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

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9 *The tragedy of Julius Caesar*: evaluation

9.1 Political Shakespeare

In the wake of this play, an obvious question arises as to whether Shakespeare could have preferred any form of government. Does he pass judgment on what is the best form? It is evident that the governmental and political systems depicted in this play cannot be based on any form of Christian orthodoxy, as the play is set in the Rome of 44 BCE. Of course, if Shakespeare had been a Christian writer, he could have imbued this play with various Christian themes. However, in this and the previous plays, it has been demonstrated that Shakespeare's tragedies do not provide evidence of religiosity; indeed, we have witnessed earlier chapters that illustrate Shakespeare's reticence in passing judgment on any subject, despite his incisive and astute observations of human behaviour and the human psyche.

In *Julius Caesar*, we witness the downfall of a republican state form and the emergence of a dictatorship, including the deification of Julius Caesar,[1] followed by the Julian theocracy (act 1, II). This is a veritable snap list of state forms, but there is not the slightest indication that one of these forms is preferred by Shakespeare.

In his lecture,[2] Professor Cantor seems implicitly to move his audience in the direction of a dichotomic question: following the line of his argumentation, was Shakespeare for or against the republic? Or did he favour, by any chance, any other form of regime? Following the analysis in the previous chapter, I now conclude that in this play, no trace is to be found of preference

1 We cannot know how the character of Julius in the play thought about this matter, there being no textual evidence as to his inclination in this area, apart from the fact that he feigned not to want a crown, which is a slightly different register since a crown is first and foremost a worldly attribute. As was suggested in a note in the previous chapter, he might very well have smoothly and pompously accepted the sycophancy and adoration of others.

2 See above.

for any form of government, religiously inspired or not.[3] Shakespeare passes no judgement or, as Dobski has it:

> One might ask (and many have) which regime or political order Shakespeare thought best or most fitting. The answer still eludes his readers. Shakespeare, in and through his plays, seems rather to be engaged in a kind of comparative political theory that cannot easily be reduced to a practical solution to perennial political problems. The action of each play has an argument, and an argument which at least in part is profoundly concerned with political problems or questions. The arguments of the plays, then, as parts of a single body of work (a corpus)–insofar as that body can or should be taken as a whole–are in an important sense in dialogue with one another. But while Shakespeare is clearly attentive to the perennial questions and problems associated with politics, he refrains from passing judgment on the regimes and statesmen he depicts for us; he forgoes the temptation to issue prescriptive remedies of his own.[4]

However, whereas Dobski and Gish accurately remark that Shakespeare passes no judgment, he, for sure, gives us a perspective that apparently escapes both authors. In my opinion – and as argued above – the sentence (and I paraphrase here Dobski's quote above): *Shakespeare shows here that the type of construct used to govern a community, a nation is in point of fact inconsequential*, should be completed with: *as long as it heeds and upholds the basic primeval existential needs of man.* Therefore, the question posed above as to what governmental system is preferred by Shakespeare is not the relevant one. Shakespeare replaces this

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3 Moreover, and being practical, he simply couldn't afford to have an opinion on these issues as they might displease the queen/king. He had to tread carefully in order not to lose his head. Also, he had interests in that he had a theatre to run and a family to provide for. So he had to keep several balls in the air; keeping his head on his shoulders being the most important one. In my view, this elemental prudence contributed to those literary characteristics that mainly formed Shakespeare's greatness. Firstly, his virtuoso play of words, leading his audience in a veritable maze of ambiguity and double meanings. Secondly, his word coinage, words that, by virtue of their novelty, did not as yet have an established field of associations (hence Shakespeare could not be accused of double–read: suspect meanings since he had introduced the word himself). These strokes of genius were prompted by the restrictions of governmental censorship. In a weird and unexpected way we may be thankful for Mr. Edward Tilney, Master of the Revels at Elizabeth's court and responsible for censoring all literary works.
In respect of the words coined by Shakespeare, I cite: "How many words has Shakespeare added to English? Guesses have ranged from a few hundred terms to more than 10,000, with the most likely estimate approximately 1,500 words." As the scholar Marvin Spevack has commented, "Shakespeare's was the period of the most rapid growth of vocabulary in the recorded history of the language.'"
(J. McQuain and S. Malless, *Coined by Shakespeare*, p. viii). Just one example of a word coined by Shakespeare: the adjective *premeditated* (*1 Henry VI, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Henry V*) in *Coined by Shakespeare*, p. 177. In short, Shakespeare's contribution to language and literature is unparalleled.

4 B.J. Dobski and D.A. Gish, "Shakespeare, the Body Politic and Liberal Democracy", *Perspectives on Political Science*, volume 41, p. 188.

question with an existential non-dichotomized inquiry: "upon which existential aspects of human behaviour would you have your communal constructs based?"

The long-term success of a particular political construct depends on the open interactive relationship of the construct and the primeval/existential human need. In the next few paragraphs, this will be further elucidated. Thus, and concluding from the perspective of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, I hold that culture can be described as the ritualized expression of human primeval needs.[5] Statecraft, the political construct that is mediated by culture, can be viewed as being both reinforced by culture and, at the same time, regulating it. The same goes, as a matter of course, for the legal construct, coming with an organised nation-state. This interdependency and embeddedness are increasingly recognized and appreciated by scholars and critics. Dobski and Gish:

> [Shakespeare had] perhaps the most vivid and enduring image in speech describing political community ever proposed. Through his works, Shakespeare helps us think about both parts and wholes in a political context and the proper relationship between the parts and the whole. Indeed, there may be no greater account or anatomy of the Body Politic in the English language than what one discovers in Shakespeare's plays and poetry.[6]

Anselm Haverkamp also appreciates the potency in Shakespeare's works in this respect; he describes in a complicated and rather circumlocutory (and vague) way the workings and effect of Shakespearean tragedy as he sees it: it is

> a visible space between the spheres of politics and law and well able to negotiate legal and political, even constitutional concerns; Shakespeare's theatre opened up a new perspective on normativity. Specifically, "history" in a new sense on the premises of the older conceptions of historical and legal exemplarity: examples, cases, and instances are to be reflected on rather than treated as straightforwardly didactic or salvific. Thus, what comes to be recognized, reflected and acknowledged, has a disowning, alienating effect, whose aftermath rather than whose immediacy counts and remains effective.[7]

Posner[8] and Crutto agree, where Posner stresses the universality of Shakespeare's oeuvre and Crutto emphasizes the interrelation between ethics and

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5 And of course, each and every culture integrates these needs in its own unique way into social structure and cultural custom. A clear example of this interrelationship is given in the previous chapter: the description of the embeddedness of friendship in social custom.

6 B.J. Dobski and D.A. Gish, "Shakespeare, the Body Politic and Liberal Democracy", *Perspectives on Political Science,* volume 41, p. 181.

7 Anselm Haverkamp, *Shakespearean Genealogies of Power*, p.p. 2 – 3.

8 Richard A. Posner, *Law & Literature.*

law.[9] Remarkably, these critics do appreciate the powerful influence of Shakespeare's oeuvre on law and legislation and their embeddedness in (aspects of) culture, none of them, however, analyzes in detail how this influence works. I hope my analysis below will complete this hiatus.

To a high extent in Shakespeare's days, the political agenda was dictated by the ruler-prince. As indicated in a previous chapter, such a prince was formed by the so-called 'mirror of princes' in which the (Christian) virtues expected from a ruler extensively resounded.[10] Law, its enforcement and justice coincided to a large extent with the person and character of the sovereign. The flip side of this coin was that a sovereign had to forsake his/her private life since this too was a state matter.[11]

The mirror of princes might be interpreted as an initial curtailment of a sovereign's "natural right to rule and administer justice": he had to subordinate his wishes and commands to an external (transcendent) party. No longer did the exclusive principle of *princeps legibus solutus* hold; instead he had to govern "under the rule of law".[12]

Machiavelli followed suit in the mirror-of-princes tradition.[13] However, as discussed above, he took a stance, explicitly different from the Christian one. In his *The Prince,* he recommended a ruthlessly effect oriented rule, virtue being redefined in this vein. One of Machiavelli's more famous quotes on this issue: "It is a sound maxim that reprehensible action may be justified by their effects [...] and when the effect is good, it always justifies the action."[14] Friedman, in one of his articles,[15] analyzes Machiavelli's opinion on statecraft in his two major works: the aforementioned *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. In the second book, Friedman detects a somewhat more restrained tone; Machiavelli advocates a moderate form of republicanism to accommodate the rising middle class. However, opines Friedman, Machiavelli realized that society as a whole was not ready for such innovations "because that class [viz. the rising middle class] had still great need of the centralizing agency of the absolute monarch in Machiavelli's day and, accordingly, he relegated his

9 K. Crutto, *Law's Interior: Legal and Literary Constructions of the Self,* p. 23.

10 Apart from those mentioned earlier in this chapter, another famous contemporary Mirror of Princes was the one by Baldassare Castiglione: *The book of the Courtier*, published in the early 16th century. The book encompassed both etiquette and morals. A popular English translation of the book was published in 1561. Other influential works were of yet older traditions: Seneca: *De Clementia*; Cicero: *De Officiis*. All these works appealed to the integrity of character of an autocrat; it took centuries before the rule of law took over.

11 As, allegedly, Elizabeth I once seemed to have sighed, when she was asked about her general health and in particular her stool performance: G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History.*

12 Of course, the rule of law in the modern sense of the word took a few centuries to develop.

13 Also see the chapter on the preliminaries on *Julius Caesar.*

14 Machiavelli, *Discourses, I,* p. 234.

15 B. Friedman, "The Nation-State: The Machiavellian Element in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar"* in *The Historian*, 1955, p.p. 25 – 40.

republic[an aspirations] to some vague future."[16] "Machiavelli admitted the desirability of a liberal political state, but his conception of the human nature, made the realization of such a state impossible."[17] Friedman continues to compare the circumstances of Machiavelli's (living in Italy at the beginning of the 16th century) with those of Shakespeare (living in England at the other end of the same century). Italy was a motley of small and petty states, at war with each other in continuously changing alliances,[18] and England was a unified nation, yet Friedman sees similarities. England could come to the brink of civil war again since Elizabeth I had no heirs and the political situation was, because of that fact, insecure. Moreover, the country was plagued by religious conflicts and tensions. Friedman subsequently argues that in the drama *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare reduces the plot to a conflict between two opposing views of the state, embodied by respectively Brutus and Marc Antony. Through them, the dramatist, still according to Friedman, debates the issue of the absolute state against a moderate republic. This is the same dualism that can be seen between Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, Friedmann continues. Brutus represents the ideal of Machiavelli's republic[19] and Marc Antony that of the autocrat.[20] In an argumentation stretched to the max, Friedman concludes that Shakespeare was concerned, as Machiavelli had been before him, to further the desirability of a moderate republic, full well knowing that times were as yet not ripe for it. This is indeed an interesting line of thought, but for the fact that Shakespeare keeps safely away from expressing preference or concern. In his article, Friedman implies that Brutus (embodying the ideal of the republic) loses the battle because the time is still not ripe for that form of government. However, Brutus is not the embodiment of any ideal at all, since he is not endowed with such a concept, as Shakespeare ironically showed by subtly comparing Brutus to Cicero. Brutus is not the embodiment of a political ideal; Brutus is – unwittingly – the embodiment of a culture and a code of behaviour: the Roman culture and codification (see further down for elaboration). In missing this, Friedman makes but half a statement on Shakespeare's genius – but that mistake has been made more often. This play goes far beyond a personal drama of two statesmen and two different concepts of

16 B. Friedman, "The Nation-State: The Machiavellian Element in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*", in *The Historian*, p. 27.

17 Ibid, p. 30.

18 And, by the way, originally – from the 14th century on – goaded on and provoked by an English mercenary army, initially led by Sir John Hawkwood, who, after the Hundred Years' War between England and France, had not been able to make it back to England. This bunch of hardened expendables travelled over the Alps into Italy to successfully harass every city state for ransom or to set the one against the other (source: *Hawkwood, De Duivelse Engelsman*, by Frances Stonor Saunders). Italy could hardly recover from this centuries-long scourge.

19 B. Friedman, "The Nation-State: The Machiavellian Element in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*", p. 35.

20 Ibid, p. 37.

statecraft. Indeed, Shakespeare does show the struggle between powers; however, in not taking sides, he, in act 5, widens a choice beyond a mere dichotomy, but before going into this universal aspect of Shakespeare, first, some other, more obvious queries have to be addressed.

9.2 Shakespeare's warning

Why does Shakespeare show this particular ending to the play? In previous dramas, he showed not to have any problem with bending the plot (and history) to his will, showing the outcome that suited him best. From this point of view, the argument that the end result was as Plutarch described it does not hold either. Why then, this ending? To understand this it seems sensible to refer back for a moment to the age and society Shakespeare lived in.

In the chapter on the preliminaries to *Julius Caesar*, I described this period as the first emergence of a nation-state and as indicated just above by Friedman, the state was governed by an autocratic queen[21] on an unstable throne through lack of heirs and religious conflicts. These circumstances were even more aggravated by the fact that a ruling woman in the past had been disastrous for the country. Firstly, the rule of her half-sister (Mary, the bloody one: 1553 – 1558) had been a disaster and antecedently Jane Grey had ruled only 9 days. Before her, there had been no woman on the throne since the times of Boudica's[22] clan-rule; the combination of women and crowns did not go down well in the public eye. Then, some decades before Shakespeare was born, the country had experienced civil war; moreover – also mentioned in previous chapters – there were many insurrections and plots during Elizabeth's reign.

Precisely these two features, civil war and autocratic rule, are given remarkable attention in the play. I therefore argue that Shakespeare has particularly wanted to point towards these dangers for his fledgling nation under a female sovereign. It is fortunate for England that the wise Elizabeth I surrounded herself with equally wise and seasoned advisors.[23] Conceivably, however, this play – being on Rome which for centuries had an impact to the whole

21 As mentioned before, but here repeated for the benefit of the reader, the queen meant is Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603), after the demise of her sister and brother, sole heir to Henry VIII (having had six wives – in a desperate attempt to produce male heirs and therewith avoid another bout of civil war – and the founder of the Anglican Church). Elizabeth called herself the Virgin Queen and professed to be "married to England". Consequently, she had no heirs; with her the Tudor period came to an end.

22 Queen of the Celtic Iceni (circa 61 CE). She led an insurrection against the Roman occupation.

23 William Cecil, baron of Burghley, but especially Sir Francis Walsingham deserve attention. His advice proved life-saving for (the younger) queen. His nickname was the spymaster, because of his wide network of connections outside and inside the diplomatic world and in the courts throughout Europe.

of Europe – can additionally be read as a warning to other European rulers, all of them wielding autocratic power at the time.

Shakespeare does not stop here; he paints the dangers of degeneration for any nation-state construct. The subtle fabric of interwoven values, culture and the nation-state is easily disrupted when their respective interdependencies are waning or lost. Instead of cooperation within a community, needed to build a nation, the self-interest of each individual citizen will take pride of place. Indeed, this is what Renan warned against; according to him, such a construct cannot even be called a nation,[24] let alone hope for longevity.

In Shakespearean tragedy, not the succumbing scenes, the destruction, the loss and the grief are important, but these (sometimes but small) elements which man reuses and which allow him to build a(n improved) new version of the previous construct.[25] Thus, the successive constructs might develop and grow.[26]

A stress test of radical violence works as a catalyst for these constructs. It always does, has done and will do so in the future. Even though the outcome is determined by the subtle differences between tragic and non-tragic (to which I will come back in the next paragraph), the violent process is the same for both.

Perhaps this last issue is why both Renan and Weber failed to distinguish between the diverse types of violence: the processes are deceptively similar. It is, however, as just argued, not the process that counts but the outcome. Is the construct capable of constraining the violence (in a way that it remains violence on a limited scale) or, if it cannot, is there an individual or group of people who are successful in turning the scales from radical non-tragic into radical tragic?

9.3 VIOLENCE: "GOOD" AND "BAD"

We have now come to the point of thoroughly analyzing the internal dynamics of regression into or progression out of radical non-tragic violence. This raises the question of whether there are such concepts as "good" violence or "bad" violence. There is one short and clear-cut comment to be made to this manner of questioning: it premises that there is such a normative distinction within the sphere of radical violence. There is not. Radical violence cannot be labeled either good or bad. It is inherently human and therefore unavoidable. It is precisely that existential characteristic in man that, when ranging free, needs

24 See chapter on Renan.

25 It is bound to be an improved version, because the pangs of pain and loss felt during the crisis just experienced are still fresh and because of the acquired insight into the situation.

26 Indeed, even the death of the hero is irrelevant; important is what he bestows on his community in his dying moment.

to be mitigated by the violence paradigm. It is for this reason that it is of tantamount importance to learn to distinguish between the diverse manifestations of violence:[27] As mentioned in the beginning of the previous chapter, neither negation nor veneration of violence are wise strategies to follow. I would dare to add: but discernment is.[28]

Well now, under what conditions is violence the free-ranging, utterly destructive kind (radical non-tragic violence)? What is the breeding ground for the mitigated variety (radical tragic violence)? When does a type 2 violence develop (state monopolized violence) and when does the type 2 fall back into a type 1-non-tragic violence. How does this operate in practice? After having witnessed Julius Caesar's and Brutus' fall I will now endeavor an answer to these queries.

The distinction between the radical non-tragic and radical tragic types has been made clear in the previous chapters; radical non-tragic changes into radical tragic under the following circumstances and I shortly recapitulate:

– A radical attitude change takes place towards violence, society and way of coexistence.[29] In the chapters on tragedy and the chapter on *Macbeth*, I pointed at the radical and total involvement of the tragic hero in his society. In *Hamlet*, this involvement is broadened to all those affected.
– A horizontalization of relationships (implying a unity in will and purpose to make the community work) *and* a deconstruction of values and constructs.

Out of these conditions (after completion of the violence paradigm), state violence evolves as described in the chapter on *Hamlet*. State violence also needs to be controlled.[30]

When this fails, most likely, a radical non-tragic violence will take over. What does this look like in a society already in turmoil? Referring back to *Julius Caesar*, I distill the following general characteristics:

– A tendency towards self-interest instead of communal interest can be detected (here I also fall back on Renan).

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27 As explained in the introduction, I only discuss violence in this thesis in relation to nationhood and nation-state.

28 Of course and needless to note, but for the sake of completeness, distinguishing one thing from the other falls into a different league altogether than normative labelling.

29 I bring to mind that tragedy principally occurs in times of social transformation and turmoil. If this basic condition is absent, then most probably the occurrence or artwork is not tragic in the Periclean or Shakespearean sense of the word and consequently, no radical tragic violence can be detected. Examples of good but non-tragic plays: *Death of a Salesman* and *Waiting for Godot*. Our 21th century timeframe is an excellent indicator of tragedy of the Shakespearean kind.

30 In the glory days of the Roman Republic, this was achieved by a counterbalance of societal forces and the Senate. Nowadays, this is done by a Montesquieu-ean separation of powers as described above.

- Laws are no longer obeyed or respected.
- Communal values become blurred, twisted, or lose meaning.
- Moral confusion in communal leaders is seen, fused by popular opinion.
- Consumerism (of values, rights, communal achievements and goods).
- The obvious reciprocity of dependencies between classes disappears.

These are the outward identifiers of a nation-state in decline.

If these are but the outward identifiers, the logical follow-up question is: from what source does this state of affairs spring? Above, I already mentioned man's existential needs and their embeddedness in political construct and culture in a more general way. Well then, in the above play, Shakespeare suggests an ideal interrelationship (and reciprocity) between nation-state, values, the legislative body on the one hand and the existential primeval needs[31] of man on the other. We saw in the play that if a construct[32] no longer mirrors and reinforces the primeval existential needs of its inhabitants, the construct in its entirety cannot hold. The construct's (legal and governmental) achievements will degenerate and fall back into legal primitivism.

At this point, an answer can be given to the question with which this journey was set out: is the Shakespearean violence paradigm related to (the proper functioning of) the public construct and if so, in what way? The first part of the question can be answered with a resounding *yes*. The violence paradigm is of tantamount importance for the ultimate (renewal of the) form and content of the public/legal construct. As we have seen in this play and the previous ones, its outcome (tragic or non-tragic) determines the difference between an improved construct or a degenerated or repressive construct; in other words, the proper discernment between the types of violence is of enormous importance.

9.4 Renan, Weber and Cicero: evaluation of their conceptualizations of the nation-state

In the previous chapter I raised questions on Renan's nation-state concept and Weber's definition of the state concept: did Renan's description sufficiently cover the nation part and was Weber in fact not too minimalistic in his state definition? Apart from the hiatus in their perception of the violence concept (mentioned in the above paragraph) I would like to make a few more comments on Renan's and Weber's concept of nation-state.

31 Recapitulating: protection from violence (from internal and external sources), secure and safe embedding in one's social surroundings/culture, the need for liberty and the need for fairness in justice.

32 Of course, here the nation-state construct is meant.

In the analysis of the play I already concluded that Weber had not sufficiently taken into account the fact that state violence must also be controlled. An awareness of which Shakespeare evidences in the drama; it is especially articulated by Cassius (act 1, II). The (theatrically futile, but politically significant) presence of Cicero also indicates this.

With respect to Renan I would like to complete his description on nation and nation forming with the following, based on the reasons and arguments just given: a nation is not just formed by unification of will, a shared set of values and a "positive spirit and a warm heart" but also, and even more so I dare say, by the success (of the nation as a whole) to adequately recognize, respect and sustain the primeval existential needs of its citizens. For this, and indeed Renan's descriptions do imply this, a reciprocity and unity in purpose of all parties involved is needed. In *Julius Caesar,* we see this condition failing and consequently the nation-state construct implodes into civil war.

Cicero emphasized the importance of keeping values and legality vibrant and alive, deeming it of vital importance for the preservation and maintenance of a healthy body politic. In Cicero's quotes, previously cited, as in Shakespeare, we find this notion of reciprocity and balance necessary to do this. Consequently, it can be said that Cicero's views in this respect seamlessly merge with those of Shakespeare; much arguing for the universality of both Shakespeare and Cicero.

9.5 The liquidations by Hamlet and Brutus

In the last two plays discussed, the protagonists are placed in a tragic crisis situation tested in that specific tragic all-out way: Brutus and Hamlet. How should we interpret their motivation with regard to the murders they committed? Are they not equally "possessed" by radical non-tragic violence and do they not simply use the same argumentation that has been the favorite excuse of many a usurper throughout time: we kill to cleanse society of subversive elements (read: troublesome elements, just like Julius Caesar had got rid of the two tribunes)? In other words, are they too guilty of "purges" much like the "Great Purge" by Stalin (1936 – 38)?

Brutus killed Julius, using an excuse similar to the one just mentioned, but deemed it inopportune to kill others from the latter's entourage. Hamlet first killed Polonius, then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, concluding his escapades with his foster father Claudius.[33]

Was Brutus right not to kill Mark Antony in light of the Stalin remark? After all, a horizontalization of relationships takes place after a successful violence paradigm; therefore, the sparing of Mark Antony's life seems a

33 The accidental death of Laertes cannot be called a murder by Hamlet, since the prince deemed it a romping in camaraderie. Moreover, he did not know the rapier was poisoned.

sensible thing to do given a future cooperation in establishing a new administration.

Indeed, in this context, it is also important to be able to forgive and "forget." Renan already pointed towards the principle of collective forgetfulness and Alexandre del Valle also discusses the concept of forgetting in his book *Het Avondlandcomplex*. The fourth chapter is relevant.[34] How should we deal with collaborators with a dictatorial criminal or repressive regime? Must they all be executed, or otherwise punished? Or is forgetting and forgiving and making a new start together a better approach? Challenging worries indeed for both Brutus and Hamlet.

Of course, not just the question of individual guilt is at stake here, but also – and added to the issue of future cooperation, mentioned above – the problem of the social cohesion in the new regime; the post-tyrannical regime. The proponents of forgiveness (among others: Nelson Mandela, Jacques Derrida and De Gaulle) emphasize the need to end division. This means that forgiveness would be a sane strategy: the nation must be brought back together. Derrida articulated this in *Le siècle et le Pardon* with the words:

> Want als men zichzelf gaat beschuldigen van – en vergiffenis gaat vragen voor alle misdaden tegen de menselijkheid die in het verleden zijn begaan, dan blijft er op de wereld geen onschuldige meer over – en dus niemand meer die als rechter of als scheidsrechter kan fungeren.[35]

To forget (violence in the past) is an important condition for the future success of the nation-state.

To the issues just mentioned:

- the need to forgive and forget
- social cohesion
- future cooperation

A fourth and additional complicating factor can be pointed out: by eliminating every ex-collaborator, the new regime could be accused of the same repressive characteristics as the previous one. And indeed, as we concluded, by the end of the play, Brutus had already begun to exhibit some of the characteristics Julius Caesar was criticized for. How should we interpret this?

Let us contrast this behavior with Hamlet's: how are we to assess him? Does our Danish executioner have a cunning trick up his sleeve to separate future foe from future confederate? Of course, he has not, or has he? Before answering this question, let me upfront debunk the delusion that there is an easy protocol that, when correctly performed, will hand us the right decision,

34 Alexandre del Valle, *Het Avondlandcomplex*, pp. 161 – 209.
35 Ibid, p. 161. Derrida cited by Del Valle.

followed by the desired result. Hamlet has, however, a strategy, a plan. He acquired such a stratagem not because of his philosophical inclination or as a result of a conscious decision – which is the way in which Brutus seems to tackle life's challenges. Hamlet bravely faced the task he was burdened with and (almost succumbing) managed to live through the agony of a tragic crisis. By the grace of surviving this he gained the necessary tragic wisdom and experience helping him to discern friend from enemy. He has undergone an attitudinal change – and he is now able to discern the difference between horizontality (all men having the same existential needs as pointed out earlier) and vertical relations – after which his perception of his opponents has become incisive indeed. It is for this reason that I argued in the last few chapters that no man can be leader who has not gone through his tragic crisis; evidently not just for the sake of the crisis or the suffering, but for the accumulation of the necessary wisdom and knowledge.

Hamlet knows what is at stake: the survival and salubrity of the kingdom. I argue that Hamlet discerns what type of violence his opponents are using: Claudius, in order to attain his goal, intends to kill off everyone standing in his way, using whatever means. In other words, this clan leader makes use of radical non-tragic violence only. Because of his tragic experience, it is plausible that Hamlet realizes that Claudius' entourage is more of the same: Polonius being an unscrupulous and corrupt opportunist and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spineless contributors to Claudius' rule. Hamlet most probably realizes that it will be a near impossibility to build a just nation in equal collaboration with people cooperating in the execution of forms of violence that Hamlet intends to end. It takes a shrewd and judicious man, having gone through a tragic crisis, to be able to recognize this.

Brutus, on the other hand, has no clue. I pointed out above that the realization that existential needs are the same for all humans (horizontalization) takes place after the successful conclusion of the violence paradigm, however, Brutus did not find a way to complete it satisfactorily, therefore his "horizontalization"[36] in the guise of sparing Mark Antony's life and letting him give his speech is an empty gesture. This decision was not informed by tragic experience but by his self-image as a Stoic and a great leader of men.[37] Besides, in the sphere of the tragic, one cannot barter or hustle one aspect of the process for another, or – in this case – skip the difficult part: the crisis itself.

The mistakes Brutus makes are informed by blindness as to the motivations of his friends and enemies; he misses tragic wisdom and insight. For these reasons he would have compromised any future endeavor in the sphere of governance anyway.

36 In Brutus 's case, amounting to the sparing of a social equal, thus confusing horizontalization with social and/or value equality.

37 Fed by Cassius in act 1; today we would say Brutus could have had a tinge of the narcissistic.

In other words and concluding, the decision to either eliminate or forgive former enemies should depend not on the considerations of expediency mentioned above, but on the question whether the one making the decision is in possession of tragic wisdom and there is only one way to acquire this.

9.6 Tragic existentialist world view of Shakespeare; its secularity

In his tragedies, Shakespeare demonstrates that violence is the basis of every form of human coexistence. With this realization, Shakespeare was centuries ahead of his time. Only in the 19th century did Renan recognize this (*contre coeur*), Weber state it (with more conviction) and Nietzsche (fully convinced) tried to analyze it to find its ultimate rationale. Later anthropologists and philosophers built on their ideas.

Shakespeare's awareness is reflected in the violence paradigm. Above, I have touched upon this way of looking at the world: his tragic existentialist world-view. As discussed, the violence paradigm does not just entail the straightforward singular inevitability of destruction and despair. With it, Shakespeare simultaneously conveys an awareness of hope, dignity and self-reliance. *The* striking characteristic of the tragic existential world-view is the accomplishment of nullifying verticality after the tragic crisis. This translates itself into the absence of a winner/loser position.[38] I consider this feature to be of the most significant importance. I have found no other theory on violence describing such a position.[39] Neither Nietzsche, nor Hannah Arendt[40] nor any other philosopher or thinker[41] since has, to my knowledge, spoken of the relevance of this change – and of its outcome. They all stopped at the ultimate outcome of radical non-tragic violence: the continuation of verticality of relations. Therefore, I will here – again – emphasize my point from yet a slightly different point of view.

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38 Of course, this is yet another aspect of horizontalization, besides the aforementioned unity in will and the united purpose just after the finalization of the violence paradigm.

39 The only doctrine coming close is Christianity, when it preaches: love thine enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:43-48). Perhaps this feature accounts for its universal success.

40 In spite of their often razor-sharp and intelligent analysis of modern society, which can still be called topical. As an important source of public violence, Hannah Arendt identifies the progressive centralization of nation-state constructs. In my opinion, this is half the story. It is not centralization in itself but the accompanying increasing verticalization of relations between state and its citizens (resultant of centralization) that is the problem in my view. Unfortunately, she does not identify this feature as such.

41 An interesting debate on violence between two esteemed Dutch philosophers springs to mind: Hans Achterhuis and Ruud Welten. They too remain focused on the verticality of relationships, which makes their altercation imprisoned in its circularity and therefore pointless.
Source: Studium Generale Utrecht 2012: https://www.bnnvara.nl/joop/artikelen/wanneer-is-geweld-gerechtvaardigd.

The horizontality, which is the resultant of the finalization of the violence paradigm, assures the absence of triumphant outcry, claim to victory, or humiliation and degradation (relative to the angle taken). As pointed out in previous chapters, no guilty parties are pinpointed, there is no sin, no consciousness-ridden culpable participants and no atonement for wrongs done. Nor are there any obvious victims to be recognized, since all are equally subjected to the effects of violence. There is only the philosophical realization of what human fallibility[42] can bring about. This awareness of and equally shared encounter with victimization is unique to the violence paradigm. Through the very destruction of old constructs, new and different possibilities can be probed in a sphere of equal relationships: man being one in purpose (for as long as the tragic wisdom lasts) and independent of any transcendental source or force. The Shakespearean violence paradigm emancipates man from religion and its adjacent concepts: fate and predestination. The absence of the didactical admonition in Shakespearean tragedy is an added factor contributing to man's dignity and independence. These occurrences fundamentally change man's place in his world. As the Greeks already realized, man is *deinon*[43] and has dignity.

In Shakespeare's tragic existential world-view we witness how violence and disruption are used not for their own sakes,[44] but as vehicles towards a deeper understanding of this human condition, trying thus to (temporarily) overcome or handle the human predicament of imperfection. In a more general way: Shakespearean tragedy copes with violence, stages a reaction to it and hands us a mode to deal with it ourselves. These qualities make the tragic existential worldview of Shakespeare secular and universalist in outlook.

42 As in: violence and disruption.

43 Awe commanding; see also my chapter on tragedy, where the word is evaluated.

44 There is discussion among scholars about his early work, notably *Titus Andronicus*. I will pass by this discussion as this work is not part of this study.