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Adikìa

On original sin within the tragic imagery

If we assume that a human is an inherently tragic being, then there are probably two main competing aspects within such an assumption. On one hand, there is the agency of the absurd to whom a man is subjected to and called to respond upon from birth to death. On the other, there is the very moment of death, which will colour every one of his decisions *à rebours*, each choice between the affirmation and the negation of oneself, of the whole of the Creation. To live or to die, to live and to die – thus theorizing the most personal answer to these queries by devoting oneself to it – means to approach the tragic sense of life.

This article[1] will try to tackle the imagery of the tragic idea by engaging with the philosophical reasons which lie behind the 'humiliating prospect' of being condemned to die by the merciless agency of a blind, senseless force. Thrown into a world that is wider and more complex than his weak gaze could ever embrace, a man might find that it is precisely inside himself that the contradiction lies; that the miraculous vastness that surrounds him might trim its highest pitches and lowest bottoms to fit into his tiny heart. Why would then this special being, gifted with incredible talents and incomparable wit, and with the power to choose to sever ties with history once and for all, if that is in his momentary will, «the strangest wonder»[2], as Sophocles wrote, die, indiscriminately, painfully, senselessly?

[1] The present article is a part of the doctoral dissertation of the title *The Birth of a Tragic Hero(ine). On tragic excess in contemporary theatre* (2022, joint PhD, University of Bologna - University of Antwerp).

[2] Sophocles, *Antigone*, in D. Grene and R. Lattimore (eds.), *Greek Tragedies I*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2013, pp. 335-375.

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Bare life

Nietzsche tells[3] a legend about King Midas, who tried to catch Silenus, Dionysus' companion. When finally captured, the *daemon* would disclose a very important piece of wisdom to the king. To the question «What is the best and most excellent thing for human beings?»[4] Midas received the following response:

> "Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you not to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon"[5].

What if Silenus was right? What if there is no *beyond* for us, what if there is only bare life?

A story about Saint Margaret of Antioch says that she killed a devil with dragon's features, who tempted her in the prison cell she had been confined to for devoting her life to the Christian God. It is believed that she died at fifteen, as a martyr.

In October 2019, the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp opened an exhibition entitled *Madonna meets Mad Meg: Masterpieces and Their Collectors*[6], in which Jean Fouquet's famous *Melun Diptych*[7] competes for attention with Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Dulle Griet*[8]. In 1894, the young art historian and collector Fritz Mayer van den Bergh bought that *Dulle Griet* at an auction in Cologne. This purchase renewed attention on Bruegel's artworks among a twentieth-century audience[9]. Who actually is Dulle Griet (in English, she is Mad Mag, from Margaret)?

«Mysterious and disturbing»[10] – as Artaud would describe her. Griet is – and this much is at least obvious – a giant. We see her walking resolutely, capable of taking

[3] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Cambridge-NewYork, Cambridge University Press, 1999 (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, Leipzig, E.W. Fritzsch, 1872).
[4] Ivi, p. 23.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Madonna meets Mad Meg. Masterpieces and Their Collectors*, from 5 October 2019 to 9 January 2022, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp, www.museummayervandenbergh.be (last accessed: 15 July 2022).
[7] J. Fouquet, *Melun Diptych* (1450-1455, conserved in Koninklijk Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp).
[8] P. Bruegel the Elder, *Dulle Griet* (1563, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp).
[9] E. Oberthaler, *et al.* (eds.), *Bruegel*, published on the occasion of the exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien, Thames & Hudson, 2018, p. 9.
[10] A. Artaud, *Letters on Language*, in *The Theatre and its Double*, in *Antonin Artaud: Collected Works*, vol. IV, London, John Calder, 1999, p. 93 (*Antonin Artaud: Oeuvres Complètes*, tome IV, Paris, Edition Gallimard, 1964).

whatever she wants – as Rabelais' Gargantua, who took the bells from Notre Dame to put them around the neck of his mule[11]. Behind her, an army of women, who, like Bacchae, impose the rule of chaos. In front of her is a mouth, wide open, like in Bosch's *Visions of Tondal*[12], leading maybe directly to hell.

Her eyes seem on alert, her neck is thick (with some kind of Adam's apple), her body supported on very large feet. Her head is covered by a metal cap, her chest in armour. In one hand, she carries a sword, in another the spoils of war. Among this loot, she carries a frying pan. It seems that Bruegel – by depicting this masculine woman of masculine manners – was engaged in ridiculing a hierarchical division between the sexes in the sixteenth-century Low Countries[13]. It seems that Dulle Griet, led by the spirit of *anti-gonos*[14], has the power to construct and deconstruct the entire world around her, building it up or tearing it apart, as what The Living Theatre in their *Antigone*[15] of the sixties called – very symbolically in this context[16] – «the Bosch-Machine»[17], a monstrous mechanism of the state, which grows with the consent of the multitude. Griet is, thus, both the oppressor and the oppressed, being swallowed by hell and being hell itself.

It may be the case that the one who can kill the devil is able to become the devil herself; while the very potentiality of turning into the biggest threat that is directly encountered and still remaining in her essence intact might make her a saint.

> "How could God ever desire the death of someone who is not a sinner?" The doctrine of martyrdom therefore justifies the scandal of a meaningless death, of an execution that could only appear as absurd[18].

In his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus writes: «Perhaps this notion will become

[11] Cf. F. Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Chicago, Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952 (*La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel*, 1532).
[12] E. Oberthaler, *et al.* (eds.), *Bruegel*, cit., p. 67.
[13] Ivi, pp. 168-171.
[14] «The "inflexible": from *anti-gon*, where *gon/gonia* means 'the angle'; or 'she, who refutes to become a mother' in the case in which *gone* from *gonos/gonia* means 'she, who gives a birth'», S. Žižek, *Antigone*, London-New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, pp. XX-XXI.
[15] *Antigone*, directed by J. Beck, J. Malina – The Living Theatre, 1967-1968.
[16] Bruegel was considered "a second Bosch" by Ludovico Gucciardini, Giorgio Vasari and others. This appellative positively influenced Bruegel's fame, www.bruegel.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be (last accessed: 15 July 2022).
[17] Cf. C. Molinari, *Storia di Antigone. Da Sofocle al Living Theatre. Un mito nel teatro occidentale*, Bari, De Donato, 1977, p. 198. The author refers to J. Jacquot testimony in J. Jacquot (ed.), *Antigone*, in *Les voies nouvelles de la création théâtrale*, 1970.
[18] G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, New York, Zone Books, 1999, p. 27 (*Quel che resta di Auschwitz. L'archivio e il testimone (Homo sacer III)*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1998).

clearer if I risk this shocking statement: the absurd is sin without God»[19]. It is a *divorce*[20], Camus claims. A fundamental divorce of myself from the rest.

It was Primo Levi – cited by Giorgio Agamben on various occasions in his *Remnants of Auschwitz* – who introduced the term «grey zone»[21], individuated by the philosopher as the new ethical element, the field of «*impotentia judicandi*»[22]. It is the zone of «irresponsibility»[23], «in which victims become executioners and executioners become victims»[24]. One very eloquent example of what Levi meant by the «grey zone» is the *Sonderkommando*: the *special* units of those imprisoned in the Nazi camps who had to manage the functioning of the gas chambers in all its monstrous details[25].

> "Certainly, I could have killed myself or got myself killed; but I wanted to survive, to avenge myself and bear witness. You mustn't think that we are monsters; we are the same as you, only much more unhappy..."[26]

Might it be possible to go even further than Levi did and assert that, in general terms, there is no specific point, no "zone" in which the victim or the executioner become the opposite of each other, but that these two correspond so perfectly as to create one inseparable entity bonded by life and death together? Might it be that hell is equally inside as outside of man? Might it be that Levi's «grey zone» is what Mitya Karamazov names «the human heart», a battlefield where God and the devil fight each other arduously?[27] It is precisely in this point where any *ratio* encounters a deadlock, or in Camus' words again, it is the hour of the meeting with the absurd:

> A stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts, what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assaults?[28]

[19] A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1975, p. 42 (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Paris, Gallimard, 1942).
[20] Ivi, p. 33.
[21] G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, cit., p. 21.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Ivi, p. 17.
[25] Ivi, pp. 24-26.
[26] Ivi, p. 25. Agamben quotes P. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, New York, Random House, 1989 (*I sommersi e i salvati*, Torino, Einaudi, 1986).
[27] Cf. F.M. Dostoevsky, *I fratelli Karamazov*, Torino, Einaudi, 2014 (part 1, book III, ch. III) (*Бра́тья Карама́зовы*, 1880).
[28] A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, cit., p. 25.

Was it not Oedipus who liberated Thebes from the Sphinx, thanks to his intelligence and his wit, but who also brought sickness and disgrace right among the Thebans, due to his lack of reasoning?

> If this fact is true, we ought to consider the scourge as the immediate medium or materialisation of a thinking power in close contact with what we call fate[29].

Western theatre, and its culture *in toto* is useless – Antonin Artaud believed – if it is to be just a decoration, a likable entertainment for some virtuous, decent people. It refers only to human reasoning, professing numb ideas, poisoned by conventions, stereotypes, the *flatus vocis* of progress and *know-how*. It is paralysing and artificial; enslaved by the word of conformism, estranged from the life. It has to change[30]. «I have to change it» – Artaud thought:

> I did not say I wanted to exert any direct effect on our times; I said that the theatre I wanted to create, in order to be possible, to exist and be accepted by the times, presupposed another form of civilisation[31].

It might be that, first and foremost, theatre should not lie. In Dostoevsky's *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, a man fell into a suicidal dream, which brought him to visit the world of a «live and constant communion with the universal Whole»[32], a world of pure joy, with no religions, nor ideas of eternity, with no science nor desire to know life, with no fear of death nor grief, but love, only love. Overwhelmed by the power of bliss, the man tried to share his earthly experiences with his host, who could not even suspect what it means to love in anguish, to hurt, grieve and hate, but still listened, accepted and understood the visitor's words. It does not take much, though – the philosopher Sergio Givone writes[33] – just a little deviation between the truth, as it is, and its mirror image in the consciousness of a man, only an act of thinking and everything changes; the truth becomes corrupted, no longer credible[34]. Just this much, this little errant spark, was enough for Dostoevsky's character to admit the following:

[29] A. Artaud, *Theatre and the Plague*, in *The Theatre and its Double*, cit., p. 9.
[30] Cf. A. Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, cit.
[31] Ivi, *Letters on Language*, cit., p. 90.
[32] F.M. Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, in *Notes from Underground, White Nights, the Dream of a Ridiculous Man, and selection from The House of the Dead*, New York, The New American Library, 1961, p. 218 (*Сон смешного человека*, 1877).
[33] «Come se tra la verità qual è in se stessa e il suo rispecchiarsi nella coscienza di qualcuno ci fosse uno scarto minimo, impercettibile, ma decisivo: basta una atto di riflessione, ed essa non è già più com'era, infatti appare offuscata, inquinata, non credibile. Nel cuore della verità c'è specie di macchia originale: la colpa di doverla confessare», S. Givone, *Metafisica della peste. Colpa e destino*, Torino, Einaudi, 2012, p. 78.
[34] *Ibid*.

> All I know is that I caused their fall from grace. Like a sinister trichina, like a plague germ contaminating whole kingdoms, I contaminated with my person that entire happy, sinless planet. They learned how to lie, they came to love it, and they grew to appreciate the beauty of untruth. It may have started with a joke, innocently, playfully, with a flirtation, but the germ of the lie penetrated their hearts, and they took a fancy to it[35].

This is original sin; carried by Oedipus, with his first step, on his perforated feet. At Colonus, the aged wanderer king defended his name as that of an *involuntary victim*:

> The bloody deaths, the incest, the calamities
> you speak so glibly of: I suffered them
> by fate, against my will! It was god's pleasure,
> and perhaps our family had angered him long ago.
> In me myself you could not find such evil
> as would have made me sin against my own[36].

Bare life is the explosion of the plague – Givone writes[37] – it is the perfect coincidence of guilt and innocence. It should never happen, the philosopher continues[38]; in fact, it could never happen (based on some shallow human expectations), but it still does; it intrudes reality, spreads quickly into every angle of the known, soaks its walls with its poisonous liquids, weighs down the air with its stagnant breath; leaves a man not only stripped of the life he knew before, but almost expelled for good from any habitable reality. The plague is much more than a human is. It hides inside what is left, after itself taking everything away.

> Whence things have their origin, there they must also pass away according to necessity; for they must pay penalty and be judged for their injustice, according to the ordinance of time[39].

[35] F.M. Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, cit., p. 220.
[36] Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in D. Grene and R. Lattimore (eds.), *Greek tragedies III*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2013, 960-970.
[37] «Che, a ben vedere, è la stessa cosa che la nuda vita, essendo la nuda vita né più né meno che l'esplosione alla peste. Donde la perfetta coincidenza, in quel nudo fatto che è la nuda vita, di colpevolezza e innocenza», S. Givone, *Metafisica della peste*, cit., p. 15.
[38] «Fatalità: certo, quel che è successo è successo. Poteva non succedere. Anzi, che succedesse era impensabile», ivi, p. 11.
[39] «Thus translates the young Nietzsche in a treatise completed in 1873 entitled *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of Greeks*», M. Heidegger, *The Anaximander Fragment*, in *Early Greek Thinking. The Dawn of Western Philosophy*, San Francisco, Harper, 1984, p. 13 (*Der Spruck der Anaximander*, in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main, copyright 1950 by Vittorio Klostermann, edition 1972).

Anaximander from Miletus believed that humans have their origins from the *apeiron*, meaning the infinite, the indistinct principium of all, to which they belonged unobjectionably. Nevertheless, something important happened – the reasons for which remain veiled – and pushed them right into the pit of turmoil, difference and conflict, into individualisation. From that moment on, man, this germ of *discordia*, has to pay his debt for being alive[40]. From that moment on, being and not being are both his enemies, as are other men, as he is to himself. Did he ever ask to be born, where being born is a fact, Givone writes[41], a physical fact[42], just as the plague itself is, a measurable entity with a precisely ascribed Latin name? The plague is not metaphysical – the philosopher asserts[43] – it is ours, as life itself is, this bare factual life, in front of which we all have to pay a debt to each other, to which we are all guilty. This is *adikìa*, the guilt of being born, the guilt of being.[44] The more we live, the more we pay. So it might be, as Silenus claims, that to participate briefly, if not to disengage at all, is of the best benefit to a man, this monstrous being[45].

Might dancing for Dionysus be a solution? Is it not precisely this divinity who re-enacts eternally his own birth, which *took place in death*?[46] Is not the god of *zōḗ*, the god of indestructible life, who was torn to pieces and reborn[47], a fairly relevant address to refer to?

> A hundred years ago, an outbreak of plague killed all the inhabitants of a town in Persia, except the man who washed bodies, who had carried on with his job throughout[48].

Artaud was resolute: «I intend to do what I have hoped to do or nothing at all»[49]. Theatre has to find its authenticity, bonding with life, again. Theatre, as a plague, should take away all the ornaments of one's ego, its virtues or flaws, achievements

[40] S. Givone, *Responsabilità per il destino*, in N. Novello (a cura di), *Tràgos. Pensiero e poesia del tragico*, Pasian di Prato, Capanotto Editore, 2014, p. 234.
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] «Il male ci appartiene in quanto fatto fisico prima ancora che metafisico. Intride la nostra carne, i nostri nervi, la nostra voce. Ne siamo portatori inconsapevoli: tant'è che basta un niente per scatenarlo. Un semplice contatto, una svista, un lapsus. Non appartiene a potenze che ci trascendono. È cosa nostra», S. Givone, *Metafisica della peste*, cit., p. 58.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] S. Givone, *Responsabilità per il destino*, cit., p. 234.
[45] B. Brecht, *The Antigone of Sophocles*, in *Brecht. Collected Plays: Eight*, T. Kuhn and D. Constantine (eds.), London-New York, Bloomsbury, 2012 (*Die Antigone des Sophokles*, 1948).
[46] Cf. K. Kerényi, *Dioniso: archetipo della vita indistruttibile*, Milano, Adelphi, 2010, p. 116 (*Dionysos. Urbild des unzerstörbaren Lebens*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1976).
[47] Cf. *ibid.*
[48] A. Camus, *The Plague*, Penguin Classics, 2013, p. 65 (*La Peste*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947).
[49] A. Artaud, *Letters on Language*, cit., p. 90.

and failures, blessings and sins, ideologies and beliefs, all its material goods and properties, all the useless burdens. Only when completely stripped of our personas can we get into Charon's boat, as in one of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*[50]; nothing of all this will be needed in Hades.

> Theatre's true purpose is to create Myths, to express life from an immense, universal aspect and to deduce imagery from this life where we would like to discover ourselves[51].

Yet, this death should occur in life, it should make us immune – as Givone writes[52] – or better, immunised, without turning us into plague spreaders who draw pleasure from their wrongdoings, without equating us completely with the disease, but helping us return to ourselves[53]. The theatre, this «sense of gratuitous urgency»[54], should reveal all the malignant spirits hidden from the light of day – actually under the garment of their opposites – taking upon itself, as a catalyser, «the victory of dark powers»[55]. Being unreal, just as a plague is – a sum of facts which does not correspond to its circumstantial resonance – the theatre should encapsulate the cruelty of disastrous immanence and sew it into its own thigh – as Zeus did with Dionysus, saved from the burning belly of his mother Semele, which had been set on fire by Hera's anger[56]. It should prevent rats going out onto the streets by giving them space on the stage.

Artaud's theatre wants to engage with life. It is not a theatre aiming to teach, to elevate the self, to liberate men from anguish and fear. It is not interested in the propagation of ideologies, in the logics of necessary progress, in the quest for a cure. It is not at anybody's or anything's service. It is a theatre of madness, maybe the best measure of the one who does not know, but yet is obliged to respond.

Responsible for it all – as Givone asserts – «tragically free»[57].

[50] Cf. Lucian of Samosata, *Dialogues of the Dead*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1961 (Λουκιανου, *De Vita Caesarum*, II AD).

[51] A. Artaud, *Letters on Language*, cit., p. 89.

[52] «[...] un immune; meglio, un immunizzato. Ossia un salvato, un preservato», S. Givone, *Metafisica della peste*, cit., pp. 17-18. The philosopher uses both terms: "immune" and "immunised", making a difference between whom is to be considered preserved in his essence, able to bear the burden of responsibility and the one who adapts to, *goes with the flow* of destruction.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] A. Artaud, *Theatre and the Plague*, cit., p. 14.

[55] Ivi, p. 19.

[56] K. Kerényi, *Gli dèi e gli eroi della Grecia. Il racconto del mito, la nascita della civiltà*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2015, p. 215 (*Die Mythologie der Griechen*, vol. I: *Die Götter- und Menschenheitsgeschichten*, vol. II: *Die Heroen-Geschichten*, 1951).

[57] «Questo significa che salvezza altro non è che restituzione al proprio destino umano. Sempre di nuovo fatti non per essere come bruti, ma *scientes bonum et malum*. In una parola: responsabili. E quindi liberi. Tragicamente liberi», S. Givone, *Metafisica della peste*, cit., p. 18.

What does it mean to be condemned to death

Thus gods justify the life of men by living it themselves – the only satisfactory theodicy![58]

For Nietzsche, the Ancient Greeks were well aware of all the horrors of life and, in order to be able to survive the cruelty of Creation, they invented the completely parallel, dreamlike world of the Olympians. In trying to pose, with some well-intentioned aim, a question concerning who we are, we must risk and ask, first and foremost – what does it mean to be condemned to death?

> Condemned to die!
> Well, why not! "Men," I remember to have read in some book which contained nothing else that was good, "*Men are condemned to die with various reprieves*." How is my position different?[59]

One day, while crossing Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, Victor Hugo saw an executioner testing his equipment for the "spectacle" that was to take place in the evening – Adèle Hugo recounts in the biography *Victor Hugo, by a witness of his life*[60]. That man on the square was talking to some curious passers-by, while calmly preparing to kill another man, who was agonising at the same moment in his prison cell – Adéle writes[61]. The following day, in 1829 – after multiple encounters with the guillotine in Paris's public space – Hugo started writing *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*.

It is a brief novel which recounts the story of a young man, maybe one certain Jean Martin[62], possibly any young man or woman, sentenced to death. From the day of the trial, the condemned had six more weeks to live and think burdensome thoughts. Hugo is interested in portraying the psychological torture endured by the imprisoned, correlated with the complete indifference of the community he belonged to before becoming a reject. The writer asks:

> Have they ever considered the painful thought that in the man whom they condemn there is an intellect, an intellect which had counted on life, a soul which was not prepared for death? No. In all that, they see only the vertical fall of a triangular knife, thinking, no doubt, that for the condemned man there is nothing before or after[63].

[58] F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, cit., p. 24.
[59] V. Hugo, *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*, cit. Here, the character refers to Hugo's book *Han d'Islande*, from 1823.
[60] A. Hugo, *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, Paris, Hetzel, 1863, pp. 429-431.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] V. Hugo, *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*, cit. (ch. VI).

The dying man, on the other hand, conflicted indeed in the instant between "who I was" and "who I am now", had become a ghost[64] even before the execution, and, thus bewildered and apparently seeing everyone else becoming ghosts, asks:

> But if these dead return, under what form will they come? What part of their incomplete and mutilated body will they keep? Which will they choose? Will the head or the body be the ghost?[65]

In the foreword to *The Meek One*, Dostoevsky judges this writing as «the most realistic and the most truthful of all his [Hugo's] books»[66]. The main reason for this claim is the fact that Hugo's Condemned Man – as if he was being recorded on a stenograph, Dostoevsky specifies – is describing his own state of mind and heart in detail until the very end of his life. To make it all less credible – Dostoevsky continues – Hugo decided to make his character write about his experience all the way through the story, even at the gallows, while pleading for mercy. Nonetheless, it is precisely this fantastic expedient – Dostoevsky claims – which renders this literary work possible in the first place. It seems that this idea aligns perfectly with Nietzsche's abovementioned one. How could it be possible otherwise to respond to the question regarding the experience of being condemned to death, if not by distancing from this calumny, if not by writing about it?

J.-P. Vernant in the book *Mythe et tragédie II*[67] looks into the origins of the Ancient Greek tragedy not by focusing on the «umbilical cord»[68] which connects it with primordial religious rites, but by rather regarding it as an extraordinary invention of the city – (while still it is also important to remember that the organisation of the Greek city was never completely separated from religion either)[69].

[64] «"Condemned to die!" shouted the crowd; and while they led me away, the people rushed at my heels with the noise of a falling building. I walked along dazed and stupefied. A change had taken place in me. Up to the moment of the death-sentence, I had been living, breathing among other men; now I clearly saw that there was a high wall between the world and myself. Nothing seemed the same to me. The great shining windows, the beautiful sunshine, the clear sky, the pretty flower, – all were white and dull, like a shroud. The crowd of men, women, and children following me were like phantoms», ivi (ch. II).

[65] Ivi (ch. XLI).

[66] «la più realistica e la più vera di tutte quelle da lui scritte», F.M. Dostoevsky, *La mansueta. Racconto fantastico*, in *La mansueta, Il sogno di uomo ridicolo*, Milano, Garzanti, 1988, p. 10 (*Кроткая*, 1876); M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 55 (*Проблемы поэтики Достоевскогo*, 1963).

[67] J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mito e tragedia due. Da Edipo a Dioniso*, Torino, Einaudi, 1991 (*Mythe et tragédie II*, Paris, Èditions La Dècouverte, 1986).

[68] «cordone ombelicale», J.-P. Vernant, *Il dio della finzione tragica*, in *Mito e tragedia due*, cit., p. 6 (All the trans. from Italian are by who writes).

[69] Ivi, p. 9.

The heroes of epos – Vernant claims[70] – whose stories were taken and re-elaborated by tragedy, once only praised and honoured as a grandiose traditional models, now became the objects of debate on the theatrical stage. While the dramatic structure borrows plots, characters and themes from the epos, it simultaneously internally shatters its one-dimensional perspective, leaving a Greek from the fifth century BC in front of his imperfect hero, who mirrors his own humanly faulty nature. In other words, the invention of what Vernant calls «tragic consciousness»[71] problematises the cultural and societal setup, within which the ancient spectator interprets reality, giving him the possibility to imagine the alternatives. The theatrical stage presents what Vernant individuates as *an absence in the presence*[72], – a pure fiction, fantasy of the elsewhere, embodied, nonetheless, right amongst the audience. This *illusion*, the awakening, followed by interrogation of the ghosts – those sacred projections of Greek thought – this new medium «based on pure artifice»[73], invents itself by inventing new imagery. In regard to this, the philosopher writes:

> The consciousness of the fiction [...] is the constitutive element of the dramatic spectacle; it appears simultaneously to be its condition and its product[74].

If there is a philosopher who would appreciate Vernant's assertion around the importance of the embodied fiction of tragic art, of its dare to imagine different potentialities to the new world born from Zagreus' heart, that might be Anaximander. Regarding the prime question of the origins of the world, his fellow-philosopher of the Ionian School, Thales, believed that everything around us is derived from water and that it all floats on water. Anaximenes, on the other hand, tried to resolve some major problems with Thales' theory, concluding that the primal substance of it all must be air. Anaximander thought of the *apeiron* as the primal element of all beings.

Setting aside the meaning of the term and its philosophical relevance, the physicist Carlo Rovelli claims that Anaximander's major contribution is in the fact that his *apeiron* is not any of the substances testable in our everyday experience, but still functions as a «unifying natural element to explain all things»[75]. This, it might be

[70] Ivi, pp. 9-10.
[71] «coscienza tragica», ivi, p. 8.
[72] «La 'presenza' che l'attore incarna a teatro è quindi sempre il segno o la maschera di una *assenza* alla realtà quotidiana del pubblico», ivi, p. 9 (italics are the author's).
[73] «un'opera umana basata sul puro artificio», ivi, p. 9.
[74] «'La coscienza della finzione, – ho scritto recentemente, – è elemento costitutivo dello spettacolo drammatico; appare contemporaneamente come la sua condizione e il suo prodotto'», ivi, pp. 9-10.
[75] C. Rovelli, *The first Scientist Anaximander and his legacy*, M.L. Rosenberg (trans.), Yardely,

said, *fantastical* thought experiment, even though it is not necessarily empirically provable, encourages the imagination as the primal source of new knowledge. It is – as in the case of *apeiron* – that, by looking at the invisible, by imagining, a human creates and thus discovers reality. Rovelli writes:

> Atoms – those of the Greek atomists Democritus and Leucippus, as well as their nineteenth-century relatives, those of John Dalton – are the direct descendants of Anaximander's *apeiron*. They are natural objects (nothing is particularly divine about atoms) that escape our direct perception but in terms of which we understand the constitution of matter[76].

It was the methodology used by Anaximander, rather than the content of his theory itself, that would be implemented by science through the centuries, until our day – Rovelli claims[77].

> Truth is accessible and an integral part of nature itself, but truth is hidden. The instruments with which it can be reached are observation and intelligence. Thought must be ready to imagine the existence of more natural entities than what we directly perceive[78].

When Dionysus for the first time presents himself in front of the Theban King Pentheus, in Euripide's *The Bacchae*, he is recognised as follows:

> So,
> you are attractive, stranger, at least to women –
> which explains, I think, your presence here in Thebes.
> Your curls are long; they fall along your cheeks.
> You do not wrestle, I take it. And what fair skin!

Westholme, 2011 (ch. V, *Anaximander: Apeiron*, e-book); It trans. «L'intuizione centrale, qui, è che per spiegare la complessità del mondo sia opportuno postulare, immaginare, l'esistenza di qualcosa d'altro, che non è nessuna delle sostanze del mondo diretto della nostra esperienza, ma possa *fungere* da elemento unificante di spiegazione per tutte queste», *Che cos'è la scienza, La rivoluzione di Anassimandro*, Milano, Mondadori, 2014, p. 74 (*Anaximandre de Milet, ou la naissance de la pensée scientifique*, Paris, Dunod, 2009).

[76] Ivi, It. trans. «Nel postulare l'*ápeiron*, Anassimandro non fa altro che aprire la strada a quello che la scienza continuerà poi a fare per secoli, con straordinario successo: immaginare l'esistenza di "entità" che non sono direttamente visibili e percepibili, ma ci permettono di rendere conto dei fenomeni. Gli atomi, sia quelli di Leucippo e Democrito, sia i loro lontani cugini di John Dalton del XIX secolo, sono diretti discendenti dell'*ápeiron* di Anassimandro», cit., p. 75.

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] «[...] la verità è accessibile è parte integrante della natura stessa, ma è nascosta. Gli strumenti per raggiungerla sono l'osservazione e il pensiero. Per fare questo, il pensiero è pronto a immaginare l'esistenza di entità naturali, cioè assumere che queste esistono, anche se esse non sono immediatamente percepibili», *ibid.*

> You must take care of it – not in the sun, by night
> when you hunt Aphrodite with your beauty[79].

While ridiculed for having an appearance similar to that of a Greek woman, whose pale skin signals her as a devoted protector of the sacred realm of *oikos*,[80] the god listens calmly, not wanting to fully disclose his identity. He prefers to be regarded as a foreigner who honours the cult of Zeus' son, while at the same time claiming his curls to be holy[81] and to have Dionysus' thyrsus in his hand. The god himself is on the stage, invisible to those who do not want to see.

> You do not know
> what is the life you live. You do not know
> what you do. You do not know who you are[82].

This beautiful foreigner would kill Pentheus using the hands of the king's own mother, Agave, who was blinded to what she was about to do. He who brings wine, who helps humans forget the burdensome necessities of this life, who unleashes from chains, he who dances – he would tear Pentheus apart, using Agave as the perpetrator of this hideous crime. Can there be anything so blatantly present and inevitably absent simultaneously as death itself is?

> Yet one will never be sufficiently surprised that everyone lives as if no one 'knew'[83].

The moment of death... Hugo protested, as mentioned earlier, that neither the crowd, not the hangman, nor the judge, nor the lawyer – nobody saw anything before or after that moment.

[79] Euripides, *The Bacchae*, in D. Grene and R. Lattimore (eds.), *Greek tragedies III*, cit., pp. 450-455.
[80] C. Gentili, *Seminare «una quantità di denti di drago». L'anomalia tebana e il significato politico di un modello tragico*, in «Bollettino Filosofico», XXX, *Nichilismo e modernità. Ripensando il tragico moderno*, 2015, p. 71, available online at: https://doi.org/10.6093/1593-7178/3690 (last accessed: 15 July 2022).
[81] Dionysus is speaking: «My hair is holy. / My curls belong to God», Euripides, *The Bacchae*, cit., pp. 490-495.
[82] Ivi, p. 505.
[83] A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, cit., p. 21.