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BIRTH AND REBIRTH OF TRAGEDY: FROM THE ORIGIN OF ITALIAN OPERA TO THE ORIGIN OF GREEK TRAGEDY

There are two pitfalls which constantly threaten the literary historian who seeks the origins or beginnings of works of the mind such as species of literature or forms of religion, as well as the examples which partake of both. One danger is that the study may become an artificial construction without sufficient concrete basis in proved historical facts; the other is that the author may prefer experience to such constructions and may be too much influenced by what he has known and been impressed with as origin and beginning in his own time. The latter has at least one advantage: where there is no experience at the outset of an investigation, not even that minimum of *empeiria* which I shall call, with the Greek poet Alcman, *peira* (*peira toi mathesios archa,* "experience is the beginning of knowledge"), then there can be no scholarship

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in the fields of literature, art, and religion. In the history of those three fields we can be competently guided only by "veterans"—not mere theoreticians but men who in a sense are also "practitioners" in the creating of works of the mind. Experience takes first place not only in the natural sciences but also in modern scholarship in these areas, even with the risk that it may be too personal, too time-bound, too small in scope.

Nietzsche's book *The Birth of Tragedy* is an example of this, one which we cannot ignore here in regard both to method and to content. Two facts are true concerning this work, facts which, set down side by side, appear most paradoxical. The historical scholars of classical antiquity immediately exposed the weaknesses of the book, and yet it has remained the one German-language work in all of classical scholarship which has least lost its vividness and effectiveness to this day. This vividness it owes surely not to its theoretical foundation, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, but to the fact that it is also based on a true *experience:* on the experience of the new element introduced to that period by the operas of Wagner. This experience, plus the expression which a writer of the caliber of Nietzsche was able to give it, keeps alive this work of his youth. On the other hand, the limitation of the experience to something as accidental and personal as was Nietzsche's musical discovery robs it of its value for understanding the genesis of Athenian tragedy. Nevertheless, the attempt to understand the birth of a species of literature through analogy with one better defined remains in the realm of the concrete and is not limited primarily to artificial construction. Nor did Nietzsche exhaust the analogies between the history of the opera and the Greek art of tragedy. In the history of our European culture, which includes the history of music in Germany as well as Nietzsche's reaction to it, we find a parallel which in time, geography, and content lies closer to Greek tragedy than the works of Richard Wagner.

EXPERIENCING A BEGINNING IN THE HISTORY OF OPERA

Nietzsche believed that in his musical experience of the years around 1870, he had been witness to the "rebirth of tragedy." He used the term more than once, trying to point out the forces that seemed to him to prove such a rebirth and also the opposing forces, which he grouped together under the term "Socratic culture." He saw in Socrates the anti-

tragic philosopher. Opera for him epitomized antitragic art, and therefore he also called those same opposing forces the *"culture of the opera."* The italicizing is his and refers to pre-Wagner opera of Italian origin, with its "idyllic tendency." Nietzsche asks:

> Is it credible that this thoroughly externalized operatic music, incapable of devotion, could be received and cherished with enthusiastic favor, as a rebirth, as it were, of all true music, by the very age in which the ineffably sublime music of Palestrina had originated? And who, on the other hand, would think of making only the diversion-craving luxuriousness of those Florentine circles and the vanity of their dramatic singers responsible for the love of the opera which spread with such rapidity? That in the same age, even among the same people, it should awaken alongside the vaulted structure of Palestrine harmonies which the entire Christian Middle Ages had been building up, I can explain to myself only by a cooperating *extra-artistic tendency* in the essence of the recitative.[1]

Even if we wanted to adopt Nietzsche's opinion on what is and what is not art, we would have to acknowledge a gap here in the German philosopher's knowledge about the origins of Italian opera. It is our good fortune that we can base our studies on the work of one who was both a "veteran" and "practitioner" of intellectual creation and, moreover, a good historian in this field. Romain Rolland's work *Les Origines du théatre lyrique moderne: Histoire de l'opéra en Europe avant Lully et Scarlatti* (Paris, 1895) filled the gap with concrete content. The corresponding texts which had been available as little pamphlets were brought out by A. Solerti in a collection, *Gli Albori del melodramma,* published in Turin. For this is a characteristic trait of the early phases in the birth of the genre known as opera: poetic text and poet occupy first place; music and composer, second. Still, even in the very first phase, something new can be recognized clearly designating the beginnings of a birth after the preliminary phases in which it did not yet exist. We owe it to a text which Romain Rolland was the first to bring forward that the effect of such a beginning, and thereby a beginning itself, becomes vivid to us in all its concreteness. Only now does there seem to be a point to talking about the "birth of a species"—tragedy or opera—regardless of previous stages which would have represented a vain historical development of the species if a special act had not unexpectedly given rise to the new creation.

This decisive act could just as well have been called a "creative" act, except that we would then have to add that, by "creative," no quantita-

1. *The Birth of Tragedy,* trans. W. A. Haussmann (Edinburgh: Foulis, 1916), chap. xix, pp. 42–43.

tive distinction is intended, either in the sense of an accumulation of previous acts in the development or in the sense of an intensification. It would be better to talk about the simple act of one who *finds* (*heuretes* in Greek), an act which even in its uniqueness is distinguished by individuality. Every "find" has this characteristic which distinguishes it from all other finds: it is a single occurrence, and it is individual. Such individuality also characterizes the find which designates the first phase in the birth of the species "opera" and separates it from everything which preceded it: from the works which Romain Rolland has characterized in a later study under the title "L'Opéra avant l'opéra" in the volume *Musiciens d'autrefois* (Paris, 1908). We cannot imagine anything more individual than this deliberate junction with Greek tragedy in Florence at the end of the sixteenth century, in which, moreover, a mistake played a decisive role.

There we find ourselves not in an abstract history of music, construed with the aid of music preserved by notation, but in the midst of a concrete event, of which more than just written music, even if not all musical products, have been preserved. In the circle of musical humanists around Giovanni Bardi, Conte di Vernio, the false conclusion was reached that the Greek tragedies had been musical works not only in their choral sections but in their entirety. This opinion, to be sure, has no basis in ancient traditions; it is due to the experience which these men had with artistic creations of their own time. The *sacre rappresentazioni,* representations from sacred stories—a more spectacular than dramatic popular form of entertainment in the early Renaissance—were already performed in the recitative form so despised by Nietzsche (*fatte in modo di recitazione*). The shepherds' plays were easily sung, Tasso's *Aminta* serving as a sample of a contemporary genre, with verses consisting of eleven or seven syllables. Two examples of this genre, the *Satiro* and the *Disperazione di Fileno,* which are regarded as the first Italian operas, were kept in the *stile recitativo* throughout, very likely accompanied by expressive music—facts later determined by Romain Rolland. Still, something new was arrived at which was neither *rappresentazione sacra* nor pastorale, by consciously, even if mistakenly, taking the path toward Greek tragedy. This step is of an individual, almost violent, nature, leading us, after all the known and unknown preliminary steps, to the first phase in the birth of opera.

The text which Romain Rolland in his earlier work chose as the basis of his description admirably reflects the effect of the find. Since today

we know so well the Italians' great love for their opera, we rarely realize that the experience of opera—the delight in it which Nietzsche mentions—was once new even in Italy, regardless of all precursors, immediate or older. The beginning is shown in all its concreteness at the first performance of the *Favola di Dafne* by Rinuccini, a pupil of Tasso, and composed at first by Corsi and Peri. This work—poetic text and music—may be called the first phase in the birth of opera. The event is described by the composer Marco Gagliano, who ten years later replaced the music of Corsi and Peri with new music to the same text. The description is found in his preface to the libretto, and its value is not limited to the history of music. Events are described here which took place first in the intimate circle of the Count Vernio, in his "Academy," but later before a larger, elegant audience in the presence of the Cardinal Giovanni Medici in Florence.

After having discussed again and again in what manner the ancients had performed their tragedies, how they had introduced the choruses, whether they had used singing and what kind, and similar matters, Ottavio Rinuccini undertook to make a poetic edition of the fable of Daphne, while Jacopo Corsi, of esteemed memory, a lover of every kind of scholarship and of music in particular, composed several arias on a part of the text. Ravished by them, and determined to see how effective they might be on the stage, he, together with Mr. Ottavio, expressed his ideas to Jacopo Peri, an experienced master of counterpoint and singer of the utmost refinement. When the latter had heard the plan and approved a number of the arias already composed, he undertook the composition of others, which pleased Corsi exceedingly.[2]

The piece was performed on the occasion of the carnival of the year 1597. And now follows an account which would seem hardly credible if it described the reaction to a performance of a pastoral play, sung, and with musical accompaniment:

The rapture and wonder roused in the souls of the listeners by this new kind of drama cannot be expressed. Suffice it to say that, no matter how often it was performed, it produced the same admiration and the same joy. Now that the test had been made and Rinuccini realized the ability of the voice to express all kinds of

2. "Dopo l'avere più e più volte discorso ala maniera usata dagli antichi in rappresentare le lor tragedie, come introducevano i cori, se usavano il canto e di che sorte, e cose simili, il sig. Ottavio Rinuccini sidiede a compor la Favola di Dafne, il sig. Jacopo Corsi, d'onorata memoria, amatore d'ogni dottrina e della musica particolarmente . . . compose alcune arie sopr aparte di essa. Dalle quali invaghitosi, risoluto di vedere che effetto facessero su la scena, conferi insieme col. sig. Ottavio, il suo pensiero al sig. Jacopo Peri, peritissimo nel contrappunto e cantore di estrema squisitezza: il quale, udite la loro intenzione e approvato parte dell'aria già, composte si diede a comporre altre che piacquero oltre modo al sig. Corsi. . . ."

feelings, and that this did not result in boredom but, on the contrary, in unbelievable joy, he wrote the *Euridice* and reveled even more in the dialogues.[3]

This refers to monologues and dialogues written for the voice and texts for arias and duets; and with *Euridice* the second phase in the birth of opera began in which it approached Greek tragedy in subject matter as well, thus almost "reaching its true nature," to use Aristotle's phrase.

EXPERIENCING A BEGINNING IN THE HISTORY OF TRAGEDY

In his *Poetics* Aristotle rather sketchily indicates the phases in the birth of Greek tragedy. Let us try to picture, as analogy to what we know about the birth of opera from material still within our reach today, what is really said in that famous chapter of the *Poetics*. The facts are more properly allusions, since Aristotle in this work treats the drama not as historian but from the much more abstract point of view of its mimetic character—"imitation" in every work of fiction. The concrete phases of development which in Athens made up the history of tragedy and comedy he either showed in a separate work or at the beginning of a more detailed history, in a work about the victories at the city Dionysia and at the Lenaea, of the writers of tragedy and comedy. In the *Poetics,* phases of development are indicated casually and without pretension of offering a complete account, particularly for the period of pre-phases corresponding to the "opéra avant l'opéra." For this phase Aristotle emphasized its improvisational character—an element which also functioned in the preliminary phases of opera, although less palpably, owing to its nature.

On the other hand, among the preliminary steps of tragedy we should probably count dithyrambic poetry, which, when thought of in connection with poets like Arion, can hardly be called "autoschediastic" (i.e., improvisational) any more than the dithyrambs of a Pindar or a Bacchylides. It is not to be assumed that Aristotle or any of the literary historians of the Greeks who followed him could have known all that belonged to this period and that in part survived tragedy. However, it was not necessary for the historians to invent data—to construe chapters of literary history. Goethe has expressed what the literature of the past

3. "Il piacere e lo stupore che partori negli animi degl' uditori questo nuovo spettacolo non si può esprimere: basta solo che per molte volte ch'ella s'è recitata, ha generato la stessa ammirazione e lo stesso diletto. Per si fatta prova, venuto in cognizione il sig. Rinuccini quanto fosse atto il canto a esprimere ogni sorta d'affetti, e che non solo non recava tedio, ma diletto incredibilie, compose l'Euridice, allargandosi più ne' ragionamenti."

is, for us, always: "Literature is a fragment of fragments; the smallest part of what has happened and what has been spoken has been written down; and of that which has been written, the smallest part has been preserved." But in classical times a concrete image existed also of that which had not been written. Aristotle and all the ancient sources have transmitted an impression of a period of evocative song and dance preceding tragedy, characterized moreover by the theriomorphic trait of dancers wearing animal masks; *satyroi* is the most common name for such dancers.

Such is "la tragédie avant la tragédie" in Greece which Aristotle indicates in his sketch and which, for us as well as for him, forms the concrete foundation for a history of the birth of tragedy. After a growth through phases with only minor differences (*katâ mikrón*), and after many transformations (*pollás metabolás metabaloûsa*), it—the genre "tragedy"—"stopped when it had found its natural form," the *Poetics* continues. We can ignore the Aristotelianism of the expression and concentrate on the concrete phases. However, even the manner of expression assumes not only a theoretical but also a practical meaning when we reflect that, for us, too—using the history of opera as example again—the opera only really existed when it was embodied in a work which was complete in every respect: in the *Orfeo* of Monteverdi it can be said to have "found its natural form." However, we must admit, on the basis of the fourth chapter of the *Poetics,* that we cannot say for certain whether for Aristotle tragedy attained its nature in the third phase, which is mentioned with the second, or in the first, which the sketch omits. In a continuation of the above, these two phases are named: "Aeschylus was the first to raise the number of *hypokritai* [we shall come back to this word for actors] from one to two; he limited the role of the chorus and made the word the chief actor. Sophocles raised the number to three and introduced painted scenery." Omitted here is the first phase in the birth of tragedy which in all the traditions of antiquity is connected with the name "Thespis"—connected with expressed reference to Aristotle.[4] Either the lost historical work was referred to or a sentence in the fourth chapter of the *Poetics* preceding the mention of the second phase—that of Aeschylus—has dropped out in the handwritten copy.

4. Themistius Orat. 26, p. 316*d;* references for what follows are best found in Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge's *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927) and his *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

Too many hypotheses have already been set up concerning the literary remains, the poor notes of which they consist. I do not want to add to them, especially since the main traits of a rich reality are fixed without doubt. Like few other nations, the Greeks were receptive to such traits, honoring and admiring them. The way in which the essential truth was kept is Greek—partly anecdotal, but by anecdote we are here referring only to the form. Judging by content, it—an anecdote about Thespis and Solon—could have been the recording of a historical event. As the period in which they lived would have permitted a meeting of the two, no objections can be made against it. There is a perfect parallel between the description of the effect of dramatic-evocative song —the first opera singing—in the *Favola di Dafne* of Rinuccini and this tale of the effect of the art of Thespis. Here, however, we are concerned with the sound of the dramatic-evocative word, or *rhesis,* and of the prologue, in the midst of and in preparation for songs and dances by performers wearing animal masks—the first phase in the birth of tragedy according to the summary which this argument ascribes to Aristotle.

At the beginnings of tragedy we find ourselves in a sphere of literary history which can no more be separated from the rest of Athenian life, particularly the grander life of festival periods, than the sphere of the musical life and the history of music could, at the start of opera, have been separated from the larger life of sixteenth-century Florence. We find in present-day Rome during the Christmas season an analogy to something which was customary during the festivals of Dionysus in Athens, particularly a certain high festival in the sixth century B.C. There are still shepherds from the Abruzzi Mountains who never miss taking part in the great ceremonies of the churches, even the vigils. They take their places in front of the church doors—not all the doors, for their number has grown small. But since ancient times—I know of no history of the custom with more precise facts—they are part of the atmosphere of the holy night and the celebration of Christmas, with their pipes and bagpipes as *pifferari* and *zampognari,* for the evocation of the birth of Christ.

An evocative atmosphere was characteristic also for the festivals of the Greeks—a special one for each festival, and most markedly for the festivals of Dionysus, which also differed among themselves. Surely it was part of the character of the festival in the month of Elaphebolion—the "month of the stag-hunting," roughly corresponding to our month

of March—that Thespis, the son of Themon from the Dionysian village of Icaria, appeared with his invention in just this setting. For posterity he was rightly regarded as Athenian. Icaria was a village at the slope of the Pentelicon, until today called *sto Dionyso* ("at Dionysus'"), a "Demos" of the Athenians but distinguished above all other Attic villages, including Athens, by having the oldest cult of the god in this landscape. It was there that Dionysus was hospitably received when he arrived. For this he gave his host Icarius, its founder-hero, the present of the grape vine and wine. This, too, became a tragic story, which, preserved in epic form by the Alexandrian poet Eratosthenes, probably goes back to the tales of the villages. The Icarians were famous also because the sacrifice to Dionysus of a male goat, the enemy of the vine, was said to have been founded by their hero Icarius; they were the first to dance around the sacrifice and to compete in jumping on a hose they had made from the skin of a goat. Like the shepherds from the Abruzzi Mountains who came to take the place of the shepherds of Bethlehem and to help create the atmosphere for the festival of the birth of Christ, these Dionysian dancers and players came down to Athens from their village in the high mountains to that festival of their god which had as its center the statue of Dionysus from another village: Dionysus Eleuthereus from Eleutherai, originally Boeotian. Why this particular ritual demanded dances by figures wearing animal masks or skins (which we believe were worn by the dancers from Icaria), we can only guess, and this is not essential knowledge for a quick sketch. But the appearance at the festival of a dance chorus from Icaria, with a leader and solo dancer who, in the person of Thespis, appeared as poet and inventor of a new genre, we may consider as a concrete piece of history. It is a picture which every sensible reader of the sparse ancient notes can consider as truth, which is more than we can say for the speculations of scholars, who would like to ascribe it all to the invention of later historians.

Moreover, the time has been fixed for that first performance of a play by Thespis and his chorus which the Greeks themselves consider the birth of tragedy: it was one of the first three years of the Sixty-first Olympiad (536/5–533/2 B.C.). The new element constituting the beginning in the history of tragedy is captured in the anecdote to which we have already referred. It has been preserved in detail in the Solon biography of Plutarch (chap. 29); and in the *Lives of the Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius (i. 59) it is mentioned and exaggerated beyond the possibilities of history. The wise legislator of the Athenians, al-

though aged at the time, as Plutarch tells us, still liked to take part in all the Dionysian activities suitable for old men—the drinking and the music-making—especially if something new was to be heard or learned. Therefore he was in the audience when once Thespis himself, as was customary with tragic poets of old, "acted." I am using the later, Latin word; the Greek word of the period is *hypokrinesthai.* The *nomen agentis* which goes with it, *hypokrites,* underwent perhaps the greatest change of meaning in the history of the Greek language. It is only through recognizing the original meaning and realizing what it was that Thespis was really doing when, in his own person and yet playing another, he placed a *hypokrites* in the middle of the chorus for the first time that one understands Solon's reaction, for the sake of which this anecdote was told and preserved. The fact that poetic creation is invention, fiction, or, according to the Greek expression, *pseudos,* or "lie," could not have been new for Solon. There is a sentence in one of his elegies which may already have been a proverb before his time: "Greatly lie the singers." But the story goes that after Thespis' production he went up to the poet and *hypokrites* and asked him if he was not ashamed to "lie so grossly" (*telikaûta pseudómenos*). When Thespis answered that it had only been said and done in play, the wise one beat the ground with his stick and prophesied that soon this kind of play would be found in serious matters, too. He was referring to the new art of deception by the evocative word, to which he himself had succumbed in a way different from ordinary performances of rhapsodies and singers. For the first time, Solon had experienced *hypokrinesthai* where before there had been only *apokrinesthai* ("answering").

A quotation from Pindar (frag. 125.69B) long since warned us of the complete change in meaning of the word *hypokrisis: delphinos hypokrisin,* the only proper translation of which is "after the true nature of the dolphin." The latest definitions of *hypokrisis* in the handbooks of rhetoric still retain authenticity (*kat' alétheian*) as an element.[5] Originally, *hypokrinesthai* meant answering—in speech or behavior—according to the real, unadulterated nature, the inner hidden truth, which is not revealed by a simple *apokrisis,* but rather by *hypokrisis,* as if the answer were being given under a higher inspiration. Those who are truly inspired are not only *pro-phetai*—this indicates the direction of the

5. Apsines and Longinus; references and earlier literature in H. Koller, *Museum Helveticum,* XIV (1957), 104 ff., and *Glotta,* XXXVIII (1958), 14 ff., without strict interpretation of the Pindar reference in question.

inspired word—but also *hypo-phetai,* pointing to the divine source. In the *Iliad* the prophetic priests of Zeus in Dodona are called *hypophetai* (16. 235), and the verb *hypokrinesthai* is used when a soothsayer (12. 28), the interpreter of a dream (*Od.* 19. 535/555), or whosoever, speaks a hidden truth, even if he has not been questioned. In judicial language the same word used as an active verb means cross-examining the opponent. The concern is always, in the original sense, with a direct statement of what was hidden and never with interpretation or explanation, which were the province of the *hermeneus.* It was not until truthful, inspired speech on the stage became a special art that the change in meaning took place and that the *hypokrites* became merely the actor and the hypocrite.

What Thespis had not only written but also projected on the stage, thus finding a new genre, was that persuasive, deep truth, a source of profound emotion for all audiences of tragedy since Solon, which nevertheless is "only" play and "lies"—a paradox which the historian must accept and not explain. The wonder at this effect of the first tragedy was once just as real as the wonder at the impact of the first opera, which, moreover, was as little a finished opera as the first play by Thespis was a finished tragedy. One device by which Thespis helped bring out the inner truth of the dramatic-evocative word has been preserved for us and remains characteristic for all of Greek tragedy—the invention of a special mask for the *hypokrites,* setting him apart in that way as well from the chorus of half-animal, half-divine dancers and connecting him with a different world. The tradition of this masking is preserved in an article in an encyclopedia[6]—condensed, and yet two of the three ways mentioned are quite comprehensible, the last as a technical improvement of the first. These concrete details are of the greatest value for the reconstruction of something which really existed, and they are authentic beyond a doubt.

The simplest kind of masking which Thespis used was painting the face with white chalk. Our authors have shown that its manner and meaning existed for a larger circle of popular representations than just the theater.[7] This is how the spirits of the dead were represented. It was an unequivocal connection of the *hypokrites* with the world of ances-

6. Suidas, *s.v.* "Thespis."

7. Compare my "Dramatische Gottesgegenwart in der griechischen Religion," *Eranos Jahrbuch,* XIX (1951), 22–23.

tors and heroes, to whom the stage of the new genre was to belong. A perfection worthy of the apparence of heroes was provided by linen masks, which are mentioned last among the innovations by Thespis. The lexicographer, and probably his philological authorities before him, lacked in botanical knowledge when it came to describing a third kind of masking which came between the first two. We do not fare much better in regard to the flora of antiquity. It is not easy to guess which among the various plants named *andrachne* (endings vary according to region) Thespis used for masking, according to the oldest tradition. We must also consider the wild-strawberry tree, which—or so it appears on the basis of representations on gold rings[8]—played a part in Mycenean cult which it retained later in connection with Hermes, the spiritual leader of the souls for the Greeks.[9]

At this point there are limits to the reconstruction. Were the leaves used as wreath or the berries for painting? We hear of the cart of Thespis on which he carried with him the indispensable requisites for his new kind of plays; this, thanks to Horace, became a tradition, a precedent for troupes of actors in later times.[10] In connection with an object which was originally used in the ritual and later in the play, we even have the record of one detail immediately preceding the phase of the invention of tragedy by Thespis: this was a sacrificial table in the theater (called already in Homer, *eleós*), used for the cutting-up of the meat, which points to the ever preceding sacrifice. Earlier, he who answered from the chorus (*apekrinato*) would leap on to this table.[11] A dialogue had existed even before Thespis, probably between the person making the sacrifice and the dancers around him. But this was not yet the *hypokrisis* with which tragedy had its beginning; the evocative, true word sounded from the mouth of a being with a white face, as if from another world. This is how the new genre was born.

8. See Martin Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1950), Fig. 158 and perhaps Fig. 124, about wild-strawberry trees in Greece. Compare Frazer in his *Pausanias* v. 149.

9. Paus. 9. 22. 2

10. This is how we are to understand the famous place in the *Ars poetica: plaustris vexisse poemata Thespis.*

11. Pollux 4. 123 and Etymologicum magnum *s.v. "thymele."*

THE ORPHEUS THEME IN RINUCCINI AND POLIZIANO

After the first performance of the *Favola di Dafne* by Rinuccini, Corsi, and Peri in 1597, the inventors of opera consciously approached the task of perfecting the new genre. We must assume a similar intention in the Greek tragedians who undertook the perfecting of the invention of Thespis: the consciousness that a new art form—the art of the spoken dramatic word for the Greeks, of the sung dramatic word for the Italians—had been found, and its highest possibilities not yet realized. Only the poets and composers of the end of the sixteenth century thought of the ultimate possibility as in a sense already realized in their false picture of Greek tragedy. The proof for this knowledge of the new situation and the artistic aim is found in the preface which Rinuccini wrote for a second dramatic-musical composition (the second phase in the birth of opera) and published with the libretto. Here, too, the name of the poet comes first; this is the phase of *Euridice* by Rinuccini, Peri, and Caccini. Its first performance took place in the year 1600 in Florence in the Pitti Palace, on the occasion of the marriage of Maria Medici with the king of France.

Consciously, here (I quote from the preface), the *Favola di Dafne* is referred to as a phase in the invention of opera: "It was the opinion of many," the poet of the new queen relates, "that the ancient Greeks and Romans sang their whole tragedies on the stage; but this noble manner of performing was not only not revived, but, as far as I know, never even tried by anyone; and this, I believe, is a fault of our modern music which lags so far behind that of antiquity. But this idea of mine was completely refuted by Jacopo Peri when, after hearing of my and Jacopo Corsi's intention, he so charmingly composed the fable of Daphne."[12] But, then, we are forced to ask, what in the new piece went farther in the direction of Greek tragedy? The poet goes on to apologize in his preface that a further step toward tragedy was prevented by the joyous occasion—the royal wedding—and that, in the fable he had chosen, he was forced to alter the tragic ending which would have brought the new work quite close to Greek tragedy.

12. "E stata openione di molti, Cristianissima Regina, che gli antichi Greci e Romani cantassero su le scene le tragedie intere, ma si nobil maniera di recitare non che rinnovata, ma nè pur che io sappia fin qui era stata tentata da alcuno, e ciò credev' io per defetto della musica moderna di gran lungo all'antica inferiore: ma pensiero si fatto mi tolse interamente dall-animo messer Jacopo Peri, quando udito l'intenzione del Sig. Jacopo Corsi e mia, misse contanta grazia sotto le note la favola di Dafne."

The prologue is proof that, with the choice of subject, the Orpheus myth, the decisive step had been taken even though the author had been forced to deviate from it. In the *Favola di Dafne* the prologue was spoken first by "musica," later by "Ovidio." Both versions express the opinion of their authors as to where their work belonged: in music and in the tradition of Ovidian poetry. In *Euridice,* "tragedia" appears to give the prologue and to reassure the public: it will not come to a real tragedy, as the Florentines would expect from the title of the melodrama. Rinuccini has his Orpheus lead Euridice from the underworld and live with her in marital happiness, as is proper in a wedding piece of good omen. The fact that it is *tragedia* who prepares for this end meanwhile is justified by a connection which had already been established between the Orpheus theme and tragedy. The myth was familiar through Vergil and Ovid. The use of the material as tragedy in Italy belongs to the period of the "opéra avant l'opéra" and was the work of Agnolo Poliziano—the *Favola di Orfeo* expressly called "tragedia" in the Codex Reggianus to which Rinuccini could refer as a famous earlier version of the theme.

Just as another *Dafne* in 1486 had been accompanied by the music of one Gian Pietro della Viola, so a musician can be named in connection with the first performance of Poliziano's *Favola di Orfeo,* according to Romain Rolland; but the mere name "Germi" does not tell us much, and the piece has not become famous through its musical accompaniment. It represents a new start in the dramatic writing of the Italians—the first act constitutes the beginning of the pastoral play—and even though it is not improvised on the stage, as a piece written for an occasion, in a sense it belongs with the improvisations. The occasion was the celebration of a double engagement in Mantua in 1480: that of Clara Gonzaga to Gilbert de Montpensier and of Francesco Gonzaga to Isabella d'Este. The poet himself in his preface somewhat apologetically emphasizes the improvisational nature of the piece and immediately sounds the motif which connects this little drama with Greek tragedy—the mutilation of Orpheus:

> I wish that the *fabula* [this, in Latin, is also the word for tragedy] about Orpheus which I wrote at the request of His Eminence the Cardinal of Mantua in two days, with continuous disturbances, in the vulgar style so that the audience would understand it better—I wish it could be torn up at once, just as Orpheus himself was

torn. For I know well that this my daughter is so constituted that she would cause her father shame rather than honor, sorrow rather than joy.[13]

Poliziano originally wrote no more than four hundred short lines creating a kind of *sacra rappresentazione* with heathen content, inserted Latin verses instead of liturgical hymns into the Italian text, and did not dream of reawakening Greek tragedy. Insofar as the birth of opera can be called the rebirth of tragedy, he involuntarily took the place in it which we might assign to one of the many autoschediasms before Thespis.

Poliziano's work is certainly not the dramatic-evocative word of true tragedy and probably was not yet combined with dramatic-evocative music. But he surprises us, at the celebration of a double engagement, with the boldness of the unrelieved tragic ending. At the end of the fourth act, Euridice is torn from Orpheus by the powers of the underworld. This is followed by a fifth act, called "Baccanale"; and here it becomes obvious that in Poliziano there dwelt not only epic sources like Vergil and Ovid but also the *Bacchae* of Euripides, a tragedy which he could obtain in Florence in two fourteenth-century manuscripts. Up to this point he had dramatized the myth in a more medieval way; here he drew his inspiration from Greek tragedy. His reading must have moved him deeply—he mastered the language so well that he could write faultless Greek verse—and Greek tragedy awoke in him, even when he had no intention of awakening it.

The scene of the bacchanale is in Thrace, where, according to all ancient tradition, the mutilation of Orpheus took place. The singer makes his entrance with three verses in *ottave rime* which could well have been included in the two volumes of collected "stanze" by Poliziano. The last verse is dedicated to the theme of misogyny, anticipating the "la donna è mobile" of Verdi, like so much else in this true "work of promise" in the Ruskinian sense: with the pastoral play it combines lyric tragedy. Abruptly, one of the bacchae appears and calls others:

> See there is he who scorns our love.
> Oh, Oh, sisters, Oh, Oh, let us give him death.
> Seize thy thyrsus, do thou break down that branch.

13. "Desideravo, che la Fabula di Orfeo la quale a requisizione del nostro Reverendissimo Cardinale Mantovano, in tempo di due giorni, intra continui tumulti, in stilo vulgare perchè dagli spettatori meglio fosse intesa, avevo composta, fusse di subito, non altrimenti che esso Orfeo, lacerata, cognoscendo questa mia figliucla essere di qualità da fare più tosto al suo padre vergogna che onore, e più tosto atta a dargli malinconia che allegrezza."

Take thou a stone or fire and hurl it hard: do thou haste
and take yonder cudgel.
Oh, Oh, let us make the wretch pay the penalty!
Oh, Oh, let us pluck the heart out of his bosom.
Let the villain die, let him die, die.[14]

In this cry for the punishment of the transgressor who repudiates the love of women all the elements are present which are usually seen in antique representations of the death of Orpheus at the hands of wild Thracean maenads—yes, even more: one hurls a thyrsos at him, another breaks off a branch for the same purpose, still others seize stones and fire to throw at him. A tree is to serve as lance against him, the singer's heart is to be torn out of his breast; this is a motif from the orphic myth about the child Bacchus who was torn to pieces by the Titans but whose heart was kept in a covered basket.

It must have been a tumultuous scene on the stage in Mantua; and now the Bacchante returns to the foreground with the head of Orpheus, triumphant:

Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, the wretch is dead!
Evoè, Bacchus, Bacchus, I thank thee.
Throughout all the wood have we rent him,
And every twig is soaked with his blood.
We have torn him limb from limb
In many pieces with cruel torture.
Go now and scorn the wedding torch.
Evoè, Bacchus! take thou this victim.[15]

14. English translations introduced into the text of Italian verse which is given in nn. 14, 15, and 16 are by L. E. Lord, "The Orpheus of Angelo Politain," *The Orpheus and Aminta* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).

"Ecco quel che l'amor nostro dispreza!
O o sorelle! o o diamogli morte.
Tu scaglia il tirso; e tu quel ramo speza;
Tu piglia un sasso o fuoco, e getta forte;
Tu corri, e quella pianta là scaveza.
O o! facciam che pena il tristo porte.
O o! caviamogli el cor del petto fôra.
Mora lo scellerato, mora, mora!"

15. "O o! o o! morto è lo scellerato.
Evoè, Bacco, Bacco! io ti ringrazio.
Per tutto 'l bosco l'abbiamo stracciato
Tal ch'ogni sterpo è del sangue sazio:
L'abbiamo a membro a membro lacerato
In molti pezi con crudele strazio.
Or vada e biasmi la teda legittima!
Evoè Bacco! accetta questa vittima."

In this verse we have a vivid description of something called *sparagmós* in Greek and which is shown nowhere else in such detail: the sacrifice is torn apart limb by limb (Orpheus is expressly called "sacrifice," *vittima,* to Bacchus); his limbs are dragged through the woods, and the hard branches are soaked with blood. The entrance with the severed head, however, is obviously taken from the *Bacchae* of Euripides. There Agave appears with the head of her mutilated son Pentheus, as if it were the head of a slain lion—a scene which Goethe found so unbearable that in his translation he toned it down, at least in one descriptive detail: he had the mother carry the head on the point of a thyrsos over her shoulder instead of in her bare hands, just as Poliziano's maenad carries the head of Orpheus after the ancient model.

A bacchic dance is performed around the head—there is no other way we can imagine it—with a song for drunkards having this refrain:

Let every one follow thee, Bacchus, Bacchus, Bacchus, evoè, evoè.[16]

FROM THE DIONYSIAN SACRIFICE TO MONTEVERDI

To our way of thinking, a song by drunkards is a strange note on which to end a tragedy; or perhaps not so strange when we remember that the finale of Greek tragedies consisted of satyr-plays. What Poliziano succeeded in doing with such ease in the flowering of the Renaissance in 1480 was this: he returned a tragic Greek subject—indeed, as is becoming clear, the primary material of Greek tragedy—to the natural soil of a southern wine-growing culture; and, by placing the power of the wine-god in the foreground, enabled him to become the high point of the festivities, even at the celebration of a double engagement. The fact that the mutilation of Orpheus was the theme of a tragedy by Aeschylus could have been familiar to him through the Codex Laurentianus Mediceus of Pseudo-Eratosthenes which belongs to the same century. However, it was no mere humanisitc learning which moved him but the very theme itself which in the Greek tragedians had already been connected with the names of Pentheus and Orpheus. A *Pentheus* is cited among the tragedies of Thespis. Aeschylus, too, had written a *Pentheus* as well as his tragedy about Orpheus, the *Bassarai;* and it is mere chance that the remolding of the Pentheus material in the *Bacchae* of Euripides has been preserved as the last work of the youngest tragedian.

16. "Ognun segua, Bacco te.
Bacco, Bacco, eù, oè."

If in the case of Pentheus and Orpheus we talk about a common tragic material as two variations on the same theme, we do so in view of the deeply moving kernel of this theme: the *sparagmós*. For whatever precedes this peculiar action makes sense only as cause for it. But even in the causes there is a certain amount of agreement. In the *Bacchae* of Euripides, Pentheus was torn to pieces by his own mother; thus he, the enemy of Dionysus, was punished; but Agave, too, was punished because she would not believe in the divinity of her sister Semele's son. As enemy of the god, Pentheus probably had to suffer in Thespis and Aeschylus. For the bacchae in the *Bassarai* (this was the name for the maenads in Thrace) of Aeschylus, Orpheus, too, must have belonged to the enemies of Dionysus, since he apparently worshiped Apollo exclusively. Still his fate can be called "Dionysian," because Dionysus among the gods suffered the same fate as Orpheus and Pentheus; he also, as has been mentioned before, was torn to pieces, according to a myth which has been preserved as Orphic tradition.

The name "Pentheus" means "man of suffering." An intensification of it is "Megapenthes" ("man of great suffering"). A mythological king of Tiryns and Argos with this name was also known as a persecutor of Bacchus.[17] But how was it possible to give such a name to a living or fictitious person? The fact that the name was not given without reason is proved by a tale in the *Odyssey* (4. 11) in which Menelaus called a son born to him late in life (not by Helen but by a slave) "Megapenthes," meaning "to his great sorrow." When the name occurs in a tale about the sufferings of a god, such as the persecution of Dionysus, we must look there for the reason. The name "Pentheus" can be found on a list of men in Knossos containing other, bacchic names like Iacchos and Phales.[18] The name "man of suffering" could also be given to a follower of Dionysus, in memory of the fact that the god at first suffered, then withstood, holy and glorious. On the stage, Pentheus and Orpheus were substitutes for the god in whose honor the tragedies were written and performed. One tradition tells of a third enemy of Bacchus, his persecutor Lycurgus, whose history was dramatized by Aeschylus, that he and Dionysus were considered the same divine being because of the similarity with which both were venerated.[19]

17. Cf. my *Heroes of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959), Index.

18. *Diogenes*, No. 20 (1957), p. 14.

19. Strabo 10. 3. 16.

The myth about the mutilation of heroes, of a Pentheus or an Orpheus, was originally the story of the suffering of the god who for all antiquity was considered the god of wine. His presence in the wine presumes his presence in the grape, which has to be torn up, broken, trampled on, to become wine. We are told of songs which were called *melos epilenion* ("song of the grape").[20] In Latin they would be *carmina calcatoria,* as the *lenos* was the vessel in which the grapes were crushed. And one tradition tells us[21] that the song, like the *lenos,* contained the *sparagmós* of Dionysus. It would be straining the literal wording of this valuable piece of information about a peasant song to try to read more into it than the following: "As the grape now suffers, thus once suffered Bacchus. . . ." Titans appear—this, too, is recorded[22] —in the work of the poet and theologian Onomacritos in the sixth century B.C., as executors of the *sparagmós* of the god; and since then they belong to the orphic tradition in a literary reshaping of the myth about the sufferings of the child Bacchus. The songs about the *lenos* could have remained untouched by this reshaping.

Besides the god and the grape, another being suffered the same fate: the *tragos,* or goat, which was sacrificed to Dionysus with the reason that it was an enemy of the vine and thus of Bacchus. At the same time the god himself was called *eriphos* ("kid"); a name for which no other reason can be imagined but the ritual in which not a grown goat but a kid was sacrificed to Dionysus and at the same time took his place. Here we find the same paradox—we may call it "tragic" in the sense of the modern meaning of the word which is derived from the tragedy and *tragos* and thus designate, at the same time, the first bearer of this paradox—as in the case of Pentheus and Orpheus on the stage: the god is honored through a representation of his own suffering by the sacrifice of a creature which is both an enemy and an embodiment of him. The goat gave his blood to the grape vine—as punishment: this is how one side of the tragic unity, the natural enmity between goat and vine, was emphasized. No less naturally, however, the other side appeared: the similarity of the two and of wine; the same divine exuberance with

20. Athenaeus 199.

21. Schol. in Clem. Protr. 1. 2.

22. Paus. 8. 37. 5; references to what follows in my article quoted above, "Dramatische Gottesgegenwart . . . etc.," expanded in Italian as "Un sacrificio dionisiaco," *Dioniso,* XIV (1951), 3–4.

which the god Dionysus appeared to his followers. His presence in goat and vine, grape and wine, is not to be thought of in a material and exclusive form, as if goat, plant, grape, and wine had been dipped and formed out of Dionysus and thus made out of the same substance as he; one has rather to conceive of the all-inclusive presence of a divine being who stands above separate phenomena: *"There, too,* is the god and suffers and will rise again!" And this is not in any pantheistic sense but refers to a very specific deity whose presence does not include *everything* but only that which is "Dionysian": goat, vine, etc.

For the rites with which he was worshiped not only were goats chosen as sacrifice but also young deer. And these rites were carried out, not in one or two simple ways—the butchering of a large buck or the dismembering of young animals—but the mutilation could also follow the butchering and be accompanied by dramatic acts corresponding to the myth of the suffering of the god. On the Island of Tenedos, where the Dionysus sacrifice was that of a young bull, the ceremony began by giving the cow which had born the sacrificial animal nursing care like that of a young mother and by putting buskins on the calf such as Dionysus[23] had worn and after him the actors on the stage. This is not the only article of clothing worn by the *hypokrites* which was originally worn by the god and inherited by him who suffered his sufferings.[24]

The word *tragodia* ("tragedy") originally meant a song for which the prize was a goat or a presentation whose actors wore goatskins. The time for the festival of the "great Dionysia" (*megala Dionysia*), to which Thespis came from Icaria with his chorus versed in dances and songs about the sacrificial buck, was the Elaphebolion, which roughly corresponds to our month of March. In this month the vines are still without leaves and tendrils, like bald stumps cut down almost to the ground, very much in need of resurrection which could be expected from the blood of the sacrificed enemy. The name "month of the stag-hunting" strengthens the hypothesis that not only goats but other kinds of bucks as well had to give up their lives for this purpose. In a curious way the line from Poliziano seems to fit in here:

May every dry twig drink its fill of blood.

23. Walter Friedrich Otto, *Dionysos: Mythos und Kultus* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1933), p. 178.

24. Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1939), 33.

The "pathos" in the realm of Bacchus—the suffering of the god in the grape, in the sacrifice, in all of animal and vegetable nature—is the great mystery of the Dionysian religion: suffering from which springs the happiness of a civilization founded on the wine culture. Pity, *pietà* in the prologue of Rinuccini's *Euridice* (the Greek word is *éleos;* the accent alone seems to distinguish it from the *eleós* meaning sacrificial table[25]), is the result of tragedy, just as its cause is the myth of the suffering god represented by the buck, *eriphos* and *Dionysus*. The "little buck Dionysus" indicates the mystery: in all butchered and torn things he suffers who is being celebrated. Dionysus suffers in Pentheus, in Orpheus, in all heroes whose tortures fill the tragic poetry of the Greeks. He was called as "son of the steer" from the underworld, also as "esteemed steer," and at the same time as "heros Dionysos."[26] According to Aristotle, pity and fear had a cleansing effect on the audience. Cleansing, indeed; but, we may ask, with the Greeks of that day, for what if not for the joy of living?

This, too, is the meaning of the *Orfeo* by Agnolo Poliziano, that lyrical tragedy of the fifteenth century which is the prelude to Italian opera. But what Poliziano dared in 1480 Rinuccini no longer dared in 1600. His *Euridice* with its happy ending heralds the *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Gluck and Calzabigi and the freedom of opera which made it relinquish the approach to Greek tragedy as soon as it had attained its true nature. This happened soon afterward in the third phase of the birth of opera with a *Favola di Orfeo*. In this case the name of the composer can no longer take second place: the work by Claudio Monteverdi and the poet Alessandro Strigio the Younger was performed at the carnival of the year 1607 in the Accademia degli Invaghiti ("Academy of the Ravished") in Mantua. It consisted of five acts, like Poliziano's *Orfeo* in its final form in the Codex Reggianus. Beginning with the fourth act, Strigio's libretto follows that model. The later editions and performances usually close with the fourth act. The text of the fifth act has always been known, but the music for it has only recently been discovered and published.[27] Quotations from the text

25. Compare Hesiod op. 265, *eleón,* "pitoyablement" (Mazon ed.).

26. Plut. Is. et Os. 35; Quaest. Gr. 36; the interpretation of the references as proof for Dionysus as god of the underworld and thus as god of tragedy in my *Heroes of the Greeks,* pp. 23 ff.

27. By G. Francesco Malipiero, *Per canto e pianoforte* (Milano, 1950).

alone would not tell us much. Here it seems for a moment as if the rebirth of tragedy were actually taking place in opera. Backstage, Orpheus is being torn to pieces; on stage the maenads are singing triumphantly, not like drunk Thracian women but like true Bacchae moved by their god, as Euripides depicted the devout Dionysian chorus in his tragedy. They are glorifying Bacchus, conqueror of the East, victorious lion. Two years later Monteverdi had already suppressed this ending, denying himself the Dionysian finale. In the edition of 1609 he has Apollo, the father of the singer, appear at the end instead of the Bacchae. The god takes his son with him, and the opera ends with the ascension of Orpheus.

The singer whose myth announced the almighty power of song brought tragedy to the stage as the sacrifice of all living things to the tragic laws of the world. His liberation from these laws, the apotheosis of the almighty singer, opened up the free world of opera in which everything has become possible—possible with such ease that it even allows playing with the tragic. And this is just what the Baroque period chose to do. Orpheus could again be torn to pieces. This happened in the first opera given in France, the *Orfeo* of Luigi Rossi in 1647. I shall quote the conclusion of the fantastic plot, using the synopsis by Romain Rolland, who, in his *Musicians of Former Days,* devoted a special essay to the event of this first opera performance in Paris:

> . . . Bacchus and the Bacchantes tear the Thracian singer to pieces. In the Apotheosis the constellation of Lyra is seen rising in the sky, and choirs sing the glory of love and conjugal fidelity. Lastly, Jupiter, in a recitative air full of stately vocal flourishes, points the moral of the story in a madrigal addressed to the queen.[28]

28. "The first opera played in Paris" (*Musicians of Former Days,* trans. Mary Blaiklock [New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1915], p. 70).