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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

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1 Introduction and research questions

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,¹ 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

1 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/sociologist² Max Weber³ (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.⁴ *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.

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.⁵ 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.⁶

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,

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 finalization⁷ 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.

7 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,⁸ or Aristotle⁹ 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;¹⁰ interpretations, dissections, analyzes and even re-writings¹¹ 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

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,¹² 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'".¹³ 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'".¹⁴ He concludes that criticism is a judgment of vision and interpretation is a reconstruction of vision.¹⁵

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."¹⁶ 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:¹⁷

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

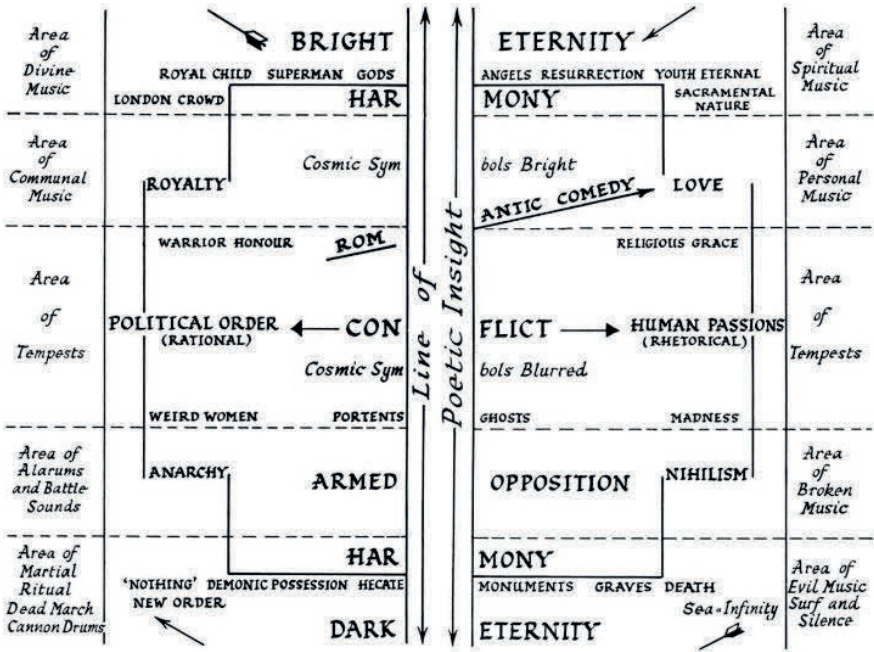
13 G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 1.

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".¹⁸

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".¹⁹ 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 Shakespearean Tempest*, p. xv.

19 G. Wilson Knight, *The Shakespearean 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.²⁰ 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 sorrow²¹ 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 *Dialogo in recht en literatuur: kritiek van de narratieve rede*,²² 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-

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., *Dialogo 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 expliciet formuleert, lijkt Wigmore hiermee te impliceren dat literatuur volgens hem helpt om het inlevingsvermogen bij juristen te ontwikkelen en te stimuleren",²³ 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."²⁴ The founder of this school of thought is B.N. Cardozo (1870 – 1923); its philosophy and concepts were continued by James Boyd White (1938).²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ Gaakeer: "centraal in deze benadering staat [...] de analogie tussen juridische en literaire interpretatie en onderzoek naar de manieren waarop teksten betekenissen genereren."²⁸

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-

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?"²⁹ 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."³⁰ 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

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 conceptions³¹ 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,³² in his work on the genre, lists as many as 34 of these attempts in his first chapter, by writers varying from Diomedes (4th CE), through Isidore of Seville (6th – 7th 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."³³ 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.

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,³⁴ 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.³⁵

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

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 20th 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*³⁶ 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

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?*