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Marx and/or Nietzsche?
Ancient Greece and Tragedy in Barthesian Theory

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for Guido

Introduction

As Roland Barthes began his postgraduate studies on ancient Greek theatre with Paul Mazon at the Sorbonne in Spring 1941, George Thomson was about to complete the manuscript for his study *Aeschylus and Athens*.[1] As Christophe Corbier points out elsewhere in this special number, Barthes was using Thomson's 1935 essay (in English) on Aeschylean theatre in his postgraduate dissertation which was submitted in October 1941 (though, for some reason, it was not credited in the bibliography).[2] This was to be the beginning of a series of scattered but important references to Thomson's work on ancient Greek theatre that appear across Barthes's career, especially in relation to *Aeschylus and Athens*. Rarely mentioned in studies of Barthes's work, Thomson's theories on the origins of tragedy and poetry have played an important role in Barthes's materialist aesthetics.

I have not found any translation into French of Thomson's work on Greece before the 1960s (when he was invited to the 'Cercle d'études et de recherches marxistes' in Paris), so we should assume that Barthes read Thomson's work in the original English.[3] The number of references to Thomson's study in Barthes's work, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, suggests more than a passing acquaintance with the main thrust of the British Hellenist's arguments.[4] It is the complex and contradictory views on

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Thomson's historicist approach to Greek tragedy in Barthes's comments that we will investigate here.

Tracing Barthes's use of Thomson on ancient Greek theatre will be carried out by way of a triangulation with the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. In a recent article on Barthes and Nietzsche, Shane Weller looks, almost exclusively, at the later Barthes, from the late 1960s onwards, to show how Barthes adopted and adapted the philological approach of the nineteenth-century philosopher for the heady days of post-68 France.[5] Weller does not mention that Barthes's very first publication in 1942, 'Culture et tragédie', in the wartime student newspaper, *Cahiers de l'étudiant*, was a thinly veiled but strong endorsement of Nietzsche's own first publication, *The Birth of Tragedy in Music, or Hellenism and Pessimism*, which appeared exactly 70 years before Barthes's first ever publication.[6]

Indeed, we know exactly when, and to what effect, Barthes had read Nietzsche's essay. In a letter to his lifelong friend Philippe Rebeyrol dated 1 January 1934 discussing his interest in the 'division of Christian and Pagan', Barthes had underlined how he had been 'all on fire over paganism because of reading Nietzsche on Apollo et Dionysus', in a clear reference to Nietzsche's 1872 essay *The Birth of Tragedy*.[7] In his only other piece written in 1942, on André Gide and his diary, Barthes cited also Nietzsche's *The Dawn* (1881) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886).[8]

The argument in this article then is not so much to suggest that, between Barthes's first ever piece on Nietzsche in 1942 and the ten years leading up to his first book in 1953, we can see all of Barthes's later illustrious career in outline (though there is much to be said on this); nor in considering the intersection of Marxianism and Nietzscheanism in Barthes's work, is the idea to reconcile these two systems of thought, in a crude way that Philippe Roger has called a 'convenient ruse'.[9] Rather it is to suggest a tension in Barthes's work between the post-romantic and the socio-critical, between the utopianism of Nietzschean critique and the 'necessity' of Marx.

I: Thomson's Marxist Hellenism: Tragedy and Culture

In a round-table broadcast on French radio in May 1967, Roland Barthes took part in a debate on tragedy called 'Vers un retour du tragique: de Nietzsche à

Beckett' [Towards A Return of the Tragic: From Nietzsche to Beckett] that has received little critical attention.[10] Alongside Yves Bertherat, Jean-Marie Domenach, Jean Duvignaud and Jean Paris, Barthes was asked whether he believed that there had been a return to tragedy between the time of Nietzsche and the theatre of Samuel Beckett, soon to be made Nobel Laureate for literature. Against the generally affirmative views of the round-table participants, Barthes set out a staunch and stark view of tragedy which heavily qualified the way, in his view, we should use the term in the modern world. As adjectival noun, 'tragique' had been 'essentialised'; whereas the predicate 'tragedy' referred uniquely to Aristotle and 'poetic discourse'. But the real danger in using the word 'tragic', Barthes opined, was that the word 'tragedy' – just like the Argo ship – changes so much its meaning, yet it remains 'tragedy'. Against this imprecision, he argued, we should look at the theories of the British 'Marxist exegete', George Thomson, whose arguments about tragedy were highly specific. In Thomson's definition, Barthes explained, for there to be 'tragedy' there needed to be 'reversal' [revirement]. All three epochs in which tragedy had been at its height – ancient Greek, Elizabethan and the seventeenth-century classical period – exhibited the 'fall' of one or more characters; and Barthes cited the example of 'le comble' [the heights] – and hence the fall – in Jean Racine's seventeenth-century tragedies.

The 'reversal' was not simply a destiny in tragic theatre in which the central character falls from on high to end up in the diametrically opposite position; it was also highly specific to certain historical and material periods. For Barthes, this meant that, in this definition, it was patently not apt to speak of tragedy in the theatre of Beckett or Ionesco, nor indeed, he added, in contemporary art. Against the capacious definition of 'tragedy', of the 'tragic', Barthes wanted to maintain a strict usage. He had already made a similar argument in his first article in 1942, 'Culture et tragédie': 'Outside of these [three] centuries, tragedy – in its constituted forms – falls silent'.[11] Here in the 1967 radio discussion, he now went further in his advocacy of Thomson's analysis. Thomson deemed the 'reversal' to be fundamentally linked to the first two of the above periods of tragedy, and above all to the radical changes taking place in their respective epochs. In fifth-century-BC Greece and Elizabethan England, Thomson had shown that there was, in Barthes's words:

> the generalised subversion of the values of money; that is, major mercantilist changes […], the sudden rise in the importance of

> money and market exchange bring about a sort of sudden change in which, as Plato put it, all things are changed into their opposites.[12]

Barthes seemed to be restating notions on tragedy that he had put forward in his polemical 1963 study *On Racine* and to which we will return presently. The use of Thomson, as we shall see, develops across the period of the 1950s when Barthes is preoccupied by the popular theatre movement, and into the early 1960s when he is writing on Racinian theatre. Indeed, Barthes's hesitant mobilisation of Thomson's theories on tragedy in 1967 reflects this ambivalence.

He pointed out in the 1967 radio-debate on tragedy that Thomson's materialist Hellenism was a 'highly contested opinion'; nevertheless he saw a merit in looking exclusively at the three periods of tragedy that we know; and thus, ruling out the existence of tragedy at any other time, including our own, represented a firm restatement of Thomson's materialist explanation of tragedy's origins, what Barthes called the 'specificity', both economic and social, of tragedy: and, he added, 'it is this which counts'.

Barthes's use of Thomson's radical historical-materialist theory started in the 1950s. A first endorsement of Thomson's theory came in his 1955 review of a Swiss production of Sophocles' *Oedipus King* which he published in *Théâtre Populaire* at the height of his popular-theatre militancy. Here Barthes warmly commended the choice of play and the adaptation by André Bonnard whose work on the choral parts had managed to bring out 'perfectly the type of lyrical statism' in Sophocles; however, Barthes felt he needed to explain his 'profound disagreement' with the director's choices.[13] It was not so much the over-articulation of the voices, nor so much the 'excess of virtue' in the materials or the actors' movements, nor even the 'Biblism' of the production that disappointed Barthes the most. Above all, it was the director's decision to see in Sophocles' play 'nothing but a rhetorical ceremony […] a bourgeois drama in which psychological suffering […] can be surrounded only by declaimed entreaties of "spirituality"'.[14] Now Barthes made the first in a series of staunch endorsements of Thomson's work:

> It is the whole of Greece, all its History and its criticism which is covered up in this whole adventure. Sophocles played like a bourgeois tragedy, Aeschylus like a 'fête nègre', it is curious, this

> mania, this modern obsession with an exoticism going in the wrong direction, with running away at all costs from the *Greek* character of Greek tragedy. […] Couldn't our directors read some good historians on the question, like Thomson for example?[15]

Strangely, Barthes did not feel the need here to add either Thomson's first name or the title of his work.

A few months after his review of Sophocles production, in the October 1955 number of *Théâtre Populaire*, Barthes wrote a (now infamous) review of Jean-Louis Barrault's production of the *Oresteia*.[16] John McKeane, in the pages of this on-line journal, has skilfully articulated Barthes's critique of Barrault's 1955 production of the *Oresteia* – and it is one that is repeated in *Mythologies*.[17] But in his persuasive analysis, McKeane does not mention that it is George Thomson who, alongside Engels and Bachofen, is mobilised by Barthes.[18]

In the review, Barthes asked the two key questions that should preoccupy a director of classical theatre: 'what was the *Oresteia* for Aeschylus' contemporaries? What have we […] to do with the ancient meaning of the work?'.[19] Now Barthes cited – at last with full name and book title too – '*Aeschylus and Athens* by George Thomson (1941)':

> In the context of its period, and despite the moderate political position of Aeschylus himself, the *Oresteia* was incontestably a 'progressive' work; it testifies to the transition from a matriarchal society, represented by the Erinnyes, to the patriarchal society represented by Apollo and Athena. [T]he *Oresteia* is a profoundly politicized work: it is exemplary of the relation which can unite a precise historical structure and a particular myth. Others may choose to see in it an eternal problematics of Evil and of Judgment; nonetheless, the *Oresteia* is above all the work of a specific period, of a definite social condition and of a contingent moral argument.[20]

This prefigures a key argument to come in *On Racine* in 1963, and to which we will return in a moment as it displays contradictory references to Thomson. But we must underline first how Thomson's work on Aeschylus and ancient Greece, alongside Bachofen's and Engels', is taken by Barthes as that which,

via the play, affords 'courage and hope'. It is with these words – rarely associated with Barthes – that the historical, and not the archaeological, specificity of the *Oresteia* is valorised:

> [H]istory is plastic, fluid, at the service of men, if only they try to make themselves its master in all lucidity. To grasp the historical specificity of the *Oresteia*, its exact originality, is for us the only way of making a dynamic use of it, a use endowed with responsibility.[21]

As we noted above, Barthes had indeed mentioned Thomson's work in his 1941 postgraduate dissertation, but nowhere in the dissertation do we see such a bald and bold statement of militant belief in a radical classical theatre.

II: Ancient Greek Culture in the 1930s: From Marx to Caudwell and Raphael

> Convinced that the powers of reason can master the natural world and give to human life a complete dignity and purpose, a Communist can no longer recognize the meaning of tragedy.
>
> George Steiner[22]

It is worth pausing in our discussion of Barthes's use of a distinctly materialist Hellenism, in order to locate the influences on Thomson, not least as they will help us to consider other areas of Hellenism in Barthes's critical theory in the 1950s, especially in relation to myth. Maarten De Pourcq's magisterial account, elsewhere in this special number of *Barthes Studies*, of the Hellenism of the 1930s – as a rich fusion of politics and utopianism – is no more relevant than in the Marxist circles in which Thomson developed his materialist anthropology of ancient Greek civilisation. Thomson's analysis of the links between the changes in the economy and the rise of tragedy in ancient Greece emerged especially from the work of Christopher Caudwell in his posthumous *Illusion and Reality* (as well as Jane Harrison, Ridgeway, Lewis Morgan and

Engels, all of whom are credited in the preface to the first edition of *Aeschylus and Athens* in 1940).[23] Published thanks to Thomson's editing skills immediately after his death whilst fighting for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, Caudwell's essay is concerned with the status of poetry today by way of an analysis of the emergence of poetry in ancient societies, especially in fifth-century-BC Greece which he describes as a society 'in ferment, in *revolution*'.[24] For Caudwell, it was the economic advancement of ancient Greece that favoured poetry; and it is precisely these arguments that Thomson took up in his 1945 essay, *Marxism and Poetry*, that Barthes also cited, and to which Thomson added tragedy as a further, poetic example of the materialist explanation.[25]

British Marxist scholarship, such as Thomson's, has fared badly in recent times due to its links to a Moscow-dominated form of political and cultural analysis. Indeed, the debates between Hellenists in the 1930s and 1940s, especially on the Marxist left, sought to question the relationship between the economic determinant and the (so-called) super-structure, since the stranglehold of a vulgar materialism emerging with Stalinism risked destroying the true Marxist tradition. The debate revolved also – understandably, given global events in the 1930s – around tragedy; and it was the work in Paris between 1932 and 1938 carried out by the German exile Max Raphael that set the tone. A brief overview of Raphael's theories on ancient Greek culture, via the ideas of Marx, will allow us not only to situate Barthes's theories, but also, by way of a conclusion, to suggest the importance of Nietzsche's Hellenism in Barthes's theatre criticism of the 1950s, and more speculatively for his wider critical theory especially in *Mythologies* and the critique of ideology.

The argument by Marxist Hellenists during the 1930s around the question of ancient Greece was a complex and intricate one. There is no evidence that Barthes had read Max Raphael's work during the 1930s, but the three essays on the sociology of art, published in Paris in 1933, showed an extraordinary similarity with Barthes's writings of a decade later.[26] Indeed, the second of the three essays – on Marx, dialectical materialism and Art – contains important discussion of myth and mythology which, twenty years before Barthes's own 'petite mythologie du mois', considered the ideological nature of mythological imagination in Greek art. Coincidentally, as we saw above, Barthes read, and was inspired by, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* the same

year as Raphael's essay was published; but the latter contains no reference to Nietzsche's work.[27]

The similarity of concerns in Raphael's work in the 1930s and Barthes's of the late 1940s and 1950s related to the notions of human consciousness, mythology and ideology.[28] Indeed, Raphael's sophisticated, anti-mechanical application of dialectics to an analysis of art, especially ancient Greek, prefigured much of what Barthes wrote in 1946 in his unpublished article (and early version of the 'degree zero thesis') called 'The Future of Rhetoric'.[29] Raphael was closely associated with the German sociologist Werner Sombart whose work Barthes regularly cited in the 1950s; and there are interesting overlaps in Raphael's and Barthes's approach to ancient Greece. Firstly, Raphael's preference for the 'folk theory of poetry' and the theory that 'society itself was the creator of a spiritual product' prefigured Barthes's 'degree zero' promotion of the sociological analysis of art-forms and the subsequent 'death-of-the author' critique of the individualised writer; secondly, the potential conflict of asserting the time-bound and yet timeless skill of ancient Greek art, which Raphael locates in Marx's writings, resurfaces in the historically '*definite form*' that we saw above in Barthes's assertion of the *Oresteia*'s historical specificity; thirdly, Barthes's insistence on the 'plastic' nature of History echoed Raphael's notion of how Greek art treated mythology 'plastically'; finally, Raphael's work on mythology and ideology has strong affinities to Barthes's approach in *Mythologies*, in the way ideology is located between mythology, art and culture, but seen as developed by the people's imagination (since there was no priestly caste in ancient Greece).[30] But it is Raphael's anti-mechanical dialectical-materialist method with respect to ancient Greece that displays the most important similarity to Barthes's discussions on the complex relationship between economic development and artistic advancement.

Raphael referred directly to Marx's brief writings in *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, where Marx had set out the problem of the 'unequal development of material production' and that of art; but, against vulgar materialism, Marx had concluded that there was no direct correlation, except that 'it is the intensity of the struggle between man and nature that matters for the purpose of elucidating the interrelationships between art and economy': as Raphael put it, 'Imbalance is the expression of the dialectics of history'.[31] It is precisely this question that begins to develop in Barthes's pronouncements on tragedy, on ancient Greek culture in general, especially

in his 1960 essay that becomes, three years later, the final section of *On Racine*, called 'History or Literature?'.

III: Thomson versus Goldmann?

Indeed, it is in his work on Racine that Barthes begins to display an ambiguous view of Thomson's materialist account of the origins of tragedy. The analysis of 'reversal' that we saw in the 1967 radio debate on tragedy first appeared in *On Racine* in 1963.[32] In a footnote, Barthes set out how Thomson theorised this, and in doing so he introduced Lucien Goldmann's work into the debate:

> The theory of the tragic reversal dates from Aristotle. A recent historian has attempted to express its sociological significance: the meaning of the reversal ('to change all things into their opposite', in Plato's phrase) is the expression of a society whose values are dislocated and upset by the abrupt transition from feudalism to mercantilism, that is, by a sudden promotion of money (fifth-century Greece, Elizabethan England). But in this form, such an explanation cannot apply to French tragedy; a further ideological treatment is required, as in Lucien Goldmann's *The Hidden God*. (cf. G. Thomson, *Marxism and Poetry*.)[33]

The translation of *On Racine* misrepresents Barthes's argument here – Goldmann's work was deemed to be an extension of (and not an alternative to) Thomson's work. It is not until the essayistic crescendo at the end of *On Racine* that we encounter the starkest example of reservations concerning Thomson's method. It comes in the context of a further discussion of Goldmann.

Through much of the final essay, and most of *On Racine*, Barthes had commended Goldmann's move away from a psychology to a sociology of literature whilst analysing Racinian tragedy. However, in the final pages, Barthes acknowledged that Goldmann too gave in to the 'postulate of analogy':

> Pascal and Racine belonging to a politically disappointed group, their vision of the world will *reproduce* that disappointment, as if the writer had no other power than to copy himself literally.[34]

Barthes's point was that the so-called 'genetic' structuralism used by Goldmann to explain seventeenth-century tragedy was still tied to an individualist psychologism. However, in a footnote, Barthes qualified this criticism of Goldmann by way of a comparison with Thomson. Seeming to go to the opposite extreme, Barthes preferred the 'genetic' to the 'analogical':

> Infinitely less flexible than Goldmann, another Marxist, George Thomson, has established a brutally analogical relation in *Marxism and Poetry* between the subversion of values in the fifth century B.C., whose trace he believes he finds in Greek tragedy, and the shift from a rural to a mercantile economy, characterized by an abrupt promotion of money.[35]

This (implicit) preference for a more flexible approach – what in Raphael's work is called the 'dialectical interlocking' but 'relative autonomy' in the 'specificity of each domain' – seemed to represent a stark change of idea from what Barthes, as we saw above, had written on Thomson in the mid-1950s.[36] Indeed, could not the same charge of a lack of suppleness be levelled at Barthes in the 1967 radio round-table concerning the definition of the tragic from Nietzsche to Beckett, and at Barthes's views on the material origins of tragedy that we also saw above?

In his unpublished doctoral thesis, Maarten De Pourcq sets out the contradictory approach to Thomson's work that he sees in Barthes's work.[37] On the one hand, suggests De Pourcq, Barthes 'disagrees with Thomson's theory postulating a vast continuity between tribal rituals and tragedy', since for Barthes 'ancient tragedy deals with specific social conditions, established by Athenian democracy'; indeed, continues De Pourcq, 'the political import of tragedy determines its cultural value, not its hypothetical genealogy, let alone the forced and dogmatic Marxist analogy between labour, society and literature'.[38] On the other hand, continues De Pourcq, 'Thomson's study of the sacro-social origins of poetry and tragedy […] does not necessarily disregard the socio-critical function of tragedy'.[39] Indeed, De Pourcq is aware of the influence that Thomson's materialist Hellenism has had since the 1960s, not least in France, and thanks no doubt, in part, to Barthes; this is

especially true for a younger generation of classicists such as Barthes's colleague at the EPHE, Jean-Pierre Vernant, who used Thomson's two-volume *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* for his seminal anthropological approach.[40]

It may also be that, between Goldmann's Lukacsian approach to seventeenth-century tragedy on the one hand, and Thomson's humanist Marxism on the other, Barthes was making tactical choices in 1963.[41] As one of the earliest promoters of the work of Georg Lukacs in 1950s France, Goldmann had absorbed the Hungarian's literary history of aesthetic forms and applied them to classical theatre. However, though Lukacs was writing in the late twenties and early thirties, in Russian and German, on the question of higher forms of civilisation including ancient Greece and the relationship with the level of economic development, and using Nietzsche on ancient Greece and tragedy, *The Historical Novel* was not available in French or English until 1965.[42] It was Goldmann who introduced ideologism – the genetic study of a writer's world-view – to critical theory in 1950s' France and which becomes an important horizon at the end of *Mythologies* for Barthes's dialectical strategy.[43] It is alongside this ideologist approach that the influence of Nietzsche on the young Barthes needs to be considered.

IV: Nietzschean voluntarism?

As John McKeane and Christophe Corbier have pointed out above, the early Barthes, in writing his DES postgraduate dissertation in 1941, applies a Nietzschean view of tragedy containing a composite of Dionysian and Apollinian motifs.[44] In his work elsewhere on Barthes's 1941 postgraduate dissertation, Corbier has suggested also the influence with regard to music that Nietzsche's Hellenism had on Barthes.[45] But before we can suggest links between Marxian materialism and Nietzschean motifs in Barthes's work, one of aspect Maarten De Pourcq's suggestion above that Barthes applies the 'chaos' of Nietzschean thought to his understanding of Greece, ancient and modern, needs qualifying.

In his very first published piece in 1942, 'Culture et tragédie', Barthes cited Nietzsche's view not on the dispersal of human life, but that culture was '"the unity of artistic style in all of its vital manifestations of a people"'; the

crucial point – again (implicitly) citing Nietzsche's first ever work – was, wrote Barthes, 'to obtain and give the vision of the world that was above all harmonious – but not necessarily serene – […] to present the human enigma in its essential meagreness':

> In order to merit tragedy, the collective soul of the people must have reached a certain degree of culture, that is, not as knowledge, but as style.[46]

Tragedy then, suggested Barthes in good Nietzschean fashion, was the opposite of '*drama*': it was an 'aristocratic' genre. Though yet to bring in his materialist argument about the origins of tragedy that he will find in Thomson's work, Barthes already in 1942 saw tragedy as dependent on the 'aristocratic' sensibility, either of seventeenth-century France and social rank, or on an original people's culture as found in ancient Greece in the fifth century BC.

Following Nietzsche, Barthes distinguished tragedy from drama. If drama – and then melodrama – moves by an 'ever overwhelming enrichening' (surenrichissement toujours débordant) of human ills, tragedy by contrast is but an 'effort ardent' to 'lay bare' (dépouiller) human suffering.[47] And though Barthes had not yet alighted on Thomson's view of the fundamental need for a 'reversal' in tragedy, he was keen to underline Nietzsche's idea, and make it thoroughly humanist in relation to the capacity of humans to act:

> [T]he miracle of tragedy […] indicates to us that the deepest questions about ourselves are concerned not with the 'what?' of things but their 'why?'. There is no need to know how the world will finish; more important is to know what it is and what is its true meaning; and not at all within Time – this is a force that is both contestable and contested – but within an immediate universe that has been deprived of the very doors of Time. […] The aim is to find [in suffering] not at all our *raison d'être*, which would be criminal, rather our ultimate essence and with it, full possession of our destiny.[48]

It is worth remembering that this is written in 1942, a full 12 years before the discovery of Brecht and the subsequent insistence in Barthes's critical theory in theatre on a voluntarism of human actions. It would seem to be the case

that where Barthes's interest in Thomson is a highly Nietzschean one, by the same token Barthes's Brechtian voluntarism of the 1950s is partly drawn from his early reading of early Nietzsche.

V: Conclusion: Triangulation

In good, unorthodox, Barthesian style, we have here a strange *chassé-croisé*. For the discussion of Thomson's orthodox historical-materialist account of ancient Greek theatre, Barthes used a decidedly contradictory set of approaches; and towards the maverick and unorthodox writings on ancient Greece by Nietzsche, he seemed to deploy a classically dialectical strategy. Despite their firm belief, common to both, that ancient Greece was an aristocratic and superior culture, in its use of tragedy in particular, Thomson and Nietzsche are, philosophically and politically, distant from one another. Nevertheless, Barthes's fundamental attachment to tragedy that Philippe-J. Salazar has insisted upon is plain to see in the tortuous trajectory of Barthesian engagement with aspects of Marxian and Nietzschean thought.[49] However, this has become clear only by way of a triangulation. This triangulation has involved not just people – Barthes *with* Aeschylus *and* Racine, *with* Raphael *and* Goldmann, with Nietzsche *and* Thomson – but also objects (mercantilism with voluntarism; materialism with post-romanticism; analogy with 'reversal'; History with Literature; the *Oresteia* with culture-as-style), both of which help us trace this trajectory. One area emerges especially from this analysis.

Much has been written on the Marxian, Sartrian and Brechtian dimensions to Barthes's mythological essays in the 1950s, but nothing has been forthcoming on the influence of Nietzsche in general and *The Birth of Tragedy* in particular on Barthes's critique of myth. Hugo Drochon does not mention the critical-theoretical dimensions to *The Birth of Tragedy*.[50] Despite his later claim that 'I am not Nietzschean', the influence of Nietzsche on Barthes's critical theory and ideological deconstructions in *Mythologies* is a huge topic, but one for another day.

Notes

[1] George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens. A Study in the Social Origins of Drama* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941).
[2] George Thomson, 'Mystical Allusions in the Oresteia', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 55.1 (1935), 20-34.
[3] However, as active Irish folklorist, Thomson had co-translated into English in 1933, with Moya Llewelyn Davies, the Gaelic oral classic in the 'Blasket' tradition transcribed by Maurice O'Sullivan, *Twenty Years A-Flowering*, which was then translated into French in 1936 by none other than Raymond Queneau.
[4] See the obituary of George Derwent Thomson (1903-1987) by Tim Enright, *History Workshop*, 24 (autumn 1987), 213-15.
[5] Shane Weller, 'Active Philology: Barthes and Nietzsche', *French Studies*, 73.2 (April 2019), 217-33.
[6] Roland Barthes, 'Culture et tragédie', *Cahiers de l'étudiant* (Spring 1942), republished in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. I, pp. 29-32. The article did not surface until the 1980s when Philippe Roger republished it in *Le Monde* (4 April 1986). Barthes's *Œuvres complètes* will henceforth referenced as *OC* followed by volume and page number.
[7] Nietzsche's essay was first translated into French in 1901 and published by the Mercure de France; see Roland Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, trans. by Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 7.
[8] Roland Barthes, 'On Gide and His Journal', in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. by Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 4, p. 15.
[9] Philippe Roger, *Roland Barthes, roman* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1986), p. 73.
[10] 'Vers un retour du tragique' (the title is also that of a book by Domenach) was broadcast on *France-Culture* 6 May 1967, as one of a series of round-table discussions called 'Signes des temps' and hosted by Alfred Simon. As Guido Gallerani has shown in his helpful graph, 1967 is a busy year for Barthes's interviews and media discussions; see 'The Faint Smiles of Postures: Roland Barthes's Broadcast Interviews, *Barthes Studies*, 3 (2018), p. 54. Available at: http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/barthes/article/the-faint-smiles-of-postures-roland-barthess-broadcast-interviews/ (accessed 27 September 2019).
[11] Barthes, 'Culture et tragédie', p. 29.
[12] My translation of Barthes's verbal intervention in 'Vers un retour du tragique' (broadcast on *France-Culture*, May 1967).
[13] Roland Barthes, '"Oedipe roi"', *Théâtre Populaire*, 13 (May-June 1955), reprinted in *OC* I, pp. 594-95. Two months later in the next number of *Théâtre Populaire* (14, July-August 1955), Barthes repeated his stark criticism of another production of Sophocles's play, this time by a Dutch company touring in Paris (*OC* I, pp. 608-09)

[14] Barthes, '"Oedipe roi"', p. 595.
[15] Barthes, '"Oedipe roi"', p. 595.
[16] Roland Barthes, 'Putting on the Greeks', in *Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 59-66.
[17] Roland Barthes, 'Two Myths of the New Theater', in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 77; John McKeane, 'The Tragedy of Barthes', *Barthes Studies*, 1 (2015), p. 62. Available at: http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/barthes/files/2015/11/McKEANE-The-Tragedy-of-Roland-Barthes.pdf (accessed 29 September 2019).
[18] McKeane, 'The Tragedy of Barthes', pp. 65-67.
[19] Barthes, 'Putting on the Greeks', p. 65.
[20] Barthes, 'Putting on the Greeks', p. 65.
[21] Barthes, 'Putting on the Greeks', p. 66.
[22] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p. 342.
[23] Christopher Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977). In the 1935 essay by Thomson on mystical allusions in the *Oresteia* that is cited in Barthes's 1941 postgraduate dissertation, Thomson has not yet read Caudwell. The influence of Caudwell after the War is such that Thomson takes an active part in the 'Caudwell discussions' hosted by *Modern Quarterly* and writes 'In Defence of Poetry' (6.2, Spring 1951, 107-34); Thomson also writes the preface to Caudwell's *The Concept of Freedom* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), pp. 7-8.
[24] Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality*, p. 54 and ff. The essay contains a brief reference to Nietzsche's theory of the 'passage from Dionysian to the Apollonian' (p. 59); similarly, Thomson's *Aeschylus and Athens* mentions Nietzsche's 'opposite poles' of Apollo and Dionysus (p. 121).
[25] George Thomson, *Marxism and Poetry* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1945).
[26] See Max Raphael, *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso. Trois études sur la sociologie de l'art* (Paris: éditions Excelsior, 1933). Available in English as *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso: Three Studies in the Sociology of Art*, trans. by Inge Marcuse (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980). See especially Chapter 2, 'The Marxist Theory of Art'.
[27] Raphael nevertheless implicitly acknowledged (*Proudhon, Marx, Picasso*, English edition, p. 93, p. 95) the key Nietzschean argument that Apollonian mythological tendencies in ancient Greek civilization had squeezed out Orphic and Dionysian tendencies.
[28] Published in 1938, it is possible that Max Raphael's *La théorie marxiste de la conscience*, trans. by L. Gara (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), was known to Barthes.
[29] Roland Barthes, 'The Future of Rhetoric', in *Album*, pp. 102-14. Indeed, though in an unpublished letter in August 1946 he had told Philippe Rebeyrol that for him

materialism and literature were incompatible, he informed Rebeyrol six months later (16 May 1947) of his use of materialism: 'I have written [...] a text on literary criticism using materialist postulates'. A good number of the letters from Roland Barthes to Philippe Rebeyrol are not included in *Album*; and this correspondence, currently being catalogued at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (under the code 'NAF 28630 – Fond Roland Barthes'), was very kindly shown to me by M. Rebeyrol before his death and before being transferred from the 'Fonds Barthes' at l'IMEC to the BNF. The translation of this unpublished correspondence is my own.

[30] See Raphael, Proudhon, Marx, Picasso, English edition, respectively, p. 100, p. 77 and pp. 103-04, pp. 92-93 and p. 95, pp. 88-92.

[31] Raphael, *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso*, English edition, p. 97, p. 99.

[32] Roland Barthes, *On Racine*, trans. by Richard Howard, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); the section was originally published as 'La relation d'autorité', in *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, 10 June 1959, 3-17.

[33] Barthes, *On Racine*, p. 41 n. 1. Translation modified.

[34] Barthes, *On Racine*, p. 169. Barthes had made a similar point in his 1953 piece on Jean Paris' early-structuralist analysis of *Hamlet*, '"Hamlet", c'est beaucoup plus qu'"Hamlet"', written in the form of a letter addressed to the author in which Barthes sees Paris' work as 'de-romanticising' the character in tragedy and thereby opening the play up to mythological critique. See *OC* I, p. 281; on the critique of psychology in tragedy, see Jean Paris, *Hamlet* (Paris: Seuil, 1953), pp. 63-64.

[35] Barthes, *On Racine*, p. 169 n. 1.

[36] Raphael, *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso*, English edition, p. 85.

[37] See Maarten De Pourcq, 'Roland Barthes and Greek Desire: Tragedy, Philosophy, Writing', unpublished PhD thesis awarded by Catholic University of Leuven, 2008, pp. 85-86.

[38] De Pourcq, 'Roland Barthes and Greek Desire', p. 86.

[39] De Pourcq, 'Roland Barthes and Greek Desire', p. 86.

[40] See J. P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs. Etude de Psychologie historique* (Paris: Maspero, 1965), which uses Thomson's work to discuss, with respect to ancient Greece, the following phenomena: the absence of monarchy (pp. 296-97), the links between agriculture and the lunar/solar calendar, the development of money and interest (p. 309) and finally the question whether there was a direct link, as Thomson had argued, between the new concepts in philosophy emerging on the one hand and the abstract form of exchange which money operated on the diverse objects that had begun to appear at the market-place. Interestingly, Vernant questions this final theory of Thomson's as possibly too 'mechanical' as well as anachronistic given Marx's argument that it is only when labour itself is turned into a commodity – in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – that the commodity form of human products begins to be the dominant social form (pp. 308-09).

[41] For an analysis of Barthes and Goldmann's respective critical practices, via a triangulation with the work of Edward Said, see Andy Stafford, 'Edward Said and Roland Barthes: Criticism versus Essayism. Or, Roads and Meetings Missed', in *Edward Said and the Literary, Social and Political World*, ed. by Ranjan Ghosh (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 19-35. Said, alongside Hayden White, was an early reader of Goldmann's work in the mid-1960s.

[42] See Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by H. and S. Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1969) which also cites Engels and Bachofen's analyses of the *Oresteia* as part of the 'world-historic changes' coterminous with the rise of tragedy in fifth-century-BC Greece (p. 111, p. 136, p. 141, p. 189).

[43] See Barthes, 'Myth Today', in *A Barthes Reader*, p. 148.

[44] McKeane, 'The Tragedy of Barthes', pp. 63-64.

[45] Christophe Corbier, 'Nietzsche, Brecht, Claudel: Barthes face à la tragédie musicale grecque', *Revue de littérature comparée,* 353.1 (2015), 5-28. In her work on the essay-form, Marielle Macé characterises elements of Nietzsche's essayism in distinctly Barthesian terms: 'image de la pensée, conception de l'existence, refus du système, écriture discontinue' [image of thought, conception of existence, refusal of system, discontinuous writing-style]; see Marielle Macé, *Le temps de l'essai. Histoire d'un genre en France au XXe siècle* (Paris: Belin, 2006), p. 35 and pp. 89-95; Macé traces 'fictionalisation' as a key Nietzschean influence on Paul Valéry's essays and which is shown to persist in French essayism more generally between 1957 and 1980 (pp. 249-50).

[46] Barthes, 'Culture et tragédie', p. 29.

[47] Barthes, 'Culture et tragédie', p. 30.

[48] Barthes, 'Culture et tragédie', pp. 131-32.

[49] Philippe-J. Salazar, 'Barthes et Aristote', in *Barthes après Barthes: une actualité en questions*, ed. by Catherine Coquio and Régis Salado (Pau: Presses Universitaires de Pau, 1993), p. 116.

[50] Hugh Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

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