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

Brouwer, R.C.G.

3 Violence and tragedy

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.[1] 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

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-rhythmical 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 (5th century BC). After him, Sophocles and Euripides improved upon them theatrically, using – in varying arrangements – three actors, which meant that the chorus lost importance.[2] Their age[3] marks the first major era of tragedy.

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

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

3.3 The role of tragedy within the Grecian community

Religion, art and state affairs[4] were no separate concerns in ancient Greece. Goldhill[5] has vividly described the interwovenness of these vital functions: theatre festivals (especially the Great Dionysia[6]) 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."[7] 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."[8] 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[9] 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

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. IJsselling, , *Apollo, Dionysos, Aphrodite en de anderen*, p.103.

and fear, whereby to provide an outlet for such emotions."[10] 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."[11] 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".[12]

Apart from the concept of *anagnorisis*, Aristotle emphasizes yet another concept inherent to tragedy: the catharsis. Some critics, such as Schmidt,[13] 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

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.[14] 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.[15] The Greeks just had to observe their religious duties towards the polis and the temple (see above).[16] 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."[17] 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-

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*[18]), 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.

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[19] 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[20] 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,[21] 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."[22] This is close to a proper description of violence. However,

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.brit annica.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.[23]

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.[24]

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.[25] 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

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."[26] 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[27] 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*.[28] 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[29] 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.[30]

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.[31]
  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

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[32] (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 im- 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."[33] 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.[34]

After which he continues with the words:

> Denn das der Gegenwart Spezifische ist, daâ man allen anderen
> Verbänden oder Einzelpersonen das Recht zur physischen Gewaltsamkeit nur soweit zuschreibt, als der Staat sie von ihrer Seite zuläât: er gilt als alleinige Quelle des "Rechts" auf Gewaltsamkeit.[35]

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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.[36] Himmler became involved with the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiderspartei*) in 1922/23.[37] 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).*[38] 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

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.

criminele organisatie. In plaats van misdaden opsporen en bestrijden, raakt men op grote schaal betrokken bij het plegen van misdaden en moordpartijen."[39] 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."[40]

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[41] orchestrated debaucheries of death and repression.[42]

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.[43] He also consulted an astrologer: Wilhelm Theodor Wulff.[44] 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[45] (he also noted that Hitler might not be of pure Aryan

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.[46] 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).[47] Macbeth calculates his chances in act 1. III, ll. 129-141 and act 1. VII, ll. 6- 28.[48]

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.[49] 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.[50]

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,[51] 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",[52] 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.[53]

Of course, the soloing autocratic tragic hero, incorporating both problem and perspective has vanished as a role model in literature.[54] 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[55] wrote his revenge tragedies. They were imitated as late as the 14th century in Italy.[56] In England, they remained popular well into the 16th century. Both Steiner[57] and Williams[58] 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[59] quote the same citation from the introduction of *The Monk's Tale* by Chaucer[60] 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.

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,[61] 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.[62]

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)."[63] 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),[64] marks the next high age of tragic drama. Great tragic writers populated the public stage: Christopher Marlowe,[65] followed by William Shakespeare, John Webster[66] and Ben Jonson.[67] 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 Johnson: 1572 – 1637.

tragedies modeled on those by Seneca; for instance *Sejanus His Fall* and *Catiline His Conspiracy*. Among others,[68] Weitz[69] and Steiner emphasize[70] that early Elizabethan tragedy[71] 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."[72] He points to a number of these new connections:

- The idea of tragedy ceased to be metaphysical[73] 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?[74]

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

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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 sturring 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 abhominable 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."[75] However, in France, fine tragedy was written between 1630 and 1690 by Racine[76] and Corneille[77]; yet the art form faded into mediocrity in the 18th century. In Germany, we see a revival in the period between 1790 and 1840.

In the course of these centuries tragedy 'secularized'.[78] 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[79] 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,

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[80] 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."[81] 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 17th century onwards[82] and of the national consciousness in the 19th 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,[83] 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.

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 excepted 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.