I. Prelude

1

Against the Grain of Tragedy:
A Provocation

I

Despite the palpable decline of classical studies and the inevitable disappearance of Greek and Latin from the curriculum in general, the cultural imagination of Europe in this century has still been haunted by the tenacious undercurrent of what might be called a "philhellenic predilection," an intellectual disposition to see something essential, fundamental, and universal unfolded and obtained by turning back to and reflecting on Greek origins and the Greek tradition. It is characteristic of this recourse to Greek classical antiquity that it is largely subconscious, and as such it is very different from either that of the Renaissance or of the so-called "Greek Revival" of the nineteenth century [1], both of which were ostensively self-conscious movements and far more outspoken in their classical orientation.

Going underground, at it were, the "philhellenic predilection" in this century seems to have become ingrained all the more deeply in the Western intellectual climate. This subconscious predilection is of a piece with the ethnocentric view of European civilization: Europe as an incomparable cultural unity, which is always already guaranteed by defining itself as descendant from the seminal Graeco-Roman tradition: the hegemony of cultural self-identification with its *fons et origo*. It is true that there

1. For the "Greek Revival," see Jenkyns. For the related idea of "tyranny of Greece," cf. Butler.

has been no lack of countercurrent; structural anthropology, for instance, has provided in the name of anti-ethnocentrism a powerful countercurrent that has helped to undermine the apparently ineradicable Eurocentricity. This has indeed had some serious political consequences. And yet, on those activities which are essentially cultural and civilizational, and in which the subconscious urge tends to gather strength, the impact of any move toward cultural relativism has been but skin deep. Rather it seems to be the case that in the field of humanities in general there is still detectable the powerful flow of the Greek-ridden undercurrent. Nothing is more symbolic of this undercurrent than the Freudian complicity of psychoanalysis with Sophocles' *Oedipus rex*, and in a similar vein it is not difficult to see some vital links between the present and Greek Antiquity in Nietzsche and Heidegger, the seminal thinkers who have supplied pivotal perspectives and foundational ideas for a series of recent intellectual movements. Anti-ethnocentricism may be observed here and there, but the Greek-oriented undercurrent is tenacious.

Invisible as it is, the undercurrent makes itself most conspicuously felt in those genres which have a special bearing on the cultural identity of Europe, i.e., epic, pastoral and tragedy. The last one, tragedy, is perhaps the most remarkable case in point.

In 1938 in his book entitled *The Pleasures of Literature* John Cowper Powys said of what he saw as the contemporary cultural outlook as follows;

> the three great tragic dramatists of Athens have come to dominate not only the Theatre, where even Shakespeare's magic has been unable to resist them; but the whole field of what might be called the imaginative culture of Europe… In our own time this is still true. Greek Tragedy, and not Shakespeare, was in Hardy's mind when he wrote *The Dynasts*. Greek Tragedy, and not Shakespeare, looms up as the main aesthetic influence behind the plays of Eugene O'Neill; and when you turn from the modern stage to the modern novel, this same tremendous tradition, austere, somber, ironic, naked, and stripped, will be still found, like a submerged spirit under the ship's keel of each powerful new book, dominating the particular dark course it ploughs. (Powys 137)

Setting aside for the moment the crucial question of the origins and composition of what he called the "tremendous tradition" of Greek tragedy, and at the same time assuming for the time being that the Hegelian, Nietzschean and Freudian trends were thought of as representative of contemporary cultural ideology, then it can be said that Powys' pre-war prognostication about the spirit of Greek tragedy has largely been justified. Thus, for example, in 1973, thirty-five years after Powys had made his prophetic assertion in *The Pleasures of Literature*, Roland Barthes in his *Le Plaisir du Texte*, to our surprise, talked of tragedy as something essential, something bound up with Freudian psychoanalysis and in no way separable from *Oedipus rex*:

> Many readings are perverse, implying a split, a cleavage. Just as the child knows its mother has no penis and simultaneously believes she has one (an economy whose validity Freud has demonstrated), so the reader can keep saying: I know these are only words, but a the same… (I am moved as though these words were uttering a reality). Of all readings, that of tragedy is the most perverse: I take pleasure in hearing myself tell a story whose end I know: I know and I don't know, I act toward myself as though I did not know: I know perfectly well Oedipus will be unmasked,… but all the same… Compared to a dramatic story, which is one whose outcome is unknown, there is here an effacement of pleasure and a progression of bliss [*jouissance*] (today, in mass culture, there is an enormous consumption of "dramatics" and little bliss). (Barthes 47–48)

Barthes' distinction here between the "dramatic story," whose end is unknown on the one hand and the "tragedy," whose end is known on the other is based on the more fundamental distinction he makes between "the text of pleasure (*plaisir*)" and "the text of bliss (*jouissance*)." [2] The text of *plaisir* is the readerly—"*lisible*" as against "*scriptible*"—text, the one we do know, if unconsciously, how to read, "the text that comes from culture and does not break with it" and "is linked to a comfortable practice of reading" (14). The text of *jouissance*, on the other hand, is defined as

2. The rendering of "*le texte du jouissance*" as "the text of bliss" is, as Jonathan Culler rightly points out (Culler 98), infelicitous.

the one that "unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories" (14). Between the polarities of these two texts, the preference of Barthes as champion of the avant-garde in general and the nouveau roman in particular goes naturally to the text of *jouissance*, the text of surprise. But, interestingly enough, it is precisely in this preference for the text of *jouissance* that the undercurrent of what Powys called the "tremendous tradition" of Greek tragedy emerges "like a submerged spirit under the ship's keel." The text of *jouissance*. as it turns out, finds its ideal case in the idea of tragedy, in which Barthes sees "an effacement of *plaisir* and a progression of *jouissance*." Unlike the "dramatic story" (whose end is unknown) or the readerly text, the "tragedy" (whose end is known) keeps unsettling "the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions." In short, "tragedy" for Barthes is the text of *jouissance*, par excellence, i.e., "a progression of *jouissance*."

Between Powys' *The Plasures of Literature* and Barthes' *Le Plaisir du Texte* there is in the intellectual climate a world of difference, whose measure is characteristically indicated by the replacement of the by-now archaic word "literature" with "text." In order for the "text" to take the place of "literature" as common currency, a number of things have had to be done both in theory and practice: the internment of the author along with his sacred intention, the reshuffling and demolition of the literary canon together with its allegedly concomitant bourgeois ideology, the epistemological inversion of historical perspective from "history out there" to the idea of the negotiative making of history, and the so-called "linguistic turn," the revolutionary change in attitudes toward language from "language as a transparent tool" to "language as a mediating and productive system," i.e. "*discours*." And in fact, the Barthes of *Le Plaisir du Texte* shows himself actually going through almost all of these revolutionary changes; his text of *jouissance* is distinguished by its disengagement from the authorial intention, the traditional canon, historical positivism, and, above all, the transparency of language. Ironically enough, however, for all these innovations, it is precisely in the old and familiar idea of "tragedy"—the submerged spirit under the keel of the ship called "Literature"—that one of the prime instances of "the text of *jouissance*," the Barthesian text par excellence, has come to find its realization.

Admittedly, tragedy as Barthes saw it in *Le Plaisir du Texte* is one thing,

and tragedy as Powys had conceived it in *The Pleasures of Literature* quite another. Tragedy in the latter is understood, first and foremost, as an aggregate of the achievements of the three great tragedians of Athens, that is, as something constituted by the *auctores* and their concomitant tradition; whereas in the former it has little to do with authorial/authoritative precedence but rather with narrative constitution and structural configuration. Secondly, with Barthes references to Freud and Oedipus are made separately, not in complicity to form the "Oedipus Complex," while with Powys it comes as no surprise that such complicity precisely constitutes one of the major elements of what he called the "tremendous tradition": "Nor is it without significance that the enormous tidal-wave of Psychoanalysis takes so much of its mysterious wine-dark pressure from the same source [i.e., Sophocles]" (Powys 138). As a matter of fact, not only the Oedipus complex but also the essential core of the whole Freudian enterprise can be justifiably seen as stemming from the heritage of Greek tragedy. Ekbert Faas has this heritage in mind when he names it "the traditional tragic matrix" (183) in general and "the Aristotelian tragic matrix" (183) in particular reference to the Oedipus complex, pointing out three main junctures where this matrix actually played the role of midwife at the very birth of Freudian psychoanalysis. The first juncture can be found where the Aristotelian concept of catharsis gives birth to the Freudian notion of "the cathartic method," in which the psychical process causing the neurosis is required to "be repeated as vividly as possible," so that the process of purging certain detrimental emotions such as "fear and pity" can take place as if it were in the mind of the spectator of tragedy, witnessing another's calamities on stage. "The cathartic method," said Freud in recollection, "was the immediate precursor of psychoanalysis, and, in spite of every extension of experience and of every modification of theory, is still contained within it as its nucleus" (*Pelican Freud Library*, ed. Richards, 3: 44, quoted in Faas 182). Secondly, there is an analogical complicity of the process of psychoanalysis with the Aristotelian analysis of the plot of *Oedipus rex*. What Freud sees in the plot of *Oedipus rex* as an archetype of the psychic process is an "intelligible, consistent and unbroken case history" and "the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement… that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laius" (quoted in Faas 183). And this precisely corresponds to what Aristotle says of the plot of the same play, whose several

incidents are "so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole" (*Poetics*, 1451 a 33–4, quoted in Faas 183). Put differently, this is the structural integration of peripeteia and anagnorisis. The third, and the most famous, is the discovery of the Oedipus complex, "the nucleus of all neuroses," made in "the legend of King Oedipus and Sophocles' drama which bears his name" (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, quoted in Faas 182). Freud's explicit reference to Sophocles and implicit debt to Aristotle are suggestive of the extent to which the Greek tragic tradition exerted a strong influence on the imaginative culture of Europe particularly from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. They serve partly as a testimony to what Powys was later to call the "tremendous tradition."

In contrast, Barthes' concept of tragedy is, on the face of it, free from such a traditional matrix, steering clear, self-consciously perhaps, of the problematic of the Oedipus complex. But, as we have noted, some vestiges or undercurrents of the tradition are discernible. And as is often the case with undercurrents, they are capable of fulfilling unobserved an indispensable function such as providing an underlying system of values. Barthes' sublimation of "*jouissance*" in the name of tragedy to the level of almost universal validity would never have been possible, had it not been for the force of mysterious significance, which was guaranteed by the traditional underlying system of values, Freud's "traditional tragic matrix."

II

Tragedy is dead, or tragedy undergoes transformation, or tragedy will re-appear (Steiner). This is a diagnosis made by a critic still attempting to endorse the beleaguered humanist position; hence a characteristic tension in it between despair at and trust in *humana* or things human. It is not difficult to discern behind this a powerful, if paradoxical, flow at once of nostalgic yearning for tragedy and of passionate desire for its transcendence. If tragedy is dead, there still exists its representational presence together with an irrepressible longing for it in pursuit of the recovery of human dignity. It seems to be the case that for tragedy there is no identity crisis: past, present, or future, whichever its true habitat may be, its

presence is invariably felt. When absent, it can be re-presented as the presence of absence. It looks as if tragedy acts as a principle of its own identity, and like Hegel's "Absolute Spirit" easily overrides historical contingencies. So much so, in fact, that in extreme instances tragedy has come to be regarded as one of the cultural constants of the Western world; thus an editor of one of the most popular anthologies on tragedy says, "the tragic,"—a sweeping concept susceptible of no formal differentiation—"is a particular way of looking at experience that has persisted more or less unchanged in the Western world from the time of Homer to the present" (Corrigan 8). Furthermore, it could transcend even cultural boundaries to be a touchstone of civilization itself; Lukács went so far as to say, "the most profound question to be asked of a civilization is in what form it experiences its tragedies" (quoted *ibid.*). If both views, essentialism of "the ragic"—constant and universalism of the touchstone of "civilization"—are more straightforward than the humanist one, they are none the less as much strained, being founded as they are on a palpable distortion of our knowledge of history.

For we know, in the first place, that there are other civilizations that have little to do with the experience of "tragedy" so that for them any kind of formal realization of the genre is out of the question. A Western "tragicomaniac"—be it of humanist or Marxist persuasion—would perhaps retort that still what deserves the name of civilization and the tragic experience are in essentials compact, but his sincerity and insight are based on an ineluctable blindness toward his own culture. Second, the essentialist theory of "the tragic"—constant proves to be equally untenable upon a brief reflection that there is a world of difference between, say, the Homeric and Virgilian (*Aeneid*, II–III; IV), the Sophoclean and Senecan, or the Shakespearean and Racinean. A sweeping survey will show that between these varieties a common denominator such as "the tragic"—constant cannot possibly be found. Granted that the Greek way of looking at tragic experience (Homer, Sophocles) is distinguishable from the Roman (Virgil, Seneca), then both of them are in their turn to be distinguished from that of the Christian Middle Ages (Robertson; Bonno), and this yet again is to be further differentiated from that of the Renaissance. Controversies in the early modern era as to whether the native or the neo-classical tradition stands in better stead are another instance that defies the essentialist theory. And then toward the end of

the eighteenth century we come to find yet another perspective, i.e., the "Greek Revival," where the great tragedians of Athens came into the limelight. In short, it is simply unimaginable that any single point of view should survive "more or less unchanged" through such an entanglement of disparate traditions. Depending on the tragic paradigm chosen, not only the historical contours but also the conceptual figuration of "the tragic" will duly change.

It appears to be the case then that "the tragic," be it an idea or a way of looking at the world, comes to gain acceptance and dominance in the cultural, social and ideological formations only in certain limited periods in the whole course of the Western civilization. And even in those limited periods where the concept of "the tragic" was made much of we are not allowed to grasp it as a simple and straightforward phenomenon; figurations or configurations it could take are a complicated matter as exemplified in the case of modern Europe, where, as we have suggested, some distinct traditions, Latin, vernacular and Greek, weave themselves into an entrammelled aggregate. The complexities of this layered entanglement must not be leveled out and glossed over, as has often been done. In fine, elements of ethnocentrism, be it implicit or explicit, are in the grain of "tragedy" or "the tragic."

III

It is obvious that this curious complicity of tragedy with the ideal unity of the West, entailing as it does a mutual sublimation, has its origins in Europe's search for, and in her will to secure, her own cultural identity, which she eventually found in the mirror of Greek Antiquity. That she achieved this objective at the outset of the modern era, in the Renaissance, is common knowledge; but there is reason to argue that the mirror in which she made her self-identification was by and large better described as Roman (or Latin) than Greek. This seems to have been particularly true with respect to tragedy: it is good to remember that when Seneca's *Hippolytus* was acted out by students of Ponponius Laetus's academy in Rome in the mid 1480s it was registered as an innovation typical of the Renaissance (Smith). It was not until the so-called "Greek Revival" of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the full-

fledged or sufficiently clear Greek mirror was ready at hand. That the present European culture is, in a sense, still under the influence of this movement can be seen in the tenacious "undercurrent" of "the traditional tragic matrix" discussed in the preceding section. In this influential movement the Germans, in particular, had an important role to play: of incomparable importance, for our purposes, are Hegel, A. W. Schlegel; and Nietzsche. Freud followed their steps, and so did A. C. Bradley.

It is perhaps useful here to remind ourselves of the beginnings and occasion of the "Greek Revival," how it all started. According to Richard Jenkyns' readable account in his *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, it has its precise beginning on March 18th, 1751, when the two British, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett—the future authors of *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762)—arrived in "a provincial town in an unimportant part of the Ottoman Empire," that is to say, Athens. For the Europeans of the second half of the eighteenth century, a passage to Greece was, much to our surprise, a new experience. More than that, it was literally an adventure surrounded and saturated with dangers. "Continually they [Stuart and Revett] risked death from disease or the knife" (Jenkyns 3). The knife, allegedly, was supposed to come from the Ottoman Turks, the "uncultivated people" and the "professed Enemies to the Arts" (*ibid.*). The motivating force, which propelled them to undertake such a perilous adventure, was a wish to trace back and see the origins of Western Civilization.

> There is perhaps no part of Europe, which more deservedly… excites the curiosity of the Lovers of polite Literature than… Atttica, and Athens its capital City: whether we reflect on the Figure it makes in History, on account of the excellent men it produced in every Art… or whether we consider the Antiquities which are said to be still remaining there… the most perfect Models of what is excellent in Sculpture and Architecture. (*The Antiquities of Athens*, I, p.v. quoted in Jenkyns 2)

Words, such as "polite Literature," "excellent men… in every Art," "the most perfect Models," and above all "the Antiquities which are said to be still remaining there" are indicative of the high-flown idealism and ardent passion which they brought to bear on this quest. As might be

expected, *The Antiquities of Athens*, at once a work of scholarship and a magnificent picture-book, enjoyed an immediate success and its effects and consequences were far-reaching. Among the fruitful effects is counted, for example, Robert Wood's *Essay on Homer* (1767), itself an influential work and a product of the same intellectual milieu. As a matter of fact, they all—Wood, Revett and Stuart—met in Greece and shared membership of the Dilettanti Society, a rakish and slightly absurd association which, however, had a curious role to play in the development of early English Hellenism only because of its pursuit of novelty. And Greece at that time was nothing but a novelty. From this Dilettanti Society to a full-fledged Hellenism in the form of the "*klassische Philologie*" there was yet a long way to go, and I cannot possibly pretend to offer even a taste of its history here. But perhaps what can be deemed an important juncture must be pointed out: the above-mentioned Wood's *Essay on Homer* was translated into four languages, and it so happened that its German version fell into the hands of F. A. Wolf, who was to be known to the world as the famous author of a *Prolegomena to Homer*. The latter work, according to Jenkyns, "had a greater impact than any other work of philology that has ever been written" (Jenkyns 22). For the rest of the story I can only refer to Hugh Lloyd-Jones's *Blood for the Ghosts* (1982), which leaves one with the gloomy impression that systematic and institutionalized studies of Greek classics are of a rather recent origin and their "summer's lease" has been too short-is perhaps already over.

The above digression into the beginnings of "the Greek Revival," I believe, serves as a reminder that Europe's rediscovery of and recourse to Greek classical antiquity must be sought not so much in the predominantly Latin Renaissance as in the later post-Neoclassical movement in the nineteenth century. If there is any remnant notion in us that Greek literature is more authentic and genuine than Latin literature, Homer is more original than Virgil, Sophocles beyond comparison with Seneca, in all probability it derives from this movement, "the Greek Revival." It is no exaggeration to say that no other previous periods since the end of late antiquity has known such a notion. It is in the wake of this movement that the current of what Powys called the "tremendous tradition" of Greek tragedy and the undercurrent of its "submerged spirit" must be placed; comprehensive validity implied by such words as "the traditional

tragic matrix," and the "tremendous tradition" must not blind us to their historicity, to the fact of their being conditioned by ideological formation and discursive practices. The "grain" of tragedy, as the Barthesian instance shows, is still powerful and tenacious, but it must be recognized that it is neither as deep as to penetrate the entirety of a civilization nor as universal as to instance a structural entity of the text.

IV

So far I have talked of the nature, extent, and provenance of "the grain of tragedy," looking into the underlying assumptions that make "the grain" look as if unobtrusively natural and proper. [3] But, here I am not proposing to talk *about* "the grain of tragedy"; my topic here is "*against* the grain of tragedy." By this I mean neither a flat denial of the grain, which is simply impossible, nor the mere recognition of its status quo, but a purposeful *disturbance* of "the grain." Strategies and practices of such a disturbing move are various, and have been to some extent suggested and even, if not purposefully, realized. The elevation of "comedy," a generic mode long regarded (precisely in the grain of tragedy) as inferior to tragedy, is one way of doing this. (Northrop Frye, C. L. Barber, and Michael Bakhtin have done this on the model of cultural anthropology.) Another strategy is to emphasize other paradigms of tragedy than the Greek, such as the Roman, the medieval, or the modern vernacular. To an extent, this again has been attempted. A search for the Shakespearean paradigm of tragedy, it can be said, has been made in the teeth of, if not independent of, the classical model. The same holds true of modern German tragedy, whose paradigm is sought after, as Walter Benjamin's powerful thesis on the Baroque "*Trauerspiel*" exemplifies, precisely in defiance of the Aristotelian tradition. In both English and German cases, it is interesting to note, an effort to recognize the modern vernacular paradigm on its own terms characteristically goes along with a recourse to the medieval heritage while at the same time going against the classical model. The medieval heritage, however, remains in the sta-

3. Other instance of "the grain of tragedy" are without number. In the field of sociologico-criminology see an interesting study by Calabresi & Bobbitt; in critical thought in general see also Domenach.

tus of heritage, never coming to attain the level of paradigm. (The reason perhaps is not far to seek: the paradigm of the "*commedia*" best represented by Dante was too strong for tragedy to either replace or displace.) There is again the possibility of Roman paradigms, namely the Virgilian and the Senecan tragedy, of which studies have not been entirely lacking. In some instances, especially with regard to the Virgilian, few but important contributions have been made (e.g., Bonno; Allen). But naturally enough, most of these studies are conducted in the spirit and interest of scholarly investigation, and, though eminent and indispensable as such, they are, especially in some unhappy instances, in danger of either smugly devoting themselves to their specialized subject alone or easily succumbing to the established habit of *Quellenforschung*.

Seneca's case in the literary history of modern Europe is, however, a very complicated matter, and precisely because this complication is a measure of historical distortion—historical distortion on the same order of our "grain of tragedy"—a consideration of it, I believe, will be conducive to our purposeful move toward disturbance. It is generally known that at the dawn of the Renaissance Seneca played an important role and was held in high esteem. J. S. Scaliger's often quoted dictum runs, "Senecam nullo Graecorum maiestate inforiorem existimo, cultu vero ac nitore etiam Euripide maiorem" (I think that Seneca is not inferior to any of the Greeks in grandeur, and, in fact, in refined style and elegance he is greater than Euripides) (quoted in Costa 96). Such high esteem of Seneca, however, rapidly declined, and especially through "the Greek Revival" of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Seneca came to be driven out of favour as an epigone of the Greek original (Regenbogen). "In a history of the dramatic art," writes Augustus William von Schlegel, an influential figure in bringing German Hellenism into Britain, "I should have altogether overlooked the tragedies of Seneca, if, from a blind prejudice for everything which has come down to us from antiquity, they had not been often imitated in modern times" (163). Which is to say, "in a history of dramatic art," which obviously was Greek-oriented, Seneca's value is negligible and can only be appreciated as an object of inkhorn scholarship dealing with his "influence" on vernacular literatures of the Renaissance. This verdict, itself a product of the "Greek Revival," largely defined the critical framework in which subsequent discussion

about Seneca's tragedy was to be conducted. Exactly in its aftermath was formed a long series of arguments on Senecan influence on English tragedy, which consists of such various and eminent scholars and critics as J. W. Cunliffe (1893), H. B. Charleton (1921), F. L. Lucas (1922), T. S. Eliot (1927; 1948) and Peter Ure (1948). Locating himself critically in this tradition, G. K. Hunter, in a pair of his articles (1967; 1974) on Senecan influence goes so far as to argue that even the Senecan influence itself is a myth and had better be discarded in favour of the medieval heritage and vernacular tradition. Nevertheless, recent trends once again have shown a revival of the positive theory as regards Senecan influence (Braden; Pratt; Segal; Rosenmeyer).

What is important, however, is not the question of whether or not there was influence of Seneca on English, or for that matter, any vernacular tragedy but the status and treatment of Senecan tragedy which is implicit in the way such a question is put. So long as we deal with his tragedy only as a museum piece and "a case-study in 'influence,'" we are still in the same boat with Schlegel and other nineteenth-century philhellenes, and hence in the logic of the present argument, are unwittingly endorsing "the grain of tragedy," where Seneca is destined to be set at a remove from the much-valued Greek origin. To go "against the grain of tragedy," Seneca must be retrieved out of the rut of such unintelligent exercises. And for this innovative move, a couple of suggestive ways have already been presented as practical possibilities: one is of literary history, the other of dramatic production. The former is the critical method of literary history called *Rezeptionsaesthetik*, and its application to Seneca is found in a collection of critical essays which, judging from its title alone, would not bid fair to be put to our use. The title is *Der Einfluss Senecas auf das Europaeische Drama* but the concept of "influence (*Einftuss*)" mobilized in the work is totally different from the ordinary one. It is proposed to examine "das korrespondierende Paar Wirkung-Rezeption" (a pair of corresponding forces of textual survival and readerly reception). *Wirkung* (survival) is basically conditioned by the text while *Rezeption* (reception) by the addressee, and between these corresponding forces is found assumption or foreknowledge (*Vorverstaentnis*), which is further "conditioned equally by accidental canonization and by invisible institutionalization, by selected and formed tradition" (16). In this framework, our project "against the grain" can be defined as a way of self-analysis

examining the underlying *Vorverstaentnis* in order to let the textual *Wirkung* fulfill itself to its utmost.

The other suggestive way is to be found in the kind of theatrical production of Seneca's tragedy attempted by Peter Brook. As is well known, in his direction Seneca's *Oedipus* (adapted by Ted Hughes) was performed in London 1968 with Sir John Gielgud in the title role. It was a commanding performance and by all accounts seems to have been sufficiently disturbing to go against the contemporary grain of tragedy. The measure of disturbance is triumphantly registered in such remarks as the following:

> The taste that lay behind this production goes back to the crazy theatrical theorist Antonin Artaud, who in 1932 was praising Seneca as a model for what he called "The Theatre of Cruelty"… [where] Seneca is treasured largely because his plays are an affront to the bourgeois sensibilities of traditional theatre-goers. (Hunter, 208)

There is no doubt that "the grain" was disturbed here to a lacerating degree. And why not more?

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