of the Achaemenid Empire".
5. "The Roman Empire," like that of Charlemagne.
6. "Communities without a homeland" (*patrie*) and held together by a religious bond, like the Israelites and the followers of Zarathustra.

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21 Renan, Ernest, *Qu'est qu'une nation? Et autres essais politiques*, 1882, Textes choisis et présentés par Joël Roman, Presses Pocket, Paris 1992. I make use of an English translation: Renan, *What is a Nation? And other political writings*, 2018 (1882), translated by M.F.N. Giglioli, pp. 247 – 263.

22 See below.

23 Renan, "What is a Nation?", pp. 247 – 248.

7. "Confederations," as we see among the Swiss and among the Americans.
8. "Affinities" based on race, as we find among German and Slavic peoples.

Renan concludes his list with:

9. "nations," France, England and "the majority of modern independent European states."<sup>24</sup>

All these "modes of grouping" exist, but one must distinguish them. Why is this distinction important? Because one cannot simply transfer the institutions of, say, "small independent cities" (Sparta and Rome) to nations consisting of thirty or forty million people, as Renan says. Related but not identical to the concept of "nation" is the concept of "state." Renan does not actually address this in "What is a Nation?" and so we must turn to another classical author for the latter concept.

## 2.5 MAX WEBER'S CONCEPT OF THE STATE

It hardly needs to be said that Renan's thoughts on the concept of the nation are of enormous significance for a proper understanding of the "nation-state": the combination of a nation with a state. Thus, although the concepts of "nation" and "state" are linked in the "nation-state," it is also clear that they are not the same thing. It is therefore important to distinguish the concept of "nation" from "state." What is a state?

The definition of the great German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) is authoritative here. In his *Staatssoziologie*, he points out that we cannot separate a state from (the use of) "power". Weber wants to approach the state as a sociologist, and what is important then is that the state accomplishes its goals by using a specific agent. It is that *agent* that distinguishes the political connection which is the state from other political connections. That agent, specifically tied to the state, he calls "das der physischen Gewaltsamkeit."<sup>25</sup> To clarify his position, Weber quotes Trotsky, who had said during a lecture in Brest-Litowsk that every state is founded on violence. Weber calls that "in der Tat richtig," and he says that if we only knew (social) institutions that never used violence as an agent, then the state would have been unknown to us ("würde der Begriff 'Staat' fortgefallen sein").<sup>26</sup> Indeed, we would then be living in a situation of constant anarchy.

The phraseology and exemplification already indicate that something odd is going on here. A strange discrepancy lies at the heart of these remarks that

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24 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 248.

25 Max Weber, Max, *Staatssoziologie. Soziologie der rationalen Staatsanstalt und der modernen politischen Parteien und Parlamente*, p. 27.

26 Weber, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

I find deeply problematic. How can a sociologist describe the use of violence by a state, and illustrate this with the wording of *the* renowned revolutionary?<sup>27</sup> Surely, in general, Trotsky's attitude towards violence (and use of it, as begotten in the communist revolt with the specific purpose of toppling society and its institutions) must be of a very different kind than Weber's. The latter's type of violence was solely meant to be used by the state to protect citizens and institutions.

To continue with Weber, he arrives at his definition of the state that has made school in the sense that it has been adopted countless times, with or without minor amendments.

Staat ist diejenige menschliche Gemeinschaft, welche innerhalb eines bestimmten Gebietes – dies: das 'Gebiet', gehört zum Merkmal – das Monopol legitimer physischer Gewaltsamkeit für sich (mit Erfolg) beansprucht.<sup>28</sup>

It should be noted that, apart from violence, another element is included. Weber puts forward territory as characteristic of the state concept. The state exercises violence over people in a specific region/land: a state territory. That state does not do so "in competition" with others, but the state is the only one that can exercise that violence. One can also say: the state has – if all goes well – overcome all competing organizations with the same ambitions (criminal organizations like the Mafia or terrorist groups with territorial ambitions like ETA or IS). Weber: the state has been able to successfully defend its monopoly over the legitimate exercise of physical violence.

I now allow myself to briefly return to my above remarks on Weber's and Trotsky's use of the term violence. As said, the type of violence of Trotsky seems to me to be of an essentially different quality than Weber's. Trotsky's is an unrestrained force of destruction. This seems almost the opposite of Weber's "state violence": regulated preferably by codified law. Well now, it is these types of violence that are the special concern of this thesis. It seems to me that an in-depth study of the concept of violence within these frameworks is of some importance; perhaps to discover the precise differentiations in characteristics and effects of (the types of) violence as well as their influence on nation and state. In what way does this influence make a nation tick and what is it – seen from this perspective – that keeps its body politic healthy and vibrant? For this, I will turn to Shakespeare's tragedies. Shakespeare also seems to have a keen eye for what makes a state or, for that matter, a nation<sup>29</sup> deteriorate. How does he see the role of the violence, as identified above, there?

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27 Trotsky helped organize the failed revolution of 1905 and played a leading role in the October Revolution of 1917 toppling the government. He fought with the Bolsheviks in the Civil War of 1917 – 1922.

28 Weber, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

29 In *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* a nation as we know it now had not as yet (*Macbeth*) or hardly (*Hamlet*) come into existence in the acts 1.

And can we perhaps say that his tragic protagonists have something to say about the mutual cohesion of inhabitants in a nation, or of the cementing of nationhood, or its corrosion? If so, then Shakespeare's work would have special significance for professional disciplines such as politicians, political theorists, jurists and statesmen, but also for citizens who are seriously dedicated to citizenship as an assignment for all members of the nation's community. I will embroider hereon in the next chapters, the violence associated with the birth of nations in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and the relationship between nation, state and violence in *Julius Caesar*.<sup>30</sup> For this moment, however, we continue our analysis of Renan's concept of nation.

## 2.6 THE BEGINNING OF THE NATION

The first thing to notice is that Renan situates the emergence of nations much earlier than happens in literature habitually.<sup>31</sup> In his *What is a Nation* Renan writes that Europe can be divided into nations ever since the end of the Roman Empire or, even better, since the decline of Charlemagne's empire (c. 745-814). He expects that once sprung into existence, these nations shall be with us unto perpetuity. France, England, Germany and Russia will remain "historic individualities" and, as he writes, "never completely merge."<sup>32</sup>

This could be put down as a miscalculation on Renan's part, given the fact that respectively the European Coal and Steel Community (1952), the European Economic Community (1957) and the European Union (1993) were founded, the latter in particular involving a far-reaching transfer of sovereignty from nation-states to supranational governance. Given the above, Renan seems to have been overtaken by history. Yet, this might just be a conclusion too hastily made. His 1882 speech could perhaps also be read as a warning that political units, such as the European Union, cannot have a long life, as he explains on the same page. This, however, is not our theme.

We will therefore return to Renan. What follows is a presentation of Renan's analysis on the subject. The first important thing to note is that the nation is not a self-evident entity. Renan writes: "Gaul, Spain and Italy, prior to their absorption into the Roman Empire, were collections of tribes, often in alliance with one another, but without central institutions or dynasties."<sup>33</sup> Nor were the Persian Empire or the Assyrian Empire nations. One can further

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30 Content and specific characteristics of the concept of nation-state will be discussed and analyzed when this concept becomes relevant and alive in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

31 Many take this date to be 1648 with the Peace treaty of Westphalia, the beginning of the "Neuzeit". As to this issue, opinions differ. Of course, as I noted above, thought on the concept of nation started much earlier than the actual emergence of the practical development and effectuation of the concept.

32 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 248.

33 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 248.

say that all the countries and regions Alexander conquered did not lead to any nation-building.

The situation for Rome was a different one. “The Roman Empire was much closer to a fatherland. Roman domination, at first so harsh, was soon loved for the immense benefit of putting an end to war. It was a great association, a synonym for order, peace, and civilization.”<sup>34</sup> During its development, Roman scholars and intellectuals emerged, seconding the emergence of the *Pax Romana*. This order was seen as far more satisfactory than the chaos of “barbarians.”

What is characteristic of a nation? There should be a “fusion of the populations that compose them.”<sup>35</sup> Sometimes religion can be a facilitating factor in this. “The Germanic peoples adopted Christianity as soon as they had regular contact with the Greek and Latin peoples.”<sup>36</sup>

It is important to cite this sentence in this context because it shows (despite all that will be said about religion below) that Renan attributes a role, albeit secondary, to religion in the unification of a nation. However, as we will note in what follows, Renan believes that for a modern nation, religion can no longer be a source of social cohesion.

## 2.7 THE NATION AND FORGETTING

Renan’s starting point for his reflections on the nation (and nation-state) becomes apparent in a most intriguing part of his analysis of the concept namely, forgetfulness (the act of forgetting, oblivion).<sup>37</sup> The important point for the formation of a nation is forgetting, he posits. It is important to give some emphasis to this element of Renan’s analysis because it is counter-intuitive. How can “forgetting” be important? These days, this must sound particularly incongruous when currently the search for one’s “roots” is enjoying enormous interest. Yet, it is what Renan deems important: forgetting is essential.

The act of forgetting, and I might even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation, and this is why the progress of historical studies is often a danger to the principle of nationality.<sup>38</sup>

Renan seems to be making three observations here, all three of which may meet with a certain amount of resistance because, as mentioned, they are

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34 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 249.

35 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 249.

36 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 249.

37 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 251.

38 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 251.

counterintuitive. Firstly, then, forgetting is positively valued. This is contrary to the idea that the acquisition of knowledge<sup>39</sup> is always constructive and productive. Secondly, brushing over past mistakes with a rosy colored hue is sometimes seen as psychologically wrong (in psychological terms: denial); it may, however, make a positive contribution to nationhood to forget past controversies; as a conscious decision to put aside old grudges. Thirdly, the science of history, a science to which Renan himself has made such important contributions,<sup>40</sup> also has disadvantages, for it may reveal matters that do not promote the principle of the nation. The latter is the case if historical research uncovers acts of violence committed in the past (even at the root of nationhood) that may not be so exalted in themselves, but which did make the nation possible.

“Unity is always achieved brutally,”<sup>41</sup> Renan writes. These words seem to have the decided resonance of Trotsky’s. Renan is indeed aware of the fact that violence is at the root of nation-forming. It is based on these considerations that Renan can make the paradoxical observation that “the essence of a nation” consists in the fact that “all individuals have many things in common, including that they have equally forgotten many things.”<sup>42</sup>

As an example of that forgetting, he mentions that all Frenchmen should forget the Night of Bartholomew (1572), as well as the massacres in the Midi in the thirteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Renan does not elaborate, but the idea seems clear: a nation must be able to form a unity, and you do not get this when people are consumed by resentment towards one another.<sup>44</sup> Resentment that is fed by the fact that old conflicts, old antagonisms are stirred up, or artificially cultivated.

I cannot but agree with Renan here, where the keeping alive of resentment between different groups towards each other is concerned. Later on in this chapter I will return to the thematic of forgetting and its opposite concept: commemoration.

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39 Meant here is, of course, the accumulation of knowledge reaped from research for historical “roots” of groups and individuals.

40 The most spectacular being his contribution to the historical-critical examination of Jesus Christ in his *Vie de Jésus*.

41 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 251.

42 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 251.

43 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 251.

44 I do not rule out that Renan’s attitude here partly might have been inspired by the fact that Renan himself had gone through the ordeals of war. He knew what he was talking about, he abhorred brutality and chose forgetfulness.

## 2.8 NATIONS MAY DIFFER

Renan clarifies in his work that the factors contributing to nation-building can vary for different states. Sometimes, a shared dynasty is an important factor. Sometimes several provinces operate in collaboration (he mentions the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium as examples). But why is the Netherlands a nation, while, for example, the Grand Duchy of Parma ("the Grand Duchy of Parma") is not? How is it that Switzerland is a nation, even though several different languages are spoken there, two different religions are practiced and three (or four) races are distinguished among the Swiss?

The tribe and the city were particularly important in ancient times. These were more or less family extensions. In Athens and Sparta, all citizens were, in one way or another, related to each other. This was the case in Israel and still is with the Arab tribes.

The development of the Roman Empire was exceptional as to its development: "[f]irst established through violence, then preserved by interest, this great agglomeration of entirely different cities and provinces deals the gravest of blows to the idea of race."<sup>45</sup> Thus the idea of "race" was dealt a fatal blow. Apparently, the concept was not so important after all. And, of course, Christianity helped to discredit the idea of race.<sup>46</sup> In modern times, finally, the idea has become even more irrelevant, Renan posits.

The truth is that there is no pure race, and that to base politics on ethnographic analysis is to surrender it to a chimera. The noblest countries, England, France and Italy, are those where blood is most mixed.<sup>47</sup>

A contemporary Frenchman is neither a Gaul, nor a Frank, nor a Burgundian. "He is," Renan writes, "rather what emerged from the great vessel in which the most varied elements fermented together, presided over by the king of France."<sup>48</sup> Whatever may be said of his earlier comments on colonialism, from these passages it becomes clear that Renan cannot, by any means, be called a racist. Indeed, he gives very strong arguments that nation-building can never be based on "race."

## 2.9 THE NATION AND RACE

In his lecture, Renan repeatedly returns to an error commonly made. He emphasizes that, too often, nation is confused with race. In our day, Renan

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45 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 254.

46 With its emphasis on personal experience of faith and redemption through Christ, rather than on race, descent or ancestry, as criteria for being accepted into the religious community.

47 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 255.

48 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 256.

states (we write 1882), race and nation are thrown together; which means that “ethnographic or rather linguistic groups are ascribed a sovereignty analogous to that of peoples that actually exist.”<sup>49</sup>

Renan strongly emphasises the fact that the element of race has no meaning today (again: in 1882). For argumentative purposes he even compares the human life to the animal world.

Human history differs fundamentally from zoology. Race here is not everything, as with rodents or felines, and no one has the right to go round the world, fingering people’s skulls and then seizing them by the throat and telling them: ‘You have our blood, you belong to us’.<sup>50</sup>

After having distanced himself from biological-physiological issues (man is not a rodent, after all), Renan emphasizes the significance of values. “There is reason, justice, truth, and beauty,” he writes and adds, “which are the same for all.”<sup>51</sup> Renan here formulates notions that can be characterized as universalisms in state formation. They apply, as we may safely assume, to all peoples and all times. For this reason, they may be considered to be part and parcel of the quintessential core values for building a nation. In addition, of course, many values are perceived as important by groups of people and embedded in their culture. A “nation” is always a combination of those two forms of values. The French subscribe to “liberty, equality and fraternity” as universal values, but in addition, they also share a series of values that distinguish them from other nations.<sup>52</sup> Thus, each country has its own identity. Both universalities and particularities in the sphere of nation formation will be retraced in *Julius Caesar*.

Two years after Renan’s death, the Dreyfus affair, the judicial scandal surrounding the wrongful conviction of the Jewish-French officer Alfred Dreyfus,<sup>53</sup> took place.<sup>54</sup> The perceptive reader, however, may notice that in Renan’s time, anti-Semitism and discussions of racism played an unsavory role. At this stage in our research into his work, we may by now understand where Renan positioned himself in those discussions and – for that matter – Max Weber who is cited in a note above. These two scholars were joined by Nietzsche who rabidly railed (e.g. in *Beyond Good and Evil* of 1886 – see note

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49 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 256.

50 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, pp. 256 – 257.

51 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 257.

52 Each nation knows, in its cultural-sociological make-up, universal values as well as particular traditions and customs that distinguish them other nations. In addition, as we shall see in *Julius Caesar*, all human existential properties are embedded in the diverse cultures/ customs in different ways.

53 Alfred Dreyfuss: 1859-1935.

54 From 1894 to 1906.

below) against the specter of anti-Semitism that was haunting Europe at the time.<sup>55</sup>

## 2.10 RENAN'S "OPEN" CONCEPT OF NATIONHOOD

With the words "reason, justice, truth, and beauty,"(quoted above), Renan introduces, as said above, universal ideas. These values may establish bonds between men because they appeal to a communally felt *condition humaine*. By implication, therefore, also values that are communally felt (be they universal or regional) do not drive rifts between people but, on the contrary, they connect. Values, in general, can be adopted or rejected by anyone. The implications of that idea are enormous: those who are willing to subscribe to the same values can form a nation together.

Basing the nation on a community of values, rather than a race, makes Renan's concept of nationhood "open." New entrants can freely decide to belong to the nation (or not). That is, when the dominant group within the nation uses this open nation concept as a principal starting point. A nationhood concept based on race is, by definition, exclusive. When one adopts a nation-concept based on commonly shared values, it is by definition inclusive. This premise had enormous significance; let me take as an example the Roman nation, who adopted it. This nation's success is often explained as a consequence of its being an inclusive society. One could move up in the Roman hierarchy, in the Roman public administration, in the Roman army, even if not a "born Roman." A culmination of this development is seen during the reign of the Roman emperor Caracalla (188-217), more specifically his laws.

Mary Beard (scholar of classical antiquity) formulates the merits of the Roman emperor as follows: "Caracalla took the step of making every single free inhabitant of the Roman Empire a full Roman citizen, eroding the difference between conqueror and conquered and completing a process of expanding the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship that had started almost a thousand years earlier."<sup>56</sup> The importance of the concept of a values-nation (in the wake of the analysis of its values – see above) will be highlighted at length in the chapter on *Julius Caesar*.

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55 "Ich bin noch keinem Deutschen begegnet, der den Juden gewogen gewesen wäre; und so unbedingt auch die Ablehnung der eigentlichen Antisemiterei von Seiten aller Vorsichtigen und Politischen sein mag, so richtet sich doch auch diese Vorsicht und Politik nicht etwa gegen die Gattung des Gefühls selber, sondern nur gegen seine gefährliche Unmäßigkeit, insbesondere gegen den abgeschmackten und schandbaren Ausdruck dieses unmäßigen Gefühls, – darüber darf man sich nicht täuschen. Dass Deutschland reichlich genug Juden hat, dass der deutsche Magen, das deutsche Blut Noth hat (und noch auf lange Noth haben wird), um auch nur mit diesem Quantum „Jude“ fertig zu werden – so wie der Italiäner, der Franzose, der Engländer fertig geworden sind.", K.S.A. 5, *Jenseits Gut und Böse*, § 251, p. 193.

56 Beard, Mary, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, p. 17.

## 2.11 LANGUAGE CEMENTING A NATION?

What Renan writes about race also applies to language. He says, "Language invites unification; it does not force it."<sup>57</sup> He points out that the United States and England<sup>58</sup> (1882) share a common language. But they do not constitute a nation. Switzerland, on the other hand, speaks four languages, yet it does constitute a nation.

One can have doubts about the first example (the United States and England) as Renan has it,<sup>59</sup> but the third example, Switzerland, is better, as Renan notes. The critical factor here is, as he has it, is the consent, the will of the different parts to form a nation.

## 2.12 NATION AND WILL

After having epitomized and analyzed all the characteristics usually advocated as being essential to the nation (but which, in his opinion, are not) Renan produces the central thesis of his lecture. That central position is held by the will (as referenced just above). He introduces that central position of the will with a generalization about man. He puts it as follows:

There is in man something superior to language; that is will.<sup>60</sup>

Man is not predestined because he has a will, as Renan postulates. Man is not determined by his language, nor defined by his race. Man can choose freely: the human capacity that provides the basis for this is the will. "The will of Switzerland to be united, despite the variety of its dialects, is far more important than a similarity often obtained by vexatious methods." This centrality of the will is presented by Renan as eminently rational.

Here again, we see a marked contrast between Renan and Nietzsche. Whereas Renan's will is the deliberate and ratio-guided faculty to freely choose, in Nietzsche's work, we meet a primordial urge to power that constitutes the will. I emphatically note that Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* is but the first draft for a book, consisting of a table of contents, mere loose notes and miscellaneous

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57 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 257.

58 Conceivably Renan is here referring to the Commonwealth of Nations. Be that as it may, it is an unfortunate example (as is the United States – as already indicated in the text) to which I do not agree. Especially where not the Commonwealth is concerned but Great Britain.

59 It is unclear why Renan does not denote the US and the UK as nations. Perhaps, but again he does not explain, he refers to England's colonies which on the whole, did not feel to be part of England's nation. As to the US, he perhaps refers to the attitude towards the indigenous tribes and the as yet not completely controlled 'wild west'.

60 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 257.

ideas, written just before his mental breakdown. He meant to set about writing this major work (as he saw it), but never got to do it. After his death, his sister Elisabeth (an avid Nazi) composed the book using her brother's notes ("rectifying" them), with the purpose to pedestalize National Socialism. For those reasons, these two types of "will" are in no way related. Their similarities lie in an altogether different field.

"Let us not abandon," Renan continues to his audience in Paris, during his lecture at the Sorbonne, "the fundamental principle that man is a rational and moral being prior to being a speaker of this or that language, a member of this or that culture."<sup>61</sup>

It hardly needs to be said that Renan is not just describing a dimension of social reality here, but that he presents his conception of man as a free actor who chooses and who is determined neither by language nor religion. He insists on the possibility of choice that he deems of essential importance for man, to be able to behave as a rational and moral being. Renan here takes the Enlightenment position<sup>62</sup> of man as a reasonable being who can shape social reality based on his assumptions. Renan articulates his position thus: "[b]efore French culture, German culture or Italian culture, there is human culture."<sup>63</sup> Apparently there is a human nature that connects us all. Cicero also spoke of *humanitas*. Stoics like Brutus (see chapter on *Julius Caesar*) also subscribed to that idea. Do opinions diverge on this issue? They certainly do. For instance Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) in his *Considerations on France*:

Now, there is no such thing as 'man' in this world. In my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, and so on. I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be Persian. But as for man, I declare I've never encountered him.<sup>64</sup>

For De Maistre, then, "man" is a nonexistent abstraction. His work would become the starting point not only for "culturalists," thinkers who consider man to be predestined by their culture, but also for "multiculturalists" who believe that any form of "integration" (or transculturation) into a new culture is a mortal sin. Renan was born when De Maistre had been dead for two years. They cannot, therefore, be characterized as contemporaries. De Maistre was a great advocate of the resistance to the principles of the French Revolution. He also greatly advocated (in several of his works, e.g. *Du Pape*) the divine right of kings. This boiled down to a divine right to rule as described by

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61 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 258.

62 As described by authoritative scholars such as Israel, Jonathan I, (*Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* and *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, Also: Hasan, Rumy, *Modern Europe and the Enlightenment*).

63 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 258.

64 Maistre, Joseph de, *Considerations of France*, p. 42.

Bossuet in his *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte*<sup>65</sup> (1709). In this work, Bossuet (the private tutor of Louis XIV) exhibits on what principles the French government was based before the revolution: “*Un roi, une loi, une foi*”. Thus, the form of government is monarchical, with the king preserving the unity. A unity is based on a single faith: Catholicism, albeit not blindly subservient to Rome.

## 2.13 NATION AND RELIGION

By emphasizing religion as essential for nationhood, De Maistre did not voice an idiosyncratic or isolated view. The intertwining of religion and nation goes back a long way. The concept was the major cosolvent for ancient Israel. In the Bible, the history is told of the people of Israel prone to apostatize and leave the God of Israel. The latter often responded with draconian punishments. In Shakespeare's time, the idea of a marriage between nation and religion was alive in the minds of many. Henry VIII, father to Queen Elizabeth (queen in Shakespeare's time), made himself head of the Anglican Church (even if he had, earlier, been exalted to the title of Defender of the Faith by the Pope) and therewith introduced his brand of religion.

I will now enlarge on Renan's opinion on the importance of religion for nation forming.

## 2.14 RELIGION IS NO BASIS FOR THE NATION; NO STATE RELIGION

Without any hesitation, Renan comes to the point. After rejecting race and language as essential to nationhood, he turns to the analysis of religion. Upfront, he states his conclusion in the heading above the paragraph on the subject:

Religion cannot offer an adequate basis for the establishment of a modern nationality either.<sup>66</sup>

He is, however, aware of the long-standing place of religion in founding a nation. Older than language, as he had it.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps older than race as well. “Originally,” Renan says, “religion was a matter of the very existence of the

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65 Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, “*Sermon sur les devoirs des rois*”, in: *Sermons: Le Carême du Louvre*, pp. 231-248.

66 Renan, “*What is a Nation?*”, p.258.

67 Here I tend to disagree since, in my professional opinion as a linguist, no predominant and developed religion can exist without the use of language. However, this is a never ending discussion of chicken and egg and no subject of this dissertation.

social group, which was an extension of the family.”<sup>68</sup> Although ancient Israel is the obvious first example when a nation’s religious foundations are concerned, Renan starts with the example of Athens. “The religion of Athens was the cult of Athens itself, of its mythical founders, its laws and customs.”<sup>69</sup> But, it soon becomes apparent, as we read on, that Athens’ mythical traditions involved “religion” in the broadest possible sense of the word; it hardly involved a relationship between the earth and transcendent powers and “it did not imply any dogmatic theology,” as Renan writes.<sup>70</sup> It was in the “full sense of the term” a state religion.

What “full sense” means here becomes clear when he continues his reflections. Renan is not talking about religion in the traditional sense, as a perspective for individual salvation that is also supported by the power of the state, but as a political principle that is supposed to be endorsed by the citizens of the state. He says, “It was at bottom the cult of the Acropolis personified.”<sup>71</sup> Those who swore allegiance to the Acropolis indicated that they were willing to die for the native country/fatherland (*patrie*). He therefore compares it to the deference for the national flag in our own time.<sup>72</sup> An ancient Greek refusing to swear allegiance to the Acropolis could very well be equated with a person refusing to enter military service nowadays.

The nature of this Athenian “state religion” has an important corollary: “there was no proselytism to force foreigners to accept it, nor did the Athenian slave practice it.”<sup>73</sup>

Renan is vehemently against imposing a state religion on a civilian population that is resistant to it. He refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, who wanted all his subjects in the Orient (especially Judea) to convert to the cult of the Olympian Jupiter.

Renan also rejects the Roman state religion; he abhors the persecutions that took place in the Roman Empire to impose a state religion. They were a “mistake, a crime, a genuine absurdity.”<sup>74</sup> As a reason for rejecting the persecutions to enforce a state religion, he refers (without actually using the term) to religious pluralism: “Each person believes and practices as they see fit, whatever they want or like.”<sup>75</sup>

In other words, Renan refers to the principle of freedom of religion. But he also speaks of the consequences of this stance for a state religion; it would make it impossible. “There is no longer a state religion; you can be French,

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68 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, pp. 258 – 259.

69 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 259.

70 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 259.

71 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 259.

72 In the next chapter I will further discuss some aspects of the Greek worship surrounding the Dionysian rites and festivals.

73 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 259.

74 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 259.

75 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 259.

English, or German while being Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or not practicing any religion.”<sup>76</sup> This means that Renan also recognizes the possibility of a “departure from religion” as a fundamental right. And this is exactly how it would eventually be codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the end (1948). Article 18 of the Universal Declaration reads, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief (...).” Contrary to popular belief, the latter – the ability to *change* religion – is essential. Some authoritative thinkers<sup>77</sup> hold that it is this clause that realizes freedom of religion and I cannot but agree with them.

In line with these last observations, I hold that true religious freedom is realized only when people not only have the choice to adhere to any religion they want but also have an unrestrained choice to change or abandon their religion. The latter conception of religious freedom has only been possible in “modern culture.” Henry VIII’s breaking away from the “holy mother church” of Rome can therefore not be seen as an example of freedom of religion under the above definition. Religious freedom only emerged during the Enlightenment period and took constitutional-legal shape in the French Revolution and the Atlantic revolutions. Not “all men are created equal” is a manifestation of modern freedom, as the lines of the American Declaration of Independence (1776)<sup>78</sup> read, but Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason* (1794),<sup>79</sup> where he (the great inspiration behind the American Revolution)<sup>80</sup> ties secularist consequences to his views that made many Americans recoil.<sup>81</sup>

However essential, to this day, the article from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has not been fully implemented. Reasons for this may be:

- countries and governments persecute believers (dissenters) or apostates, as is generally the case in the Arab world,<sup>82</sup>
- countries still uphold a state religion (generally in diluted form) for reasons of tradition (as is the case with the Anglican state religion today).

76 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 259.

77 Among whom Paul Cliteur in: *Theoterrorism v. Freedom of Speech*.

78 Reck, Andrew, “The Enlightenment in American Law I: The Declaration of Independence”, in: *The Review of Metaphysics*, 1991, 44, pp. 549-573.

79 Paine, Thomas, *The Age of Reason*, 1794, in: Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings*, The Library of America, New York 1995, pp. 665-885.

80 Paine, Thomas, *Common Sense*, 1776, in: Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings*, The Library of America, New York 1995, pp. 5-59.

81 Paine, Thomas, *Rights of Man*. Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution, 1791/92, in: Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings*, The Library of America, New York 1995, p. 433-661.

82 Cliteur, Paul, Houben, Laetitia, and Slimmen, Michelle, “Death of a Princess”, in: Paul Cliteur and Tom Herrenberg, eds., *The Fall and Rise of Blasphemy Law*, With a foreword by Flemming Rose, Leiden University Press, Leiden 2016, pp. 111-137.

All this is incompatible with Renan's idea of nationhood. He says, "Religion has become an individual matter; it concerns the conscience of each person."<sup>83</sup> Optimistically, Renan writes that religion "preserves all its importance in the heart of each person; but has ceased almost entirely to be one of the grounds that define the frontiers of peoples."<sup>84</sup>

When Renan wrote this in 1882, he did so against the backdrop of a past in which this was different, even in France. J.B. Bury writes in *A History of the Freedom of Thought* (1913)<sup>85</sup> that Renan's "sensational *Life of Jesus*" (1863), in which he had rejected the "supernatural," had cost him his chair at the *College de France*.<sup>86</sup> Thus, when Renan writes that religion "has ceased almost entirely to be one of the grounds that define the frontiers of peoples", he portrays a somewhat idealized condition. What reasons does Renan have for his laudatory view? Had the situation changed for the better in 1882 compared to a few decades earlier? Rather, it seems that Renan believes that religion should be treated as a private matter. Yet he is firmly in touch with reality, aware as he is that this is an ideal. An ideal that in part has been realized, while in part it is still on the agenda.

## 2.15 A NATION IS NOT A "ZOLLVEREIN"

Above, we noted that the nation does not coincide with language, not with race, not with religion. Nor does the nation coincide with citizens who pursue only their (economic) self-interest,<sup>87</sup> as is the case with, e.g., a customs union (*Zollverein*). "Self-interest," Renan writes, is not "sufficient to make for a nation."<sup>88</sup>

In a sense, Renan, like Cicero, opposes an apolitical antique movement such as Epicureanism. "He [Cicero] is evidently combating the Epicurean hostility to patriotism," writes the editor<sup>89</sup> of Cicero's *De Re Publica* in the Loeb Classical Library.<sup>90</sup> "The Epicureans, whose ideal of a quiet life free from pain made them discountenance participation in politics," the editor says. Cicero seems to endorse several elements of modern republican thought, e.g. the concept that is often described as "moral autonomy". He praises Xenocrates

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83 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 259.

84 Renan, "What is a Nation?", pp. 259 – 260.

85 Renan, Ernest, *Vie de Jésus*, Éditions de la Bohème, Paris 1992 (1863).

86 Bury, J.B., *A History of the Freedom of Thought*, Thornton Butterworth, London 1932 (1913), p. 198.

87 The self-interest that drove Rome in its latter days. I will elaborate on this theme in the chapter on Julius Caesar.

88 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 260.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Cicero, *De Re Publica, De Legibus*, XVI, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G.P. Goold, Cambridge, Mass., London 1977, p. 13.

who impressed upon his students his ideal: "To do of their own accord what they are compelled to do by the law."<sup>91</sup>

The same, somewhat lofty, ideals as articulated by Cicero are also found in Renan's 1882 essay. The pursuit of self-interest cannot produce a lasting political connection, the latter writes. A "community of interest only makes commercial treaties."<sup>92</sup> He points out that an element of "feeling" or "sentiment" is firmly housed in the concept of nationality. It is a body and soul together, or, as Renan tantalizingly puts it, "a Zollverein is not a fatherland."<sup>93</sup>

After saying that also territory ("geography") is not decisive for the concept of nationhood, Renan continues: "The soil provides the substratum, the field the battle and labor; man provides the soul."<sup>94</sup> Then he provides a description of "nation" that may appear to some to be exalted, but which seems to very well complement his republican ideals. "Man is everything in the formation of that sacred thing called a people,"<sup>95</sup> Renan says. Practical and materialistic issues simply will not do in themselves.

A nation is a spiritual principle resulting from profound complications of history, a spiritual family and not a group determined by the configuration of the soil.<sup>96</sup>

After having systematically broken down all elements associated with nationhood – but not coinciding with it – Renan finally answers the question of what constitutes the essence of the nation. He formulates this very "spiritually." He says:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.<sup>97</sup>

That "soul" has two aspects: the past and the present. "One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is the present consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form."<sup>98</sup>

On both these dimensions of the nation concept some observations are to be made. First, the "possession in common of a rich legacy of memories." It goes without saying that a shared "rich legacy" that is collectively shared by all – and alive in their minds – will be not as abundant in pluralistic societies with a diversity in population as in relatively homogeneous societies. And

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91 Cicero, *Ibid.*, p. 17.

92 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 260.

93 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 260.

94 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 260.

95 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 260.

96 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 261.

97 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 261.

98 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 261.

because modern societies are particularly diverse, it is therefore not easy to cement nationhood in this day and age.

This brings us to the second element, the “desire to live together.” The *vivre ensemble*. This desire to live together may become more prominent and alive in a population when they share a common cultural heritage. Yet, this is complicated since it is precisely this that is often lacking. “The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of effort, sacrifices and devotion,”<sup>99</sup> Renan wrote. Up to a certain extent this could be said about the France of 1882. It is much less true in today’s France; a far greater effort will have to be made to effect “a desire to live together” along the lines of the above description. The concept has lost its self-evident character. Therefore, nations nowadays will have to put much more effort into encouraging the desire to live together.

Accordingly, the nation’s motto now should be commemoration instead of “forgetting” (see above). Acquiring knowledge about the nation in all its aspects, both present and past, is a prerequisite for loving it. Renan does not hesitate to speak of the need for a “cult of ancestors,” which he considers justified. And not just justified; it is, for him, a non-negotiable requirement. After all, it is our ancestors who have made us what we are today. It must be possible to tell a heroic story about the past. Renan says:

A heroic past, great men, glory (genuine glory, I mean), that is the social capital on which a national idea is founded. To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have done great things together, and to seek to do again, those are the essential conditions for being a people.<sup>100</sup>

The importance of a communal experience does not only lie in celebrating together, but also the having gone, as a community, through suffering and/or disaster. Perchance, the latter might be even more important than a conjoint festivity or ceremony. Anticipating the following chapters, I would like to point out that there is a specific form of “suffering together” that is related to a mode of consciousness: the tragic consciousness as seen both in the Periclean tragedies and in those of Shakespeare. I will elaborate on this idea in the following chapters.

Renan then continues with a second element which is equally important to him; the promise of a joint future. Of importance is the desire to “move forward” together: “the clearly expressed consent and desire to continue a common life.”<sup>101</sup> And this is precisely the core message that tragedy shows us: moving forward together despite (or: due to<sup>102</sup>) what has been suffered

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99 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 261.

100 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 261.

101 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 261.

102 As we shall see in the next chapters.

in the past. Even better: that suffering will offer prospects for continuous renewal and improvement of the construct that is called the nation-state, as I hope to demonstrate in the ensuing chapters.

Renan goes as far as to suggest banishing the metaphysical and the theological from politics. What will remain in this case is man, man with his wants and needs. To Renan, that seems quite enough. In his future vista's, he emphatically links the possibility of freedom to the nation-state. In the summary of "What is a nation?" he ends up expressing his emancipatory humanist ideal when he says:

Let me summarize, Gentlemen. Man is neither the slave of his race nor his language, nor to his religion nor to the course of rivers, nor to the direction of mountain chains.<sup>103</sup>

One must be healthy in spirit and warm in heart – that is the moral principle from which nation-states spring.

In his discourse, Renan emphatically underlined man's (free) will to live together. He interpreted this will as a spiritual and continuous process set in the temporal dimensions of past and present. He elaborates upon its inherent spirituality, rather than the fact that a will could also be formed as a deliberate conscious decision of resolve on a rational basis. Also, the element of violence as a basis of this resolve is hardly present – he does mention suffering, but does not specify it – in his otherwise thorough analysis.

In the following chapters, I will therefore try to unravel and interpret what exactly Renan's will entails, and delve deeper into what he might have meant by suffering together. I will see whether it could be paired with (or even be complementary to) violence, more specifically: Shakespeare's tragic violence and Nietzsche's position concerning violence. In what way did the art form of tragedy contribute to the cementing or undoing of nation(-states); what is the exact format of violence according to Nietzsche and what is its relevance for today's politicians and jurists? Let us, in the next chapter, turn to the specifics of tragedy.

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103 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 262.



### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In his work, Renan did identify correspondences in culture and religion as aspects of cementing nations; to him, they are – although to a certain extent factors – of secondary importance. Instead, he establishes the will of a group of people as the essential criterion for the founding of a nation. In the next chapters, I will go into the precise nature of Renan's will utilizing Shakespearean tragedy and relate it to *the* most important common characteristic of tragedy: violence.

But before I can do that, I must first focus on violence itself: a complex concept of violence in the context of nation formation, state formation, and the birth of nation-states, which I will explore in this chapter.

Unfortunately, Renan pays little attention to violence, merely stating that the foundation of every union consists of brutality. These words seem to echo the notion that Renan understands that unrestrained and unchecked violence (the Trotsky kind, if you will) lies at the origins of a nation-state. Furthermore, his treatise appears to exude a preference for non-violence. If so, it suggests a type of violence arising from a well-organized nation-state; in short, the kind of violence that Weber advocates, which is state-monopolized and law-bound. Yet, these observations can only be made tentatively because Renan does not provide a clearly articulated position on violence (other than expressing his aversion to it), let alone demonstrate an awareness of different types of violence.

Through the centuries, many thinkers have pondered on the phenomenon of violence. Classical Greece even dedicated an art form to it: the Greek tragedies of the Periclean period, which are staged even up to the present day. They recognized violence's role in the formation of communities and nations. For this reason, I will, in this chapter, highlight the role of tragic violence in the art form of tragedy, plus the type of violence that is state-controlled.<sup>1</sup> Both types of violence are, as I find, different in practice, purpose and character.

In the first paragraphs of this chapter, I will trace back tragedy to its beginnings. Next, I examine its form; in the following paragraph, the differences between violence, tragic violence, and state-controlled violence are

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1 As in: used by the state itself to safeguard its continues existence.

analyzed. Additionally, the concept of the violence paradigm is introduced, which outlines the violent process in tragedy. I will attempt to unearth the precise nature of the radicality of this type of violence: how it arises, what aspects it has, and how we might end it are the relevant questions here. Is knowledge of this format important for a successful nation-state? I will try to answer this question in the next few chapters. Next, I will discuss the role and characteristics of the tragic hero by comparing them to those of a non-tragic historical character. I will also address the diverse social and literary schools related to tragedy, up to and including the 20th century. Special attention is paid to Nietzsche's philosophy on violence since this professor of classical philology (and later philosopher) was one of the first to thematize violence from a literary/philosophical angle. His attempts have been tragically misunderstood for a long time.

I will try to analyze the influence and force of tragic violence and controlled violence in the next few chapters on Shakespeare's tragedies. Do both types of violence have any significance at all in the formation of communities, nations and subsequently nation-states?

Is a study on violence, such as we are now embarking upon, of any importance? Yes, it most certainly is. For a proper understanding of what a nation-state essentially is, one has to examine carefully how a fully-fledged nation-state may ensue from a mere community. It offers us an awareness of who we humans really are and therefore, how all of our constructs essentially come into being. Let us now embark on a journey through the landscapes of violence's history in the fine art of tragedy.

### 3.2 THE GREEKS: THE ORIGIN OF TRAGEDY

European tragedy originated in Greece, more specifically from Thracian and Boëthian ecstatic fertility rituals that were brought to Greece by migrants. Here it evolved into festive rites for the god Dionysus – the god of wine, fertility and life, but also of destruction; this was always, however, a form of destruction anticipating (re)new(ed) life. Since the god Dionysus is often depicted with a goat-like appearance, these musical-rhythmicical rites were called goat songs in the form of choral songs. Initially, these songs consisted of a duologue between the actor and the chorus. This format later developed into a monologue of one actor or a duologue between two actors in Aeschylus' tragedies (5<sup>th</sup> century BC). After him, Sophocles and Euripides improved upon them theatrically, using – in varying arrangements – three actors, which meant that the chorus lost importance.<sup>2</sup> Their age<sup>3</sup> marks the first major era of tragedy.

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2 Source: Clifford Leech, *Tragedy*. 1969.

3 Periclean Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the age of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

### 3.3 THE ROLE OF TRAGEDY WITHIN THE GRECIAN COMMUNITY

Religion, art and state affairs<sup>4</sup> were no separate concerns in ancient Greece. Goldhill<sup>5</sup> has vividly described the interwovenness of these vital functions: theatre festivals (especially the Great Dionysia<sup>6</sup>) were state affairs. Those paying and organizing them were chosen by the state from among the wealthy (free male) citizens. The playwrights to compose the dramas were appointed by a state official. Each of them had to produce three tragedies and a satyr play. Both playwrights and sponsors were honored in rituals surrounding the performances, as were other “civic benefactors who had done [...] exceptional services for the state during the year [...] The ceremony therefore is not a moment of personal glory so much as a collective expression of the city’s values.”<sup>7</sup> Goldhill goes on to say that tragedy was thus fully part of the democratic revolution, “an institution formed in the explosion of cultural innovation that made the fifth century such an astounding era.”<sup>8</sup> These aspects, again as to Goldhill, evolved out of the compounding and organizing of the tragic rituals. Combined with the aforesaid characteristics, tragedy had an important role, both politically and socially, for the Greek citizens. Below, we will see that especially in the Romantic era these aspects were reverted back to.

IJsseling<sup>9</sup> also points towards the coinciding rise and development of tragedy and the (polity of the) city-state. These are closely linked and come with a corresponding change in culture. The legal order is no longer understood as naturally given: it is perceived as construed by man. It needs no argumentation or explanation that this major shift deeply affected man’s perception of his place in the common weal, his handling of the organizational structures of society and his relation to the deity/ies.

### 3.4 THE FORM OF TRAGEDY

The earliest theoretician of tragedy we know of is Aristotle. He enlarged upon the art-forms then known and gave them a descriptive framework. His definition of tragedy reads: “a tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, has magnitude, and is complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind introduced separately in different parts of the work; in a dramatic – as distinct from a narrative – form; with incidents arousing pity

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4 As in: affairs of the polis – matters concerning politics.

5 Simon Goldhill, *Love, Sex and Tragedy*, chapter 2: The Question of Tragedy.

6 From mid fifth century and onwards, the Dionysian celebrations had developed into a great and important state festival lasting no less than four days.

7 Simon Goldhill, *Love, Sex and Tragedy*, pp. 224 and 225.

8 Simon Goldhill, *Love, Sex and Tragedy*, p. 220.

9 S. IJsseling, , *Apollo, Dionysos, Aphrodite en de anderen*, p.103.

and fear, whereby to provide an outlet for such emotions.”<sup>10</sup> He divided tragedy into five phases. First the exposition or account of what has gone on before. This is followed by the intrigue or plot in which the structure of the action can be seen. An important propensity of the intrigue is that it is often violent or of a disruptive nature. As this is shown in a ritualized way it tends to channel and drain away destructive emotions in the audience. This is followed by the climax in which the tension is increased; the catastrophe in which the hero’s downfall is enacted as a result of the intrigue; and the *peripety* or decisive turn and completion.

In the *peripety*, the so-called *anagnorisis* or discovery takes place: “Discovery, as the very word implies, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, and consequently either to love or to hate, in the personages destined for good or evil fortune. [...] This kind of discovery will give rise either to pity or fear.”<sup>11</sup> This describes the discovery within the protagonist and, as an audience tends to identify itself with the hero, the acknowledgment of imperfections within the audience. Confronted with the ultimate (meaning: death, brokenness and loss or, in short, the results of human imperfection), the public experiences a solemn type of solidarity induced by grief, dignity and involvement: they realize that they, too, are bearers of human fallibility. These fallibilities, initially inducing violence, may take a host of different forms.

The discovery gives the audience and hero an insight into who we humans essentially are. In other words: tragedy exposes the toilsome path from primordial agnosia to tested knowledge of the human soul. “The *anagnorisis* [...] comes as near as we can get to the essence of tragedy”.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the concept of *anagnorisis*, Aristotle emphasizes yet another concept inherent to tragedy: the catharsis. Some critics, such as Schmidt,<sup>13</sup> emphasize the ethicality of this phenomenon. He notices the importance Aristotle attached to the notion of *catharsis*: both a cleansing and calming down of the emotions of pity and fear and reconciliation with human fate.

The tendency to explain catharsis in an ethical way is understandable as tragedy was (as described above) closely linked to both religion and politics. It should also be emphasized that the subject matter of tragedies is the myths featuring the Grecian Olympian gods, which makes tragedy, in a sense, religious.

However, Greek myths are not moral in the Judaic/Christian religious sense. In fact, this very subject matter counteracts moral interpretations. The gods are by no means “holy”(as we know it), nor is their behavior ethical. IJsseling puts it as follows: *the holy* in ancient Greece is omnipresent, *a holy*

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10 Aristotle, *Poetics*, translation John Warrington, p. 12.

11 Aristotle, *Poetics*, translation John Warrington, p. 20.

12 Clifford Leech, *Tragedy*, p. 64.

13 Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and other Greeks, Tragedy and Ethical Life*, pp. 53-55.

(god) is unknown.<sup>14</sup> Morality within the realm of the Olympic gods was highly problematic. The gods were never entirely to be trusted, nor was pious devotion necessary or even required.<sup>15</sup> The Greeks just had to observe their religious duties towards the polis and the temple (see above).<sup>16</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Renan also saw it as just a formalized body of rites serving the stability of the state (and in this sense a state religion).

The Greek tragedy stimulates a reflection on the human condition and the phenomenon of morality; it, however, does not moralize. This last characteristic of Grecian tragedy is hardly compatible with the stance most major monotheistic religions take, as the latter prescribe one dominant morality. And this, in its turn, is difficult to reconcile with the nation-state as Renan saw it, because it connects transcendence (a divine being) with a single set of morals. In a culturally and religiously diverse society, this will pose problems since citizens of differing persuasions will be submitted (by their respective religions) to divergent “absolute” moralities and truths. A “vivre ensemble” in unison of will and purpose will thus become extremely problematic. Even if a single worship of all citizens has been realized, this will be at odds with the concept of freedom of choice, including religious ones. The Greek way of coping, however, is compatible with Renan’s idea of the nation and the existence of a nation-state. This seems to me to be an important observation, not in the least for the political field.

From the above, we may infer that the content of the tragic message cannot be understood as one of unequivocal morality. However, it can be said that tragedy formulates the prerequisites for any moral codification. These prerequisites are self-knowledge and the acknowledgement of human imperfection. In this sense, tragedy shows an openness towards ethics, rather than being normative itself. I come back to the significance hereof for the founding of a nation-state envisioned by Renan: a nation-state based on the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment. His ideas are as good as antipodal to the vision of the nation-state dominant during the reign of Louis XIV as set forth by Bossuet, discussed in the previous chapter: one nation under one religion, ruled by one king.

In his book *On Germans and other Greeks* Dennis Schmidt says: “what makes tragedy ethically instructive and gives us delight to see, is the illumination into the nature and possibilities [...] of purposive action.”<sup>17</sup> Here, Schmidt broadens the presupposed ethicality of catharsis to the entire play. In my view, the very use of the word “possibilities” indicates the pre-ethical and pre-

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14 S. IJsseling, *Apollo, Dionysos, Aphrodite en de anderen*, p. 97.

15 It is even said about Protagoras that he didn’t believe in the gods: S. IJsseling, *Apollo, Dionysos, Aphrodite en de anderen*, p. 156.

16 These duties are (in the case of *The Libation Bearers*) partly the subject matter of tragedy, but not tragedy’s essential message. Therefore not to be taken as an ethical lesson.

17 Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and other Greeks, Tragedy and Ethical Life*, pp. 53-55.

normative nature of the tragic process. It creates possibilities towards ethical behavior; it indicates the empirical playing field within which ethical codification – or, for that matter, any codification, including the one on law – can be made possible. Therefore, I argue that in tragedy (as discussed in the chapters below) the emphasis is on the pre-ethical, rather than on the ethical. In my opinion, in tragedy, we enter the sphere in which the very fundamentals for the codification of law are forged.

At this point, *the quintessential choices* are made; further down in this thesis, I will come back to how exactly these choices are made in detail: the nation as being based on the free choice of cooperation towards the purpose of forming a nation – a free choice and a conscious decision of will.

The concept of catharsis works on three different levels:

- The audience can identify with the protagonist.
- Moreover, the solemnity of the collectively felt emotions in combination with (the fatality of) the witnessed crisis forges any group into a community.
- Finally, it hands tested self-knowledge to the audience.

### 3.5 VIOLENCE IN TRAGEDY: FORMAT AND CONTENT

In antique tragedy, the most frequent types of violence could be characterized as follows:

- Destruction caused by natural phenomena such as floods, storms, earthquakes and the like. These are absent in Greek tragedy as the *cause* of tragic crisis. Sometimes, however, these phenomena may play a role: induced by one of the (angered) gods they might be instrumental in the overall scheme of fate or doom, e.g. in *Prometheus Bound*.
- The form often seen in antique tragedy is primordial violence, as a cause of tragic crisis. The Greeks perceived this type of violence as induced by their gods in the form of fate and predestination (e.g., *Oedipus*, *Agamemnon*). Also, a curse as a result of some transgression man committed in the past against divine rulings (*hybris*<sup>18</sup>), or of strife amongst the gods themselves, can be seen to be at the heart of tragic violence. In my opinion, also man's reactive violence against such a divinely doled-out curse or rule might be called *hybris*.
- Violence in the form of diverse types of revenge.

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18 *Hybris*: defiance or pride; also transgression of rules set by orthodoxy.

- Humanly effected violence (sometimes overlapping with the previous kind, but not necessarily): in particular, escalating strife and/or clashing reality constructs<sup>19</sup> as the genesis of the tragic crisis (e.g., *Antigone*).

Since we no longer believe in the gods of antiquity doling out doom and punishment or releasing their wrath upon the world, I will skip these forms. In the chapter on *Macbeth*, I will amply analyze and discuss the revenge theme in violence. Let me, therefore, for now, concentrate on violence through strife and conflict/conflicting reality constructs.

How to explain the concept of violence in general. Searching for a Dutch juridical definition<sup>20</sup> of violence I found the following: “openlijk en in vereniging plegen van geweld tegen personen of goederen. Strafbaar gesteld in art. 141 WvSr.” In that same juridical dictionary I found: “De definitie van ~ [geweld] is niet in het Wetboek van Strafrecht omschreven. Per strafbepaling is in de jurisprudentie uitgemaakt wat in dat specifieke geval verstaan dient te worden onder ~ [geweld].” The first article is a specification of circumstance and manner of destructiveness, however, the second clearly states no definition is to be found of violence, nor an analysis of the essential characteristics of violence. And of course, the penal law is no such place to query into these aspects. However, in my opinion, scholarly research on these characteristics may be crucial for the amelioration of knowledge on the curbing and bridling of violence, especially radical or tragic violence,<sup>21</sup> which is the concern of this thesis.

A further search for definitions of violence brought me to the Encyclopedia Britannica, which reads: “An act of physical force that causes or is intended to cause harm. The damage inflicted by violence may be physical, psychological, or both.”<sup>22</sup> This is close to a proper description of violence. However,

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19 In this thesis I define this concept as follows: any form of organizational structuring, metaphysically dictated or not, projected on to ontology by humans in order to get control over it. Some examples: a reality construct can be of a personal nature: with it the individual comes to grips with the surrounding ontology. It can also be of a collective nature: for instance economic, political, legal or cultural models; the several philosophical discourses and schools; or it can be of a metaphysical nature, such as a particular religious system. There are sociological schools that occupy themselves with *describing* and *explaining* diverse constructs of social realities. Of course, explaining one particular reality (in this case social) construct is not in the same register as the pinpointing of the quintessential characteristic that all reality constructs have in common, viz. their primeval fallibility. These flaws come in a host of different forms and shapes in the diverse reality constructs. Unearthing them is the one of the core achievements of Shakespearean tragedy.

Some philosophers have, from different angles and with different theories, occupied themselves with the relationship between ontology, reality and being (among others Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre). As a discussion of their philosophies is outside the scope of the present research I will limit myself to just mentioning them.

20 <https://www.juridischwoordenboek.nl/zoek/geweld>

21 And here of course, I look to Shakespearean tragedy, which is the concern of this thesis.

22 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/violence>

to fully understand the nature of violence that occurs in tragedy and as analyzed in this thesis, we have to go into the meaning and manner of violence in general a bit more. To do so, let me briefly sidetrack into Simone Weil's study of force and violence in *War and The Iliad*. In this work, she sees, as the Encyclopedia definition does, force as instrumental of violence:

The true hero, the true subject, the centre of the *Iliad* is force. Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away.<sup>23</sup>

Further down the same page she describes the essence of force and, more importantly, the twinned notion: violence.

To define force – it is that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a *thing*. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. [... In the *Iliad*] [T]he bitterness of such a spectacle is offered us absolutely undiluted. No comforting fiction intervened, no consoling prospect of immortality, and on the hero's head no washed out halo of patriotism descends.<sup>24</sup>

This is the absolute ultimate (the *nec plus ultra*) of violence. It is the type of violence we meet in the first acts of Shakespeare; it is the violence without consolation, without hope, without escape or solution. Induced by human fallibilities, this violence spirals out of control to become (as Weil has it) undiluted radical violence. It destroys not only man, but also (some if not all of his) familiar social constructs.<sup>25</sup> So far, so gruesome; however, unmistakably recognizable and to be assigned to those realms of repression and horror the human is capable of. Is there a difference between this type of radical violence and the violence we meet in the subsequent acts of Shakespearean tragedy, and if so, what is the exact difference?

As indicated in the introduction, in the next few paragraphs these forms of violence will be described that my analysis further down has brought to light. What is found here is the theoretical representation of my analysis of three tragedies, the substantiation of which can be found in the following chapters.

First, let us pry into the difference between violence and radical violence. When violence spirals out of control, it becomes radical violence. It spirals out of control because it *can*: as a consequence of failing or absent social or legal constructs (as said above, in *ultimo* caused by human fallibility since all reality constructs are man-made). This radical violence is ultimately self-destructive; not only destroying itself – after which it dies down – but also

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23 Simone Weil, *War and The Iliad*, p. 3.

24 *Ibid.*

25 A social construct is one of the modes of reality construct. For the notion of reality construct: see above note.

its agent(s) and victims. It offers us no hope – as indeed Shakesperean tragedy does in the end – it is dystopian in character and no perspective for improvement of constructs is offered. Therefore, I name this type of radical violence: radical *non-tragic* violence.

There is a second type of radical violence, which is its tragic counterpart: radical *tragic* violence. Let us have a close look at this radical *tragic* violence. In the early stages of the tragedy, no difference can be discerned with radical *non-tragic* violence: firstly, it is always the result of human fallibility and secondly, it always escalates beyond control, destroying existing reality constructs. However, at the point where the Shakespearean tragic crisis is reached some differences with its *non-tragic* counterpart strike the eye: the tragic hero, in moments of psychological clarity (in Aristotelean terms: *anagnorisis*) realizes that he, in *ultimo*, will be the victim of the violence he initiated (indeed the self-destructive aspect of radical non-tragic violence). In Shakespearean terms: “Bloody instructions which, being taught, return/To plague th’inventor.”<sup>26</sup> This realization is immediately followed by an attitudinal change on the hero’s part: he radically affirms his actions (*without normative judgement or condemnation*). In Shakespeare, the hero then soars above his faults and limitations and gives his all for a community in chaos, thus reconnecting with his social surroundings. While doing this, the hero is fully aware that this will mean his demise. However, death is no great issue in this stage: the well-being of society as a whole is. Thus, despite all horror and destruction, Shakespearean tragedy<sup>27</sup> gives perspective and perspective gives hope.

This tragic process can be systematized as follows: the author of tragic violence releases his act(s) of violence into the world. Initially, this act has a non-tragic structure: the protagonist produces destruction and makes victims who suffer; this format shows the vertical relationship of culprit and victim (put differently: winner and loser). After the tragic crisis, in an advanced stage of the tragedy, the tragic hero gains his insights. He realizes that he is the victim of (his own) violence as well.

Thus, the violence format tilts into horizontality: the protagonist is (his own) victim and violence equals suffering – full stop. This equation is horizontal in character as opposed to the violence we see in the initial acts of the tragedies, where violence is pictured as essentially vertical. The very horizontality of this last format cannot but mean a reconnection of the protagonist with his former victims. The awareness of horizontalization of relationships also heralds the end of violence and the opening of new perspectives.

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26 *Macbeth*, act 1. VII, ll. 9 – 10.

27 As indicated earlier there is a decided difference between Periclean tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy: whereas Aristoteles has it that the Periclean catharsis reconciles man with the brokenness of the human condition and cleanses the disposition (which is conducive for the continuation of the status-quo), the Shakespearean violence paradigm offers perspective and hope, which nudges towards change/improvement which is non conducive to the status-quo.

This is the marked difference with radical *non-tragic* violence, where no appreciation of position-horizontalization takes place. The only reshuffle of positions that might take place in radical *non-tragic* violence is a reversal of winner and loser positions, which means that nothing essentially changes in the format of the construct; no progress is made. This format is dystopian; the reality construct is a closed one – no openness towards improvement can be discerned.

Thus identified, I will, in the next chapters, try to prove that radical *tragic* violence holds for Shakespearean tragedy; I name the process as described here the *violence paradigm*.<sup>28</sup> I argue and intend to prove that this Shakespearean violence paradigm is of tantamount importance for the understanding and curbing of both types of radical violence and violence tout court.

In its turn, this essence of tragedy has enormous significance for law, for well-constructed law, the idea of law and a good legal order. Many scholars of the law<sup>29</sup> have intuited this importance, but were not able to pinpoint the exact relevance – it is remarkable, however, that Shakespeare is one of the most quoted writers in the world of politics and law.<sup>30</sup>

To briefly summarize the quintessential difference between the types of violence:

- Violence: destruction on a limited scale.

In general, and loosely following Simone Weil's lead, I would define violence as those acts aimed at diminishing and harming another person or group of persons physically, mentally, and/or materially. By definition, it is a vertical act.

- Radical violence: violence that has spiraled out of control because it *can*, due to failing constructs (social, legal) to curb it.<sup>31</sup>
  0. Radical *non-tragic* violence: self-destructive violence that ends when it has eaten itself. It is without hope for betterment (verticality still intact); dystopian in character. War is the most explicit (and terrible) manifestation of this form of violence.
  1. Radical *tragic* violence (appearing within the process of the violence paradigm): death, destruction and destruction of existing constructs. Because of an awareness of horizontality in tragic positions, it gives perspective and hope with, as a result, continuous (after each tragic crisis) renewal and/or improvement of constructs.

How does this work in practice? These radical types are not easy to distinguish at first sight. Is it just an academic division, or are there differences in content

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28 I will use the word paradigm in the classical sense: a pattern or model.

29 In the chapters on the tragedies I will discuss several scholars who wrote relevant and fine articles on Shakespearean tragedy. They express their appreciation for Shakespeare's work and stress its importance, however, some do not seem to grasp its ultimate meaning as far as violence is concerned. In the respective chapters I will come back to this issue.

30 See introduction for reference.

31 As will be shown in the chapters analyzing the tragedies.

and effect? Indeed, there are. Below, I will give two practical examples. Now I will clarify some more. Radical non-tragic violence extinguishes when it has eaten itself, as mentioned, and man is left dazed and defeated. After the crisis, the state of affairs continues as before. The existential properties<sup>32</sup> (if any) remain based on the same parameters (self-interest, power, narcissism, etc.); most characteristic of this type of violence (and also easiest to recognize) is the same vertical format (with the same or other occupants in key positions). The effect is that the (political/legal) format remains the same. Possibly, some minor changes may be discerned, yet the flaws in the construct remain the same. In a worst-case scenario, even a deterioration of political/legal/daily conditions is effected. It will take another (tragic) crisis for the construct to implode or explode.

The radical tragic violence shows the following: there is a change in the appreciation of existential properties (brought about by horizontalization of positions and by the magnitude of the tragic crisis). These properties tend to be based on: collective grief for loss experienced, a realization of collectivity and collective values and the need to solve the human predicament in a unified effort. At these moments the nation is born or we see basic fundamental changes taking place to or in the nation construct. And precisely this frame of mind reminds us of Renan when he says that (the commemoration of) having suffered together inspires the promise of a joint future and “the clearly expressed consent and desire to continue a common life.”<sup>33</sup> This is the core message of tragedy. I will substantiate this in detail in the following chapters.

There is one other form of violence that concerns us here. For this type of violence, I will have to revert to Weber’s definition of state. I reiterate the quote from the previous chapter:

Staat ist diejenige menschliche Gemeinschaft, welche innerhalb eines bestimmten Gebietes – dies: das ‘Gebiet’, gehört zum Merkmal – das Monopol legitimer physischer Gewaltsamkeit für sich (mit Erfolg) beansprucht.<sup>34</sup>

After which he continues with the words:

Denn das der Gegenwart Spezifische ist, daß man allen anderen Verbänden oder Einzelpersonen das Recht zur physischen Gewaltsamkeit nur soweit zuschreibt, als der Staat sie von ihrer Seite zuläßt: er gilt als alleinige Quelle des “Rechts” auf Gewaltsamkeit.<sup>35</sup>

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32 For existential needs might as well be based on negative premises; hence self-interest, powerbase positions, prejudices, petty complaints, neuroses and the like could be experienced as being existential needs. The process of the violence paradigm filters out these negativities as we shall see in the next chapters.

33 Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 261.

34 Weber, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

35 *Ibid.*

From this quote, it logically follows that this type of violence has characteristics that differ from the previous two.

- This violence is state (or state-instituted agents, as Weber has it) monopolized and regulated.
- From which follows that it has, by definition, a vertical organizational form.
- From which follows that it represents a certain (state) order and is affected within the operating range of that state's value system.
- From which follows that it is not pre-ethical and might not be a-religious.

This type of violence is of a totally different order than the type 1 violence above. I will, for clarity's sake, indicate the radical violence (resp.: non-tragic and tragic) as type 1 violence and the state monopolized violence as type 2 violence, where relevant.

### 3.6 THE TRAGIC HERO AND THE NON-TRAGIC VILLAIN: MACBETH AND HIMMLER

Sometimes the demarcation between tragic hero and non-tragic criminal is so subtle that it can hardly be discerned. I will therefore give an example of both a tragic and a non-tragic character: the protagonists being Macbeth and Heinrich Himmler. Their swift careers upwards, their stations in life and their actions and reactions are strikingly similar. They both highly value predictions and augurs of various kinds. They base their actions on predictions as well as on the chance calculi they concoct themselves. They let others do their dirty work and, when confronted with the result of their crimes (corpses), they become squeamish.

To start with their respective stations in life: in act 1, Macbeth is Thane of Glamis, but within that same act, he is proclaimed Thane of Cawdor as well. In act 2, he becomes king.<sup>36</sup> Himmler became involved with the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiderspartei*) in 1922/23.<sup>37</sup> Soon he became prominent in the expanding of the SS (the *Schutzstaffel* or SS established in 1925) from a small group forming the personal bodyguards of the *Führer* into a professional well-oiled organization specializing in military exploits (among other divisions: *Waffen-SS*) as well as the repression and/or massacre of the population (*Sonderkommandos* part of the *Einsatzgruppen*).<sup>38</sup> In 1936 Hitler appointed Himmler *Chef der Deutschen Polizei*. In 1943, he even became Minister of the Interior; in 1944 *Oberbefehlshaber der Volkssturmtruppen*. After Himmler's appointment as chief of police in 1936: "veranderde de politie zelf in een

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36 I will extensively come back to Macbeth and his career in the next chapter.

37 Source: Emerson Vermaat, *Heinrich Himmler en de cultus van de dood*.

38 Not to be confused with the *Sonderkommandos* in the concentration camps which consisted of Jewish prisoners that were to take out corpses from gas chambers and crematoria.

criminelle organisatie. In plaats van misdaden opsporen en bestrijden, raakt men op grote schaal betrokken bij het plegen van misdaden en moordpartijen.”<sup>39</sup> These crimes and killing sprees were commissioned by Himmler. In the character of Macbeth, a similar reaction to having unchecked power can be seen: after his coronation, his behaviour becomes increasingly repressive. This is demonstrated in the conversation between Macduff and Malcolm, where they articulate the pitiable state of Scotland that is nearly emptied of honest and honourable men: Macduff: “Bleed, bleed, poor country./ Great tyranny, lay thou thy basis sure,/For goodness, dare not check thee; wear thou thy wrongs,/ The title is affeered.” Malcolm answers: “I think our country sinks beneath the yoke;/ It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash/Is added to her wounds.” Whereupon Macduff concludes: “Not in the regions/Of horrid hell can come a devil more damned/In evils to top Macbeth.”<sup>40</sup>

The crimes themselves are, while commissioned by Macbeth, done by thugs (act 3, I – act 4, II) and, of course, Himmler had the organizations he headed to do his dirty work. Both these masters of the murk<sup>41</sup> orchestrated debaucheries of death and repression.<sup>42</sup>

Himmler was particularly superstitious and highly interested in occultism and spirituality. He was especially interested in the mythology of the Nordic countries: inventing his own brand of pseudo-mythological Aryan rites. Frequently, he gathered his elite units of the SS in the Wewelsburg in Paderborn to perform quasi-spiritual-mythological rites.<sup>43</sup> He also consulted an astrologer: Wilhelm Theodor Wulff.<sup>44</sup> Macbeth also banked on the predictions of supernatural beings and sought their advice. (act 1, III – act 4, I)

Despite this inclination towards the irrational, both men were capable of rationally calculating their actions based on experience and expectation. Himmler kept an ultra-secret case file; it reveals that Himmler, as early as 1941, knew that Hitler was ill<sup>45</sup> (he also noted that Hitler might not be of pure Aryan

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39 E. Vermaat, *Heinrich Himmler, en de cultus van de dood*, p. 25.

40 *Macbeth*, act 4. III, ll. 32 – 57.

41 Himmler, it must be said, for ideological reasons and Macbeth to stabilize his throne. Both had, however, a lust for power and an excess of ambition.

Also note that the SS wore the black uniform and sported the *Totenkopf* as an emblem; the scenes in which Macbeth features are mostly set in murky half-darkness.

I add (just as a remarkable detail and tongue in cheek comment on *Hamlet* as well as, anachronistically, on Himmler) that the statue of Shakespeare in Weimar (the German Shakespeare city par excellence) features a *Totenkopf* wearing a fool’s cap under one of Shakespeare’s feet.

42 Where Macbeth is concerned, I will go into this in more detail in the next chapter.

43 E. Vermaat, *Heinrich Himmler, en de cultus van de dood*, chapter 4.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

45 Himmler knew that Theodore Morell, Hitler’s private G.P., had been administering Hitler generous cocktails of drugs and painkillers (to suppress some physical ailments) from 1936 onwards.

blood). Consequently Himmler sought an opportunity to succeed Hitler.<sup>46</sup> For some time he secretly plotted against Hitler by probing the possibilities to enter into separate peace negotiations with the western allies (last part of WWII).<sup>47</sup> Macbeth calculates his chances in act 1. III, ll. 129-141 and act 1. VII, ll. 6- 28.<sup>48</sup>

And lastly, they both shrink away when witnessing the practical outcome of their actions. When Macbeth sits at his banquet table he is horrified and nearly swoons at seeing Banquo's ghost confronting him.<sup>49</sup> Concerning Himmler's attitude, Vermaat quotes the historians Hilberg, Reitlinger and Gilbert who, based on eyewitnesses, record the following on Himmler's visit to the city of Minsk, where he witnesses a mass execution of citizens –due to the extraordinary weight of this scene, I will quote this at some length:

Bach-Zelewski [an SS official] zag dat Himmler al na het eerste salvo begon te wankelen en bijna flauwviel. Toen de beide vrouwen niet snel genoeg stierven schreeuwde hij (Himmler) de politiesergeant toe hen niet langer te martelen. Een andere ooggetuige [...] beschrijft dat er een open graf was gegraven en dat er tijdens de executies stukjes hersenen van enkele slachtoffers op Himmlers jas en gezicht waren terecht gekomen. Himmler stond namelijk voorovergebogen aan de rand van het open graf te kijken naar de lijken die daarin lagen. Daarna werd hij [...] bleek van schrik. Hij begon te wankelen en dreigde in de kuil te vallen.<sup>50</sup>

In this quote, that particular perverted mixture of fascination and fear is described, distinctive for characters like Himmler and the Macbeth of acts 3 and 4. Having noted all these similarities, one wonders why it is that, through time, Macbeth is pitied by audiences and Himmler is universally despised. The answer is simple: in Macbeth we witness a radical attitudinal change,<sup>51</sup> whereas Himmler persists, doggedly sticking with the righteousness of his course: "Europa kan niet zonder mij in de toekomst. Ik blijf verder nodig als politieminister om de orde te handhaven. [...] Ze zullen spoedig inzien dat ze op mij aangewezen zijn – of het wordt een heilloze chaos",<sup>52</sup> as he crows in early 1945. This quote shows no awareness of the consequences of the radical violence he unleashed or even a scintilla of understanding of his place

46 This could be perceived as a difference between the two; Himmler never actually succeeded Hitler, while Macbeth does successfully oust Duncan. However, I hold that Himmler, reaching the height of his career, had in practice the same absolute power within the optimum range of his own organizations – and the *Reich* – than Macbeth had over his tribal realm.

47 *Ibid*, p. 54

48 I will go into Macbeth's chance calculations at some length in the next chapter.

49 *Macbeth*, act 4. III.

50 E. Vermaat, *Heinrich Himmler, en de cultus van de dood*, p. 204. En: Michael Burleigh, *Het Derde Rijk*.

51 To be discussed in the next chapter.

52 E. Vermaat, *Heinrich Himmler, en de cultus van de dood*, p. 54.

in a murderous machine. While going under in a sea of blood, he keeps hammering on the legitimacy of his ideology. There is no greatness in Himmler, no saving grace and nothing that makes us pity him, other than the fact that he is a zealot whose psychopathology smothers his humanity. In the character of Macbeth, we find a radically different attitude after his tragic crisis: in act 5, he grows, larger than life, and fearless of death, he gives his life to satisfy Macduff and save the kingdom from further bloodshed.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, the soloing autocratic tragic hero, incorporating both problem and perspective has vanished as a role model in literature.<sup>54</sup> Also in real life it is no longer the soloist salvaging us from our collective fallibility, our system faults and radical violence. We all have become bearers of this tragic assignment.

### 3.7 THE RECEPTION AND APPROPRIATION OF TRAGEDY AFTER THE GREEKS

In Roman times, Seneca<sup>55</sup> wrote his revenge tragedies. They were imitated as late as the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Italy.<sup>56</sup> In England, they remained popular well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Both Steiner<sup>57</sup> and Williams<sup>58</sup> mention the fact that, after the Greeks, tragedy disappeared as a theatrical art form for centuries (in medieval England, only some narrative forms remained). Tragedy reoccurred as a full-fledged *dramatic* art form in Tudor England. However, what disappeared from the historical stage was the theatrical form with its particular content, but not the tragic sense of life. Through time and cultural change, tragedy was redefined with regard to appearance and purport. Steiner, Williams and Morris Weitz<sup>59</sup> quote the same citation from the introduction of *The Monk's Tale* by Chaucer<sup>60</sup> to illustrate tragedy's place in medieval England in the form of non-theatrical poetry. It was one of the few examples of tragedy being mentioned; as an important theatrical art form it is hardly seen. The below quotation defines tragedy as Chaucer understood it.

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53 Again: I will come back to the play and the protagonist in the next chapter.

54 As we shall see below, the tragic in the arts has assumed other shapes.

55 Seneca: 55 BC – approx. 39 AD).

56 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 12.

57 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 106.

58 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 19.

59 Morris Weitz, *Shakespeare, Philosophy, and Literature*, p. 5.

60 Geoffrey Chaucer (1340s – 1400) *The Canterbury Tales*, "The Monk's Tale – Prologue", Manuscript group B2, lines 3164-3167, p. 355. From: *Chaucer's Major Poetry*, ed. by Albert C. Baugh, 1963.

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,  
 As olde books maken us memorie,  
 Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,  
 And is yfallen out of heeigh degree  
 Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

What does this small quotation mean? Chaucer was the chronicler of public lore par excellence. If he tells us that tragedy is remembered from old books, this means that a sense of old tragedy is still alive in the consciousness of the general public. However, time and memory changed that awareness: it is the downfall of an important and noble human being that is highlighted here. *Catharsis* or pity and fear are not mentioned by Chaucer. Moreover, his form is not dramatic, but narrative. What did remain, however, was the rudimentary feeling of the insecurities in life, and the incomprehensible peregrinations of the feared Wheel of Fortune,<sup>61</sup> tossing around humans randomly. Vividly alive as these concepts were in the medieval consciousness, it is to be doubted however, in what sense Medieval man would characterize this inherent quality of life as tragic in the Greek sense of the word.<sup>62</sup>

Morris Weitz states: “[T]he *Poetics* [by Aristotle] was not known in the West until the Italian Renaissance. The first critical edition with a commentary was Francisco Robotello’s (1548).”<sup>63</sup> From that time on, tragedy was much debated as Weitz continued his discussion of European tragedy. The discovery of Senecan drama during the 1560’s both furthered the popularity of tragedy and restored the theatrical form to tragedy.

Early Renaissance England, the age of the Tudors (1580 – 1603),<sup>64</sup> marks the next high age of tragic drama. Great tragic writers populated the public stage: Christopher Marlowe,<sup>65</sup> followed by William Shakespeare, John Webster<sup>66</sup> and Ben Jonson.<sup>67</sup> During this time, the latter wrote his learned

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61 The Wheel of Fortune (or Lady Fortuna) is seen as an external cause of disruption and destruction. Of course, the first question to be asked is: is the tossing of Fortune’s wheel really external? The second question would be: if so, are either fate or predestination truly tragic?

Because many critics see medieval fate as an external cause of man’s misery, they deem the Middle Ages to be non-tragic. However, external causes (some critics even hold death itself to be tragic) can also lead to a tragic process. In my opinion fate can be tragic as long as it is seen as the vehicle of the irrational aspects of life, not as staunch (Christian) predestination. However, I will not here go any further into these issues on medieval tragedy, interesting though they are, as these are beyond the subject of the present thesis.

62 It is to be doubted even whether common lore had incorporated the Greek sense of the word in the Middle Ages; steeped in Christianity as the age was.

63 Morris Weitz, *Shakespeare, Philosophy, and Literature*, p. 5.

64 During the reign of the first Stuarts (James I: 1603 – 1625; and Charles I: 1626 – 1649) tragedy continued to flourish.

65 Christopher Marlowe: 1564 – 1593.

66 John Webster: 1578 – c. 1632.

67 Ben Jonson: 1572 – 1637.

tragedies modeled on those by Seneca; for instance *Sejanus His Fall* and *Catiline His Conspiracy*. Among others,<sup>68</sup> Weitz<sup>69</sup> and Steiner emphasize<sup>70</sup> that early Elizabethan tragedy<sup>71</sup> still had much of the medieval allegory: the dramatis personae were emblematic and had few personal feelings. As such, these plays belong to the medieval morality play tradition as well as to the early modern tradition of tragedy.

Williams mentions the further development of the meaning of tragedy as the Tudor age progressed. "With the dissolution of the feudal world, the practice of tragedy made new connections."<sup>72</sup> He points to a number of these new connections:

- The idea of tragedy ceased to be metaphysical<sup>73</sup> and became more and more critical. To some scholars (e.g. the aforementioned Williams, but also Steiner, Nietzsche, etc.) a tragedy is "critical" when, in their eyes, tragedy's most important message is reasoned away in the following manner: the human predicament is not the result of (primeval) fallibility, but of ignorance and a lack of (intellectual, technical, juridical etc.) knowledge and/or expertness. In the eyes of Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), this process of disenchantment of tragedy started with Socrates, but more commonly, the work of Sir Philip Sidney (1554 – 1586) is seen as a starting point (see note below). He wrote a theoretical treatise in which he also discussed tragedy and in which he paid more attention to the methods of writing tragedy than to any underlying existential characteristics of the human condition. This process was only completed in neo-classical times.
- In the wake of this different point of interest came a renewed interest in the actual workings of tragedy. More specifically: how can suffering in tragedy give pleasure?<sup>74</sup>

The tragedies by Shakespeare deserve separate discussion; I will come back to them in the following chapters.

68 Of course, they are not the only scholars who acknowledge this. Suffice it to mention just a few: Steiner, Campbell, Bradley, Wilson Knight.

69 Morris Weitz, *Shakespeare, Philosophy, and Literature*, p. 6.

70 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 14.

71 Note that Shakespeare, though an Elizabethan himself, is of the next generation.

72 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 23. ff

73 Raymond Williams is one of the defenders of the ethicality – and therewith the metaphysicality – of tragedy (*Modern Tragedy*, p. 25). I oppose this view as will be shown below. I do however, agree with Williams as to tragedy becoming more and more critical.

74 A question Philip Sidney had raised in his *Apology for Poetry*. It reads: "The high and excellent Tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and sheweth forth the Ulcers that are covered with Tissue; that maketh Kinges feare to be Tyrants, and Tyrants manifest their tyrannical humors; that, with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainety of this world, and upon how weake foundations guilden roofes are builded. But how it can move, Plutarch yeeldeth a notable testimonie of the abhominal Tyrant Alexander Pheraeus from whose eyes a Tragedy, well made and represented, drewe abouncance of teares [...] and how he] coulde not resist the sweet violence of a Tragedie."

### 3.8 RENAISSANCE

After the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, tragedy as a dramatic art nearly disappeared in England. "When the new world picture of reason usurped the place of old tradition during the seventeenth century, the English theatre entered its long decline."<sup>75</sup> However, in France, fine tragedy was written between 1630 and 1690 by Racine<sup>76</sup> and Corneille<sup>77</sup>; yet the art form faded into mediocrity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Germany, we see a revival in the period between 1790 and 1840.

In the course of these centuries tragedy 'secularized'.<sup>78</sup> This process started more or less simultaneously with tragedy becoming critical (see previous paragraphs) during and after the Renaissance.

### 3.9 NEO-CLASSICISM

The process of secularization<sup>79</sup> and criticizability was completed in the neo-classical period. The question that comes to mind is whether these two concepts could be related in any way. Do they reinforce each other, or are there other correlations or causalities? They bring with them a whole field of associations; however, they both have one associated concept in common: ratio. This, in its turn, is the carrier of the following associations: knowledge and provability. According to Steiner, it is precisely the nestling of these concepts in the heart of tragedy that meant its demise. For knowledge seems capable of repairing all ills and sufferings that are staged in tragedy. In other words, not primeval human imperfections or a clash between two conflicting human reality constructs determine the life of human beings, but the inability (through a lack of knowledge) to repair the anomalies of life. Reparability of suffering through knowledge implies a new vision of the human and his place in the universe. Indeed, this new vision of mankind was one of the markers of the Renaissance. Man was free and had unfathomable talents to develop and new vistas of possibilities to probe and be responsible for. The reverse concepts, coming with these realizations, were judgment and guilt. This type of guilt, of course, is the guilt of the responsible free agent and the result of his error, ignorance,

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75 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 23.

76 Racine: 1639 – 1699.

77 Corneille: 1606 – 1684.

78 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 30.

79 Williams holds that, before the Renaissance, tragedy had been mainly religious and/or moral. I hold that just its subject matter was, not its essential message. Williams is correct as to the protagonists: they become less and less associated with gods and metaphysics.

or any character flaw. It had completely evolved away from the Greek “guilt”, which was doom-stricken, coming with fate<sup>80</sup> and primeval imperfection.

This new and ratio-related interpretation of judgment and guilt meant the increasing adoption of a different outlook on tragedy: no longer the staunch acceptance, the affirmation of inescapable suffering, at the same time giving the hero dignity, but righteous retribution as the result of fallacies or breach of a commonly shared ethics. “Tragedy, in this view, shows suffering as a consequence of error, and happiness as a consequence of virtue.”<sup>81</sup> During this period, tragedy loses its function of staging the irrational aspects of life and, more importantly, it does not hand to us a way to come to an informed knowledge of the human psyche and behavior anymore. Also, the status of violence changes dramatically; it becomes an instrument of retribution, mainly in a vertical format. In other words, here we meet the slow but sure transition of type 1 violence (radical tragic violence) to type 2 violence (the state-regulated type of violence). This, in its turn, marks the birth of nations from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards<sup>82</sup> and of the national consciousness in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The tragic hero, previously larger than life, dignified in his acknowledgement of his humanity no-matter-what, lost stature and became the guilt-ridden, irresponsible individual.

Within the realm of antique tragedy,<sup>83</sup> that is within the discourse of the dichotomy of perfection/imperfection, the concept of responsibility differs essentially in meaning from the same concept within the sphere of the dichotomy of guilt/guiltless. As a result of this meaning shift, the vision of man and his place in society and the universe tilts. This new type of tragedy is staged with a new thematic: guilt and accountability. In the next chapter the development of this shift in meaning and its consequences will be described.

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80 I won't go any further into the continuing philosophical discourse of free will versus predestination, guilt and responsibility here as this – interesting though it is – is beyond the scope of the present work. I merely want to indicate that this discourse had an influence on the perception and meaning of tragedy at this point in time.

81 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 31.

82 As is generally accepted and mentioned in the previous chapter: the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 marking the new era of nation-states.

83 That is: within the sphere of the violence paradigm.



#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Romantic Movement<sup>1</sup> proved to be an important influence on the reception of tragedy. In the Romantic Era, art – particularly tragic art – was seen as the panacea for revitalizing society and politics. The influence of art on society as a whole and particularly on statecraft could, to a certain extent, still be felt in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nietzsche deemed art the highest form of human expression (of course, to him, music being the most sublime, immediately followed, though, by the art of writing tragedy). In this chapter, I will describe the influence of Romanticism on tragedy (and vice versa), politics and society, followed by an analysis of Nietzsche's thought on (the violence of) tragedy and tragic drama and its correlation with society and culture.

#### 4.2 ROMANTICISM

"The Romantics believed that the vitality of drama was inseparable from the health of the body politic. That is the crux of Shelley's<sup>2</sup> argument in his *Defence of Poetry*:

And it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence: and that the corruption or extinction of drama in a nation where it has once flourished is a mark of corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life."<sup>3</sup>

In Germany, this belief was also prominently present; it is therefore no surprise that the years of the German revival of tragedy more or less coincided with the Romantic Movement.<sup>4</sup> Philosophy also took an interest in tragedy. In 1795,

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1 Roughly from 1798 till 1835

2 Shelley: 1792 – 1822.

3 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 109.

4 See below.

Friedrich von Schelling<sup>5</sup> wrote his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*.<sup>6</sup> In it, the writer proclaims the return of tragic art as the important problem for philosophy. Schelling explores the relation between art and philosophy, giving primacy to art (in particular tragedy) at the expense of philosophy – in defiance of Plato.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he wants a clear philosophical determination of the nature of the tragic. “In the course of [his...] letter it becomes clear that tragedy is “the highest in art” and that when the powers of reason fail, when philosophy gives out, the disclosive powers of the highest possibility in art still preserve what is most in need of being understood. Art, specifically tragic art, takes over when philosophy comes to an end.”<sup>8</sup> Here, Schelling shows, by describing its limitations, the main characteristics of the dominant neo-classicist philosophy of his time up till then: a rationally steered and fully logical construct, not capable of explaining, let alone absorbing, the anomalies of life. The big counter-movement, was just to begin at that point in time, is Romanticism.

The idea that dramatic art was concomitant with social and political progress – as expressed by Shelley in the above quote – was shared by, among others, Goethe<sup>9</sup> and Schiller.<sup>10</sup> Their tragedies are an attempt both to enhance Germanophilia in the Teutonic consciousness and to regenerate an era of great tragedy. They were convinced that German national consciousness<sup>11</sup> could be nourished by feeding it a range of historical tragedy plays, especially in the vein of Shakespearian drama. Thus Schiller – after having read *Richard III* and other history plays<sup>12</sup> – writes *Wallenstein*.

Goethe creates *Götz van Berlichingen* and *Egmont*. However, their attempts to write tragedy in the Shakespearian vein had gone through the romantic and neo-classical discourse. The very fact that they used their plays in an attempt to educate their audience towards a solid Germanic nationalism goes to prove that their plays were (fine) specimens of the new (critical) outlook on tragedy.

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5 N.B.: Friedrich Schelling (1775 – 1854) went to the *Tübinger Stift* to study there in 1791 at the age of 16. His roommates there were Georg Hegel (1770 – 1831) and Friedrich Hölderlin (1770 – 1843).

6 Also mentioned in Dennis Schmidt's *On Germans and other Greeks, Tragedy and Ethical Life*, pp. 73 ff.

7 In other words: he presents philosophy as the ancillary of art – tragedy – instead of vice versa as Plato did. In this, Schelling is a precursor of Nietzsche who uses the same hierarchy. I will come back to Nietzsche below.

8 Dennis Schmidt on Schelling in his *On Germans and other Greeks, Tragedy and Ethical Life*, p. 74.

9 Goethe: 1749 – 1832.

10 Schiller: 1759 – 1805

11 Of course, public emotions involved in building one united state (Germany became a unified nation in 1871) are not to be compared with 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century – European – nationalism.

12 As he writes to Goethe in a letter dated 28 November 1797. Source: [www.briefwechsel-Schiller-Goethe.de](http://www.briefwechsel-Schiller-Goethe.de) Letter 390.

One important revolution in literature, art in general and philosophy during and in the wake of romanticism was the emphasis that was laid on the Grand Emotion, the Sublime and Human Passions. A representative par excellence of this school is the above-mentioned Friedrich Schiller. In his treatise on tragedy, he starts out saying:

The state of passion in itself, independently of the good or bad influence of its object on our morality, has something in it that charms us. We aspire to transport ourselves into that state, even if it costs us some sacrifices.

[...]

It is certain, besides, that all pleasure, the moment it flows from a moral source, renders man morally better, and then the effect in its turn becomes cause. The pleasure we find in what is beautiful, or touching, or sublime, strengthens our moral sentiments, as the pleasure we find in kindness, in love, etc., strengthens these inclinations. And just as contentment of the mind is the sure lot of the morally excellent man, so moral excellence willingly accompanies satisfaction of heart. Thus the moral efficacy of art is, not only because it employs moral means in order to charm us, but also because even the pleasure which it procures us is a means of morality.<sup>13</sup>

Passions and morality are firmly correlated. Tragedy is described as a means to provoke passions that enoble the disposition of man. It is the moral resistance to suffering, not suffering by itself, that is the true subject of tragedy.<sup>14</sup> Violence, in this view, is nothing but the (negative and therefore unwelcome) secondary side effect of the Grand Passion and should be swiftly superseded by it. Awareness of the functioning of the violence paradigm is absent. The entire tragic process was meant to give pleasure and pleasure was morally edifying. Of course, this type of tragedy is of a different fiber than the antique Grecian tragedy. Also the Romantic Grand Passion is not to be compared with the solemn grief of *catharsis* of the mourning for existential loss and destruction.

Besides writing tragedy, Schiller's contemporary Goethe also theorized on tragedy. Goethe did not in every respect agree with Schiller concerning the niceties of its meaning and influence, especially as to the exact workings of the catharsis:

Goethe goes at once to the heart of the matter: the meaning of the term *catharsis*. [...] note that it is a radical and complete break with all the variously moralizing interpretations of the term to be found in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment from Corneille to Lessing and indeed to Schiller. Goethe sets his face quite explicitly against the idea that Aristotle's definition says anything about the effect of tragedy on its audience.

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13 Friedrich Schiller, *The Aesthetic Essays*, "On the Tragic Art", first published as *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* in 1794. The Project Gutenberg Ebook, first released in 2006, revised in 2012.

14 Morris Weitz, *Shakespeare, Philosophy, and Literature*, p. 7.

[...]

No, catharsis must, Goethe thinks, be a term referring to something internal to the drama, part of its aesthetic structure. Tragedy certainly arouses our passions, our pity and fear, but it also calms them and brings them to a resolution.<sup>15</sup>

“Catharsis is best understood as expiation and reconciliation on the part of the hero rather than as purgation on the part of the public,”<sup>16</sup> as Weitz phrases Goethe’s analysis of the workings of catharsis.

The revival of tragedy in 19th-century Germany, then, is not first and foremost to be found on the stage, but in the theorizations on tragedy. Above, I cited Schelling: in these words, the old meaning and consciousness of tragedy are reworded. Shelley’s quotation is another example of the prevailing *Zeitgeist*. Nietzsche – somewhat later: 1844 – 1900 – was the most prominent representative of this revival. Thus, not just the writing of tragedy per se, but also the expression of the tragic consciousness in prose can be important in keeping its spirit alive.

The didactic function of tragedy becomes its focus point instead of the careful study of man’s fallibility and consequently of the existential workings of tragic violence. Tragedy was now used to educate the population into a vital and active citizenship. This can be considered as the dissemination of the role of the (autocratic) tragic hero over an entire population: his tasks of protecting his community are here decentralized over the populace.

The appreciation for tragedy is measured by its success in repressing violence and unwanted violent behavior. Ergo: tragedy’s most valuable lesson is lost: understanding the process of the (Shakespearean) violence paradigm.

With the romantic interest in history and emotions came a renewed reading of Shakespeare; in neo-classical times, he had hardly been read or staged on the continent.<sup>17</sup> Regrettably, the French and Italian renderings lacked sophistication.<sup>18</sup> These poor translations, together with the emphasis the Romantics

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15 Nicolas Boyle, “Goethe’s Theory on Tragedy”, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (October 2010), pp. 1072-1086, p. 1073.

16 Morris Weitz, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 7.

17 In England his works had been staged in this period, be it in adapted form. For example the adapted plays by Alexander Pope, tailored to neo-classical taste.

18 To illustrate their quality I here quote Robert H. Leek on Ducis: “De brave Jean François Ducis, een mislukt toneelschrijver die erin slaagde om zich aan Shakespeares jaspanden nog een beperkt soort onsterfelijkheid in te laten sleuren, en – ironisch genoeg – na Voltaires verscheiden, diens zetel in de Académie Française toegewezen kreeg, kon geen woord Engels lezen. Oude uitgaven van de Petite Larousse noemten hem een ‘traduciteur prudent de Shakspaeer’ en dat heeft hij te danken aan het feit dat hij tussen 1769 en 1792 een zestal keurige, tamme classicistische treurspelen in elkaar knutselde die wel de titels van Shakespeare’s meesterwerken droegen, maar er verder bar weinig op leken.” Robert H. Leek, *Shakespeare in Nederland*, p. 35.

“The good Jean François Ducis, a failed playwright who succeeded in acquiring an immortality of sorts by measuring himself up against Shakespeares’s coat tails, and – ironically enough – was presented with Voltaire’s chair in the Académie Française after his demise,

laid on individual emotions, resulted in a perception of Shakespeare as the playwright of the 'Big Emotion'.

The Shakespeare of the romantics [...] was not primarily an Elizabethan poet with medieval traditions in his art and world view. He was a master of poetic sublimity and volcanic passion, a proclaimer of romantic love and melancholy, a radical who wrote melodrama.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, French scholars disapproved of Shakespeare because of his complete lack of accuracy as to chronology, adherence to the classical Aristotelian unities, the mixing of genres (putting comic elements into tragedy and vice-versa) and the "sloppy" way in which he staged local custom (notably in his history plays) and biography.<sup>20</sup>

In Germany, Shakespeare's reception was of a different quality. In the 1760s, Wieland had translated twenty of Shakespeare's plays. These translations were of mediocre quality. However, the Schlegel and Tieck translations of the complete works of Shakespeare (1796 – 1833) were excellent.<sup>21</sup> These translations were an important factor in the growing popularity of Shakespeare's works. This popularity,<sup>22</sup> in turn, resulted in the foundation of the Shakespeare Society in Weimar on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1864: *Die Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft*. It is the oldest Shakespeare society in Europe,<sup>23</sup> founded even before the English one (in 1877). Also, several reputable

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couldn't read one word of English. Old editions of the *Petite Larousse* describe him as a 'traducteur prudent' [a prudent translator] of Shakespeare. A fact he owed to the assembling of six neat, tame classical tragedies that bore the titles of Shakespearean masterpieces but had furthermore nothing to do with them." Translation by R. Brouwer  
Also, Voltaire, one of the torchbearers of the Enlightenment, had a complicated relation with Shakespeare. He started out venerating Shakespeare, but later in life he despised him for lack of knowledge of the classical rules. Source: Cambridge History of English and American literature on line. <https://www.bartleby.com/215/1205.html>

19 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 155.

20 Source: <https://www.bartleby.com/215/1205.html>

21 The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche owned the 1853-1855 edition of this translation. He got his Shakespearean knowledge mainly from this edition, since he did not speak or read English. During his secondary school years in the renowned *Schulpforta* Institute in Naumburg he developed a predilection for the English Renaissance poet as evidenced by a ten stanza long panegyric on Shakespeare that Nietzsche wrote when he was a secondary school pupil there.

22 Sometimes even resulting in idolization. As Steiner puts it: " Appropriately, the love affair between Germany and Shakespeare culminated in the attempt of certain Prussian scholars to show that Shakespeare had actually been a German.", p. 157.

23 The Shakespeare Society of Philadelphia (1852), claims to be the oldest in the world.

Shakespeare studies by German scholars<sup>24</sup> appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Arthur Schopenhauer is a 19th-century German philosopher who devoted a few pages of his extensive writings on the phenomenon of tragedy. In his *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, part II, chapter 37, we find his fullest account on the matter. He states that in tragedy, we do not see beauty, but the sublime. While beholding the catastrophe, we experience that part of the world has turned against our will. Through this, we discover a particular negativity within ourselves that can be described as a life-negating force: we turn away from life itself when we come to realize its futility. Thus, the true soul of tragedy is resignation.<sup>25</sup>

Schopenhauer deems modern (Christian) tragedy of greater excellence than its antique predecessor. He argues that, in the Greek ones, the hero is radically submitted to fate, whereas the Christian tragedy propagates the total renunciation of the will to live, as life is fruitless and vain. He particularly mentions Shakespeare as superior to Sophocles for the above reasons. In my opinion, Schopenhauer rightly implies that Shakespeare is a class in himself, however, he misses the point that Shakespeare is anything but life negating and has no overt Christian message. In other words, Schopenhauer is right for the wrong reasons.

Schopenhauer's contemporary was Georg Hegel, who extensively theorized on tragedy. As mentioned in a previous note, he was Schelling's roommate at the *Tübinger Stift*. His influence on the modern discourse on tragedy has been of some importance. Hegel is preeminently the philosopher of idealism: of the Grand Conclusive Construct.<sup>26</sup> He sees history as dialectically progressing within a schematization propelled upwards by the dynamics between the subjective, the objectified and the absolute Spirit. His philosophy is thus metaphysically grounded.

On Hegel's interpretation of the tragic hero Roche<sup>27</sup> remarks:

In his introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel analyzes the [tragic] world-historical individual who shapes history often beyond her conscious

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24 As early as 1759 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had deemed Shakespeare equal to Sophocles. And in 1773 Johann Gottfried von Herder broached a fundamental debate by challenging the French classicists thesis that tragedians should exclusively be judged by their ability to adhere to classical rules. According to Herder the play itself should be able to carry its intrinsic value and meaning; using Shakespeare as example par excellence for his proposition.

25 Schopenhauer's life negation has a strong Buddhist component.

26 It should be noted that Hegel's thought on the system is just another reality construct. Hegel's systematizations compromise the entirety of ontology. His system-thinking seeks to explain ontology and defining hierarchies amongst manifestations of constructs.

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intentions; such figures emerge ahead of their time, come into conflict with their ages, and prepare a new world.<sup>28</sup>

We can find Hegel's most comprehensive study of tragedy in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*.<sup>29</sup> Here, he analyzes the structure of Greek plays as a collision between two different (ethical) truths, each of which has some good in it. So, in *Antigone*, not the characters of the heroine and Creon are at issue, but the ethical positions they embody.<sup>30</sup> Hegel's remarks on antique tragedy are important because, with them, he reintroduces the large schematizations, the romantics having largely disregarded them in favor of the highly individualized emotion. Also, he stresses that in tragedy, the exclusively good or evil is non-existent (as opposed to the neo-classical perception of tragedy). Thus, Hegel focuses not on the reception of tragedy, but on the core structure, as Roche points out in his article.<sup>31</sup> Further down in the same article, the latter also describes Hegel's analysis of tragedy as "the inevitable consequence of the absolute realizing itself in history."<sup>32</sup> The single-minded positions the heroes take up relative to one another engender collisions and conflicts as a result of which history progresses dialectically. Another critic, Guido Vanheeswijck,<sup>33</sup> mentions a further result of Hegel's analysis: by stressing the "other" – as the opposite of dialectical reason – Hegel reintroduces the irrational and intangible elements of tragedy (these having been largely neglected in neoclassicism). However, in one and the same movement, Hegel negates them again by incorporating them in his scheme of dialectical reason; thus, they are reduced to mere counter pieces within his dialectics.

It is remarkable that Hegel, in his fixation on grand schemes, sees these schematizations themselves as offering the solution to the tragic problem. The temporary inconveniences can be easily overcome when looking at the larger picture. The Greeks, however, problematized the schematizations themselves (a schematization being just another reality construct, either metaphysical or

28 Mark W. Roche, "Introduction to Hegel's Theory of Tragedy", *PhaenEx1*, no. 2 (fall/winter 2006), p. 11.

29 These were compiled by one of Hegel's students in 1835: Heinrich Gustav Hotho and are based on student transcriptions of the lectures. Source: <http://www.textlog.de/5690.html>

30 As mentioned in both Kaufmann and Roche. Walter Kaufmann does so in his *Tragedy and Philosophy*.

31 Roche mentions here Hegel's focus point: tragedy's structuring. I would like to point to the fact that Hegel gives meaning to the phenomenon of tragedy by structuring the shown interaction. In itself, such an analysis might be valid as long as we see that these structures are part of the staged problematization. Hegel misses this point.

32 This is a rather circumlocutory and vague attempt to outline Hegel's theory while remaining within Hegel's historical discourse; tragedy taking the place of Hegel's absolute spirit. Greek tragedy however, *conveys* meaning and metaphysics. It is not, in itself, metaphysically spirited.

33 Guido Vanheeswijck, "Vijandige broers, verloren zonen. Halfweg tussen ethische bewustwording en mythische vergelding: de precaire positie van de tragedie volgens René Girard" in: *Tragisch, Over tragedie en ethiek in de 21e eeuw*. p. 72.

moral). The problematization could be staged in the form of a clash (but not necessarily so, see below, where I mention Kaufmann's critique of Hegel). A clear case in point is Sophocles' *Antigone*, where there is, indeed, a collision of two reality constructs. The first is the older law of family, the newer one the law of the (emerging) polis and the ensuing new attitude towards the polis' politics. From this angle, *Antigone* can be seen as a power clash between old and new mechanisms: a system crisis. Both mechanisms try to legitimize themselves employing the prevailing metaphysics. Because of the interwoveness of human law with transcendence,<sup>34</sup> compromise is not possible. *Antigone* doesn't hand us a solution to this problem by reverting to mechanisms or systems. It simply stages the limitations of each and every human construct and the radical tragic violence (the violence paradigm) ensuing from a clash between two of them.

Kaufmann<sup>35</sup> outlines yet other inconsistencies and contradictions in Hegel's analysis, such as the fact that not all Greek tragedies center around collisions (e.g., Sophocles' *Electra*, *Ajax*, or *Oedipus in Colonus*). Moreover, Hegel doesn't mention the moral conflicts (due to the ethical chasms) as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Hegel deems that true tragic suffering can only exist in consequence of a collision.

It can, but need not be a collision of reality constructs that we find at the heart of tragedy's plot. Rather, it is the fact that such (a) construct(s) backfire(s) on its/their constructors. In other words, it can take the form of a collision (*Antigone*), but it might as well be a single construct staged as a mental process within one person (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*) or more (*Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*).

Due to Romanticism (stressing the emotional life), Hegel (the "other" as opposed to dialectical reason) and Schopenhauer (philosophy of life and Ideal), the irrational never again left the tragic-philosophical landscape.<sup>36</sup> The early Nietzsche was an important representative of this movement in philosophy.

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34 I emphatically note that the reality constructs of transcendence are of human making also. I therefore rank them among the reality constructs. However, they are metaphysical by nature, which sets them apart from other human reality constructs. It means that founding them is not under discussion, since constructs or concepts passed to humanity from the transcendent sphere are said to be outside the scope of human questioning; they are to be believed, not questioned.

35 Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy*, p. 202 ff.

36 For post-Hegelian thinkers the world is not exclusively rational. Apart from Nietzsche, other representatives of this movement are e.g. Kierkegaard, Cioran, Bergson and Heidegger.



#### 4.3 NIETZSCHE

I want to pay attention to this philosopher because, like no other thinker in his time, he emphasized and continued to emphasize the importance of tragedy and the tragic to cure society's and culture's ills as he saw them. As one of the first, he underlined and elaborated the importance of the irrational aspects of life to come to innovation and reconfiguration of culture and society. Herein, of course, he built on the Romantic idea of the grand passion. Following Schelling's lead, he prioritized art above philosophy, yes, even above science in general. This clearly was consistent with the anti-rational movement that began in the early Romantic Period. He intuitively sensed that tragic crises as well as radical tragic violence played crucial roles in this process. He was the first 19th-century philosopher to continuously emphasize our attitude towards and handling of radical violence throughout his career.

In his early period, he was preoccupied with Grecian tragedy, with a leading role for the Grecian god Dionysus,<sup>37</sup> many titles bearing witness to this.<sup>38</sup>

In "Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens",<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche sketches the outlines of tragedy and the conditions under which it may arise.

In den Griechen wollte der Wille sich selbst zum Kunstwerke verklärt anschauen: um sich zu verherrlichen, mussten seine Geschöpfe sich selbst als verherrlichenswerth empfinden, sie mussten sich in einer höheren Sphäre, gleichsam ins Ideale emporgehoben, wiedersehen, ohne dass diese vollendete Welt der Anshauung als Imperativ oder als Vorwurf wirkte. Dies ist die Sphäre der Schönheit in der sie ihre Spiegelbilder, die Olympier, erblicken. Mit dieser Waffe kämpfte der hellenische Wille gegen das dem künstlerischen correlative Talent, das zum Leiden und zur Weisheit des Leidens. Aus diesem Kampfe und als Denkmal seines Sieges ist die Tragoedie geboren.

The influence of Schopenhauer on Nietzsche's thought on tragedy can be clearly felt in this quote. The former's philosophy was life negating: the will drives us, even worse, the desire to become an individual, to be different from one another; humanity as a series of individualized beings is the source of all suffering. The concept of being an individual, as differentiated from all other creatures, is called the principle of individuation, or principium individuationis. This is best overcome by a total negation of the will, a resignatory attitude towards life and a renunciatory mindset where the world is concerned, as Schopenhauer has it. In the self-abandonment of the Dionysian state, the individual succumbs.

In 1872, the young Nietzsche, 24 years old at the time and the youngest professor of classical philology ever, wrote his first published work: *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>40</sup> It consists of twenty-five chapters. The first fifteen deal with

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37 As discussed in the first paragraphs of this chapter, Dionysus was the Grecian god for wine, destruction, but also of rejuvenation and fertility. Throughout his career Nietzsche used this Grecian god to symbolize the two major aspects of tragic violence: violence itself and its counterpart suffering.

38 Some titles: "Das Griechische Musikdrama", "Socrates und die Tragoedie", "Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens", "Sokrates und die griechische Tragoedie", "Die Philosophie im tragische Zeitalter der Griechen." In his treatise "Die dionysische Weltanschauung" (1870) Nietzsche pursues the connection between the Dionysian and tragedy. "Eine Kunst, die in ihrem ekstatischen Rausche die Wahrheit sprach, verscheuchte die Musen der Scheinkünste; in der Selbstvergessenheit der dionysischen Zustände gieng das Individuum mit seinen Grenzen und Maassen unter: eine Götterdämmerung stand nahe bevor. [...] Es galt einer neuen und höheren iç-ái? des Daseins, der Geburt des tragischen Gedankens."

39 K.S.A. 1, "Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens", p.p. 581 – 599.

40 First edition published in 1872 as *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*. In a later edition (1878): *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Oder Griechentum und Pessimismus*. I will refer to this book as published in the Colli, G., en Montinari, M. edition of *Nietzsche Werke – Kritische Gesamtausgabe* in 15 volumes. Abbreviated as K.S.A. Kritische Birth of Tragedy, Geburt der

Greek tragedy. In the last ten chapters, Nietzsche uses Greek tragedy as a model to demonstrate the demise of our culture and to reveal a possible trajectory to its revival.

The following quote is a pointed summary by Keith Ansell Pearson in which he tries to make sense of Nietzsche's somewhat disjointed line of thought in paragraphs 3 and 7 of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Yet more importantly, the quote accurately foreshadows the tragic life affirmation of the later Nietzsche:

For Nietzsche, a strong and vibrant culture is one which rests on a 'pessimism of strength'. The Greeks, Nietzsche says, knew and felt the terror and the absurdity of existence (BT3). Out of the recognition of this terror and absurdity they invented art in order to experience life as an aesthetic phenomenon in which the human being transcends a merely individual nature and gains a glimpse of life as eternal becoming. Art provides the 'metaphysical comfort.... that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable' (BT7).<sup>41</sup>

In the early Nietzsche, we see an appreciation of the tragic as caused by (Dionysian) suffering; descriptions of this suffering include, among others, a Dionysus being caught in the nets of individualizations. In other words, tragic violence is mediated by individuation to cause suffering.

Nietzsche was educated as a classical philologist and he therefore knew, like no other, what classical tragedy did for the development of a community (see also above: Grecian tragedy). This is a long shot away from his later thinking; he, however, knew that tragedy has the capacity to produce chaos, absurdity and loss, but also make it survivable. He also realized that it tends to unify a group of people.

Unter dem Zauber des Dionysischen schließt sich nicht nur der Bund zwischen Mensch und Mensch wieder zusammen: auch die entfremdete, feindliche oder unterjochte Natur feiert wieder ihr Versöhnungsfest mit ihrem verlorenen Sohne, dem Menschen. Freiwillig beut die Erde ihre Gaben, und friedfertig nahen die Raubthiere der Felsen und der Wüste. Mit Blumen und Kränzen ist der Wagen des Dionysus überschüttet: [...] Jetzt ist der Slave freier Mann, jetzt zerbrechen alle die starren, feindseligen Abgrenzungen, die Noth, Willkür oder „freche Mode“ zwischen den Menschen festgesetzt haben. Jetzt, bei dem Evangelium der Weltenharmonie, fühlt sich Jeder mit seinem Nächsten nicht nur vereinigt, versöhnt.<sup>42</sup>

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Tragödie or their abbreviations BT or GT. Nietzsche's first notes on the matter start in 1870 – 1871.

41 Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker*, p. 65.

42 K.S.A. 1, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, § 1.

Behold the words of a high-spirited, inspired Nietzsche. That this mission was no mere impulse of the moment or temporary whim we may gather from the fact that he keeps coming back to these points throughout his working career, be it with different focus points. Just a small selection from the countless examples and quotes underpinning this picked randomly from the entirety of his career:

- On 12th December 1870, Nietzsche wrote to his friend Carl von Gersdorff about the horrors he had witnessed in the French-Prussian war and the urgent need to accomplish their mission; this being the enhancement of culture.
- In *Jenseits Gut und Böse*, § 41, Nietzsche expounds on the importance of independent thought and the independent human.
- In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in § 382, he emphasizes the “great health” needed by argonauts when they discover new, unknown territory, urging them to continue exploring.
- In 1887, he wrote in his notes that he protested against the little peaceful mediocrity, those who do not know the large powerhouses among men, who do not recognize the true greatness of culture and who do not want greatness and change.<sup>43</sup>

In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 153, he describes the position tragedy then takes in his thought as follows: he has written the ultimate tragedy which comprised a moral knot in act 5 only the gods can disentangle; but, as he adds rather sardonically, in act 4 I murdered all gods, so what am I going to do in act 5?

This paragraph reflects his later position towards tragedy. He no longer sees the art form of tragedy as the solution to the tragic status of man and society; he just sees this art form solely as an aesthetic phenomenon. He, however, does not cease to seek the true tragic format and look for its sources and remedies.

Up till approximately 1881, Nietzsche’s tragic had the following faces:

- The tragic (meaning the tension between the Dionysian and Apollonian<sup>44</sup> forces within the human mind) is very much alive,
- This life force, plus Dionysian suffering, is vaguely implicated as the source of tragic violence. The initial cause and effect are reversed.
- True tragedy (meaning the vehicle for tragico/emotional elements) had died because of theoretical knowledge;

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43 K.S.A. 12, *Nachlass*, 10[98] (217). p. 512. A remarkable detail is that this quote is followed by a citation (in line with his own note) by Francis Bacon – whom Nietzsche believed to be Shakespeare, using the latter name as an alias.

44 In Greek mythology Apollo was the god of the sun, male beauty, rationalism and self-discipline. Therefore Apollo serves as the counterpart of Dionysus in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*.

- A tragic violence format (or even a broadly indicated strategy), if any, is the above-mentioned tension between Dionysus and Apollo. This is not a full-blown blown mature tragic violence format. It is not even a format tout court. It is a psychological analysis of a possible plot content of a tragedy.

Gradually, Dionysus acquires a different position in Nietzsche's tragic thought. The Dionysian symbol and the tragic insight it gave into the nature of human life incited Nietzsche to develop, formulate and reformulate his tragic affirmation<sup>45</sup> of life in the course of his career. If any tragic format is formulated by Nietzsche at all, it is around this tragic life affirmation.

After 1881, when Nietzsche had his epiphany on the eternal return<sup>46</sup> of the same, Nietzsche's theorems on tragic life affirmation crystallized and as a result, his philosophical notions as a whole developed further. He therefore feels a need to rewrite his books, or in any case, write new introductions to them; so he does with *The Birth of Tragedy*. In his second introduction, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" written in 1886, he looks back at his earlier Dionysus

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45 Emphatic affirmation of and joy in life in all its aspects; also its painful and/or fatal ones. Man has to be fully and energetically involved with life in full consciousness of the chaotic and horrible life-basis as Nietzsche has it.

46 As was customary for Nietzsche during his "wander years", he took up residence in the Alps in early spring and summer on a regular basis to profit from the climate. Thus it occurred in early spring 1881. He went to his by now familiar – modest and cheap – pension in Sils-Maria. Nietzsche liked it there, and whenever he had no migraine attacks (severe headaches he had suffered from since his teenage years and that often lasted several days; these attacks were accompanied by heavy vomiting and an intolerance for daylight) he took his long hikes into the mountains. On one of this walks he stumbled upon a like side: Lake Silvaplana and standing beside an oddly shaped rock (this rock has become a famous sight and is now called: Zarathustra's Rock) Nietzsche had an epiphany. He was exalted to suddenly realise that life was nothing but an eternal recurrence of the same. Excitedly he jotted it down in his booklet: "*Die Wiederkunft des Gleichen. Entwurf*" (K.S.A., *Nachlass* 1880 – 1882, 9:11 [141]) followed by a list of items to be used as chapters for a future treatise on the subject. This revelation was so overwhelming for Nietzsche that he wrote, as it were, in exclamation marks: "Das neue S c h w e r g e w i c h t: d i e e w i g e W i e d e r k u n f t d e s G l e i c h e n. Unendliche Wichtigkeit unseres Wissen's, Irren's, unsrer Gewohnheiten, Lebensweisen für alles Kommende. Was machen wir mit dem Reste unseres Lebens" (Ibid). It seems as if he wanted to retain the moment in a still: he described the time, place and feeling he had: "Anfang August 1881 in Sils-Maria, 6000 Fuss über dem Meere und viel höher über allen menschlichen Dingen! –" (K.S.A., *Nachlass* 1880 – 1882, 9:11 [141]). Upfront Nietzsche debunks any possible remarks of unbelieving cynics. In his next fragment addresses them: "do I speak as someone who had a revelation? Well, simply despise me and do not listen." The concept of eternal recurrence will, in fact, recur – be it not eternally, but with some regularity – in his later works and notebooks: in *Gay Science* (K.S.A., *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* IV, 3:341, p.570), in *Zarathustra* (K.S.A. 4, "Der Genesende, § 2", *Also sprach Zarathustra* III, pp. 271 – 277), in *Ecce Homo* (K.S.A. 6, "Also sprach Zarathustra", *Ecce Homo*, p 335) and in several of his posthumous fragments (K.S.A. 10, *Nachlass* 1882 – 1884, 10:5[1]; K.S.A.11, *Nachlass* 1884 – 1885, 11:25[7]; K.S.A. 13, *Nachlass* 1887 – 1889, 12: 14[188]).

appreciation, in the fourth paragraph and again asks himself what the origin of Greek tragedy is.

Ja, was ist dionysisch? – In diesem Buche steht eine Antwort darauf, – ein „Wissender“ redet da, der Eingeweihte und Jünger seines Gottes. Vielleicht würde ich jetzt vorsichtiger und weniger bereit von einer so schweren psychologischen Frage reden, wie sie der Ursprung der Tragödie bei den Griechen ist. Eine Grundfrage ist das Verhältniss des Griechen zum Schmerz, sein Grad von Sensibilität, – blieb dies Verhältniss sich gleich? oder drehte es sich um? – jene Frage, ob wirklich sein immer stärkeres Verlangen nach Schönheit, nach Festen, Lustbarkeiten, neuen Culten, aus Mangel, aus Entbehrung, aus Melancholie, aus Schmerz erwachsen ist.<sup>47</sup>

Where the early Nietzsche expressed himself in exalted terms while writing on Dionysus and the Dionysian, in this text, he is inquisitive to the extreme. He tries to probe the essence of tragedy utilizing a host of questions. However, the Dionysian force as a source of the tragic is beyond doubt. It is noteworthy that Nietzsche distinguishes between the *god Dionysus*, whom he mentions in the preceding paragraph, and the *Dionysian*; in the original *The Birth of Tragedy*, he used both terms indiscriminately. The differentiation between them here shows that not the god Dionysus is at play here, but certain (Dionysian) characteristics of the human tragic. The terminology used in the next sentence: “schweren psychologischen Frage” also implies that Nietzsche places the origin of tragedy within the realm of the human subconscious.

The nature of the bombardment of questions that Nietzsche fires at us in this paragraph demonstrates his focus when he tries to sound the tragic enigma: how to renew society by renewing its value system. In his line of questioning, Nietzsche relates pleasure to pain or deprivation: the first emotion originating from the latter. Nietzsche describes deprivation further as pessimism, melancholy and the ugly as the will to tragedy. The craving for destruction, annihilation and fatality is the foundation of our existence, he emphasizes further down this paragraph.

The Dionysian destructive force is reworked as a crazed frenzy and madness. We see from this time on that Nietzsche radicalizes violence; I hold that he intuitively feels violence is the most important element of the tragic process. He senses that somewhere around this concept of violence should be the solution to his problematizations. Therefore, I argue that he, as a thought experiment, radicalizes it, enlarging it to find this solution.

In my opinion, his intuition is correct. However, the act of violence in itself is not the solution to the problem of stagnating ethics no longer working for *den freien Geist*; it is the starting point of a tragic process (the violence paradigm). Only when the radical tragic violence stops because it has tilted into

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47 K.S.A. 1, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 4, p.p. 15 – 16.

horizontality, and we look the debris of crumbled ethics/society/culture in the eye, a new space is created. A space for possible different constructs. Since the experience of devastation will still be fresh, this is most probably an improved reconfiguration of (ethical/social/cultural/legal) constructs. Horizontality, also in the most literal sense of the word, offers perspective.

In 1884 Nietzsche formulated another of his well-known concepts: that of *Umwertung aller Werten*,<sup>48</sup> for the first time in one of his notebooks. In 1888 Nietzsche's book *Götzen-Dämmerung* is published. In the last paragraph of the last part, "Was ich den Alten verdanke", he outlines his tragic disposition and tragic attitude towards life. Since it is a paragraph of quintessential importance, I will quote it in its entirety.

Die Psychologie des Orgasmus als eines überströmenden Lebens- und Kraftgefühls, innerhalb dessen selbst der Schmerz noch als Stimulans wirkt, gab mir den Schlüssel zum Begriff des tragischen Gefühls, das sowohl von Aristoteles als in Sonderheit von unsren Pessimisten missverstanden worden ist. Die Tragödie ist so fern davon, Etwas für den Pessimismus der Hellenen im Sinne Schopenhauer's zu beweisen, dass sie vielmehr als dessen entscheidende Ablehnung und Gegen-Instanz zu gelten hat. Das Jasagen zum Leben selbst noch in seinen fremdesten und härtesten Problemen; der Wille zum Leben, im Opfer seiner höchsten Typen der eignen Unerschöpflichkeit frohwerdend – das nannte ich dionysisch, das errieth ich als die Brücke zur Psychologie des tragischen Dichters. Nicht um von Schrecken und Mitleiden loszukommen, nicht um sich von einem gefährlichen Affekt durch dessen vehementen Entladung zu reinigen – so verstand es Aristoteles –: sondern um, über Schrecken und Mitleid hinaus, die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein, – jene Lust, die auch noch die Lust am Vernichten in sich schließt... Und damit berühre ich wieder die Stelle, von der ich einstmais ausgieng – die „Geburt der Tragödie“ war meine erste Umwerthung aller Werthe: damit stelle ich mich wieder auf den Boden zurück, aus dem mein Wollen, mein Können wächst – ich, der letzte Jünger des Philosophen Dionysos, – ich, der Lehrer der ewigen Wiederkunft.<sup>49</sup>

In this paragraph, Nietzsche describes the essence of his tragic attitude towards life. Important and indispensable ingredients to achieve this tragic state are: eternal becoming (*die ewige Lust des Werdens*), the revaluation of all values (*Umwertung aller Werthe*) and the eternal return (*der ewigen Wiederkunft*). This is accompanied by a vehement involvement with life and its (oftentimes difficult) circumstances in the form of saying yes to life no matter what.<sup>50</sup>

48 K.S.A. 11, *Nachlass*, 26 [259].

49 K.S.A. 6, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, "Was ich den Alten verdanke", § 5, p. 160.

50 An attitude we meet in the Shakespearean tragic hero as we will see in the next chapters.

The combination of these three elements sits uneasily with Nietzsche's later critics.<sup>51</sup> For the eternal return of the same does not nicely combine with the revaluation of all values and the eternal becoming. So many critics have argued one element away in favor of another one (or two). They either ignored the "contradiction" or one "misplaced" element, or it was argued that Nietzsche had worked himself into a loop. In my opinion, nothing is less true, for Nietzsche was never closer to a solution for his tragic problematizations than in this quote. *Das ewige Werden* is the concept that points towards the tragic inescapability of tragic crisis after crisis as results of our own fallibilities. It also indicates that tragedy will always mercilessly unearth the hidden flaws in our reality constructs and the need for constant betterment. This being the case, Nietzsche says, we had better enjoy it. The *Umwerthung* is the twin concept of the tragic phase in which an invitation is made towards a new form of ethicality or legality—after the devastation of the tragic crisis has died down; it is a clear indication of the phase within the violence paradigm where all possibilities towards a new ethicality/new legal constructs/a reshuffle of community towards nation lie open.

*Der ewigen Wiederkunft* is Nietzsche's phrasing of the fact that human brokenness and fallibility will eternally be with us; the odds are that the same mistakes will be made over and over again (especially when the tragic lesson is not learned). The concept is also the pendant of the need to regularly repeat the tragic lesson. In the next chapters, we will see that these are precisely the elements of the Shakespearean tragic process; here they are united in Nietzsche's life-affirming tragic vision.

Apart from his three famous concepts, also violence and suffering are described in the above quote. As I will point out in the following chapters, these are the main ingredients of the Shakespearean tragic violence paradigm. Tragedy is the only realm where all important concepts of Nietzsche's thought are harmoniously married.

James Porter<sup>52</sup> says the following about the above *Götzen-Dämmerung* quote: "If anything, the interpretation of *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Twilight of the Idols* is too selective to give an undistorted reading of the earlier text, while

51 Some critics on this issue: Arthur Danto in his *Nietzsche as Philosopher* does not carry his argument any further than connecting the *Übermensch* with eternal recurrence; he holds that eternal becoming is quite separate from these two and is part of Nietzsche's moral theories (chapter 7). Kaufmann takes a somewhat different view and links the *Übermensch* to the will to power; apart from these two concepts come the revaluation of all values and eternal becoming. He does not join them in an overall tragic view. Heidegger (*Nietzsche, volumes 1 and 2*) relates eternal recurrence to the will to power and the latter concept to the *Übermensch*. Eternal recurrence is more or less defined away as the being of the being, relating the concept not to the tragic, but to progressing time (vol. 1, p. 19 and vol 2, p. 107). Baeumler, *Nietzsche: Philosopher and Politician*, p. 80, puts it more clearly stating that only either one of the concepts of eternal recurrence and eternal becoming can be valid. Both at the same time is an impossibility.

52 James Porter, *The invention of Dionysos*, p 23.

the later passage is too impoverished to encompass the reach of Nietzsche's thought at the time of *Twilight*.<sup>53</sup> In my opinion, this judgment is out of place and incorrect. I deem Nietzsche's summary of *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Twilight* extremely to the point in its succinctness. It exactly renders Nietzsche's main concerns and is a fine summary of his tragic vision. He could not have given a better description; irrespective of the fact that Nietzsche's tragedy statements in *The Birth of Tragedy* are still unripe and partly meant to pedestalize Wagner. I would therefore like to reverse Porter's judgement: *The Birth of Tragedy* can be characterized as the lesser rendering of the paragraph in *Twilight*.

In *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, Young discusses Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, one element of the philosopher's tragic life affirmation. Young feels that Nietzsche is "quite vague as to just what it is that is to recur."<sup>54</sup> On section 370 of the *Gay Science* he says: "'Dionysian pessimism' – Nietzsche's paradoxical name for that profoundly *unpessimistic* view of the world which acknowledges all of the questionable in life yet finds it to be justified – is a 'pessimism of the future', achievable not by ordinary mortals but only by the 'Dionysian god and man'." In other words, the *Übermensch*.<sup>55</sup> In my opinion the symbolic tragic composition "Dionysian god and man" that Nietzsche mentions, indicates the whole process of the tragic, since that process as a whole is the only trajectory capable of mustering up the force (and having the strength to do so) to bear such a process (including eternal return). The *Übermensch*, of course, is instrumental in such a process, but no more than that. Within the realm of the tragic, such a *Mensch* could be equated with the Shakespearean tragic hero. Another issue is that Nietzsche's most quintessential message is not the heralding of the *Übermensch*, but to come to an integral tragic vision of life that is life (and ethics) enhancing. In the paragraphs Young indicates, Nietzsche is *trying* to do so; in the paragraph from *Götzen-Dämmerung* quoted above Nietzsche *succeeds splendidly*.

Still, when Young points to the fact that Nietzsche seems to situate the solution of his problematisations in the future, he is right. It seems that Nietzsche cannot come to a solution towards a new, better society by force of sheer passion and exalted emotions. He places the final resolution in the

53 Of course, it was not Porter's first object to unravel the tragic disposition of *The Birth of Tragedy* as summarized in *Twilight*. His main concern in this book is with the Platonist and metaphysical thematizations in the entirety of Nietzsche's oeuvre. For this thesis, these issues are not relevant.

54 J. Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, p. 108. I do not think it is vague. In the paragraph, Young refers to (*Gay Science* § 341), Nietzsche is, in my opinion, playing a thought experiment on how eternal return would look like and – above all – how it would feel like. I am in agreement with Heidegger here, who explains the paragraphs in this same way. Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Parts I and II*, Part I, ch. 4, p. 29). However, in the same work, Heidegger describes eternal return also as a threat. In that case, I argue, it will be the eternal recurrence of human flaws, in casu, of vertical violence that will eternally reverse positions of winners and losers which is, of course, an extremely dystopian prospect.

55 Ibid, p. 109.

future and its then generations as he tells us in *Ecce Homo* where he expounds on the above paragraph (from *Götzen-Dämmerung*):

Aus dieser Schrift redet eine ungeheure Hoffnung. Zuletzt fehlt mir jeder Grund, die Hoffnung auf eine dionysische Zukunft [...]. Werfen wir einen Blick ein Jahrhundert voraus, setzen wir den Fall, dass mein Attentat auf zwei Jahrtausende Widernatur und Menschenschändung gelingt. Jene neue Partei des Lebens, welche die grösste aller Aufgaben, die Höherzüchtung der Menschheit in die Hände nimmt, eingerechnet die schonungslose Vernichtung alles Entartenden und Parasitischen, wird jenes Zuviel von Leben auf Erden wieder möglich machen, aus dem auch der dionysische Zustand wieder erwachsen muss. Ich verspreche ein tragisches Zeitalter: die höchste Kunst im Jasagen zum Leben, die Tragödie, wird wiedergeboren werden<sup>56</sup>

Did not Nietzsche, by situating the solution in the future, procrastinate it – and procrastinate it indefinitely? This seems unsatisfactory. Why is it that Nietzsche, given that he identifies all tragic elements, does not arrive at a satisfactory solution for his problematizations (or, at any rate, define a mode to handle them adequately) but places it – in the above quote – in the hands of an as yet non-existent science fiction entity such as the *Übermensch*?

He does see all tragic elements, yet, he does not perceive them as being part of a causal sequence in a tragic process: an initial act of violence causing destruction and devastation, followed by a horizontalization of violence which offers perspectives for *Umwerthung* and *Werden*; this whole process to be repeated indefinitely (*ewige Widerkunft*) as a result of the human predicament of imperfection. In other words, he did not reconceptualize violence as tragic-radical violence and put it in causal order with his three concepts. In the above quote, he offers nothing more than vague indications towards a future solution.

He sees violence as the solution for the human tragic predicament; in other words, violence is not the cause but the solution for Nietzsche, therefore, the Dionysian (violence) should be radicalized and affirmed.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, he confuses tragical violence with non-tragical vertical violence. The main point here is that Nietzsche is a systemic vertical thinker. In the above quote, we see that he recommends a vertical type of violence, but he also thinks in hierarchy and verticality concerning the social field. Just a few quotes to underpin this:

Zarathustra kann nur beglücken, nachdem die Rangordnung hergestellt ist. Zunächst wird diese gelehrt. [...]  
Die Rangordnung durchgeführt in einem Systeme der Erdregierung:

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56 K.S.A. 6, *Ecce Homo*, "Die Geburt der Tragödie", § 4, p. 313.

57 His radicalization of violence resulted in the unsavoury interpretations in the first half of the 20th century. Of course, his philosophy suffered greatly from this.

die Herrn der Erde zuletzt, eine neue herrschende Kaste. Aus ihnen hier und da entspringend, ganz epikurischer Gott, der Übermensch, der Verklärer des Daseins.<sup>58</sup>

Another remarkable example from his notes is the following. Immediately after his having coined the concept of *Umwertung aller Werten* in 1884 (see above), he continues with: "In diesem pöbelhaften Zeitalter soll der vornehm geborene Geist jeden Tag mit dem Gedanken der Rangordnung beginnen: hier liegen seine Pflichten, hier seine feinsten Verirrungen."<sup>59</sup> There are numerous of these examples, underlining the fundamentally hierachal line of thought (attitude even) in Nietzsche.<sup>60</sup> Now, verticality in violence<sup>61</sup> shares the same static characteristics as vertical social *Rangordnung*. In the case of radical non-tragic violence, it tends towards repression; strict verticality in social constructs tends towards stagnation. The verticality of radical non-tragic violence and social verticality interact in the following way: when vertical violence (of the just-mentioned type) is at stake, the only possible change is a reversal of social positions of perpetrator and victim; if and when the former victims gather strength enough to defeat the former victor. This generates a static construct in which significant improvements and / or reconceptualization become highly improbable. Therefore, when the revaluation of values is in so close a proximity to the strict social hierarchies Nietzsche describes, the odd chance of achieving the desired outcome is negligible. In such a society, the only becoming or *Umwerthung* will be *Umdrehung*. Precisely these issues were combated fiercely by Nietzsche; he did not see that his verticality was part of the problem.

In summary, when we look at the totality of Nietzsche's oeuvre, his main concerns are the reconfiguration of ethicality and the renewal of society, preferably in one fell swoop. Nietzsche's major tools to this end are the revaluation of all values and his concepts of eternal becoming and eternal recurrence of the same. These are precisely the resultants of violence paradigm and tragic process. Nietzsche nearly succeeded in finding solutions for his problematizations. He, however, was hampered by the following factors:

- In the early days of his career he started out in an unfortunate way: by using the Grecian symbols of Dionysus and Apollo to analyze the tragic. In fact, these symbols merely personified the description of a possible psychological process within a tragic hero; they are not necessarily the quintessence of a tragic process.

58 K.S.A. 11, *Nachlass*, 35 [73].

59 K.S.A. 11, *Nachlass*, 26 [260].

60 He, however, does acknowledge the importance of error and fallibility – which error is likewise present within the tragic process in the guise of the fatal flaw of the tragic hero.

61 Whereas verticality shares the same static characteristics as social hierarchy, horizontality does not share the same characteristics as equality. Tragic horizontality and equality are unrelated. I will come back to this issue further down.

- We meet Dionysus as the symbol of suffering (as early as *Die Geburt der Tragödie*) and the symbol for violence; later in his career violence radicalizes. Violence is part of the solution rather than part of the problem.
- Nietzsche does not place the elements of the tragic process in a causally logical order.
- Violence and suffering – the main elements of the tragic violence paradigm – are to Nietzsche's mind – concepts within a vertical construct only. With regard to the tragic he thinks hierarchies and verticalities only.

As argued above, Nietzsche felt (rather than clearly analyzed) that violence was the pivotal force around which the tragic evolves and that the tragic – in its turn – was a pivotal jet start for new reality-constructs. He saw all the elements of the tragic process, but did not put them in causal order. Moreover, it never occurred to him to reconceptualize violence as radical tragic violence in a horizontal way; horizontality offering, in the most literal sense of the word, (new) perspectives.

Nietzsche was the first to identify and thematize radical violence and all its adjacent concepts as primeval existential human characteristics; it took great courage to do so, especially in the bovinely bourgeois society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, he was the first to see that we had to deal with violence in this life and not in some religious hereafter. This is an immense achievement and it makes Nietzsche the great tragic thinker of his age and ours. But for his vertical blindness,<sup>62</sup> he would have been the greatest theoretician of the tragic ever.

Let us now scrutinize the analyses of tragic thinkers in the century on the brink of which Nietzsche passed away.

#### 4.4 TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the last century, the focus of thought on tragedy was mainly on the occurrence of and the prerequisites for tragedy. I will now discuss some of the representatives of this line of thought.

Some scholars have analyzed the circumstances under which the art form of tragedy could (re)develop or disappear again from the public consciousness and attention. As to this, I am in concurrence with Ger Groot, who remarks<sup>63</sup> that tragedy especially flourishes in periods of social unrest and cultural upheaval and uncertainty. Hence, its florescence fell in the fifth century B.C.E, and in the 16th and 19th centuries CE. I previously exemplified this with

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62 Of course, this remark is meant metaphorically. In fact, Nietzsche was, by the end of his active writing life, 75% blind as a result of his illness.

63 Ger Groot, "Ramkoers: Antigone tegenover Kreon" in *Tragisch*, ed. by Paul Vanden Berghe, p. 24.

*Antigone*, in which a conflict of reality constructs was staged. In a distressing and terse way, the play reflects the social change and ensuing upheaval of the time.

The early Steiner emphasizes a different aspect: he posits that reason destroys the true meaning of tragedy (see above). In his opinion, tragedy slowly changed its character into rationally based socio-drama from the Renaissance onwards. With the atmosphere of reason comes optimism and an overall belief in the reparability of the world through the ratio. Later in his career, he changed his view: tragedy had not disappeared since man's position in the world was still a broken one. In his article "Tragedy Reconsidered" he states:<sup>64</sup> "[The] nucleus [of tragedy] is that of 'original sin.' Because of that fall or 'dis-grace', in the emphatic and etymological sense, the human condition is tragic. It is ontologically tragic, which is to say, in essence. Fallen man is made an unwelcome guest of life or, at best, a threatened stranger on this hostile or indifferent earth."<sup>65</sup> Steiner's terminology here is firmly based in religion: *original sin*, *fallen man* in his state of *dis-grace*. It rings the tones of a stern and unforgiving god voicing his displeasure with his creatures.

Throughout his article, Steiner argues an amalgamation of tragedy with the transcendent, if not the (Christian) religious. Although all philosophical work on tragedy of the post-Hegelian school acknowledged the irrational<sup>66</sup> as a substantial component of life, there is no unanimity among scholars as to the religious or the transcendent as an essential component of tragedy.<sup>67</sup> However, in unison, they raise their philosophical voice against the spirit of optimism<sup>68</sup> and rationalism as being the bane of tragedy. Not only for Steiner, but for several other thinkers, the irrational transmutes itself into the religiously coloured ethical. To them, tragedy is the ethical vehicle par excellence.<sup>69</sup> In the chapter on *Hamlet*, I will further exemplify the ethical stance, comparing

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64 He wrote it in 2004, 43 years after he had written *The Death of Tragedy*.

65 George Steiner, "Tragedy, Reconsidered", in *New Literary History*, Volume 35, Number 1, Winter 2004, p. 2.

66 The irrational as stemming from human subconsciousness.

67 The complex and oftentimes toilsome relationships between the religious, the metaphysical and tragedy will be discussed further down this chapter.

68 This raises the issue of the exact relationship between optimism and hope. As this research is not psycho-linguistic or of a semantic nature I will limit myself to the interpretations used here. With optimism I mean the optimism coming with technical progress: its character is materialistic. Hope can be the result of this attitude; I will therefore label it as materialistic hope. There is also a different kind of hope. It comes with an understanding of the lessons of tragedy. It teaches us commitment and involvement; it is this hope that just might form the foundations of a sound community.

69 However, as I pointed out before: the Greeks themselves did not take their tragedies to be ethical in our (Christian/Judaic) sense of the word. Therefore, their (post Hegelians and later thinkers) argumentations are, in my view situated in 20th century thought and by no means in antique Greek thought. Yet, as I argued, there is an openness towards ethic codification and the tragic thematic is religious in an antique Greek sense.

it to the existential posture. I will make this comparison based on violence being either inside or outside the legal construct.

Some important representatives of the ethical-religious school, apart from the above-mentioned George Steiner, are: Humphrey Kitto, Walter Benjamin, Martha Nussbaum, René Girard, Iris Murdoch and Willem Lemmens. With their ethical-religious stance, these thinkers place the human and the divine in a relation to each other; the human being, the changeable mortal element of the relationship – in dire need of constancy, precepts and, indeed, of immortality – and the divine, which is the eternal factor. Moreover, divine ethics itself – being a part of this divine – acquires with this an eternal and immutable status.<sup>70</sup> Thus, ethics, in this view, becomes the promise of dwelling in the proximity of divinity and contains within it the ethereal pledge towards perfection and immortality.

To be sure, we need ethics as a system that gives our lives direction and a certain structure and basis. Not to dwell with the gods, but to have a set of sound values to interrelate with each other. Also, ethics as a system is not invariable. It changes through time and strife. Ethics evolves out of interplay; an interplay of cultures (either individual or collective ones) and human power (structures).

It is precisely this change that goes to prove that ethics doesn't stem from inalterable transcendence but from sublunary vigor and conflict. Ethics doesn't point upwards to the sky; it reaches deep down inside of us to the consummation of our hearts' ultimate needs.<sup>71</sup>

A counter-movement against the ethical-metaphysical stance (see above) can be discerned from the beginning of the 19th century onwards.<sup>72</sup> These are the so-called left-wing Hegelians such as Marx, Feuerbach,<sup>73</sup> Bauer and Ruge. In their anti-idealistic analyzes they wipe the floor with the Hegelian metaphysical claims about tragedy. As the Grand Conclusive Narratives slowly break down, tragedy reappears according to Vanheeswijck. Indeed, in the course of the 19th century, we see a renewed interest in tragedy, particularly in Germany. It stands to reason: if the protection of the big reality construct

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70 And with this, of course, indisputability.

71 Phrase taken from Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*. In full it reads: "He sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries towards the consummation of his heart's ultimate needs." Penguin Books, 1979, p. 126.

72 Guido Vanheeswijck, "Vijandige broers, verloren zonen. Halfweg tussen ethische bewustwording en mythische vergelding; de precaire positie van de tragedie volgens René Girard" in: *Tragisch, Over tragedie en ethiek in de 21e eeuw*. p. 79.

73 Marx is seen as a materialist pur sang. He argued that all suffering was the result of a repressive class system. Feuerbach saw God as the projection of man and religion as a construct that satisfied man's desire for perfection and bliss in the hereafter. Marx criticized Feuerbach's opinion, calling him a crypto-idealist. Bauer was a student of Hegel and saw himself as a radical rationalist in philosophy, politics and theology. Ruge was a political and religious liberalist; he was closest associated with Hegel's idealism and became involved with the Young Hegelians.

against the unspeakable crumbles down, the wisdom of the tragic consciousness gently nudges us onwards.

In his *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Walter Kaufmann also fervently challenges the post-Hegelian stance, but from an altogether different point of view.<sup>74</sup> He argues that tragedy did not die of optimism but as a result of despair. His argument may be summarized as follows: Nietzsche stated that tragedy had died of rationalistic "optimism". This implies that Nietzsche holds that tragedy should be born from a tragic vision that entails deep despair or notions of inevitable failure. However, Kaufmann points to a few tragedies in which this does not hold, for example, some plays of Aeschylus that have positive outcomes and are nevertheless recognized as great tragedies. Therefore, Kaufmann rejects Nietzsche's view. Subsequently, Kaufmann argues that tragedy did, indeed, carry a message of hope vis-à-vis the human condition. The message is that optimism, in the wake of the development of modern technology, cannot cure human ills, but that we can weather catastrophe. It is then, argues Kaufmann, not optimism that destroyed tragedy, but despair: the specific despair that took hold of man after the horrors of WWII and Auschwitz and brought about utter hopelessness. A hopelessness not to be repaired, according to Kaufmann.

In his argument, he situates 19th-century technological optimism as opposed to post-1945 mental despair and feelings of failure. However, these are values of separate worlds. Their significances cannot be set against each other just like that, as they are not opposites within the same register. Technological progress and the ensuing social feeling of grip and optimism can go hand in hand with mental depression and human despair.

Moreover, Kaufmann opposes the materialistic optimism and hope to the tragic ones,<sup>75</sup> the material varieties ruling out the latter ones. Yet, both specimens of hope and optimism can co-exist; the tragic will merely warn of the fact that mankind demands perfection through the former types. Furthermore, Kaufmann argues that the outcome of the *plot* of a tragedy (optimistic versus pessimistic) determines the message of a tragedy. I dispute this position. The final outcome of the *plot* of any tragedy is utterly irrelevant to its essential meaning and message. The amount of blood and deaths in act 5 of any tragedy are a matter of prevailing taste, the mastery of the playwright and the construction of the plot. I do, however, endorse Kaufmann's view that tragedy conveys hope. We are shown coping mechanisms in the face of adversity and

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74 p. 165. ff.

75 In a previous note I explained the difference between optimism and the shades of hope relevant within this context. I will here briefly repeat the difference: with optimism I mean the optimism coming with technical progress: its character is materialistic. Hope can be the result of this attitude; I will therefore label it as materialistic hope. There is also a different kind of hope. It comes with an understanding of the lessons of tragedy. It teaches us commitment and involvement; it is this hope that just might form the foundations of a sound community.

are handed pity, compassion, involvement and (tragic) dignity. As George Steiner puts it:

[The tragic gives] a terrible, stark insight into human life. Yet in the very excess of his suffering lies man's claim to dignity. [...]. Hence there is in the final moments of great tragedy, whether Greek or Shakespearean or neo-classic, a fusion of grief and joy, of lament over the fall of man and of rejoicing in the resurrection of his spirit. No other poetic form achieves this mysterious effect.<sup>76</sup>

Kaufmann mentions the disenchantment and hopelessness after Auschwitz. Indeed, the shock of the realization of what man can do to his fellow creatures still resounds, at every commemoration of the WWII victims. However, I hold that tragedy does not die of despair as a result of the atrocities committed by humans; it warns of what the human is capable of. The chorus of *Antigone* in the first *stasimon* of the Ode to Man (lines 332 – 375) opens with the following realization:

Many the forms of life,  
Fearful and strange to see,  
But man supreme stands out,  
For strangeness and for fear.  
He, with the wintry gales,  
O'er the foam crested sea,  
'Mid billows surging round,  
Tracked his way across.<sup>77</sup>

The Greek word *deinon* is here translated with: fear(ful) and strange(ness). Other translations give: wonder and wondrous.<sup>78</sup> This indicates the ambiguity of the word: man could be fearful, strange as well as wonderful. Mankind has all possibilities rolled into one and the same creature. Heidegger,<sup>79</sup> in his analysis of *Antigone*,<sup>80</sup> interprets the word as 'uncanny'. "The *deinon* is the terrible in the sense of the overpowering power which compels panic fear, [...] true fear; and in equal measure it is the collected, silent awe that vibrates with its own rhythm. The mighty, the overpowering is the essential character of power itself."<sup>81</sup>

76 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 10.

77 Sophocles, *Antigone*, the opening sentences of the Ode to man, <http://www.bartleby.com/8/6/1.html>.

78 Penguin Classics, translated by E.F. Watling; [http://mthoyibi.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/antigone\\_2.pdf](http://mthoyibi.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/antigone_2.pdf); <http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/antigone.html>

79 Apart from Heidegger, other authors have occupied themselves with the concept of *deinon* in much the same vein. For instance: Hölderlin and Jos de Mul.

80 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 156.

81 Simon Oswitch, "Heidegger's reading of Antigone", <http://hdl.handle.net/10464/2352, p. 1>.

Thus, the concept of *deinon* expresses the bi-polarity and graduation of all human accomplishments. And precisely these qualities of the human enterprise constitute the major thematic of tragedy.

The scale of the killings in Auschwitz is a result of (the abuses of) the technological progress mankind avails itself of. It shows in a gruesome way the ever-widening operating range of evil facilitated by technology. If Kaufmann were right and this type of despair meant the demise of tragedy, then, in fact, he agrees, in a graduated way, with the position of the post-Hegelians. Tragedy neither dies of optimism nor despair. But, as we have seen above, the tragic consciousness does change shape and varies its content through time. It adapts to the prevailing reality, construct and taste and needs of the time juncture.<sup>82</sup> It hides itself for periods on end – to crop up again in troubled times.

Frequently, the concept of tragedy is related to Christianity, especially by those adhering to the ethical/metaphysical line of thought. And, as we have seen above, Schopenhauer deemed Christian tragedy of superior quality because of its life-negating inclination; in the later Steiner, we find a pseudo-Christian rendering of tragedy.

Why is it that tragedy is sometimes identified with the notions and orientation of Christianity?<sup>83</sup> Of course, they are linked via metaphysics,<sup>84</sup> this being the nuclear basis both of Christian belief and classical tragedy. Moreover, Christianity relates to suffering as tragedy does.<sup>85</sup> Yet, a dissimilarity lies at the heart of their united interest in metaphysics. The Christian faith offers a solution; a way out of the essentially tragic human condition in the hereafter; tragedy doesn't. It offers no solutions; it offers the possibility – tentatively – to cope with the tragic, the radical tragic violence and the destruction in the here and now. Vanheeswijck<sup>86</sup> argues that, thus, Christianity is in essence anti-tragic as a metaphysical redemption is offered and therewith a solution

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82 Tragedy can be prose (Saul Bellow: *Seize the Day*), it can be poetry (Chaucer: "The Monk's Tale"; W.B. Yeats: "The second coming"), it can be painted (Munch: *The Scream*), it can be sculpture: Ossip Zadkine: *Man without Heart*, it can be music: Dmitri Shostakovich: Symphony Nr. 4 "Leningrad". I mention just one famous example for every art form out of numberless ones.

83 Of course, many a study have discussed this issue. I will not join this debate as the present study is not devoted to the precise relation between the two. I will therefore merely identify some similarities, relevant to the present topic.

84 Karl Löwith, in his outstanding study, has pointed out that Christianity and metaphysics had been so closely related in the popular consciousness, that they had nearly become identical. Thus, at the demise of the 19th century brand of bourgeois Christianity – as Löwith calls it – the corresponding metaphysics disappears. According to him, the spiritual and individual perception of faith held ground. Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche, Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 303 ff.

85 The life of Jesus Christ, as described in the Gospels, being an example of tragic suffering.

86 Guido Vanheeswijck, "Vijandige broers, verloren zonen. Halfweg tussen ethische bewustwording en mythische vergelding: de precaire positie van de tragedie volgens René Girard" in: *Tragisch, Over tragedie en ethiek in de 21e eeuw*. p. 79.

out of the tragic position. I do not corroborate this position as transcendent redemption doesn't alter the immanent human tragic condition.<sup>87</sup> Another point is that tragedy can end positively and be nonetheless great tragedy.

Some present-day critics<sup>88</sup> hold that postmodern man has lost contact with the tragic feeling of life as shown in Greek drama. We no longer feel tossed by fate and crushed by warring legislations coming from transcendence. To be sure, these thematizations are no longer ours. Yet, with Vanheeswijk, I hold that the susceptibility for the tragic has not been lost, even though we are offered Christian redemption, have gone through the Enlightenment and have witnessed the horrors of industrial wartime killings since the Greeks put the tragic on Europe's politico-philosophical agenda. We are intrinsically unable to bring our reality constructs to perfection. It is of no great importance whether the shown reality construct is of antique or more recent (metaphysical) making. We will always need the hope embedded within the workings of tragedy: the individual's need for (communal) grief, dignity and involvement: *the shortcut to humanity's ultimate common denominator*. If critics fail to see this, they completely miss this cardinal characteristic of tragedy.

Because tragedy, religion and ethics all deal with human imperfection, some thinkers heavily charge tragedy with religious/ethical connotations. Is a complete set of moral rules staged in tragedy? If these are not kept properly, one is in trouble? No. In tragedy, the very verges and the limitations of human ethicality are explored. In short: all of its fallibilities, leaving open any (new way of) ethical codification. *Tragedy is therefore the only a-religious scheme that offers immanent (as in non-transcendental) hope and perspective in the face of violence and destruction as a result of human imperfection. It does not offer final discharge in an afterlife.*

In this chapter, I discussed the violence paradigm, the tragic hero and the successive opinions on tragedy throughout European history. Especially after Shakespeare (when tragedy became 'critical') radical tragic violence was treated as something to be phased out of the human mind by rationality and education. At the same time, tragedy's violence tilted towards a format of reparability within the sphere of guilt/guiltless/accountability; a type we find as being monopolized by the state. This did not change until the end of the eighteenth/beginning of the nineteenth century; the Romantics understood tragedy as staging august emotion, when used properly, this ingredient was ideally suited for the construction or consolidation of a nation or society (as the Greeks had done). They were the precursors of the romantic nationalism

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87 In phenomenology and the philosophy of difference the transcendent is often referred to as the radical alterity. As this 20th century school is out of the scope of this dissertation I will limit myself to this remark.

88 For instance Dennis Schmidt who substantiates this point in his book: *On Germans and other Greeks*, and also Oudemans, Th.C.W. en Lardinois, A.P.M.H., *Tragic Ambiguity. Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol. 4, Leiden, 1987.

of that century. They mostly emphasized the didactic and aesthetic aspects of tragedy. The violence paradigm had no place in their schematics. In the next century (the 20<sup>th</sup>), ethical and religio/spiritual facets of tragedy were highlighted; the elements of loss and mourning were considered the net effect of tragic violence. The only one addressing radical tragic violence in all its aspects, as early as the nineteenth century, was Nietzsche. He saw radical tragic violence's dangers as well as it being the jet-force for renewal.

In the next two chapters, I will analyze the faces of radical violence and Shakespeare's handling of them. I will go into the question as to how this type of violence interacts with Renan's will to form a nation and how values can ensue from the violence paradigm.



## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In *Macbeth*, we meet three autocratic warrior leaders. King Duncan is introduced early in the play, as is Macbeth, our tragic hero, who ousts<sup>1</sup> King Duncan. Macbeth becomes the next tribal leader<sup>2</sup> and is – in his turn – ousted by Malcolm, son of King Duncan. All three of them combine military command, administration and jurisdiction in their persons. We witness a society coming to grips with such leaders. In the play, in the first few acts, there is, as yet, no sign of a nation or a national consciousness; only at the end of the play is a new perspective towards these concepts opened by Malcolm. The way is being prepared by our tragic hero, Macbeth, who ends an important tribal custom: *sippenhaft*<sup>3</sup> or blood law. *Sippenhaft* is vicarious liability or “the principle of a family sharing the responsibility for a crime committed by one of its members.”<sup>4</sup> In Northern Europe, it was mostly used in (Celtic and Germanic) communities where oral customary law was the norm.<sup>5</sup> The abolishment of this customary form of justice is an important step towards the founding of a nation as a unity. For as long as *sippenhaft* revenge exists, there can be no (will to form a) nation: when the danger of such a kill from some resentful tribe member might hang over one’s head, a collective will to unity is out of the question. It also heralds the transition from (Celtic) tribal law to (Anglo-Norman)<sup>6</sup> monarchical law.<sup>7</sup>

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1 In fact, Macbeth achieves this by killing king Duncan.

2 Shakespeare gives them the title king, but in fact – seen in the light of the timeframe in which the play is set – they are tribal leaders as I will explain further down in this chapter. See summary of the play for plot and characters.

3 For now, may the definition suffice. Of course this concept will be elaborated further down in this chapter.

4 Source: [https://onelook.com/thesaurus/?s=sippenhaft&res=res\\_0&senseid=2056853858](https://onelook.com/thesaurus/?s=sippenhaft&res=res_0&senseid=2056853858)

5 A revival of this custom could be seen during the German occupation in WW II in both Germany and the occupied countries.

6 The Celtic Era in England (600 BCE to approximately 43 CE). After the Roman conquest of England of 43 BCE, the Celtic (cultural/social) sway over the country did not end abruptly. A mixed Celtic/Roman culture developed that continued until the invasion into England of William the Conqueror in 1066. The latter became the first Anglo-Norman king of England, heralding the Anglo-Norman culture. The *Anglo*-part of the word meaning: a continuation of the (ever waning) influence of the tribe of the Anglo-Saxons (originating from Denmark/Friesland – the other invaders of England: from 4<sup>th</sup> century to approx. 11<sup>th</sup>

*Macbeth* is an intriguing play for those who study violence. How does it operate in such a relatively unorganized society? How does violence evolve: into sheer barbarism or (the first rudimentary) signs of civilization? Does the Shakespearean violence paradigm play a role here, and if so, in what way? Other interesting and topical queries given the present thematic are whether – in any way – Renan's will might be related to the violence paradigm. Also, is Renan's stance towards religion and culture concerning nation forming<sup>8</sup> substantiated by Shakespeare's violence paradigm, or is it nullified? Are Renan and Nietzsche perhaps more related (through the Shakespearean violence paradigm) than both of them deem desirable or even in the slightest way plausible or possible?

In the following paragraphs, I will analyze the play, focusing on how tragic violence paradigm can unfold in societies in transition.

## 5.2 THE BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

The play was first performed in 1606 at Hampton Court for James I and his brother-in-law Christian IV of Denmark.<sup>9</sup> The play was most probably written for this occasion.<sup>10</sup> The anachronistic appearance of Sweno (Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark, Norway and England) and the many references to Nordic behavior and practices in the play just might be due to the presence of Christian. Shakespeare got the history of *Macbeth* from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, published first in 1577. The historical Macbeth lived in the 11th century (Mac Bethad mac Findláich or Macbeth son of Findlay, 1005 – 1057). Since we know that Shakespeare did not make an issue of historical correctness, we have to tap historical sources if we want to learn something about the actual Macbeth. Luckily, an 11th-century contemporary Gaelic poem survives: *The prophecy of Berchán* describing Macbeth's appearance: he had "flowing blond hair and a ruddy face." From other contemporary sources,<sup>11</sup> we know that he became Mormaer (a kind of warlord with absolute power over his domain) of Muray in the North of Scotland in 1032, when he murdered the previous Mormaer<sup>12</sup> and married the latter's widow, Gruoch.

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7 century). The *Norman*-part of the word (not to be mixed up with *Nordic* with which Vikings are meant) being an allusion to the Duchy of Normandy in France where William was duke.

8 Early type of codified law – mostly by an autocratic king.

9 See chapter in Renan: the latter holds that these concepts play no role (or should play no role) in the forming of a nation.

10 Christian ascended the throne when he was only 11 years old. One of the regents who took over governmental power until Christian came of age was called Jörgen Rosenkrantz.

11 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sylvan Barnet, introduction p. xxii.

12 Among others: The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Annals of Tigernach.

13 Not being king Duncan, but a the previous mormaer. Macbeth burnt him and his retinue alive.

This was quite customary in the Nordic/Celtic societies of the time. Remarkably, this historical custom occurs in *Hamlet* as the event around which the entire plot is built. I will come back to this in the chapter on the play.

In 1040, the king of Alba (Scotland), the Anglicized Duncan I, was killed in action by Macbeth's troops when the former tried to ransack and levy Macbeth's territory.<sup>13</sup> Macbeth succeeded Duncan and reigned in Scotland until 1057, when he was killed in battle. Macbeth protected the region against the regular Viking raids; therefore, the historical Macbeth in fact yields (state-controlled) violence in an exemplary way: the way Weber meant it: for the protection of his people. Macbeth's reign was mostly peaceful and he was known for his generosity.<sup>14</sup> After his death, Macbeth's stepson Lulach succeeded him, but shortly after, he was ousted by Duncan I's son, Malcolm III.<sup>15</sup> The historical Macbeth was never thane; he was the last of the Celtic<sup>16</sup> kings; with him, Celtic traditional law and governmental constructs faded into history; and therewith, Scotland entered the era of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings.

### 5.3 MACBETH AND HAMLET: TWIN TRAGEDIES

Before I embark on a discussion of *Macbeth*,<sup>17</sup> I want to discuss a few similarities between *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* (discussed in the next chapter). Not only are they historically and plot-wise related, but their respective themes are also akin.

To begin with, both plays are set in the same era. Apart from the fact that we can ascertain the exact dates of the historical Macbeth, with which we can determine *Macbeth*, we can periodize both plays alike, because in both a shared kingship/alliance of England and Denmark is mentioned. In *Macbeth*, the king concerned is actually mentioned: King Sweyn or Sven or Sweno 'Forkbeard' (reigned: 986 – 1014). In *Hamlet*, such a joint leadership is implied.<sup>18</sup> Since this is the only period in which Denmark could dictate England<sup>19</sup> being united under one crown, it must be situated in the same era.

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13 At first Macbeth was Mormaer (warlord) over Muray: the Northern part of Scotland. After he had slain Duncan, he became king over all of Scotland (or, as it was called, Alba).

14 Source: Royal Encyclopaedia, <https://www.royal.uk/macbeth-r-1040-1057>

15 Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq75Cl\\_osxk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq75Cl_osxk), Time line, World History Documentaries.

16 Of the Scoto-Celtic tradition.

17 I again refer to the appendix for a summary of all plays discussed.

18 The only period that such a joined leadership occurred was during Sweyn's reign. Shakespeare makes Claudius one such sovereign.

19 I will, of course, come back to Claudius' behavior, in dictating England, further down in this chapter. This happens during the second Viking Age: roughly the 11<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of Sweyn Forkbeard and Cnut the Great.

Moreover, we find similar Nordic customs and traditions in both plays (the marital customs among leaders were already mentioned above); I will come back to this issue at some length in this and the next chapter.

Furthermore, this period is marked by its big social, cultural and legislative transitions. Above, I already mentioned that Macbeth was the last of the Celtic warlords/tribal leaders; Scotland thereafter entered the Anglo-Norman period. The transitions take place through violent system clashes. In *Macbeth* we see the above-mentioned development (more specifically, the end of blood-law being replaced by the Anglicized rule of Malcom with his governmental innovations) and in *Hamlet* we see the tension between the old barbaric ways (as described by Hamlet in Act 1) and the views of the young Hamlet, freshly schooled in the values of Renaissance and *Neuzeit* at the university of Wittenberg.<sup>20</sup> I here come back to my remark in the previous chapter that tragedy as an art form especially tends to emerge in times of transition, for, of course, Hamlet's time as well as Shakespeare's time – the time when this tragedy was written – were times of unapparelled transitions (characterized by the accompanying insecurity and social turmoil).<sup>21</sup> Let us now have a look at the play.

#### 5.4 DISCUSSION OF *MACBETH*: THE SETTING OF THE SCENE

The play opens with a scene on the heath, thunder and lightning in the sky. Three witches enter. The conversation of the three women sets the tone: ominous and unsettling. The sinister atmosphere they create is reflected in the sky: a common medieval thematic (see also Shakespeare's England in the appendix, A biography of Shakespeare).

They reverse values: the battle will be lost as well as won – which, of course, is true, depending on what vantage point is chosen. Fair is foul and the other way around.

First witch:

When shall we three meet again?  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second witch:

When the hurly-burly's done,  
When the battle is lost and won.  
[...]

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20 Which is, of course, the anachronism of all anachronisms – and very Shakespearean, since the university of Wittenberg was founded in 1502. I will come back to this issue in the next chapter.

21 I cannot but add that our time witnesses unparalleled transitions as well. It would be wise to realize what transitions of that magnitude entail and bring with them; Shakespeare, like no one else, paints such a landscape for us.

All:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair,  
Hover through the fog and filthy air<sup>22</sup>

The atmosphere is murky, dark and oppressive. It permeates the entire play and it addresses the subconscious layers of the human mind. A suggestion of the dark forces of evil is evoked, enhanced by a complete reversal of values.<sup>23</sup>

The three women vanish and the scene is changed and focused on King Duncan asking a captain how the battle<sup>24</sup> was fought. This is how the good captain answers him:

Doubtful it stood;  
As two spent swimmers, that do cling together  
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonald—  
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that  
The multiplying villainies of nature  
Do swarm upon him—from the western isles  
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;  
And fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,  
Show'd like a rebel's whore: but all's too weak:  
For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—  
Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel,  
Which smoked with bloody execution,  
Like valour's minion carved out his passage till he faced the slave;  
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,  
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,  
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.<sup>25</sup>

The adjectives and adverbs Shakespeare uses do not seem to fit their nouns and verbs. The pairs look queer and seem to reverse or counter-balance each other: clinging swimmers, who by their clinging to each other do not rescue themselves or the other, but choke their ability to swim; Macdonald is merciless as well as worthy. Worthy, that is, to be a rebel, because the villainies of nature are multiple in him. Within the register of theatrical poetics, nature was usually associated with bounties or plenty. Fortune smiling upon someone usually has a positive connotation and the smiling is done upon a righteous person. In this account it is the reverse, for fortune is the rebel's whore and the mean-

22 *Macbeth*, act 1. I, ll. 1-11.

23 The medieval devil is traditionally presented as reversing values.

24 The battle was between the army of King Duncan, led by Macbeth, and the traitor Macdonald, thane of Cawdor, who, in alliance with the Norwegian king Sweno, had planned to take over Scotland.

25 *Macbeth*, act 1. II, ll. 8-23.

ing is negative. Macbeth is brave and disdains fortune, he becomes “valour’s minion”. *Minion* meaning *favorite*; it also has a slight connotation of weakling. However, weaklings are usually not described as brave or in the favor of valor.

Shakespeare deconstructs familiar images to unsettle their meaning and estrange the audience from commonly used metaphors. After thus having played havoc with the homely imagery with which we describe the world that is (now *was*) familiar to us, Shakespeare introduces the way Macbeth acts: out in the battlefield towards his enemies.

[He] carved out his passage till he faced the slave;  
 Which ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,  
 Till he unseam’d him from the nave to the chaps,  
 And fix’d his head upon our battlements.<sup>26</sup>

The violence described is extremely bloody and cruel: the text does not tell us into what the carving is done, but the verb is usually associated with meat (in this instance, living bodies are obviously meant). The enemy is cut in half and beheaded. What is described reminds us of the cruel and merciless practices of the Vikings during their raids in England and Scotland. I want to call to mind that Harald Hardrada<sup>27</sup> and the historical Macbeth were contemporaries.

## 5.5 ORAL TRIBAL LAWS

The degree of violence and cruelty of the Vikings depended entirely on the mood and disposition of the leader-warrior; no codified laws of war or rights for prisoners or defeated existed within Nordic traditional law (the defeated were either slaughtered or used/sold as slaves). Traditional community legislation in the Viking age was passed down orally by ‘law speakers’ or cited in sagas and only applied to the indigenous Nordic communities. Outside these communities, customary laws did not apply. Therefore, Vikings on a raid had the liberty to do as they pleased. Only the later Middle Ages saw the development of codified law (in and outside the community).<sup>28</sup> For now, this description must suffice; at the end of this chapter I will come back to customs in law and succession in these days and Shakespeare’s.

Back to the quote above. The only thing that seems inappropriate in this scene is the fact that no handshake or bidding farewell takes place at the

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26 Ibid, ll. 20 – 23.

27 Harald Hardrada (1015 – 1066). Most famous contemporary: William the Conqueror. Harald was killed in the Battle of Stamford Bridge (1066) that took place just before William’s invasion into Britain in the same year.

28 Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Germanic-law/Rise-of-feudal-and-monarchical-states>

proper moment. The above short description is permeated with violence. Everything in the scenery and the description of character, surrounding the execution of violence, is ambivalent and/or reversed. No sound ground, other than the quenching of a rebellion,<sup>29</sup> can be found for this extreme violence. The atmosphere is fear-driven. No security exists in this godforsaken universe. Violence rules<sup>30</sup>; there is no evidence of any rule of law.<sup>31</sup> But then the captain continues: he describes the rising of the sun (usually bringing comfort) bringing more disaster followed by a fresh assault:

Mark, king of Scotland, mark:  
 No sooner justice had with valour arm'd  
 Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels,  
 But the Norwegian lord surveying vantage,  
 With furbish'd arms and new supplies of men  
 Began a fresh assault.<sup>32</sup>

Here we find the source of justice, of law (or rather law speaking, see above): indeed, Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis is meant; it is he that forces the kerns to trust their heels. Together with his friend and fellow thane Banquo, as we learn from the reaction of King Duncan.

The captain ends:

Except they [Macbeth and Banquo] meant to bathe in reeking wounds,  
 Or memorise another Golgotha,  
 I cannot tell.<sup>33</sup>

The thane of Ross enters and he recounts the end of the battle: Bellona's<sup>34</sup> bridegroom, meaning Macbeth, has won the battle. Thus Macbeth, who is called: the belligerent, valiant and worthy, is the embodiment of rules; the (bloody) executioner of law (of war) and order.<sup>35</sup> What is described here is in fact, the heart and sinews of a feudal Nordic state where personal strength (either in cunning or physically) is decisive in the doling out and execution of justice.

29 To make a leap in time: in Shakespeare's days rebels were granted a trial (see the appendix *A biography of Shakespeare: Shakespeare's England*). The earl of Essex got a trial (of sorts) and was beheaded in the Tower. However, there were no large scale executions and many of his followers got away with a fine. Southampton was released by James I; Sir John Davies was set free.

30 As in fact it did in 11<sup>th</sup> century Scotland.

31 As it was understood in Shakespeare's time.

32 *Macbeth*, act 1, II, ll. 28-33.

33 *Macbeth*, act 1, II, ll. 39-42.

34 Bellona: Roman goddess of the art of war.

35 Again the resemblance between Macbeth and Harald Hardrada (see below) is striking. Hardrada (Old Norse) means: harsh counsel or severely judging and ruling.

However, it still is King Duncan who speaks the following words, ordering Cawdor's (Thane of Cawdor, in other words: the traitorous Macdonald) death, and promoting Macbeth to a higher status.

No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive  
Our bosom interest: go pronounce his present death,  
And with his former title greet Macbeth.<sup>36</sup>

Who really is in charge of justice? Here, Macbeth is presented as justice incarnate. However, Duncan can, without any trial or even council, order Cawdor's death. This is a strange combination. On the one hand, Macbeth impersonates the execution of "bloody execution", on the other hand, Duncan now seems to take in hand tribal law. These facts do not point towards any well-balanced and mature tradition of law or (legal) custom. The Thane of Ross also tells King Duncan that Sweno,<sup>37</sup> the Norwegian King, requests a parley. King Duncan completely ignores this petition of a fellow ruler, being on the same level of leadership. A king not taking this matter in hand seems strange, especially for a king having the power to, in a single breath, condemn Cawdor to death.

Duncan is also informed that the defeated king Sweno could bury his dead in sacred ground only after having paid a huge sum of money. As the king is new to this information, he initially had no hand in exacting the levy. In this kingdom, it is just the semblance of justice that prevails. Again, the question in whose hands (the execution of) justice lies, can be posed. How stable, how sound is the basis of this society? To paraphrase the captain's words: doubtful it stands as the story unfolds further. It is, however, crystal clear that there is no question of a stable community here, let alone of a nation-state under one law.

Justice and national stability seem to revolve around the person of Macbeth; because he fought bravely against rebels and saved Duncan's territory.

## 5.6 WHO IS MACBETH

We meet this tribal prize fighter in act 1 – scene III, when he encounters the three weird sisters on the heath. The ladies foretell that he will be thane of

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36 *Macbeth*, act 1, II, ll. 63-65.

37 Sweyn Forkbeard (king of Denmark and Norway) is meant, who raided England on a regular basis between 1002 and 1012. In 1013 he invaded England and became king from 1013 till 1014 when he died. He had ruled only a few weeks. It is impossible that the historical Macbeth could have been involved in these conflicts, since he was born in 1004. Therefore I conclude that Shakespeare here used poetic license to set the atmosphere of fear and murkiness of the play since the raiders were feared for their ruthless cruelty – see above.

Cawdor and King thereafter. Immediately, half the prediction proves true when the thane of Angus enters and announces that Duncan has rewarded Macbeth's war effort with the title of Cawdor.

Macbeth reflects upon this overwhelming news:

This supernatural soliciting  
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,  
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
 Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:  
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
 Against the use of nature? Present fears  
 Are less than horrible imaginings:  
 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
 Shakes so my single state of man that function  
 Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
 But what is not.<sup>38</sup>

He goes on and concludes that he doesn't have to do anything, but wait until the second half of the prediction comes true.<sup>39</sup>

The three fortunetelling phantoms are able to excite his existential<sup>40</sup> *angst* and shake him out of his certainties. He doesn't know whether the prophecy is good or bad; as the quote indicates, he is not so much afraid of the prophecy itself, as he is of his own thoughts about murder. This is a telling insight. He seems to be calculating himself out of his fears and moral deadlock. However, the outcome of a chance-calculus cannot very well be the reference point for ethical good or bad. His strategy of suppressing *present* fear by comparing it with the horrors of what is *still to come* does not testify to great emotional stability or proven self-knowledge in that area of the psyche. This musing shows another striking trait in Macbeth. He does not seem to be plagued by ethical considerations but by existential ones; at this point, his existential apprehension for what is to come drives him, not his ethical values. This attitude is in sharp contrast with his behavior on the battlefield, where he was a brave and loyal fighter, for which he was profusely praised. There is, then, an odd imbalance in the character of Macbeth of which no one (including Macbeth himself) seems to be conscious. This oddity hardly makes him the

38 *Macbeth*, act 1. III, ll. 129-141.

39 In point of fact, it would not have been unreasonable. Kingship was traditionally elective and he who had the best track record in the field of military prowess would most probably win.

40 Tragic existentiality pertains to the quintessence of life and decease of the individual human being; this essence being devoid of normative hierarchy of whatever nature. I would call it the ultimate primeval emotion or need. It should be noted that this type of tragic existentiality is unrelated to whatever philosophical school or movement.

ideal hero to be entrusted with a community's (or nation's) safety or justice. This is how we find Macbeth in act 1. Let us now turn to his antagonists in the play.

### 5.7 DUNCAN, THE LADY AND THE OTHERS IN THEIR INTERPLAY WITH MACBETH

Duncan is informed that Macdonald, the traitor, has been put to death. The king reacts by recalling his former absolute trust in Macdonald. In other words, Duncan had not noticed any conniving against him and was taken by surprise by the rebellion. Neither had he been aware, at an earlier stage, of the maneuvers of the army of the Norwegian king Sweno.<sup>41</sup>

By and by, an imbalance; a sense of pending danger, provoking fear, becomes apparent in the basis of Duncan's realm, gyrating around the person of Macbeth and the blindness of Duncan. Blinder still he becomes. For – in the next scene – Duncan doesn't see what it does to Macbeth when he appoints his son Malcolm as his heir-apparent and grants him the title of Prince of Cumberland.

Macbeth:

The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step  
 On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,  
 For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;  
 Let not light see my black and deep desires:  
 The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,  
 Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.<sup>42</sup>

Macbeth's "black and deep desires" become more and more apparent and are overruling his better judgment. When Macbeth leaves, Duncan assesses his worthiness:

[...] he is full so valiant,  
 And in his commendations I am fed;  
 It is a banquet to me. [...]  
 It is a peerless kinsman.<sup>43</sup>

As Lady Macbeth learns about the predictions, one of which has already materialized, she fears her husband will not take the shortest route to the

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41 To refresh the memory: King Sweno of Norway had, together with the traitorous Macdonald, thane of Cawdor, planned to invade Scotland. Thanks to Macbeth their combined army was slain (literally).

42 *Macbeth*, act 1. IV, ll. 48 – 53.

43 *Macbeth*, act 1. IV, ll. 54 – 58.

fulfillment of the second half for he is “too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness.”<sup>44</sup>

Act 1, scene 7 is half soliloquy and half dialogue between Macbeth and his wife. It starts with Macbeth’s famous soliloquy: he decides not to kill his king and kinsman.

[T]hat but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We’d jump the life to come. But in these cases  
We still have judgment here; that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague the inventor.  
[...]  
I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself  
And falls on the other.<sup>45</sup>

If only the horrid deed he is about to commit had no consequences in this world, he would be prepared to give up bliss in the hereafter. However, he is fully aware of the fact that the violence will have repercussions in the here and now.

Alexander Leggatt<sup>46</sup> has it that for Macbeth, the present horror and the horror of the final judgment become one. However, risking the one for the other would not automatically imply their fusion; in my opinion Macbeth stresses the horror of the first deed by comparing it to the ultimate terror yet to come (he used a similar strategy before: comparing present horrors with those further in the future. Now he tries trading them).

Here, Macbeth expresses the realization that the violence he is about to commit will have terrible and irreversible consequences. He also sees that the murder he is about to actualize will return to him “to plague the inventor.” This is a realization, in so many words, of the workings of the violence paradigm. Because of this awareness of the ultimate outcome of violence he knowingly and responsibly comes to the conclusion that this course of action is unwise for every conceivable reason. He is even aware of his “dark thoughts” and imperfections. He decides, probing the self-knowledge he has at this particular moment, not to execute the plan any further. He will, in his vaulting ambition, overplay not only his hand, but himself and everything he stands for. This scene represents Macbeth as a free agent, consciously

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44 *Macbeth*, act 1. V, ll. 16.

45 *Macbeth*, act 1. VII, ll. 6- 28.

46 Alexander Leggatt , *Shakespeare’s Tragedies*, p. 178.

arguing his decisions. But more importantly, he is aware of the imperfections and flaws in his character.

Again, as we have seen above, these considerations are not ethical, but pragmatic. Again, he makes a chance calculus: what does it do to me and what will be its influence in future.

At this point, I would like to draw attention to the fact that, strictly speaking, Macbeth is on the brink of committing an act of so called regicide. However, since this is a tribal community that is kept afloat by the Nordic and oral customs of succession,<sup>47</sup> one can hardly speak of regicide as we understand it (such as in a nation-state in development – *Hamlet* – or a nation/state/empire as in *Julius Caesar*).

Lady Macbeth<sup>48</sup> enters and he tries to dissuade his lady from the plan. She, however, convinces him using the following arguments: you don't love me properly if you shy away now; you have promised, but now you recoil; you are unmanly if you daren't do it now. We cannot but succeed if we do it well. Macbeth is convinced: "I am settled, and bend up, / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat."<sup>49</sup>

Act two is the most intense act of the play. Since Macbeth, as I noted above, effectively personifies justice and the execution thereof, this could be seen as state-controlled violence. But, there is as yet no such thing as an organized state; his killing stems from oral tribal tradition. Therefore, we cannot speak of a typical characterization of violence as part of a systematized construct as yet,<sup>50</sup> just that it is erratic and stemming from legal primitivism. Moreover, it is a terrible violation of Nordic custom: the killing of a guest who is also kin is an unspeakable breach of tradition and to top this all, Duncan still seems to be the leader in charge.

Therefore, the violence committed: the murder of Duncan, is unspeakably horrific. It being (in summary):

- the killing of the king/tribal leader (bad, but more or less passable since it seems to be customary for a successor to succeed by killing the predecessor),
- the killing of a kinsman (worse, but known among Nordic *leaders*) and
- the murder of a guest whom one is supposed to protect (decidedly worst), all rolled into one horrendous act.<sup>51</sup>

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47 See below for what these entail.

48 As pointed out above: the historical Lady was called Gruoch and according to Gaelic sources she was a generous woman, popular and well-liked by the populace.

49 *Macbeth*, act 1. VII, ll. 79 – 80.

50 The type two violence: state controlled.

51 As a matter of fact, Macbeth had used these argument in his soliloquy, so he is aware of them as being horrific.

In this scene, Shakespeare plays with the historical meaning of regicide and the opinions on the subject in his own time, anachronistically<sup>52</sup> situating the conception of his day in Nordic times. And, to be sure, a lot of king-killing took place just before Shakespeare's day (see: A Biography of Shakespeare in the appendices). Therefore, the subject was a topical one; debate among the University Wits<sup>53</sup> was ardent as to when regicide was permitted and when not. I will come back to this debate further down and in the next chapters.

The act of betrayal, then, to be detected in these scenes amounts to the following: the betrayal of kin and the lies to cover up the murder. In the scene leading up to the murder (act 2.I), Macbeth describes the mental process he goes through, using the image of a mind's dagger. He is marshalled by the dagger, yet it is a dagger coming from his own mind. In other words, Macbeth is giving in to his human imperfections that cannot but end in common horror.<sup>54</sup>

[...] Or art thou but  
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,  
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?  
I see thee yet, in form as palpable  
As this which now I draw.  
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;  
And such an instrument I was to use.  
[...]  
Take the present horror from the time,  
Which now suits with it.<sup>55</sup>

Macbeth stabs Duncan offstage. Immediately, the impact of the horror is felt throughout. Lady Macbeth heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.<sup>56</sup> Macbeth hears a voice cry: "Sleep no more, [...] Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor/Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more."<sup>57</sup> Macbeth has unleashed an act of violence upon the world. It is a vertical act of violence and the immediate effect of it is crystal clear: Macbeth will sleep no more.<sup>58</sup>

52 As we already concluded: Shakespeare was no stickler as far as historical correctness was concerned.

53 Playwrights/Intellectuals in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that had had a university (Oxfordian or Cambridgean) education.

54 In Grecian tragedy also called *hybris*. The difference here is that Macbeth is fully aware of his yielding to his desires and ambitions.

55 *Macbeth*, act 2. I, ll. 37 – 60.

56 *Macbeth*, act 2. II, l. 15.

57 *Macbeth*, act 2. II, ll. 33 – 41.

58 Also from instances further on in the play we may conclude that Shakespeare was very much aware of the effects of sleep deprivation on the human mind.

A.C. Bradley writes that blackness broods over this scene.<sup>59</sup> As it does over the whole tragedy, for that matter. He goes on: "The blackness of night is to the hero a thing of fear, even of horror; and that which he feels becomes the spirit of the play."<sup>60</sup>

### 5.8 THE REACTION OF BYSTANDERS TO THE VIOLENCE

Leggatt<sup>61</sup> emphasizes that the other characters in the play cannot find words for this awful act. Violence deprives us of suitable words to describe it:

O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart  
Cannot conceive nor name thee!<sup>62</sup>

As Macduff shrieks out, after having found Duncan's body. When words are lacking, communication with our fellow humans stops. Macbeth claims to have killed Duncan's servants in a rage: "Th'expedition of my violent love/ Outran the pauser, reason."<sup>63</sup> He had refrained from consulting his fellow-thanes, who are amazed and taken aback. The bond of trust between the Thanes begins to fray: why has Macbeth done so? A vague uneasiness can be sensed on the part of Lennox and Macduff. They draw back. Banquo remains silent, keeping his thoughts to himself. Duncan's two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, decide: they'll hold their tongues and flee.

Malcolm (Aside to Donalbain):  
Why do we hold our tongues,  
That most may claim this argument for ours?

Donalbain. (Aside to Malcolm):  
What should be spoken here,  
where our fate,  
Hid in an auger-hole, may rush, and seize us?  
Let 's away;  
Our tears are not yet brew'd.<sup>64</sup>

Failing words and faltering in trust, the community falls apart into dumb-founded individuals. Even life itself doesn't make sense anymore. Macbeth: "From this instant, there's nothing serious in mortality./ All is but toys.

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59 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 279.

60 Ibid.

61 Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, p. 179.

62 *Macbeth*, act 2. III, ll. 62-63.

63 *Macbeth*, act 2. III, ll. 110-111.

64 *Macbeth*, act 2. III, ll. 119 – 123.

Renown and grace is dead./ The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees/  
Is left this vault to brag of.”<sup>65</sup> Thus is the impact of violence on the community. No more words: trust and shared values vanish and are no longer articulated and consequently, the communal coherence falters and individuals become isolated.

### 5.9 THE RESULT OF VIOLENCE

However, this act of violence not only dumbfounds and mutes, it also dehumanizes. The most obvious way in which dehumanization takes place is the killing itself: the transformation of a human being into a corpse, as explained in the previous chapter. This act is ineradicable<sup>66</sup> and cannot be repaired. It irrevocably changes not only the victim but the inflictor as well: Macbeth has murdered his sleep as he cried out (see above) and therewith his peace of mind. The enormity of this realization is worded in the above quotation, where Macbeth reports the falling away of meaning, dignity and grace. He even wishes away the little self-knowledge he had reaped (see above): “To know my deed ‘twere best not know myself.”<sup>67</sup> Act 2 ends with the equivocal benediction of the old man:

God’s benison go with you; and with those  
That would make good of bad, and friends of foes!<sup>68</sup>

### 5.10 HOW VIOLENCE UNFOLDS ITSELF

In his new role as king, Macbeth tries to playact the good king and ruler: he invites the Thanes for a festive dinner. His attempts are, however, in vain, for he is not able to suppress the consequences of the initial violence with which he has acquired his throne. His peace of mind is gone: more and more, he becomes obsessed and paranoid (he indeed has lost that little self-knowledge he possessed), seeing Banquo as the main enemy.

To be thus is nothing;  
But to be safely thus.—Our fears in Banquo  
Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature  
Reigns that which would be fear’d.<sup>69</sup>

65 *Macbeth*, act 2. III, ll. 91 – 95.

66 As we shall see later in the play Lady Macbeth is unable to wash off the deed from her hands.

67 *Macbeth*, act 2. III, l. 71.

68 *Macbeth*, act 2. III, ll. 41 – 42.

69 *Macbeth*, act 3. I, ll. 49 – 52.

Even though he is cordially invited to the banquet, Banquo has lost all trust in his king, however, he remains silent: “I fear / Thou played’st most foully for’t. [...] But hush, no more.”<sup>70</sup> Here, the effect of the violence committed can be felt to the full. There is no longer just a lack of words to express the horrific, or the hesitation to speak, but a total loss of communication, resulting in isolation and mutual distrust.<sup>71</sup> These processes seem to reinforce each other. Lady Macbeth also wants peace of mind:

Nought’s had, all’s spent,  
Where our desire is got without content.  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy  
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.<sup>72</sup>

Macbeth’s state of mind is no better:

But let the frame of things disjoint, both the  
worlds suffer,  
Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep  
In the affliction of these terrible dreams  
That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead,  
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,  
Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
In restless ecstasy.<sup>73</sup>

Both Macbeth and his lady lose humanity and humaneness and go under in the maelstrom of the unspeakable: “Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.”<sup>74</sup>

*Violence not only spirals out of control, but its character changes.* We may now speak of fully radical violence that is self-destructive and, as yet, without hope: radical non-tragic violence.

The plot pushes on, ever faster, towards Macbeth’s collapse. Banquo’s murder – commissioned by Macbeth – is executed and therefore the former is absent at the banquet. Macbeth sees Banquo’s ghost at the banqueting table and breaks down: the thanes leave dumbstruck. Many of them flee to England, as we learn from a conversation between Lennox and another lord:

The son of Duncan,  
From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth  
Lives in the English court, [...]

70 *Macbeth*, act 3. I, ll. 2 – 10.

71 Wilson Knights also mentions the isolation that permeates the play as a result of violence. In this case the isolation of Macbeth himself. *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 154.

72 *Macbeth*, act 3. II, ll. 6 – 9.

73 *Macbeth*, act 3. II, ll. 18 – 24.

74 *Macbeth*, act 3. II, l. 56.

thither Macduff  
 Is gone to pray the holy king, [to help us so  
 that] we may again  
 Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,  
 Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,  
 Do faithful homage and receive free honours:  
 All which we pine for now.<sup>75</sup>

Society starts to disintegrate. As already noticed in act 1, there was an odd imbalance in the basic structure of society to begin with.<sup>76</sup> In terms of the dramatic tragic format, this oddity can be translated as the fatal but inescapable human flaw from which all tragedy originates. Now this unnoticed imperfection seems to explode in the faces of those involved: no longer is sleep a matter of course, and fear of bloody knives has taken the place of peace and security. Macbeth casts aside all pretence. Indeed, he – having lost himself – becomes his violence and outrage:

I am in blood  
 Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,  
 Returning were as tedious as go o'er:  
 Strange things I have in head, that will to hand;  
 Which must be acted ere they may be scann'd.  
 [...]  
 My strange and self-abuse  
 Is the initiate fear that wants hard use:  
 We are yet but young in deed.<sup>77</sup>

### 5.11 CRISIS

His initial act of violence, which was no more than his sheer human weakness,<sup>78</sup> has grown into the main trait of his character.<sup>79</sup> Macbeth consults the witches again. He wants to be reassured, which means that he knows nothing for certain anymore. But then, at this point of the play, he doesn't function on the level of knowledge and ratio anymore: he solely acts on impulses and urges of the moment. The quote above shows his violence and

75 *Macbeth*, act 3. VI, ll. 24 – 37.

76 As there was an imbalance in the character of Macbeth. His bloody instructions not only "plague the inventor", but the entirety of the community.

77 *Macbeth*, act 3. IV, ll. 135 – 143.

78 Amounting to no more than excited ambition and pricked coveting as we have seen in act 1.

79 K. Muir, *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence*, p. 155.

aggression. With the witches, he vents his fears and uncertainties: "Thou hast harped my fear aright."<sup>80</sup>

The apparitions address his subconscious level with ambiguous riddles: no man born of woman can harm thee; you will not be slain until Great Birnam Wood comes against Dunsinane Hill. They show him images that he takes to be the assumed future. It unsettles him even more, for he sees Banquo's descendants as kings and rulers. It has to be noted that none of the utterances give hard and fast future facts.<sup>81</sup> In this respect, they have a high Delphic quality, as the interpretations are the beholder's. This means that the explanation of these divinations is nothing but the projection of what is already present in the mind. Of course, the supernatural element remains in the sudden appearance and vanishing of the ladies. Also, their remarks about Birnam wood and a 'man unborn' cannot have lived in Macbeth's mind before these predictions.<sup>82</sup> However, not this strange prescience makes Macbeth tick, but the fact that it touches upon his innermost fears and *angst*.<sup>83</sup> As we saw above, his responses are on this subconscious level. In this sense, and this sense only, the ladies are no more than the incorporation of Macbeth's subliminal self.<sup>84</sup> Therefore we may conclude that Macbeth, even though he consults the three weird sisters, remains a free agent and is responsible for what he does.

### 5.12 BLOODLAW AND REVENGE

After Macduff (Thane of Fife) has fled to England, Macbeth decides to kill Macduff's wife and children to satisfy his insulted anger. What we witness here is an orgiastic (even for these Nordic times) form of bloodlaw or *sippenhaft* revenge.

Let us now sidetrack for a bit and take the reader on a short tour of the diversity of revenge methods.

The eye-for-an-eye tradition is ancient. One of the oldest sources to be found is the bible, where this revenge tradition is voiced in the following texts:

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80 *Macbeth*, Act 4. I, l. 89.

81 As Bradley had noted also, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 289.

82 Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 290.

83 He might as well have ignored them and dismissed them, as Banquo had.

84 As they had been on the previous occasions. In act 1 they function as provokers of his weaknesses: they are strange, fearful, but no existential threats. In act 5 they have grown in stature: they are threatening, darker, fiercer. But, more importantly, Macbeth is now dependent on them to avert his existential fears. But they just – and in this they haven't changed – incite.

Exodus 21, 23 -24,<sup>85</sup> Leviticus 24, 19 – 20,<sup>86</sup> Deuteronomy 19, 21.<sup>87</sup> The New Testament opposes these views: Matthew 5, 38-42.<sup>88</sup>

The *sippenhaft* principle<sup>89</sup> is a tribal Nordic<sup>90</sup> concept; it entailed that members of a family could be fined, punished, or executed for wrongs done by one of their kin; i.e., kin liability or the principle of collective punishment.<sup>91</sup> Both the eye-for-an-eye and the *sippenhaft* method placed great value on 'just' retribution and the regaining of honor.

The *honor revenge*, or *honor killing*. When a person is wronged or feels insulted by a breach of custom (or one of his immediate family has been mistreated thus) a prominent member of the family/tribe may retaliate against the culprit to restore the honor of the disgraced and/or his tribe (this might be classified as a specific form or subdivision of *sippenhaft*)

Psychological revenge: any form of psychological terror or threat as revenge (of which the silent treatment, defamation, or gaslighting are the more common ones). Ever since the use of social media, countless variations can be seen.

Indirect revenge: the voodoo doll method, mostly practiced privately and/or by self-proclaimed practitioners. These last two methods attach great importance to the calming of the mind, the channeling of frustration/aggression and the regaining of self-confidence in the victim.

It is obvious that here we are dealing with the oral tribal custom of blood-law or *sippenhaft*. Having arrived at the English court, Macduff tells Malcolm, Duncan's son, of the desolate state Scotland is in:

[...] Each new morn  
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows  
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds  
As if it felt with Scotland and yell'd out  
Like syllable of dolour.<sup>92</sup>

85 "And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

86 "And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, Tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again."

87 "And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

88 "Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." King James Bible. Translation was commissioned in 1604 and published in 1611.

89 Source: H. Maihold, "Die Sippenhaft: Begründete Zweifel an einem Grundsatz des 'deutschen Rechts'" in *Mediaevistik*, Januar 2005, pp. 99 – 126.

90 Also to be found among other indigenous peoples of earth's continents. Kaius Taori (*Lawyers and Savages*, Routledge, 2015) calls this phenomenon legal primitivism.

91 This type of retribution was revived in Nazi Germany.

92 *Macbeth*, act 4. III, ll. 4 – 8.

Scotland is now in chaos. An army is gathered to ride against Macbeth. The latter will, in act 5, meet his death as a result of this battle. In fact, both the Macbeths will meet their deaths.

"These two characters are fired by one and the same [...] ambition; and to a considerable extent they are alike. The disposition of each is high, proud, and commanding. They are born to rule, if not to reign. [...] They support and love one another. They suffer together. And if, as time goes on, they drift apart a little, they are not vulgar souls, to be alienated and recriminate each other when they experience the fruitlessness of their ambition. They remain to the end tragic, even grand."<sup>93</sup>

Thus reads the excellent and empathic description of Bradley of the couple. He describes them not as petty and vulgar, but true to their status as tragic heroes: larger-than-life. Within this realm of tragic grandness, there is no place for feelings like regret, self-pity, or guilt and – in fact – these are absent in Bradley's acute description. Both Macbeth and his Lady suffer by their violence, but do so in a different way. The lady retreats from the stage as well as from sanity; she slowly but surely fades away into madness. Her acknowledging the truth, her very culpability, breaks her. Her doctor and her lady-in-waiting<sup>94</sup> assess her state and they do so aptly.

Gentlewoman: She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that: heaven knows what she has known.

[...]

Doctor: What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.<sup>95</sup>

In desperation, she tries to reconnect with her husband, reminding him of their violence, committed jointly.

To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate:  
come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's  
done cannot be undone.–To bed, to bed, to bed!<sup>96</sup>

Sadly enough, she is too far away from actual communication and community to see that her attempts are but specters of the mind, emphasizing her deplorable isolation. Macbeth is described by some thanes. He is as isolated as his wife. He is, however, not mad, but mad-like and full of fury. And he has lost all authority:

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93 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 293.

94 Almost functioning as a Greek chorus here.

95 *Macbeth*, act 5, I, ll. 46 – 51.

96 *Macbeth*, act 5, I, ll. 63 – 65.

Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him  
Do call it valiant fury: but, for certain,  
He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause  
Within the belt of rule.

[...]

Those he commands move only in command,  
Nothing in love: now does he feel his title  
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe  
Upon a dwarfish thief.

[...]

His pester'd senses to recoil and start,  
When all that is within him does condemn  
Itself for being there?<sup>97</sup>

### 5.13 THE PROCESS OF THE VIOLENCE PARADIGM COMPLETED: FORCING MACBETH TO RENEWED SELF-DEFINITION – HIS RISING ABOVE SIPPENHAFT

In spite of all his passion and fury, Macbeth understands that he has to do without “love, obedience and troops of friends, [...] but in their stead/ Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath/ Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.”<sup>98</sup> Again, Macbeth realizes that his violence backfires on his position. The only person he still shows concern for is his wife; he asks the doctor to cure her.

He is full of pugnacity and belligerence and prepares for the fight. Even in his tyrannical aggression, he is grandiose. Macbeth hears cries inside the castle, but even midnight shrieks like these, he says, do not frighten him anymore. Then he learns that the shrieks are from his lady's women: his wife is dead. This overwhelming news triggers Macbeth. It shocks him into moments of clarity. Macbeth indeed goes through a monumental and shattering phase, there is no more trading, comparing, or bartering (as in act 1, scene III). Macbeth speaks in lucid absolutes:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!<sup>99</sup>

These sorrowful words of mourning are heartrendingly personal, yet they are not petty, self-piteous, or resentful. This famous soliloquy has become part

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97 *Macbeth*, act 5. II, ll. 13 – 24.

98 *Macbeth*, act 5. III, ll. 27 – 30.

99 *Macbeth*, act 5. III, ll. 18 – 22.

of our cultural heritage because it is universally understood. They touch upon the quintessence of our existence and no human being can remain unmoved by its solemn sadness and magnificence.

In the second half of the speech, he evaluates life as a whole, but the last sentence amounts to an accurate description of his position at this point:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.<sup>100</sup>

These words speak of the futility of the human lifespan, yet they are not in the least relativistic or nihilistic. *There is a fundamental difference between nihilistic despair and tragic despair*. The nihilistic approach to tragic crisis entails a *dissociation* from the situation because it is utterly inescapable, hopeless and temporal anyway. The tragic approach shows a vehement *engagement* with the tragic crisis because it is utterly inescapable, hopeless and temporal, full stop.<sup>101</sup> The tragic process gives the protagonist new acumen on which he acts with an altered attitude. He knows he can, for he has (going through his tragic crisis) affirmed his active share in the development of the crisis. Macbeth commits himself to the situation with the full fury of his character.

If we read the quote carefully, we understand that it emphasizes the temporal aspect of human strife. Set within the limitation of a timeframe, human endeavor comes to naught and becomes undone. This very temporariness is distinctive for the imperfection of the human attempt; time being the grim reaper not only of man but of all his artefacts.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, we are determined by transience and are without escape from it. This is *the* description of the tragic condition of man.

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100 *Macbeth*, act 5. V, ll. 23 – 27.

101 Friedrich Nietzsche addresses nihilism at some length in his Lenzer Heide fragments of 1887 (K.S.A. 12, *Nachlass* 1887 – 1889, 12: 5[71]), ff. In these fragments he uneasily veers between these two types of nihilism: *das ewige Werden* combined with a type of almost Buddhistic disengagement which he sees as a Christian perversion and *das ewige Werden* in combination with *das Ja-sagen* which means an involvement with the situation at hand. I identify the latter type as tragic nihilism. This is another indication for Nietzsche's apperception as tragic thinker. I leave this interesting discussion as it is not the topic at hand.

102 Here is shown that humans as well as their constructs are temporal. Earlier I have already pointed to the fact that our reality constructs (see previous chapter) are all imperfect and it is these imperfections that boomerang back into the face of the inventor and will thus prove to be his undoing. Macbeth pondered upon this in his famous soliloquy at the end of act one: "we but teach/Bloody instructions, which being taught, return/To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice/Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice /To our own lips." Act 1.VII, ll. 8 – 12. This quote sketches the unspeakable as architect of our destruction.

Coinciding with the above tragic process, Macbeth's delusional self-confidence (based on the predictions) diminishes when he hears that the wood is walking towards the castle.<sup>103</sup> As a result of these two processes, his martial bravery and valor on the battlefield, for which he had been lavishly praised in act 1, are rekindled.

I pall in resolution, and begin  
 To doubt the equivocation of the fiend  
 That lies like truth: 'Fear not, till Birnam wood  
 Do come to Dunsinane' and now a wood  
 Comes toward Dunsinane.  
 [...]  
 There is nor flying hence nor tarrying here.  
 I gin to be aweary of the sun,  
 And wish the estate o' the world were now undone.  
 [...]  
 At least we'll die with harness on our back.<sup>104</sup>

He still trusts the second prediction: be wary of one not born of woman:

They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,  
 But, bear-like, I must fight the course. What's he  
 That was not born of woman? Such a one  
 Am I to fear, or none.<sup>105</sup>

When he meets Macduff in battle, he does not want to fight him. The text gives us two reasons: in the first instance, it is because "My soul is too much charged/with blood of thine already."<sup>106</sup> This is not cowardice, but a burden too heavy: fully charged and saturated with the blood on his hands. This is precisely the term the good doctor uses (see above) for Lady Macbeth: "her heart is sorely charged." In the end, their charge was the only thing they still had in common.

When Macbeth learns that Macduff was born through a Caesarian section, he refuses for a second time; he now feels completely betrayed and put down by "these juggling fiends."<sup>107</sup> This time also, no trace of cowardice. It would turn Macbeth into a deplorable and petty Mr. Average – for which there is no proof in the text. In addition, just moments before, he had realized that he would die in armor, which he had seen as an asset, given his situation (and the Nordic tradition). Finally, his innermost fears had, in the end, made him

103 Malcolm had told his troops to camouflage themselves with branches.

104 *Macbeth*, act 5. V, ll. 40 – 50.

105 *Macbeth*, act 5. VII, ll. 1 – 4.

106 *Macbeth*, act 5. X, ll. 5 – 6.

107 *Macbeth*, act 5. X, l. 19.

into a (fiercely) acting tyrant, not into a coward shying away. Therefore, a sudden stroke of cowardice at this point would be an illogical and implausible move for a tragic hero of his stature.

I suggest yet a third reason for his refusal. Macbeth has by now completed his tragic crisis (and therewith the process of the violence paradigm) and he fully acknowledges and affirms the enormity of his actions. It has to be noted that the affirmation of one's actions is in an altogether different register than pleading guilty. The first attitude is in the existential register, the second in the ethical register (in which register Macbeth is not). Macbeth acknowledges his actions, but he doesn't retreat into a role of contrite hangdog. To the contrary, his stature grows. "Here I am, fully conscious of what I have done. So be it." He seems to have risen above the level of guilt, crime and punishment. These are not his concerns: Macbeth lacks ethics; he had only used ethics as the basis of a chance calculus (act 1, III).

Macbeth bravely takes a stand vis-à-vis the course of events. Once this attitude is taken, the realization that the course of events can also be changed and influenced is not far.

This is precisely what Macbeth does: as he realizes he is fully "charged" and can have no more, he will, therefore, allow no more futile violence. Some scholars – following the more conventional interpretation involving crime, guilt and punishment – hold that this word indicates that Macbeth is guilt-ridden. I argue that it means being assaulted to the full. There is no guilt in Macbeth; there are existential worries and grief. His soliloquies do not indicate any sense of guilt; they convey, however, grief, passionate involvement and a weariness about being (and having) assaulted too much. All these are convincing instances for my position that *Macbeth's* essential theme is lies in the existential sphere, not in the ethical.

#### 5.14 THE OUTCOME

Up to that point, his entire course of action had been one of escalating radical violence, leaving destruction and loss in its wake. Moreover, as Macbeth realized, it had all been in vain. He wants it to stop. This tragic process is verbalized in the text by the following paraphrased quotes: act 3. IV, ll. 135 – 143: I am violence; act 5. III ll. 22 – 30: I have lived long enough, all violence has led to nothing and is therefore futile; act 5.V, ll. 47 – 50: I cannot but go on, but, in fact, I want it to stop); act 5.V, l. 48:

"I am weary of the sun." He wishes the [old] estate [read: construct] of the world undone (l. 49). This expresses his desire to halt the old ways of violent action. He knows he will die: "at least we'll die with harness on our back" (l. 51).

At this point, the violence tilts into horizontality: Macbeth realizes he will be a victim in this last violent effort, nevertheless, he engages in it.

It is important to note that horizontality entails a recognition and acknowledgement of the universality and equality of man's existential needs. It is not an equality of the valuation of humans, which is in a different register.

His rethinking of his position and his resolution to act upon it are indicative of his new self-definition: he is able to assess and act. He is a free agent, seasoned by experience and having gone through tragic crisis. This is an important pivotal moment; it heralds the birth of the individual as an independent actor and therewith the embryonic beginning of the English Renaissance.<sup>108</sup>

Macduff,<sup>109</sup> for one, completely misses the crucial change in Macbeth; calls him a coward and provokes him. Macbeth answers him that he will not yield to a young man like Malcolm nor to the rabble. However, he will make a last, ultimate effort.

What do his words mean?

- First of all, he will not be humiliated. I hold that, at this point, he is above violence as well as above humiliation vis-à-vis just anybody.
- Furthermore, he will engage in battle with Macduff.

In other words, concerning Macduff, things are different. Macbeth decides to fight him. He even throws his shield away, after which he encourages Macduff to attack.<sup>110</sup> This means that Macduff fights a defenseless man (a shield<sup>111</sup> being a defensive utensil and not a weapon) and will almost certainly win. Why does Macbeth do this?

The conventional explanation is as follows: it no longer makes any difference what he does, all predictions have come true and he *has* and *is* lost anyway. This would mean that Macbeth is either a defeatist and predestined man or he has surrendered to evil, implying that, with regard to violence, nothing matters anymore. There is no evidence whatsoever in the text for either position.

Yet, he *is* disillusioned: by the prophecies, but also by his own course of action in response to them. He had, at a certain point in act 1, decided to

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108 Shakespeare here, anachronistically, gears forward from 1057 to his own time in 1606 – the year of the conception of the play – being the period of the English Renaissance.

109 Macduff wants revenge.

110 *Macbeth*, act 5. X, ll. 32 – 33. "Before my body / I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff."

This sentence is crucial and – as always in Shakespeare – ambiguous. In the theatrical rendering by the BBC (directed by Jack Gold) Macbeth indeed throws away his shield. In the Trevor Nunn rendition the sentence is left out, awkward and unfitting as it is to throw a shield (to defend oneself with and not to be thrown) and not a lance or spear. Or even a sword (which indeed can be thrust).

111 I refer to a similar situation in *Coriolanus* where Martius prepares for battle before the city of Corioles. Here Shakespeare uses the words: "Now put your shields before your hearts, and fight", act 1, IV, l. 25, which words are in no way prone to equivocal interpretation.

believe the witches because it suited his (and his lady's) plans nicely. Now that he realizes he has been left to his own devices, he bravely and courageously takes his position and acts to attain his new goal.<sup>112</sup>

I argue the following: Macbeth will give it his last, his all, or even more than he has, in a larger-than-life effort to rid himself of his charge.<sup>113</sup> He – in one last huge swoop – attempts to purify both himself and his community from violence. Ending *sippenhaft* and the revenge it entailed.<sup>114</sup>

We witness Macbeth's last fight. Macbeth acknowledges Macduff's earlier loss by allowing the latter to fight him and make it a sure victory for Macduff. Not only allowing, for he almost commands Macduff: "damned be him that first cries: "Hold, enough!"<sup>115</sup> In other words, he doesn't want to be spared. This battle is not fought out of defeatism, nor out of sheer aggression or pathological lust for blood. This battle is fought to stop further bloodshed and violence.<sup>116</sup> At this point, Macbeth's violence can be characterized as the type of violence (nation)states employ to protect their citizens from the harm of the radical non-tragic type: it is violence to stop further bloodshed. The stand Macbeth takes here bears undeniable similarity to the basic prerequisite on which Weber's definition of a state rests: the monopolization of violence by the state to end further violence and protect its citizens. Many steps still have to be taken to come to an ordered nation-state. Macbeth's approach towards the situation is, however, of such importance that it can hardly be overstated: he uses violence to stop further (radical non-tragic) violence.

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112 See act 5, V, l.49: undo the old reality construct.

113 Jan Kott, (*Shakespeare our Contemporary*, p. 94), also has it that Macbeth has had enough. He, however, concludes from this, that Macbeth has grown indifferent and cannot but drag as many lives as possible with him. This is illogical – not in line with Macbeth's tragic stature and not in line with a Macbeth who lets Macduff win a crucial fight. This is not the course of action of a man weary and indifferent.

Kott quotes ll. 1 – 3 of act 5, X to prove Macbeth's bloodlust until the end. It reads: "Why should I play the Roman fool, and die/ On mine own sword? whiles I see lives, the gashes/ Do better upon them." Here Macbeth is comparing again. We have seen him doing this before, making chance-calculi. This, however, is no such chance-calculus but an informed choice, comparing suicide with death on the battlefield. He chooses the battle-field. That the words are not uttered out of sheer bloodlust is proven by his very next utterance where he refuses to fight Macduff. If he had been the murderous, indifferent and nihilistic hellhound Kott takes him for in act 5, Macbeth would have immediately attacked, no matter what.

114 In summary I argue that my argument here is based on two aspects: firstly Macbeth's mental make-up as painted by Shakespeare which makes it unlikely to portray him as a defeatist and secondly linguistic evidence (the fact that Macbeth throws away his shield). While the latter may seem scanty evidence, I counter that 1) that it is a fast-moving and intense tragedy in which 2) Shakespeare manages to evoke a whole world (of associations) in just a few words. This, in fact, is embedded in the trade of a poet and it is the very hallmark of Shakespeare's genius.

115 *Macbeth*, act 5, X, l. 34.

116 Macbeth, being overcharged, will have no more.

In the wake of his finalized tragic crisis, Macbeth has outgrown the level at which scores are settled employing violence.<sup>117</sup> His actual death is of lesser importance than its message. A violent death to stop violence: a truly Shakespearean paradoxical double bind,<sup>118</sup> solved by Macbeth's death.

Violence does actually stop with his being slain. A new social balance is reached when Malcolm is crowned king. He proclaims peace and a newly structured community.

My thanes and kinsmen,  
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland  
In such an honour named. What's more to do,  
Which would be planted newly with the time,  
As calling home our exiled friends abroad  
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny.<sup>119</sup>

Macduff solemnly declares that "Here comes newer comfort. [...] The time is free",<sup>120</sup> suggesting that a new era will begin for this community; the commonwealth made gentler.<sup>121</sup> Malcolm's arrival heralds the end of the old Celtic rule and implicates a new monarchical rule and law.

### 5.15 EVALUATION

A scholar who, in the last century, commented on the tragic process in this play is Walter Kaufmann. In his book *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, he characterizes Shakespeare's work as follows:

Shakespeare's poetry is the poetry of abundance. There is laughter in it and despair, but no resentment or self-pity. [...] He knew the view that man is thrown into the world, abandoned to a life that ends in death, with nothing after that, but he also knew self-sufficiency. He had the strength to face reality without excuses and illusions and did not even seek comfort in the faith in immortality.

These remarks truly describe the majestic and existential quality of *Macbeth*.<sup>122</sup> Elsewhere in the same book,<sup>123</sup> he mentions its numinous quality. That is,

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117 Macduff has not and he attacks in fury.

118 See also: Peter G. Platt: "And that's true too"; *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox*. Neill (in "Shakespeare's tragedies", p. 131 of *The new Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*), also mentions Shakespeare's love for reversals and paradoxes.

119 *Macbeth*, act 5, X, ll. 28 – 33.

120 *Macbeth*, act 5, X, ll. 20 – 22.

121 G. Blakemore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 1355.

122 On p. 3. Both Kaufmann and Jan Kott (*Shakespeare, our Contemporary*, pp. 93, 94) acknowledge the existentialist quality of Shakespeare.

123 *Ibid*, p. 37.

numinous without being Christian, for that Shakespeare is not, as Kaufmann emphatically adds.<sup>124</sup> These words poignantly characterize the major issues in Shakespeare's work. Another quote:

Shakespeare, like the Greeks before him and Nietzsche after him, believed neither in progress nor in original sin; he believed that most men merited contempt and that a very few were head and shoulders above the rest of mankind and that these few, more often than not, meet "with base infection" and do not herald progress. The prerogative of the few is tragedy. The tragic world view involves an ethic of character, not, like the Gospels, an ethic of otherworldly prudence.<sup>125</sup>

I am in agreement with Kaufmann as to the absence of the concept of original sin in Shakespeare. But here my acquiescence with this last quote ends. In my view, Shakespeare nowhere expressed contempt for man, moreover, Shakespeare points towards the possibility of a free choice, which might mean a way to progress. At the most, he described common human failings in a precise and apt way and with a well-nigh unparalleled perception of the human psyche. However, if Shakespeare's texts are approached with fixed prerequisites concerning the description and treatment of the lighthearted, the none-too-bright, or the less fortunate in our society,<sup>126</sup> his precise way of describing them could be characterized as merciless.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, Shakespeare's characterizations of the human act are very realistic; they have in no way lost topicality and are given without judgment; the author's personal opinion on his characters is unknown and irrelevant. However, in later centuries, Shakespeare's characters have undergone several interpretations and appropriations (the above example being a case in point).

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124 He also stresses that what some Shakespeare scholars call the religious (read: Christian) quality of Shakespeare's work is indeed its numinous quality, it is: "an apt word for what is simultaneously majestic, awe inspiring, overpowering and fascinating – that is of the essence Shakespeare's great tragedies and gives them the depth and intensity of the religious experience[...]." Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, p. 37.

125 W. Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, p. 13.

126 These prerequisites consisting of a cautious and favorable treatment of the subjects.

127 Apart from being merciless and contemptuous Shakespeare has been accused of being anti-democratic. These remarks belong within the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> democratic discourse. Democracy as it is functioning nowadays, was unknown in Shakespeare's time and therefore not present to be judged or commented upon. In his plays Shakespeare registers how rulers and dignitaries resist parting with power in favor of commoners. He subsequently registers what opinions these same rulers hold with regard to the general population. Shakespeare shows how the working population interacts and how they behave towards their leaders. As examples suffice it to mention the opening scene from *Julius Caesar* and the protagonist's speeches in *Coriolanus*.

Moreover, as I remark in Shakespeare's biography (see Appendixes): I cannot but note the other more practical reason for refraining from political and/or religious stands in Renaissance England. Every remark on these topics displeasing the monarch, was rewarded by an involuntary stay in the Tower, or worse.

Kaufmann describes the Shakespearean hero as larger-than-life. Yet in Kaufmann, the grandeur seems to come early in *Macbeth*, after which the hero's stature appears to diminish ("meeting with infection" as he does). Kaufmann doesn't mention an increase in tragic stature as a result of the tragic process. Nor does he mention the temporal (albeit precarious) balance as the outcome of the tragic crisis.

### 5.15.1 The violence paradigm, Renan's will and Nietzsche

My previous chapter on tragedy explains that the concept of normativity – and hence of guilt, Christian or otherwise – is introduced in tragedy from the Renaissance onwards, when tragedy became critical<sup>128</sup> and bourgeois.<sup>129</sup> In Shakespeare and especially in *Macbeth*, these concepts are absent. So are original sin, crime and punishment, or any other items from value systems. *Macbeth* is beyond god and beyond good and evil, as the text in several instances evidences. In his ultimate effort, *Macbeth* copes with violence, rising above it (act 5, V), putting an end to it by his death, thereby delivering both himself, Macduff and society. *Macbeth*'s death counterbalances the absurdity of violence and its effects, thus finalizing the process of the violence paradigm, which we see at work here.

When perspectives tilt, protagonist as well as audience realize what violence does; this horrific realization results in an attitudinal change. It not only means the disappearance of old concepts and views (having partly facilitated the violence in the first place), but also a chance for new perspectives to arise. These moments only occur after deep tragic crises.

In this tragedy, Shakespeare shows us possibilities of how these self-cleansing mechanisms within a community might work. He, however, never points towards a perfect construct, just to possibilities for (re)construction. It is, therefore, my opinion that it is not perfection<sup>130</sup> that dictates the success of a certain construct: it is the commitment to it by those involved, the joint effort for this never to happen again (as Malcolm personifies and heralds). A free choice, made by free individuals, best guarantees this commitment; repression never does. This mindset is brought about solely by the effects of the violence paradigm on a group of people. Here also, Shakespeare is centuries ahead of his time.

Only in the 19th century, as voiced by Renan, we find an articulation of this mindset stemming from the same principle: the will of a group of people

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128 I will come back to this thematic in the next chapter from a legal point of view: violence inside and outside the law.

129 In France between 1630 and 1690 we see a revival of tragedy; in Germany between 1790 and 1840.

130 Also because there is no such thing as perfection within whatever construct.

to form a community that is “positive in spirit and warm of heart”. In other words, Renan’s will finds its origin in the mental make-up of those who had just before survived a tragic crisis and the effects of the violence paradigm, as even Renan was forced to recognize: all nations are born from brutality. In these tragic moments of mournful dignity, Renan’s will is most manifest, the will – and I note it is will as much as necessity – to curb radical non-tragic violence in their society. This can only be done if a community is united in will and purpose. The breakdown of the old ways during the tragic crisis has opened new perspectives; it was and is entirely up to man to take this in hand.

Renan renounced religion and culture as essential ingredients for nation forming. Since the tragic and violent process described here (viz. the violence paradigm) is both a-religious and pre-ethical but indispensable and vital for nation forming, by reason it follows that Renan’s stand vis-à-vis both concepts is correct. Therefore I can, now for sure, confirm the query from the introduction above; the logical consequence of the vital role of the violence paradigm in nation forming is another confirmation – from quite a different angle – of Renan’s presumption that both culture and religion play at most a subordinated role in a nation’s genesis.

The violence sparking the change must have appealed to Renan’s antipode, Nietzsche. He interprets violence as testifying to the vital energy necessary for what he calls *das ewige Werden* in the creative processes of constructing society and nation. In terms of violence’s necessity herein, therefore, both thinkers agree, albeit with quite a few nuances: Renan acknowledges it reluctantly and Nietzsche radicalizes it with full conviction.

Moreover, both Renan and Nietzsche are in agreement as to the relationship between religion and nation formation. Hence, we see the second similarity between the two.

Both emphasize the will necessary for nation-building; with Nietzsche, that will<sup>131</sup> is a tragic (Dionysian) energy that destroys as well as rebuilds, with Renan, it is a rational choice, made with a warm heart, as I explained in a previous chapter.

These rather unexpected similarities between the two men come together in the tragic process that Macbeth undergoes. We can therefore say that this Shakespearean tragedy functions as an intermediary in the thought of both academics.

The character of Macbeth is very clearly a Shakespearean tragic hero, however, he may also be interpreted as either Nietzsche’s *freie Geist*,<sup>132</sup> or his *Übermensch*.

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131 Earlier I have pointed out that Nietzsche’s will to power is in a different register altogether from this tragic will to (Dionysian) renewal.

132 Free from any religious dogmatism and normativity. Completely self-reliant. K.S.A. 3, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 347, p. 583.

First of all, some general comparisons. As pointed out above, Macbeth is beyond god, good and evil, which expressions are, of course, emblematic of Nietzschean philosophy. Macbeth acts with a furious energy comparable to Dionysian frenzy. The Nietzschean *Ja-sagen* in the face of eternal-return-of-the-same could be compared with Macbeth's engagement in the last scene of act 5.

There are, however, some difficulties in making the Macbeth/*Übermensch* comparison. The latter is sporadically mentioned throughout Nietzsche's work; only 39 times. He mentions the concept for the first time in his *Nachlass* of 1882, the last three quotations are in *Ecce Homo* (1889, a few days before his mental breakdown). The notion is vaguely defined, while all of Macbeth's actions can be followed at length, including all arguments and reflections. However, strength, energy and detachment from normativity coincide.<sup>133</sup>

Despite this detachment Macbeth cannot be called a *freie Geist* (see definition in note) since he is influenced by the weird sisters, his wife, his hopes and calculations and up to his tragic crisis by his paranoid fury, *angst* and aggression. Yet, he is depicted as a free agent acting with deliberation; by no means predestined. This, of course, is due to the genius Shakespeare, who can depict man affected and impacted by all life's events, influences and leverages and still being capable of deciding and evaluating what strategy to follow. It is, in short, not surprising that Nietzsche became fascinated by Shakespeare's tragic heroes.

Macbeth's final act of suffering lends him dignity and tragic stature. What we witness in the play is the self-cleansing mechanism of a country (through its leader) by the tragic violence paradigm. Ultimately, the result of this scheme is the opening of new perspectives, invitingly suggesting a reconstruction of society; it is the beginning of a new, more gentle rule (last speech of Malcolm: act 5, IX, ll. 27 – 42).<sup>134</sup> In short, we witness the birth of a nation.

### 5.15.2 The practice and theory of succession of kings within the Nordic tradition and in Shakespeare's time

To finalize this chapter and introduce the next, I will now give a concise overview of the succession issue. In *Hamlet*, the plot centers around precisely

133 To be compared with Nietzsche's first remark on the *Mensch*: K.S.A 10, *Nachlass November 1882 – Februar 1883*, 4 [75], p. 134: "Der Übermensch hat aus Überfülle des Lebens jene Erscheinungen der Opiumraucher und den Wahnsinn und den dionysischen Tanz". And his last remarks in K.S.A. 6, *Ecce Homo, Warum ich so gute Bücher schreibe*, § 1, p. 300: "Das Wort „Übermensch“ zur Bezeichnung eines Typus höchster Wohlgerathenheit, im Gegensatz zu „modernen“ Menschen, zu „guten“ Menschen, zu Christen und andren Nihilisten..."; K.S.A. 6, *Ecce Homo, Warum ich ein Schicksal bin*, § 5, p. 370: "So fremd seid ihr dem Grossen mit eurer Seele, dass euch der Übermensch furchtbar sein würde in seiner Güte."

134 As always, a new balance cannot but be of a temporary basis, since all human endeavour is temporary. We will have to learn to cope with this ultimate truth, as tragedy shows us.

this and its crisis unfolds from succession gone wrong (and the ensuing clash in systems). Moreover, as mentioned above, *Hamlet* is set in the same period as *Macbeth*.

The plays themselves were performed for Tudor/Stuart audiences, having the corresponding Tudor/Stuart succession concerns.

Well then: the Northern part of Europe, in the mid-1000s: place and time of Macbeth of Muray. Military prowess and physical strength are much praised and it is therefore no surprise that Macbeth and all of his contemporary warrior-kings are richly blessed with these endowments. I have mentioned some of these fighter-heroes above: William the Conqueror of Normandy, Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark, Norway and England (died in Macbeth's childhood: 963 – 1014) and Harald Hardrada of Norway. Other notorious examples are: the brothers Harold and Tostig Godwinson of Wessex, Harald Grenske of Norway<sup>135</sup> (slightly earlier: 960 – 995), and Harthacnute of Denmark.<sup>136</sup> These commanders/kings were all leaders of warrior societies, as was Macbeth. Even though the populations were 'Christianised', much of the old Nordic customs and culture remained.

Another characteristic was that these societies had – in the second half of the millennium – become increasingly militarized since the fall of the Roman Empire. More often than not, these kings died violently: either in battle, or as a result of war or siege.<sup>137</sup> A tribal king's prospects for longevity were overly bleak; in modern eyes, these aspects certainly would not invite holding such a position. For these chieftains, this was obviously different. First, it was generally seen as an honour to die in battle, especially when the opponent was 'worthy'<sup>138</sup> and second, once they won the battle, their territory would be enlarged by that of the vanquished and their power proportionately greater. Kingship was elective in Nordic cultures. Yet, looking at the above historical warrior/kings, they were more often deposed or killed by their successors.<sup>139</sup> We may conclude that being killed in or through battle was an accepted occupational hazard, with the odd chance that this happened at the hands of your successor. Although this was generally accepted, the killing (of either

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135 He is mentioned because the way he was killed shows resemblance with Duncan's death. Harald was killed while asleep in his family's hall. His foster sister Sigrid Storrada killed him – he had wanted to marry her, because of her rich inheritance.

136 Source: Snorri Sturluson in the Olav Trygvasons saga. [https://nbl.snl.no/Harald\\_Grenske](https://nbl.snl.no/Harald_Grenske) and <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Heimskringla>

137 Of those mentioned above, only Sweyn Forkbeard's death is unknown. Sweyn's honour (that remarkable notion that it was honourable to be killed by a worthy opponent) was saved by saga: it was whispered that St. Edmund himself rose from his grave to stab Sweyn in his sleep. The other kings died violently; Harald Grenske by kin: see previous note.

138 In general this worthiness consisted of the above mentioned physical and military accomplishments.

139 For instance Sweyn Forkbeard who combatted and deposed his father.

a relative or an acquaintance) within the community itself was barely accepted.<sup>140</sup> It was reprehensible, even in Macbeth's day.

While being praised within their societies (especially by their skalds<sup>141</sup>) for their steadfastness of rule and for the way they were able to keep their territories safe from raids and invasions, they were feared and hated by their enemies. Only when the former characteristics failed or faded, or their blood-thirsty barbarism extended to their people or allies, were they greeted with disdain and banishment. Now, how would the character of Macbeth be judged within such a society? Most probably, his initial act of assassinating Duncan would not have raised many eyebrows in Northern Scotland. After all (and quite apart from the fact that the community was used to this custom) Duncan was the initial offender because kingship was elective and Malcolm was chosen by his father, not elected by his peers.

The same offence can be pinpointed in *Hamlet* (since Claudius, by killing his brother, usurps the throne instead of being elected). This (start of a new) hereditary method, moreover implemented without prior approval or even consultation of peers, could well have been seen as an infringement on traditional law and therefore an affront to which Macbeth reacted. In my mind, it is plausible that not the killing itself, but the dishonourable way of doing it (while Duncan was asleep and lying about the cause of death afterwards) might have provoked repulsion. If the character Macbeth had stopped at this, he might have reigned steadily for the ensuing years, as did the historical Macbeth after he killed his predecessor.<sup>142</sup> However, our Macbeth acts otherwise: Duncan's death is the commencement of a killing spree throughout the realm.

The best comparison to be made here is with Tostig, Harold Godwinson's<sup>143</sup> brother. His malice and atrocities against members of the court and his population got him expelled from England. He fled to Flanders, but the Flemish also got rid of him after having witnessed his savagery. Upon that, he turned against his brother and was eventually killed in the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. People committing Tostig's type of crime were called 'the berserkers':<sup>144</sup> those who go berserk, who fly into a maniacal rage, become infuriated or uncontrollably irate.<sup>145</sup>

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140 The king was excluded from this rule; being killed by either kin or enemy was – as said – his occupational hazard.

141 Nordic court poet writing epic poetry about their heroes. Some Viking kings were accomplished skalds themselves as e.g. Harold Hardrada.

142 See introduction of this chapter.

143 Harold of Wessex.

144 Irrationally mad as a bear.

145 This behaviour could be the result of the working oneself into a frenzy, just before the battle.

It could also be a manifestation of psychosis. Whatever the cause, the result was a company of daredevil and courageous warriors throwing themselves into battle.

What befell the uncanny Tostig, happened in *Macbeth*, when the play progresses and Macbeth's biography of violence unfolds. Macbeth, like Tostig, turned against his people. While his initial killing most probably would have been accepted, his subsequent behaviour most certainly would not. As Tostig was judged, so Macbeth would have been, by banishment and if that proved impossible, by being killed (in action), which, happened to Macbeth.

Now, how would Macbeth be evaluated in Shakespeare's time, had he lived then? The then-current academic debate was on when it was permitted to oust a king, either by deposition or assassination;<sup>146</sup> it was allowed if the king had come to power illegitimately, was obviously mad, bad, or brutal beyond reason.<sup>147</sup> Since Duncan was none of these things overtly, he certainly did not fit the bill. Therefore, and theoretically speaking,<sup>148</sup> it would have been a punishable crime. Yet, it was more a matter of power, influence and support (among nobility and/or the military) whether it would have been penalized as such: see the last note. Since Macbeth is, in the initial stage of act 1, a war hero and well able to lead men, the odds are that, at that point in his career, he might be able to remove/kill a king, suppress an uprising and rule steadily. Later on, he becomes the irate tyrant Shakespeare describes so colourfully, which brings us to a discussion of the deposition of tyrants.

### What is a tyrant?

In antiquity, the term referred to a ruler who came to power by usurpation, without constitutional warrant. In the works of Plato, Aristotle [...] and others [...], the term came to describe any evil ruler, anyone who governed by whim for personal gain instead of by law for the general welfare. Deriving mainly from Aristotle, long lists [...] itemize the distinctive characteristics of tyrants and kings and contrasted their styles of government. Medieval and Renaissance theorists [...] officially recognized both the earlier and later conceptions of tyrants, declaring that a man could prove himself a tyrant in entrance [...] or in execution. [...] By Shakespeare's

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146 Also see my discussion of Miola in the *Julius Caesar* chapter.

147 One of the academic debates was on how to define illegitimate. This in itself could be a slippery and dangerous debate, the degree of jeopardy heavily depending on the 'legitimacy' of the then sovereign. See note below.

148 Reality, as we know, was different. After Henry VIII's death his son, young Edward, came to the throne. In actual fact, since he was only 9 years old, the powerful court factions ruled through him. When he died 7 years later, he left the country torn by opposing parties. He was succeeded by Lady Jane Grey, pushed on the throne by the Duke of Northumberland; she ruled for only 9 days. She and most of her sympathizers were killed by supporters of Mary Tudor (yes, the bloody one). The latter reigned 5 years, steeping the country in misery and bloodshed. When she died in 1558 she was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth I. In this troubled period of various rule, it was not so much legislation and even less academic debate that determined the rules of succession, but rather the power and influence of the diverse court factions. I also bring to memory the many plots and uprisings that, at times, thwarted the reign of Elizabeth I.

day, then, the term 'tyrant' could apply to any usurper of power by force as well as to any lawful ruler who governed viciously.<sup>149</sup>

Looking at this description and the fact that Macbeth murdered Duncan, I cannot help but conclude that Shakespeare's contemporaries (as in: fellow nobles and court parties) would have approached Macbeth, once on the throne, with great suspicion, carefully circumnavigating him. They most probably would have sounded how many (hidden) supporters were at his beck and call and plotted against him – cases in point being the Throckmorton plot (an attempt to oust Elisabeth I in favour of Mary, Queen of Scots) and the unsuccessful rebellion of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (during which Essex' followers asked The Globe theatre to perform Shakespeare's play *Richard II*, the deposition scene included).

Luckily for both Macbeth and Hamlet, these were not yet their concerns. Let us, therefore, proceed and see all that befell Hamlet in the next tragedy. In Macbeth, we have witnessed the end of old tribal (Celtic) law and *sippenhaft*. We now enter the era of the fledgling nation under monarchical law.

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149 Robert S. Miola, "Julius Caesar Challenges the Renaissance Debate on Tyrannicide", in *Social Issues in Literature*, p. 96. Also partly quoted in my chapter on *Julius Caesar*.



## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

First of all, a few words about the manuscript and the content of the play, as the publishing history of *Hamlet* has caused difficulties among scholars. In 1603, a “bad quarto” (Q1) was published. In 1604/05, an apparently “good quarto” followed (Q2). The first folio (F) appeared in 1623. Below, I will follow the conflated text of the Oxford Shakespeare, which indicates the additions and omissions from the three editions.

In his book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Jan Kott mentions the fact that the bibliography of dissertations and studies devoted to *Hamlet* is twice the size of Warsaw’s telephone directory.<sup>1</sup> Further down in his discussion, the same author asserts that the issues addressed in *Hamlet* are countless.

There is politics, force opposed to morality; there is discussion of the divergence between theory and practice, of the ultimate purpose of life; there is tragedy of love, as well as family drama; political, eschatological and metaphysical problems are considered. There is everything you want, including deep psychological analysis, a bloody story, a duel, and general slaughter. One can select at will.<sup>2</sup>

All the aspects mentioned in this quote are encompassed within the tragic process that *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, goes through. The spectator cannot help but be moved, witnessing it. The play attacks the viewer, grabbing him by the throat. And it has done so throughout the centuries, and it still does, even to postmodern man. This characteristic, this streak of genius, makes for the universality of *Hamlet*.

In this colorful landscape of thematics I will limit myself (with the utmost prudence and modesty) to the theme at hand: the development of a nation through tragic crisis and the corresponding patterns of violence; full well knowing that, looking at the amount of research and inquiry into the brilliance of *Hamlet*, it will be a next to impossible task to jot down something not-as-yet-observed about this tragedy. This, certainly, is not my aim. I will try to come as close as possible to the quintessence of the *Hamletian* tragic violence.

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1 J. Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, p. 57.

2 Ibid, p. 59.

*Hamlet* starts where *Macbeth* leaves off. In *Macbeth*, we saw the desire to form a unity/embryonic nation by abolishing the legal primitivism of *sippenhaft* revenge. In this chapter, I argue that the *Hamletian* theme revolves not around revenge, but around the building of a nation-state out of a tribal community. *Hamlet* marks the transition from tribal law to monarchical law, including a first hint at a separation of powers. The types of violence we see in *Hamlet* evolve parallel to this; moreover, the play takes a hinge position between *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. Like in the other tragedies discussed, *Hamlet's* violence paradigm too is pre-ethical and a-religious, as will be shown in this chapter.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I show that Renan's will is not the only resultant of the tragic crisis; also values such as those discussed by him ensue from the same tragic crisis.

There is no single system clash in *Hamlet*. It is a cascade of system clashes that, through enormous leaps in time, tumble over each other. Herewith, Shakespeare stretches the tension within the play to the limit.

Firstly, Claudius breaks with the old Nordic elective system and murders his brother. This, however, is just a relapse of another older custom of succession violence. Next we see him inefficiently using the new form of diplomacy and negotiation. He completely loses his bearing as to governance and diplomacy. Polonius is the caricature of a diplomat and Lord Chancellor.

I will explain that the violence used by Hamlet<sup>3</sup> – he kills not only Polonius, but also Guildenstern and Rosencrantz; his last murder being that of Claudius – is justified and I will assess him along the lines of the young and developing craft of the statesman/politician/courtier; concluding that he is, in fact, far better than his father.

Finally, in Act 5, we see Hamlet casting his vote for a new monarch, stipulating in his will a separation of governmental duties and responsibilities: a first hint at a separation of powers. The entire play exudes an uneasy atmosphere of transition between Nordic/Anglo Norman chieftainship and Tudor/Stuart leadership.

## 6.2 DISCUSSION OF HAMLET: THE SETTING OF THE SCENE

The play opens with a scene on the battlements of Castle Elsinore. Two guards had seen a ghost and now Horatio, Hamlet's friend and fellow student from Wittenberg, has come to see for himself. The ghost appears again; it strikingly resembles Hamlet's father (who died a few weeks earlier), having the same

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3 In order to be able to enjoy the plot of this beautiful tragedy to the full, I gladly refer to the summary in the Appendices.

“martial stalk”<sup>4</sup> and battle array he had. Horatio tries to speak with the apparition, but it refuses to talk.

From the dialogue between the two guards, we learn that, not long ago, there had been two conflicts (a war against Norway and an armed skirmish against Poland<sup>5</sup>) in which the “warlike form”<sup>6</sup> of Hamlet Sr. had taken part, winning both. We also learn that Hamlet Sr. was provoked by Norway to start the war,<sup>7</sup> but, against all odds, apparently, Danish Hamlet Sr. had won and claimed all land from the slain Norwegian king. The conflict between Poland and Denmark<sup>8</sup> was also won.<sup>9</sup> Hamlet Sr. is described as having been of a belligerent disposition and successful in protecting his country against aggressors (as befitting a true tribal warrior – Hamlet Sr., in this sense, incorporated the last echoes of old lore). The country is preparing for war again, as is said during the same conversation: the Norwegians want to win back their former territory, taken by the late Danish king. But, Denmark having no longer the prowess of a good fighter and leader, Horatio fears the worst for the Danish lands. He compares the precarious state it is in with Rome’s hazardous situation just before Julius Caesar was killed.<sup>10</sup> Why is it that Horatio makes this comparison? He explains: there is something fundamentally amiss<sup>11</sup> with the country. And that something could be compared with the perilous state Rome was in. This is an important remark linking the thematic of this tragedy with that of our next play *Julius Caesar*. Moreover, this is but the first reference in this play to *Julius Caesar*; more are to follow. It is another indication that *Hamlet* is a transitory play between two worlds: the world of Macbeth and the world of Rome.

After having seen the ghost, Horatio again expresses his fears: “This bodes some strange eruption to our state.”<sup>12</sup> Horatio’s comment is striking for two reasons. Firstly, Horatio defines himself as a Dane (*our* state) or at least he considers himself to be so; and secondly, he mentions the word *state* instead

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4 *Hamlet*, act 1. I, l. 65.

5 *Hamlet*, act 1. I, l. 66.

6 *Hamlet*, act 1. I, l. 45.

7 *Hamlet*, act 1. I, l. 64.

8 Some scholars hold that it was Hamlet Sr. that initiated these wars because of lines 112 – 114 (act 1, I): “Well may it sort that this portentous figure,/Comes armed through our watch so like the King/That was and is the question of these wars.” However, the war against Norway was most certainly initiated by that country (ll. 85 – 90). Moreover line 114, act 1, I, could refer to Hamlet being the cause of the war, as well as to his armour being a sure sign of the danger of the (impending) war. (Source: *Hamlet*, Arden Edition, ed., Harold Jenkins, p. 173). I would opt for the second interpretation, since it is in accordance with the rest of the text (and the character and actions of (the ghost) Hamlet Sr.).

9 *Hamlet*, act 1. I, l. 65. We do not know for sure who started this conflict, but since it was Hamlet Sr. that frowned at the Poles it must have been Poland, since frowning is mostly done in reaction to something.

10 *Hamlet*, act 1. I, ll. 115 – 127.

11 Apart from the fact that Hamlet Sr. is no longer there to protect Denmark.

12 *Hamlet*, act 1. I, l. 68.

of *nation, common weal*, or simply Denmark. I will come back to this issue below. For now, let us note that he means the state of the nation at this point in time: it has lost its martial mainstay and there is some fundamental evil, as yet unnamed and frightening, plaguing the country. In the late king's stead, a no-good king<sup>13</sup> now reigns. And there is, of course, the grieving and depressed prince, being not a bit like his successful father. The queen and mother is unstable and weak ("frailty, thy name is woman", act 1.II, l. 146): shortly after her first husband's death, she had, opportunistically,<sup>14</sup> married Claudius and she is therefore no support to her son.

In the previous chapter, I pointed out that a marriage between the victor of a battle and the wife of his victim (mostly the previous tribal leader) was quite customary. From this perspective, Hamlet's reaction to his mother's marriage should be considered out of the ordinary.

Here, Shakespeare evokes the tension of transition between old and new by playing havoc with the expected responses in Hamlet. Shakespeare, with equal ease and in the same swoop, not only provokes a tension between the old northern/Danish customs and the dawning new era (as represented by Hamlet and his studies in Wittenberg), but also between Nordic- and his own time, because Shakespeare indicates the marriage as incestuous and "A little month" after Hamlet Sr.'s death (Act I, 2, l 147.). And indeed, under the strict conditions of the Levirate marriage,<sup>15</sup> the English law of Shakespeare's time would have considered the marriage incestuous, as Posner remarks.<sup>16</sup> However, Hamlet is set centuries earlier – a fact with which, actually, Posner concurs. Yet, he does not conclude that, therefore, the marriage would have been quite ordinary. In this sense, *Hamlet* is a multi-transitional play. As we have seen in the previous chapter, wrenching and reversing imagery, times and a period's particulars are all in the Shakespearean game.

What depresses Hamlet most, though, is not his father's death or his mother's remarriage to a hated uncle, but the fact that he should be silent about this – in his eyes – outrageous fact.

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13 According to Hamlet Jr. At that point in time Hamlet does not as yet know that Claudius is a usurper that killed the lawful king.

14 Gertrude is depicted by Shakespeare as an uninfluential woman busying herself with trivialities, a lightweight much like Ophelia. Not a bit like Portia and Calpurnia in *Julius Caesar*.

15 "The conflict between Prince Hamlet and Claudius can be recast as a scriptural conflict between the incest taboo of Leviticus 18, which forbids marriage to a sister-in-law, and the rule of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25, which commands a brother to marry his deceased brother's widow [these contradictory rulings would have, at best, provoked no small amount of tension]. Of relevance here is Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his brother Prince Arthur, in order to marry Ann Boleyn, mother of Elizabeth I." Source: Jason P. Rosenblatt, "Hamlet, Henry, *Epicoene*, and *Hebraica*: Marriage Questions", p. 14.

16 Source: Posner, Law & Literature, note 45, p. 105.

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of the world!  
[...]  
It is not nor it cannot come to good:  
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.<sup>17</sup>

Hamlet compares his late father and Claudius to Hyperion<sup>18</sup> and a satyr, respectively (act 1.II, l. 140). He adds: “My father’s brother, but no more like my father/Than I to Hercules.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, Hamlet doesn’t deem himself courageous, indeed, he feels himself to be quite the opposite of his father, making an unfavorable comparison altogether.

### 6.3 KING CLAUDIUS

Meanwhile, Claudius quickly takes possession of his position and, although he ought to grieve, he admits, he wants to combine the grieving with business as life goes on, doesn’t it, and moreover, we should think of ourselves, shouldn’t we. Ah yes, and while we’re at it, we might as well marry the grieving widow (act 1, II, ll. 1 – 20). Equally effortlessly, Claudius takes the affairs of the country in hand, resolutely reorganizing them.<sup>20</sup> He dispatches two messengers to Norway<sup>21</sup> to “suppress his [young Fortinbras’s] gait”<sup>22</sup> towards war with Denmark. In fact, he sends them not to young Fortinbras, but to the latter’s bedridden uncle, who is officially the king of Norway, but only in name. His young nephew is in charge, as we learn. Claudius asks the old king to dissuade his nephew from war.<sup>23</sup>

At first sight, Claudius seems to be an efficient and successful king: he tries to prevent a war with Norway and – in his next conversation – tries to prevent Hamlet from running amok. Yet, from his entrance speech on, it becomes crystal clear what kind of person the new king of Denmark is: a

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17 Hamlet, act 1. II, ll. 133 – 159.

18 Greek mythology: the Titan of the Sun.

19 Greek mythology: one the bravest heroes. Hamlet, act 1. II, ll. 152 – 153.

20 Yet Claudius knows but too well his status and performance can never bear fruit, for they are based on usurpation and murder: fratricide no less. “Oh, my offence is rank! It smells to heaven./ It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t,/ A brother’s murder. Pray can I not./ Though inclination be as sharp as will,/ My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,/ And like a man to double business bound/ I stand in pause where I shall first begin,/ And both neglect.” Act 3, II, ll 36 – 43. The personal mark and seal that he leaves on the kingdom is perfidious: and he is well aware of it.

21 Here again, a disruption of times and customs may be perceived. In Nordic times political and territorial issues were usually not solved by diplomacy but by the axe.

22 Hamlet, act 1, II, l. 31.

23 Later in the play we learn that this is Claudius’ characteristic cause of action: instead of acting himself, he gets others to do it for him, manipulating them (the King of England, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes).

hustler and deal-broker, hiding behind cheerful briskness and manipulation. Hamlet is right to intuitively dislike his uncle and be concerned. Moreover, he is not the only one: Marcellus, the guard, had sensed: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." (act 1, III, l. 67). As we saw above, Horatio had voiced concerns of the same nature. These premonitions hang uneasily above the scene, it is still to be seen whether the rotten reek rises uniquely from Claudius; perhaps there is more.

Claudius is depicted here as a hybrid personality between old Nordic custom (succession and marriage) and the "newfangled" ways. The killing of his brother follows the old Nordic manner of succession violence, stemming from the oral tribal tradition. Therefore, as we have seen in Macbeth, we cannot classify that violence under a codified legal system since there is no system for classification. This violence arises from legal primitivism, similar to Macbeth's. Paradoxically, he employs the relatively new tool of Renaissance diplomacy. It is clear that he is inexperienced in this role: his diplomatic mission is misdirected (the wrong power source is addressed), yet he attempts to organize the affairs of state rationally. Because he is able to manage this mission, it becomes evident that—as in Macbeth—justice and the country's protection rest in his hands, which again indicates a tribal concentration of power.

The king is not averse to favoritism: when Laertes wants to ask him a favor, Claudius' response is upfront and resolute. He will grant Laertes anything because his father is as close to the throne as hand is to heart, as he asserts (Act 1: II, ll. 42 – 47). We meet the same warm-hearted courteous and gentlemanly behavior in the next chapter in Julius Caesar when the latter entertains his friends at home. As it will turn out, both gentlemen playact to hide their behavioral and character issues in which they abound.

After having concluded these affairs, Claudius speaks to Hamlet, trying to allay his grief. Hamlet reacts surprisingly accurately and is quick-witted for someone submerged in mourning:

Claudius: But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,  
Hamlet: A little more than kin, and less than kind.<sup>24</sup>

#### 6.4 WHO IS HAMLET; WHAT IS HE UP AGAINST

As we learnt previously, Hamlet is depressed and grieving; angry and lonely (*melancholy* as Renaissance physicians would call Hamlet's *humour*), but as yet, not going through a tragic process. His emotional isolation is caused by:

- The loss of the three people he loves and trusts most: his father is dead, his mother is emotionally absent and Ophelia (his sweetheart) is obedient

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24 *Hamlet*, act 1, II, ll. 64 – 65.

to her father who forbids her to consort with a member of the royal family, as he is not altogether in her league (act 1, III, ll. 115 – 135). Apart from Horatio, there is no one he can truly trust (see note with quote below).

- He feels ineffective and powerless, as he is the opposite of his warlike father.
- Hamlet shrouds himself in a defensive aura of witticisms.<sup>25</sup> He displays this type of quick reply (philosophically tinted or otherwise incisive) when he wants to avoid a conversation about what truly moves him.<sup>26</sup>

He, however, has a sharp and sensitive perception of the reality surrounding him, and he is capable of analyzing and assessing it. When he is brought to the battlements by Horatio (hoping to meet the ghost), Hamlet expounds on the present state of affairs in Denmark. Hamlet feels he lives in a barbaric culture, deprived of even the most basic forms of civilization:

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25 In contrast to e.g. Macbeth, Hamlet's isolation doesn't consist of a lack of meaningful words. Words abound in his vocabulary; however they are used to emphasize his desolation and the passionate perturbations of his mind. He uses words to isolate himself.

26 Throughout the play his quick wit in his communications with others is pervasive (aggressive almost) and very successful in avoiding personal and intimate exchanges. A second strategy to evade this is acting the fool.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, reporting Hamlet's behavior to King Claudius, describe it as follows:

Rosencrantz: He does confess he feels himself distracted;  
But from what cause he will by no means speak.  
Guildenstern: Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,  
But, with a crafty madness, keeps aloof,  
When we would bring him on to some confession  
Of his true state. Act 3, I, ll5 – 12.

Hamlet even makes Horatio swear not to give him away when he acts "strange". He, however, never takes Horatio into his confidence as to what is going on, thus alienating him.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come;  
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,  
[...]  
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on,  
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,  
With arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake,  
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,  
[...]  
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note  
That you know aught of me: [...] Swear. Act 1, V, ll.168 – 182.

This heavy-headed revel<sup>27</sup> east and west  
 Makes us traduced and tax'd of other nations:  
 They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase  
 Soil our addition; and indeed it takes  
 From our achievements, though perform'd at height,  
 The pith and marrow of our attribute.  
 So, oft it chances in particular men,  
 That for some vicious mole of nature in them,  
 As, in their birth--wherein they are not guilty,  
 Since nature cannot choose his origin--  
 By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,  
 Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,  
 Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens  
 The form of plausible manners, that these men,  
 Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,  
 Being nature's livery, or fortune's star,--  
 Their virtues else--be they as pure as grace,  
 As infinite as man may undergo--  
 Shall in the general censure take corruption  
 From that particular fault: the dram of eale  
 Doth all the noble substance of a doubt  
 To his own scandal.<sup>28</sup>

## 6.5 THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN DENMARK

Colorfully, Hamlet describes the rottenness of his fellow countrymen. He abhors their degenerate state; the stench oozes from every word Hamlet spits out; it is not only Claudius, but his entire entourage and, for that matter, all of Denmark he emphasizes; their bad habits corrupting all good they may have: "their virtues else shall in the general censure take corruption from that particular fault" (ll. 33 – 35). Claudius, the court and the entire nation act like maladjusted and mentally disabled animals, as Hamlet describes it.

Are the communities of Macbeth and Hamlet similar? At first sight, the above quote could have been a Macbethian one, after a battle won: this being the traditional behavior of carousing (Viking) warriors. Yet there is a difference in the respective murky hues of darkness. *Macbeth* exudes the atmosphere of unadulterated tribal culture. In *Hamlet*, the darkness is otherwise defined. Instinctively, he correlates the undefined rot to the old tribal/warrior way

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27 Hamlet is referring to the splurging drinking-bouts customary at the Danish court.

28 *Hamlet*, act 1.IV, ll. 19 – 41. From This..... up to and including scandal: In Q2; not in Q1 and F.

From line 25 onwards (So oft it chances.... etc.) this quote gives us a perfect example of the tragic philosophy of life, which coincides, as we can see here, with Hamlet's view of life. In other words, Hamlet is susceptible to the tragic.

of acting; by now, it sits uneasily with just about everyone witnessing it. Shakespeare sketches the first ominous signs of what is to happen when a community no longer sustains and accepts the violence of an autocratic tribal leader. However, for now, we may conclude that this society uneasily veers between elective succession, successional violence and the repugnance this evokes. As yet, there is no overt system clash and no revenge problematics.

I will come back to the former theme below and as to the latter, we are immediately served, for in the next scene, the ghost appears and it talks to Hamlet. It gives him three assignments:

- He should avenge his father (act 1, V, l. 8),
- He may not let his vengeance turn against his mother (act 1, l. 86)<sup>29</sup>
- He is asked to remember his father (act 1, V, l. 91).

The vengeance theme deserves some elaboration. Because of the ghost's first request, many critics have seen *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy proper, as, in fact, the Ur-*Hamlet* (now lost) by Thomas Kyd had been.<sup>30</sup> Shakespeare had allegedly taken the plot of this play and reworked it into *Hamlet*.<sup>31</sup> Below, I will try to argue that *Hamlet* goes far beyond the vengeance theme. I hold that it is not a revenge play at all. However, at this stage it seems to be one, however, the reader is advised to observe Hamlet and his reaction.

#### 6.6 HAMLET'S REACTION TO HIS ASSIGNMENTS

Hamlet immediately understands the enormity of the tasks he is burdened with. He hears that his late father has been vilely murdered by Claudius, who is, as Hamlet understands now, not only a hustler, but also a usurper.

Besides fratricide, it turns out to be regicide as well.<sup>32</sup> With this scene, Shakespeare gives us a glimpse of his age. In Renaissance Europe, regicide is not just the killing of an individual. It has wider implications. The king is

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29 The quote reads as follows: "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive/Against thy mother aught." Some critics hold that the phrase "Taint not thy mind" should be read as a warning not to sin and be damned. This would make Hamlet a play with a Christian message. I read the quote as two coordinative conjunctions; the conditions being complementary and of the same content.

30 Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's play*, p. 158.

31 Another source, often mentioned, is the work of Saxo Grammaticus in his account of the Danish history, where we find a similar story (source: Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's play*, p. 159).

32 Again culture and custom are, anachronistically, those of Shakespeare's time.

the embodiment of the ordered state; the head of a god-given and ordained hierarchy.<sup>33</sup> Kantorowicz.<sup>34</sup>

[T]he legal jargon of the ‘two Bodies’ scarcely belonged to the arcana of the legal guild alone. That the king ‘is a Corporation in himself that liveth ever,’ was a commonplace found in a simple dictionary of legal terms.<sup>35</sup>

It was found in literature as Kantorowicz notes, giving an abundance of examples. A notable one is the following: “Francis Bacon suggested for the crowns of England and Scotland, united in James I, the name of ‘Great Britain’ as an expression of the ‘perfect union of bodies, politic as well as natural.’”<sup>36</sup>

The implications for Hamlet are enormous. If he kills the present king, he kills not only a usurper, but also the (seemingly) stabilized<sup>37</sup> community. In the previous chapter we have seen that in Shakespeare’s day the term ‘tyrant’ could apply to any usurper of power by force as well as to any lawful ruler who governed viciously.<sup>38</sup> For regicide to be just and accepted, the body politic (viz.: it’s king) must be most evidently sick. Hamlet himself had – just before – analyzed the sickness and unstableness of that same body politic. This would mean that he is justified in killing the usurper, but is he really? And how can he be sure of his diagnosis?

I argue that Hamlet is very much aware of all the implications of what the ghost asks of him. In avenging his father’s death, he should restore the country of Denmark to health. Since king and country are of the same body, Shakespeare seems to say, the very death of Hamlet Sr. means the destabilization of the entire country. It is in great peril. The late king’s life’s work had been the protection of Denmark against external enemies and the extension of the country’s territory.<sup>39</sup> His brother, the deal broker Claudius, could very well nullify this by sending his two envoys to Norway<sup>40</sup> and there

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33 The fact that kings and nobles were seen as embodiment of their territory is shown by the fact that they often were addressed by their territory’s name. E.g.: Claudius, asking about the diplomat’s negotiations with Fortinbras, the Norwegian king: “Welcome, my good friends, /Say, Valtemand, what from our brother Norway?” act 2, II, ll. 58 – 59.

34 Ernst Kantorowicz (1895 – 1963): a German (Prussian) historian of Jewish descent, specializing in mediaeval political and intellectual history on which subjects he wrote a number of thorough and well-received works. In 1938 he fled Germany to pursue his career in the US.

35 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, p. 24.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

37 However, from Shakespeare’s biography (see Appendices) we know that from the “natural signs” the average Renaissance audience could “read” the state of the country and since Horatio had duly summed up all occurrences in his comparison with Rome, they already knew that these manifestations boded otherwise.

38 Previous chapter: Robert S. Miola, “Julius Caesar Challenges the Renaissance Debate on Tyrannicide”, in *Social Issues in Literature*, p. 95/96.

39 Extremely important and positively valued qualities for a Renaissance king.

40 The outcome of the deal with Norway is as yet uncertain.

was no telling what he would do next.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the elder Hamlet asks his son to secure his realm. His third request to be remembered reinforces this:

Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.<sup>42</sup>

These words, spoken in sadness and sorrow by one once so powerful, are both desperate and commanding, with an intensity only the totally disenfranchised can muster. The once king tries to exorcise his powerlessness with this phrase – an incantation almost: keep me alive in your thoughts, but also keep my work alive and keep my realm well.

Considering the circumstances, this is the heftiest task. Apart from nudging the body politic to health, Hamlet is asked to keep in mind and endorse his father's accomplishments vis-à-vis the nation: he has to keep a keen eye on Denmark's (strategic) position and protect the country against invaders as his father had done (old Nordic style). Since Hamlet is – as we have seen – not at all like his warlike father and is, moreover, versed in the ideas of the Renaissance, this means that Hamlet has to change his character and his bearing considerably. It remains to be seen whether he can accomplish this inhumanly difficult task.

## 6.7 THE TASK BEGINS

Hamlet knows but too well he has to accomplish this alone. As he is also grieving, depressed, angry and of a philosophical disposition, this burden cannot but result in a vast panorama of nearly insurmountables, paradoxical by nature. Hamlet's tragic process commences. Furthermore, to add even more to his uncertainties and anxieties, he doubts the credibility of the ghost. To sum up Hamlet's plight:

- Hamlet is shaken out of his comfort zone (being not so comfortable to begin with) and burdened with an unfeasible task: called upon to avenge his father and therewith restore society to health. What is more, he has to maintain Denmark's military position – Nordic style.
- This is too colossal an order for a single person, but especially for the studious Hamlet. The command makes him feel both more ineffective and alone. Hamlet is asked to be like his father.
- It is impracticable for yet another reason: Hamlet is not a free agent and never will be. This is expressed by Laertes, explaining Hamlet's social

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41 In fact, he tried to persuade the king of England to murder Hamlet; when this did not work out, Laertes was exploited.

42 *Hamlet*, act 1, V, l. 91.

status<sup>43</sup> to his sister Ophelia: “his will is not his own/ For he himself is subject to his birth. [...] for on his choice depends / the sanity and health of the whole state.”<sup>44</sup> Laertes can barely sound the profundity of his words. They are prophetic: Hamlet is imprisoned by his status, and on him rests “the sanity and health of the whole state.”

- He feels surrounded by hypocrites and “fishmongers,”<sup>45</sup> of whom he doesn’t trust a single person. Moreover, he doesn’t know for sure that the ghost is trustworthy.<sup>46</sup> The only person who might help him is Horatio. However, Hamlet made him pledge a vow: not to be surprised at his future behavior. At the same time, Hamlet denies him precise insight into the motivation of this behavior, thus alienating his best friend.
- Indeed, his only weapon in this lonely struggle is his wit. This is, however, a two-edged sword. A quick wit and a ditto mind can also turn against the holder of such features.<sup>47</sup>

there is nothing  
either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me  
it is a prison.<sup>48</sup>

This ambiguous remark is made by Hamlet while speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about Denmark. Not only does Denmark feel like a prison for Hamlet, but his thought also incarcerates his thinking.

Let us join the perplexed Hamlet on the battlements of Elsinore. He decides to try and live up to his task.

O fie! Hold, hold, my heart, /and you my sinews, grow not instant old,/But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?/ Ay, thou poor ghost, [...] I'll wipe away all trivial fond records/All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past/That youth and observation copied there,/ And thy commandment all alone shall live/Within the book and volume of my brain (Act 1,V, ll. 93 – 103).

Hamlet is resolved to try and be like his father both in bearing (“bear me stiffly up”) and in mind (“thy commandment all alone shall live”).

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43 Of course, Laertes words are spoken within the context of Hamlet’s freedom to choose his spouse. Even so, Laertes’ words clearly show the emblematic characteristics of kingship. The king is not just a private body, he is a public body (see also quote and text above: the king as embodiment of the state). His status setting him boundaries as absolute as the power given to him within these boundaries (cf. Claudius, Duncan and Macbeth). In other words, the king is placed in a paradoxical situation.

44 *Hamlet*, act 1, III, ll. 17 – 21.

45 *Hamlet*, act 2, II, l. 175. Fishmongers, in Shakespeare’s time were notorious for their dishonesty and swindle.

46 In the medieval/Renaissance lore ghosts can be benevolent as well as coming from hell.

47 Further down we will see how this will turn out for Hamlet.

48 *Hamlet*, act 2, II, ll. 251 – 253.

Naturally, this creates an enormous tension in Hamlet's mind. Modern psychology would give Hamlet a 0% success rate if he followed this strategy. The rise of this internal tension in Hamlet runs parallel to the tragic course of the plot: we will see Hamlet change from an indecisive youth into full-blown Renaissance royalty, fully using the prerogative coming with it: the execution of violence. Its use is not prompted by personal whim or temper (as with Macbeth), but expressive of his plan to save Denmark. Here then, we observe a different type of violence.

The message that his uncle might be a smiling villain (as the ghost disclosed), making his mother pernicious, fills Hamlet with disgust and loathing.

That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;  
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark  
[...]  
The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!<sup>49</sup>

To play for time, he decides to play the fool; he needs to think it all over.

His adoption of the pretense of madness may well have been due in part to fear of the reality; to an instinct of self-preservation, a fore-feeling that the pretense would enable him to give some utterance to the load that pressed on his heart and brain, and a fear that he would be unable altogether to repress such utterance.<sup>50</sup>

as Bradley remarked. Earlier in the same book, he observes:

Hamlet [is] highly intellectual by nature and reflective by habit. [He] may even be called, in a popular sense, philosophic [...], being also a 'good' man, show[ing] accordingly, [...] a sensitive and almost painful anxiety to do right. And though [he] fails [...] the failure [...] is rather connected with [his] intellectual nature and reflective habit than with any yielding to passion.<sup>51</sup>

Wilson Knight typifies Hamlet's state of mind as extremely melancholic and cynical.<sup>52</sup>

Hamlet's soul is sick. The symptoms are horror at the fact of death and an equal detestation of life, a sense of uncleanness and evil in the things of nature; a disgust at the physical body of man; bitterness, cynicism, hate. It tends towards insanity.

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49 *Hamlet*, act 1, V, ll. 109 – 110 and ll. 190 – 191.

50 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 96.

51 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 63.

52 G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 22.

However, “[t]he disease is deeper than his loss of Ophelia, deeper than his mother’s sexual impurity and his father’s death. [...] the thing itself is ultimate, beyond causality.”<sup>53</sup> Wilson Knight identifies “Hamlet’s disease as mental and spiritual death.”<sup>54</sup> Death being the true theme of the play, as Wilson Knight gives us.

Friedrich Schlegel characterized this typical Hamletian theme as: “a maximum of spiritual despair.”<sup>55</sup> Victor Lange translated Schlegel’s enunciation as follows:

There is no more perfect representation of the unresolvable disharmony of the human mind – the true subject matter of philosophical tragedy – than the infinite discrepancies between thought and action in Hamlet’s character.<sup>56</sup>

Lange goes on paraphrasing Schlegel’s words:<sup>57</sup>

‘Philosophical’ tragedy disturbs without resorting to a vision of relief, it unsettles without catharsis; indeed, its main object is to produce in the audience a philosophical state of doubt and unrest. The modern poet – this is Schlegel’s central if not altogether original thesis – recognizes the inevitable alienation of the mind vis-à-vis nature and does not, and cannot, in his work transcend a situation which in its essence is tragic; his main effort must, therefore, be directed not at aesthetic reconciliation, but at making the inescapable conflicts between nature and mind articulate and transparent.<sup>58</sup>

Weitz’s view on *Hamlet* is far more sanguine. He emphasizes (with Tillyard<sup>59</sup>) the importance of the tone of the play:

the tone is life-enhancing [...]. That is, the quality of the sheer love of life, of being alive, is shared by all, including the melancholic Hamlet. [...] In effect, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare shows us that man lives, questions, affirms, doubts, and dies. The rest is silence.<sup>60</sup>

All of the above interpreters tackle a part of *Hamlet*’s essence. I will now briefly go into their arguments. I do not agree with Wilson Knight when he argues that the play’s main theme is death. Indeed, death is an important theme in

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53 Ibid., p. 23.

54 Ibid. p. 28.

55 Friedrich Schlegel, *Seine prosaischen Jugendschriften*, p. 109.

56 Victor Lange, “Friedrich Schlegel’s Literary Criticism”, p. 291.

57 Coleridge was of the same opinion. He posits that in *Hamlet* we see an “enormous intellectual activity and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it.” Bradley holds (p. 84) that “the Schlegel-Coleridge theory [...] is the most widely received view of Hamlet’s character.”

58 Ibid., p. 291.

59 Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 63.

60 Morris Weitz, *Shakespeare, Philosophy and Literature*, pp. 32, 33.

any tragedy, but it is not its quintessence. Going through a tragic process entails destruction, the facing of the ultimate (often death) and the unspeakable; however, above all, it induces us to weather and survive these aspects of our sublunary existence. And that, of course, ties in with Knight's remark about the fact that life's diseases are beyond causality. Life either is or is not and tragedy urges life to be.

Of course, when Schlegel asserts that in Hamlet we see a maximum of spiritual despair, he is right. However, when he states there is no catharsis, no escape in *Hamlet*, he is wrong.

Weitz comes close to the vitalist interpretation of Hamlet, emphasizing the importance of the life-reverberating tone of Hamlet.

Below, I hope to show how Hamlet's process through despair into convalescence (disregarding even his death – as did Macbeth as a matter of fact) takes place. It is not only a personal convalescence, it is the restoration and renovation of a nation into a nation-state; in view of this thematic, Hamlet does not fail in the end – consequently, I disagree with Bradley.<sup>61</sup> Hamlet's isolation and loneliness not only stem from despair as to the task at hand; I would suggest that an important aspect might also be the fact that he has no role models to speak of in bringing his country to health and a viable form of government. It has never been done before.

Some time must have passed after this last scene, because, by this time (we are picking up the story in act 2, II), it is a well-known fact that Hamlet of Denmark is, to say the least, weird (act 2, II, ll. 163 – 170).

When a group of travelling actors arrives at Elsinore castle (Act 2.II), he receives them in a most friendly way and even rehearses some pieces from a play about Troy with one of them. After they have left, Hamlet ponders upon his motives and position. It is one of the rare occasions that Hamlet finds himself quite alone.<sup>62</sup> And only when he assumes to be unattended, can he speak his mind. Thus, he starts: observing that now he is, indeed, quite alone.<sup>63</sup>

Hamlet compares himself to the players: these people are capable of showing emotions like grief or mourning, shedding tears even for non-existent persons. Whereas Hamlet feels confined within his mind, while his cause is anything but fictitious:

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61 I do agree though, with Hamlet being highly intellectual and reflective.

62 As Jan Kott remarked in his *Shakespeare our Contemporary* (p.60), there is no genuine privacy at all in Elsinore castle: "At Elsinore castle someone is hidden behind every curtain." Hamlet must have been aware of that fact; indeed, he plays with it, when he stabs "the rat" (being Polonius) behind the curtain in his mother's boudoir. In other words, his loneliness is of a mental nature. The constant physical presence (visible or not) of distrusted others, just emphasizes his mental solitude.

63 In the early phase of the play Hamlet only feels safe to speak honestly while being alone. Only from act 5. I onwards is he capable of opening his mind to Horatio.

Now I am alone.  
 O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!  
 Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
 [...] and all for nothing!  
 For Hecuba!  
 What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
 That he should weep for her?  
 [...] Yet I,  
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,  
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,  
 And can say nothing; no, not for a king,  
 Upon whose property and most dear life  
 A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?  
 Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?  
 Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?  
 Tweaks me by the nose?<sup>64</sup>

His self-created defense has grown into his prison. He realizes this and concurrently, he concludes that, by now, relieving his feelings in words only is by no means an adequate response to his predicament or an effective strategy towards solving his problems any longer. To “unpack my heart with words, / And fall a-cursing, like a very drab, / A scullion! Fie upon’t foh!”<sup>65</sup>

Hamlet decides to change the plot of the actor's play to observe Claudius' reaction: this way, he hopes to gather more evidence for Claudius' crime (act 3.III, ll. 599 – 606). Immediately after this (even before the play is enacted), Hamlet falls precipitately into a tragic crisis and produces his famous monologue, hitting rock bottom:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;  
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
 To sleep: perchance to dream:<sup>66</sup>

64 *Hamlet*, act 2, II, ll. 551 – 578.

65 *Hamlet*, Act II, 2, ll. 588 – 590.

66 *Hamlet*, Act 3, I, ll. 58 – 67.

Hamlet's mixture of disgust<sup>67</sup> – his aversion to evil as Bradley<sup>68</sup> calls it –; his inability to communicate and the tragic understanding that he is the only one able to bring Denmark back to health, is too much to bear. Bradley remarks that Hamlet must have been not far from insanity;<sup>69</sup> he almost breaks under the burden. The only thing stopping him is his fear of the unknown. He goes on:

ay, there's the rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause:  
[...]  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action.<sup>70</sup>

In the second part of this quote, Hamlet describes how he has, up till then, lost his appetite for action. This only adds to his disgust (now being disgust at his own thoughtful disposition, negatively put down as cowardice) and repugnance.

Such a state of feeling is inevitably adverse to any kind of decided action; the body is inert, the mind indifferent or worse. [...] And the action required of Hamlet is very exceptional. It is violent, dangerous, difficult to accomplish perfectly, on one side repulsive to a man of honour and sensitive feeling, on another side involved in a certain mystery.<sup>71</sup>

Bradley here gives an accurate description of Hamlet's tragic crisis (without calling it thus).

From the onset, Hamlet had realized the enormity of his plight; in the “to be” monologue, Hamlet phrases that by now it fully hits home to him that it might also entail a full turn in his existence: he might even stop being. Here he, for the first time, takes this possibility in both hands and looks it in the face. Also, in all honesty, expressing his existential anxieties. The universality

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67 At the present situation.

68 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 89.

69 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 96.

70 *Hamlet*, act 3, I, ll. 67 – 90. Some scholars hold that Hamlet, in this speech, voices the fear for hell. However, there is no hell in this speech, only the fear for what may come after death. In my opinion this is a universal and existential fear, not to be attributed to a particular religion.

71 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 98.

of his feelings makes Hamlet into a character we can understand and identify with. Moreover, it makes him dear to our hearts. In his speech, ethical considerations are absent. He, the prince, and no doubt versed in etiquette, ethics and desired and correct behaviour, is entering the realm of the ultimate where no ethics hold. What we witness is the fear coming with non-existence. Life and non-life are deconstructed to their bare quintessence. Here, tragic existentiality<sup>72</sup> is born in Hamlet. He undergoes it, contemplating the unspeakable: his primeval *angst*, his fears, his despair. These are thematized here.

The 'to be' speech is uttered some minutes before he meets Ophelia. The meeting is arranged by Polonius and the king (who both shuffle behind a tapestry hastily)<sup>73</sup> to see how Hamlet will react to Ophelia's presence; Polonius quickly pushes a book into Ophelia's hands, urging her to pretend to read.

If a man is in a tragic existential crisis of the above proportions, one would say he is in dire need of human compassion and consolation. What, however, does the utterly ignorant Ophelia do? She gives him back the love-trinkets<sup>74</sup> Hamlet had given her before, adding: "Their perfume lost,/ Take these again, for to the noble mind/ Rich gifts wax poor when givers proves unkind./ There my lord."<sup>75</sup>

Ophelia's small but meaningful gesture pushes Hamlet over the edge: by rejecting him, she magnifies the position he is in. And Hamlet can do nothing but push back as violently as he can with the weapon he knows best: his verbal fervour:

If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for  
 thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,  
 thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery,  
 go, farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool;  
 for wise men know well enough what monsters you  
 make of them.<sup>76</sup>

72 Tragic existentiality (as also described in the previous chapter) pertains to the quintessence of life and decease of the individual human being; this essence being devoid of normative hierarchy of whatever nature. I would describe it as the concept that expresses our ultimate primeval needs. It should be noted that this type of tragic existentiality is unrelated to whatever philosophical school or movement.

73 Two clowns hurriedly stumbling over each other with, metaphorically speaking, their feet too small in their shoes too big.

74 NB: this is one of the few initiatives of Ophelia's own accord (apart from going mad and drowning herself). Even Polonius hadn't ordered her to do this. This little scene marks the utter lack of human understanding and communication in a heart-rending way. Now Hamlet exists in the outer voids of the tragic universe.

75 *Hamlet*, act 3, I, ll. 98 – 101.

76 *Hamlet*, act 3, I, ll. 137 – 142.

Hamlet's words are effective; they utterly shatter the naive Ophelia: "And I, of ladies most deject and wretches, [...] O woe is me,/ T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see!"<sup>77</sup>

## 6.8 MODELLING A STATEMAN'S PROFESSION

Let me revert back to our theme at hand: a tragic system clash between oral tribal laws of succession and the wish to change them. In Act 1, Denmark is depicted as a tribal society; Claudius uses one of the traditional modes of succession (the Nordic one of succession violence). We had also noted that there was an undefined sense of unease about this among the bystanders (the population?). Change was in the air; however, no one was able to channel it into viability. It was clear, however, that the old ways no longer satisfied. The next issue to arise was the problem of implementing something new (and nobody knew as yet what that something had to entail), and who by? The only (improbable) candidate being an insecure young man whose only tools are his Renaissance education and his exceptional verbal abilities. He has, however, no military power at his beck and call, moreover, he is not in the least militarily inclined. On the contrary, he is theoretically and philosophically predisposed. He does not realize that precisely these traits are his strength.

Well then, what exactly did the theory of governing and politics entail in Shakespeare's time? In the previous chapter, I discussed the rules for the deposition of tyrants and non-functional royals. In the next chapter, I will return to this issue and consider the various forms of government that may have been familiar in Shakespeare's time: those of republic and kingdom. But how did they think about statesmanship, the craft of legislation and politics?

Francis Bacon published "The Advancement of Learning" in 1605. In it, he set about developing a scientific method of research and discovery. He also paid attention to the art of governance and politics. As yet he did not offer a fully worked out system with a theoretical foundation to what he called the science of politics. First of all, it was a fledgling science<sup>78</sup> and secondly, it was a dangerous and slippery business as too much frankness might antagonize the (as yet autocratic) sovereign.<sup>79</sup> He described the political (and legis-

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77 *Hamlet*, act 3, ll. 159 – 164.

78 Machiavelli's *The Prince* was printed in 1532 and Hobbes' *Leviathan* did not appear until 1651.

79 His prudence did not much help him. A public and influential figure such as Bacon had many (resentful) enemies. He fell out of grace in 1621: he was stripped of Lord Chancellorship and brought to the Tower on cooked up charges of corruption. He was one of the great driving forces of the Enlightenment. (Source: P. Rossi, *Bacon, Pionier van de Wetenschappelijke Methode*).

lative<sup>80</sup>) fields in practice. "His profound belief in the possibility of learning in politics reflected the intellectual climate of his day."<sup>81</sup> The play *Hamlet* reflects this vapidity and precarious legal void; as yet, few courtiers/politicians<sup>82</sup> knew exactly what their jobs entailed. And if they knew, they were extremely prudent as to how far they could voice their opinions, stretch their operating range and influence legislation (I bring to mind that during Henry VIII's reign all Lord Chancellors had come to a grim end). And even though she ruled with wisdom, Elizabeth I was autocratic, as Henry VIII had been.

What definition does Bacon give us of this line of work and what practical support? Tsukada gives us the Baconian description of content:

What did Bacon accept as being the proper subject of political inquiry? He was clear about what was political and what was not. In "The Advancement of Learning", Bacon defined 'science civil and politic' as 'the doctrine of conjugation of men in society,' contrasting it with morality. (Works 111, p. 428). Besides *science civil* and *politics*, Bacon used other words such as *policy* and *civil knowledge* to mean the science of politics. The difference between morality and policy rests on the fact that the former 'propoundeth to itself the framing of internal goodness' while the latter 'reurreth only an external goodness.' (Works, p. 455) Politics was concerned with externals, and the promotion of man's interior life did not belong to the province of the political.<sup>83</sup>

This rings undeniably Machiavellian tones.

The practicalities with which the Baconian toolbox for true statesmanship was filled were the following: wisdom of behavior, wisdom of the business on hand and wisdom of state.<sup>84</sup> Wisdom of behavior consisted partly, as Tsukada<sup>85</sup> has it, of prudence. The statesman had to master the art of prudence. Which is, of course, what Hamlet starts with, using as tactics his playacting.<sup>86</sup> Precisely this is what Bacon also advises: "The courtier or

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80 The sovereign in Shakespeare's days was in charge of legislation and justice. Tsukada quotes Walter Raleigh's *Maxims of State*: "The prince himself is to sit sometimes in place of public justice, and to give an experiment (sic) of his wisdom and equity, whereby great reverence and estimation is gotten; where, for better performing of this princely duty, some special causes may be selected, which may thoroughly be debated and considered upon by the prince in private, with the help and advice of his learned counsel, and so be decided publicly, as before is said, by the prince himself." Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 32.

81 Tomiharu Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 29.

82 In Shakespeare's days a politician was always both statesman and courtier.

83 Tomiharu Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 30.

84 Tomiharu Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 31.

85 Tomiharu Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 28.

86 Bacon published "The Advancement of Learning" in 1605 and *Hamlet* was performed in 1601/02. It might be wishful thinking on my part to say that Bacon came to his conclusions after having seen *Hamlet*, but the thought remains. Seen in this light it is not so strange

political actor should constantly play the role cast for him by changing times. He cannot afford a consistent and uniform character.<sup>87</sup>

Hamlet shows he has wisdom of behavior (his playacting and prudence), he has knowledge of the business (he knows that Claudius is a murderer and he has acquired the Renaissance knowledge in university as we may assume). As far as these points he must be considered to be up to the job.

The wisdom of the state entails the following:

[T]he more comprehensive problem of how to maintain and control the state with a certain vision, as compared with the second part, which deals with the problem of adaptation to a given order. Here, the knowledge not only of the actualities of politics, but also of certain fountains of justice, are needed.<sup>88</sup>

Further down, we will see whether Hamlet is able to master this type of wisdom.

Thus far we may safely conclude that Shakespeare meticulously depicts the (political and legal) actuality of his day in *Hamlet*, despite the fact that the drama is set in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This, of course, can only be successfully accomplished by a genius.

Another question in view of the present thematic is whether Denmark, at this point (we are in act 3, Claudius pretending to be an efficient ruler and Hamlet revving up to bring his country back to health), is a nation in accordance with Renan's theory. When we look at Denmark, we meet a community in turmoil, too much so to be able to act with a collective will to make this community work. Therefore, I would rather say that Denmark is perhaps a nation on the make, but by no means a nation according to Renan. As to the state part, there is something of an attempt to organize action in the form of Claudius' attempts at diplomacy, but no structured diplomacy as we know it. Therefore, at this point Denmark is neither state nor nation.

We will return to Hamlet, who, from now on, sets his course. Immediately after the scene with the poor Ophelia, another Hamlet seems to emerge. Out of his despair, his *angst* voiced in the 'to be' speech, his resolutions seem to be born. They are characterized by a different engagement with the situation. A realization that the familiar coping mechanisms no longer work and that he has to engage with the situation, the self and the community in another way altogether. The first signs of an attitudinal change become apparent in Hamlet.<sup>89</sup>

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that some (among whom Friedrich Nietzsche) came to think that Shakespeare was in fact Bacon which is – as has been proven – not correct.

87 Tomiharu Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 33.

88 Tomiharu Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 36.

89 In *Macbeth* I have expounded upon the difference between nihilistic despair and tragic despair. In *Macbeth* the tragic despair is even more marked than in *Hamlet*, the latter, of course, being a tragedy of a more reticent and philosophical character.

Hamlet opens up to Horatio, truly communicating again to his trusted friend:

Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man  
 As e'er my conversation coped withal.  
 [...]  
 Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice  
 And could of men distinguish, her election  
 Hath seal'd thee for herself;  
 [...]  
 Give me that man  
 That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
 In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
 As I do thee.<sup>90</sup>

He shares his course of action (with regard to the modified play the visiting actors are about to play) with Horatio and asks him to help him detect guilt in Claudius' face.

Then the king and his retinue enter the hall to watch the play. Hamlet asks Polonius whether he had performed in theatre in his university years. Polonius answers: "I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th' Capitol. Brutus killed me." Whereupon Hamlet retorts: "It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there."<sup>91</sup> This is the second reference to *Julius Caesar*, the play I will discuss in the next chapter. Why does Shakespeare refer to *Julius Caesar* here? Of course, the easy explanation is that he is getting the laughs with the self-indulgent doltishness of Polonius. Besides referring to *Julius Caesar*, this also foreshadows Polonius' death in a similar way in the following scene, which is beyond funny and gives the remarks a prophetic charge and increases the tension within the play.

Polonius here exposes himself as a snob and quasi-intellectual, knowledgeable as to the latest topical developments. He is the bombastic Lord Chancellor and the caricature of a statesman. Not only in his death does he resemble the one to whom he refers, but also by his character and manner (as we will see in the next chapter). We meet this type of courtier in Bacon. This is how Tsukada describes Bacon's observations:

Offices and places increased in proportion to the expansion of the central administration, promoting the ambitions of the courtiers. As a result, the court became an arena of struggle for royal favour, office, place, and patronage. Thus in and beyond the court, politics erupted and pervaded as a form of activity centering around the quest for competitive advantage. Bacon was profoundly knowledgeable about the actualities of court politics. The following description vividly illustrates

90 *Hamlet*, act 3, II, ll. 52 – 72.

91 *Hamlet*, act 3, II, ll. 102 – 105.

the situation of court involvement in the vortex of artifices. 'others seek to wash away their own vileness and evil consciences by accusing others ; others make way for the honours and wishes of their friends by traducing and calumniating their opponents; while others get up stage plots and a number of the like fables against their enemies. These are the machinations of servants who are of a more dishonest nature.'<sup>92</sup>

This description, so befitting Polonius, is one more indication of the chaotic process of a nation-state under construction. It has not finished by far. To describe the present situation in summary:

- Polonius' actions and personality are characteristic of the stage of development the country is in.
- Polonius is not only Hamlet's foil, but points ahead to the role played by Julius Caesar in the said play: how are we to read his character?
- Without knowing it, Polonius touches upon the thematic further worked out in *Julius Caesar*: how to build a nation-state (and perhaps more importantly, how not to).

We return to the performance of the play. When Claudius sees the plot changed by Hamlet, he angrily breaks off the play. Hamlet is asked to see his mother in her chambers. Hamlet goes off and soliloquizes: Soft! now to my mother./ O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever/ The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:/ Let me be cruel, not unnatural:<sup>93</sup> / I will speak daggers to her, but use none".<sup>94</sup>

Hamlet here cautions himself not to lose sight of a course of action fitting his temperament and character. In other words, he cannot but have found a way of dealing with his situation that is in accordance with who he is; not copying his father's attitude (which was his resolve just after having met the ghost), but choosing his own way. It is a tone markedly different than the despairing and anxious words of an earlier Hamlet (being totally at a loss and forlorn). Hamlet has become a man with a plan.

On his way to his mother's closet, he passes Claudius, who is praying and performing his religious duties. Hamlet draws his sword, but refrains: he will not send his father's murderer to heaven, while his father is still wandering the spheres, waiting to be avenged.<sup>95</sup> This instance is important for the follow-

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92 Tomiharu Tsukada, "Court and Politics: Bacon's Political Thought", p. 29.

93 He will not be unnatural, meaning: he will not do anything against his nature.

94 *Hamlet*, act 3, II, ll. 381 – 385.

95 Shakespeare here refers to a persistent religious (Roman Catholic) custom: one had to be fortified by the Holy Church before dying; otherwise one would go to hell or purgatory (as had happened to Hamlet's father). Claudius (in the middle of his religious duties) would go to heaven if killed at this point in time. This would not be the desired effect of his revenge. The fact that Shakespeare here refers to a religious rite doesn't make Hamlet a Christian play or Shakespeare a Christian author. Just as it doesn't make him a sorcerer when he writes about witches, ghosts and witchcraft. Shakespeare merely appeals to

ing reason: Hamlet is capable of postponing violence. This is a very first (and still embryonic) indication of controlled and restrained violence, based on reason, as wielded by a real state (it is one of the characteristics of type 2 violence).

In his mother's room, he sits his mother down: "You shall not budge./ You go not till I set you up a glass/ Where you may see the inmost part of you."<sup>96</sup> His mother cries out. Polonius, behind the curtain, thinks she needs help and yells. Hamlet reacts promptly and effectively; no trace of the former doubting and hesitating Hamlet is seen here. He thrusts his sword through the arras, crying: "How now, a rat?"<sup>97</sup> Hamlet had thought it was the king: "Is it the King?"<sup>98</sup> When he learns it is but Polonius, Hamlet reacts:

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!  
 I took thee for thy better: take thy fortune;  
 Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.  
 [and to his mother:]  
 Leave wringing of your hands: peace! sit you down,  
 And let me wring your heart<sup>99</sup>

Hamlet clearly assumes the stature of a king. He decides over his mother's posture and demeanor; what's more, he decides over life and death (in this case: over Polonius' death<sup>100</sup>), without remorse or second thought. Hamlet has indeed fundamentally changed. He is in full control of the situation instead of being its victim. As I remarked above, Hamlet is (or spoken with more deliberation: definitely on his way to becoming) Renaissance royalty and using the violence prerogative coming with it. I argue that he uses this violence within the framework of his salvage plan for Denmark. Without much ado,

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commonly observed or believed specters or rituals, Christian or not. There are several other allusions to Christianity in *Hamlet*; his remark that "heaven hath pleased it so,/ To punish me with this and this with me" (act 3, IV, ll. 156 – 157). These cursory remarks do not suffice to make the tragic message of *Hamlet* a Christian one. Also: the allusion to Wittenberg, where Hamlet studied is insufficient proof. The more so because some scholars hold that Shakespeare allegedly stayed within the Roman Catholic faith; if so, he would never have alluded to such a heretical university. I again point to the fact that the University of Wittenberg was founded in 1502 and this play is set in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

96 *Hamlet*, act 3, IV, ll. 18 – 20.

97 *Hamlet*, act 3, IV, l. 23.

98 *Hamlet*, act 3, IV, l. 25.

99 *Hamlet*, act 3, IV, ll. 30 – 34.

100 Indeed, when Hamlet cried out *a rat*, he expected to kill his uncle. He, however, doesn't falter or show remorse for one minute when he discovered it was Polonius he had stabbed. He does, however, *regret* (which is in a different register than remorse altogether) the death of Polonius ("For this same lord/I do repent", act 3, IV, l. 175 and "I must be cruel only to be kind", act 3, IV, l. 180), but there is no trace of guilt or shame. Hamlet had indeed entered the universe of tragic existentiality, that paradoxical twilight zone, where despair or ethics no longer hold.

Polonius is treated as collateral damage<sup>101</sup> by Hamlet, who continues his conversation with his mother.

I here anticipate the next chapter where Brutus<sup>102</sup> does not realize the vital importance of having to defuse not only the leader but also his immediate entourage. Hamlet demonstrates greater skill at statesmanship by doing so. The murders of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern must be seen in this same context. The latter event has the additional quality of self-defense. I will return to this below as well as to the question of how it is possible that, before the king is murdered, Hamlet already realizes that he must get rid of his confidants as well: the Shakespearean reversed time and space aspects of this play.<sup>103</sup> For these reasons, I anachronistically appreciate this type of violence as state-controlled (type 2) violence.

Again, Hamlet uses the weapons he is best at: his wit and his sensibility in sounding people correctly. Hamlet lashes his mother mercilessly with his words – as he had done with Ophelia. There is, however, a notable difference in Hamlet's attitude towards the two ladies. With Ophelia his vitriolic sarcasm was meant as protection: Hamlet was not yet recovered from his shattering tragic crisis himself and, on top of that, he had to endure Ophelia's inane but for Hamlet heart-rending action. His conversation with his mother, however, is meant to confront her and make her recognize and own her actions. Hamlet, verbally ornate as he is, succeeds. She says: "Oh Hamlet, speak no more!/ Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,/ And there I see such black and grained spots/ As will not leave their tinct."<sup>104</sup> However, Hamlet persists and goes on. Even the ghost has to interfere to remind Hamlet of his second assignment: do not harm your mother while avenging me. After the ghost's admonishment, Hamlet moderates his tone. With more restraint, he advises her to live more purely and to assume virtues – if she cannot bring herself to truly be so (act 3.IV ll. 150 – 160).

As only Hamlet sees the reappearance of his father's ghost and even speaks to him, Gertrude thinks her son is raving mad. Hamlet asks her not to let Claudius know that he is "but mad in craft."<sup>105</sup> Gertrude, however, expressly expounds her opinion on Hamlet: "mad as the sea and wind when both contend/ which is the mightier."<sup>106</sup> Claudius decides to ship Hamlet off to

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101 Hamlet acknowledges his act without further ado, drags Polonius from the scene and has done with it: "I will bestow him, and will answer well/ The death I gave him. So, again, good night./ I must be cruel to be kind." Act 3. IV, ll. 160 – 162.

102 I will go into the comparison between Hamlet and Brutus in more detail in the next chapter.

103 Reversal of action sequences is sometimes used in theatrical and movie productions. In my opinion Shakespeare here uses a reversal of time, cause and result as a means of showing the mental state Hamlet is in. I am in agreement with Wilson Knight about this aspect of the play. Further down I will come back to this important issue.

104 *Hamlet*, Act 3, IV, ll. 78 – 81.

105 *Hamlet*, act 3, IV, l. 190.

106 *Hamlet*, act 4, I, ll. 6 – 7.

England at the first opportunity available. Claudius asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to watch Hamlet closely during the voyage. He also gives them sealed documents for the king of England,<sup>107</sup> requesting him to kill Hamlet.<sup>108</sup>

Just before he embarks for England, Hamlet sees young Fortinbras' army march by for Poland. Hamlet ponders upon Fortinbras' resolution to act,<sup>109</sup> wavers and decides to be more resolute. Fortinbras, the young and tender prince, is prepared, even for "a straw of land"<sup>110</sup> to fight for honor and kingdom.

Some time passes while Hamlet journeys to England. In Denmark, Ophelia breaks down mentally. Laertes comes back from France (full of fury and keen on taking revenge on Hamlet for the dead of his father) and public unrest stirs Denmark ever since Polonius' death. Claudius sighs:

O Gertrude, Gertrude,  
When sorrows come, they come not single spies  
But in battalions. First, her father slain:  
Next, your son gone; and he most violent author  
Of his own just remove: the people muddied,  
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers,  
For good Polonius' death;<sup>111</sup>

Meanwhile, Hamlet's ship has been attacked, but Hamlet manages to board another ship and he is brought back to Denmark. When he comes ashore, he arrives at a grave site where two workers are digging a grave. When he identifies Yorick's<sup>112</sup> grave (plus skull) Hamlet ponders upon the transience of existence. Hamlet realizes that there is no escaping

- temporality,
- the implacability of the life/death cycle; more specifically, the outright arbitrariness with which you are cast into (and out of) temporality as well as into (and sometimes out of) a certain station in life.
- the paradoxical theme of the continuity of life beyond the individual's temporality.

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107 The text says: "if my love thou hold'st at aught - / As my great power thereof may give thee sense,/ Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red/After the Danish sword", (ll. 61 – 64). Shakespeare could refer to the Danish invasions in Britain during the second Viking age (11<sup>th</sup> Age). Since Claudius mentions the yet fresh cicatrices, it was most probably Hamlet Sr. that took the English to task. Another feat of arms of the late king.

108 *Hamlet*, act 4, III, l. 60.

109 Q2 is the only edition in which this monologue can be found.

110 *Hamlet*, act 4, IV, l. 26.

111 *Hamlet*, act 4, V, ll. 75 – 81.

112 The late king's jester. Hamlet had known him well.

Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay,  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away:  
O, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,  
Should patch a wall to expel the winter flaw!<sup>113</sup>

This is the third reference to the following play to be discussed. Although the pressure in Hamlet's text is tangible, it is devoid of the despair and the forlorn quality of the 'to be' speech. Hamlet is, as it were, revving up to come into action. He, markedly, places relativity into the framework of continuity and emphasizes the worth of life as a continuing process. The emphasis on the continuation of life prevents Hamlet from becoming nihilistic.

Moreover, in naming and analyzing both the conditionality and the continuity of the human life cycle, Hamlet places himself in the midst of as well as above these processes. Of course, fathoming and grasping them is a prerequisite to be equal to a task such as Hamlet's, viz.: to set to right the 'something rotten' in the state of Denmark and keep it safe.

In the previous chapter, I touched upon the topic of the legitimacy of killing or ousting a king/leader:<sup>114</sup> When was a person or party justified in doing so? This was, *inter alia*, permitted if the king had come to power illegitimately. Since Claudius had killed his brother and subsequently had covered this up (Hamlet Sr. had supposedly died in his sleep), and given the fact that Hamlet was called upon to act as the royal savior<sup>115</sup> of his country the type of violence he used could be seen as a state controlled one; state controlled *avant-la-lettre*.

After having spoken with the ghost, Hamlet had come to realize that obeying it most probably meant his death; now he ponders upon the continuity of life after death. Wilson Knight is right when he identifies death as a main theme in *Hamlet*, however, it is not *the* theme. Its subject is the continuation of life, as long as Hamlet's story shall be told. I will come back to this important theme below.

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113 *Hamlet*, act 5, I, ll. 75 – 81.

114 To be worked out further in the next chapter.

115 Anyone intending to overthrow a government (and succeeding) may avail himself of such an argument: pretentiously presenting himself as the predestined savior of the country. We should carefully distinguish this from Hamlet's position. The royal title is not pre-destined, but either hereditary, elective or acquired by the turmoil of successionary violence (as a matter of interest: these rather volatile and unstructured ways of succession, in themselves, are another indication of a community that has as yet not matured into a nation, leave alone a nation-state). Moreover Hamlet is called to his task against his will and initially totally unable to answer the call. Finally Hamlet acts in the Shakespearean sphere of the reversed time/space imagery; the house of mirrors and paradoxical events par excellence as I will explain below. Compare this to e.g. Robespierre (Reign of Terror, France, 1793 – 1794) demanding to be treated as the preordained Supreme Being and the difference becomes crystal clear.

Hamlet does not suffer from any metaphorical blindness.<sup>116</sup> On the contrary, he is very sensitive to his surroundings and he is an apt interpreter. Yet, initially, he had not been capable of monopolising and claiming for himself the position that came with his royal birth<sup>117</sup> and making Denmark stable and safe. He faltered under the burden. And yes, it takes time to successfully accomplish his Herculean labour. He has to go through his tragic crisis, find himself a unique monarchical identity *and* practice *and* gain strength, both mentally and physically. Some interpreters hold that Hamlet is a play of procrastination and sloth,<sup>118</sup> as it takes Hamlet four acts to come into action. I argue that Hamlet is exceedingly rapid, seen in the light of what he is up to. Moreover, the play is set outside our chronological timeframe. This issue also, will be discussed below.

Hamlet's developmental process is metaphorically represented by his practicing the rapier time and again<sup>119</sup> and, in the end, winning from Laertes, the renowned sword-fighter.

I agree with Schlegel (referenced above) and Posner (referenced below) when they call *Hamlet* – I paraphrase – a play of thought. I would add: in the sense of mental growth (Posner) – starting with disgust, then despair and ending in total self-sufficiency and with a stately individuality, moreover, an individual caring for his community; about to completely renew it. I will come back to this theme further on in the text.

When Hamlet sees Ophelia's funeral<sup>120</sup> pass, he and her brother Laertes get into a squabble as to who mourns her the most. Hamlet openly confesses that he had loved Ophelia. In this scene, no trace of depression can be detected within Hamlet; indeed, he has, by now, a clear sense of who he is and what he stands for. He is Hamlet the Dane, worthy son and successor of Hamlet the King – yet not his copied image – and taking things in hand in his unique way:

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116 I will come back to this theme when discussing Brutus in the next chapter.

117 Making him a good candidate to be elected as the next king.

118 I will revert back to this issue in the evaluation.

119 *Hamlet*, act 5, II, ll. 205 – 209.

Horatio: You will lose my lord.

Hamlet: I do not think so. Since he [Laertes] went into France, I have  
Been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds.

Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my  
Heart; but it is no matter.

120 She had drowned, most probably committing suicide.

This is I,  
Hamlet the Dane.  
[... to Laertes]  
For, though I am not splenitive and rash,  
Yet have I something in me dangerous,  
Which let thy wiseness fear.<sup>121</sup>

In a next scene, Hamlet tells Horatio the circumstances of his voyage back to Denmark. He recounts how he had out-tricked Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, sending them to their deaths.<sup>122</sup> Hamlet here (as he had done before when killing Polonius) shows no remorse or hesitancy and demonstrates the same type of violence.

Why, man, they did make love to this employment;  
They are not near my conscience; their defeat  
Does by their own insinuation grow:  
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes  
Between the pass and fell incensed points  
Of mighty opposites.  
Horatio:  
Why, what a king is this!  
Hamlet:  
Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon--  
He that hath kill'd my king and whored my mother,  
Popp'd in between the election and my hopes,  
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,  
And with such cozenage--is't not perfect conscience,  
To quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damn'd,  
To let this canker of our nature come  
n further evil?<sup>123</sup>

#### 6.9 THE COMPLETION; THE EXECUTION

Hamlet shows his true colors. He is open to Horatio<sup>124</sup> concerning his purpose. He regally dismisses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They should die; they are not near his conscience. What does Hamlet mean by these words? Above, I discussed the necessity of defusing Claudius' entourage. Therefore, I deem this act justified under the circumstances. Now let us have a closer

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121 *Hamlet*, act 5, I, ll. 253 – 260.

122 He had exchanged Claudius' original letters for the English king with others, ordering Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths instead of Hamlet's.

123 *Hamlet*, act 5, II, ll. 58 – 72.

124 As we saw in the previous scene, he had been open with regard to his feelings towards Ophelia!

look at what they do not mean, after which I will probe the self-defence and time aspects of the deed.

- They do not bear witness of Hamlet's nihilism as we have just ascertained that he is passionately committed to restoring Denmark to health again.
- Neither can we say that Hamlet here testifies to cruelty and/or bloodlust. He is too matter-of-fact about the killings.
- They do not testify to lust for or abuse of power. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths are just necessary (referenced above and below).
- These acts are not committed out of panic or despair; again, Hamlet is being level-headed about the demise of his two former friends.
- It is not a direct active self-defence as the two could finish their journey.

However, there is no denying that this act is an act of violence. How should we understand this? Hamlet knows that he will almost certainly die himself, fulfilling his task. His death, brought about within the scope of this task (saving Denmark from Claudius – and therewith from the old ways – and giving it a new system of justice), is the ultimate<sup>125</sup> violence, committed against Hamlet by Claudius. At this stage, it has not as yet happened, but in a reversed<sup>126</sup> way, the killing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern results from this ultimate act of violence (because of Hamlet's prior knowledge of his own death<sup>127</sup>). For surely, if Hamlet had not had to fulfil his task, their deaths would not have been imperative; nonentities that they were.

Apart from these arguments, the elimination of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as well as the stabbing of Polonius, show shrewd and strategically wise statesmanship as argued above. The three of them are bombastic nullities, but they are nullities from Claudius' camp.

Now, as to the second issue: what does Hamlet mean with his words? Literally, it means that he does not have these deaths on his conscience and he is dead right about this, for it is not he that signed the death warrant, but Claudius. Moreover, it was a death warrant ordering his own murder. Hamlet just changes the names in the letter. This is an act of self-defense; however, in my opinion, the explanation goes far deeper, especially in a tragedy of this magnitude.

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125 As in last and most brutal. It is not a single death: also Gertrude and Laertes fall victim.

In this sense it is a killing spree, caused by the evil genius of Claudius. The latter is killed by Hamlet. With it Hamlet not only fulfils his task, but, within the scope of the violence paradigm, restores Denmark to health. After which the violence dies down.

126 I am in agreement with Wilson Knight here, who states that: 1) Shakespeare was no great observer of the correct chronology in general (leave alone follow the Aristotelian unity of time rules; 2) In *Hamlet* everything seems to be reversed, explosively starting (instead of ending) with Claudius' first act of violence. *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 42. See also Wilson Knight's remarks below on the spatial and temporal aspects of *Hamlet*.

127 In two ways: he knows he will most certainly die fulfilling his task, moreover, he had also read Claudius' letter commissioning the English king to murder Hamlet at arrival in England.

In my view, Shakespeare indicates here that Hamlet's conscience has travelled away from the then prevailing value system of those around him. Indeed, it is not even near his as he tells us. Phrased differently, here again Hamlet gives evidence of lingering in the realm of tragic existentiality, where the old values no longer hold, living in another sphere altogether. This is in line with Wilson Knight's interpretation that Hamlet has stepped out of the orbit of ordinary man. Wilson Knight holds:<sup>128</sup>

Shakespearean tragedy is set spatially as well as temporally in the mind. By this I mean that there are throughout the play a set of correspondences which relate to each other independently of the time-sequence which is the story: [...] [T]he Shakespearean person is intimately fused with this atmospheric quality; he obeys a spatial as well as a temporal necessity.

What Wilson Knight describes as the spatiality of the play, I have termed the universe of tragic existentiality. Thus, Hamlet lives within the logic of the average mortal's temporal world as well as within the solitude of this tragic void. This state of mind corresponds to Shakespeare's leaps in time: back and forth from tribal times to Tudor Renaissance. Sometimes some timeless space in between, accentuating the uncertainty of a transitional period. As for Hamlet's state of mind, we must be well aware that in such a void, the ideal breeding ground arises for abandoning an old system that no longer works.

Therefore and despite his existential loneliness, we hear a self-confident and royal Hamlet speak, deciding over life and death. In other words, Hamlet, the tragic hero, going through his tragic process and surviving it, is up to providing the initial impetus to make Denmark, in one great effort, not only a nation but a nation-state (on which subject I will come back extensively in the next chapter). Having, at first, dissociated himself from his surroundings, spurred on by despair as he was, he now vehemently engages himself with his community, royally affirming his actions. Indeed, he intends to save the state of Denmark in its entirety from barbarity (see quote of Marcellus (act I, 3, l. 67) and Hamlet's remarks on Denmark's barbarity (act 1, IV, ll. 19 – 41) and lawlessness. This thematization saves *Hamlet* from being an unstratified revenge play (see also below).

As explained earlier in this chapter, Hamlet knows that to take on this task means his death. He confirms this knowledge again in his reaction to Horatio when the latter suggests he should not fight if he is not well. Hamlet reacts: "We defy augury. There is special provi-/dence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to /come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not

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128 Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 3.

now, yet it will come—the readiness is all.” (act 5, II, ll. 166 – 168)<sup>129</sup> Here, he reacts to a concerned Horatio who proposes to postpone the rapier fight with Laertes. Hamlet’s reaction is almost unconcerned. He accepts his death, but his last words, “the readiness is all,” express not resignation, but determination and a renewed energy to fight. This speech is not only knowledge of his death, but also its positive and willing acceptance. He realizes the violence (originally started by Claudius) has now reached him. Yet his increasing maturity, his philosophical inclination and intuitive intelligence give him the tools (his unique talents that also make him create new and as yet unheard of solutions for this community in turmoil) to accept this. In this respect, Hamlet is the stuff that (tragic) heroes are made of.

The finale of the play shows the rapier fight between Laertes and Hamlet. It is an impressive scene. Claudius is mercilessly exposed for the little runty man he is. His petty scheme of poisoning a sword and a chalice fails as Hamlet refuses to drink from the cup. Gertrude, however, wants a drink. Claudius desperately tries to prevent her from drinking but fails. Before the fight begins, Laertes and Hamlet make their peace:

Hamlet:

Give me your pardon, sir: I’ve done you wrong;  
But pardon’t, as you are a gentleman.

[...]

Laertes:

I am satisfied in nature,  
Whose motive, in this case, should stir me most  
To my revenge: but in my terms of honour  
I stand aloof; and will no reconciliation,  
[...]

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129 Some scholars see this quote as further proof of Hamlet being in essence a Christian play (also see above: act 3.III, ll. 72 -73 and below: act 3, IV, ll. 156 – 157). In their explanation “providence” refers to God and the simile with the sparrow to Matthew 10:29 where it says that no sparrow will fall without God’s knowledge. In this explanation the phrase on the readiness would refer to Matthew 24:44 where it says: “be ye also ready.” In my opinion Shakespeare here effectively makes use of well-known Christian imagery to evoke and explain (everybody in the audience immediately would have known what was at stake here as they all knew the bible) Hamlet’s state of mind.

The same goes for the words at the beginning of this scene: “There’s a divinity that shapes our end, rough-hew them how we will.” (act 5, II, ll. 10 – 11) This divinity is not necessarily the Christian God. It is one more example Hamlet’s use of well-known imagery to indicate that he will carry out his resolution. The words should be read in context with the rest of Hamlet’s speech (act 5, II, ll. 4 – 11).

I am aware of the fact that my explanation is diametrically opposed to some conventional interpretations that hold that Hamlet is deeply religious. However, my explanation does more justice to the existential universality of Shakespeare’s genius. Moreover, Shakespeare, in general, kept well away from religious substantiations, since this could be dangerous. In my opinion, he just used well-known Christian imagery to make his point.

I do receive your offer'd love like love,  
And will not wrong it.  
Hamlet:  
I embrace it freely;  
And will this brother's wager frankly play.<sup>130</sup>

So, for Hamlet, this is a fraternizing duel, having restored communication with his old-time friend Laertes.<sup>131</sup> However, the dice are loaded as the sword and wine are poisoned. When Gertrude drinks the wine, she slowly starts to die. Both Hamlet and Laertes are wounded by the poisoned swords. When Laertes yells that the swords have been tampered with, Hamlet stabs Claudius, knowing he will die soon. He asks Horatio to tell his story and to tell Fortinbras he has Hamlet's "dying voice":

Horatio, I am dead;  
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright  
To the unsatisfied.  
[...]  
O good Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story.  
[...]  
O, I die, Horatio;  
The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit:  
I cannot live to hear the news from England;  
But I do prophesy the election lights  
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice;  
So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,  
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.<sup>132</sup>

Why is it so important for Hamlet to have his story told and why does he want Fortinbras to be his successor? Let us start with the second question. In the above quote, Hamlet informs us of the fact that, had he lived, he would have voted for Fortinbras.<sup>133</sup> But his ambiguous words also mean: now Fortinbras will speak with my voice. In other words: Hamlet is sure that, if Horatio tells the facts of Hamlet's story to Fortinbras, the latter, the new royal and ruler in the country – will speak in Hamlet's voice and with his intentions.

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130 *Hamlet*, act 5, II, ll. 172- 198.

131 Who, by the way, still plays a suspect role at this stage; however, the cardinal point here is the sincerity of Hamlet and his capability of genuine and honest communication.

132 *Hamlet*, act 5, II, ll. 337 – 357.

133 Remember that Denmark was, at that point in time an elective monarchy.

Hamlet hopes Fortinbras will do so, because he recognizes true nobility in Fortinbras; when he, in act 4. IV, had seen him pass with his army to fight against Poland over a mere scrap of land and Hamlet had pondered:

Examples gross as earth exhort me:  
 Witness this army of such mass and charge  
 Led by a delicate and tender prince,  
 Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd  
 Makes mouths at the invisible event,  
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
 To all that fortune, death and danger dare,  
 Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great  
 Is not to stir without great argument,  
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
 When honour's at the stake.<sup>134</sup>

Thus, Hamlet foresees that Fortinbras will carry on and foster the honour and soundness of state Hamlet holds dear. Life will go on and new justice will rule: "report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied." These words are laden with meaning. Here, Shakespeare again works with his customary ambiguity and diverse layers of meaning and association fields. The tension within the text is huge – Hamlet's model for another future is packed into these few lines: let those who do not know, hear the whole story (and be able to judge for themselves). But also: let there be justice for those who have none (my case providing law of precedence); Hamlet wishes a fair and just society, especially for those who have no justice.<sup>135</sup>

With this will and testament, Hamlet connects himself with his community and hurls his notions on another fairer judiciary<sup>136</sup> into the future. Preferably 'reported'. That is: publicly and officially stated, preferably in writing and this, in its turn, is an embryonic statement for a codification of law.

The first question asked in the previous paragraph ties in with Hamlet's wish. This wish, his desire to keep his story alive and meaningful is a tragic one: he knows that, after his death, the new sound status of society – this new construct of a nation-state – will rest but on a precarious balance and, moreover, on free choice in the most literal sense of the word.<sup>137</sup> Merely by the

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134 *Hamlet*, act 4, IV, ll. 46 – 56.

135 The intense cry for fairness and a just society could also be interpreted in yet another way: it could articulate the existential primeval need for justice (in general understood by many as the implementation of natural law) but for his wish for it to be 'reported', i.e. deliberately constructed and his clearly expressed choice for a separation of powers. I will come back to the concept of natural law in my discussions on *Julius Caesar*.

136 I.e. a more honest and honourable way of dealing with justice.

137 The election of the new monarch is a choice and tragedy does not dictate, it invites (free)-choices.

grace of remembrance might a similar mistake be avoided and the freshly born nation-state be kept sound.

## 6.10 EVALUATION

### 6.10.1 The leadership and Bacon's wisdom of state

In this play, Shakespeare queries the fundamentals of the then-nation-state construct: what characteristics should a ruler have to safeguard the stability of the state and on what premises should a fair system of justice be based.

As to the leadership that Hamlet has shown, above, I mentioned Kantorowicz, who has convincingly shown that the body politique and the ruler were one. Thus, the answer to the question of how the country develops from crude justice to a society with a codified law could be answered through the development of its sovereign. I will now examine if this holds for *Hamlet*.

Throughout the play, we see cross references, bearing on both the sovereign and the country as a whole. Just a few instances: the strain and ominous atmosphere in act 1, after the death of the old king; Laertes stating that the sanity of the state depends on Hamlet's fate (act 1, III); Rosencrantz voicing the fact that when a ruler dies, the country is in danger (act 3, III); Claudius sighing that when troubles come they "come not single spies, but in battalions" (act 4, V ll. 78 – 79). Claudius can hardly cope simultaneously with the country being in an uproar over Polonius' death and Hamlet's departure. Moreover, Laertes revolts. He is up to vengeance. We see that both Claudius and the country synchronously deteriorate (act 4, V ll. 78 – 79).

Hamlet changes as well. From act 3, IV<sup>138</sup> onwards, Hamlet has behaved in a manner totally different than before, as I argued. From act 5, scene I onwards, Hamlet in effect takes over the royal position formally held by Claudius. The latter diminishes into nefariousness. We see the country's respiration moving parallel to these developments.<sup>139</sup> I may conclude that this play is about the birth of a regulated nation as much as it is about the qualities a leader should have to rule such a country.

In other words, this play is Shakespeare's tragic answer to the *Mirror of Princes* of the time. Machiavelli dealt with the pragmatics of leadership; the more traditional counterparts (e.g., Desiderius Erasmus and Sir Thomas Elyot – referenced in the next chapter) extolled and encouraged the ethical virtues in princes coming with the then brands of Christianity (mostly Roman Catholic). Shakespeare points out that a leader can only be a good leader when they have survived their tragic crises.<sup>140</sup> Only then can he have the qualities

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138 The scene in which he crushes Ophelia after the latter has given him back his love trinkets.

139 See examples just above.

140 Modern day politicians – and "managers" for that matter – could take this to heart!

needed to lead and only then does he have a thorough (tragic) knowledge of himself, can he assess the situation his country is in and act effectively.<sup>141</sup>

If Hamlet had not been through this crisis, he never could have pulled it off and because he had, he was, in the end, more successful than his father – who got himself killed only halfway achieving his ends: protecting his country from outside enemies. We may safely conclude that Hamlet abundantly evidences what Bacon calls “wisdom of state.” Shakespeare invites us to have a look at a blueprint for a true leader and a blueprint for an ordered nation-state under the<sup>142</sup> rule of law.

#### 6.10.2 The nation and the separation of powers

In what state does Hamlet leave his country?

Hamlet burdens Horatio with the implementation of justice and Fortinbras with the national government. This represents a new and remarkable separation of powers. I argue that Hamlet chooses Horatio to oversee justice because the latter, despite the text showing no evidence of Horatio being a legal expert, is a kindred spirit. They studied at the same university and are imbued with the same Renaissance ideas. We may conclude that Horatio demonstrates an awareness of and vision regarding an ideal-typical state. The choice of Fortinbras as the sovereign is almost a given, since Hamlet had already expressed his admiration for this young leader. His country will certainly be safe and protected in the latter’s hands.

The dichotomy in tasks might be seen as an embryonic beginning of a division of powers, but for certain, it is the beginning of a new monarchical rule with the potential to become a sovereignty under (codified) law.

Hamlet’s wishes carry both the promise of a nation-united after this bloodbath—and of a state, a construct with separate legislation. It is an invitation, for as we have seen in the chapter on tragedy, (Shakespearean) tragedy never dictates; it shows and invites. It leaves innovations and improvements to the creativity and ingenuity of mankind, which has recently endured slaughter and destruction. In Macbeth, we saw, after the horrible onslaught throughout Scotland, the ending of a gruesome tradition of *sippenhaft*, and in this play, we see the first step towards the rule of law in a nation-state. These are huge accomplishments, and Shakespeare illustrates how to achieve them. They are effected by the Shakespearean violence paradigm.

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141 Hobbes’ *Leviathan* was still to appear (1651).

142 This, of course, does not mean that Hamlet entrust Horatio with the ministry of justice. It means the first hint at and beginning of a new way of thinking: the first contours of an independent and autonomous judiciary.

### 6.10.3 How are violence and values interrelated

In the chapter on tragedy I discussed the several types of violence. In the last chapter we met the tribal custom of *sippenhaft* revenge. Several critics have argued that Hamlet's main theme is the violence of revenge. Below I will go into their argumentations. But first I will embroider on the correlation between violence and values.

Since, as I have shown above, Shakespearean tragedy challenges each and every value system and governmental construct (in short: all reality constructs), and puts them to (and through) the ultimate stress test of the tragic violence paradigm in the acts 5 no ethicality<sup>143</sup> to speak of is left. We have seen this happening to Hamlet, at a certain point in the play, living in the lone universe of existentiality. Again, I cannot help but conclude: *Hamlet* is not written from a particular ethical stance. In act 5, when the violence dies down, what remains are our existential needs. Therefore, concepts within the ethical sphere are never advocated in Shakespearean tragedy; they are at most used as a theatrical plot catalyst.

We also concluded that all critics discussed so far in the previous chapters agree on the fact that nations are built on violence.

Well now, how can ethicality ensue from a play that essentially deals with a type of violence that only leaves us with existentialities?

In the previous paragraphs, I mentioned that the person of Hamlet and the state were one and the same body. In act 5, last scene, Hamlet articulates his testament. Since he embodies the state, what Hamlet voices here are nothing but the existential needs of a community: protection of the state and righteousness. In their finishing conversation, Horatio and Fortinbras pronounce the impetus for the practical elaboration into a(n ethical) system of these existential needs: act 5, II, ll.377 – 400. Their conversation is the result of having just witnessed a momentous tragic crisis, including an all-out slaughter. Both mourning Hamlet, they feel the need for a united effort for his wishes to materialize: his wishes given shape as a new value system. Another noteworthy point is that they speak on an equal basis and from mutually independent positions. This horizontality in positioning is indicative of an openness towards a new (or renewed) ethics. At this particular stage of the violence paradigm, the causal link between violence and value is ingrained. Indeed, Shakespeare kindly invites us to renew/improve our ethics, our constructs, after having gone through a tragic crisis based on that same tragic crisis. As said, a tragic crisis that unearths our existential needs.

As Renan already convincingly argued, a nation should preferably be a community of people living together, grounded on values. A nation best acquires these after having successfully lived through the Shakespearean

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143 Ethics being, after all, just another reality construct.

violence paradigm. Hence, not only does the will to form a nation stem from the violence paradigm, but also the construction – *after* the event of the tragic crisis – of (a set of) values that suit our existential properties. From which, of course, issues the ethics of the legal system.

Intrinsically, the radical tragic violence has nothing in common with the state-monopolized violence (type 2, which is always firmly nestled within the ethical system). However, from the causal sequence just outlined, we may conclude that, ideally, a type 2 violence is also correlated with the violence paradigm; be it in a graduated way, after the tragic crisis has been digested and the improvement on the construct is being established. This state-controlled violence has a diversity of functions, but concerning the present subject, I would like to emphasize that precisely this type 2 violence is meant to rein in/suppress its radical predecessors/counterparts.

When a nation-state loses sight of this interwovenness – these interdependencies and the dangers coming with them, or the nation-state fails to distinguish between the two types (and subtypes), then its chances of surviving the next tragic existential stress test are next to nil, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The blurring of definitions is indicative of the fading away of knowledge on the diverse types of violence. Subsequently, functions, correlations and causal relationships also become less distinct. In my opinion, this development is a point of concern because in this way crucial knowledge about violence is lost. This just might entail possible dangers and weaknesses in the construct itself. I will explain what caused this blurring of demarcations in the next paragraph.

#### 6.10.4 Violence, value and nationhood: their mutual influence

An obvious question on the topic of radical tragic violence might be: but surely some tragedies convey a certain morality, at least some critics believe so. Both comments are correct. To explain this, I refer back to the chapters on tragedy. In these chapters, I pointed out how tragic art and society mutually influenced each other: tragedy became “critical.” I will concisely recapitulate the argument. When tragedy became critical,<sup>144</sup> both status and meaning of violence and the associated concepts of guilt and punishment changed fundamentally. In the Periclean period, violence was a matter of (divine) doom accompanied by human failure or *hybris* and in Shakespeare, a consequence of human failure (ambition, doubt, haughtiness and every conceivable variation thereof). From the time tragedy became critical, violence became the consequence of criminal

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<sup>144</sup> Roughly during Romanticism, but opinions differ. Nietzsche for instance holds that criticality of tragedy began with Socrates. Other scholars identify its start with Philip Sydney in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; examples are referenced in the chapters on Tragedy.

(or otherwise derailed) behavior or lack of knowledge. It turned (as I argued) the tragic hero from a character larger than life (and beyond the ethical system of good and evil), to a character taking the wrong turn somewhere along the line, or a protagonist being wronged by the construct.

The result of the above is that violence acquires a status within the prevailing value system and thus tragedy loses its existential message. Tragedy becomes a vehicle either for the existing establishment or for forces heralding national consciousness<sup>145</sup> or of forces looking for social change or religious revival.<sup>146</sup> Hence, in Renan's century, the century of an increased national consciousness, tragedy's violence was occasionally received as ancillary to social stability, religious doctrine or potent nationhood: a substantial meaning shift.

In itself this is perfectly acceptable, but for the consequence: we no longer sharply distinguish between types of violence; witness the example Weber gave, referenced in the first chapter.

#### 6.10.5 The critics and the revenge aspect

Of course, I already sufficiently debunked the interpretation of most critics that the *Hamletian* theme is based on revenge. Nevertheless, it is of interest to learn what their stance is on the subject. Since revenge is treated as a given by most critics and hardly defined, I will now examine this theme along the lines of the types of revenge I identified in *Macbeth*.<sup>147</sup>

Given the fact that nowhere in the play can Hamlet be seen busying himself with voodoo dolls or other charms, which are characteristic of the indirect method of revenge, I will examine the remaining variants. If Shakespeare had intended to show *sippenhaft* or psychological vengeance in *Hamlet*, the drama would have ended in act 3, for in scene I, Hamlet burns Ophelia to the ground and in scene IV, he almost (but for the intervention of the ghost) mentally shatters his mother. Moreover, in the same scene, he stabs Polonius. One would say: if this is a revenge play, then this is ample revenge: three people for the life of one, practiced in two different manners of revenge: psychologically and the *sippenhaft* way.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, the argument of revenge along those lines does not hold.

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145 I bring to mind Goethe and Schiller (mentioned in the tragedy chapter) who wanted, with their tragedies, to educate their fellow citizens into a robust German nationalism (Germany became a unity only in 1871 as I mentioned).

146 For an extensive discussion of these issues: see my chapters on tragedy.

147 Just to recap the mentioned types in the last chapter: the eye-for-an-eye revenge, the *Sippenhaft* principle, psychological revenge and indirect revenge.

148 Polonius is so near Claudius's inner circle – and his right hand in affairs of state and personal matters – that it would well fit the bill for *Sippenhaft*.

I will now scrutinize the eye-for-an-eye principle. The crucial question is: does this type of revenge integrally define the fundamental issues of this play? Let us have a close look at the scene where we see this type of vengeance in practice: in act 5, II, when Hamlet and Laertes have the rapier fight. Laertes had long since wanted to avenge his sister and father, but for Hamlet, this was not vengeance at all; it was a friendly fight. And in fact, Laertes<sup>149</sup> too had made his peace with Hamlet before the fight (act 5, II ll. 240 – 248). What is more, just after the queen died and Hamlet was wounded by the poisoned rapier, Laertes cried out (act 5, II ll. 319 – 326) that the blades had been poisoned which means that he let slip the retributinal aspect of the vengeance as well as the regaining of honour aspect, both important characteristics coming with successful eye-for-an-eye revenge.

After that, the dying Laertes articulated the following:

He [Claudius who had just been stabbed by Hamlet] is justly served.  
It is poison temeper'd by himself.  
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.  
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,  
Nor thine on me.<sup>150</sup>

I would interpret these words of the dying Laertes as follows: Claudius is indirectly the author of his own death since he had helped to poison Laertes' blade; which makes it a circuitous way of suicide and – in tragic terms – also evidence of out-of-control radical violence coming back to visit its initial author; this tragic fact is completely outside the scope of whichever vengeance. Laertes' next utterance was one of mutual forgiveness. I would say the concept of forgiveness does not go with the revenge just committed; where terms like 'getting even with' and 'I have saved my honour' would be more fitting.

I cannot but conclude that, although there is revenge in the play, the play cannot be characterized as having revenge (in whatever form) as a major theme.

In his *Law & Literature*, Posner too feels uneasy about pinpointing revenge as the major thematic. He finds an escape in stating that Hamlet "is not just an avenger".<sup>151</sup> Also, Hamlet's maturing plays a role in the unravelling of the drama's deeper meaning; Posner is, of course, right in his hesitations. When arguments are based solely on the fact that *Hamlet* is a revenge play, one has to overlook a host of evidence that it is not just the revenge issue that

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149 In fact, earlier, when still angry with Hamlet, Laertes had suggested to Claudius to poison the rapier. At this point, however, he evidently had changed his mind and makes his peace with Hamlet.

150 *Hamlet*, act 5, I, ll. 333 – 337.

151 R. Posner, *Law & Literature*, p. 105.

Shakespeare conveyed, moreover, the loose ends have to be overlooked and – as Boyd<sup>152</sup> perceptively remarks – the fact that the revenge comes to naught.

Posner discusses *Hamlet* at some length. He notices some awkward problems within the structure of the play regarding revenge; when vengeance is considered, then the play is hackneyed, for Hamlet cannot come to make himself do it. He is a stumbler and a delayer; he is a multiple killer and justice comes at a high cost.<sup>153</sup> All collateral murders should not have happened if only Hamlet had been a bit more efficient. Apart from this being 21st-century efficiency thinking, it disparages Shakespeare's achievement, reduces the richness of the play and makes Hamlet into an idiosyncratic neurotic and a murderer (on top of which he is afflicted with an Oedipal complex). But "anyway a long delay is also good as long as it is filled with adventure and shipwreck."<sup>154</sup> This is, of course, a tongue-in-cheek observation of Posner and it testifies to his experienced authorship. It is followed by a discriminating and comprehensive analysis of the Hamletian problematics. Not only is the revenge theme analyzed, but also the 'maturing' of Hamlet is interpreted and put into perspective.

Posner on the relation between revenge and the rule of law:

justice as vengeance is crude from a moral standpoint once one steps outside the moral framework of the vengeance system itself. Lacking differentiated institutions for making and applying rules of law, justice as vengeance cannot distinguish between culpable and justifiable or excusable injuries. Liability is absolute. The avenger is as "guilty" as the original aggressor. This feature of justice as vengeance makes the feud logical rather than pathological. Law provides both a superior calibration of punishment to blameworthiness and a machinery for public condemnation.<sup>155</sup>

[...]

[A]s centralized institutions of law enforcement emerge in tandem with the nation-state, vengeance, even as refined by principles of retribution, composition, and compassion, falls out of favour. The nation-state claims a monopoly of force; so taking the law into one's own hands becomes itself a crime.<sup>156</sup>

Of course, I am in agreement with Posner when he posits that *Hamlet* is the foreshadowing of the codification of law at the expense of the older custom of revenge. However, when he suggests that Shakespeare critiques the custom of revenge, I disagree. Firstly, I point towards the remark by Prosser (referenced below) that revenge had long since fallen into disgrace in Shakespeare's time and secondly – as I extensively argued above – *Hamlet* is not a play

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152 Referenced below.

153 R. Posner, *Law & Literature*, p. 104.

154 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

155 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

156 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

centring around revenge (or its critique) but centring around the aforesaid transitions. Notwithstanding the fact that Possner also identifies this thematic, he does not identify it as *the* central thematic.

I will now discuss some other representative critics from the legal field that have commented on the revenge theme in *Hamlet*, by way of the excellent overview by Boyd.<sup>157</sup> In his article, he identifies two leitmotifs in *Hamlet*: firstly, Hamlet's delaying the revenge of his father for four long acts and secondly – and legally speaking, deemed even more important: the revenge itself.

Special focus is laid on the implications for the relation between private vengeance and law and the ethics of violence in a codified legal system.<sup>158</sup> Hamlet's delay has led to many speculations as to its precise nature.

Literary scholars, and their legal counterparts, continue to struggle over the interpretation of Shakespeare's most famous character and the ultimate meaning of Hamlet's 'delay.' [...] The play [...] becomes a kind of litmus test for us all, exposing in sharp relief our relationship to the ethics of violence and revenge that reside at the center of Hamlet's 'problem.'<sup>159</sup>

The body of legal commentators attributes Hamlet's delay either to doubt and brooding or to Hamlet's ethical scruples on vengeance. The nature of the brooding and ethical worries varies from commentator to commentator. In Prakash Mehta ("An Essay on Hamlet: Emblems of Truth in Law and Literature", 1994), it was not so much moral doubt as the uncertainty on familial affiliation spiced even with a tinge of Oedipal conflict.

Mehta's veers away from what many [...] would regard as the central ethical problem of the play [viz. taking matters into one's own hands by committing vengeance based only on a ghost's wish] only begins to make sense upon consideration of the critic's discussion of the theme of vengeance in the play. For Mehta, Hamlet's failure through Acts I–IV is principally the failure to answer the legitimate call to vengeance.<sup>160</sup>

When Hamlet finally springs into action, he is restored to mental health again, as Mehta gives. Boyd continues:

Mehta is by no means alone in viewing Hamlet's final willingness to exact revenge as indicative of the character's resolution of his 'problem' and as a sign of his

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<sup>157</sup> Richard Boyd, " 'The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience'": The Legal Community Reads *Hamlet*", in *Law, Culture and the Humanities*.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p. 426.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, p.p. 428 – 429.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, p. 432.

growth toward full maturity. Many, in both the legal and literary communities, have offered similar interpretations of the play and its hero.<sup>161</sup>

In this, they overlook, argues Boyd, the darker side of the problem: the private revenge of Hamlet is and stays premeditated murder, after which he continues discussing the revenge thematic in the drama. Eleonor Prosser (*Hamlet and Revenge*, 1971) embroiders on this subject, stating that both church and society during the Tudor and Stuart reign would have abhorred revenge, unisono condemning it. Even then, not a trace of the generous consideration that Mehta shows could be found for a private undertaking in the sphere of vengeance.

Some scholars, among whom are Jacobi (*Wild Justice*, 1983) and Posner (*Law & Literature*, 1988), see in *Hamlet* the transition of a society haunted by primitive revenge laws into a society with a system of codified law. "In such accounts, *Hamlet* itself enacts something of this evolution in human society."<sup>162</sup> Of course – and here I agree – this is the important outcome in the play, it being the hinge point between Macbeth's tribal society and the highly developed Roman nation-state in the next play discussed. However, this transition is not due to the protagonist's hesitation (viz., his moral doubts and scruples) tout court, but to a far more sophisticated (tragic) mechanism as I argued above.

Coming back to the delay, Boyd continues to discuss Weisberg ("Hamlet and Ressentiment", 1972). The latter offers a startling new and Nietzschean interpretation<sup>163</sup> of the play: since Hamlet – as an aristocrat – should have a strong character, Hamlet's delay (as Boyd has on Weisberg) is sheer cowardice and deeply rooted resentment (towards Claudius) that blocks action. Moreover, (Boyd on Weisberg again), we are in dire need of a new morality altogether, so no more Christian hampering about, as Nietzsche expostulates. I leave this interpretation without much reaction or reflection since it is a unilateral interpretation of Nietzsche on top of a limited and, in my view, deeply incomplete<sup>164</sup> interpretation of *Hamlet*. Weisberg is salvaged more or less by Boyd when the latter offers the following:

In Weisberg's case, I believe his most important gesture is to posit a fundamental difference in the play between Hamlet and Claudius, between a character purportedly paralyzed by resentment and one given over fully to action. According

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161 Ibid, p. 435.

162 Ibid, p. 435.

163 As I understand it, retrieved from *The Genealogy of Morals* only; without consideration for the body of Nietzsche's oeuvre.

164 Influenced more by Freud, than by Shakespeare as also Boyd asserts. However, it is a courageous and refreshing attempt to challenge the conventional revenge discourse and defy Christian theories.

to Weisberg, Hamlet envies Claudius as the dominant Other, the strong figure who has the will to act out the very desires lodged deep in Hamlet's unconscious.<sup>165</sup>

Girard (*Theater of Envy*, 1961), however, holds a diametrically opposite view of Claudius and Hamlet:

Claudius resembles Hamlet in his inability to take a prompt and healthy revenge on his enemies. The king should react more explicitly and decisively to the murder of Polonius [by Hamlet], who was, after all, his private counsellor.<sup>166</sup>

Girard also maintains that Claudius is less nasty than he looks, because he, too, had acted in reaction to revenge. In his argument, Girard points to the fact that Hamlet Sr. might have committed a fatal felony, whereupon Claudius had taken action. There is, of course, no textual evidence in the play to corroborate this. Admittedly, Hamlet Sr. felt encumbered with the burdens of the soul, but so did his son, who had killed nobody at that stage of the play.

#### 6.10.6 The time argument

The time aspect was generally specified above as the delaying of the revenge or procrastination. In my analysis, I already indicated that Hamlet is not in any way delaying or frustrating the course of events; he is – in my view – exceedingly rapid since he had to save the kingdom single-handedly, is going through a massive tragic crisis, and has no one he can trust and rely on.

Now, in response, I would like to ask: what is meant by time and: how long is too long? Is time measured chronologically; is their “too long” meant to describe “unnecessary deaths”, Hamlet’s increasing “madness”, his “sloth”, or too large a number of acts? There is no satisfactory conclusion to these queries. What Wilson Knight identifies as the spatiality of the play is captured by me as tragic existentiality. This concept does not obey chronological time; it is meant to depict a psychological timespan, more specifically, the emotional intensity of a certain timespan. This timespan can be characterized by – apart from having a certain chronological longitude – a lack of personal and mental purpose, a breach in communication with the surrounding community and an utter personal void, which makes it even more emotionally exhausting. The ultimate result<sup>167</sup> of having inhabited such a sphere is an attitudinal full turn as described above. This attitudinal change in itself has a certain duration that cannot be measured in terms of too long

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165 Richard Boyd, “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience”: The Legal Community Reads Hamlet”, in *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, p. 440.

166 *Ibid.*, p. 440.

167 I will come to more aspects of this emotional state later.

or too short. Furthermore, I consider such queries futile in the face of the fundamental issues Shakespeare raises; it belongs to the reality of those measuring the quality of this play by its number of commas.<sup>168</sup> I therefore dismiss the time aspect as a substantive thematic for *Hamlet*.

Ultimately, Shakespearean tragedies are existential and existentiality and revenge are mutually exclusive. In the next chapter, we will scrutinize our next tragic heroes and see how they handle their existential properties within their society.

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168 Or, in L.C. Knightsian terminology, as substantial as the research into the number of Lady Macbeth's children. And, by the way, the historical Lady Macbeth, named Gruoch, did not have any children by her husband Macbeth at all. And, while I am at it, I want to bring to mind that it was in fact the historical Macbeth that married the wife of the one he had killed (slain in battle), as I explained in my previous chapter. And last but not least: Gaelic sources report that the historical Macbeths had a happy marriage.



### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Before turning to the vicissitudes of Julius Caesar, Brutus, his adopted son and Cassius, the latter's friend, I would like to clarify some adjacent points of interest relevant to the understanding of the play. Such are: what is a nation-state? How does this compare to the Roman political constellation? How did Cicero understand his time? How does this compare to the England of Shakespeare's days?

I will start out with a short discussion of the nation-state, the birth of which we witnessed in the previous chapter and the well-being and health of which is the main subject of the ensuing play. A brief summary of the play and its main characters can be found in the appendices.

### 7.2 THE NATION-STATE

In the previous chapter, the birth of the nation-state was announced with some aplomb, but without further explanation. It seems, therefore, high time to study this construct more closely. The obvious questions to ask are: what is a nation-state, how does it work in practice and is the Roman Republic indeed a nation-state? Let us start out with the first query: the definition of a nation-state.

The combination of state and nation is called "nation-state." Thus, it is a concept composed of two elements, together denoting the construct that combines organization (the state component) and ideal (the nation component) into one model. Along these lines, the conceptual apparatuses of Renan and Weber are merged into the concept of nation-state. It has proven to be a highly successful model by which the world has been divided ever since 1648.

According to Weber, the state established a monopoly on violence within its borders to protect citizens, their values and the territory. I dare to add: a type 2 violence to ward off further radical violence.<sup>1</sup> The next few chapters will analyze whether Weber's definition is sufficient to cover the entire concept of the state.

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<sup>1</sup> I will, of course, extensively come back to this seemingly random remark.

If, armed with these definitions, we scrutinize the Rome of 44 BCE, will Rome pass the nation-state test? To shed some light on this question, the sensible thing to do is to turn to a versed contemporary: Cicero. A major part of his oeuvre centers around questions concerning the concept of the state.

### 7.3 The Roman political construct – Cicero

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BCE – 43 BCE) was a politician, philosopher, lawyer and orator. As such, he was involved in the political tribulations of his time. Cicero ended up on Marc Antony's death list (see below) and was killed while trying to escape.

It is not easy to find heroes of moral integrity in the Rome of the transition from Republic to Empire. During the two triumvirates (see further down: the history of Rome) that defined the political scene for some decades in the last century BCE, one does not find many examples of political leadership that are both morally honest and politically effective. Perhaps Cicero is the exception and even though he plays but a minor role in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, his ideas on statecraft color mood and ambience of the play to a high extent.

In 1958, Ernest Glockner<sup>2</sup> asserts that Cicero was *the* most representative Roman philosopher not only of his time, but for all times. Cicero has been criticized for a lack of character stability by some, however, Glockner fervently defends him. As to Glockner, Cicero displayed "*Entschlossenheit*"<sup>3</sup> in several political issues as well as "*Mannesmut*"<sup>4</sup>

This was particularly the case in his encounter with Catiline<sup>5</sup> in 64 BCE. When Cicero had won the elections for the consulship from Cataline for the second time,<sup>6</sup> the latter attempted a coup. Cicero consequently sued Catiline before the Senate. The former's four orations against Catiline – the so-called *Catilinarians* – became legendary.<sup>7</sup> So much so that in all the Elizabethan schools,<sup>7</sup> "they were used to drill generations of pupils in the Latin language and were closely analyzed as literary masterpieces by Renaissance intellectual and rhetorical theorists."<sup>8</sup>

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2 Glockner, Hermann, *Die europäische Philosophie von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 232.

3 Ibid., p. 234.

4 Cataline, scion of a Roman aristocratic family, professed himself spokesman for the proletariat and vociferously defended their interests. Cicero on the other hand paradoxically (because from a relatively non-descript provincial family) became the champion for the interests of the elite. During Cicero's second consulship, the trial against Cataline took place.

5 Both in 64 and 63 BCE.

6 It goes without saying that Cicero won the trial and Cataline was subsequently exiled.

7 For this reason I hold that Shakespeare must have known about Cicero's orations. Most probably, in view of the "didactical" methods used in his day, by heart.

8 Mary Beard, *SPQR*, p. 41.

Cicero's ideal was the philosophically trained orator. He advocated for well-constructed democratic law against a background of the natural law principles reflecting "eternal justice." He drew inspiration from the works of Plato as well as the Stoic views on human dignity.

Cicero's first main philosophical work was called *On the State* (*De Re Publica*: 54 – 51 BCE).<sup>9</sup> Through Scipio, paragon of Roman patriotism, he expressed his views on the state in the form of a dialogue. Although not all of his work has survived, the crucial "Dream of Scipio" (*Somnium Scipionis*) has. The words of Hannibal's defeater read thus: "For nothing of all that is done on earth is more pleasing to that supreme God who rules the whole universe than the assemblies and gatherings of men associated in justice, which are called states."<sup>10</sup> We may conclude that he has a clear view on the underlying idea of what a state should be: "a gathering of men associated in justice."

The next question would certainly be: how are Cicero's ideas on statesmanship and the organization of a nation-state manifested in the everyday handy-work of political practice? In his *De Re Publica*, his political and constitutional ideas on this subject take shape. In this work Cicero intended to initiate a discussion of the state: what structure could a state best have and what qualities/qualifications should those entrusted with its implementation have. In the book, he presents the now well-known doctrine of the mixed form of government<sup>11</sup> that reached its peak popularity in the Roman Republic. Cicero articulates it as follows: "a monarchy is a rule by one, in which power is held by a king or supreme leader; an aristocracy is a rule by the best, in which power is held by a ruling class and democracy is the rule by the people when power is held by the community as a whole."<sup>12</sup> Each of these forms could be perverted.<sup>13</sup> A monarchy was in danger of degenerating into tyranny, the aristocracy could become an oligarchy and a democracy could descend into mob rule. Therefore, Cicero deemed it best if these three forms were balanced against each other before corruption could creep in.

On statesmanship, *The Re Publica* reads as follows: the ideal statesman "should possess a wide knowledge of law, a thorough education. [...] He must be fully conversant with justice in its highest aspects, for without that no one can be just and he must not be ignorant of the civil law".<sup>14</sup> Cicero cannot

9 This work was lost. It was not retrieved from the Vatican archives until 1820. So unfortunately, Shakespeare could not have known this work. Yet, the notions on what a healthy nation-state should entail are remarkably similar. In the next chapter I will come back to this issue.

10 Cicero, *De Re Publica*, VI, XIII, pp. 265 – 266.

11 In short, the *regimen mixtum* stands for a constitution in which the three principles of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy are properly balanced. Source: Alban Mik, "Het classicistische politieke denken van Van Hogendorp", p. 72.

12 Cicero, *De Re Publica*, I, XXXV, p. 83.

13 Cicero, *De Re Publica*, I, XLIV, p. 101.

14 Cicero, *De Re Publica*, V. III, p. 249.

be any clearer about the importance of the rule of law for the proper function and maintenance of a state construct; accordingly, despite his account of his doctrine on mixed government, which veers towards autocratic rule, he can be typified as an early advocate of the 'rule of law'. Glockner (referenced above) also recognizes this when he rightly says that Cicero was concerned with the connection of law and state power. Although Glockner does not characterize Cicero's views explicitly as campaigning for the rule of law, yet he does detect Cicero's emphasis on it.

The proper role of aristocratic leadership and Senatorial independence, together with Platonic analogies for the requisite concord and harmony in the city, were central themes of Cicero's political philosophy, as he wrote: "What the musicians call harmony with respect to song is concord in the state, the tightest and best bond of safety in every republic; and that concord can never exist without justice"<sup>15</sup> Cicero's political philosophy, developed in part in connection with the aforementioned Greek views, of which he had an excellent knowledge, was supplemented by him with the Roman brand of Stoic ethics which Glockner characterizes as "*Altrömertum*" and elaborates as:

Sittengesetze, Tugendpathos, praktische Lebensweisheit, Willenskraft, Männlichkeit (virtus), während man für unfruchtbare Spekulationen wenig übrig hatte und einen gewissen Grad von Skepsis sogar für nützlich hielt.<sup>16</sup>

How does all this relate to our theme: the nation-state? Besides the importance of law, Cicero refers to "concord in the state" in the preceding quote from *De Re Publica II*. Thus, a state cannot exist without a certain cohesion. This represents the nation element in his thought. In the republic, we cannot seek a basis for cohesion in one religion, according to Renan. Shakespeare is also aware of this. But we do need a basis for human coexistence. We see now that Cicero seeks that foundation in the idea of unity.

In other words, Cicero had a clear perception of what was needed for the formation of a healthy body politic and a stable state in addition to the needs of nationhood. Quite obviously, his thoughts centre around the ideals of nation and nation-state; therefore we may indeed conclude that Rome was familiar with and aware of the ideal-typical concept of the nation-state around that time.

Cicero, in his work *De Re Publica*, also discusses the state of affairs during the latter days of the republic:<sup>17</sup> "But though the republic, when it came to us, was like a beautiful painting, whose colours, however, were already fading

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15 Cicero, *De Re Publica*, II, XLII, pp. 181 – 182.

16 Glockner, Hermann, *Die europäische Philosophie von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 237.

17 The Roman Republic had existed from 509–27 BCE. In 509 the Romans replaced the monarch by elected magistrates who, in turn, would govern the state. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Roman-Republic>. Also see: paragraph on the history of Rome.

with age, our own time not only has neglected to freshen it by renewing the original colours, but has not even taken the trouble to preserve its configuration and, so to speak, its general outlines.[...] For the loss of our custom is due to our lack of men [...] For it is through our own faults, not by any accident, that we retain only the form of the commonwealth, but have long since lost its substance.”<sup>18</sup>

Cicero’s political views and commitment eventually proved fatal to him. As mentioned above, he ended up on the death list of Mark Antony, who was part of the second Triumvirate. Cicero died in 43 BCE.

Cicero epitomizes the idea of the *nation-state* as that of the *republic*. A logical question in this context might be: does it make sense to compare the concept of the *nation-state* (Renan/Weber) with Cicero’s *republic* and subsequently query Shakespeare on these subjects? Is not a nation or nation-state essentially differing from a republic? It could be argued that Renan is not talking about a republic and Cicero is not talking about a nation. If one were to make a meaningful comparison between the political theory of these two important commentators of law and politics – the first from antiquity, the other from modern times – the comparison would have to be organized on the basis of equally quantifiables. For example, a comparison could be made between the French Republic as it existed at the end of the 19th century and the early Roman Republic. But even so, in spite of the fact that we would compare two republics, the problem of distance in time remains.

Obvious as it may seem, this objection makes no sense. The error lies in the fact that neither the format itself nor its nomenclature is important; rather, it is the content of that format. Indeed, Cicero does not use the word nation in *De Re Publica*, and Renan does not use the word republic in “What is a Nation?” However, the study of their respective oeuvres reveals that the two thinkers pursue the same goal: they try to define the conditions for lasting and just cooperation among people in a community or state context. They seek the sources of lasting social cohesion.

The counterpart of such enduring social cohesion then also comes into view: the sources of decline. Not only is coherence of interest here, also the degeneration of a (social) construct. Here we come close to the central theme of the last tragedy under discussion: Shakespeare’s tragedy *Julius Caesar*, which play illustrates in a phenomenal and terse way the political and social decay of a nation-state.

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18 Cicero, *De Re Publica*, V II, p. 245.

#### 7.4 THE EROSION OF A NATION-STATE

Cicero, in his quotation from *De Re Publica V II*, cited above, clearly indicates how a nation-state can erode. He also identifies its source: nation-states may disintegrate through a loss of custom (referring to the ideal of the nation, which needs active maintenance) and a lack of preserving their configuration (the state-construct, which should also be well-kept). When both elements are neglected, the nation-state can fall apart. This is also what threatened to happen during the Roman civil war. In the play, Shakespeare points out that Cassius and Brutus rightly show that the nation needs an animating connection of nationhood. Of course, a life-enhancing connection can impossibly be carried by a single person. It has to be shared by an entire community. When this sense is lacking or absent, the nation might fall apart. In other words, the degeneration of the nation-state construct was not just caused by friction between groups, but also by the fact that the nation-state and its value system were no longer mutually nourishing. When that happens, the nation-state is in great peril of losing its control over state-monopolized violence; it just might degenerate into radical (non)tragedical violence.

Could the proper functioning of the public construct be related to the Shakespearean violence paradigm? If so, in what way? I hope to find an answer to this question in the next chapter and its evaluation.

#### 7.5 THE HISTORY OF ROME AS RELEVANT FOR THE PLAY

In order to be able to fully appreciate *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* it is necessary to know some essentials of Roman history.<sup>19</sup> Rome began as a kingdom from about 755 until 509 B.C.E. The last king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, exerted a veritable reign of terror.<sup>20</sup> At last a revolt against him was led by Lucius Junius Brutus (note that this is a direct ancestor of Marcus Brutus who is – apart from being a historical figure – also one of the play's leading characters)<sup>21</sup> in 509 B.C.E., after which Rome became a republic. It was governed by two consuls simultaneously, who were elected yearly; the Senate formed the advisory and assisting counsel to the consuls, consisting of some 600 free men. History's irony has it that in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, a reverse movement can be seen: from the shared power of the republic into an absolute monarchy. Even more ironic is the fact that this monarchy is the ultimate

19 Sources: Mary Beard, *SPQR* and *Julius Caesar*, Cambridge School of Shakespeare, Cambridge University Press.

20 In his longish poem *The Rape of Lucrece* Shakespeare relates in detail the rape of Lucrece by this king's son. Plutarch tells us that after this rape a general uprising breaks out.

21 I carefully note that one should not mix up the historical figures with the characters in the play, tempting though it is. As far as I can ascertain Shakespeare made use of poetic licence in depicting the characters.

outcome of an attempt to prevent absolute monarchy.<sup>22</sup> In the years preceding Julius Caesar's rule, Rome had known constant upheavals, mainly due to attempts at land reforms – which did, of course, not sit comfortably with patrician and landowning families – and the curtailing of power of those same patrician families. These interests were played out by feuding factions in the Senate and ended in escalation into open civil war. The two opposing parties were the *Populares* and the *Optimates*. Julius Caesar headed the *Populares*, which faction aimed, contrary to the politics of the *Optimates* (headed by Pompey), at the aforesaid land reform.

To curtail the power of the Senate, three important representatives of influential patrician families formed the first triumvirate in 60 BCE. This triumvirate consisted of Pompey,<sup>23</sup> Crassus<sup>24</sup> and Julius Caesar. During this period, Julius and Pompey were intimate, their bond even sealed by marriage ties (Pompey being married to Julia, Caesar's daughter). When Crassus was killed in a battle against the Parthians in 53 BCE, the triumvirate continued as a duo. Until then, Pompey had always been the most prominent consul of the three.

"Pompey held more power and authority than any one man in Rome had ever had."<sup>25</sup> He was given the name Magnus: the great.

However, Julius Caesar increasingly gained power and influence, much helped by the fact that he had some 40.000 legions at his disposal that had fought with him in Gaul. Julius was extremely popular among his troops, mainly due to his promise to provide plots of land for the senior legionaries.<sup>26</sup>

When Pompey ordered him to lay down his arms and come to Rome without his army to report to the Senate, Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon with his army on 7<sup>th</sup> January 49 BCE. In the eyes of many Senate members, he changed from a brilliant general into an inconvenience and a problem. After he traversed the Rubicon, civil war broke out. Pompey and Julius, the one-time intimates, became mortal enemies.

After a series of battles, Julius Caesar defeated Pompey in 48 BCE, after which the latter flew to Egypt, where he was assassinated. In January 44 BCE, the Senate appointed Julius dictator for an indefinite period.

Julius' appointment was unprecedented. As a rule, dictators were appointed only in times of great emergencies and never for longer than one year. After

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22 C. Kahn, "Julius Caesar Relies on Ancient Rome's Complex Political Stage", in *Social Issues in Literature*, p. 49.

23 Pompey the Great, 106 – 48 BCE, general and statesman. Former protégé of Sulla (see below).

24 Crassus, 115 – 53 BC, general and statesman. Accumulated immense wealth by proscriptions (confiscated properties).

25 C. Kahn, "Julius Caesar Relies on Ancient Rome's Complex Political Stage", in *Social Issues in Literature*, p. 49.

26 Hence Julius' politics for land reform; it always being very convenient to give something away that is not yours to give in the first place.

having been given this much power, Julius started to court kingship. Fearing his absolute power, some of his intimate friends (including Marcus Brutus) murdered him on the fifteenth of March, 44 B.C.E.

Following his assassination in March 44 BCE, the second triumvirate was established (in November of the same year) to govern Rome. It consisted of Octavian, Lepidus and Mark Antony. This triumvirate continued until 31 BCE. The triad was established by law to form a new government. Soon, Lepidus was side-lined. Octavian was given the administration of the western territories and Mark Antony that of the eastern ones (Egypt and Alexandria). In 31 BCE, Mark Antony's navy lost a battle against Octavian. In 27 BCE, Octavian returned to Rome; he was appointed princeps and given the title Augustus.

## 7.6 ENGLAND DURING SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

What was, as a point of interest, the status of constitutional affairs in Shakespeare's day? Of course, in England, the concept of republic<sup>27</sup> was unthinkable, or even the slightest inclination towards any form of republicanism.<sup>28</sup>

In the early modern period, England underwent a political transition, as had Rome – the latter several times. It was the time of "the cementing of the nation-state and the emergence of a new Tudor and Stuart government, which broke with the medieval feudalism and practised more strategic and goal-oriented politics."<sup>29</sup> The precise form, however, was not questioned; the concept of monarchy itself was never attacked by Tudor scholars in law as it seemed a self-evident universality and sacrosanct. The monarch was also the anointed head of the Church,<sup>30</sup> implying that this was god's holy order and thus desired by him, as was the hereditary status of the throne. "The Elizabethan historian Sir Hayward (1560 – 1627) sums up the familiar analogical argument with exemplary simplicity when he writes: 'As one God ruleth the world, one master the family.... So it seemeth no less natural that one state should be governed by one commander.' With its almost universal agreement on the desirability of monarchical rule, whether absolute or constitutional, much of the political writing of the period focused on defining the

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27 A people electing their representatives under a ruler (rather than a hereditary monarch).

28 Only in 1649 the commoner Oliver Cromwell abolished the monarchy. He became Lord Protector of England and Scotland in 1653. A crown was offered to him in 1657, but he politely refused. After his death in 1658 his son and successor could not secure the unity of the country; in 1660 Charles II was crowned king.

29 U. Kizelbach, *The Pragmatics of Early Modern Politics: Power and Kingship in Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 253. This characteristic does point – to some extend – in the direction of a republican ordering of the state (in the sense of Cicero's *De Re Publica*), but it should be noted that the England of the 16<sup>th</sup> century it is not even close to republicanism in the modern sense of the word. It would take more than half a century for Cromwell to take over.

30 Since Henry VIII: he made himself the head of the Church of England.

nature of the ideal prince.<sup>31/32</sup> Despite this one constant governmental factor, the Elizabethan era was a time of uncertainty and upheaval. Religious tensions reigned and intermittently the Black Death raged over the isle; moreover, there were insurrections against the queen's rule (see also my chapter on *Macbeth*, where I mentioned some of the more renowned revolts).

Treatises on just and virtuous kingship abounded in any shape and form. Well-known and widespread was the book by Desiderius Erasmus: *The Education of a Christian Prince* (published in 1532). Also well-read was the treatise by Sir Thomas Elyot: *The Book of the Governour*<sup>33</sup> (published in 1531). Both works extensively describe the virtues required in a successful and ideal prince. The emphasis was on Christian ethics; how to be or become virtuous in the eyes of the world and – above all – of god and the church. Autocratic and constitutional rulers alike could be eligible for such a qualification.

A completely different angle was taken by Machiavelli. In his *The Prince* (first published in 1532)<sup>34</sup> he sketched an approach that was startling for his time. Headlam Wells writes: "Machiavelli was above all a pragmatist. Appealing not to an abstract theological principle, but to the practical realities of political life, he set out in *The Prince* to offer advice on the art of successful government. [...] It is not enough to rely on the traditional kingly virtues of justice and integrity; the successful prince must learn to beat the world at its own game."<sup>35</sup>

In the chapter on *Hamlet*, I identified Shakespeare's approach to the attainment of the necessary statecraft- and leadership skills: no man can be a good leader or statesman who has not gone through his tragic crisis successfully. It is again an approach which is diametrically opposed to the previous two; in not being rationally and ruthlessly pragmatic like Machiavelli's and not being Christian like the conventional ones. I will indicate this as the tragic existentialist approach: a tragic existential mirror of princes. Actually, the term mirror of princes is far too limited a term for something that could apply to the whole of the community and all aspects of (political and social) life. For surely, the violence paradigm affects not just the prince but the entirety of a community. Consequently, the violence paradigm represents not a mirror of princes but an entire worldview. A worldview differing substantially from the idealist world view of, e.g. Plato, the Christian one by Dante, or the later naturalist worldviews of Hume and Hobbes. Shakespeare's tragic existential

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31 Prince: in this context generally used as a term to indicate a hereditary ruler of noble birth.

32 R. Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Politics, a contextual Introduction*, p. 90. It becomes crystal clear from the ensuing argument in his treatise that he means kingship here and not some other form of autocracy.

33 Also mentioned in the chapter on Shakespeare's biography on another topic.

34 See also the evaluation below, where Machiavelli, his works and the tradition he stands in are discussed in more detail.

35 Ibid, p. 108.

world view is essentially secular. I will expound on the content of his views below in my last chapter on *Julius Caesar*.

Another topical subject, which was also touched upon in the previous chapters was whether it was permitted to commit regicide or oust a bad or irrelevant ruler. Killing a sovereign, divinely ordained as he was supposed to be (see John Hayward's quote above), was tantamount to challenging god's sway over the universal order. It would unsettle not only the nation, but the harmony of all the spheres.<sup>36</sup>

Much along the lines of the regicide debate, the discussion on tyrannicide (also referenced in previous chapters) was conducted. Important points of dispute were the following: "how to tell a tyrant from a just king [...] how and when to justify assassination. [...] Examination of the term "tyrant" can clarify the nature of these criteria. In antiquity, the term referred to a ruler who came to power by usurpation, without constitutional warrant. In the works of Plato, Aristotle [...] and others, however, the term came to describe any evil ruler, anyone who governed by whim for personal gain instead of by law for the general welfare. Deriving mainly from Aristotle, long lists [...] itemized the distinctive characteristics of tyrants and kings and contrasted their styles of government."<sup>37</sup> Armed with this knowledge of Shakespeare's and Julius' times, we will now turn to the tragic death of the intended king of Rome.

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36 See the paragraph Shakespeare's England in William Shakespeare's biography.

37 Robert S. Miola, "Julius Caesar Challenges the Renaissance Debate on Tyrannicide", in *Social Issues in Literature*, p. 95/96.



### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Thematically, *Julius Caesar*<sup>1</sup> is in many ways the sequel to the play *Hamlet*, it being a following step in the life cycle of a nation-state. In the previous plays we saw, in succession, how both the will to form a nation and values<sup>2</sup> emerged from the violence paradigm; then the nation-state itself sprang into being as a logical corollary of Hamlet's wishes concerning the separation of powers. In unity of will and purpose, his wishes are honored. We might say that the entire community is thus affected by the powerful effect of the violence paradigm, undergoing the same change in attitude and outlook, working in unison for the benefit of the community as long as this influence lasts.

We now enter the stage in which, in effect, we witness this influence wane and wear down. How do the protagonists in this tragedy deal with the correlation between values and (state-monopolized) violence? Do they understand that values are not in the same league as consumer goods: to be used at their pleasure?

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1 For summary and main characters of the play: see Appendices.

2 Of course, further down this chapter I will elaborate on how this takes shape.

In this chapter, I will focus on these questions as well as on the following issues:

- Do Renan's and Weber's concepts of nation and state adequately cover the reality of the nation-state?
- How does Cicero's rule of law relate to the violence paradigm?
- In what ways is the proper functioning of the public construct related to the violence paradigm?

These aspects of the topic in hand will be evaluated conclusively in the next chapter.

## 8.2 SETTING OFF ON A JOURNEY

Rome was a nation based on territorial expansion through military successes and victories. This becomes especially apparent in the values the Romans upheld. This society has absorbed that much violence that violence itself has turned into a socially accepted value, it seems. Well now, is it wise to simply incorporate a type of violence (any type, but in this case, the aftereffect of many wars of conquest; war being of the radical non-tragic type) into a state construct without the mediation of the violence paradigm? Is such a construct able to withstand the stress test of the next crisis?

Cicero's commentary in the previous chapter, on the (eroding) state of affairs in the republic, is lucid and completely unambiguous. It is against this background that the play starts. In act 1 we meet a society in turmoil, having just lived through the most terrible of wars: the civil war variety. The danger not coming from without, but from within. Julius at that time is at the height of his power; being loved, hated and feared.

## 8.3 OPENING OF THE PLAY

In scene I, we meet two tribunes,<sup>3</sup> Flavius and Murellus, who confront two common citizens with their public behavior. In spite of the fact that these functionaries were the chosen representatives of the plebeians in the Senate (and may therefore be expected to promote and guard their interests), a sense of tension and conflict can be detected in their words. "Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home! Is this a holiday?"<sup>4</sup> In an interrogative tone, they ask the two laborers why they are out on a working day and why they are celebrating. Their answers are sharp and cheeky, quick-witted with a touch

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3 Tribunes in Republican Rome were elected in the Senate by the plebeians. They were, in the true sense of the word, representatives of the common people.

4 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, I, l. 1 – 2.

of rebuff. They are holidaying to celebrate Julius Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons. Murellus is outraged and gives them a severe scolding:

Wherfore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?  
 What tributaries follow him to Rome  
 To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?  
 You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things,  
 O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,  
 Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft  
 Have you climbed up to walls and battlements,  
 To towers and windows, yea, to chimney tops,  
 Your infants in your arms, and there have sat  
 The livelong day with patient expectation  
 To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.<sup>5</sup>

Murellus understands that the end of a civil war should never be a valid reason for celebration since half the nation is in grief for the loss of fathers, sons, or other casualties. Festivities at this point would be the ultimate affront for those who had lost and are, after all, still fellow citizens. In this case, he's talking about those in favor of Pompey. He also reminds the revelers of the fickleness of their preferences. Only a short while ago, they hailed Pompey as the victor of battles. In other words, Flavius and Murellus warn for the wrong attitude towards violence. Both the negating and venerating of violence are unwise strategies to follow. From this perspective, Julius' triumphant parade is bizarre and foolish.

Flavius adds that the merrymakers should hurry home, and pray for forgiveness; when they are gone, he urges Murellus to divest all statues and images in the streets of their festive ornaments. He remarks:

I'll about  
 And drive away the vulgar from the streets.  
 So do you too, where you perceive them thick.  
 These growing feathers plucked from Caesar's wing  
 Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,  
 Who else would soar above the view of men  
 And keep us all in servile fearfulness.<sup>6</sup>

In this scene, Shakespeare paints Rome's crisis in rough but sure brushstrokes. Effectively and explicitly, he depicts the internal differences among citizens as well as the loss of coherence and interdependence within and between the classes. A united will to overcome and heal the wounds of civil war is totally absent. There is a tension between the general public and its representatives.

5 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, I, ll. 31 – 41.

6 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, I, ll. 69 – 74.

Not only between the tribune-senators<sup>7</sup> and the populace trust is gone; these representatives, in their turn, anxiously observe how consul Julius Caesar concentrates power in his person by his continued consulship; the above quote also shows their apprehension and fear of Julius' growing power.<sup>8</sup> Note that there is no trace of the relaxation and appeasement that a newly made peace might bring after a devastating civil war. Shakespeare communicates minutely that at any moment, violence could flare up again.

The subtle gossamer of Roman's social fabric is badly torn. Relationships are built on mutual distrust, fear and expediency. No trace of Renan's explicit condition of unity in will and purpose can be detected. Nationhood, as defined by Renan, is totally absent here. Shakespeare characterizes the citizens as consumers of pleasures. They want a holiday and seek an occasion to get one. Paul Cantor remarks that in *Julius Caesar* we witness the transformation of citizens into consumers and spectators.<sup>9</sup> I recall Renan's words in the second chapter on nations and self-interest: no nation that is based on self-interest can stand, giving Rome as an example. Hostility looms directly below the surface. Tensions and mistrust that are widely spread and, as always, these are harbingers of violence to come.

In the second scene, we witness yet another festivity: the procession to celebrate Lupercal.<sup>10</sup> Caesar enters with his train of followers and friends. In a short intermezzo, Shakespeare sketches important aspects of Caesar's character and attitude. He exhibits his superstitions when he asks Antony to touch Calpurnia to relieve her from her barrenness,<sup>11</sup> for it was commonly believed that the touch of someone taking part in a holy procession could remedy this condition. Yet, somewhat later in the same scene, he condescendingly rebukes a soothsayer who warns him of the Ides of March.<sup>12</sup> Caesar calls the man but "a dreamer".<sup>13</sup> This scene, filled with cheering crowds pressing round Caesar, tells us that he is venerated and that, because he realizes this, he feels he can play men at will. But then again, he is subject to that same superstition when he asks Antony the above favour. His volatile behaviour has a touch of decadence and instability. The short intermezzo

7 It should be remembered that by the power of their office they were important strongholds on which the republic rested. However, they did not have the same amount of influence and power our modern members of parliament have.

8 As we have seen above, during the republic a consulship lasted only one year; Julius held this office much longer and was thus able to transfer power to his position and to himself.

9 Paul Cantor, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llHxxnJge5s>

10 Lupercal was a Roman festival held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February. Originally it was a farming festival to ward wolves off the lambs. Later on it was adopted by the city of Rome to chase away evil spirits. Source: William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Cambridge School Shakespeare, ed. by Timothy Seward and Rob Smith, p. 172.

11 There is the possible suggestion that her barrenness, might also be his impotence; witness his faltering masculinity, his deafness and epileptic fits. Julius is clearly past his prime.

12 The fifteenth of March, still to come at that point.

13 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, sc. II, l. 24.

hardly sketches a picture of the wished-for mentality of the empire's leader and guardian. An empire in dire need of stability after a period of civil war and administrative crisis. The cracks begin to appear in the basis of the realm and amongst those in charge of it, soiling the very fabric of society.

Of course, historically speaking (I remind the reader of the fact that here we are discussing a play, not history and here I digress a bit into history), these cracks had long since been there. Julius had just come back from a ten-year campaign in Gaul. Today, we would say a decade packed with war crimes. It had been to the greater glory of Rome. Again, the question can be raised as to how Rome copes with a person who had caused so much radical non tragic violence? Pompey had made an effort by ordering Julius Caesar to leave his troops north of the river Rubicon and summoning him to the Senate. This is, by far, not enough for a person who has gone through 10 years of war and is hardened to the bone. Most of his soldiers must have been damaged either mentally or physically or both and, of course, in the Rome of the first century BCE, no one had a clue as to this issue. We can safely assume that in the mind of Julius Caesar, his military exploits in Gaul seamlessly merge into the civil war in Rome (lasting four years). For now, it may suffice to conclude that Julius Caesar brought a huge amount of violence with him into a society with an already weak and decrepit state construct.

In the play we find a Julius Caesar who is volatile and superstitious. He knows very well how to wield violence and how to wield success, but does he know how to wield a nation-state, an empire?

#### 8.4 CASSIUS AND BRUTUS: WHO ARE THEY AND HOW DO THEY PERCEIVE JULIUS CAESAR

Two of Julius' associates, Brutus and Cassius, had joined Julius in the procession, however, they remained behind in the street as the parade continued. Who are Cassius and Brutus? Brutus was a senator and had previously fought alongside Pompey in the civil war. After the battle of Pharsalus (48 BCE), lost by Pompey, Julius Caesar had pardoned Brutus for fighting on the 'wrong side'; they even became intimates. This developed into an even closer relationship when Julius adopted Brutus as his son. Brutus descended from an aristocratic lineage, in which he took much pride. Cassius was married to Brutus' sister, he had an excellent reputation as a commanding officer in the field. He too, initially fought on Pompey's side, and he too, was pardoned by Julius. However, Cassius remained hostile towards Julius. Both were praetors<sup>14</sup> at one point. Between these two, the following conversation unfolds.

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14 A kind of judge.

Cassius asks Brutus whether he will "go see the order of the course".<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare here plays with the meaning of the word course (in modern English: the race), which in middle and early modern English also could mean *curs* or *curse*: threat, curse or doom.<sup>16</sup>

Cassius remarks that Brutus is not as good-natured and affectionate towards him as he used to be. Brutus reacts that he had been troubled of late; "vexed I am/of late with passions of some difference,/Conceptions only proper to myself."

He keeps them to himself and won't trouble his friends: "But let not therefore my good friends be grieved/(Among which number, Cassius, be you one)/Nor construe any further my neglect/Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war/Forgets the shows of love to other men."<sup>17</sup>

Here, Brutus defines his friendship with Cassius as a genuine heartfelt relationship; one in which friends can be themselves and freely show their feelings and voice their opinions. It is precisely that aspect that Cassius addresses in his question. Cassius, however, does not use this bond with Brutus to reinforce its sincerity. He has a different objective. He starts to play Brutus to manipulate him and prime him for his own purposes. An interesting conversation ensues, cautiously guided by Cassius. He tells Brutus that the latter needs an interpreter for a better understanding of himself. Of course, this is not his private opinion, Cassius hastens to add, but that of many Romans.

And it is very much lamented, Brutus,  
That you have no such mirrors as will turn  
Your hidden worthiness into your eye  
That you might see your shadow. I have heard  
Where many of the best respect in Rome,  
(Except immortal Caesar), speaking of Brutus  
And groaning underneath this age's yoke,  
Have wished that noble Brutus had his eyes.<sup>18</sup>

Cassius has packed a few messages in his words: you lack proper feedback to come to a better self-knowledge. He also implies: this is not my private opinion, but the *opinio communis*. Cassius here plays on an important primeval need<sup>19</sup> in man (and therefore, of course, also in Brutus): his need to be embedded and secured within his community. Cassius continues: many are

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15 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, sc. II, l. 25.

16 *Curs*: Old English and *Cours*: Old French. Source: F.H. Stratman, *A Middle-English Dictionary*, lemma *Curs*, p. 146.

17 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 43 – 47.

18 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 56 – 62.

19 I will extensively come back to man's primeval existential needs and the difference with modish and consumptive needs later on in the play.

dissatisfied with the current time-juncture in Rome. Brutus feels uncomfortable, but cannot precisely pinpoint the essence of it. He responds:

Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,  
 That you would have me seek into myself  
 For that which is not in me?<sup>20</sup>

Thereupon Cassius offers himself to be Brutus' sparring partner to give his self-knowledge the boost Cassius deems necessary. In this terse scene we see a perversion of friendship and trust on the part of Cassius. After this conversation it is no longer (if it ever was) a friendship between equals, but a vertical one: Cassius leading on Brutus.

Brutus describes his general attitude towards the important Roman value of honor within the polis.

If it be aught toward the general good,  
 Set honour in one eye and death i' th' other,  
 And I will look on both indifferently,  
 For let the gods so speed me as I love  
 The name of honor more than I fear death.<sup>21</sup>

For Brutus, honour is of greater importance than his death. Cassius responds to it, going specifically into the honour aspect.

Honour has several connotations. 1) Honour in the battlefield (this aspect is first and foremost in the Roman mind since Rome had been a highly militarized culture, bent on conquest). 2) To distinguish oneself in battle or suffering an honorable death by a worthy opponent.<sup>22</sup> 3) This is in line with the Roman concept of honourable suicide.<sup>23</sup> 4) Next, there is the association with honour revenge; revenge in order to restore one's honor.<sup>24</sup> 5) Lastly, there is the virtue honour of an individual: a person of integrity.

Well now, there is a subtle difference between a value and a virtue: a value is commonly shared within a community and a virtue is a personal characteristic. A value could be personified as an individual asset, but an individual characteristic can never be a common value (i.e., the other way around). Cassius uses the concept as a personal virtue: the upright code of conduct. "I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus."<sup>25</sup> But Brutus was talking about the honourable death in the battlefield (being a value shared by many: Act 1, II, l. 89). In other words, Cassius implies that a commonly shared value is a

20 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 63 – 65.

21 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 85 – 89.

22 Cif. chapter on *Macbeth*.

23 See further down: act 5.

24 See *Macbeth* on revenge.

25 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, l. 90.

virtue of Brutus: burdening Brutus thus with the responsibility for upholding single-handedly a communal value. The question is whether Brutus can live up to this.

Cassius goes on to tell a story of how he had to rescue Caesar from drowning by carrying him on his back. He compares this to the story of Aeneas (by Vergil), who carried his old father Anchises on his back, fleeing from Troy. The implications are crystal clear: Cassius = Aeneas and Anchises = Caesar. The coming young man and the waning old man. The Roman value of *pietas* is implied here: the obligational cohesiveness, especially from the younger towards the older and elderly, was an important value<sup>26</sup> even more so when the older one was higher in rank. Here we touch upon an important notion also mentioned by Renan: the unity in will and purpose that transforms a group into a nation; in other words, the necessary cohesiveness within a nation. Here, this takes shape in the form of mutual obligation. However, Cassius perverts this by telling the story with contempt for the older person, depicting him as weak and needy. Herewith, he completely peels the concept of its customary meaning, distorting and twisting it.

Cassius casually mentions that “this man” (meaning Julius Caesar) is now a god: “And this man/Is now a god, and Cassius is/A wretched creature and must bend his body/If Caesar carelessly but nod on him.”<sup>27</sup> Cassius’s spite sputters from his lips. “Ye gods, it doth amaze me/A man of such feeble temper should/So get the start of the majestic world/And bear the palm alone.”<sup>28</sup>

Cassius cries out: “Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed/That he is grown so great? Age, thou art shamed!/Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods.”<sup>29</sup> Cassius, however, is part of this degeneration himself, abusing his friendship with Brutus, playing him, becoming the consumer of their friendship. After Brutus has left him, Cassius rummages, assessing Brutus’ character:

Well, Brutus, thou art noble. Yet I see  
Thy honourable mettle may be wrought  
From that it is disposed. Therefore it is meet  
That noble minds keep ever with their likes,  
For who so firm that cannot be seduced?<sup>30</sup>

The crucial question here is whether Brutus will be able to singly uphold not only his honour, but also his constancy. Cassius’ observations, realistic as they are, bode little good.

26 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare’s Rome*, p. 85.

27 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, sc. 2, ll. 116 – 118.

28 Ibid. ll. 129 – 131.

29 Ibid. ll. 149 – 151.

30 Ibid. ll. 297 – 301.

## 8.5 RECAPITULATION AND ASSESSMENT OF VALUES DISCUSSED SO FAR

So far, several values have been reviewed, all of them more or less degenerated. Allow me to, at this point, elaborate briefly upon them for a moment:

- The relationship and reciprocity between the classes of a soundly operating hierarchical system are abating, if not outright hostile.
- The democratic<sup>31</sup> organization of the state (the Roman Republic) is heavily under pressure. This, of course, had not appeared out of thin air. Unrest and upheavals had weakened the internal social structure for a considerable time (this is also referenced in the previous chapter: the paragraph on the history of Rome).
- A perversion of culture in the sense that active citizenship seems to be replaced by passive consumerism of democratic achievements. In fact, the play starts with the “consummation” of a day off after Julius Caesar’s victory.
- The Roman values of integrity and loyal friendship. The true variety is only apparent in Brutus’s friendship towards Cassius. The other way around, it is professed only in words.
- In the above quote: “Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed”: ll. 149, Cassius talks about *our* Caesar. The use of this pronoun could be a sign of familiarity and proximity (and indeed Caesar had always been in close and informal contact with his troops), but here his name is no longer a proper name, but the acknowledgment of Julius’ sway over his fellow Romans: his name has become the recognition of his function: he is their *caesar* (emperor, ruler). With this accreditation, Cassius himself becomes a function of Caesar’s power and subject to it. A different kind of power: Cassius’ acknowledgement of Julius as (autocratic) emperor, tying in with the fact that now the democratic organization is in real danger.

Apart from these points of serious concern, there were yet other inherent weaknesses potentially dangerous for the well-being of the nation-state construct. Above was noted that Rome’s *raison d’être* had been defined for the most part by her conquests and territorial expansions. Julius had, to a large extent, been the personification of this drive. “Caesar is the peak and the end of that old order. Republican Rome had existed and flourished on two conditions: – external warfare [I dare to supplement: wars of conquest] and domestic faction”<sup>32</sup> as Bloom characterizes this. This had resulted in two things, which now began to work against the Roman nation-state. Firstly, the army itself. I already pointed out above that Julius’ enormous army (consisting

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31 It has to be born in mind, though, that the Roman notion of democracy (the tribunes that were elected into the Senate by the plebeians) is a far cry from our definition of democracy.

32 Allan Bloom, *Shakespeare’s Politics*, p. 79.

of troops having a devoted loyalty to their leader) began to form – in the terminology central in this dissertation – an independently operating entity; a nation in a nation. Apart from the one mentioned above (being the importation of violence into a social structure), this was an additional reason for the fact that this army (the military nation) began to constitute a threat to the nation of Rome. “And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.”<sup>33</sup> Mary Beard muses in her work on the Romans:

The pressing question was what would happen when Caesar left Gaul and how after almost ten years [...], he was to be reintegrated into the ordinary mainstream of politics. [...] on the one hand were those who [...] wanted to bring Caesar back down to size; on the other, Caesar and his supporters insisted that this treatment was humiliating, that his *dignitas* – a distinctively Roman combination of clout, prestige and right to respect – was being attacked. The underlying issue: [...] would Caesar, with more than 40,000 troops at his disposal only a few days from Italy, follow the example of Sulla<sup>34</sup> or of Pompey?<sup>35</sup>

In his lecture on the play Paul Cantor<sup>36</sup> points at a second aspect constituting a possible weakness of the Roman empire: the enormous distances to be travelled from one side of the empire to the other: it took almost a year to walk from Rome to Madrid. How can one attain and maintain unity in a nation-state of this proportions with the means of communication then available.

It would be a nearly impossible task for Rome to maintain the monopoly on violence (type 2 violence). The danger of a monopoly on violence becoming a multiplicity of violence (i.e., radical non-tragic violence) loomed. It takes a judicial and knowledgeable leader to be able to handle this, preferably one who has gone successfully through his tragic crisis, as I will emphasize once again. And again, the question of whether Roman society would be able to successfully mitigate Julius Caesar’s radical violence of the non-tragic variant (i.e., civil war) into a state-controlled one presents itself in a more pressing way.

Our Cassius, for one, tries to remove the violence Julius Caesar represented by murdering him. But will this end well? Does Cassius grasp the essence of non-tragic violence and is he able to turn it into tragic-violence? How *does* he handle violence, and, equally important, does he have a clear vision of the future as e.g. Hamlet and his heirs had?

Cassius continues his story, recalling to memory another Brutus (ll. 159 ff.). In fact, this had been the historical Lucius Junius Brutus who, 450 years before, had deposed the then last king/tyrant Lucius Tarquinius Superbus. The implication is clear. Brutus reacts that he will think over the issue as indeed the times are hard.

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33 Mark 3:24.

34 Sulla (138–78 BC), general, won the first civil war and came to power by force.

35 Mary Beard, SPQR, p. 285.

36 Paul Cantor, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llHxxnJge5s>

Brutus had rather be a villager  
Than to reput himself a son of Rome  
Under these hard conditions as this time  
Is like to lay upon us.<sup>37</sup>

It is as if we hear Hamlet complain about the state of Denmark. Brutus is right: there is something fundamentally amiss at the core of the nation-state construct of Rome.

#### 8.6 THE OTHER PROTAGONIST: JULIUS CAESAR

After the games are over, Caesar and his train pass by again. Caesar notices Cassius and he comments on his appearance:

Let me have men about me that are fat,  
Sleek-headed men and such as sleep a-nights.  
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look.  
He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.<sup>38</sup>

He wants easy-going men around him, preferably saturated and satisfied; lazy and slack consumers of the good things in life and, above all, of Caesar's goodness and thus satisfied with life in general. Hungry men are angry and angry men more often than not crave power and therefore they are flat-out dangerous. This is irony at its best and very Shakespearean when he pictures Julius Caesar as a well-satiated man, but he is perceived by Brutus and Cassius as a power-hungry man and therefore a danger to the state construct. Who actually considers whom to be a security liability? Shakespeare seems to raise this question here, since he continues to extensively describe Julius' shortcomings in what follows: physical as well as psychological.<sup>39</sup> Then the following scene ensues.

As Caesar's parade passes, Brutus pulls one of the revelers, Casca, by the cloak. The latter leaves the festive procession and, staying behind, he is asked by Brutus what had happened just before and why Caesar looks so sad. Upon this, Casca recounts what befell Julius. Antony offered the crown to Caesar and the latter refused. We learn that the crown was offered to Caesar thrice. Casca reports: three times in a row, Caesar refused the crown. However, as Casca states emphatically, Caesar's refusal was but a show. He was greedy for it and nearly couldn't keep his hands from grabbing it ("but to my thinking he was very loath to lay his fingers off it."<sup>40</sup>).

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37 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 172 – 175.

38 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 192 – 196.

39 In medieval and early modern plays physical characteristics often mirror psychological particulars.

40 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 237 – 238.

A third time of crown-grabbing and Caesar fell down in a fit. Brutus assumes it was his falling sickness. Cassius wittily replies that they themselves have the falling sickness – subjected as they are to Caesar.

Our reporter Casca ends with the casual remark: “I could tell you more news too. Murellus and Flavius, for pulling scarves off Caesar’s images, are put to silence. Fare you well.”<sup>41</sup> The ominous part of this report is not just the facts: the prioritization spells a murky dark perspective: evidently, Caesar’s show of highhanded refusal is deemed far more important than the fact that this same Caesar puts two tribunes (members of the Senate and buttresses of the republic) to death for their opinions. This, in itself, is an outrage. For in 58 BCE, the Senate had decreed that no Roman citizen could be executed without a proper trial.<sup>42</sup>

### 8.7 JULIUS AND VIOLENCE: THE REACTION OF THE BYSTANDERS

What legal values there were in Rome are now quenched by the killing of the last two tribunes who had (some points of) criticism of Julius Caesar. It is telling that Julius kills off the representatives of those very commoners who venerated him and helped him come to power<sup>43</sup> in the first place. Indeed, when an overlord destroys his own stronghold, the power base from which he operates, it is in *ultimo* an act of self-destruction (and as we know now, radical violence has this characteristic). Moreover, although Julius operates like an autocrat, he has to take due account of those popular power currents that had raised him to power in the complicated and corrupted political landscape that Rome was. Severing this bond of reciprocity and loyalty, he unknowingly throws himself at the mercy of the shifting political powers<sup>44</sup> in a fermenting society. In the end, what Julius does here in terms of his own needs is that he separates himself from his embeddedness in his community.

The conspirators will meet that night. They have to go through a terrible storm to meet. At this point in the play, Shakespeare introduces Cicero, who chances upon Casca on his way to the secret gathering. They exchange a few remarks on the weather (Cicero debunking Casca’s superstitions on bad

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41 *Ibid.*, ll. 273 – 275.

42 Mary Beard, *SPQR*, p. 36.

43 For instance by serving long contract terms (of ten years on end) as legionary in his army. The reciprocity of this contract lies in the fact that after the ten years of service, land was granted to the legionnaires by Julius.

44 As we shall see, the revulsion for the murder only came after Mark Antony’s speech. After the first speech by Brutus the populace cheered.

weather being a bad omen<sup>45</sup>) after which both go their separate ways, disappearing into the night.<sup>46</sup>

After having bumped into Cicero, Casca meets Cassius in the same terrible storm. Cassius totally reverses the customary superstitious reaction to the unusual and dangerous natural events; it is not a frightening thing. No, quite the opposite, it is pleasing: "A very pleasing night to honest men."<sup>47</sup> Here we see, again, a total reversal of meaning. He embarks on an elucidation of his views: the heavens do not react to present ills and current governmental mismanagement (as was customarily believed), but they are potent portents of what is to come if we do not intervene (viz, if we do not kill the tyrant-to-be: Julius).<sup>48</sup> He correlates his new interpretation to some customary Roman modes of being, blending and blurring their meanings in a way that he deems conducive to his purposes. He mentions the honoured Roman tradition of virtuous suicide,<sup>49</sup> and sets it off against dishonourable slave suicide. He tells Casca that, when he becomes a slave under Julius, he will commit the act of valorous slave suicide.

We see, in the reactions of the three men, a proportional mystification of values, culminating in a total reversal of their significance.

- Casca displays the orthodox reaction,
- Cicero represents the rational reaction and points out that man makes the interpretation. Indeed, in this, the words of the other early student of the Humaniores echo: "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."<sup>50</sup>
- Cassius uses custom and tradition to further his interests, blurring their meaning at will.

The latter's devitalisation of values inevitably results in moral confusion. The importance of this scene lies in the fact that accepted values are no longer the

45 Elizabethan English were, on the whole, wholehearted believers of bad omens; and in Rome bad omens, augury etc. were generally accepted as true. In this respect Shakespeare had an easy task synchronising both superstition-systems.

46 Why does Shakespeare introduce Cicero at this point? I refuse to accept textual weakness on Shakespeare's part as an excuse. The most plausible reason would be that he wants to pointedly contrast Julius' handling of the law (who had, in the previous scene, just murdered two tribunes without form of trial) and Cicero's (the man of law, justice and concord within the state).

47 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, III, l. 43.

48 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1. III, ll. 66 – 72.

49 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, III, ll. 89 – 99.

The Romans approved of "patriotic suicide"; death as an alternative to dishonor. A 'virtuous death', one guided by reason and conscience, was also accepted (e.g. the one by Cato the Younger after Pompey's defeat). After military defeat suicide was considered honorable. The suicide of slaves however was uneconomic and therefore seen as dishonorable and forbidden. Sources: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide\\_in\\_antiquity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_in_antiquity)

50 *Hamlet*, act 2, II, ll. 251 – 253.

guiding principle for the actions of the community. The habitual common ground in understanding each other falls away. Shakespeare needs but a mere 50 lines to sketch the meltdown of a traditional system of beliefs and values; economy of words and linguistic agility are the very hallmarks Shakespeare's excellence.

What impact does the confusion have; what does this mean for the status of violence introduced into society by Julius Caesar and what does this mean for the status of the nation-state? The story continues.

## 8.8 BRUTUS

In act 2, scene I, we find Brutus in his orchard by night, awaiting the conspirators. He ponders on the decision he is about to make, trying to find justified or rational reasons for killing Caesar:

I know no personal cause to spurn at him  
 But for the general. He would be crowned:  
 How that might change his nature, there's the question.<sup>51</sup>

After this he extensively embroiders upon the likelihood of a perversion of Caesar's character might he get complete autocracy. This line of reasoning lacks every legal basis; it is a flagrant breach of sound justice. In this monologue Caesar is convicted for flaws of character and misdemeanors that he may commit in future. Why? Because power corrupts as Brutus reasons and he is anxious that Caesar just might abuse this power.

In act 1 (during his talk with Cassius – see above), we have already observed that Brutus is the only one upholding the Roman standards for nobility. Miola remarks<sup>52</sup> that Cassius realizes he needs Brutus to give purpose, coherence and above all legitimacy to his conspiracy, the latter being the last of "the breed of noble bloods." This is an important remark, as this quality in Brutus is innate. It is not of the polished and perverted quality we witnessed before: the ethics of expediency. Brutus just needs to be himself: the archetypal conscientious Roman. It is precisely this inborn quality in Brutus that makes him irreplaceable for Cassius. However, Brutus is alone, he lacks a healthy reinforcing context as Rome has become perverted. The nature of his deliberations shows that Brutus has lost his anchorage. And therefore, by the faltering of the sole upholder of innate nobility, the city itself is in peril. Thus, this tragedy is not so much the tragedy of individuals as of Rome, its

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51 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 11 – 13.

52 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 92.

nationhood and its values that go through a crisis, or, as Miola puts it: "Rome is the central protagonist of the play."<sup>53</sup>

It should be noted that Brutus does not use the two arguments that would have made sense, viz., the fact that Julius had centered all power in his consulship and the murder of the two tribunes.

The old republicans were egalitarians.<sup>54</sup> This is shown in the next scene,<sup>55</sup> where all conspirators profess their equality to each other. As explained in the previous chapter, during the system of republicanism, the city used to be ruled by two consuls, each chosen for a year. Julius was now dictator for an indefinite number of years. Moreover, he had procured for himself a senate filled with yes-men, as he had just done away with the last two independent and critical tribunes. (act 1, scene 2, ll. 274 -275). He had a temple built in his honour and a statue erected; Julius not only flirted with kingship, he had nearly become a god and with this, Rome got theocratic characteristics.

#### 8.9 THEOCRACY AND LEGAL PRIMITIVISM

Thus, Rome was in real danger of becoming a theocracy. What is a theocracy? The *Encyclopedia Britannica* gives us: "a government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided. In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, and the state's legal system is based on religious law. Theocratic rule was typical of early civilizations. The Enlightenment marked the end of theocracy in most Western countries. Contemporary examples of theocracies include Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Vatican."<sup>56</sup>

As the above description indicates, a distinction can be made between the concept of leaders being divine (as Julius Caesar aspired at), being divinely guided or chosen, and religious law per se. The notion of being divinely chosen can be traced back to the divine right of kings (on which the Tudor and Stuart thrones were based – and indeed to this day we see a customary connection between throne and religion in that Charles III was anointed king by the archbishop of Canterbury and also heads the Anglican Church). The idea of religious law is much more drastic and far-reaching: the obligation to conform to religious laws (and customs). It is now seen in some Eastern/Islamic traditions.

A theocracy might be called a nation or even a state, but it is certainly not a democracy or a republic, as Cicero had characterized Rome up to that point.

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53 Ibid., p. 92.

54 That is to say egalitarian in the Roman way: all patricians were equal, however society as a whole certainly was not.

55 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 112 – 113.

56 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/theocracy>

How does theocracy relate to a nation-state (with a democratic construct)? Renan's nation-state ideal is based on the premise that it cannot be based on an a state-religion, however, what happens now is precisely that.

We witness the first signs of degeneration of the nation-state by the looming danger of being regulated by a power that characterizes itself as being transcendent. This type of dominance has the aura of the absolute supremacy of the warlord-rule (a warlord having as much sway over people as the deified dictator) we met in *Macbeth*. Of course, this goes hand in hand with the weakening and eventual disappearance of the sway regulations and restraints had over power and violence. In republican Rome, this was safeguarded by both the corrective influence of social values and the Senate. However, Rome's social values were perverted and the Senate was now filled with yes-men. We may conclude that in Rome we see the combination of the two elements described above (the divine right of kings and religious law) united in the person of the emperor. He is not divinely chosen, but a god himself and thus he has the power to implement what law he chooses.

Ideally, a separation of powers should be implemented. To cite Cliteur and Ellian<sup>57</sup> on this:

[i]n wielding power, which it must by necessity, the state must be constrained by certain norms. For a start, it must be constrained by its own laws. This is called the *legality principle*. But in order to prevent abuse of power [or e.g. the degeneration of state controlled type 2 violence into radical violence of either sub division], the power of the state also needs to be *divided* among three separate bodies: a legislative body (the legislature), an executive body (the government), and a judiciary body (the courts). This is the separation of powers.

In this quotation, Cliteur and Ellian describe the state of affairs after the Enlightenment. The situation in republican Rome could be described as a type of pre-Montesquieuan situation, safeguarding the balance of powers to restrain state violence. Cicero is also aware of the importance of this balancing of power in his writing, as described in the previous chapter.

In his definition of state and state power, Weber seems not to have taken into account that state power – if unchecked – can easily get out of control. Julius Caesar, at this point, causes a development inverse to that of the Enlightenment (so well-described by both authors above). What control there was on the state is now in danger of being nullified by Julius Caesar.

In the terminology here used, it can be formulated as follows: radical non-tragic violence takes over from state violence in a graduated way. State violence is no longer based on the justice born out of the violence paradigm as we saw it emerge in *Hamlet*. If law and justice no longer spring from the tragic process but from a transcendental principle (as in a theocracy), there

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57 Paul Cliteur and Afshin Ellian, *A New Introduction to Legal Method*, p. 170.

is no guarantee whatsoever that law will be righteous because an – irate – deity is by definition unfamiliar with the human mundanity of checks and balances for power and violence. The odds are that both justice and violence change in character (as we saw happen in *Macbeth*): the violence becomes radical and non-tragic.

Indeed, we are back to square 1 of violence: the legal primitivism<sup>58</sup> of the warlord (who in this case also declares himself god), including the accompanying violence of the radical non-tragic type. The question is whether Brutus (like Hamlet) has an adequate answer to this. I will leave it to the following chapter to return to the internal dynamics between the two types of radical violence, state violence and values.

Some modern jurists, chiefly in the US, endeavor to reevaluate legal primitivism in an effort to give it a place in the modern legal system.<sup>59</sup> One of the advocates of this reassessment is Professor Steven Wilf, who specializes in intellectual property law and who also has an interest in the history of law. He wrote an article on the legal heritage of Native American tribes focused on traditional Indian law and customs in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans and consequently also before the Enlightenment and modernity in law. In brief, his reasoning amounts to the following: he professes to “address[...] a different sort of legal transplant – one in which outside legal doctrines are imported in order to be cabined, treated as normative counterpoints, and identified as the legal other. Legal primitivism is a kind of anti-transplant. It heightens the persistent differences between a dominant legal system and its understanding of primitive rules.”<sup>60</sup> Wilf wants to compare. He continues to describe legal primitivism as *other*. He concludes, in rather Levinasian terms, that legal primitivism, because it is *other*, would be a useful tool against which formal law can be set off: “Law might very well need a law of the *other* to define itself.”<sup>61</sup> I could not disagree more. First of all, *otherness* in itself is not an inherent quality but a comparative one. Moreover, it does not seem to occur to Mr. Wilf that thorough self-definition (or redefinition) does not ensue constructively from the comparison with the *other*. Indeed, the self-definition would change in direct proportion to the change of the object of comparison. It seems to me to be an extremely volatile and dangerous strategy to follow. The only reliable way to come to self-definition is by going through a tragic existential crisis successfully. Perhaps it seems

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58 Legal primitivism has many definitions and as many aspects: ranging from forms of natural law, via the ten commandments in the Bible to the concerns of some modernist culturalists. This makes a discussion of the concept multifarious and convoluted. I will sidetrack this discussion here since this thesis is solely concerned with the types of legal primitivism coming with and from the radical non-tragic type of violence.

59 In my opinion and to my knowledge this occurred primarily and mainly within the framework of an overall reassessment of native American culture, art and (oral) customary law.

60 Steven Wilf, “The Invention of Legal Primitivism”, p 485.

61 Steven Wilf, “The Invention of Legal Primitivism”, p 508.

outlandish to Wilf, but what happens in these Shakespearean tragedies just might occur any time in our civil society when the subtly interwoven fabric of values, justice and nationhood falters and tears in the way it is about to do in this play.

### 8.10 THE PLOT

We pick up our story and rejoin Brutus pondering on the legality of Julius Caesar's murder.<sup>62</sup> With his decision to play along with the plot, Brutus – and with him the old Roman values<sup>63</sup> he embodies – plunges Rome headlong into a tragic crisis. This ill-advised decision will turn out to be Brutus's first big mistake. Why? Surely, Julius Caesar had turned into a deified dictator, courting kingship and killing off all opposition. In this respect, a decision of such magnitude is certainly defensible. However, as mentioned in the note just above, his arguments for going forward are legally invalid and generally absurd. Moreover, Brutus is morally confused and off anchor; he no longer has the ethical compass or tools at his disposal to make the payoff of such a murder into a success. In short: Brutus has no clue.<sup>64</sup> The conspirators arrive at Brutus's house and the plot is concluded. After this has been done, Cassius proposes a binding oath.<sup>65</sup> Brutus, however, rejects the proposal.

No, not an oath. If not the face of men,  
 The sufferance of our souls, the time's abuse—  
 If these be motives weak, break off betimes,  
 And every man hence to his idle bed.  
 So let high-sighted tyranny range on  
 Till each man drop by lottery.<sup>66</sup>

62 I have sufficiently discussed tyrannicide – a term that also might come to mind in this context – in the chapter on *Macbeth*. I will therefore pass the discussion here.

63 As we have seen above the following values are at risk:

- the relationship and reciprocity between the classes of a sound hierachal system,
- the republican organization of the state (plus the democracy the Roman way),
- Rome's culture in the sense that active citizenship seems to be replaced by passive consumerism,
- the Roman value of integrity,
- the important value of loyal friendship.

To these is now added: the innate integrity of Brutus' Roman blend of nobleness.

64 Cf. for instance Hamlet who is in a comparable position, but whose reaction contrasts sharply with Brutus': Hamlet first looks for evidence, then eliminates probable opposition, then comes up with a resolution and a plan and realizing he will die executing this plan, he pronounces his will and testament.

65 In Roman culture the oath had an almost holy status. Once bound by oath it was well-nigh impossible to break or ignore it. The oath ritual was intertwined with the republican Roman values of loyalty, friendship and mutual responsibilities.

66 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 114 – 119.

This is the second mistake Brutus makes.<sup>67</sup> The oath would have been an unbreakable bond between the men,<sup>68</sup> however, this mistaken appraisal makes this undertaking rather noncommittal. Brutus's attitude echoes the old Roman and republican idea of equality among men. In the old system, the city was ruled by equals. An oath was binding and sacred. Brutus adds:

Swear priests and cowards and men cautious,  
Old feeble carriions and such suffering souls  
That welcome wrongs. Unto bad causes swear  
Such creatures as men doubt. But do not stain  
The even virtue of our enterprise<sup>69</sup>

Here again: a total reversal of values is depicted (instead of representing the oath as noble and socially unbreakable bond, it is now for cowards and untrustworthy doubters). It illustrates the tragic mental turmoil Brutus is in; also conducting his fellow-conspirators into this scenario.

Cassius suggests asking Cicero to join them. All agree, except Brutus. "For he [Cicero] will never follow anything/that other men begin."<sup>70</sup> Cicero certainly would have added credibility and status to the plan. Indeed, Brutus's refusal, perhaps prompted by his fear of being intellectually outshone, constitutes the third big mistake by Brutus. Above, I already mentioned in one of the notes that one reason why Shakespeare might have inserted this short scene was to set Julius Caesar's attitude against Cicero's, which makes for a strong theatrical plot opposition. Likewise, it might have been inserted principally to emphasize not only the petty unpleasantries and discord of men of state amongst themselves, but even more so to underpin Brutus' utter lack of vision on statecraft by setting it off against Cicero's political accomplishments.<sup>71</sup>

Brutus is plainly afraid to lose his leading position to Cicero, as the latter "will stand very strong with them."<sup>72</sup> Brutus doesn't realize that here he acts exactly in the same way as absolute ruler Julius Caesar, overruling the initial majority of the vote.

Cicero's accomplishments in statecraft were not insignificant. Previously, I touched upon Cicero's thoughts on the state and its relationship with law and justice. Brutus has, up till now, given no evidence of having a clearly defined conception of these issues.

Immediately after Brutus's third mistake, he makes a fourth by deciding, in advance, to spare the lives of other potentially dangerous men in Caesar's

67 The first being his faulty argumentative foundation to join the conspiracy. See just above.

68 Here also, we see the social embedding – and therewith security – being absent.

69 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 129 – 133.

70 *Ibid.*, ll. 151 – 152.

71 Well bearing in mind that Shakespeare relied on his audience's knowledge of Roman history and philosophy and familiarity with Cicero's convictions and political mastery.

72 With the conspirators. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, sc. 1, l. 143.

entourage. I cannot help but note that this is opposite to what Hamlet did (see also note just above). It is a mistake of a totally different order than the previous ones. It hints towards fatality; the enterprise will become much more perilous. Not only is it perilous from the perspective of a success/failure calculus, but first and foremost, from a tragic point of view. I will enlarge on this important issue in the evaluation in the next chapter. Especially Mark Antony would constitute a danger, as Cassius argues. Brutus retorts: "Our cause will seem too bloody [...] for Antony is but a limb of Caesar."<sup>73</sup> Sadly enough, his circle is incapable of offering the necessary counterpoise and therewith a sound basis. Herein, he hardly differs from his former friend, now foe, Caesar. Decius (one of the conspirators) adequately describes Caesar's favorite inner circle:

[H]e loves to hear  
That unicorns may be betrayed with trees,  
And bears with glasses, elephants with holes,  
Lions with toils, and men with flatterers.  
But when I tell him he hates flatterers,  
He says he does, being then most flatterèd.<sup>74</sup>

In this scene, Shakespeare shows a veritable house of mirrors full of reversals and double imagery. As a result of which the protagonists' perceptions are utterly blurred and confused. Brutus compares the companionship with actors, hardly aware of all the implications of his metaphor:

Let not our looks put on our purposes,  
But bear it as our Roman actors do,  
With untired spirits and formal constancy.<sup>75</sup>

After the men have left, Brutus's wife Portia, appears, voicing her anxiousness about Brutus's strange behavior of late. She asks what the matter is. Without any hesitation, she sizes him up at a glance, looking right through his excuses that he is ill. "No my Brutus,/You have some sick offence within your mind,/ Which by the right and virtue of my place/I ought to know of."<sup>76</sup>

Portia kneels and pleads with Brutus to confide in her. Brutus is moved and shaken out of his comfort zone: "Oh ye Gods,/Render me worthy of this noble wife!"<sup>77</sup> Still, he tells her nothing, but he promises to explain everything at a later point in time.

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73 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, l. 163.

74 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 203 – 209.

75 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 225 – 227.

76 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 267 – 270.

77 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 303 – 304.

Up till now, Brutus has posed as the constant factor for his surroundings. Miola remarks that both the conspirators and the victim claim to have this virtue.<sup>78</sup> Brutus, in the quotation above, exhorts his fellows to display "formal constancy". And Caesar will boast that he is constant as the northern star (act 3, I, l. 60).<sup>79</sup> In Brutus's case, this constancy is part of his self-image, as Paul Cantor<sup>80</sup> argues. But in the above dialogue, we see him break under Portia's honesty and anxiety.

### 8.11 PHILOSOPHICAL ROME

In his lecture on *Julius Caesar*, Cantor embroiders on the phenomenon of philosophy<sup>81</sup> in this play: ever since Rome had become a world empire, new cultural inspirations from conquered peoples had become part and parcel of the Roman culture. Since Rome had also vanquished Greece, this was also the case with Grecian cultural features. Greece had been conquered between 146 and 27 BC and although it had physically and geographically lost, culturally it had far outshone Roman culture in that Greek philosophy had become fashionable for the well-educated and cultured Roman. "Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit"<sup>82</sup> (once defeated, Greece conquered its savage captor).<sup>83</sup> We cannot know whether Shakespeare was aware of this social phenomenon.<sup>84</sup> In the play, Cicero is featured as a Sceptic, whereas the historical Cicero was influenced by the later Roman Stoics.<sup>85</sup> To stick to the Cicero in the play: scepticism boiled down to the methodical and formal inquiry into the verity (or otherwise) of every occurrence. For some, it has come to mean: to doubt everything. "Accordingly, textbooks usually treat scepticism as a phenomenon that belongs to decline and therefore occurs rather late: after the peak of Greek philosophy. The question is whether this is correct and whether scepticism, well understood, may be called a paralyzing phenomenon. Philosophers such

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78 The virtue of constancy.

79 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 99.

80 Paul Cantor, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llHxxnJge5s>

81 He explains that Shakespeare hardly ever features philosophical currents in his plays, *Julius Caesar* being a marked exception. In this play four different philosophical schools are mentioned, either implicitly or explicitly.

82 <https://www.lingq.com/en/learn-latin-online/translate/la/23911745/graecia-capta-ferum-victorem-cepit>

83 A conquering or colonizing country being, in its turn, overtaken by the vanquished culture is an extremely interesting and relevant topic. It is however, not the theme of this dissertation.

84 However, Shakespeare here shows very convincingly that he was aware of the common human reaction to fashions (be it robes, gloves or philosophy) and the mere snobbery that might go hand in hand with it.

85 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stoicism/Later-Roman-Stoicism>. See also previous chapter.

as Plato and Aristotle certainly interpreted the word 'scepticism' differently from 'doubting everything'; to them, it was the equivalent of contemplation."<sup>86</sup>

Next, there is the unnamed poet who is defined as a cynic (act 4, III, l. 133).

Cynic, member of a Greek philosophical sect that flourished from the 4th century BCE to well into the Common Era, distinguished as much for its unconventional way of life as for its rejection of traditional social and political arrangements, professing instead a cosmopolitan utopia and communal anarchism;<sup>87</sup>

and completely in line with this anarchistic inclination, he was duly ripped to pieces by the mob in the play.

The two philosophies most prominently present in the play are those of Brutus and Cassius: Brutus had adopted (as the historical Cicero had – see above) a Stoic attitude. Cassius poses as an Epicurean. In this play, Shakespeare depicts the respective philosophies as much sought-after accessories, not as deeply felt convictions. In the first few acts (e.g., in the above example), Shakespeare merely alludes to some of their most superficial characteristics, without fully grasping their quintessence. Only later in the play are these philosophies either explicitly or indirectly named: Cassius (in act 4, sc. 3, ll. 145 -146) tells Brutus that he (Brutus) doesn't make use of his philosophy, "If you give place to accidental evils". One act later (act 5, sc. 1, ll. 76 – 77) Cassius altogether abandons his own fashionable beliefs to half-return to good old superstitions and reading omens: "I held Epicurus strong/ And his opinion. Now I change my mind/ And partly credit things that do presage." As does Brutus when he expresses his insecurity with his Stoic philosophy: I don't know, but somehow I feel.... "Even by the rule of that philosophy/ By which I did blame Cato for the death/ Which he did give himself, I know not how,/ But I do find it cowardly and vile,/ For fear of what might fall."<sup>88</sup> These "persuasions" aren't any help in times of anxiety or distress. It is quite clear that they are not internalized and are readily shaken off in times of tragic crisis. In other words, philosophy here is not of an existential quality.

If not of existential quality, then why does Shakespeare emphasize their respective philosophical persuasions? Epicureans and Stoics held opposing political views. Stoic philosophy emphasised the control of emotion by reason. The concepts of *autarkeia* (being independent of coincidences) and *apatheia*<sup>89</sup> (being uninfluenced by changes occurring beyond the conscious will) are important for Stoics. Moreover,

[i]t was [...] their turning of doctrine to themes in moral philosophy and natural science that appealed to the intensely practical Romans. The times perhaps

86 Bor and Petersma, *De Verbeelding van het Denken*, p. 45.

87 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cynic-ancient-Greek-philosophy>.

88 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 102 – 105.

89 Bor and Petersma, *De Verbeelding van het Denken*, p. 43.

demanded such interests, and with them Stoicism was to become predominantly a philosophy for the individual, showing how – given the vicissitudes of life – one might be stoical. Law, world citizenship, nature, [were] the principal areas of interest of Stoicism at this time.<sup>90</sup>

Important Stoic statesmen were Seneca (Nero's tutor and governor of the empire during the latter's minority) and the emperor Marcus Aurelius. As these two examples show, Stoics were actively involved in politics and statesmanship.

In this, they can be defined in opposition to the Epicureans. For the latter, the greatest good to be obtained was to seek *ataraxia*: a state of total calm of mind; preferably to be obtained through seeking a minimum of desires; discouraging involvement in the tribulations of political life. The Epicureans became so important that Cicero attacked them, accusing them of licentious hedonism and a lack of virtue and duty and keeping away from public service. According to Plutarch, Julius Caesar<sup>91</sup> leaned towards Epicureanism.<sup>92</sup> By emphasizing their respective adherence to these different persuasions, Shakespeare deliberately magnifies their principal difference of opinion on polity and governance. Certainly, one would expect accomplices, entering a conspiracy of this momentousness, to have at least the same notions as to their strategy, policy and ultimate goal. This is the mainstay of the success of any undertaking. As Renan would have put it, there has to be unity in will and purpose to build a nation. Yet, with Brutus and Cassius, this seems to be no issue. Shakespeare here pictures the fundamental instability of the venture, which does not meet one single requirement for success.

#### 8.12 THE ESCALATION OF THE CRISIS

In the last scene of act 2, we find Caesar in his family circle. Being at home, he lets his hair down, and we can have a closer look at who Caesar really is. We learn that, like Portia, Calpurnia too, is concerned about her husband's welfare. Yet, the cause of her concern is a different one. Whereas Portia<sup>93</sup> sees right through her husband and confronts him, Calpurnia's nightmarish dreams and her experiences through the day are omen-ridden; she is frightened and therefore she pleads with her husband not to go to the Capitol. We are served a kaleidoscopic palette of portents and prejudices that would have given the shivers to the average Shakespearean audience.<sup>94</sup> We learn that Caesar,

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90 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stoicism/Later-Roman-Stoicism>

91 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julius-Caesar-Roman-ruler>

92 K. Tebo, "Cicero as a Source for Epicurus", p. 2

93 See scene above on p. 311.

94 As mentioned before, late medieval and early Renaissance audiences were, on the whole, staunch believers in omens, ghosts and portents.

too, is superstitious as he sends for a priest to have him foretell his success. At first, he protests with a nimble-minded response:

Cowards die many times before their deaths  
The valiant never taste of death but once.<sup>95</sup>

But then he gives in to both Calpurnia's apprehension and the auguries' negative advice. His assumed friends arrive, who are in fact the conspirators, to persuade him to come to the Capitol that morning. He receives them very jovially, inviting all in and offering them some wine (act 2, I, ll. 126 – 127). This is the Caesar who knows how to win friends and treat them kind-heartedly. Under the sway of their arguments – they explain the omens in a diametrically different way – he again changes his mind.<sup>96</sup> He will come with them.<sup>97</sup>

In this scene, Caesar is depicted as a witty, good-natured gentleman, courteous and generous to his friends. Yet he is prejudiced and susceptible to omens. In act 1, we saw him whimsical and wavering in attitude and opinion; also as languid and inert, having physical disabilities.<sup>98</sup> By casually mentioning these characteristics, Shakespeare makes clear that there is something wrong with Julius. He is no longer on top of things. He is influenced by soothsayers, by his wife and by his enemies. We should bear in mind that in Elizabethan times, ruler and state were coinciding variables.<sup>99</sup>

Caesar is toppling and in danger. And therefore, the world he stands for is in danger. How and in what way? Shakespeare, the master of suspense, takes us to the streets of Rome for the last two very short scenes. At breakneck speed, tension and suspense are augmented. First, we meet Artemidorus rereading a note of warning he had written for Caesar. He intends to press

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95 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, II, ll. 32 – 33.

96 Showing his lack of self-knowledge; for just a little later, in act 3, he boasts that he is as "constant as the northern star" (act 3, I, l. 60).

97 Here an interesting division between private and public display of ethics is shown. From the point of view of ethics in the private area, their conduct is blameworthy since they violate Julius' trust. On the other hand, they are about to commit murder for the good of the Republic; which can be seen as laudable in the light of the public spirit and ethics; trying to protect the Republic and its values. After all, Julius in his turn had breached its contract (both ethically and legally) in that he had killed the last two tribunes – therewith also undermining his power base. The question could be posed whether this murder was justified; in my view this issue could be reversed: why did Julius undermine his own power base thus rigorously. As experienced power player he must have known the consequences. See what immediately follows in the text above: Julius is no longer (completely) in charge of the course of events. As early as in act 1 Shakespeare had made clear that Julius was in his descent.

98 In contrast to Plutarch's *Lives* in which Julius is depicted as a great man.

99 See e.g. my remarks on the concurrence of king with country in *Hamlet*.

it unto Julius's attention, on his way to the Capitol. "Caesar, beware of Brutus, take heed of Cassius [...]"<sup>100</sup> Anxiously, he ponders:

My heart laments that virtue cannot live  
 Out of the teeth of emulation.  
 If thou read this, O Caesar, thou mayst live;  
 If not, the fates with traitors do contrive.<sup>101</sup>

In the second scene, we see a highly uneasy Portia who sends her slave to the Capitol to see if Brutus is well. In the street, she meets a soothsayer who tells her that "much that I fear may chance".<sup>102</sup> These words all but reassure her and full of vague but anxious premonition, she enters the house again.

### 8.13 VIOLENCE, VALUES, THE NATION-STATE AND THEIR RECIPROCITY

The fundamentals of what this tragedy is about become clear in these first two acts. As stated above, Miola<sup>103</sup> suggested that *Julius Caesar* staged the tragedy of Rome, more specifically, the construct of the nation-state. What we are about to witness now is the tragic crisis of nearly all the aspects that make a nation-state tick. Its social structure, its values and how violence is reined in by them (to function as state monopolized violence) will come to naught.

There is always an interplay between individuals, their values and the nation-state construct. What Shakespeare paints here is a totally perverted society with, as a result, perverted personal behavior<sup>104</sup> and vice versa. What constructs/values specifically are portrayed as perverted and enter into a tragic crisis in these first two acts?

#### 1) The social codes of behaviour:

- a. Individually: the friendship between Cassius and Brutus is unashamedly (mis)used by Cassius and thus perverted.
- b. Collectively: the relations between the different social echelons are decrepit. No longer is a system of mutual care and respect collectively cherished. The populace has, from democratically active citizens within the republic, become subjects and consumers (noted above). Their

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100 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, III, l. 1.

101 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, III, l. 10 – 13.

102 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, III, l. 32.

103 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*. See above.

104 Brutus is effectively the only one escaping from the general degeneration, precisely because of the detachment and constancy characteristic for Stoics. Yet he has his own fallibilities. He is not the person to, all alone, bear the brunt and succeed as will be seen in the next acts.

We see here the source of perversion lying in values and social structures instead of in one (or a few) persons as e.g. in *Macbeth*.

demands are for food, play and more days off. The rich are busy with their careers, their play and their positions in society. The last two tribunes to represent the plebeians are silenced: the system has become one of vertical relationships *without* reciprocity and such a relationship is prone to radical violence. I paraphrase Renan here:<sup>105</sup> a nation focused on self-interest only cannot be a nation in the true sense of the word.

- 2) Philosophy has become *the* fashionable accessory of the well-to-do and educated Roman. Thus, externalized, it loses its intrinsic value. In this play, four types of philosophy can be perceived:
  - a. Brutus the Stoic,
  - b. Cassius poses as the Epicurean,
  - c. Cicero is a Sceptic.
  - d. An unnamed poet: a Cynic (act 4, III, l. 133).
- 3) The political and governmental crises take shape in these acts. The republic is on the verge of collapse. It loses ground rapidly to absolute theocracy.<sup>106</sup> Also, a profound legal crisis (the murder of two officially elected members of the Senate) becomes apparent. With this, justice itself is in jeopardy.
- 4) The Roman values, its moral code, are subject to an ever-increasing crisis. Together they constitute the greater proportion of Rome's ways and habits, in short, its culture. In particular, the following values can be discerned:
  1. Virtue or nobility of mind; that state of mind that can flawlessly determine which honourable choice to make for the commonwealth.
  2. *Pietas*: respect and obligation to offer help; being fully aware of mutual dependencies.
  3. Friendship: already mentioned above as cementing individual loyalties and dependencies.
  4. The indubitable character of the Roman oath.
  5. Constancy or permanence.

These latter are the precise values with which the Romans initially cemented their Republic. It is remarkable that, among these, religion is absent. This is in accordance with the ideas of Renan on the nation-state, as noted above. However, Julius Caesar wants to create a theocracy which completely counter-

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105 See chapter on Renan.

106 See above: theocracy.

acts the idea of the secular state.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, as I argued above, theocracy as to *content* and *use of violence* can be typified as legal primitivism.

It seems a rather Sisyphean labor to try and challenge an entire social system to this extent. Therefore, let us take a closer look at the above list to see if we can shed some clarity on it. When viewing it, we cannot help but notice a huge difference in quality between the listed concepts. Let us go into the nature of each of them, scrutinizing the list item by item.

Point 1: The social code of behaviour. This is a custom-weathered cultural construct. But then, friendship can model itself along the lines of social codes of behaviour, however, the underlying emotion upon which friendship is based just *is* or *is not*. Therefore, friendship itself is of an existential<sup>108</sup> quality: it belongs to man's set of primeval needs. The social code is a construct. The existential quality of friendship is embedded, as it were, within the social code. Both construct and existentiality should reinforce each other to form a healthy unity. Thus, there is a reciprocity between the two: constructed code (the norm) and existence (the existential quality of friendship) touch and influence each other (so also here, on a micro level, we see the reciprocity between components that together bind a society). In the two acts we have seen thus far, this mutual reinforcement is broken and/or perverted. The friendship has become a vertical construct only, used for the profit of the one above: Cassius. Vertical (social) constructs without reciprocity tend to use violence, as it is needed to maintain the verticality of the construct.

Point 2: The difference between construct and existentiality holds for philosophy as well. The need to understand oneself, the phenomenal world and everything transcending it is an intrinsic human desire. This existential and primary need takes shape in the diverse philosophical schools, and norms and values. As we have seen above, the innate existential need should be

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107 Of course, one could argue that Rome was a polytheistic society where gods were state supported and promoted. However, I very much question the state component of this religion. In my view the Romans of this particular period treated religion much the same as their Greek counterparts in the Periclean age: see my Tragedy chapter on the subject. See also Mary Beard, *SPQR*, pp. 102 -103. Religion in Rome was "mainly focused on the performance of rituals that were intended to keep the relationship between Rome and the gods in good order." The emphasis laying mainly on correctly performing rituals to engineer prosperity, rather than on the actual belief in gods. This attitude towards the gods gravitates towards self-interest rather than towards deference and offering. In this same context, the theocracy Julius pursued can possibly be characterized as a theocracy of expedience; Julius aspiring it from an opportunistic point of view; he allows it to happen, slickly adapting and turning it to his advantage. Mary Beard, of course, writes about the classical Rome. Shakespeare, however, had a keen eye on his own period; perhaps he saw the parallels with his own time.

108 Existentiality; existential: pertaining to the quintessence of life (and decease) of the individual human being; this essence being devoid of (constructed) normative hierarchy of whatever nature. In this sense and within the realm of Shakespearean tragedy it is the opposite concept of reality construct. It should be noted that this type of existentiality is unrelated to whatever philosophical school or movement.

embedded in a constructed form. In this tragedy, it is the other way around. The philosophical fashion creates the (in this case existential) needs (as modern fashions still do today) and thus styles them. Ay, there's the rub;<sup>109</sup> the existential need is in grave danger of not being able to fully identify and pronounce itself as it is robbed of its social space to grow and develop naturally. Cassius, in his reply to Brutus,<sup>110</sup> voices this concern (perhaps subconsciously and within a slightly different register, however, the underlying format is identical) when he says that they suffer from the falling sickness. This systematic will give occasion to existential shallowness and poverty.

Point 3: The tragic crisis of the political and governmental system. These go hand in hand with a legal crisis here. These constructs differ somewhat from the previous ones in that their correlation with existentiality is of a complex nature.

In this play, the nation-state (i.e., both nation and its political and governmental constructs), originally mediated by the culture from which both nation and state developed,<sup>111</sup> has evolved away from the existential or primeval human needs.<sup>112</sup> Up till now, we have seen that these needs are: the need for protection from violence (external as well as internal violence), the need for a safe and secure embedding in a supportive community (the aforesaid reciprocity between individual and group). The fact that primeval human needs and political/legal constructs have grown apart is precisely the reason why both construct and primeval need cannot reinforce and sustain each other and grow estranged; the result is the state of affairs in Rome as we meet it here.

Behind (and disguised as) the points itemized above, an important feature may be recognized also figuring in the previous chapters; to be summarized as the just mentioned universal cry for fairness and justice. And it is exactly this concept that has been an important spin-off of the violence paradigm: the primeval existential need for a just and fair treatment: i.e. the need for justice.

It is this existential need that lies at the basis of the concept of natural law. Accordingly, and quite obviously, Shakespeare's existential primeval need for justice aligns with Cicero's natural law<sup>113</sup>; herein, both authors are related. As explained above, Cicero was specifically influenced by the Platonic version of the ideal of natural law. However, the state of affairs outlined above is a far cry from Cicero's conceptions of justice. The same applies to the emphasis he placed on the importance of well-constructed democratic law, his support

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109 To use a Hamletian Shakespeareanism.

110 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, II, ll. 249 – 250.

111 Of course, this strongly reminds us of Renan and his nation of values.

112 Existential primeval needs are not to be confused with physical needs like the need for sleep, food, or housing. Existential primeval needs are to be satisfied by culture, society and the nation-state. Physical needs are the concern of the individual. The difficulty in discerning between these two types of needs is that there is an overlap within the sphere of culture. In this thesis, I strictly limit myself to the existential primeval needs.

113 See the previous chapter

for senatorial independence, and his Platonic analogies regarding the requisite concord and harmony in the city. All of this is jeopardized. Throughout history, a wide range of scholars have contemplated the inherent characteristics of natural law, which they perceived as an existential need.<sup>114</sup> Let me just give one example: Augustine and his remark on (the need for) justice: "Remota iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia."<sup>115</sup>

In this tragedy, construct and values are embodied by the diverse protagonists. By following them throughout the play, we follow the tragic process of the construct, violence and values and their interrelationships with our primeval existential needs.

I cannot but notice that another important existential primeval need is conspicuously absent here: the need for liberty, freedom. Up to now, Shakespeare has not put this up for discussion; we will meet these concepts later in the play.

Shakespeare sets himself an extremely difficult task here. As already indicated earlier, in this play, the author does not depict the tragic crisis of a hero (as, e.g., Macbeth or Hamlet) but of the concepts described above. The difficulty here is how to avoid sinking away into the sterile discipline of allegorical characters with their didactic and sermonic twists.<sup>116</sup> How to make his protagonists real living human beings, caught up in social/political turmoil, who seek deliverance from their plight, acting like swimmers in the mist. Brutus, of course, plays a major role here. Shakespeare resolves this by emphasizing Brutus' stoical attitude as well as his emotional state of being. By detaching himself philosophically from his immediate surroundings – inspired by Stoicism – Brutus becomes a secluded figure; however, in spite of this aloofness, Shakespeare succeeds in depicting him not as a wooden and unrealistic character, but as a living human being. An additional point is that, with his stoicism, Brutus becomes the embodiment of what once was a coherent and stable society that made sense to its occupants.

I will now continue with some clarification of the last item in the above list.

Point 4: These values are an odd lot. Partly belonging to the moral code (so to constructed ethics), they are partly of an existential nature (friendship being a case in point: see above); and, as stated before, together forming part and parcel of Roman's customary ways and habits.

- 4.1 Virtue or nobility of mind. This is the characteristic that is explicitly present in Brutus and which makes him the sought-after candidate to serve

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114 Of course, their search for bases of justice is as variegated as the scholars searching. I will sidetrack this discussion here, for the sake of focus and brevity.

115 "Kingdoms without justice are like criminal gangs". Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, IV, 4, p. 139.

116 E.g. the medieval plays *Everyman* and *The Castle of Perseverance*; in these plays all characters are stiff and impersonal allegorical models.

as the flagship for the conspiracy. It gives legitimacy to it as stated. What does this imply? This characteristic is an auxiliary attribute for the constructs in point 3. We will still see whether this characteristic survives its tragic process and, if so, in what way.

- 4.2 *Pietas*. This can also be regarded as an auxiliary value to the stability of the political construct, government and justice, especially in a highly hierarchical society.
- 4.3 Friendship: see above.
- 4.4 Roman oath. Auxiliary to point 3 as it makes society dependable and therewith stable.
- Of course, the same holds for the last point: 4.5.: constancy or permanence.

This play is teeming with this type of auxiliary values, originally having buttressed the Roman nation-state. Does that make this play an ethical one? I hold it is not, for it is precisely the moral (reality) construct itself that is put to the test. In other words, these values are deconstructed by the tragic process. In act five we will see what will become of them.

With these observations in mind, we pick up the course of events at the beginning of act three. Caesar and his train stride towards the Capitol. In one single brilliant line, Caesar's mood is sketched. Flippantly, he remarks to the soothsayer who had previously warned him for the Ides of March (act 1, II. 1. 23): "The Ides of March are come."<sup>117</sup> The soothsayer can only reply that the day hasn't gone yet. Caesar is surrounded by suitors with petitions, including Artemidorus with his letter about the plot. He urges Caesar to read his letter, telling him it concerns Caesar's own person. However, Caesar, with condescending regality, deems it fitting to his status to treat other suits first.<sup>118</sup>

#### 8.14 THE ASSASSINATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

Meanwhile, Cassius is nearing a hysterical breakdown, seeing counter-plotters where there are none (act 3, sc., ll. 16 – 17). Brutus, using his Stoic trademark, urges him to be constant. Caesar denies Metellus' suit to lift his brother's ban. In his last speech<sup>119</sup> alive Julius emphasizes his constancy; immediately after that, he is stabbed.

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<sup>117</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, l. 1.

<sup>118</sup> I agree with Paul Cantor when he remarks that this is exactly how a tyrant thinks and acts.

I note that these short but brilliant and very effective scenes are the true hallmark of Shakespeare's genius.

<sup>119</sup> This is his last speech. Of course his famous last *words* are: Et tu, Brute? – Then fall Caesar".  
Act 3, I, l. 77.

Caesar's death cuts through all aspects of Roman life. It means the end of everything that seemed, up till then, self-evident. The tragic crisis for Rome's polity has hit home. The conspirators cry out:

Cinna:

Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!  
Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets.

Cassius:

Some to the common pulpits, and cry out,  
'Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!'<sup>120</sup>

A bit later, Brutus and Cassius cry out in their excitement:

Let'all cry, 'Peace, freedom and liberty!'  
[...]  
So oft as that shall be,  
So often shall the knot of us be called  
The men that gave their country liberty!'<sup>121</sup>

Here at last we encounter the other primeval existential needs: yelled in excitement as slogans; to be cried out from pulpits. These outcries pose some fundamental questions. The terms liberty and freedom are most remarkable and strikingly modern, even though they are directly translated from Plutarch into 1599 early modern English.

What do these concepts, these indispensable existential needs, represent for Brutus and Cassius and what do they mean for Shakespeare? As I posited above, Brutus and Cassius represent the values of the old Republic at this point. And it is these two who will have to successfully go through the tragic crisis in order to defend these values and (re)introduce them as living and vital in the community by undergoing and bringing about an existential change in outlook and emotions. These are the hallmarks of successfully coming through tragic slaughter. Are they capable of doing this? For now, they are exultant as they seem to have achieved their immediate goal: saving the republic.

Mark Antony hadn't been present at the assassination. Prudently, he sends a scout to see how the land lies. When the scout reports back that the coast appears to be clear, Mark Antony himself enters the scene, still cautious. Sounding the general sentiment among those present, he invites them:

Fulfill your pleasure. Live a thousand years,  
I shall not find myself so apt to die.  
No place will please me so, no mean of death,  
As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,  
The choice and master spirits of this age.<sup>122</sup>

120 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 78 – 81.

121 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 110 – 117.

122 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 159 – 163.

These remarks are a perversion of the old Roman notion of patriotic suicide or honorable death.<sup>123</sup> They are notably insincere. Brutus, however, takes him at his word and replies that they have no intention to kill him.<sup>124</sup> Cassius, the ever practical one, asks Mark Antony whether he is friend or foe. He answers: "Friends am I with you all, and love you all,/Upon this hope, that you shall give me reasons/Why and wherein Caesar was dangerous."<sup>125</sup> Brutus ensures him he will be satisfied; he decides there and then that he will go to the pulpit "and show the reason of our Caesar's death."<sup>126</sup>

It totally escapes Brutus that here Antony craftily manipulates him into a certain tone of speech: the reasonable explanation. After that, Brutus will leave the pulpit (and the marketplace) to Antony. These will turn out to be his fifth and sixth mistakes.<sup>127</sup> Antony knows that he has carried the day, while it still has to begin:

A curse shall light upon the limbs of men:  
 Domestic fury and fierce civil strife  
 Shall cumber all the parts of Italy.  
 [...]  
 All pity choked with custom of fell deeds,  
 And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,  
 With Ate by his side come hot from hell,  
 Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice  
 Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,  
 That this foul deed shall smell above the earth  
 With carrion men, groaning for burial.<sup>128</sup>

Sparing the life of an adversary of this magnitude is indeed cataclysmic. It means a fatal blow to the concepts of freedom and liberty since Antony is clear about his purposes: revenge, not for honor but for power.

The loss of state controlled violence – and at this point, the faltering and isolated Brutus is the only one embodying this concept – means that the democratic laws of the state, as formulated by Cicero, are nullified. Effectively, the nation-state ceases to exist and society relapses into chaos. The result of such a collapse is a rebound into the legal primitivism of the warlord wielding the radical violence of the non-tragic type, as was described earlier in this chapter. From Antony's monologue above, it becomes clear that Brutus and

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123 See note above.

124 I will discuss this issue in the next chapter.

125 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 220 – 222.

126 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, l. 237.

127 Note that Brutus, after killing Caesar, urges all conspirators to "bathe their hands in Caesar's blood" (act 3, I, l. 106). This makes them look like butchers and is therefore bad publicity. It could be seen as another mistake of Brutus'. His idea was to emphasize the Roman idea of cementing individual loyalties and interdependencies (points 4.3 and 4.4 above).

128 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 262 – 275.

Cassius have, up to this point, not been able to vitalize their concepts of freedom and liberty.

Antony tells Octavius's servant to report to his master that Antony will send him word when to come to Rome with his army. The dogs of war, awoken, have to wait a while, till after Antony's speech.

Brutus mounts the platform. His speech is a veritable lesson in Roman and Renaissance rhetoric. It is a brief yet effective address, grounded in reasonable argument (gently nudged in that direction by Antony). The plebeians receive it positively, even shouting for him to become the next Caesar.<sup>129</sup>

Brutus leaves the scene, introducing Antony. The latter carries Julius's body. No argument is more telling and persuasive than the blood-smeared body of a ruler who gave the plebeians free days, food and games.

Initially still under the spell of Brutus's speech, the spectators are slowly reeled in by Antony, who uses the same rhetorical tools as Brutus, but far outdoes him in number of lines, emotional intensity and persuasiveness. Mark Antony starts to undermine the one argument Brutus used to justify his act: Julius's ambition. He repeats it four times. At first stating it is a grievous fault (act 3, sc. 2, l. 72), continuing to give clear-cut examples of the opposite: *Julius had been a faithful and just friend to him* (l. 77), *Julius filled the coffers of Rome with his spoils of war* (l. 81). *Three times he refused the crown, when offered* (ll. 88 – 89). *You all did love him once, so why not mourn him now* (l. 95). These remarks are accompanied by emphatic statements that Brutus is indeed an honorable man.

His powerfully used *repetitio* bashes his point into the heads of his audience. The combination of the demonstrated defectiveness of Brutus' reasoning with the statement that he is honorable makes him look naïve, ridiculous, and his argumentation spurious. The plebeians respond duly: "There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony."<sup>130</sup> This type of nobility is far removed from the nobility Cassius meant in act 1, sc. 2, l. 151.<sup>131</sup> In this first act Cassius referred to nobility as being able to put oneself into the service of the polity, mastering the art of the right choice for the common good; the nobility that had *pietas*, and constancy of mind as its twin values. Now the word is hurled by the plebeians towards Mark Antony, the double-faced manipulator, intending to set the dogs of war at Rome. This is a total reversal and therewith (again) an erosion and undermining of old Roman values. Antony goes on after an intermezzo of the plebeians. He doesn't shun down-right provocation, working the crowd:

O masters, if I were disposed to stir  
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,  
I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong

129 Note that the name now has become a title.

130 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, II, l. 108.

131 "Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods."

Who (you all know) are honourable men.  
 I will not do them wrong; I rather choose  
 To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,  
 Than I will wrong such honourable men,  
 But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar,  
 I found it in his closet, 'tis his will.<sup>132</sup>

His remark about the will that he has at hand is most probably a trick.<sup>133</sup> Shortly after, in act 4, sc. 11. 7 – 9, he asks Lepidus to run to Caesar's house and fetch him the will: he wants to have it to see if he can tamper with Caesar's legacies to the people, doctoring them down or away. As a true demagogue, he stirs up the crowd, showing Caesar's wounds.

Were I Brutus  
 And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony  
 Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue  
 In every wound of Caesar, that should move  
 The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.<sup>134</sup>

When Mark Antony informs them of the contents of Caesar's will, the popular fury rises to a fever pitch. They decide to burn Brutus's house: violence thus spreads like wildfire. Brutus and Cassius flee the city in a hurry.

After Caesar's death, Brutus and Cassius have no idea of what more is needed to consolidate the new situation and change the course of history. They apparently think their one deed suffices to establish freedom; which is nowhere near what a tragic crisis should entail.

Mark Antony sees his chance to take over. Unsuspectingly, the two friends lose their game to Antony, the master mind of ill-intent. Forcing them into a reactive role, Antony orchestrates the final and total downfall of the republic.<sup>135</sup>

As he takes over, it is now Mark Antony who has to answer the question of what liberty and freedom from tyranny have to look like. Or will he? Nothing of the sort; he draws up a death list:<sup>136</sup>

MA: These many then shall die, their names are pricked.  
 Octavius: Your brother too must die; consent you, Lepidus?  
 Lepidus: I do consent.<sup>137</sup>

132 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, II, ll. 113 – 121.

133 Note that with his manipulation of the crowd and his lie about the will, Mark Antony revives the power base Julius himself had lost by the killing of the two tribunes.

134 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, II, ll. 216 – 220.

135 I again point to the fact that there is a discrepancy between history and the play. In reality, a year lapsed between Brutus' departure from Rome and the battle at Philippi.

136 In the historical version, Cicero was also on the death list.

137 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, I, ll. 1 – 3.

The implications of these short remarks are chilling to the bone; what exactly are they? The bond that makes a family a unity is broken; family loyalties no longer seem to matter. Lepidus doesn't object to the killing of his brother. This is the characteristic of a totalitarian state: everything had to be subjected to state and dictator, including the bond between family members.<sup>138</sup>

Although Caesar is now dead, the spirit of arbitrariness that he represented is more alive than ever. Brutus wanted to erase perversity, tyranny and random favoritism from the system. Yet, these seem to be invigorated. It certainly proved a vital mistake not to murder the new embodiment of these concepts: Mark Antony. In other words, Caesar is dead, but his spirit looms over the scene. On Lepidus, Mark Antony remarks:

He [is...]  
 A barren-spirited fellow, one that feeds  
 On objects, arts, and imitations,  
 Which, out of use and staled by other men,  
 Begin his fashion. Do not talk of him  
 But as a property.<sup>139</sup>

In just a few sentences, Mark Antony here outlines the nutrient soil on which Caesarism can thrive, resulting in tyranny. This violent society has spawned a violent universe, escalating in death-listing would-be enemies. Not even a hint of attitudinal change or horizontalization can be perceived.

In act 2, scene 1, lines 167-170, Brutus had said: "We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,/ And in the spirit of men there is no blood./O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit/ And not dismember Caesar!". We may now conclude that he has achieved the opposite. The murder of Julius had solved nothing, save leading up to a series of tragic crises in the fields of politics, society and Roman values.<sup>140</sup> Miola<sup>141</sup> has it that after the murder Brutus' behavior starts to mirror Caesar's; Antony's role imitates that of Brutus – but only in assuming a leading role.

### 8.15 A PERSONAL SHOWDOWN

After his flight, Brutus had pitched his tents in the fields near Sardis. We find him there in act 4, scene 2, waiting for Cassius and his train. From the circumlocutory way in which Brutus inquires after Cassius' treatment of the servants, it becomes clear that the matter-of-course friendship (old Roman style)

138 As during the Stalinist period in Russia where children had to betray their parents – also practiced in Nazi Germany.

139 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, I, ll. 35 – 40.

140 See list itemized above.

141 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 102.

that Brutus has always shown Cassius now shows cracks. Brutus seems distrustful of his old friend.

Cassius arrives. His first words to Brutus are: "Most noble brother, you have done me wrong."<sup>142</sup> Indeed, a nice way to greet an old friend and – moreover – a confederate in conspiracy and war. Of course, their differences are magnified and intensified because both men have to live under enormous stress and threat. When they make a wrong move or lose the coming battle, they will have to pay with their lives and they know it. This gives their altercation an apprehensive quality.

Brutus, even more piqued than he already was, reacts to Cassius' remark: "Wrong I mine enemies?/ And if not so, how should I wrong a brother." They enter Brutus's tent to speak of their grievances in private. Once they are inside, the argument erupts. Cassius accuses Brutus of partiality.<sup>143</sup> Brutus points to the fact that they had killed Julius to end such favouritism. Cassius explodes – he asserts that he is the better and older soldier and therefore should not be lectured like this. What follows is an 'Is too!'- 'Is not!' discussion that wouldn't have been out of place in a nursery for four-year-olds. Cassius spits fire. Brutus blazes.

Brutus' self-conceit and (self)-image as a noble Roman is mercilessly torn to pieces by Shakespeare as Brutus furiously gallops through all breaks and reservations. *In fact, he accuses Cassius of those imperfections which he himself possesses in abundance.* His argument boils down to the following:<sup>144</sup> You, Cassius, have withheld gold intended for me. I needed it to pay the army. And, by the way, you acquired this very gold by dishonest means – I cannot dirty my hands with foul money – but still I need it.

For I can raise no money by vile means.  
 By heaven, I had rather coin my heart  
 And drop my blood for drachmas than to wring  
 From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash  
 By any indirection. I did send  
 To you for gold to pay my legions,  
 Which you denied me.<sup>145</sup>

Bloom<sup>146</sup> has the following on the moral standards of the two friends:

"To this point [i.e. the point where the discussion about money starts] in the play, Brutus has, in spite of subterranean flaws, been the distinctly superior person, and

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<sup>142</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, II, l. 37.

<sup>143</sup> Brutus had condemned one Lucius Pella for taking bribes, while Cassius, on the other hand, had tried to speak in his favour. act 4, III, ll. 2 – 5.

<sup>144</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 65 – 82.

<sup>145</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 71 – 77.

<sup>146</sup> Allan Bloom, *Shakespeare's Politics*, p. 100.

Cassius has appeared as a rather low figure, even comparable in some respects to Iago [Othello]. But the roles suddenly begin to be reversed. Brutus, after castigating Cassius' "itching palm", in a turnabout accuses him of not having provided money when asked. Brutus himself is too good to squeeze the poor peasants. But he still needs the money, and he is perfectly willing to use Cassius' vice for his needs. He is unwilling to face the implications of his own situation and is forced into a rather ugly form of hypocrisy. Brutus remains pure by allowing others to perform the immoral acts which are the conditions of his purity. Then he can attack Cassius for being immoral. Wars need money, and, if a man starts a war, he is responsible for the acts which provide the money to pursue it, whether or not he performs them himself. Money is the sign of the material, or of what satisfies the needs of the body. Again Brutus refuses to recognize the existence of the body; in this instance, however, we are made privy to the casuistry, the falseness, into which such a man is forced. He does not really live on his virtue alone, he just acts as though he does."

This quarrel is the tragic crisis of a friendship. The reproaches are meant to bring the other down, or at any rate, lower than the speaker himself. It is a showdown in verticality.<sup>147</sup> The two men are brought back to their impulses and essential vices; masks down. As Bloom rightfully remarks, Brutus, denying "the material, the body", is forced to acknowledge that he needs base matter such as money. The Stoic Brutus is brought back to essential physical life by Cassius the Epicurean, who grabs gold. Alongside the tragic crisis of their friendship, also their fashionable philosophies tumble into the existential abyss. After this outburst, cracks appear in both characters and their tone changes. Through the fissures of their bruised egos, emotions come out and the tone of their conversation changes. Instead of pointing to each other for some arcane kind of guilt or supposed faults, they speak of their own feelings and the effect these have in assessing each other.

Cassius: Oh, I could weep  
My spirit from mine eyes.  
[offers Brutus his bared dagger] There is my dagger.  
And here my naked breast. Within, a heart  
Dearer than Plutus' mine, richer than gold.  
If that thou beest a Roman, take it forth.  
I, that denied thee gold, will give my heart.  
[...]  
Brutus: O Cassius, you are yokèd with a lamb  
That carries anger as the flint bears fire,  
Who, much enforcèd, shows a hasty spark  
And straight is cold again.  
[...]  
Cassius: Hath Cassius lived

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147 As are all quarrels in which no holds are barred.

To be but mirth and laughter to his Brutus,  
 When grief and blood ill-tempered vexeth him?  
 Brutus: When I spoke that, I was ill-tempered too.  
 Cassius: Do you confess so much? Give me your hand.  
 Brutus: And my heart too.<sup>148</sup>

Instead of hurling reproaches at one another, genuine feelings are expressed. They timidly inquire whether the other still loves him, despite past mistakes. Cassius: "Have you not love enough to bear with me.." and Brutus promptly answers: "Yes."<sup>149</sup>

Shakespeare's message is a clear and intense one: the quintessence of every true friendship should be to love each other despite all shortcomings and also in adverse situations – it being easy to love someone while going with the wind under an all-blue sky. True friendship means acceptance of fallibility within the other. This gives their relationship a new balance and procures them human dignity. The friendship is thus renewed, now based on mutual understanding. It is also devoid of any social code of behaviour. It has become a friendship as it should be: a trusting relationship between equals. The important value of true friendship has come successfully through a tragic crisis, but is this enough to save the sanity of an entire nation-state?

Brutus tells Cassius that he hadn't been himself as his wife Portia is dead. Cassius is full of understanding and sympathy. Especially when he learns that Portia has committed suicide.

After this intermezzo, Messala and Titinius arrive. They bring alarming news: Octavius, Mark Antony, and Lepidus have raised an enormous army; moreover, they have killed a large number of senators. Some accounts speak of seventy deaths, while others mention one hundred: violence and social disruption are rampant. Following this, the news reaches Brutus that his wife, Portia, has died. We know he was already aware. Still, Brutus reacts as if he were not. This time, we see him respond as a true Stoic:

Why, farewell, Portia. We must die, Messala.  
 With meditating that she must die once,  
 I have the patience to endure it now.<sup>150</sup>

Some critics argue that the second scene announcing Portia's death originates from a flawed quarto and should have been excluded from the First Folio. However, Paul Cantor, with whom I concur, believes that Shakespeare has intentionally included the second announcement of her death. During the first

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148 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 99 – 117.

149 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 118 – 122.

I would say that Shakespeare here paints us a picture that has become mainstream only as recently as the 20<sup>th</sup> century among psychotherapists and in self-help circles.

150 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 190 – 192.

announcement, Brutus has the opportunity to absorb the news privately—simultaneously reinforcing his friendship with Cassius and truly bonding with him. The second announcement serves to publicly display Brutus' composure. Cassius immediately recognizes the importance of maintaining a positive public image and goes along with it, without hesitation. Effectively, Cassius bolsters Brutus' reputation by claiming that he himself could not bear such news with the same composure: "I have as much of this in art as you,/But yet my nature could not bear it so."<sup>151</sup> It does not seem to concern Cassius that this remark elevates Brutus above him in terms of endurance and composure, which is striking considering Cassius' earlier portrayal of Brutus (act 1) and the context of Rome's masculine and hierarchical society.

In the last part of act 4, scene 3 Brutus has retired to his tent and at night, the ghost of Julius Caesar visits him. For sixteenth-century Elizabethans, ghosts were by no means fantastical and most people genuinely believed in ghosts. As we see in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, it was thought that ghosts could be either benevolent or deluding and evil. They could predict the future but also beguile a mortal. Talking to a ghost was seen as a special competence. Only seasoned philosophers and alchemists could do this well. Luckily, the ghost itself tells Brutus he is his evil spirit or conscience.<sup>152</sup> The spirit tells Brutus he will meet him again in Philippi, then disappears. Brutus is completely undone and doesn't know what to say. His philosophy has been of little avail to him. He reproaches himself for not having been able to converse with the spirit more:

Now I have taken heart thou vanishes.  
Ill spirit, I would hold more talk with thee.<sup>153</sup>

This short scene is crucial as it shows that, despite Caesar being dead, his spirit (Caesarism) is more alive than ever. This (new) spirit of Caesarism permeates the rest of the play. Yet, there is another, much more important and deeply tragic meaning to this scene. Brutus here, in the most literal sense of the word, faces the results of his actions up to that point. It "mak'st [his] blood cold and [his] hair to stare."<sup>154</sup> He meets his ghost in the literal sense of the word; his ultimate fears. He cries for help from his comrades and even from his servant Lucius. He also has to confront the fact that he is the murderer of Caesar, and this fact will stay with him. In other words, he realizes that he is the author of violence. It remains unclear from the text whether he understands that violence, once unleashed, becomes – as the tragic process unfolds – indiscriminate regarding its goal; it might just turn against its initial author

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151 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 194 – 195.

152 As always in Shakespeare, his words are charged with a maximum of double meanings and connotations.

153 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 287 – 288.

154 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, l. 280.

(as radical violence always does). However, here he must undergo the existential experience of violence as suffering. In this and the next act, we will see how Brutus processes this realization and how his surroundings react to it.

### 8.16 THE FINAL BATTLE

In act 5, the actual battle takes place. Beforehand, Octavius and Antony talk about strategy. Antony orders Octavius to move to the left side of the line of battle, which the latter refuses; he insists on standing to the right. This place in battle was important as the superior and more experienced general customarily was situated on the right side of the battle line.<sup>155</sup> The tension between the two generals is clearly perceptible.

Meanwhile, Cassius has his own worries. He cries out:

Why now blow wind, swell billow, and swim bark!  
The storm is up, and all is on the hazard.<sup>156</sup>

This is not the average macho bragging sometimes heard before a fight. On the contrary, Cassius is anxious and in his bewilderment, he reverts to what he feels is his anchorage in life. He continues:

This is my birthday, as this very day  
Was Cassius born. Give me thy hand, Messala.  
Be thou my witness that against my will,  
As Pompey was, am I compelled to set  
Upon one battle all our liberties.  
You know that I held Epicurus strong  
And his opinion. Now I change my mind,  
And partly credit things that do presage.  
Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign  
Two mighty eagles fell, and there they perched,  
Gorging and feeding from our soldiers' hands,  
Who to Philippi here consorted us.  
This morning are they fled away and gone,  
And in their steads do ravens, crows, and kites  
Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us  
As we were sickly prey. Their shadows seem  
A canopy most fatal, under which  
Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost.<sup>157</sup>

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155 Source: William Shakespeare, ed. Timothy Seward and Rob Smith, *Julius Caesar*, p. 140.

156 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 67 – 68.

157 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 70 – 87.

He begins by identifying himself with his date of birth.<sup>158</sup> Next, he presents a highly individual opinion: this battle, in its current form, is against his will. After that, he discards his (fashionable) paraphernalia, such as philosophy, which is of no avail whatsoever in this time of existential crisis. He partially returns to the old ways and superstitions. Cassius' tragic crisis hits hard. In fact, what occurs here mirrors what happened to Brutus in act 4, scene 3, when Caesar's ghost revealed itself to him. Cassius is confronted by his innermost fears, his ghosts; the speech exudes a spirit of existential anxiety.<sup>159</sup>

Cassius then falls back on Brutus, specifically his friendship with him, seeking advice, encouragement, and support. He asks the customary what-if question often used in intimate friendships to gain new footing and perspective with the only other person who is trusted blindly: "If we do lose the battle[...]/ What are you then determined to do?"<sup>160</sup>

Brutus's answer is unexpected: he will not revert to an honourable death by suicide. But neither will he be dragged through the streets of Rome in chains. In other words, he doesn't yet know how to react to a lost battle. Here is proof of Brutus being at a loss. Also, for him, their newly forged friendship is the only anchorage. From this new perspective, they say their goodbyes:

And whether we shall meet again I know not.  
 Therefore our everlasting farewell take.  
 Forever and forever farewell, Cassius.  
 If we do meet again, why, we shall smile.  
 If not, why then this parting was well made.<sup>161</sup>

It is striking (and heartrending) that Brutus and Cassius, just before the battle starts, speak of losing it as a genuine option. In this manner, Shakespeare weaves foreboding into this conversation.

It is of importance to emphasize that, despite inflated machismo, the men are capable of emotionally reaching out to each other. Their heartfelt affection and loyalty are almost tangible. Their impressive bond (seasoned by their earlier dispute: act 4, III) gets them through this difficult time; they feel they are facing the ultimate. This type of experience belongs to the realm of existentiality. Brutus's words "O that a man might know/The end of this day's business ere it come!/But it sufficeth that the day will end,/And then the end is known"<sup>162</sup> seem to tell us that Brutus already knows the outcome, polysemic as these words are.

158 The Romans are known as the first civilization that generally celebrated birthdays. Thus, it became part and parcel of one's identity. Source: <https://isgeschiedenis.nl/nieuws/de-geschiedenis-van-het-verjaardagsfeest>

159 Carrion eaters, such as ravens and kites, were seen in medieval times as foreboding death.

160 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 98 – 100.

161 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 115 – 119.

162 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 122 – 125.

The battle begins. The course is messy and chaotic. In act 5, scene III, we find out that the battle doesn't go well for Cassius and Brutus. Cassius' soldiers have fled; he slays his fleeing standard bearer (act 5, III, ll. 1 – 4) and has to retreat. His tents are on fire. Brutus, having advanced too soon, is surrounded by Mark Antony's men. Cassius has lost a broad overview of the chaotic situation and asks Titinius, one of his officers, to ride across the field to have a look. He asks his slave Pindarus to climb a nearby hill to see how Titinius fares. Cassius muses: "This day I breathèd first, time is come round,/ And where I did begin, there shall I end./My life is run his compass."<sup>163</sup> This is the mood of a stupefied man who is resigned to his defeat.

Dutifully, Pindarus, from his hilltop, communicates what he sees. With great precision, he reports: Titinius is surrounded by men. They make him dismount; they are on to him ("He's ta'en [...and then shouting] And hark they shout for joy"<sup>164</sup>). However, Cassius hardly lets Pindarus finish and it is to be doubted whether he heard the last sentence at all (the soldiers didn't take Titinius prisoner, but they cheer him); he has already formed his opinion: Titinius is taken for real. Totally despondent, he calls Pindarus down. He has made up his mind to kill himself. His last two orders to Pindarus are to kill him with his own sword and thereafter be a free man. Cassius' last words are: "Caesar, thou art revenged/Even with the sword that killed thee."<sup>165</sup>

Pindarus, having been a slave before, now has his freedom, but can hardly rejoice; he has come to love his master and, therefore, does his bidding. With this small scene – the trust of Cassius that Pindarus will do as he bids and the loyalty of Pindarus – Shakespeare paints us pietas (see above: point 4.3), the respect and obligation to offer help, fully aware of any mutual dependencies. A deep friendship and trust also permeate the scene. Messala, entering the scene, aptly observes:

Mistrust of good success hath done this deed.  
O hateful error, melancholy's child,  
Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men  
The things that are not? O error, soon conceived,  
Thou never comest unto a happy birth  
But kill'st the mother that engendered thee!<sup>166</sup>

Messala continues to tell us that Brutus had won the battle against Octavius. Together with Titinius, he had come to tell Cassius this news, but Cassius was already dead. Titinius is undone to such a degree (he realizes that – with the

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163 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 23 – 25.

164 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 31 – 32.

165 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 45 – 46.

166 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 66 – 71.

Some 300 years later, this phenomenon was described as intentionalism by Husserl.

most experienced general gone – the battle will be lost) that he also commits honourable suicide.

Brutus enters the scene and, seeing both Cassius's and Titinius's bodies, cries out: "Oh Caesar, thou art mighty yet,/ Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords/ in our own proper entrails."<sup>167</sup> Here, Brutus voices some important observations:

- Caesar's ghost still seems alive; that is, Caesarism is alive. This means that the politics Caesar intended to implant (that of an autocratic kingdom) will prevail.
- On a deeper level, it means that here Brutus finally realizes to the full that radical violence ultimately turns itself against its author(s). Brutus continues:

Are yet two Romans living such as these?  
The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!  
It is impossible that ever Rome  
Should breed thy fellow.<sup>168</sup>

The last representatives of the old Rome have died. Here, Brutus forgets that he himself is seen as the last living symbol of the values of old Rome.<sup>169</sup> Brutus here tells us that

- his attempt to preserve the old values of the Republic seems nullified: these men were the last true Romans,
- Moreover, his mission in the name of Liberty, Freedom has failed (flip siding the same coin, for these were among the shared values of the Republic). The only concept that has successfully gone through its tragic crisis is the friendship between Brutus and Cassius. This friendship, however, is of a personal nature and does not affect its social embedding (see above). Therefore it is incapable of carrying an entire construct into renewal.

It can also be argued that Brutus' innate nobility weathered the tragic crisis well. However, this is a questionable argument since Brutus' disposition remains static throughout the crisis: he does not give evidence of a significant attitude change. He even resorts to traditional "honorable" suicide. I would argue that he has come quite some way down the road of the violence paradigm in realizing that violence (whether committed by himself or someone else) means suffering for all and that the radical variant is not goal-oriented. He, however, stops there and does not make the inference that – for these very

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167 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 94 – 96.

168 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 98 – 101.

169 Even Antony and Octavius will refer to this in the last scene of the play: act 5, V, ll. 69 – 82.

reasons – he will have to make some attitudinal full turns (with respect to socio/political issues and as to the content of the concept of liberty).

Brutus decides to once more fight the army of Antony and Octavius: “We shall try our fortune in a second fight.”<sup>170</sup> This fight is lost and leaves Brutus dismayed. He takes several of his confidants aside, asking them to help him with an honourable suicide. They are aghast and refuse. Brutus asks Volumnius, telling him that Caesar’s ghost had visited him the night before. Therefore, he knows it is his time. It is the time of his physical death as the enemy is pressing on. All present at the scene have to flee as Brutus insists. He asks Strato, his servant, to hold his sword. Strato does so and Brutus runs into it and dies. Just before he dies, he speaks:

My heart doth joy that yet in all my life  
 I found no man but he was true to me.  
 I shall have glory by this losing day  
 More than Octavius and Mark Antony  
 By this vile conquest shall attain unto.  
 So fare you well at once, for Brutus’ tongue  
 Hath almost ended his life’s history.  
 Night hangs upon mine eyes. My bones would rest,  
 That have but labored to attain this hour.<sup>171</sup>

What does Brutus allude to here? Brutus here reverts to the Roman custom of honourable suicide. This behaviour seems to be fuelled by fear of being taken prisoner<sup>172</sup>; when being fearful, one is bound to fall back on coping mechanisms of the familiar social codes of behaviour. But it is precisely these codes of behaviour that Shakespeare has painted as being eroded and perverted in acts 1 and 2. Earlier, we have seen that the concept of honour is a questionable one: it has some uncanny connotations, making it especially prone to perversion. The falling back on old coping mechanisms is telling. It means that no change in attitude is taking place in Brutus: even up to his death, he compares himself (in a rather competitive way, placing himself in a vertical relationship of excellence with Octavius and Antony) to his opponents. In his last words, we cannot find a shimmer of thought or behaviour that indicates a renewed rapport to or involvement with his community. Brutus, standing on the self-created debris of the old constructs, shows no bold dash into the new unknown, as we have witnessed in the other tragedies. As argued just above, he, however, did acknowledge the terrible consequences and essential qualities of radical violence (once released into the world). This makes him, from a tragic perspective, a halfway case. On the other hand, like a true

170 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, l. 110.

171 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, V, ll. 34 – 42.

172 Which was a fate not to be envied. Being paraded through the streets of Rome, possible torture or being sold as a slave were not bright prospects. Brutus most certainly would have been held indefinitely for ransom or been dishonored and exiled.

Shakespearean hero, not a single shadow of self-pity or guilt darkens his brow. In this, he is a veritable son of Shakespeare's imagination.

I may now conclude that the requirements for the successful closure of the violence paradigm have not been met. What does this entail? Mark Antony articulates it in his eulogy for Brutus:

This was the noblest Roman of them all.  
All the conspirators save only he  
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.  
He only in a general honest thought  
And common good to all, made one of them.  
His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"<sup>173</sup>

Brutus was the noblest of the insurgents. And yet, from our point of view, he did not succeed. In fact, throughout the play, he begins to increasingly resemble Julius Caesar:

- Brutus mentions certain physical inconveniences addressed by Cassius in act 1; Julius also has physical problems, as we saw in the same act.
- Both men have an autocratic style of decision-making. They do not listen to the good advice of trusted friends.
- Neither of them has a clear vision of statesmanship and governance: Brutus cries freedom and liberty, but this turns out to be empty sloganeering.
- They created an inner circle of yes-men to applaud them.
- Julius and Brutus have the same self-image of constancy (Julius Caesar: Act 3, I 1.60 and Brutus acting the Stoic throughout) while in fact being mercurial.

The substitution of Julius Caesar by Brutus would not have produced the necessary construct renewal. Brutus had not been able to successfully complete the violence paradigm. With him, the values of virtue and nobility of mind (4.1 in the above list) perish in this play. And with this important value buttressing the old republic (point 3 in the above list), the latter concept will perish.

And as to Julius, in spite of all his achievements in the European theatres of war, he would neither have pulled this off; for now we know that victory in this register is not a criterion for the proper completion of a violence paradigm. Rather, it is a hindrance because war itself is preeminently a radical and vertical affair.

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173 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, V, ll. 68 – 75.

Rome will now enter the era of Caesarism. Concerning content, the system will remain the same; just different dignitaries will populate the stage. They will give themselves new titles and, of course, the territory they wield will be name-embellished as the Roman Empire.<sup>174</sup>

In my next and one but last chapter I will go some more into the clarification of some knotty problems posed in this complex play; and of course, I will also answer the questions put forward in the beginning of this chapter.

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174 And of course this is a perfect example not of Nietzsche's *Umwertung*, but of Shakespearean *Umdrehung*.

### 9.1 POLITICAL SHAKESPEARE

In the wake of this play, an obvious question arises as to whether Shakespeare could have preferred any form of government. Does he pass judgment on what is the best form? It is evident that the governmental and political systems depicted in this play cannot be based on any form of Christian orthodoxy, as the play is set in the Rome of 44 BCE. Of course, if Shakespeare had been a Christian writer, he could have imbued this play with various Christian themes. However, in this and the previous plays, it has been demonstrated that Shakespeare's tragedies do not provide evidence of religiosity; indeed, we have witnessed earlier chapters that illustrate Shakespeare's reticence in passing judgment on any subject, despite his incisive and astute observations of human behaviour and the human psyche.

In *Julius Caesar*, we witness the downfall of a republican state form and the emergence of a dictatorship, including the deification of Julius Caesar,<sup>1</sup> followed by the Julian theocracy (act 1, II). This is a veritable snap list of state forms, but there is not the slightest indication that one of these forms is preferred by Shakespeare.

In his lecture,<sup>2</sup> Professor Cantor seems implicitly to move his audience in the direction of a dichotomic question: following the line of his argumentation, was Shakespeare for or against the republic? Or did he favour, by any chance, any other form of regime? Following the analysis in the previous chapter, I now conclude that in this play, no trace is to be found of preference

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1 We cannot know how the character of Julius in the play thought about this matter, there being no textual evidence as to his inclination in this area, apart from the fact that he feigned not to want a crown, which is a slightly different register since a crown is first and foremost a worldly attribute. As was suggested in a note in the previous chapter, he might very well have smoothly and pompously accepted the sycophancy and adoration of others.

2 See above.

for any form of government, religiously inspired or not.<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare passes no judgement or, as Dobski has it:

One might ask (and many have) which regime or political order Shakespeare thought best or most fitting. The answer still eludes his readers. Shakespeare, in and through his plays, seems rather to be engaged in a kind of comparative political theory that cannot easily be reduced to a practical solution to perennial political problems. The action of each play has an argument, and an argument which at least in part is profoundly concerned with political problems or questions. The arguments of the plays, then, as parts of a single body of work (a corpus)—insofar as that body can or should be taken as a whole—are in an important sense in dialogue with one another. But while Shakespeare is clearly attentive to the perennial questions and problems associated with politics, he refrains from passing judgment on the regimes and statesmen he depicts for us; he forgoes the temptation to issue prescriptive remedies of his own.<sup>4</sup>

However, whereas Dobski and Gish accurately remark that Shakespeare passes no judgment, he, for sure, gives us a perspective that apparently escapes both authors. In my opinion – and as argued above – the sentence (and I paraphrase here Dobski’s quote above): *Shakespeare shows here that the type of construct used to govern a community, a nation is in point of fact inconsequential*, should be completed with: *as long as it heeds and upholds the basic primeval existential needs of man*. Therefore, the question posed above as to what governmental system is preferred by Shakespeare is not the relevant one. Shakespeare replaces this

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3 Moreover, and being practical, he simply couldn’t afford to have an opinion on these issues as they might displease the queen/king. He had to tread carefully in order not to lose his head. Also, he had interests in that he had a theatre to run and a family to provide for. So he had to keep several balls in the air; keeping his head on his shoulders being the most important one. In my view, this elemental prudence contributed to those literary characteristics that mainly formed Shakespeare’s greatness. Firstly, his virtuoso play of words, leading his audience in a veritable maze of ambiguity and double meanings. Secondly, his word coinage, words that, by virtue of their novelty, did not as yet have an established field of associations (hence Shakespeare could not be accused of double-read: suspect meanings since he had introduced the word himself). These strokes of genius were prompted by the restrictions of governmental censorship. In a weird and unexpected way we may be thankful for Mr. Edward Tilney, Master of the Revels at Elizabeth’s court and responsible for censoring all literary works.

In respect of the words coined by Shakespeare, I cite: “How many words has Shakespeare added to English? Guesses have ranged from a few hundred terms to more than 10,000, with the most likely estimate approximately 1,500 words.” As the scholar Marvin Spevack has commented, “Shakespeare’s was the period of the most rapid growth of vocabulary in the recorded history of the language.”

(J. McQuain and S. Malless, *Coined by Shakespeare*, p. viii). Just one example of a word coined by Shakespeare: the adjective *premeditated* (*1 Henry VI*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Henry V*) in *Coined by Shakespeare*, p. 177. In short, Shakespeare’s contribution to language and literature is unparalleled.

4 B.J. Dobski and D.A. Gish, “Shakespeare, the Body Politic and Liberal Democracy”, *Perspectives on Political Science*, volume 41, p. 188.

question with an existential non-dichotomized inquiry: “upon which existential aspects of human behaviour would you have your communal constructs based?”

The long-term success of a particular political construct depends on the open interactive relationship of the construct and the primeval/existential human need. In the next few paragraphs, this will be further elucidated. Thus, and concluding from the perspective of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, I hold that culture can be described as the ritualized expression of human primeval needs.<sup>5</sup> Statecraft, the political construct that is mediated by culture, can be viewed as being both reinforced by culture and, at the same time, regulating it. The same goes, as a matter of course, for the legal construct, coming with an organised nation-state. This interdependency and embeddedness are increasingly recognized and appreciated by scholars and critics. Dobski and Gish:

[Shakespeare had] perhaps the most vivid and enduring image in speech describing political community ever proposed. Through his works, Shakespeare helps us think about both parts and wholes in a political context and the proper relationship between the parts and the whole. Indeed, there may be no greater account or anatomy of the Body Politic in the English language than what one discovers in Shakespeare's plays and poetry.<sup>6</sup>

Anselm Haverkamp also appreciates the potency in Shakespeare's works in this respect; he describes in a complicated and rather circumlocutory (and vague) way the workings and effect of Shakespearean tragedy as he sees it: it is

a visible space between the spheres of politics and law and well able to negotiate legal and political, even constitutional concerns; Shakespeare's theatre opened up a new perspective on normativity. Specifically, “history” in a new sense on the premises of the older conceptions of historical and legal exemplarity: examples, cases, and instances are to be reflected on rather than treated as straightforwardly didactic or salvific. Thus, what comes to be recognized, reflected and acknowledged, has a disowning, alienating effect, whose aftermath rather than whose immediacy counts and remains effective.<sup>7</sup>

Posner<sup>8</sup> and Crutto agree, where Posner stresses the universality of Shakespeare's oeuvre and Crutto emphasizes the interrelation between ethics and

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5 And of course, each and every culture integrates these needs in its own unique way into social structure and cultural custom. A clear example of this interrelationship is given in the previous chapter: the description of the embeddedness of friendship in social custom.

6 B.J. Dobski and D.A. Gish, “Shakespeare, the Body Politic and Liberal Democracy”, *Perspectives on Political Science*, volume 41, p. 181.

7 Anselm Haverkamp, *Shakespearean Genealogies of Power*, p.p. 2 – 3.

8 Richard A. Posner, *Law & Literature*.

law.<sup>9</sup> Remarkably, these critics do appreciate the powerful influence of Shakespeare's oeuvre on law and legislation and their embeddedness in (aspects of) culture, none of them, however, analyzes in detail how this influence works. I hope my analysis below will complete this hiatus.

To a high extent in Shakespeare's days, the political agenda was dictated by the ruler-prince. As indicated in a previous chapter, such a prince was formed by the so-called 'mirror of princes' in which the (Christian) virtues expected from a ruler extensively resounded.<sup>10</sup> Law, its enforcement and justice coincided to a large extent with the person and character of the sovereign. The flip side of this coin was that a sovereign had to forsake his/her private life since this too was a state matter.<sup>11</sup>

The mirror of princes might be interpreted as an initial curtailment of a sovereign's "natural right to rule and administer justice": he had to subordinate his wishes and commands to an external (transcendent) party. No longer did the exclusive principle of *princeps legibus solutus* hold; instead he had to govern "under the rule of law".<sup>12</sup>

Machiavelli followed suit in the mirror-of-princes tradition.<sup>13</sup> However, as discussed above, he took a stance, explicitly different from the Christian one. In his *The Prince*, he recommended a ruthlessly effect oriented rule, virtue being redefined in this vein. One of Machiavelli's more famous quotes on this issue: "It is a sound maxim that reprehensible action may be justified by their effects [...] and when the effect is good, it always justifies the action."<sup>14</sup> Friedman, in one of his articles,<sup>15</sup> analyzes Machiavelli's opinion on statecraft in his two major works: the aforementioned *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. In the second book, Friedman detects a somewhat more restrained tone; Machiavelli advocates a moderate form of republicanism to accommodate the rising middle class. However, opines Friedman, Machiavelli realized that society as a whole was not ready for such innovations "because that class [viz. the rising middle class] had still great need of the centralizing agency of the absolute monarch in Machiavelli's day and, accordingly, he relegated his

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9 K. Crutto, *Law's Interior: Legal and Literary Constructions of the Self*, p. 23.

10 Apart from those mentioned earlier in this chapter, another famous contemporary Mirror of Princes was the one by Baldassare Castiglione: *The book of the Courtier*, published in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The book encompassed both etiquette and morals. A popular English translation of the book was published in 1561. Other influential works were of yet older traditions: Seneca: *De Clementia*; Cicero: *De Officiis*. All these works appealed to the integrity of character of an autocrat; it took centuries before the rule of law took over.

11 As, allegedly, Elizabeth I once seemed to have sighed, when she was asked about her general health and in particular her stool performance: G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History*.

12 Of course, the rule of law in the modern sense of the word took a few centuries to develop.

13 Also see the chapter on the preliminaries on *Julius Caesar*.

14 Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I, p. 234.

15 B. Friedman, "The Nation-State: The Machiavellian Element in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*" in *The Historian*, 1955, p.p. 25 – 40.

republic[an aspirations] to some vague future."<sup>16</sup> "Machiavelli admitted the desirability of a liberal political state, but his conception of the human nature, made the realization of such a state impossible."<sup>17</sup> Friedman continues to compare the circumstances of Machiavelli's (living in Italy at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century) with those of Shakespeare (living in England at the other end of the same century). Italy was a motley of small and petty states, at war with each other in continuously changing alliances,<sup>18</sup> and England was a unified nation, yet Friedman sees similarities. England could come to the brink of civil war again since Elizabeth I had no heirs and the political situation was, because of that fact, insecure. Moreover, the country was plagued by religious conflicts and tensions. Friedman subsequently argues that in the drama *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare reduces the plot to a conflict between two opposing views of the state, embodied by respectively Brutus and Marc Antony. Through them, the dramatist, still according to Friedman, debates the issue of the absolute state against a moderate republic. This is the same dualism that can be seen between Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, Friedmann continues. Brutus represents the ideal of Machiavelli's republic<sup>19</sup> and Marc Antony that of the autocrat.<sup>20</sup> In an argumentation stretched to the max, Friedman concludes that Shakespeare was concerned, as Machiavelli had been before him, to further the desirability of a moderate republic, full well knowing that times were as yet not ripe for it. This is indeed an interesting line of thought, but for the fact that Shakespeare keeps safely away from expressing preference or concern. In his article, Friedman implies that Brutus (embodiment of the ideal of the republic) loses the battle because the time is still not ripe for that form of government. However, Brutus is not the embodiment of any ideal at all, since he is not endowed with such a concept, as Shakespeare ironically showed by subtly comparing Brutus to Cicero. Brutus is not the embodiment of a political ideal; Brutus is – unwittingly – the embodiment of a culture and a code of behaviour: the Roman culture and codification (see further down for elaboration). In missing this, Friedman makes but half a statement on Shakespeare's genius – but that mistake has been made more often. This play goes far beyond a personal drama of two statesmen and two different concepts of

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16 B. Friedman, "The Nation-State: The Machiavellian Element in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*", in *The Historian*, p. 27.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

18 And, by the way, originally – from the 14<sup>th</sup> century on – goaded on and provoked by an English mercenary army, initially led by Sir John Hawkwood, who, after the Hundred Years' War between England and France, had not been able to make it back to England. This bunch of hardened expendables travelled over the Alps into Italy to successfully harass every city state for ransom or to set the one against the other (source: *Hawkwood, De Duivelse Engelsman*, by Frances Stonor Saunders). Italy could hardly recover from this centuries-long scourge.

19 B. Friedman, "The Nation-State: The Machiavellian Element in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*", p. 35.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

statecraft. Indeed, Shakespeare does show the struggle between powers; however, in not taking sides, he, in act 5, widens a choice beyond a mere dichotomy, but before going into this universal aspect of Shakespeare, first, some other, more obvious queries have to be addressed.

## 9.2 SHAKESPEARE'S WARNING

Why does Shakespeare show this particular ending to the play? In previous dramas, he showed not to have any problem with bending the plot (and history) to his will, showing the outcome that suited him best. From this point of view, the argument that the end result was as Plutarch described it does not hold either. Why then, this ending? To understand this it seems sensible to refer back for a moment to the age and society Shakespeare lived in.

In the chapter on the preliminaries to *Julius Caesar*, I described this period as the first emergence of a nation-state and as indicated just above by Friedman, the state was governed by an autocratic queen<sup>21</sup> on an unstable throne through lack of heirs and religious conflicts. These circumstances were even more aggravated by the fact that a ruling woman in the past had been disastrous for the country. Firstly, the rule of her half-sister (Mary, the bloody one: 1553 – 1558) had been a disaster and antecedently Jane Grey had ruled only 9 days. Before her, there had been no woman on the throne since the times of Boudica's<sup>22</sup> clan-rule; the combination of women and crowns did not go down well in the public eye. Then, some decades before Shakespeare was born, the country had experienced civil war; moreover – also mentioned in previous chapters – there were many insurrections and plots during Elizabeth's reign.

Precisely these two features, civil war and autocratic rule, are given remarkable attention in the play. I therefore argue that Shakespeare has particularly wanted to point towards these dangers for his fledgling nation under a female sovereign. It is fortunate for England that the wise Elizabeth I surrounded herself with equally wise and seasoned advisors.<sup>23</sup> Conceivably, however, this play – being on Rome which for centuries had an impact to the whole

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21 As mentioned before, but here repeated for the benefit of the reader, the queen meant is Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603), after the demise of her sister and brother, sole heir to Henry VIII (having had six wives – in a desperate attempt to produce male heirs and therewith avoid another bout of civil war – and the founder of the Anglican Church). Elizabeth called herself the Virgin Queen and professed to be "married to England". Consequently, she had no heirs; with her the Tudor period came to an end.

22 Queen of the Celtic Iceni (circa 61 CE). She led an insurrection against the Roman occupation.

23 William Cecil, baron of Burghley, but especially Sir Francis Walsingham deserve attention. His advice proved life-saving for (the younger) queen. His nickname was the spymaster, because of his wide network of connections outside and inside the diplomatic world and in the courts throughout Europe.

of Europe – can additionally be read as a warning to other European rulers, all of them wielding autocratic power at the time.

Shakespeare does not stop here; he paints the dangers of degeneration for any nation-state construct. The subtle fabric of interwoven values, culture and the nation-state is easily disrupted when their respective interdependencies are waning or lost. Instead of cooperation within a community, needed to build a nation, the self-interest of each individual citizen will take pride of place. Indeed, this is what Renan warned against; according to him, such a construct cannot even be called a nation,<sup>24</sup> let alone hope for longevity.

In Shakespearean tragedy, not the succumbing scenes, the destruction, the loss and the grief are important, but these (sometimes but small) elements which man reuses and which allow him to build a(n improved) new version of the previous construct.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the successive constructs might develop and grow.<sup>26</sup>

A stress test of radical violence works as a catalyst for these constructs. It always does, has done and will do so in the future. Even though the outcome is determined by the subtle differences between tragic and non-tragic (to which I will come back in the next paragraph), the violent process is the same for both.

Perhaps this last issue is why both Renan and Weber failed to distinguish between the diverse types of violence: the processes are deceptively similar. It is, however, as just argued, not the process that counts but the outcome. Is the construct capable of constraining the violence (in a way that it remains violence on a limited scale) or, if it cannot, is there an individual or group of people who are successful in turning the scales from radical non-tragic into radical tragic?

### 9.3 VIOLENCE: “GOOD” AND “BAD”

We have now come to the point of thoroughly analyzing the internal dynamics of regression into or progression out of radical non-tragic violence. This raises the question of whether there are such concepts as “good” violence or “bad” violence. There is one short and clear-cut comment to be made to this manner of questioning: it premises that there is such a normative distinction within the sphere of radical violence. There is not. Radical violence cannot be labeled either good or bad. It is inherently human and therefore unavoidable. It is precisely that existential characteristic in man that, when ranging free, needs

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24 See chapter on Renan.

25 It is bound to be an improved version, because the pangs of pain and loss felt during the crisis just experienced are still fresh and because of the acquired insight into the situation.

26 Indeed, even the death of the hero is irrelevant; important is what he bestows on his community in his dying moment.

to be mitigated by the violence paradigm. It is for this reason that it is of tantamount importance to learn to distinguish between the diverse manifestations of violence.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned in the beginning of the previous chapter, neither negation nor veneration of violence are wise strategies to follow. I would dare to add: but discernment is.<sup>28</sup>

Well now, under what conditions is violence the free-ranging, utterly destructive kind (radical non-tragic violence)? What is the breeding ground for the mitigated variety (radical tragic violence)? When does a type 2 violence develop (state monopolized violence) and when does the type 2 fall back into a type 1-non-tragic violence. How does this operate in practice? After having witnessed Julius Caesar's and Brutus' fall I will now endeavor an answer to these queries.

The distinction between the radical non-tragic and radical tragic types has been made clear in the previous chapters; radical non-tragic changes into radical tragic under the following circumstances and I shortly recapitulate:

- A radical attitude change takes place towards violence, society and way of coexistence.<sup>29</sup> In the chapters on tragedy and the chapter on *Macbeth*, I pointed at the radical and total involvement of the tragic hero in his society. In *Hamlet*, this involvement is broadened to all those affected.
- A horizontalization of relationships (implying a unity in will and purpose to make the community work) and a deconstruction of values and constructs.

Out of these conditions (after completion of the violence paradigm), state violence evolves as described in the chapter on *Hamlet*. State violence also needs to be controlled.<sup>30</sup>

When this fails, most likely, a radical non-tragic violence will take over. What does this look like in a society already in turmoil? Referring back to *Julius Caesar*, I distill the following general characteristics:

- A tendency towards self-interest instead of communal interest can be detected (here I also fall back on Renan).

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27 As explained in the introduction, I only discuss violence in this thesis in relation to nation-hood and nation-state.

28 Of course and needless to note, but for the sake of completeness, distinguishing one thing from the other falls into a different league altogether than normative labelling.

29 I bring to mind that tragedy principally occurs in times of social transformation and turmoil. If this basic condition is absent, then most probably the occurrence or artwork is not tragic in the Periclean or Shakespearean sense of the word and consequently, no radical tragic violence can be detected. Examples of good but non-tragic plays: *Death of a Salesman* and *Waiting for Godot*. Our 21th century timeframe is an excellent indicator of tragedy of the Shakespearean kind.

30 In the glory days of the Roman Republic, this was achieved by a counterbalance of societal forces and the Senate. Nowadays, this is done by a Montesquieu-ean separation of powers as described above.

- Laws are no longer obeyed or respected.
- Communal values become blurred, twisted, or lose meaning.
- Moral confusion in communal leaders is seen, fused by popular opinion.
- Consumerism (of values, rights, communal achievements and goods).
- The obvious reciprocity of dependencies between classes disappears.

These are the outward identifiers of a nation-state in decline.

If these are but the outward identifiers, the logical follow-up question is: from what source does this state of affairs spring? Above, I already mentioned man's existential needs and their embeddedness in political construct and culture in a more general way. Well then, in the above play, Shakespeare suggests an ideal interrelationship (and reciprocity) between nation-state, values, the legislative body on the one hand and the existential primeval needs<sup>31</sup> of man on the other. We saw in the play that if a construct<sup>32</sup> no longer mirrors and reinforces the primeval existential needs of its inhabitants, the construct in its entirety cannot hold. The construct's (legal and governmental) achievements will degenerate and fall back into legal primitivism.

At this point, an answer can be given to the question with which this journey was set out: is the Shakespearean violence paradigm related to (the proper functioning of) the public construct and if so, in what way? The first part of the question can be answered with a resounding *yes*. The violence paradigm is of tantamount importance for the ultimate (renewal of the) form and content of the public/legal construct. As we have seen in this play and the previous ones, its outcome (tragic or non-tragic) determines the difference between an improved construct or a degenerated or repressive construct; in other words, the proper discernment between the types of violence is of enormous importance.

#### 9.4 RENAN, WEBER AND CICERO: EVALUATION OF THEIR CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE NATION-STATE

In the previous chapter I raised questions on Renan's nation-state concept and Weber's definition of the state concept: did Renan's description sufficiently cover the nation part and was Weber in fact not too minimalistic in his state definition? Apart from the hiatus in their perception of the violence concept (mentioned in the above paragraph) I would like to make a few more comments on Renan's and Weber's concept of nation-state.

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31 Recapitulating: protection from violence (from internal and external sources), secure and safe embedding in one's social surroundings/culture, the need for liberty and the need for fairness in justice.

32 Of course, here the nation-state construct is meant.

In the analysis of the play I already concluded that Weber had not sufficiently taken into account the fact that state violence must also be controlled. An awareness of which Shakespeare evidences in the drama; it is especially articulated by Cassius (act 1, II). The (theatrically futile, but politically significant) presence of Cicero also indicates this.

With respect to Renan I would like to complete his description on nation and nation forming with the following, based on the reasons and arguments just given: a nation is not just formed by unification of will, a shared set of values and a “positive spirit and a warm heart” but also, and even more so I dare say, by the success (of the nation as a whole) to adequately recognize, respect and sustain the primeval existential needs of its citizens. For this, and indeed Renan’s descriptions do imply this, a reciprocity and unity in purpose of all parties involved is needed. In *Julius Caesar*, we see this condition failing and consequently the nation-state construct implodes into civil war.

Cicero emphasized the importance of keeping values and legality vibrant and alive, deeming it of vital importance for the preservation and maintenance of a healthy body politic. In Cicero’s quotes, previously cited, as in Shakespeare, we find this notion of reciprocity and balance necessary to do this. Consequently, it can be said that Cicero’s views in this respect seamlessly merge with those of Shakespeare; much arguing for the universality of both Shakespeare and Cicero.

## 9.5 THE LIQUIDATIONS BY HAMLET AND BRUTUS

In the last two plays discussed, the protagonists are placed in a tragic crisis situation tested in that specific tragic all-out way: Brutus and Hamlet. How should we interpret their motivation with regard to the murders they committed? Are they not equally “possessed” by radical non-tragic violence and do they not simply use the same argumentation that has been the favorite excuse of many a usurper throughout time: we kill to cleanse society of subversive elements (read: troublesome elements, just like Julius Caesar had got rid of the two tribunes)? In other words, are they too guilty of “purges” much like the “Great Purge” by Stalin (1936 – 38)?

Brutus killed Julius, using an excuse similar to the one just mentioned, but deemed it inopportune to kill others from the latter’s entourage. Hamlet first killed Polonius, then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, concluding his escapades with his foster father Claudius.<sup>33</sup>

Was Brutus right not to kill Mark Antony in light of the Stalin remark? After all, a horizontalization of relationships takes place after a successful violence paradigm; therefore, the sparing of Mark Antony’s life seems a

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33 The accidental death of Laertes cannot be called a murder by Hamlet, since the prince deemed it a romping in camaraderie. Moreover, he did not know the rapier was poisoned.

sensible thing to do given a future cooperation in establishing a new administration.

Indeed, in this context, it is also important to be able to forgive and “forget.” Renan already pointed towards the principle of collective forgetfulness and Alexandre del Valle also discusses the concept of forgetting in his book *Het Avondlandcomplex*. The fourth chapter is relevant.<sup>34</sup> How should we deal with collaborators with a dictatorial criminal or repressive regime? Must they all be executed, or otherwise punished? Or is forgetting and forgiving and making a new start together a better approach? Challenging worries indeed for both Brutus and Hamlet.

Of course, not just the question of individual guilt is at stake here, but also – and added to the issue of future cooperation, mentioned above – the problem of the social cohesion in the new regime; the post-tyrannical regime. The proponents of forgiveness (among others: Nelson Mandela, Jacques Derrida and De Gaulle) emphasize the need to end division. This means that forgiveness would be a sane strategy: the nation must be brought back together. Derrida articulated this in *Le siècle et le Pardon* with the words:

Want als men zichzelf gaat beschuldigen van – en vergiffenis gaat vragen voor alle misdaden tegen de menselijkheid die in het verleden zijn begaan, dan blijft er op de wereld geen onschuldige meer over – en dus niemand meer die als rechter of als scheidsrechter kan fungeren.<sup>35</sup>

To forget (violence in the past) is an important condition for the future success of the nation-state.

To the issues just mentioned:

- the need to forgive and forget
- social cohesion
- future cooperation

A fourth and additional complicating factor can be pointed out: by eliminating every ex-collaborator, the new regime could be accused of the same repressive characteristics as the previous one. And indeed, as we concluded, by the end of the play, Brutus had already begun to exhibit some of the characteristics Julius Caesar was criticized for. How should we interpret this?

Let us contrast this behavior with Hamlet’s: how are we to assess him? Does our Danish executioner have a cunning trick up his sleeve to separate future foe from future confederate? Of course, he has not, or has he? Before answering this question, let me upfront debunk the delusion that there is an easy protocol that, when correctly performed, will hand us the right decision,

34 Alexandre del Valle, *Het Avondlandcomplex*, pp. 161 – 209.

35 Ibid, p. 161. Derrida cited by Del Valle.

followed by the desired result. Hamlet has, however, a strategy, a plan. He acquired such a stratagem not because of his philosophical inclination or as a result of a conscious decision – which is the way in which Brutus seems to tackle life's challenges. Hamlet bravely faced the task he was burdened with and (almost succumbing) managed to live through the agony of a tragic crisis. By the grace of surviving this he gained the necessary tragic wisdom and experience helping him to discern friend from enemy. He has undergone an attitudinal change – and he is now able to discern the difference between horizontality (all men having the same existential needs as pointed out earlier) and vertical relations – after which his perception of his opponents has become incisive indeed. It is for this reason that I argued in the last few chapters that no man can be leader who has not gone through his tragic crisis; evidently not just for the sake of the crisis or the suffering, but for the accumulation of the necessary wisdom and knowledge.

Hamlet knows what is at stake: the survival and salubrity of the kingdom. I argue that Hamlet discerns what type of violence his opponents are using: Claudius, in order to attain his goal, intends to kill off everyone standing in his way, using whatever means. In other words, this clan leader makes use of radical non-tragic violence only. Because of his tragic experience, it is plausible that Hamlet realizes that Claudius' entourage is more of the same: Polonius being an unscrupulous and corrupt opportunist and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spineless contributors to Claudius' rule. Hamlet most probably realizes that it will be a near impossibility to build a just nation in equal collaboration with people cooperating in the execution of forms of violence that Hamlet intends to end. It takes a shrewd and judicious man, having gone through a tragic crisis, to be able to recognize this.

Brutus, on the other hand, has no clue. I pointed out above that the realization that existential needs are the same for all humans (horizontalization) takes place after the successful conclusion of the violence paradigm, however, Brutus did not find a way to complete it satisfactorily, therefore his "horizontalization"<sup>36</sup> in the guise of sparing Mark Antony's life and letting him give his speech is an empty gesture. This decision was not informed by tragic experience but by his self-image as a Stoic and a great leader of men.<sup>37</sup> Besides, in the sphere of the tragic, one cannot barter or hustle one aspect of the process for another, or – in this case – skip the difficult part: the crisis itself.

The mistakes Brutus makes are informed by blindness as to the motivations of his friends and enemies; he misses tragic wisdom and insight. For these reasons he would have compromised any future endeavor in the sphere of governance anyway.

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36 In Brutus' case, amounting to the sparing of a social equal, thus confusing horizontalization with social and/or value equality.

37 Fed by Cassius in act 1; today we would say Brutus could have had a tinge of the narcissistic.

In other words and concluding, the decision to either eliminate or forgive former enemies should depend not on the considerations of expediency mentioned above, but on the question whether the one making the decision is in possession of tragic wisdom and there is only one way to acquire this.

### 9.6 TRAGIC EXISTENTIALIST WORLD VIEW OF SHAKESPEARE; ITS SECULARITY

In his tragedies, Shakespeare demonstrates that violence is the basis of every form of human coexistence. With this realization, Shakespeare was centuries ahead of his time. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did Renan recognize this (*contre coeur*), Weber state it (with more conviction) and Nietzsche (fully convinced) tried to analyze it to find its ultimate rationale. Later anthropologists and philosophers built on their ideas.

Shakespeare's awareness is reflected in the violence paradigm. Above, I have touched upon this way of looking at the world: his tragic existentialist world-view. As discussed, the violence paradigm does not just entail the straightforward singular inevitability of destruction and despair. With it, Shakespeare simultaneously conveys an awareness of hope, dignity and self-reliance. The striking characteristic of the tragic existential world-view is the accomplishment of nullifying verticality after the tragic crisis. This translates itself into the absence of a winner/loser position.<sup>38</sup> I consider this feature to be of the most significant importance. I have found no other theory on violence describing such a position.<sup>39</sup> Neither Nietzsche, nor Hannah Arendt<sup>40</sup> nor any other philosopher or thinker<sup>41</sup> since has, to my knowledge, spoken of the relevance of this change – and of its outcome. They all stopped at the ultimate outcome of radical non-tragic violence: the continuation of verticality of relations. Therefore, I will here – again – emphasize my point from yet a slightly different point of view.

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38 Of course, this is yet another aspect of horizontalization, besides the aforementioned unity in will and the united purpose just after the finalization of the violence paradigm.

39 The only doctrine coming close is Christianity, when it preaches: love thine enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:43-48). Perhaps this feature accounts for its universal success.

40 In spite of their often razor-sharp and intelligent analysis of modern society, which can still be called topical. As an important source of public violence, Hannah Arendt identifies the progressive centralization of nation-state constructs. In my opinion, this is half the story. It is not centralization in itself but the accompanying increasing verticalization of relations between state and its citizens (resultant of centralization) that is the problem in my view. Unfortunately, she does not identify this feature as such.

41 An interesting debate on violence between two esteemed Dutch philosophers springs to mind: Hans Achterhuis and Ruud Welten. They too remain focused on the verticality of relationships, which makes their altercation imprisoned in its circularity and therefore pointless.

Source: Studium Generale Utrecht 2012: <https://www.bnnvara.nl/joop/artikelen/wanneer-is-geweld-gerechtvaardigd>.

The horizontality, which is the resultant of the finalization of the violence paradigm, assures the absence of triumphant outcry, claim to victory, or humiliation and degradation (relative to the angle taken). As pointed out in previous chapters, no guilty parties are pinpointed, there is no sin, no consciousness-ridden culpable participants and no atonement for wrongs done. Nor are there any obvious victims to be recognized, since all are equally subjected to the effects of violence. There is only the philosophical realization of what human fallibility<sup>42</sup> can bring about. This awareness of and equally shared encounter with victimization is unique to the violence paradigm. Through the very destruction of old constructs, new and different possibilities can be probed in a sphere of equal relationships: man being one in purpose (for as long as the tragic wisdom lasts) and independent of any transcendental source or force. The Shakespearean violence paradigm emancipates man from religion and its adjacent concepts: fate and predestination. The absence of the didactical admonition in Shakespearean tragedy is an added factor contributing to man's dignity and independence. These occurrences fundamentally change man's place in his world. As the Greeks already realized, man is *deinon*<sup>43</sup> and has dignity.

In Shakespeare's tragic existential world-view we witness how violence and disruption are used not for their own sakes,<sup>44</sup> but as vehicles towards a deeper understanding of this human condition, trying thus to (temporarily) overcome or handle the human predicament of imperfection. In a more general way: Shakespearean tragedy copes with violence, stages a reaction to it and hands us a mode to deal with it ourselves. These qualities make the tragic existential worldview of Shakespeare secular and universalist in outlook.

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42 As in: violence and disruption.

43 Awe commanding; see also my chapter on tragedy, where the word is evaluated.

44 There is discussion among scholars about his early work, notably *Titus Andronicus*. I will pass by this discussion as this work is not part of this study.

In the introduction of this disquisition, I formulated the research questions concerning the definition and the interpretation of violence within the scope of nation-state founding. We have now reached the stage to formulate answers utilizing the conclusions of the previous chapters. The first question inquired into the nature of the relationship between Renan's will to form a nation and Shakespearean tragic violence. To answer this coherently, we will have to bring to memory the description Renan gave of the concept of will and we will have to shortly reiterate the diverse shapes and characteristics of violence or, more precisely, the violent process.

Renan described the will as a soul, a spiritual principle. I paraphrase, it is the shared and positive attitude of a group of people determined to reach a goal together: the founding of a nation. Renan goes on stating that this will has two aspects: past and present. In other words, this joint will is kept afloat by an accumulation of past memories as well as by present experiences. The past segment of this collectiveness consists of *commemorating* experiences as well as of the *determination to forget* past affronts or resentments (within the group or targeting the group). According to Renan, the collective will is carried by both a present process and the collective memory.

What is the exact relation between these issues and violence? Among scholars, there is a consensus on the fact that violence lies at the origin of nations. However, so far, little consideration has been given to a possible correlation between the precise course of the violent process and the ultimate outcome: the final form the nation-construct assumes. I illustrated this lack of awareness in chapter 2 with the Weber quote.<sup>1</sup>

Let us turn our attention to the first play discussed: *Macbeth*. In this play, we find the baseline measurement of the birth of a nation. Obviously, where there is no nation, neither a state-construct along the lines of Weber's definition is possible. We see the violence paradigm at work in this drama. The violence spirals out of control from violence on a limited scale to radical violence in the first acts. Indeed, violence overshadows all other aspects of life and even the protagonist himself is overwhelmed by it. He becomes violence (act 3). It changes character, becoming all-out destructive radical non-tragic violence.

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1 Weber quotes Trotsky, who had said that every state is founded on violence, with which Weber agreed, unaware of the difference between his concept of violence and Trotsky's.

Thereupon (act 5), a tremendous sorrow overwhelms Macbeth, a mourning over all that is broken and lost; despair almost. He decides to engage with this situation.<sup>2</sup> At this moment, the violence changes from radical non-tragic into radical tragic violence because of Macbeth's altered attitude. He grows in stature and rises above himself and in one last overwhelming effort of strength, he leaves the violent universe. Violence is defeated by a defeated Macbeth.<sup>3</sup> At that tragic moment, the nation is born (proclaimed by Malcolm in so many words) as the resultant of the violence paradigm.

During this process, the complete palette of violent forms is presented: initially violence on a limited scale, becoming radical non-tragic violence, then radical tragic violence, ending with the promise of the regulation of it: violence controlled by monarchical rule.

We may conclude that Renan's collective will consists not just of a spiritual principle as described above, but also – and I dare say: even more so – of a collectively experienced necessity to jointly protect the group against primordial radical violence. Furthermore, this felt necessity is also prompted by the sorrowful tragic episode. Here Renan's account of the will springs from the violent experiences from the violence paradigm.

In consequence, now the above question can be answered. Renan's will to form a nation can, supplemental to the spiritual principle, be identified as the resultant of the tragic violence paradigm. The content of the collective will primarily springs from those moments of tragic crisis when the witnesses thereof experience solidarity, dignity and involvement, distinctive of tragedy. In these moments of grief and solemnity, the urgent need is felt to rein in radical violence. In addition, it should be noted that these intense episodes are the exact moments suited to be commemorated in the future and renew the realization that all group members indeed are united in one nation. As pointed out by Renan, a shared religion or a shared race are at most of secondary importance and we may now add: especially when set off against the results and effects of the violence paradigm.

Yet another important issue needs to be mentioned regarding tragedy. In this thesis it is shown that Shakespearean tragedy is no didactical tool and it does not testify to a particular (educational, ethical, religious, political) narrative. The process of radical violence knows no morality, theology, or ideology:<sup>4</sup> it is just radical. Its essence is the destruction of everything presenting itself: man, his institutions, his edifices, his constructs, leaving man dazed and bereft, but fully aware of his bare, basic existential needs. When violence

2 In the chapter I explained the difference between *nihilistic despair* and *tragic despair*: the nihilistic approach to tragic crisis entails a dissociation from the situation because it is utterly inescapable, hopeless, temporal anyway. The tragic approach shows a vehement engagement with the tragic crisis because it is utterly inescapable, hopeless and temporal.

3 I remark that only a Shakespeare can make this plausible.

4 Autocrats who are under the misguided impression that they can employ and control radical violence might use these terms to justify their actions.

becomes radical, it stops being instrumental. The ultimate logical result of this is that trying to curb it by legal means becomes futile and fruitless. Many a statesman or ruler made that miscalculation, considering themselves to be the helmsman of radical violence – supposing it would remain their instrument. This, as we know now, is a mistake. The radicality of out-of-hand violence rules out its being instrumental. Here, the philosophical question might be raised: do people exploit radical violence, or does radical violence consume people? In *Macbeth*, we saw that radical violence indeed consumed Macbeth: he erred in the same way.

Renan is a great advocate of the secularity of public affairs and hence also the founding of a nation should be on that same basis: preferably without metaphysics or theology. He also recognizes the “brutal basis” of nation forming, as he calls it. It is therefore no unreasonable conclusion that he, in a graduated way and without calling it thus, acknowledges the status of radical (tragic) violence as the necessary (albeit tragic) basis of a nation. To rephrase this in a more Renanian vein: one should realize that, to achieve a sustainable co-existence in a nation-context, the path via overcoming radical tragic violence is far to be preferred to a nation based on religion, race, or any ideology.

The second question reads: what does Shakespearean tragedy show us in terms of genesis, containment and/or the curbing of violence? Are there different types of violence within the focus area of the nation-state? If so, which?

As was shown in the discussion of the three tragedies, out of – and as a consequence of – the successful completion of the violence paradigm, a new perspective towards a (new or renewed) construct evolves; an awareness of the necessity to curb radical violence from then on. Thus, with the recognition of radical tragic violence, Renan, in the same sweep, endorses state-monopolized violence and indeed his oeuvre assents to the necessity of institutionalized violence (the type 2 violence).

The perspective towards improvement of constructs is invitingly shown after a tragic crisis. In these precise moments a type 1 violence (preferably of the tragic subgroup) blends into a type 2 violence after which eventually a fully developed type 2 violence emerges. Here we see the state component of the nation-state construct develop.

An important point of interest is that, in the above-mentioned instances in this chapter, Renan’s and Weber’s visions of nation and state are closely interlinked and firmly related to each other. I hold that they are tied together by Shakespeare’s violence paradigm: Renan’s will not just being a spiritual principle, but also – specifically in the tragic moment – the collectively experienced necessity to protect a group against radical non-tragic violence. Here, and I reiterate, Renan, in a graduated way, endorses state-monopolized violence; his oeuvre assents to the necessity of institutionalized violence (the type 2 violence) – the type of violence Weber advocates. Thus, Renan and

Weber are mediated by the violence paradigm of Shakespeare: their ideas on nation and state are bound and come together in the violence paradigm.

Important identifiers for the evolution of violence (from radical non tragic violence via radical tragic violence into state-controlled violence or type 2 violence) are: an attitudinal change of the protagonist(s) regarding violence and environment, a realization of horizontality of man's existential needs, and lastly: those involved commit themselves (again) to society edged on and inspired by these changes.

We witness both these changes and the emergence of the state component of the nation-state in a prominent way in *Hamlet*. After Hamlet has dictated his will and testament, Fortinbras and Horatio jointly execute Hamlet's last wishes: a division of state power in a legislative section and an executive section and therewith the curbing of violence. With *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, we enter the sphere in which the very fundamentals for the codification of law are forged.

A separation of powers is of the utmost importance. In the Hamletian case, this can be translated into the very germinal beginning of the control of state power for also state monopolized violence (type 2 violence) needs to be controlled. Men are no angels,<sup>5</sup> as we know. A solution to this predicament is to control power by separating it into hierarchical independent segments, preferably ruled by codified law. This development facilitates the transition from a power-state to one under the rule of law. And Hamlet does precisely that.

If this step is not taken, the state is in real danger of succumbing to radical violence and ultimately destroying itself, having no or insufficient response to perverting internal or external forces. We saw this happen in *Julius Caesar* and – more recently – in the Nazi-state of Himmler et al. Neither Weber nor Renan paid sufficient attention to this necessary separation of power and/or control mechanisms. They have been and are, however, of tremendous importance in igniting the discussion regarding nation and state and the development of a defining apparatus for the concepts.

The toilsome way towards a civilized nation-state under the rule of law can be witnessed in these consecutive tragedies. From a violent tribal community where the law of the jungle and *sippenhaft* rule, via a tentative conception of a sense of nationhood, to an organized nation-state. Regrettably, in the last play, the nation-state is not able to safeguard or preserve its institutions –

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5 I here refer to Madison: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and the next place, oblige it to control itself" J. Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, no 51, *Writings*, p. 295.

which happens when the violence paradigm is misconceived, disregarded, or the process is unfulfilled.

The last question deals with the relation between violence and the *degeneration* of the nation-state. In *Hamlet*, we hear the prince complain about the degenerate state of his fellow countrymen in act 1. In *Julius Caesar*, we see the degeneration of social and political institutions. Before answering the above question, we have to establish whether these types of degeneration are identical. Tragedy is always the portrait of a process of transition. In *Hamlet*, we see a cascade of these transitions in the form of progress from a degenerate state into a fledgling nation-state under the rule of law. In *Julius Caesar*, we witness the collapse of a highly developed nation-state. The format of the degeneration is the same: dealing with the breakdown of an old system that is perverted, heralding the advent of a tragic crisis. The developments of the respective crises, however, are in reverse directions: in *Hamlet*, the birth of a nation-state is seen and in *Julius Caesar*, a nation-state descends into civil war. In both cases, the violence paradigm shows radical violence. However, eventually, the outcomes of both plays differ. By now, we know that in *Hamlet*'s case, the radicality of the violence is of the tragic sort and in *Julius Caesar*'s case, the violence is of the non-tragic type. It is therefore self-evident that both instances are dissimilar. How can we distinguish, in the chaotic and stressful situation of a pending crisis, between tragic and non-tragic violence? Can we at all? The radical aspects of violence are easy to recognize because in that case the juridical and social instruments, the public toolbox, is unable to contain, curb, or stop the violence. But then, once gone off anchor and haywire, how might we, in the midst of that process, recognize both types of radical violence: distinguish the non-tragic from the tragic. This seems to be an important question in light of the difference in the ultimate result.

I noted down the indicators for the pending disaster of a looming violence paradigm in my chapters on *Julius Caesar*: a tendency towards self-interest instead of communal interest, laws are no longer obeyed or respected, communal values lose meaning, there is moral confusion in the communal leader and consumerism, and the obvious reciprocity of dependencies between classes disappears. However, the most important identifier is when existential needs are no longer embedded in the social codes of society and are therefore no longer able to develop and stay vital. We have seen Brutus and Cassius fail miserably in recognizing this and acting upon it, trying to vitalize their concepts of freedom and liberty in society. However, Hamlet was successful. He was able to do so by the grace of the fact that he lived through a monumental tragic crisis; he was able to discern.

Knowledge<sup>6</sup> of the phases and faces of violence is of importance to keep our body politic healthy and see the dangers. We need Shakespeare's tragedies

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6 And with this, of course, I mean the brand of tragic wisdom that Hamlet gives evidence of.

as a lasting source of inspiration to think about violence: how violence might derail and how indispensable awareness thereof is for the maintenance of our socio-political constructs. The tragedies of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* continue to be icons that inform us about this.

In the last play discussed, we are shown that, if the systematics of the violence paradigm are not adequately and successfully finished the result will be detrimental. An entire nation-state (in the case of *Julius Caesar* a fully matured republican nation-state construct) can deteriorate into legal primitivism. Shakespeare's warning is a universal one and it is crystal clear: a nation-state construct is in need of continuous attention and repair.

Weber and Renan were right, stating that all forms of communities are based on violence, Nietzsche was right when he realized that violence was the vital driving force behind renewal and improvement, but above all Shakespeare was right when he showed us how the tragic creative driving force lends us the freedom and the dignity man needs in building and renewing his nation-states. It is up to us all to answer that call.

## Samenvatting (Dutch summary)

Deze studie geeft antwoord op de vraag wat Shakespeareaanse tragedie te maken heeft met de rechtswetenschap, staatstheorie en rechtsfilosofie. Centraal staan de noties van staatsvorming, geweld en natie. Meer specifiek: wat heeft het geweld, getoond in Shakespeareaanse tragedies, te maken met het ontstaan, het onderhoud of de teloorgang van een natiestaat en ook een rechtsstaat.

Derhalve een studie van geweld binnen de kaders natie en natievorming. Er worden drie tragedies behandeld: natievorming staat centraal in *Macbeth*, de natiestaat in *Hamlet* en het verval van de natiestaat in *Julius Caesar*.

Wat alle drie tragedies gemeen hebben is het *violence paradigm*: het tragisch geweldsproces. Ondanks het feit dat de drie tragedies ieder een geheel andere uitkomst hebben, is het format van dit geweldsparadigma steeds hetzelfde: geweld op beperkte schaal loopt uit de hand en verandert in radicaal alles vernietigend geweld dat een tragische crisis veroorzaakt. Na de crisis zien we dat de combinatie van rouw en de inzichten die het ervaren van geweld teweeg brengt zich samenbalt in een poging een natiestaatconstruct te vormen of verbeteren zodanig dat dit type geweld niet meer kan voorkomen. Met andere woorden: het geweldsparadigma van Shakespeareaanse tragedies is ten diepste de geboortegrond voor de natiestaat, zoals deze zich later weer zou ontwikkelen tot een rechtstatelijke natiestaat. Renan was de theoreticus die de grondslag legde voor de democratische natiestaat daar hij de basisvooraarden formuleert voor het vormen van een dergelijke staat: de wil om samen te leven (zijn: "vivre ensemble"). Deze wil is pregnant aanwezig net na een tragische crisis van Shakespeareaanse proporties. Weber definieert een staat als een construct dat het geweldsmonopolie heeft op een bepaald gebied. Tezamen vormen deze concepten de natiestaat.

Het hierboven omschreven geweldsproces is met name te zien in *Macbeth* en *Hamlet*, echter in *Julius Caesar* zien we de degeneratie van de natiestaat ten gevolge van een tragische crisis. Dit wordt veroorzaakt doordat het radicale geweld zowel *tragisch* kan zijn als *niet tragisch*. Radicaal *tragisch* geweld kan worden omschreven als totaalgeweld dat de volgende veranderingen teweeg brengt: de dader ontdekt dat hij ten onder (dreigt) te gaan aan het zelf veroorzaakte geweld; hierdoor kantelt zijn inzicht: hij begrijpt dat ieder mens dezelfde existentiële noden en behoeften heeft (horizontalisering van behoeften derhalve). In dit behoeftepatroon is eenieder gelijk (noot: horizontalisering is het besef van eendere behoeftepatronen hetgeen iets anders is dan gelijkheid tussen mensen). Tragische horizontalisering heeft tot gevolg dat de pleger besef dat

eenieder gelijkelijk onderhevig is aan de gevolgen van geweld. Dit heeft een gedragsverandering tot gevolg: de pleger stijgt boven zichzelf uit en doet een ultieme poging zijn gemeenschap te redden/behouden. Hiermee verbindt hij zich (weer) met die gemeenschap; er vindt een revalidering plaats van waarden.

Tevens wordt in deze dissertatie het verschil met radicaal *niet tragisch* geweld aangegeven: bij deze vorm van geweld blijven de onderlinge verhoudingen hiërarchisch/verticaal: duidelijke overwinnaar- en verliezersposities blijven zichtbaar. Ten hoogste vindt een omdraaiing in posities van de betrokkenen plaats: de eerdere pleger wordt slachtoffer en vice versa. Slechts de (posities van de) spelers veranderen, niet het format.

Naast deze geweldstypen is er het door de staat gemonopoliseerde geweld. De Shakespeareaanse tragedies tonen aan dat dit type geweld een uitvloeisel is van afgerond radicaal tragisch geweld. Het ontstaat tijdens het wordings- of vernieuwingsproces van de natiestaat. Het is van belang dat dit type geweld wordt gecontroleerd en gecodificeerd. We zien dit gebeuren in *Hamlet*.

Een goed inzicht in geweld en de diverse subtypes daarvan is van het grootste belang voor het onderhoud aan en behoud van onze rechtstatelijke natiestaat. Shakespeareaanse tragedie geeft dat inzicht.

## Personal observations

The original idea was to write a dissertation on both Shakespeare and Nietzsche. It started out as a sure future failure. Many eyebrows were raised when I unfolded this resolve. And indeed, it made little sense at first. I had, as yet, no idea where to find some common ground between the two. Only on a hunch, an unfounded, headstrong intuition that refused to disappear, I continued: there were tragic heroes and *Übermenschen*, interconnected vaguely by violence. Eventually, the idea evolved and grew into what it is now: Shakespeare, Renan, Weber, the violence paradigm and its influence on the nation-state. And yes, also Nietzsche stood his ground in this thesis, be it on a slightly different level.

By the bureau for external PhD candidates Leiden, I was coupled to my promotor Paul Cliteur because he is reputed to be an experienced promotor, not afraid to take on a challenge, and moreover “a sympathetic Mensch”. The latter remark about him proved absolutely true, as I experienced later. The first said something about his competence, but also about the success-prognosis of my endeavor, but I chose to remain blissfully unaware of this undertone. Even though, initially, I had my doubts to be coupled to a professor of jurisprudence – for what was I supposed to do at the Faculty of Law? Philosophy, yes, but Law?! – I decided to take it on anyway.

Paul, I am very grateful for your expertise, your unswerving optimism and encouragement, your perseverance, and your courage. For surely, it must take some courage on your part as well to tackle the early modern English metaphors of a literary genius, the Leonardo da Vinci of world literature: William Shakespeare.

I owe thanks to another Paul: Paul Franssen, emeritus professor of English Letters at the University of Utrecht. Paul, I greatly appreciated your wise advice in the Shakespearean field, your editorial expertise, and your friendly encouragement and support.

I also thank my partner, Herbert van Hoogdalem, who always supported me: thank you dear. A thank-you also to my brother-in-law: Herman van Hoogdalem, for his impeccable German translations.

A class by themselves are my true and loyal friends. Veronica Verbeek, I thank you for your humor, your laughter and our many talks on English Letters and Linguistics and your unwavering support. Marry Lut, you proved a true friend who never failed to support and encourage me. Thank you for

our many talks on literature and life. I also thank Patricia Olthof for her support.

Finally, long live serendipity that made me find what I was not looking for: an interpretation of Shakespearean tragedy hugely differing from the traditional interpretative canon, but standing its ground firmly *and* the expressiveness and significance of his tragedies for the field of law and justice. Thanks to lateral thinking along these lines, this thesis could be finished.

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[https://www.bjutijdschriften.nl/tijdschrift/rechtsfilosofieentheorie/2002/1/RenR\\_2002\\_032\\_001\\_006.pdf](https://www.bjutijdschriften.nl/tijdschrift/rechtsfilosofieentheorie/2002/1/RenR_2002_032_001_006.pdf),  
Book review: Freeman, M., Lewis, A., eds., *Law and Literature, Current Legal Issues*, vol 2, OUP, 1999.



## Appendices



## Appendix 1

### Summary of *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

“The Thane of Glamis, Cawdor to be; King of Scotland thereafter”.

Of course, Macbeth is meant here. His story is well-known: Macbeth is a loyal thane<sup>1</sup> (thane of the territory of Glamis) of King Duncan. On his way home after his victorious battle against the rebellious thane Macdonald, who had helped the Norwegian King Sweno to invade Scotland, Macbeth meets three witches who predict that he will soon also be thane of Cawdor and, after that, king of Scotland. Arriving at Duncan’s abode, Macbeth learns that the first half of the prediction is immediately fulfilled: he is given the title of Cawdor by Duncan as a reward for his valor during battle. In spite of initial doubts and hesitation, he is so caught by ambition (enthusiastically urged on by his wife) that he decides to murder King Duncan to hasten the realization of the second half of the prediction. After this assassination, Macbeth increasingly mistrusts his former friends and peers, bordering on a psychopathic frenzy, and initiates a whirlwind of bloody murders. Most former friends are killed. Those who escape flee to England to prepare a war against Macbeth. The latter loses contact with reality and goes to the moors to consult the witches again. His wife falls ill: she starts to hallucinate. Macbeth realizes what he has done and how vain it all was: he is alone and isolated. He faces death in the final battle, knowing that his death will restore peace and end the practice of blood law. Harmony is restored in Scotland and Duncan’s son Malcolm installs a new and more humane rule.

Main characters:

- *Macbeth*: Thane of Glamis, then Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland
- *Lady Macbeth*: his wife
- *Duncan*: King of Scotland
- *Macdonald*: rebellious thane of Cawdor, conspiring with the king of Norway. After Macdonald is defeated by Macbeth and condemned to death by Duncan, the latter gives his title – Thane of Cawdor – to Macbeth
- *Malcolm and Donalbain*: sons of King Duncan
- *Banquo*: a fellow thane and friend of Macbeth, later on killed by Macbeth
- *Macduff*: Thane of Fife; later on in the play, his wife and children are murdered by Macbeth because Macduff had fled the country.
- *Sweyn or Sweno*: King of Norway
- *Lennox*: a fellow Thane

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<sup>1</sup> Thane: a vassal of noble birth to the Scottish king.



## Appendix 2

### Summary of *The Tragedy of Hamlet*

The plot revolves around the Danish prince Hamlet, who is named after his warlike father. Shortly after Hamlet Sr. has slain the Norwegian king Fortinbras, and thus secured the latter's dominion, he dies, supposedly in his sleep.

Claudius, Hamlet Sr.'s brother, is then crowned king and marries Gertrude, the late Hamlet's widow.

Hamlet Jr. is ordered to avenge his father's death by a ghost. The apparition claims to be the wandering soul of Hamlet Sr. It also reveals the true cause of the late king's death: his own brother Claudius killed him. This makes the latter a usurper and a perpetrator of two capital crimes: fratricide and regicide.

Hamlet, already downcast by his father's death, gets even more depressed because of his indecision as to complying with the ghost's wishes; his behavior becomes more and more erratic and mad.

Claudius and Gertrude try to cheer him up by inviting two of his former study friends to Elsinore castle: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They can keep him company and meanwhile keep an eye on him.

When the pompous Lord Chancellor Polonius suggests that Hamlet's behavior is caused by the young man's infatuation with his daughter Ophelia, Claudius spies on the couple to see if this is true. However, Hamlet rudely repudiates Ophelia, telling her to enter a nunnery and generally rejecting the concept of marriage.

A group of actors visits Elsinore Castle. The royal couple thinks this is a fine distraction for Hamlet. Hamlet, however, decides to test Claudius' guilt by changing the script: the actors are to enact a scene similar to Claudius' alleged crime. The king's reaction tells Hamlet that Claudius is guilty.

When Hamlet confronts his mother with this new information, he accidentally kills Polonius, who is hidden behind a tapestry, overhearing the conversation. Hamlet stabs Polonius, acting as if he assumed there was a rat behind the hangings, but in actual fact, he thinks it is Claudius. After having killed Polonius, Hamlet is dispatched in a hurry to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Claudius hands Hamlet's two friends a sealed letter for the English king, requesting him to kill Hamlet as soon as he arrives. Hamlet, however, having intercepted the letter, returns to Denmark. Meanwhile, Ophelia has gone mad because of her father's death, she drowns herself in grief.

Polonius' son Laertes also arrives. He has come back from France upon his father's death. Claudius sets the two young men against each other; this is not difficult as Laertes wants to avenge his father. Claudius suggests a rapier fight between them; Laertes poisons his sword to secure Hamlet's death when hit. To be completely on the safe side Claudius also prepares a poisoned goblet of wine, intended for Hamlet.

Laertes is stabbed by his own sword and dies. Instead of Hamlet (who refuses), Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup and also dies. Hamlet is wounded by the

poisoned sword and knows he will die soon. Before he dies he stabs Claudius and asks his friend Horatio to keep his story alive in order to be remembered and so that the truth may be known: “*report me and my cause aright/ to the unsatisfied*”. Then Hamlet dies.

Main characters:

- *Hamlet Sr.*: former King of Denmark, now a ghost, murdered by his brother Claudius
- *Claudius*: usurper of the throne of Denmark after having killed his brother
- *Hamlet Jr.*: Prince, son of Hamlet Sr., and the protagonist of the play
- *Gertrud*: initially married to Hamlet Sr., after the latter’s death, she married Claudius
- *Polonius*: Lord Chancellor to Claudius
- *Ophelia and Laertes*: Polonius’ children. Ophelia is Hamlet’s sweetheart
- *Horatio*: Hamlet’s college friend from Wittenberg University
- *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*: fellow students from Wittenberg University
- *Fortinbras*: Prince of Norway, named after his father, who was king of Norway before him. The latter does not figure in the play; he is only mentioned.

## Appendix 3

### Summary of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*

In this play, the murder of the historical Julius Caesar is enacted. In act 1, we see Julius' victorious entrance in Rome after he has slain Pompey's sons: his arch-rivals in the fight for supremacy over Rome. The triumphal procession is watched by the two friends Brutus and Cassius. The two have a confidential conversation in which Cassius speaks of his doubts concerning Julius' ambitions to become an autocratic ruler. Cassius thus tries to draw Brutus into a conspiracy against Caesar.

After having returned home, Brutus ponders Cassius's words. During a storm that night, some letters are hurled through the window of Brutus's home. Apparently, they are from citizens urging Brutus to act against Caesar's ever-increasing power and supremacy. In fact, Cassius has concocted the letters and thrown them into Brutus's window.

Brutus, who also fears a possible dictatorship, is won over by the "citizens' letters" to partake in Cassius's plot. The conspirators meet in Brutus's house; Brutus takes control of the meeting. They decide to kill Caesar when he attends a meeting of the Senate.

After this has been decided and the men are gone, Portia, Brutus's wife, notices that her husband seems extremely preoccupied. She begs him to confide in her, but he rebukes her.

When Caesar goes to the Forum the next day, he is killed by all the conspirators. Marc Antony, a general and a member of Julius's entourage, swears that the latter's death shall be revenged.

In the next scene (act 3, scene 2), both Brutus and Marc Antony give an address to the general public at the Forum. Brutus explains his murderous act in a rational, argumentative manner and Marc Antony plays to the emotions of the populace. His speech is an example of superior rhetoric in the best Roman tradition; he lavishly heaps his praises upon Brutus' head, at the same time exposing him mercilessly. As a result, the populace revolts and Brutus and Cassius have to flee. Meanwhile, Octavius arrives in Rome and forms a coalition with Antony and the senator Lepidus. Brutus and Cassius raise an army against this newly formed triumvirate.

On the battlefield they have a fall out on matters of money and honor. During the night Brutus has a nightmare in which the ghost of Caesar appears who warns him that they will meet again on the battlefield. Octavius and Antony also have their differences. There is a contention on matters of tactics.

Some of Cassius's men flee the battle; he sends his orderly Pindarus to a hilltop to see how the battle is getting on. Pindarus misinterprets the army movements: the general Titinius is being surrounded by cheering crowds, but Pindarus thinks Titinius is captured by enemy forces. Cassius panics and orders Pindarus to kill him. Titinius arrives at the suicide scene and upon perceiving Cassius's slain corpse he also commits suicide.

Seeing his army decimated by the deaths of Titinius and Cassius, Brutus loses heart and impales himself on his sword. He realizes that, with his death, Caesar (or rather Caesar's ghost) will finally be satisfied. Octavius and Antony arrive. Octavius orders Brutus to be buried with all due Roman honors. Antony states that Brutus is the noblest among the Romans. This statement is a variation on his theme during his oration after Caesar's death. However, the gravity of this scene implies that this time, Antony isn't playing the audience. He is in earnest.

Main characters:

- *Brutus*: Roman patrician, senator, adopted son of Julius Caesar, one of the conspirators against Caesar
- *Julius Caesar*: general, consul, aspiring to become *Emperor*.
- *Calpurnia*: his wife
- *Mark Antony*: patrician and senator, belonging to the entourage of Julius Caesar
- *Lepidus and Octavius*: patricians, together with Mark Antony they form the ruling Triumvirate after Julius' murder
- *Portia*: Brutus' wife
- *Cassius*: co-conspirator and friend of Brutus, general
- *Cicero*: statesman, philosopher
- *Flavius and Murellus*: Tribunes in the Senate, critical of Julius Caesar
- *Casca, Cinna, Metellus*: co-conspirators of Brutus

## Appendix 4

### Biography of William Shakespeare

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a concise biography of William Shakespeare, explores the theories and speculations surrounding his identity, lists his bibliography, and provides a brief overview of life and thought during the Elizabethan era.

Very little is factually known about Shakespeare. Some written sources have survived, mainly transcripts of official (legal or clerical) documents. The biographers used for this overview are Greenblatt, Schoenbaum, Rowse, and Ellis. As a general reference, I have used the standard work by E.K. Chambers. In the paragraph on Shakespeare's identity, I have used Buisman De Savornin Lohman and Gibson as main referents. For the bibliography, *The Oxford Shakespeare, the complete works* (2005) was of great help.

#### 4.2 BIOGRAPHY

William Shakespeare was born into solid middle-class stock from Warwickshire; Stratford-upon-Avon to be precise. His parents were John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, the daughter of a prosperous yeoman and a gentleman.

John Shakespeare became bailiff in the politically difficult year 1569.<sup>1</sup> Each year, a new bailiff was elected, so after his year as bailiff, John became chief alderman. He had some debts he didn't pay, but also stood surety for others' debts.

William was baptized on April 26, 1564. The family had eight children; William was the third in this row and the first son.

When signing legal documents, both parents used a symbol: Mary with a cross and John with a pair of compasses, emblematic of the glover's trade.<sup>2</sup> It is not known whether they were illiterate, yet their mode of signing documents makes it highly probable.

Stratford was a small town tucked in a rich landscape. John Leland,<sup>3</sup> touring the country from 1538 to 1543 and describing it, was much impressed with the surroundings. According to Rowse, it is defined as follows:

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1 In that year, Mary Queen of Scots tried an uprising against her cousin Elizabeth, which failed.

2 Source: S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 26.

3 Leland, John, *Itinerary in England and Wales*, ed. by Lucy Toulmin Smith, four vol.s., G. Bell and Sons Ltd., London, 1910. [http://www.archive.org/stream/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft_djvu.txt)

From early times, and right through the Middle Ages, the primary division in the landscape was that made roughly by the River Avon. The north was a countryside of scattered farms and hamlets in the woodland; the south was more populous, with large villages and open fields, plenty of arable [land], richer. [...] Warwickshire in general was a county of landowners of middling status, where the gentry ruled, no great baronial families [...] no stranglehold on this free shire.<sup>4</sup>

It was mainly the memory of this scenery that young William brought to London in the 80s of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, planning for a career as an actor/writer. Even so, before he had reached that point, he still had to go through a cycle of Stratfordian experiences, such as attending grammar school. There is no written evidence that he went to the Stratford Grammar school, however, his later writings show a familiarity with the curriculum of this type of school as well as with the school procedures. Also, no other school was available in the vicinity. It therefore seems plausible to state that William went to the King's New School in Stratford. Tuition there was free for boys, which was lucky as business didn't prosper for father John.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century an average school curriculum for primary and secondary schools was imbued with the medieval scholastic principles.<sup>5</sup> In practice, it was built up as follows:<sup>6</sup> At the age of four or five, a boy attended a petty school. Here he was taught how to read and write, the alphabet and the elementary numbers; some fundamentals of religion and Catechism, saying grace before and after meals, the psalms in metre. Literacy was learned using a horn book.<sup>7</sup>

After the petty school came lower grammar school. A pupil would be approximately seven years old. The standard book here was Lily's *Short Introduction of Grammar*. In this book, grammar, of course, meant Latin grammar as in lower grammar school the education was entirely Latin based. Quotations from Lily would appear throughout Shakespeare's early work.<sup>8</sup> Also treated were the literary and

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4 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 2.

5 R. Williams in his *The Long Revolution*, p. 130, has it that the concept of the Seven Liberal Arts (the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, the *quadrivium* of music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy) dates back as far as the fifth century, however, only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century did it begin to be fully realized in education because new material from classical learning became available. Further Scholastic influences on early Renaissance society are discussed below.

6 Sources: S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 29 ff. And: T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine&LesseGreek*. Vols. 1 and 2.

7 Hornbook (in Dutch: *leesplankje*): a single printed leaf with on it printed the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer. The leaf was attached to a wooden board and protected by a transparent horn leaf. The pupil could copy the letters and the prayer.

8 Just one example is the hilarious conversations in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* between Sir Hugh Evans, his pupil William, in the presence of the latter's mother, Mrs. Page (Act IV, scene 1 – 63 – 75):

Evans: [...], art thou lunatics? hast thou no understandings for thy cases, and the numbers of the genders? Thou art as foolish Christian creatures as I would desires.

Mrs Page: Prithee, hold thy peace.

Evans: Show me now, William, some declensions of your pronouns.

Will: Forsooth, I have forgot.

rhetorical classics, the comedies of Plautus and works by Ovid (for instance, *Metamorphoses*). Furthermore, simple texts by Aesop and Cato, providing moralizing tags that were a feature of Elizabethan education and life.<sup>9</sup>

Lower School was duly followed by Upper School where the schedule was as follows: the Greek New Testament was taught for grammatical improvement and moral instruction. From this William could gather a little Greek.

Much later, after Shakespeare's demise in 1616, his friend and fellow-writer Ben Jonson, in his eulogy, mentions Shakespeare's "small Latine & Lesse Greeke".<sup>10</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum<sup>11</sup> subtly remarks that Shakespeare's achievements are respectively small and less in the contemporary perception, but not in ours.

On the schedule were furthermore: Virgil, Ovid, Cicero<sup>12</sup> and Horace and the basic principles of logic and rhetoric. "Again and again we find Shakespeare's expertise in dialectical argument according to the text-book turned to use, especially in the earlier plays. [...] Even more useful when he came to write was the training in rhetoric, so important to Elizabethans – and to which he took like a duck to water. There it all is easily recognizable: the high, low and medium styles."<sup>13</sup>

History was taught as a subject. Sallust and Livy were treated, again, for moral purposes. "The moment the young dramatist gets to work on the story of the Wars of the Roses, with *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, it is not only the events, the drama that interests him: these plays are held together by the moral of it all, which is as constantly enforced as any schoolmaster could wish. So also with *Richard II*, and *King John*, with *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, with *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, and at the very end with *Henry VIII*".<sup>14</sup>

The King's New School was visited by another remarkable pupil: Richard Field, the tanner's son. He was a couple of years older than Shakespeare. He became one of the important publishing printers in London.

When William was five years old in 1569, the Queen's men visited Stratford: this group of professional actors might very well have been the first the young boy ever encountered. John Shakespeare was the bailiff then. They performed in the Guild Hall of Stratford. Other companies followed: e.g., Leicester's Men<sup>15</sup> (led by John Burbage) in 1573 and the Earl of Worcester's Men.

As stated above, there is no written record of his school entrance, nor is there a record left of his leaving school. Schoenbaum<sup>16</sup> assumes that he was drawn from

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Evans: It is qui, quæ, quod: if you forget your 'quies,' your 'quæs,' and your 'quods,' you must be preeches. Go your ways, and play; go.

9 Source: A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 36.

10 Ben Jonson, "To the memory of my beloved Master William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us", from: *The Works of Ben Jonson*, vol. 3. London: Chatto&Windus, 1910, pp. 287-9. <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/jonson/benshake.htm>

11 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 29.

12 Especially his *Catilinarians*, his orations against Cataline, see chapter 7, were used to drill pupils.

13 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 39.

14 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 40.

15 Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1532 or 1533 – 1588), was the Queen's favorite for many years.

16 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 43.

school as his father John had fallen on hard times. Father Shakespeare borrowed money and parted with plots of land, formerly his property. The exact cause of John's setbacks is unknown; likewise, we don't know why (or even when; supposing he had entered) his son William left grammar school.

In 1575, John had tried to obtain a Coat of Arms, however, he dropped the request later on. Probably (but, again, not known for a fact) because of the expenses involved.

In 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. There is no record as to where the marriage took place. Six months later, their daughter Susanna was born; she was baptized in May 1583. Twenty months later, twins were born: Hamnet and Judith. Greenblatt<sup>17</sup> supposes, like many girls at that time, that Anne couldn't read or write.

After the birth of his twins, Shakespeare cannot be traced for seven years. There is no record as to when exactly Shakespeare left Stratford. Most biographers agree that it must have been in the 1580s, as the first written record about Shakespeare's person<sup>18</sup> stems from 1592, when Robert Greene, poet and university wit,<sup>19</sup> was on his deathbed. He was embittered because he was dying in poverty, all his possessions pawned. He wrote a pamphlet entitled the "Groatsworth of Witte"<sup>20</sup> to warn his fellow writers about this upstart<sup>21</sup> without even a university title.

Yes trust them not: for there is an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute Iohannes factotum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.<sup>22</sup>

The publisher, Henry Chettle, apologized in his preface (written after Greene's death) for the lash out at Shakespeare, so obviously Shakespeare had been able at this stage to obtain himself a respectable reputation as an author and actor (as appears from the text).

Rowse observes<sup>23</sup> that Greene's attack is one more indication that Shakespeare was considered an outsider among his fellow writers: he was neither a university wit nor a literary journalist. Up till then, nearly all writers had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge. However, his not having a university degree didn't harm Shakespeare's career. An account of Shakespeare's work is given below.

The London Shakespeare came to was a lively city: expanding, growing richer under Elizabeth's reign (from 1558 to 1603). In 1588, the Armada had been defeated, leaving England free from fear of Spanish invasion. "Shakespeare's London lives

17 S. Greenblatt, *William en de Wereld*, p. 118.

18 Apart, of course, from the recording of his baptism.

19 University wit: a group of playwrights that had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge. Thus, Christopher Marlowe, the above-mentioned Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe were from Cambridge and John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, George Peele were from Oxford.

20 Groatsworth: something that can be sold or bought for a groat. A groat is a coin of low value. In Dutch: *vierstuiverstuk*.

21 He meant Shakespeare.

22 Robert Greene: "Groatsworth of Wit", 20 September 1592, published by Henry Chettle, London. <http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/essays/greene/greeneorig.html>

23 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 99.

too in the splendid sweep of the panoramas engraved by Claes Jan Visscher and Wenceslaus Hollar. These depict, in lovely detail, the metropolis as viewed from Bankside – in the foreground, to the west, the playhouses; a single bridge cluttered with buildings [...] spanning the great tidal river; on the opposite bank the Tower, St. Paul's [...], the Blackfriars, the Royal Exchange, innumerable church steeples, huddled tenements, an abundance of trees, and here and there a windmill.<sup>24</sup>

London was also the center of the book trade. The above-mentioned Richard Field from Stratford became an important publisher. In fact, he published Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* in book form in 1593. Some biographers (e.g., Ackroyd<sup>25</sup>) have it that Shakespeare resorted to poetry in these years since 1592 – 1593 were notorious plague years and theatres were consequently closed. Theatre companies used to leave London and then to tour the country.

After he arrived in this bustling Tudor metropolis, Shakespeare joined the company under James Burbage, playing at The Theatre. This was the first playhouse in town, established in 1576. Of course, an acting tradition had been established in England long before that, coming from the mystery plays (religious enactments of Biblical stories and hagiographies) and the morality plays (showing a shift from religious topics towards more secular themes). As early as 1497, the first fully secular play had been performed during a banquet hosted by Cardinal Morton, who entertained the Flemish and Spanish ambassadors. The play was: *Fulgens and Lucres*, a comedy by Henry Medwall.<sup>26</sup>

In 1596, Hamnet Shakespeare, William's son, died. In that same year, William renewed his father's request for a coat of arms, which was granted soon after the request. In the autumn, Shakespeare went across the Thames to live on Bankside in the vicinity of the Swan, the theatre played by the Chamberlain's Men. Shakespeare is known to have been a member of this company for some time.

Shakespeare wrote his plays first and foremost for the theatre, not for the printing press. This implies that we cannot be sure of the exact date of conception of the works; only of certain publication dates.

He started with his history plays; the *Henry VI* plays were a success. They were most probably followed by *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus* and the *Comedy of Errors*.<sup>27</sup>

When *Titus Andronicus* was published in 1594, in a good text almost certainly from the author's manuscript, the title-page says, 'as it was played by the right honourable the Earl of Derby, Earl of Pembroke and Earl of Sussex their servants'. This seems to indicate that performances had been staged by those three companies in succession. Pembroke's men may have been a troupe splitting off from the main grouping of Alleyn's and Stranges's Men. These took the name of Henry Herbert, second Earl of Pembroke. [...] This group did not last long, but during its brief spell it acted *Titus Andronicus*, 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.<sup>28</sup>

24 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 56.

25 P. Ackroyd, *Shakespeare, de Biografie*, p. 202.

26 A. Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, p. 35.

27 Source: A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 100.

28 Ibid.

This citation<sup>29</sup> is exemplary of the disorderly and confused dynamics in which the theatre changed and developed. It is believed by some biographers that Shakespeare was associated with the Lord Pembroke's Men.

The world of the theatre was peopled with actors, writers/producers, supernumeraries, loiterers, rummagers, prostitutes and hustlers; a sanctuary for the marginalized of society indeed. A part of the audience stood before the stage on the ground floor: the theatre yard or pit. These were also called the groundlings and on hot days, they were called *stinkards*. The well-to-do gentlemen and noblemen – the theatre patrons and the interested – watched the play from the galleries or balconies, where the Lord's Rooms were situated: the most expensive places. It might be assumed that Shakespeare met his second patron here: Henry Wriothesley, the young Earl of Southampton. He was nine or ten years Shakespeare's junior. Shakespeare dedicated his long poem *Venus and Adonis* to Southampton.

The sonnets were dedicated to a Mr. W.H. It is not known who that is, but it is surmised that this is in fact Henry Wriothesley with reversed initials. Other theories have it that William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, Shakespeare's earlier patron is meant.

In 1597, Edward Alleyn left the stage, after which Richard Burbage (James Burbage's brother) became the leading tragedian. Burbage and Shakespeare were still in the same company, which was increasingly successful. They were called the Lord Chamberlain's Men.<sup>30</sup> As the local authorities of London had decided earlier to restrict the theatre companies to two, it left London with two rivaling companies: The Chamberlain's Men and (at the Rose theatre) the Admiral's Men.

At the Theatre in Shoreditch the Burbages were having trouble with landlord and tenants as to the lease, and [in the] winter of 1598-99 they decided to move the theatre. Lock, stock and barrel, across the Thames to a new site on Bankside. Thus was the famous Globe arrived at [...] and the Chamberlain's men had a permanent place to play in. Under the new contract, 21 February 1599, the Burbages had one moiety of the interest, the other moiety was shared by Shakespeare, Pope, Phillips, Heminges and Kemp. Shortly afterwards Kemp left, making his share over to the other four. Shakespeare had thus an one-eighth interest in the Globe theatre: a substantial and profitable investment.<sup>31</sup>

In 1601, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, ventured upon an insurrection. To rouse popular feeling against Elizabeth I, some of his co-conspirators had commissioned a performance of Shakespeare's play *Richard II*,<sup>32</sup> which featured the deposition of

29 In the quotation, reference is made to Alleyn's and Strange's men. Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange and later Earl of Derby, was a notable patron of the theatre and maintained a group of players, led by Edward Alleyn and known as Lord Strange's Men.

30 After the accession to the throne of James I, the group came under the patronage of James and was called the King's Men.

31 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 286.

32 An early history play (1596 – 1597) by Shakespeare. In it the story of Richard II (1367 – 1400) is told, who was deposed by Henry Bolingbroke and imprisoned in the Tower. Later on Richard was murdered there. This made him the first victim of the Wars of the Roses, a series of struggles for the crown of England between the houses of York and Lancaster.

a king. The revolt ended in a debacle and a trial followed, convicting Essex to death. The Chamberlain's Men were suspected of having favored the rebellion as they had performed this rabblerousing play. It brought Shakespeare's company into an uneasy position. Luckily, the magistrates were convinced by Augustine Phillips, one of the actors who spoke on behalf of the company during the trial, that they had known nothing of the conspiracy: they just got an extra 40 shillings for the special performance, which was why they had played it. When all the commotion around the insurrection was over, the Queen<sup>33</sup> herself allegedly snapped angrily: "I am Richard II, know ye not that?"<sup>34</sup>

Around 1613, Shakespeare retired to New Place in Stratford, where he died on 23 April 1616. In 1623, two of his fellow actors published 36 of his plays, 18 of which had not been published before: this was the First Folio. In later years authorship and authenticity of some of the plays (either incorporated in the Folio or not) were disputed.

#### 4.3 SHAKESPEARE'S CONTROVERSIAL IDENTITY

As stated above, little is known about the personal life of the Bard of Stratford. It was, of course, prudent and wise of Shakespeare to remain silent about personal matters and preferences of creed, as too much openness in times of religious discord could prove to be devastating for one's well-being.

As the popularity of Shakespeare's plays soared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the question of his true identity popped up. For surely, an inconsequential actor from a provincial town couldn't have written such fine poetry, have known his classics that well and given evidence of inside knowledge of court life. Certainly, the name William Shakespeare must have been an alias of a high-born person:

it was not until 1857, more than 200 years after the great works had been written, that the storm actually broke, though, unknown to the world at large, there had been a forerunner of it in 1781. In that year the Rev. J. Wilmot [...] who had spent a great deal of time searching for records of Shakespeare in and around Stratford-on-Avon, came to the conclusion that such a man as he appeared to have been could never have possessed the necessary education and experience to write the plays ascribed to him.<sup>35</sup>

James Shapiro is far more precise when he describes Wilmot's research.<sup>36</sup> The Rev. Wilmot had informed James Corton Cowell, a fellow researcher from Ipswich, that

33 In spite of being a very successful ruler, "Elizabeth's reign was a turbulent one, and she was the target of an almost constant series of rebellions and conspiracies designed to drive her from the throne." Source: <http://hfriedberg.web.wesleyan.edu/engl205/wshakespeare/plotsandrebelions.htm>

34 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 235.

35 H.N. Gibson, *The Shakespeare Claimants*, p. 17.

36 J. Shapiro, *Contested Will*, p.p. 11 – 14. Also courtesy of the fine scholarship of Dr. Paul Franssen.

he had not found any new documentation on or documents by William Shakespeare in Stratford, while he was researching there and had begun to think the famous author couldn't have been the man William Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon. When Wilmot died, he did not leave any notes on this research. Cowell, however, mentions Wilmot's findings in several lectures for the Ipswich Philosophical Society.<sup>37</sup> In these lectures (delivered in 1805), there is mention, among other things, of the fact that Shakespeare's household stored grain to sell to malt dealers. Shakespeare was also supposed to have been engaged in moneylending. Allegedly, Wilmot had doubted that a household involved in these kinds of activities could be the household of the esteemed author. However, these facts didn't become known until 1844, when John Payne published documents<sup>38</sup> proving storage of grain and some moneylending by the Shakespeare family. Shapiro nicely pinpoints the dangers of anachronistic thinking when he mentions that Wilmot, in 1785, couldn't have known facts that became known in 1844.

Complex argumentations were developed to underpin a diversity of theories. Gibson in *The Shakespeare Claimants* roughly distinguishes two schools of thought on this item: the Stratfordians and the Theorists. The Stratfordians believed that, indeed, William Shakespeare was W. Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon. The Theorists claimed it to be some nobleman's pen name. Which nobleman qualified best was a matter of – at times – heated debate.

Up to the second half of the last century, several theories switched first places in importance, till the fine research of two scholars put an end to it. Gibson and Muir<sup>39</sup> made it clear that, by all odds, William Shakespeare was indeed just William Shakespeare, the glover's son from Stratford-upon-Avon. Yet we will never be able to prove this with absolute certainty. "All we know positively is that the plays have come down to us bearing his name, that he was generally accepted as their author in his own day, and that he has been generally accepted as such ever since."<sup>40</sup> Still the debate sometimes flares up again, as it did in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche also took a stance in this discussion.<sup>41</sup>

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37 J. Shapiro, *Contested Will*, p. 1.

38 J. Shapiro, *Contested Will*, p. 12.

39 H.N. Gibson: see previous note and K. Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1977.

40 H.N. Gibson, *The Shakespeare Claimants*, p. 301.

41 Nietzsche frequently mentions Shakespeare; in the *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Herausgegeben von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, he mentions the name Shakespeare; shakespeareischen, Shakespeares, Shakespear, Shakespearischen and Shakespearisches, the name Verulam plus Shakespeare's works in total 173 times. In his letters (K.S.A.: *Sämtliche Briefe*) Shakespeare is mentioned 33 times. In total, this amounts to 205 times.

Verulam is Sir Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount of Saint Alban, whom was called Verulam by Nietzsche. I add these qualifications because Nietzsche assumed that Shakespeare was in fact Sir Francis Bacon.

The DIGITAL CRITICAL EDITION (eKGWB): <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB> has a count of 178 for the mention of Shakespeare and his oeuvre. As this study is not a lexicographical one, I will put the issue of this difference in numbers aside. In my opinion, the difference can be (partly) explained because in the K.S.A. the counts in volume 14 (the commentaries) are added, while in the digital edition, these are neglected.

I will outline the major points sketchily and refrain from details. The arguments of the theorists can usually be ranged under a number of principal headings. The way in which evidence is gathered is leading here:

- The so-called internal evidence<sup>42</sup> emphasizes the importance of literary and textual sources. Quotations from plays and poetry are used in evidence.
- The historical approach: biographical data such as letters, official documents are used.
- Graphological evidence: based on handwriting analyses conclusions are reached.
- Often, a mix of the above methods is used to prove a certain identity.

Withal, no conclusive proof could be established in favour of any of the suggested identities that were put forward.

Some of the most popular candidates for the authorship of Shakespeare's works were the following:<sup>43</sup>

- Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550 – 1604)
- Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam and Viscount of St. Albans (1561 – 1626)
- William Stanley, Lord Strange, the later Earl of Derby (1561 – 1642)
- Christopher Marlowe, playwright (1564 – 1593)

Sometimes even William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery (1580 – 1630), and Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton (1573 -1624), are mentioned in this context, as they had a close connection to Shakespeare. They both had been Shakespeare's patrons at some stage and poems had been dedicated to them.

Some famous Baconians were: S.T. Coleridge, Gervinus, Lamb, Tennyson, Emerson, Lowell, Whittier, Whitman, Mark Twain, Nietzsche, Henry James and Freud.<sup>44</sup> Derbyite scholars are amongst others: A.W. Thitherley and A.E. Evans and A. Lefranc. Practically the whole body of serious scholars is Stratfordian. I but mention E. Chambers and F.E. Halliday. Abel Lefranc, apart from being an advocate of the Derbyite theory, stresses the great consanguinity between Shakespeare and John Dee (1527 – c 1608) a contemporary magician, astrologer and alchemist.

#### 4.4 BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRICAL WORKS

Above, I have already mentioned some of the major plays of Shakespeare. As indicated, it is hard to pinpoint the exact date of creation of these works, as they were meant to be played, not published. Several scholarly publications of the complete works of Shakespeare attempt a chronology on several grounds.

The list of plays below follows the ranking of *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, which is one of the standard academic editions. Behind the titles are the

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42 F. Buisman de Savornin Lohman, *Wie was Shakespeare*, p. 55.

43 They were mentioned as candidates because they were: 1) of nobility – the earls and lords – and had connections to the court; Francis Bacon had the added advantage that he was a man of learning. 2) The literary talents were beyond question (Christopher Marlowe)

44 Arthur E. Briggs, "Did Shaxper Write Shakespeare?", *American Bar Association Journal*, April 1960, vol. 46., p. 410.

assumed timespans in which the plays are presumably created. Only surviving and canonical plays are included; sonnets and narrative poems are excluded as they are outside the scope of the present research.

*The two Gentlemen of Verona* (1589 – 1591)  
*The Taming of the Shrew* (1590 – 1591)  
*Henry VI, part two* (1590 – 1591)  
*Henry VI, part three* (1591)  
*Henry VI, part one* (1591)  
*Titus Andronicus* (1593-94)  
*Richard III* (1592-93)  
*Edward III* (1594)  
*The Comedy of Errors* (1594)  
*Love's Labour's Lost* (1594 – 1595)  
*Richard II* (1595)  
*Romeo and Juliet* (1595-96)  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595)  
*The Life and Death of King John* (1596)  
*The Merchant of Venice* (1596 -97)  
*Henry IV, part one* (1596 – 1597)  
*The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597 – 1598)  
*Henry IV, part two* (1596 – 1597)  
*Much Ado About Nothing* (1598 – 1599)  
*Henry V* (1598 – 1599)  
*Julius Caesar* (1599)  
*As You Like It* (1599 – 1600)  
*Hamlet* (1600 – 1601)  
*Twelfth Night* (1601)  
*Troilus and Cressida* (1602)  
*Measure for Measure* (1603 – 1604)  
*Othello* (1603 – 1604)  
*King Lear* (1605 – 1606)  
*Timon of Athens* (1606)  
*Macbeth* (1606)  
*Antony and Cleopatra* (1606)  
*All's Well That Ends Well* (1606 – 1607)  
*Coriolanus* (1608)  
*The Winter's Tale* (1609 – 1610)  
*Cymbeline* (1610 – 1611)  
*The Tempest* (1610 – 1611)

#### 4.5 SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

In the above paragraphs, I have already sketched theatre life and the main aspects of Elizabethan London. The reign of Elizabeth I is often characterized as a relatively

secular period.<sup>45</sup> During her rule, Humanist<sup>46</sup> and Renaissance notions would have had leeway and opportunity to become ingrained in the English mind, especially the humanities (which were being reconsidered), the arts and sciences. As true as this may seem, a considerable proportion of the English population, be they either nobility, gentry, or further down the feudal ladder, were still steeped in the old medieval lore and thought.

The medieval world view<sup>47</sup> was dominated first and foremost by a predilection for universal order, the harmonizing of the sublunary with the eternity of the celestial spheres. The Elizabethans saw the universe as a strictly hierarchical system. This heavenly order was mirrored in the feudal order in society. On earth, the order could be fractured by human sin of every kind. Immediately, the disruptive sin was mirrored as some perturbation in the heavenly spheres as well. This could be noticed by man as strange and unnatural phenomena in the skies or on earth.<sup>48</sup> In Shakespeare, we find like descriptions in abundance when the intrigue of the play reaches a climax. Just one example:

The night has been unruly. Where we lay  
 Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,  
 Lamentings heard i'th' air, strange screams of death,  
 And prophesying with accents terrible  
 Of dire combustion and confused events  
 New-hatched to th' woeful time. The obscure bird  
 Clamoured the livelong night. Some say the earth  
 Was feverous and did shake.<sup>49</sup>

The order could be restored by (the hope for) redemption that would restore the proper hierarchy.

Among the avalanche of didactical prose<sup>50</sup> published from the early years of Elizabeth's reign onwards, one can also find fine examples of the medieval penchant

45 For instance, by Rowse and Ellis. I would characterize Elizabeth's reign as relatively tolerant in a world that was permeated by religion, Protestantism as well as Catholicism. Elizabeth's predecessor was the strictly Catholic Mary. The early Stuarts were Protestants.

46 Humanism: in the 14th and 15th centuries, new ideas spread through Europe, much helped by the invention of the printing press in 1540. This movement entailed a new and open approach towards the classical canon and new scientific methods in painting (the perspective), sculpture, architecture and the humanities. During the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, prominent humanists were:

- Sir Walter Raleigh, explorer (he colonized North America *inter alia* Virginia), politician and writer (*inter alia* *The History of the World*) and poet.
- Sir Francis Bacon: Lord Chancellor of England, philosopher, lawyer, writer, made important contributions to the development of the empirical scientific method.
- John Dowland, musician and composer of Renaissance music.

47 The source of the following is Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*.

48 For instance, inexplicable mortality among the piglets throughout the country, strange behavior of birds or falling stars.

49 *Macbeth*, act 2, III, ll. 53 – 59. The Scottish thane Lennox describes the night during which Macbeth murdered the king.

50 See above on the prevailing educational principles.

towards the hierarchical format. For instance, the well-known *Boke named The Governewour* by Thomas Elyot:

Beholde the foure elementes wherof the body of man is compacte, howe they be set in their places called spheris, higher or lower, accordynge to the soueraintie of theyr natures, that is to saye, the fyre the most pure element, having in it nothing that is corruptible, in his place is higheste and aboue other elementes. The ayer, whiche next to the fyre is most pure in substance, is in the seconde sphere or place. The water, whiche is somewhat consolidate, and approcheth to corruption, is next unto the erthe. The erthe, whiche is of substance grosse and ponderous, is set of all elementes most lowest.<sup>51</sup>

The above practices went hand in hand with the everyday superstitions. Not only gentry, tenants and peasantry shared a common belief in witches, sorcerers, the magical skills of augurs, piss-poking clairvoyants and “signs in the sky”; King James himself was a staunch believer in witchcraft.<sup>52</sup>

The medieval lore found its more sophisticated pendant in medieval Scholasticism,<sup>53</sup> the most important representative of which was Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> century). The Scholastic<sup>54</sup> perspective was a thoroughly theocentric one, heavily relying, however, on Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian concepts. It comprises a logic-based way of thinking in opposites: the dialectical method, practiced by Greek philosophers. The scholastic procedure was indisputable and meticulously described in chronological and hierarchical steps; another manifestation of the medieval inclination towards harmony and (hierarchical) order.

After Thomas, scholasticism had become the prevailing philosophical-scientific method. Initially, it was responsible for the profound study and analysis of the classics

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51 Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named The Governewour Devised by Sir Thomas Elyot, Knight*, Book 1, paragraph I, published in 1531.

In modern English: Behold the four elements, whereof the body of man is composed, how they be set in their places called spheres, higher or lower according to the sovereignty of their natures. Which is to say: fire has the highest place and is above the other elements. Air, which is next to fire, is most pure in substance, is in the second sphere or place. Water, which is more solid [than the ones mentioned before] and prone to corruption, is next to the earth. Earth, which is quite solid and heavy, is set lowest of all elements.

52 He considered himself to be an expert on witchcraft. In order to ban this nefarious evil from his kingdom he wrote a book on the topic: *Daemonologie* in 1597. He also introduced a harsh witchcraft act in 1604, to replace the milder one from Elizabeth's reign.

53 See above for the average school curriculum, based on scholastic principles.

54 General note on the scholastic method: from the early Middle Ages (approximately the year 1000 – which is the period of Macbeth, William the Conqueror etc. – see chapter on *Macbeth*) medieval philosophy began to develop. The method can be characterized as a scientific method characterized by going back to authoritative doctrines of the earlier ecclesiastical fathers (Johannes Scottus Eriugena, Anselmus of Canterbury, Pierre Abélard and later on Thomas Aquinas) and the falling back on an established corpus of concepts, distinctions, definitions, rhetoric and logic based on Aristotelian and Boethian philosophy. This method was highly didactical and resulted in Shakespeare's time in the school curriculum as described in this chapter. Source: Jan Bor, Errit Petersma, ed., *De Verbeelding van het Denken*, p. 174

and classical languages and a fundamental and sophisticated Bible exegesis. Withal, in the second half of the 16th century, it had worn slightly thin, depleted as it had become with rhetorical tricks that had made it, by then, hackneyed and irrelevant.<sup>55</sup>

Towards the 16th century, a mix of Old Testament views and occultism became rooted in European thought, influenced especially by the Alexandrine Jewish<sup>56</sup> communities.<sup>57</sup> They had been trading with and employed at the courts of early Renaissance Italian city-states. Another Italian influence is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). Some critics see him as a Renaissance humanist, as he published on the dignity of man: the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, published in 1486. This work is seen as one of the earliest humanist manifestos. Yet he was also interested in the *Kabbala*; he believed to be able to prove the reliability and verity of the Christian creed by using Kabbalistic numerology. He can be seen as a transitory figure between occultism and scholasticism on the one hand and the Renaissance on the other.

Humanist formative influences on the English Renaissance were: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527), also extensively mentioned in the above thesis, was an Italian philosopher and diplomat who wrote *Il Principe; The Ruler* (1513). It gave the principal rules for successful government<sup>58</sup> according to Machiavelli. These rules were ruthlessly pragmatic and completely devoid of moral codification. Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592), a French philosopher and politician, wrote *Essaies* (1580), a series of essays on the nature and disposition of man. Thomas More (1478 – 1535) is a well-known English humanist and a friend of the Dutch humanist Erasmus. More wrote *Utopia*, the description of a flawless, blissful society in 1516. Another authoritative English scientist of the period is Francis Bacon, known for the development of a new scientific methodology.<sup>59</sup> He developed empiricism or experiential philosophy.

Of course, these different perspectives: Renaissance humanism, Scholasticism, the medieval worldview and mundane superstition, could easily be at odds with each other. Not much was needed for relations within society to become strained or even hostile. Tensions became evident in street and pub brawls and a general preference for cruel pastimes such as hangings, public tortures and bear and dog fights to the death in the bear pits<sup>60</sup> on the Southbank.

The unfortunate's heads, executed by the hands of the Tower's headsman, could be seen perched on stakes on London Bridge.

Religious tensions had been part and parcel of 16th century England since Henry VIII chose to separate England's church from the Catholic Church of Rome in 1534. Henry died in 1547 and was succeeded by his son Edward, who reigned for 6 years.

55 Shakespeare often jibed at this kind of rhetoric.

56 Jews from Alexandria, Egypt. This community had a strong occult Kabbalistic tradition.

57 Sources for this short account on cultural influences were: E.M.W. Tillyard: *The Elizabethan World Picture* and Frances Yates: *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*.

58 Educational treatises for (future) rulers were extremely popular in those days. See e.g. *The Boke named The Governour* by Thomas Elyot mentioned above.

59 As I mentioned above, for this reason and because he was of noble birth, he was thought to be the real William Shakespeare by some.

60 The venues (often literally pits) where animals (bears or dogs in a variety of combinations) were set against each other to fight to the death.

He died before attaining majority in 1553. His half-sister Mary<sup>61</sup> ascended the throne. She was the Catholic daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon. She tried to bring England back to the holy mother church by hunting down and executing a large proportion of well-known Protestants. The most important victim of her reign of terror was Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury (1489 – 1556), who died burning at the stake. He was commemorated in *Actes And Monuments Of These Latter And Perilous Dayes* also called: *Book of Martyrs* (1563) by John Foxe, which covered some three hundred executions. Schoenbaum calls this book one of the most influential books of Elizabethan England and a powerful weapon of Protestant propaganda.<sup>62</sup>

It should be noted that, amidst all this religious fervor and turmoil, Shakespeare's father, allegedly, remained a protestant while the Ardens, John Shakespeare's in-laws, were professed Catholics.<sup>63</sup>

Apart from the religious tensions, there were medical and health issues. "Shakespeare's overcrowded, rat-infested, sexually promiscuous London, with raw sewage flowing in the Thames, was the hub for the nastiest diseases known to mankind."<sup>64</sup> There were smallpox and syphilis<sup>65</sup> (often called the pox as well). But worst of all was, of course, the Bubonic Plague. There were outbursts of the Black Death in 1563-64 (during Shakespeare's childhood), 1578-79, in 1582, in 1592-93 and 1603.

Park Honan has it that the biggest plague in Shakespeare's lifetime was the one of 1592-93 when Shakespeare must have been in London.<sup>66</sup> A good 14% of the city's population died then. Courtiers were not exempt from diseases. Queen Elizabeth herself caught smallpox when she was 29 years old. She barely survived.<sup>67</sup>

At court, the queen gathered around her men of learning and sophistication. Some famous courtiers were: Sir Francis Drake, explorer, who sailed the Americas and defeated the Spanish Armada; Sir Walter Raleigh, poet, writer and soldier. William Cecil was an elder statesman. After his death, his son Robert Cecil replaced him as chief advisor to Elizabeth. Christopher Marlowe, the gifted dramatist and poet, was possibly a spy for Elizabeth's court. He was killed – this murder was allegedly related to his intelligence work for the queen.

During Elizabeth's reign, Christopher Saxton made his atlas of England, on which he worked for six years and for which he travelled throughout the kingdom. In 1579, he published it. "Saxton deserves a place beside Shakespeare as an interpreter of

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61 Mary went down in history as Bloody Mary.

62 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 17.

63 According to A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 60.

64 Taken from the introduction of <http://www.shakespeareonline.com/biography/londondisease.html>

65 Especially distressing because the level of medical care never reached above that of – at best – well-intentioned herbalists. Chirurgeons (like the fun-fair quacks) had next to no knowledge of the human body and its workings, based as medicine was on the medieval principles of the four humours: black bile (melancholic), phlegm (phlegmatic), blood (sanguin) and yellow bile (choleric).

66 Park Honan, *Shakespeare, a life*, p. 145.

67 The illness left her with bad and thin hair. Later on, she grew almost completely bald; after which her impressive red wigs became famous. Moreover, as Her Majesty had a sweet tooth, she had – in her riper years – no healthy teeth to speak of or with. Source: A.L. Rowse, *The Elizabethan Renaissance: The Life of the Society*, p. 44 ff.

the national consciousness, unity and pride which were the greatest achievements of Elizabethan England.”<sup>68</sup>

In this chapter, I have explained that Shakespeare lived in an England that gave him the standard education of the day, based on and formatted along the lines of scholasticism. Also, his country was a nation in transition between medieval feudalism and superstitions on the one hand and Renaissance humanism on the other. Scientists, explorers, statesmen and men of letters gave shape and content to new developments.

However, it was also an agitated and strained society. The tension releasing itself in cruelty and criminality. Of course, the theatre was another important stress release these days. Shakespeare, being the best playwright, was famous and venerated, yet despised by the jealous.

The changes the Tudor years saw, were intensified by the religious discords, the most important chronicle of which was, of course, John Fox’s influential book; an important reflection of the conflicts and tensions between Anglican (or Evangelists as they were sometimes called, especially when they read – or had in their home – the Wycliffe or the Tyndale bible) and Roman Catholics.

Insurrections threatened the throne of the maiden queen. In short, this period was determined by, alternately, uncertainty and growing self-consciousness; conservatism and progress.

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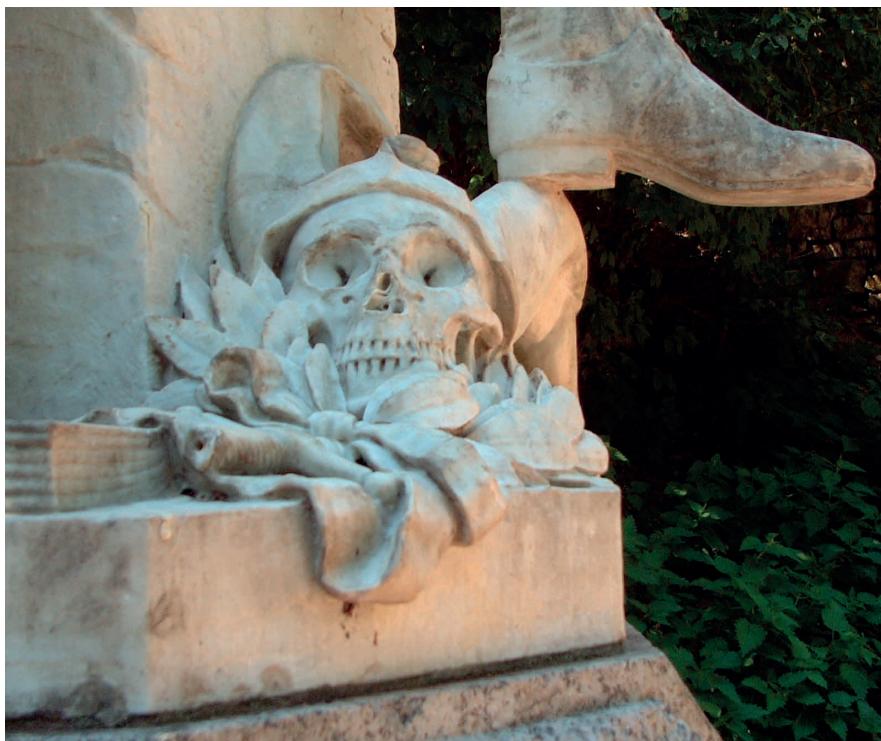
68 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 16.



## Curriculum vitae

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This study addresses the question how Shakespearean tragedy relates to legal science, state theory, and the philosophy of law. More specifically, what does violence, as shown in Shakespearean tragedies, have to do with the creation, maintenance, or demise of a nation-state and the rule of law?

This work examines three tragedies: nation forming is central in *Macbeth*, the nation-state *per se* in *Hamlet*, and the decline of the nation-state in *Julius Caesar*.

What the tragedies have in common is the *violence paradigm*: the tragic process of violence. Even though the three tragedies are entirely different as far as contents and outcome are concerned, the format of their *violence paradigms* is always the same.

Where Renan and Weber have mapped out the theorizations behind nation and state, the Shakespearean tragic paradigm of violence (the *violence paradigm*) provides a profound insight into the critical success – or failure – factors of both nation-state forming and its maintenance.

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