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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

Brouwer, R.C.G.

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4 | Tragedy from Romanticism onward

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Romantic Movement¹ proved to be an important influence on the reception of tragedy. In the Romantic Era, art – particularly tragic art – was seen as the panacea for revitalizing society and politics. The influence of art on society as a whole and particularly on statecraft could, to a certain extent, still be felt in the first half of the 20th century. Nietzsche deemed art the highest form of human expression (of course, to him, music being the most sublime, immediately followed, though, by the art of writing tragedy). In this chapter, I will describe the influence of Romanticism on tragedy (and vice versa), politics and society, followed by an analysis of Nietzsche's thought on (the violence of) tragedy and tragic drama and its correlation with society and culture.

4.2 ROMANTICISM

"The Romantics believed that the vitality of drama was inseparable from the health of the body politic. That is the crux of Shelley's² argument in his *Defence of Poetry*:

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

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

1 Roughly from 1798 till 1835

2 Shelley: 1792 – 1822.

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

4 See below.

Friedrich von Schelling⁵ wrote his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*.⁶ In it, the writer proclaims the return of tragic art as *the* important problem for philosophy. Schelling explores the relation between art and philosophy, giving primacy to art (in particular tragedy) at the expense of philosophy – in defiance of Plato.⁷ Moreover, he wants a clear philosophical determination of the nature of the tragic. “In the course of [his...] letter it becomes clear that tragedy is “the highest in art” and that when the powers of reason fail, when philosophy gives out, the disclosive powers of the highest possibility in art still preserve what is most in need of being understood. Art, specifically tragic art, takes over when philosophy comes to an end.”⁸ Here, Schelling shows, by describing its limitations, the main characteristics of the dominant neo-classicist philosophy of his time up till then: a rationally steered and fully logical construct, not capable of explaining, let alone absorbing, the anomalies of life. The big counter-movement, was just to begin at that point in time, is Romanticism.

The idea that dramatic art was concomitant with social and political progress – as expressed by Shelley in the above quote – was shared by, among others, Goethe⁹ and Schiller.¹⁰ Their tragedies are an attempt both to enhance Germanophilia in the Teutonic consciousness and to regenerate an era of great tragedy. They were convinced that German national consciousness¹¹ could be nourished by feeding it a range of historical tragedy plays, especially in the vein of Shakespearian drama. Thus Schiller – after having read *Richard III* and other history plays¹² – writes *Wallenstein*.

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

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

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

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

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

9 Goethe: 1749 – 1832.

10 Schiller: 1759 – 1805

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

12 As he writes to Goethe in a letter dated 28 November 1797. Source: www.briefwechsel-schiller-goethe.de Letter 390.

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

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

[...]

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

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

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

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

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

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

[...]

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

"Catharsis is best understood as expiation and reconciliation on the part of the hero rather than as purgation on the part of the public,"¹⁶ as Weitz phrases Goethe's analysis of the workings of catharsis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

couldn't read one word of English. Old editions of the *Petite Larousse* describe him as a 'traducteur prudent' [a prudent translator] of Shakespeare. A fact he owed to the assembling of six neat, tame classical tragedies that bore the titles of Shakespearean masterpieces but had furthermore nothing to do with them." Translation by R. Brouwer

Also, Voltaire, one of the torchbearers of the Enlightenment, had a complicated relation with Shakespeare. He started out venerating Shakespeare, but later in life he despised him for lack of knowledge of the classical rules. Source: Cambridge History of English and American literature on line. <https://www.bartleby.com/215/1205.html>

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

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

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

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

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

Shakespeare studies by German scholars²⁴ appeared in the 18th and 19th centuries.

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

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

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

On Hegel's interpretation of the tragic hero Roche²⁷ remarks:

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

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

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

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

27 Mark W. Roche is Professor of German Language and Literature and Concurrent Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kaufmann³⁵ outlines yet other inconsistencies and contradictions in Hegel's analysis, such as the fact that not all Greek tragedies center around collisions (e.g., Sophocles' *Electra*, *Ajax*, or *Oedipus in Colonus*). Moreover, Hegel doesn't mention the moral conflicts (due to the ethical chasms) as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Hegel deems that true tragic suffering can only exist in consequence of a collision.

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

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

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

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

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



4.3 NIETZSCHE

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

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

In “Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens”,³⁹ Nietzsche sketches the outlines of tragedy and the conditions under which it may arise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The tragic (meaning the tension between the Dionysian and Apollonian⁴⁴ forces within the human mind) is very much alive,
- This life force, plus Dionysian suffering, is vaguely implicated as the source of tragic violence. The initial cause and effect are reversed.
- True tragedy (meaning the vehicle for tragic/emotional elements) had died because of theoretical knowledge;

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

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

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

Gradually, Dionysus acquires a different position in Nietzsche's tragic thought. The Dionysian symbol and the tragic insight it gave into the nature of human life incited Nietzsche to develop, formulate and reformulate his tragic affirmation⁴⁵ of life in the course of his career. If any tragic format is formulated by Nietzsche at all, it is around this tragic life affirmation.

After 1881, when Nietzsche had his epiphany on the eternal return⁴⁶ of the same, Nietzsche's theorems on tragic life affirmation crystallized and as a result, his philosophical notions as a whole developed further. He therefore feels a need to rewrite his books, or in any case, write new introductions to them; so he does with *The Birth of Tragedy*. In his second introduction, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" written in 1886, he looks back at his earlier Dionysus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

James Porter⁵² says the following about the above *Götzen-Dämmerung* quote: "If anything, the interpretation of *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Twilight of the Idols* is too selective to give an undistorted reading of the earlier text, while

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

55 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

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

Aus dieser Schrift redet eine ungeheure Hoffnung. Zuletzt fehlt mir jeder Grund, die Hoffnung auf eine dionysische Zukunft [...]. Werfen wir einen Blick ein Jahrhundert voraus, setzen wir den Fall, dass mein Attentat auf zwei Jahrtausende Widernatur und Menschenschändung gelingt. Jene neue Partei des Lebens, welche die grösste aller Aufgaben, die Höherzüchtung der Menschheit in die Hände nimmt, eingerechnet die schonungslose Vernichtung alles Entartenden und Parasitischen, wird jenes Zuviel von Leben auf Erden wieder möglich machen, aus dem auch der dionysische Zustand wieder erwachsen muss. Ich verspreche ein tragisches Zeitalter: die höchste Kunst im Jasagen zum Leben, die Tragödie, wird wiedergeboren werden⁵⁶

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another remarkable example from his notes is the following. Immediately after his having coined the concept of *Umwertung aller Werten* in 1884 (see above), he continues with: "In diesem pöbelhaften Zeitalter soll der vornehm geborene Geist jeden Tag mit dem Gedanken der Rangordnung beginnen: hier liegen seine Pflichten, hier seine feinsten Verirrungen."⁵⁹ There are numerous of these examples, underlining the fundamentally hierarchal line of thought (attitude even) in Nietzsche.⁶⁰ Now, verticality in violence⁶¹ shares the same static characteristics as vertical social *Rangordnung*. In the case of radical non-tragic violence, it tends towards repression; strict verticality in social constructs tends towards stagnation. The verticality of radical non-tragic violence and social verticality interact in the following way: when vertical violence (of the just-mentioned type) is at stake, the only possible change is a reversal of social positions of perpetrator and victim; if and when the former victims gather strength enough to defeat the former victor. This generates a static construct in which significant improvements and/or reconceptualization become highly improbable. Therefore, when the revaluation of values is in so close a proximity to the strict social hierarchies Nietzsche describes, the odd chance of achieving the desired outcome is negligible. In such a society, the only becoming or *Umwertung* will be *Umdrehung*. Precisely these issues were combated fiercely by Nietzsche; he did not see that his verticality was part of the problem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4 TWENTIETH CENTURY

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

Some scholars have analyzed the circumstances under which the art form of tragedy could (re)develop or disappear again from the public consciousness and attention. As to this, I am in concurrence with Ger Groot, who remarks⁶³ that tragedy especially flourishes in periods of social unrest and cultural upheaval and uncertainty. Hence, its florescence fell in the fifth century B.C.E, and in the 16th and 19th centuries CE. I previously exemplified this with

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

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

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

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

Throughout his article, Steiner argues an amalgamation of tragedy with the transcendent, if not the (Christian) religious. Although all philosophical work on tragedy of the post-Hegelian school acknowledged the irrational⁶⁶ as a substantial component of life, there is no unanimity among scholars as to the religious or the transcendent as an essential component of tragedy.⁶⁷ However, in unison, they raise their philosophical voice against the spirit of optimism⁶⁸ and rationalism as being the bane of tragedy. Not only for Steiner, but for several other thinkers, the irrational transmutes itself into the religiously coloured ethical. To them, tragedy is the ethical vehicle par excellence.⁶⁹ In the chapter on *Hamlet*, I will further exemplify the ethical stance, comparing

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

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

66 The irrational as stemming from human subconsciousness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

70 And with this, of course, indisputability.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁴ p. 165. ff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why is it that tragedy is sometimes identified with the notions and orientation of Christianity?⁸³ Of course, they are linked via metaphysics,⁸⁴ this being the nuclear basis both of Christian belief and classical tragedy. Moreover, Christianity relates to suffering as tragedy does.⁸⁵ Yet, a dissimilarity lies at the heart of their united interest in metaphysics. The Christian faith offers a solution; a way out of the essentially tragic human condition in the hereafter; tragedy doesn't. It offers no solutions; it offers the possibility – tentatively – to cope with the tragic, the radical tragic violence and the destruction in the here and now. Vanheeswijck⁸⁶ argues that, thus, Christianity is in essence anti-tragic as a metaphysical redemption is offered and therewith a solution

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some present-day critics⁸⁸ hold that postmodern man has lost contact with the tragic feeling of life as shown in Greek drama. We no longer feel tossed by fate and crushed by warring legislations coming from transcendence. To be sure, these thematizations are no longer ours. Yet, with Vanheeswijck, I hold that the susceptibility for the tragic has not been lost, even though we are offered Christian redemption, have gone through the Enlightenment and have witnessed the horrors of industrial wartime killings since the Greeks put the tragic on Europe's politico-philosophical agenda. We are intrinsically unable to bring our reality constructs to perfection. It is of no great importance whether the shown reality construct is of antique or more recent (metaphysical) making. We will always need the hope embedded within the workings of tragedy: the individual's need for (communal) grief, dignity and involvement: *the* shortcut to humanity's ultimate common denominator. If critics fail to see this, they completely miss this cardinal characteristic of tragedy.

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

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

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

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

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

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