

# *Ancient Tragedy as Morphogenetic Fracture of the Modern Subject: Nietzsche and Freud in Comparison*

di Silvia Capodivacca\*

## ABSTRACT

The contribution aims to investigate how the ancient form of the theatrical representation is constituted as an aesthetic and morphological prodrome of the peculiar conception of the individual that is placed between the abyssal spread of the Dionysian on the one hand and the poisoned gift of Prometheus on the other.

Reviewing some passages from the texts of Nietzsche and Freud, the thesis we intend to support is based on the assumption that the reference to the archetypal figures of ancient tragedy is not limited to outline the features of an irresolvable contradiction, or, rather, sinking into the abyss of this same statement means creating something that somehow goes beyond it. Hence the formulation of the tragic in terms of a morphogenetic fracture: an immense caesura, an appalling and non-recomposable crisis, from which nonetheless springs an army of forms of reality unparalleled in size and nature than any other generative force. The contradiction assumes in this sense the character of essentiality because it is constituted as *prius*, requirement and false bottom constantly present in every real *morphé*.

## KEYWORDS

Nietzsche, Freud, Tragedy, Apollineus/Dionysiac, Oedipus

## 1. *Tragedy in Ancient Times*

The ancient tragedy is universally known for having brought on the theatrical – thus public – stage countless forms of contradiction and ambiguity embodied by the various characters whose story is told each time. Sophocles first of all stages the idea of duplicity bringing it to a level of paradox that reaches paroxysm with the narration of the story of Oedipus: key figure of the ancient drama, marrying – although unaware of the parental relationship – his mother Jocasta he is in fact at the same time father and brother of his offspring, husband and son of his partner, savior of Thebes, which acclaims him king, and usurper who leads the same city to ruin.<sup>1</sup> That his story has an

\* Università di Udine, [silvia.capodivacca@gmail.com](mailto:silvia.capodivacca@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> See Curi U. *Endiadi. Figure della duplicità*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2002, pp. 20-8. About

exemplary value for the human condition is also surreptitiously confirmed by the episode of the Sphinx, prelude to his proclamation as king. Sophocles does not indicate the first – interrogative – part of the riddle that the Sphinx, half lion and half man, poses to Oedipus, as to all those who passed that way. He just sticks to inform us of the fact that, unlike the others who disastrously tried the enterprise, Oedipus has been able to solve the riddle and therefore had free access to the city that the monster protected with its threatening stateliness. If the choice of the playwright to evade the enunciation of the question is probably due to the fact that at the time that was a question well known to the public, so much so as to become proverbial and therefore surmountable in the narrative, today that crosstalk provides us with one more element to understand the paradigmatic nature of the story of Oedipus. Faced with the question which, in Diodorus Siculus' formulation, asks: "What is it that is at the same time a biped, a triped, and a quadruped?,"<sup>2</sup> in fact, Oedipus answers, icastically: "Man". Human beings creep on all fours when they are infants, walks on two legs as adults, and, with the coming of old age, often resort to the support of a stick – but it is not really Oedipus' cunning that is striking here. Rather, with the solution of the puzzle he demonstrates two fundamental things: first of all, to know better than others what the Sphinx alludes to, that is to say, to know what human beings are and to understand, secondly, what their nature actually consists of, the enunciation of which, on the contrary, appeared illogical, impossible to the others who were confronted with the question, to the point of giving up imagining a plausible answer. On the contrary, by answering the enigma Oedipus informs us that the nature of the individual is to be a multiplicity, a set of manifestations of existence apparently not compatible with each other: Oedipus, in other words, solves the riddle by embodying the contradiction, that is to say, becoming himself the witness of

other philosophical aspects of ancient tragedy, see also Leonard M., *Tragedy and the Seductions of Philosophy*, in "The Cambridge Classical Journal", 58 (2012), pp. 145-64. The importance Freud attached to Oedipus and to the complex he symbolizes with his story is well known; Nietzsche as well dedicated some notes to the same character. Closer examinations of these readings of the Greek hero can be found in Roudinesco E., *Freud and Regicide*, in "American Imago", 68/4 (2011), pp. 605-23; in Lobo A.L., *Freud Face à L'Antiquité Grecque: Le Cas Du Complexe D'Edipe*, in "Anabases", 8 (2008), pp. 153-85; and in Rudnytsky P.L., *Nietzsche's Oedipus*, in "American Imago", 42/4 (1985), pp. 413-439. I would also like to thank Prof. Horst Bredekamp who suggested me the recently published volume by Asmus Trautsch on this subject: *Der Umschlag von Allem in Nichts: Theorie Tragischer Erfahrung*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, in 12 voll., Engl. transl. by C.H. Oldfather, Heinemann, London 1933, vol. IV, 64, 3.

logically irreconcilable antinomies.

If the case of Oedipus is emblematic and now iconic, the idea that Greek theater reveals a perspective on the human being that highlights intrinsic oppositions emerges also from other famous staged stories. Consider, for example, the conflict that inwardly lacerates Antigone (whose name etymologically means ‘born against’), Oedipus’ daughter-sister, who shares with him an equally tragic destiny: she is determined to give burial to her brother Polynices despite the prohibitions of Creon, her mother Jocasta’s brother and therefore the girl’s maternal uncle. She is therefore locked up in a cave, condemned for not having accepted the image of an enemy that in a univocal and dogmatic way Creon attributes to her brother. According to her uncle, all that matters about Polynices is that he has besieged Thebes and therefore his corpse does not deserve dignity nor compassion. He is uncompromising in his determination to dwell upon only one aspect of his nephew’s personal history, which is instead much more articulated and less linear than he wants to understand it. Antigone, for her part, does not accept the simplification and continues to see in Polynices even a loving brother, even one who was humiliated and then unjustly exiled from his city, even a person violently killed. She therefore contests Creon’s simplification and her desire not to neglect even one aspect of the story leads her to conclude that Polynices too, even the ‘enemy’ of the city of Thebes deserves to be buried there. As in the case of her father, however, in gaining awareness of what essentially is the human being – not a stereotype or a cliché, but always a multidimensional figure, unambiguously unclassifiable, whose profiles are often inwardly in disagreement – Antigone does not face a properly bright destiny. The depth of the acquired wisdom runs parallel, for the protagonist of the Sophoclean drama, to the misfortune of her fate: tragedy is not an accessory or avoidable element in her story framework. As Aeschylus declares in the famous adage of the *Agamemnon*: *pathei mathos*.<sup>3</sup> It is the pain that generates knowledge, it is only by passing through an ordeal that one gains access to the truth of things and even once one has come to understand the world in its essential plot, this goal does not bring with it a happy enlightenment, because it is a question of coming into contact with a difficult reality, with respect to which one can never lower the guard, i.e. never stop that training of self-awareness which enables to grasp even what appears unacceptable. Thus, Polynices is given

<sup>3</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, in H. Weir Smyth (ed.), *Aeschylus*, in 2 vol., Heinemann, London 1926: “wisdom cometh by suffering”, vol. 2, v. 177, p. 19.

back his dignity as a human being, his humanity at the price of Antigone's tragedy. Equally, the fact that Oedipus understands himself and the likes of him by solving the enigma of the Sphinx is inseparable from the monstrosity of the parental relations that he weaves thanks to and starting from that same acute answer.

As for the specific content to which suffering gives access, Oedipus and Antigone seem to communicate and incorporate the impossibility for the subject to give themselves a linear determination. In a quick and inevitably incomplete overview of some other crucial characters of ancient drama, among the many female characters who tread the stage, Cassandra is a seer who foresees the worst misfortunes and precisely because she is a prophetess of doom she is systematically ignored – she is therefore characterized by an ability which is extraordinary but in fact unusable, an exceptional gift that is at the same time the sure sign of her misfortune; Medea, on the other hand, is at the same time a caring mother and a ruthless murderer of her offspring, without the second aspect of her character really coming into conflict with the first – until their last breath she loves her children and therefore (in all the apparent senselessness of this consequentiality) she cannot but take their lives; the Erinyes, with their own metamorphosis into Eumenides, that is to say, in the occasional transformation of their name into an epithet that evokes the utmost benevolence and good disposition of mind, teach in an almost didactic way how in fact the nature of each is never determined once and for all, but on the contrary contains in itself also its opposite, the exact opposite of what has emerged so far. The message that obliquely crosses the tragic representations breaks in fact the classical idea of univocal individuation and therefore reduces the concept of individual into fragments of contrasting meanings. Traditionally, in ancient manifestations the actor wears a mask, a *prosopon*: rather than concealing the face that hides through it, it can be metaphorically understood as an expedient aimed at holding together the pieces of a subject that is ambiguous, equivocal, twofold – substantially shattered.<sup>4</sup> The Greek tragic heroes define the outline of the subject in an unusual way: the man-form emerges simultaneously with the pathetic manifestation of its inconsistency.

<sup>4</sup> G. Vattimo speaks of the total assumption of the mask, which leads on the one hand to a complete identification, and on the other to a redemption of the mask itself “from every element of lie and deception”, “in a world where being continually different and transforming oneself ceaselessly are not fiction and disguise, but the consequence and the sign of a recovered original vitality”, *Il soggetto e la maschera. Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione*, Bompiani, Milano 2003, p. 36, our transl.

## 2. Nietzsche's Re-Birth of Tragedy

In modern times, it is above all Nietzsche who weighs and re-vives this conspicuous heritage to reconstitute the broken subject, without, however, this going in the direction of a linear recomposition of the individual; rather, in his work he proceeds to outline the traits – and with them also the lines of flight – of a singularity which always exceeds univocally categorizing classifications. In *The Birth of Tragedy* the sense of the tragic unfolds around the inseparable polarity of Apolline and Dionysiac understood not only as guiding principles of artistic representations, but as paradigmatic of all human existence.

“Apollo | Dionysus. Apollo as the persistence of the world – the eternal god who makes everything equal in the world conflagration. Dionysus as metamorphosis of the world.”<sup>5</sup> This observation is part of several notes that, at least until 1872, reveal a specific interest of the author in the Apolline-Dionysiac dyad: Apollo embodying the natural propensity for order and unity, Dionysus leaving indelible traces of his turbulent passage, paradoxically with respect to their divine origin, both of them mark the human horizon in a significative way. In the classical Greek world, in which the conflict between form and its frenzied disintegration was strongly felt, the tragic art assumes a fundamental role as educator “to seriousness and horror”.<sup>6</sup> The function of tragedy is thus not exhausted in the cathartic purification of woes, but rather represents a heroic way of facing life, which leads men to face existence and the pain that it inevitably brings with it. The Apolline “parades images of life before our eyes and stimulates us to comprehend in thought the core of life contained within them. With the enormous force of image, concept, ethical doctrine and sympathetic excitement, the Apolline wrenches man out of his orgiastic self-destruction”.<sup>7</sup> The contradiction aroused by the opposition of the two principles creates a dynamic harmony between the ecstatic force and the ordering power: the individual’s ability to endure this dichotomy will then be directly proportional to the possibility of the same to free himself,<sup>8</sup> that is, to be properly himself. The Apolline is not exhausted in

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche F., *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, herausgegeben von G. Colli, M. Montinari, Walter de Gruyter, München und Berlin-New York 1980, Nachgelassene Fragmente Winter 1870-71 – Herbst 1872, vol. 7, 8 [46], p. 240, our transl.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, Nachgelassene Fragmente Ende 1870 – April 1871, 7 [101], p. 161, our transl.

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche F., *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, R. Geuss and R. Speirs (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> “Now you must only dare to be tragic human beings, for you will be released and redeemed”, urges the author, ivi, p. 98.

the ability to make homogeneous the becoming, insofar as the same uniforming property of the Apolline is not categorized in itself, that is, does not stand alone: equally, the Dionysiac is destruction, annihilation and exit from itself that acquires a sense in the incessant dialectical movement towards and against its opposite. In bringing these forces to expression, the figures that tread the stage of Greek theater are the object and subjects of continuous metamorphosis – there is no room for monological characters, not even when it comes to establishing an inner dialogue of the protagonists with themselves.

For the conceptual depth and the multiple connotations that it assumes in the pages of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, it is understandable how much the discourse on tragic and on its hero Dionysus is propagated along Nietzsche's research. Among the last texts, both *Ecce homo* and *Götzen-Dämmerung* conclude with the non-random epithets of “*Dionysus versus the crucified*” and “last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus” that the author attributes to himself.<sup>9</sup> Even more explicitly, in *Twilight of the Idols* he writes about tragedy: “Not to escape horror and pity, not to cleanse yourself of a dangerous affect by violent discharge – as Aristotle thought –; but rather, over and above all horror and pity, so that *you yourself may be* the eternal joy in becoming, – the joy that includes even the eternal joy in negating.”<sup>10</sup> This passage is significant because it not only summarizes and leads to the end the discourse on Nietzsche's way of understanding classical tragedy, but also ties up loose ends of the relationship between tragedy and negation of life, arguing that the two concepts are indeed in sharp contrast. In particular, the theoretical plexus of such a statement is highlighted when for the understanding of all his thought the author introduces the fundamental concept of “*L u s t a m V e r n i c h t e n*”, literally the pleasure of becoming nothing. Whereas the pessimistic vision of life tends to magnify the state of suffering of the individual, tragedy does not overlook the question of theodicy, but ennobles it, associating it with a properly morphogenetic value: it is from the tragic, with the tragic and in the tragic that human beings can find themselves and take care of their thoughts, that is, of what more than anything else distinguishes them from other beings. Turning to the close of *The Gay Science*, which opened with a praise to affliction, it is equally significant that the book ends with the im-

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche F., *Ecce homo. How to Become What you Are*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, A. Ridley, J. Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 151, and *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, ivi, p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 228.

age of 'great health', an idea not very developed, but nevertheless central in Nietzsche's thought. It is precisely this new concept of health, in fact, that redeems the human being from a state of disease that could destroy him. "It is perhaps only with it", Nietzsche concludes, "that *the great seriousness* really emerges; that the real question mark is posed for the first time; that the destiny of the soul changes; the hand of the clock moves forward; the tragedy begins."<sup>11</sup> This *grosse Gesundheit* is not just any kind of health: its greatness consists, in fact, in its constituting itself as a state of strong metastability, crossed by contrasting forces that make any equilibrium precarious and that, precisely because of their high rate of indetermination, make possible the spontaneous emergence of new forms, new arrangements and perspectives on reality. We therefore speak of a state of health because it is at that level that man fully expresses his creative essence, but it is not a simple health because it requires the greatest and most constant exercise of acceptance of the strong and painful contradictions of human nature. Here again, it is therefore a question of producing a framework of the human without giving in to the dissolution of the inconsistencies that connote it and that indeed bring out its peculiar specificity. It is not a matter of deciding between the rational, luminous and Apolline aspects of existence at the expense of the more ctonic, humble and impulsive elements that also distinguish it; the challenge is rather to bring out a form of the individual that does not follow the idea of beauty as a balanced proportion of forces in agreement with each other.

### 3. *Civilization and Its Tragedy in Freud*

The theme of the discomfort of the subject in the civilized society is widely treated in Freud's work: according to him, the survival of the individuals depends on the same civilization that forces in chains their basic drives. The psychoanalyst provides an original interpretation of the character of Prometheus to show that the very existence of human beings is closely related to the frustration of their drives.<sup>12</sup> The Freudian hermeneutic of the myth has as a direct antecedent a psychoanalytic consideration about the establishment, among primitive peoples, of the faculty of preserving

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche F., *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, B. Williams (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, p. 247.

<sup>12</sup> In *Sigmund Freud and the Greek Mythological Tradition*, in "Journal of the American Academy of Religion" 43/1 (1975), pp. 3-14, C. Downing investigates "Freud's understanding of the role of myth in human life", p. 3.

heat sources. It can be found in a footnote of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where the author lets himself go to an assumption which is extravagant, but yet for him worth spreading: “It is as though primal man had the habit, when he came in contact with fire, of satisfying an infantile desire connected with it, by putting it out with a stream of his urine. [...] The first person to renounce this desire and spare the fire was able to carry it off with him and subdue it to his own use. By damping down the fire of his own sexual excitation, he had tamed the natural force of fire. This great cultural conquest was thus the reward for his renunciation of instinct.”<sup>13</sup> Although relegated to a footnote, this hypothesis had a certain resonance at the time of the publication of the book and within a few years Freud collected more than one criticism, but also several ethnographic confirmation by some scholars who had been confronted with his suggestion.<sup>14</sup> The discordant voices did not prevent him then to propose and reiterate, in a very short contribution of 1931, the theory that interprets the acquisition of fire as a moment from which Man had to give up his full libidinal satisfaction. The version of the myth that the Viennese doctor takes into consideration is mainly the Hesiodic one,<sup>15</sup> according to which the Titan brings fire to men, hiding it inside a hollow stick. The punishment for this act contrary to the will of the Olympian gods forces Prometheus to remain chained to a cliff from which every day an eagle devours his liver, which also regenerates daily, in a circle of excruciating pain and suffering. In Freud’s perspective, the hollow stick in which the fire is carried together with its ‘heat’ represent, respectively, the penis and the sexual drive contained therein; the character of impiousness associated with the act of the Titan falls within the semantics of taboo that almost always connotes the horizon of sexuality, while the liver, seat of every

<sup>13</sup> Freud S., *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, in 24 voll., edited by J. Strachey in collaboration with A. Freud, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London 1966, vol. XXI, p. 90. On the same wavelength is the work of Frazer J.G., *Myths of the origins of fire*, Routledge, London 2019. Of a different opinion is instead G. Bachelard, who considers Prometheus as an emblem of a complex that concerns the will to knowledge rather than sexuality: “The problem of obtaining a personal knowledge of fire is the problem of *clever disobedience*. The child wishes to do what his father does, but far away from his father’s presence, and so like a little Prometheus he steals some matches”, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1938), Engl. transl. by A.C.M. Ross, Routledge and Kegan, London 1964, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> See in this regard the list of validations (by E. H. Erlenmeyer and G. Buschan) and denials (by A. Schaeffer and E. Lorenz) that Freud makes known in *The Acquisition and Control of Fire*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, cit., vol. XXII, p. 187 and that lead him “to take up this theme again”, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See. Hesiod. *Theog.*, vv. 507-616, G.W. Most (ed.), Hesiod. *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 43-53.



passion and appetite, is being recreated just like every instinct. Finally, Freud explains, the Titan who imposed the preservation and not the extinction of the 'fire' of each, that is, who forced individuals not to satisfy their libidinal desires, such a partisan of sexual repression can only be the recipient of a fierce punishment, a revenge by the injured party, i.e. the gods / instincts cheated.<sup>16</sup>

The cruelty of the punishment inflicted on Prometheus is therefore derived from the fact that his act marks an equally painful caesura: by stealing the fire he imposes the preservation of sexual instinct, prohibits the extinguishing of the heat of passion, inhibits satisfaction and thus depotentiates the primordial predominance of the Id. Out of metaphor, Freud's position is clear: the survival of Man on earth is linked to a social evolution that is based primarily on a drive renunciation and his remarks do not stop at the level of the observation of the facts: the originality of the Freudian approach to the issue lies in fact in the daring the author shows in tracing a balance of what the subject loses and gains when it fits within the social order. "In fact, primitive man was better off in knowing no restrictions of instinct. To counterbalance this, his prospects of enjoying this happiness for any length of time were very slender. Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security."<sup>17</sup> The sense of unease that these words induce gives voice to the tragic and at the same time makes visible one of the forms to which it gives consistency, that is civilization, or more specifically human being as a social animal. From the laceration created between the elementary impulses and the repression of the same, humans gain indeed their very being in the world, their only chance of survival. "What we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery and we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions. I call this contention astonishing because, in whatever way we may define the concept of civilization, it is a certain fact that all the things with which we seek to protect ourselves against the threats that emanate from the sources of suffering are part of that very civilization."<sup>18</sup> Sublima-

<sup>16</sup> See Freud S., *The Acquisition and Control of Fire*, cit., pp. 188-9.

<sup>17</sup> Freud S., *Civilization and Its Discontents*, cit., p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, p. 86. On this issue, we choose to side with the author, against Marcuse's thesis, according to which "first, Freud's theoretical conception itself seems to refute his consistent denial of the historical possibility of a non-repressive civilization, and, second, the very achievements of repressive civilization seem to create the preconditions for the gradual abolition of repression", Marcuse H., *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955), Beacon Press, Boston 1974, p. 5. The breadth of the notion of *Kultur* and the intrinsic link that binds it to the concept of repression makes us lean towards the structural impossibility of eliminating the latter without the annihilation of the former.

tion holds the individual in the vicelike grip of inhibition and at the same time it liberates the multiple forms of life: civilization and the conditions necessary for its manifestation, in fact, are not only instruments of interdiction of the development of fundamental drives: “No feature, however,” admits Freud, “seems better to characterize civilization than its esteem and encouragement of man’s higher mental activities – his intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements – and the leading role that it assigns to ideas in human life.”<sup>19</sup> The debasement to which the elementary drives are subjected constantly follows the pace of elevation from the animal state. It is the feeling of tragedy that makes the subject feel the pain of the gap between the awareness of the potential of their drives and the need for a limitation or deviation of the same.

Prometheus is therefore seen as the hero of civilization and its unquenchable discomfort, since he embodies on the stage the progress of humanity at the same time in which he forces human beings to a sublimation – and therefore frustration – of their instincts. Humans are such because a gesture of renunciation precedes them, a sign of an unattainable past, but an indelible mark of their essence. According to Freud’s metapsychological reconstruction, before humans, therefore in an indefinite without-human world, the earth was saturated with inhuman inhibitions; and yet in order to delineate the boundaries of their own essence – in order to assert themselves – the individuals need the negative reference to this primitiveness, which generated them and which at the same time confuses their contours. Far from standing as an obstacle, this dramatic affirmation of the human beings on the basis of what they are not and can no longer be is instead an indisputable condition of life: once again, a profound inner split does not correspond to a surrender, to non-existence, but to an exuberance of forms that are therefore inexorably linked to the contradiction to which they are paradoxically indebted.

#### 4. *Conclusions: A Morphogenetic Fracture of The Subject*

What definition can be given of the individual, once the deception of their non-origin has been unmasked? How is it possible to bring out the clear profile of a figure that continually refers back to something that there was when it was not yet properly itself?

<sup>19</sup> Freud S., *Civilization and Its Discontents*, cit., p. 94.

The answer to these puzzling issues can only question the premise, namely the actual existence of something that answers to the name of ‘subject’, ‘individual’, ‘I’. Nietzsche comes to our aid: “I take the *I itself to be a construction of thinking*, of the same rank as ‘matter’, ‘thing’, ‘substance’, ‘individual’, ‘purpose’, ‘number’: in other words, to be only a *regulative fiction* with the help of which a kind of constancy and thus ‘knowability’ is inserted into, *invented into*, a world of becoming. [...] Something can be a condition of life and *nevertheless be false*”.<sup>20</sup> Since its origin, the subject is split and no serious evaluation of human nature can disregard this statement – individual does not exist, every definition being elusive and inadequate. Every action is simultaneously performed by endless masks, deuteragonists of a protagonist who is not really substantial: “The individual contains many more people than he thinks. ‘Person’ is just an emphasis, a summary of traits and qualities.”<sup>21</sup> Yet such a tangle of ephemeral identities, this dramatic decomposition *ad infinitum*, “t r o t z d e m f a l s c h”<sup>22</sup> is an indisputable condition of life. We always attain only the surface and the veil of presumed intelligibility that covers it, but the exteriority with which we are placed in contact is a harbinger of an exceptional heterogeneity of forms as well. The individual is “die jüngste Schöpfung,”<sup>23</sup> a “work of art, but does not become conscious of this”<sup>24</sup> and tragedy records the drama that, incessantly, creates Man. Once again, at the moment in which we try to give an account of a movement that is both contradictory and inescapable, the name of tragedy comes to our lips, and is

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche F., *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, R. Bittner (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, May-July 1885, 35 [35], pp. 20-1. There are multiple references by the author to the concept. For example: “The ‘individual’ is only a sum of conscious feelings and judgments and errors, a belief [...], a ‘unit’ that does not hold up”, Nietzsche F., *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr-Herbst 1881*, in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, cit., vol. 9, pp. 442-3, our transl. And again: “It is impossible to prove the existence of individuals. There is nothing fixed about the ‘personality’”, *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr 1884*, ivi, vol. 11, 25 [508], p. 147, our transl. For Brianese: “We come across the radical critique of the concept of ‘subjectivity’: Nietzsche denies any value to the alleged consistency of the subject’s self thought as a permanent center and agent of reality and unmasks it as the fundamental fiction from which the concepts (in turn false and mystifying) of ‘being’ and ‘substance’ derive”, in *Nietzsche: il nichilismo come volontà di potenza*, in Nietzsche F., *La volontà di potenza*, G. Brianese (ed.), Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2006, p. 26, our transl.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche F., *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr 1884*, in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, cit., vol. 11, 25 [363], p. 108, our transl.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche F., *Nachgelassene Fragmente Mai-Juli 1885*, in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, cit., vol. , 35 [35], p. 526.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche F., *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, cit., vol. 4, p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche F., *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, R. Geuss and A. Nehamas (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, 2dn ed., Beginning of 1871, 10 [1], p. 65.

increasingly characterized as an essential feature of a certain way of looking at reality. Tragic frenzy favorably inhabits contradiction and produces difference in it: the tragic subject, consequently, is such only by virtue of the fact that they are able to generate in pain the forms of life – one must keep always “one foot in tragedy which tears you apart even as it delights you.”<sup>25</sup>

Holding firm to the assumptions expressed so far, from different points of view the tragic is increasingly defined as necessary. It is necessary and equally tragic, first of all, the war of contradictions in which the individual is constantly thrown: reality is shown through a series of phenomena that we call tragic because they are made up of indistinguishable contradictors. With Jaspers: “Truth and reality split apart. In consequence of this split, men must support each other in community, and they must battle in collision. Tragic knowledge sees those battles which are unavoidable.”<sup>26</sup> The world is thus understood in terms of a bipolar ambivalence and, likewise, this equivalence of opposites cannot but generate first and foremost pain and bewilderment. This is the *ananke* of which speak the theatrical characters considered at the beginning, bringing on stage the truth, but also the pain that accompanies its unveiling: “Each time the individual is defeated: and yet we perceive his destruction as a victory. For the tragic hero it is necessary to be destroyed by that which is intended to make him victorious.”<sup>27</sup> The lesson Nietzsche gives us consists, secondly, in seeing the tragic as a necessity in an optative sense, a hope and a useful movement to get out of the mesh of romantic pessimism: “I promise a *tragic* age: tragedy, the highest art of saying yes to life, will be reborn when humanity has moved beyond consciousness of the harshest though most necessary wars without suffering from it.”<sup>28</sup> In opposition to an attitude of renunciation

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche F., *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, R.-P. Horstmann and J. Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 130. The same intersection between aesthetics and ontology of the tragic can be found in the famous aphorism which reads: “Grand style originates when the beautiful carries off the victory over the monstrous”, in *Human All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*, Engl. transl. by H.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 334.

<sup>26</sup> Jaspers K., *Tragedy Is Not Enough* (1952), Engl. transl. by H.A.T. Reiche, H.T. Moore, K.W. Deutsch, The Beacon Press, Boston 1952, p. 46.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche F., *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, cit., End of 1870 – April 1871, 7 [128], p. 51. On this topic, see P.J.M. Van Tongeren, ‘A Splendid Failure’: Nietzsche’s *Understanding of the Tragic*, in “Journal of Nietzsche Studies”, 11 (1996), pp. 23-34.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche F., *Ecce homo*, cit., p. 110. On the relation between tragedy and pessimism see also Dienstag J.F., *Tragedy, Pessimism, Nietzsche*, in “New Literary History”, 35/1 (2004), pp. 83-101. We report that number 35/1 (2004) of “New Literary History” is entirely dedicated to the theme of *Rethinking Tragedy*; see also, Steiner G., ‘Tragedy’, *Reconsidered*, cit., pp. 1-15.

towards the world, the tragic assumes in this meaning an even soteriological function: through it danger is strictly bound to the possibility to get out of the unproductive impasse of negativism: the tragic subject does not look for annihilation, but meets it in the eternal affirmation of every alternative. In this way, makes its way a third way of the necessity of tragedy, this time seen as an unavoidable condition for the occurrence of an event: "Creating is redemption from pain. But pain is necessary for the one who creates."<sup>29</sup> There are a thousand wises to express beauty, health, happiness – the tragic shows them in their completeness. This can be read between the lines of the work of Freud, who also comes to explicitly declare that "the only thing that matters is that the individual is wretched, irrespective of how:"<sup>30</sup> in the psychoanalytic context, suffering can in fact be defined as that particular experience that makes the organism able to reverse the 'usual' reaction to an external stimulus, which would otherwise provide for the retention of energy within. The displeasure in fact triggers a discharge that, while not having a predetermined reactive direction, nevertheless in some way is hence developed and released. The fulcrum of Freud's practice, the goal to which the Viennese doctor turns his research, lies in the ability to discharge an affection, or a certain amount of energy. We would therefore say that the individuals 'heal' at the moment in which they allow an excitement to burst outwards, that is, at the moment in which they feel pain.

Reviewing some passages in the texts of the two authors mentioned, the thesis that has emerged is based on the assumption that the reference to the archetypal figures of ancient tragedy is not limited to outline the features of an irresolvable contradiction, or, rather, sinking into the abyss of this same statement means creating something that somehow goes beyond it. Hence the formulation of the tragic in terms of a morphogenetic fracture: an immense caesura, an appalling and non-recomposable crisis, from which nonetheless springs an army of forms of reality unparalleled in size and nature than any other generative force. The contradiction assumes in this sense the character of essentiality because it is constituted as *prius*, requirement and false bottom constantly present in every real *morphé*.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche F., Nachgelassene Fragmente November 1882 – Februar 1883, in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, cit., vol. 11, 5 [1], p. 213.

<sup>30</sup> Freud S., *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Engl. transl. by H.R. Kirkby, Penguin, London 2003, p. 208.

## Bibliography

- Aeschylus *Agamemnon*, in H. Weir Smyth (ed.), *Aeschylus*, in 2 vol., Heinemann, London 1926.
- Bachelard, G. *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1938), Engl. transl. by A.C.M. Ross, Routledge and Kegan, London 1964.
- Curi, U. *Endiadi. Figure della duplicità*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2002.
- Dienstag, J.F. *Tragedy, Pessimism, Nietzsche*, in "New Literary History", 35/1 (2004), pp. 83-101.
- Diodorus Siculus *The Library of History*, in 12 voll., Eng. transl. by C.H. Oldfather, Heinemann, London 1933.
- Downing, C. *Sigmund Freud and the Greek Mythological Tradition*, in "Journal of the American Academy of Religion" 43/1 (1975), pp. 3-14.
- Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, in 24 vol., J. Strachey in collaboration with A. Freud (eds.), The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London 1966
- Freud, S. *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Engl. transl. by H.R. Kirby, Penguin, London 2003
- Hesiod *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, Engl. transl. by G.W. Most (ed.), Harvard University Press 2006.
- Jaspers, K. *Tragedy Is Not Enough* (1952), Engl. transl. by H.A.T. Reiche, H.T. Moore, and K.W. Deutsch, The Beacon Press, Boston 1952.
- Leonard, M. *Tragedy and the Seductions of Philosophy*, in "The Cambridge Classical Journal", 58 (2012), pp. 145-64.
- Lobo, A.L. *Freud Face à L'Antiquité Grecque: Le Cas Du Complexe D'Œdipe*, in "Anabases", 8 (2008), pp. 153-85
- Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955), Beacon Press, Boston 1974.
- Nietzsche, F. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, in 15 voll., G. Colli, M. Montinari (eds.), De Gruyter, München-Berlin-New York 1980
- Nietzsche, F. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, R. Geuss and R. Speirs (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007.
- Nietzsche, F., *Human All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*, Engl. transl. by H.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005
- Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, B. Williams (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008.
- Nietzsche F., *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of*

- the Future*, R.-P. Horstmann and J. Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002
- Nietzsche, F. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, A. Ridley, J. Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006.
- Nietzsche, F. *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, R. Geuss, A. Nehamas, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010.
- Nietzsche, F. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, R. Bittner (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006.
- Roudinesco, E. *Freud and Regicide*, in "American Imago", 68/4 (2011), pp. 605-23.
- Rudnytsky, P.L. *Nietzsche's Oedipus*, in "American Imago", 42/4 (1985), pp. 413-39.
- Steiner, G. 'Tragedy', *Reconsidered*, in "New Literary History", 35/1 (2004), pp. 1-15.
- Van Tongeren, P.J.M. 'A Splendid Failure': *Nietzsche's Understanding of the Tragic*, in "Journal of Nietzsche Studies", 11 (1996), pp. 23-34.
- Vattimo, G. *Il soggetto e la maschera. Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione*, Bompiani, Milano 2003.