5
Nietzsche and Tragedy

James I. Porter

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) gave new life to the modern reception of tragedy, especially in its ancient Greek form. Thanks to Nietzsche, tragedy not only rose to prominence as a supreme literary and cultural achievement. At the same time tragedy also became a clarion call for modernism and a benchmark by which to measure the claims and aspirations of the modern world against the classical past. Indeed, henceforth world history and worldviews could be conceived in terms of literary genres, with tragedy occupying pride of place.

Nietzsche coined the term *tragic age*, and he left behind innumerable suggestions, which are really just provocations, about extending the moniker from ancient Greece to modern Europe. In a word, with Nietzsche *tragedy* became a powerful label, one that could be applied to cultures, mentalities, historical moments, and sweeping historical patterns. Tragedy likewise came to be applied to aspects of Nietzsche's own intellectual achievements, and at times to the coherence and tenor of his thinking as a whole. But by the same token, because Nietzsche's thought was as suggestive and provocative as it was, in his wake the very idea of tragedy became something of a challenge and a puzzle. Nietzsche bequeathed to posterity not a clear view of tragedy but a series of urgent problems and questions: Did the Greeks experience a tragic age? Can modernity experience tragedy again and attain the vanished heights of the classical period? Is there such a thing as a tragic view of the world, and is that view valid today? Is Nietzsche himself possibly a tragic thinker? If it is difficult to separate out the fascinations with tragedy from the uncertain boundaries of the concept, Nietzsche is not entirely to blame, but neither can he be lightly exempted from the charge.

Nietzsche's influence was both vast and lasting. It is doubtful that thinkers as diverse as Miguel de Unamuno, Karl Jaspers, and Raymond Williams would have given tragedy the central importance they did were it not for Nietzsche and his clamoring reception. This is not to say that Nietzsche directly influenced how all who came after him chose to read the idea and phenomenon of tragedy, but rather that he

made it difficult for anyone not to think of these things whenever the topic of modern life was on the table. Hegel may have located tragedy within the evolution of the human spirit as one of its key transitory stages. But it was Nietzsche who made tragedy into a touchstone of the future, and consequently of paramount importance for the present, a thing not only born once and then rendered *passé* and of antiquarian interest, but a form, less of art than of *experience*, that had once struggled to come to life and that was now on the verge of being born again – not least due to the promising successes of the new total art form, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, of Wagnerian opera. Tragedy was no longer a dry article of history but a sign of possibilities hitherto untapped. It was a sign and symbol of life.

While it was a significant element of historical consciousness, tragedy for Nietzsche thus had the potential to transcend history, and so, too (as the example of Wagner suggested), the generic boundaries of the art form. With Nietzsche tragedy suddenly became existentially relevant, a kind of primordial experience that brought one back not only to the depths of the human heart but to the roots of human history and human existence. The challenge of this conception was that to be incapable of tragedy was to be incapable of being fully human. Tragedy was not simply permitted again: it was imperative, to be ignored at one's peril.

It is no small paradox that tragedy, that harbinger of disaster and grim fatality, should be associated with human flourishing and abundance and with hopes for cultural renewal. But this, too, is part of the Nietzschean inheritance, and, indeed, its most distinctive feature. Likewise, if tragedy points to the future, it is nonetheless in the classical roots of the Western tradition that one must go to seek tragedy in its purest and most natural form. It is there one can trace the sources of the tragic essence, of both tragic writing and tragic performances on the one hand and of the very idea of tragedy on the other – what is frequently referred to, in an alluring if vague way, as *the tragic* and sometimes as *the tragic vision*. In one respect, at least, Nietzsche's thinking about tragedy is entirely conventional: it merely rephrases a long-standing tradition that looked to an archetypal Greece whenever tragedy came to mind. What is novel about Nietzsche's thinking on the subject is his reversal of this commonplace gesture. Tragedy for Nietzsche is the single pivot around which antiquity, indeed world history, turns: everything leads up to its development, gradually and over millennia, from Asia to Europe, and then just as slowly and inexorably culture falls off from this unparalleled height of achievement. And because tragedy occupies so central a place in Nietzsche's view of the classical world, it is also the case that in Nietzsche's eyes the modern world must define itself in relation to tragedy.

To be sure, Nietzsche's reading of tragedy would not have resonated the way it did had he not been capitalizing on a peculiarly modern set of desires and fears, although specifying what these were would be a study unto itself (the acceleration of modern life, feelings of cultural crisis or cultural exhaustion, a reaction to materialism, a foundering spirituality, and the need to lay claim to a legitimating and authoritative past are all contributing factors). Classics had long been a conduit and a symptom of these worries, at least in Europe. Nietzsche's peculiar contribution lay

in his revealing a dimension of classical culture, especially in one of its most revered relics, that was literally hidden by its obviousness: namely, its turbulent, ritualized violence. In this way Nietzsche opened the floodgates of Greek tragedy, and so too of classical antiquity, unleashing an energy that has yet to have completely dissipated. In his wake, tragedy and the tragic became points of ferment across an array of inquiries – in philosophy, aesthetics, and literary criticism generally, and in the study of classical antiquity in several domains, but above all in myth, ritual, and anthropology. Hellenism and primitivism were among the primary beneficiaries of this trend: the cult of the early Greek past and the cult of the cultic itself (most notably J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* of 1890 and the work of the so-called Cambridge Ritualists, who sought to trace the origins of tragedy in myth and ritual). And Nietzsche was himself a beneficiary of this trend, as his name became attached to a long line of developments that he could now be held responsible for having spawned. Whether he would have approved of these developments is an open question. Indeed, whether Nietzsche's view of human life or his philosophy are fundamentally tragic, like that of the Greek Presocratics whom he frequenrly adored, is likewise open to question. As with other aspects of his philosophy, it is probably safe to say that Nietzsche stimulated more opinions than he ever would have shared. His writing was suggestive, if nothing else.

The Birth of Tragedy and Nietzsche's *Curriculum Vitae*

The writing that contains Nietzsche's most concentrated reflections on tragedy is *The Birth of Tragedy*. First published in 1872 as *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* when he was 27, the book was republished in 1886 as *The Birth of Tragedy, or, Hellenism and Pessimism*, with a new preface that revived the earlier controversy and in ways sought to palliate it as well. It is a labyrinthine and mystifying work, and impossible to classify. Only a classical scholar could have written it, but no scholar of the classics would have dared to sign his name to such a book. Presented as an inspired essay, lacking notes and apparatuses of any kind, and overtly hostile to scientific method and to classical philology in particular, *The Birth of Tragedy* was bound to cause a sensation. Speculative in the extreme, the work contained a good deal of modern mythmaking – a fact that ought to be a clue to some of its larger purposes. Nor was Nietzsche unaware of this problem. When one classical scholar later asked him for a bit of "proof, just a single piece of evidence, that in reality the strange images on the *skênê* [stage] were mirrored back from the magical dream of the ecstatic Dionysian chorus," Nietzsche soberly replied, as he only could, "Just how, then, should the evidence approximately read? . . . Now the honorable reader demands that the whole problem should be disposed of with an attestation, probably out of the mouth of Apollo himself: or would a passage from Athenaeus do just as well?" (letter to Rohde, 4 August 1871). Whatever else Nietzsche may have been trying to do with *The Birth of Tragedy*, he was surely guided by a certain perversity of mind. "Oh, it is

wicked and offensive! Read it furtively in your closet," he confided to his ftiend Gustav Krug in December of 1871 while the book was at the publisher's waiting to be printed. But neither was this the first sign of Nietzsche's desire to shock his readers, or of his willingness to put his career, or at least his professional image, on the line in the process.

So eventful was *The Birth of Tragedy* to Nietzsche's life that his profile and identity as a thinker and a cultural force could not help but be bound up with his views on tragedy, and consequently with the way he would be remembered, whether in terms of his career (which at least outwardly plots a course from old-fashioned philology to radical philosophy) or in terms of his thinking, given the place – though not quite centrality – of tragedy in his thought. Conventionally, *The Birth of Tragedy* is seen as occupying an uncomfortable and transitional middle ground in Nietzsche's development: for all its rebelliousness, the work is too metaphysical, too earnest, and too beholden to modern German myths of cultural renewal to typify the later free-spirited thinker. But there is something wrong with this way of characterizing the *curriculum vitae* of Nietzsche's thought.

For one thing, Nietzsche's writing during his academic period is every bit as radical – as daring, unsettling, subversive, and self-subverting – as it is at any other time in his productive life. Like the later productions, his writings up to and including *The Birth of Tragedy* engage a reader in the perils of establishing safe and final meanings, and they render Nietzsche less the producer than the *occasion* of those meanings. At the same time, Nietzsche is unafraid to be contaminated by the objects of his critique. As a result, Nietzsche is a most unreliable witness to his own purported meanings. His interest is fitst and foremost in the *staging* of meaning and its perplexities. As a rule, his writings provide a sampling, and a hyperbolizing, of culturally available assumptions and counter-assumptions, at times extrapolated into mind-spinning hypotheticals intended to make vivid the psychology, and above all the frequent illogic, of everyday belief ("What would follow if reality really looked like this or that?"). The ultimate object of Nietzsche's writings, both early and late, is thus not abstract philosophical truths, but the all-too-human nature of humanity and its endlessly marvelous and criticizable dissonances. "If we could imagine dissonance become man – and what else is man?," Nietzsche asks (*The Birth of Tragedy* §25; trans. Kaufmann), posing a hypothetical that is perhaps the hardest of all to conceive and imagine. *The Birth of Tragedy* typifies Nietzsche's presentational styles, both early and late, not least because it is more a processual object than a stable text: its controversial qualities originate from within itself. At the limit, it is literally an incredible work, one that sets up a long list of improbabilities and then dares us to believe in them.

Without going into all of the work's dimensions, we can trace some of the essentials of Nietzsche's views of tragedy in one of the central motifs of *The Birth of Tragedy*, which doubles as its main methodological problem, namely the way it accounts for the mere apprehension of the various truths it names. The concepts in question here are three: intuition, appearances, and imagination. But before that, it will be useful to

sketch out the general outlines of Nietzsche's first book, and in particular its surface plot.

At the heart of *The Birth of Tragedy* lies the opposition between the two Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus, who in turn stand for two antagonistic aesthetic principles that are nonetheless complementary and equally vital to the production of the highest art. Apollo and his abstraction the Apollonian represent the realm of clear and luminous appearances, plastic images, dreams, harmless deception, and traits that are typically Hellenic and classical, at least to the modern imagination (simplicity, harmony, cheerfulness, tranquility, and so on), while Dionysus and the Dionysian represent hidden metaphysical depths, disturbing realities, intoxication, music, and traits that are typically exotic and therefore unclassical (ecstasy, disorderliness, dance, orgy). The history of Greek art is the history of the relation between these two principles. At its origins Greek art is naïve and Apollonian, as in the epic world of Homer. All surface, Apollonian art is blissfully ignorant of any dimensions of reality beyond the immediately visible. Instead, it is rapt by objective images (appearances) that are as vivid and certain as marble. Lyric poetry in Homer's wake marks a heightening of the powers of music and a loss of individuality: it is the heartfelt cry of Dionysian passions that echo the depths of the world's soul.

At its peak, the Dionysian nearly gains the upper hand and obliges the Apollonian to speak its own truths. As from behind a screen, another reality is revealed to the aesthetic spectator, who is henceforth the privileged focus of artistic effect, but no longer its perceived cause. The culmination of this process is the rapid flowering of Greek tragedy, first with Aeschylus and then Sophocles, in which music and dance, song and speech, and spectacle are magnificently coordinated in a first anticipation of the Wagnerian total work of art. But just as rapidly a decline sets in during the last third of the fifth century BCE, with the rise of dialectic (Socratic–Platonic philosophy) and its tragic equivalent in Euripidean theater. Tragedy is debased, brought down to the level of the banal and the everyday, and no longer spiritually significant. Music and spectacle give way to the calculations of garrulous speech, while the balance between quiet and ecstasy gives way to a violent oscillation between the twin excesses of rationality and momentary passion. As Apollonianism is replaced by Socratism (science), Dionysianism retreats into the mystery cults. Both gods await a rebirth in a world that is now rendered thoroughly Alexandrian and unclassical, which is to say degenerate, epigonal, and modern.

So much for the overall plot of Nietzsche's first book. If this was all *The Birth of Tragedy* contained, it would have been an interesting work but not an original or remarkable one. The modern German tradition of Hellenism alone supplied all the materials one needed to develop this nostalgic reading of Greek tragedy and classical culture (Baeumer 1976; Silk and Stern 1981; Behler 1986; Henrichs 1986; Courtine 1993; Porter 2000b, chs. 4 and 5). However, on this rather conventional story about Greece Nietzsche overlays an unconventional metaphysical scheme and a daring epistemology. These new elements raise the stakes of his project considerably, but they also put a heavy strain on its coherence.

Aesthetic Intuitions

The Birth of Tragedy opens with a remarkable assertion: "We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision [*zur unmittelbaren Sicherheit der Anschauung*], that the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* duality." One of the problems with this claim is that the immediacy it awards to the modern mind is in turn "borrowed" from the Greeks: "The terms Dionysian and Apollonian we borrow from the Greeks, who disclose to the discerning mind the profound mysteries of their view of art, not, to be sure, in concepts, but in the intensely clear figures of their gods," which is to say, once again, through direct intuition, and not logic. Through a borrowed distinction, borrowed names, and a borrowed perception we are to attain a vision of the Greek world that is evidently illusion-free and unmediated.

This dilemma, or rather glaring improbability, is directly paralleled by the way Nietzsche frames the metaphysics of *The Birth of Tragedy*, which both puts on offer and withdraws the possibility of an immediate intuition of reality. And this in turn sets up the conditions for tragedy, because tragedy embodies this kind of direct and shocking encounter with the real, the meaning of which forever eludes one's grasp. The problem can be simply stated. Being (reality, truth, "the ground of our being," "the eternally suffering and contradictory primal unity," *das Ur-Eine*, or the One Will) is seemingly accessible in brief, unmediated glimpses (tragic knowledge is predicated on this possibility), but in point of fact no glimpse of reality can be had except through the filtering and distortive agency of appearances. Not even the so-called "primal unity," that curious entity postulated by Nietzsche and seemingly invented *ad hoc* as a grotesque calque on the (already bizarre) Schopenhauerian Will, can have an immediate intuition of itself. Indeed, appearances just are the illusions by means of which the primal unity finds a numbing joy and pleasure and so heals its pains, although what the exact nature of these pains or their redemption is Nietzsche nowhere clarifies.

The duality is in ways Kantian, with Apollo representing the warm and familiar realm of phenomenal appearances and Dionysus representing the chilly and inaccessible reality of things in themselves. But it is also Schopenhauerian, with Apollo standing for the principle of individuation, the instrument by which the metaphysical Will (represented by Dionysus) that lies at the bottom of all things acts out its contradictory urges to enter the world of appearances even as it struggles agonizingly, but not inexplicably, to return to its original primordial state of unity and quiescence. Apollo placates the self-tormenting Will, but the Will needs Apollo to act out its urges. This is their basic collaborative pact, which gives rise not only to sweet dreams but to art and culture, and above all to tragedy, the culminating form of both.

Lodging contradiction in reality in this way has the advantage at least of making reality in a sense tragic. Meanwhile, tragedy is the most intense experience of

metaphysics one can have, inasmuch as the conditions for simultaneous pain and pleasure are in tragedy intensified to the greatest bearable limit. Approximating to a metaphysical experience, tragedy is painful and pleasurable at once – painful because it hurts simply to touch ground, as it were, without the protections of appearance, pleasurable because it puts us into communication with our original reality. And yet, while tragedy "forces" a recognition of the reality that Being dwells in (§7), there is nothing tragic about the final result, because pain, whether tragic or primordial, is converted into pleasure ("aesthetically justified"), seemingly in its very apprehension. Tragic pleasure is for this reason comparable to the "primordial joy experienced even in pain," which in turn resembles "the joyous sensation of dissonance in music" (§24). As a consequence, experiencing metaphysical reality through tragedy is in the last analysis profoundly life-affirming.

Thus, so far from being tragic, Nietzsche's view of life is, on the contrary, one of tragedy averted. Reality's ongoing redemption in appearances saves the metaphysics of *The Birth of Tragedy* from collapsing into unbridled pessimism. In this way tragedy no longer has to be the sign of nihilism and of oppressive fatalism (as it was, for instance, in Schopenhauer). Rather, it is the promise of aesthetic fullness and of a complex joy – even ecstasy – that is tinged (and so, too, heightened) with pain and loss. Pain and suffering are never a reason for despair: instead they are a motive for their own conversion into pleasure. But Nietzsche can arrive at this cheery conclusion only by ensuring that his account is at bottom a perceptual one and grounded in lies and illusions: metaphysical pain, to be felt, has to appear. In this way, pain is not only "obliterated by lies [*hinweggelogen*] from the features of nature" (§16), it can never quite get off the ground. The significance of this perceptual bias emerges in Nietzsche's portrayal of the way tragedy evolved, with its emphasis on the spectator (see below).

To this metaphysical scheme Nietzsche adds a psychological scheme to help map out the metaphysical undertow of tragedy and to render it anthropologically plausible – a much needed step, given the blatant anthropomorphism of *The Birth of Tragedy*'s metaphysics, with its thrashing and restless Will yearning for aesthetic redemption. Dreams and music, the provinces of Apollo and Dionysus respectively (so Nietzsche, but with little ancient warrant), short-circuit ordinary consciousness and put the mind "directly" (intuitively) in touch with reality, at once revealing reality's hurtful pains and protecting us from them. And yet, as we saw, the immediate intuition into metaphysical truth seems a priori excluded on this picture. Indeed, all that seems immediate is the spontaneous urgency of the process being described, which conflates art and nature at every turn. The Primordial One suffers in us and through us, while what we suffer is its pain, not our own. Not even the nihilistic core of tragic knowledge – knowledge that "what is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is – to die soon" (§3) – can be immediately apprehended: it must pass through an aestheticizing filter. (Here, truth is put into the mouth of a mythical being, a "fictitious natural being" [§7], Silenus.) It is for this reason that the aesthetics of *The Birth of Tragedy* can be aptly

called an "artists' metaphysics" (as in the preface from 1886), which is also why tragedy is at bottom a metaphysical experience – or, rather, an experience of metaphysics. Tragedy shows us the illusion that we are.

Is our experience of reality direct and unmediated, or is it not rather our access to *illusion* that is direct and immediate? Nietzsche's language in places strongly suggests the latter. Not even the Primordial Being seems to have direct access to itself, as we saw. It is a fair question whether metaphysical pain is ever experienced in itself, or whether all that is ever experienced of metaphysical pain is its appearance as such. By the same token, it is unclear whether reality consists in the experience of pain or in its evasion, and finally whether this latter isn't better called a "deception" (§21; see "obliterated by lies" in §16, quoted earlier). Metaphysics, after all, confronts us in the end not with metaphysical pain but with "the metaphysical comfort . . . that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable" (§7; cf. §8). This comfort is interestingly propositional.

Immediacy of perception, straining credulity by itself, is, moreover, something that Nietzsche's earlier and contemporary writings explicitly reject on epistemological and psychological grounds, putting in its place *the illusion of immediacy* and of a totalizing perception (see his inaugural university lecture, "Homer and Classical Philology," 1869 = *KGW* 2.1: 247–69, with Porter 2000b, 62-81). Is Nietzsche now, or rather again, commending an illusion? If he is, then his stance is suspect, and the surface meaning of *The Birth of Tragedy* has to be seen in an entirely different light. The chief difficulty with the scheme of this book is that the whole of it seems to be the product either of an illusion or a dream, or both. The metaphysical principles involved are as mythical as the gods that represent them – a point made abundantly clear by Nietzsche in his essay "On Schopenhauer" (1867/8 = *BAW* 3: 352–61, with Porter 2000a, 57–73). And where does our knowledge of these latter gods come from? It is plainly mediated, "borrowed from the Greeks," as we've seen. But then where did the Greeks come across this knowledge? Nietzsche's answer, which appears on the first page, is unequivocal: "It was in dreams, says Lucretius, that the glorious divine figures [of Apollo and Dionysus] first appeared to the souls of men; in dreams the great shaper beheld the splendid bodies of superhuman [*übermenschlichen*] beings" – whence "the intensely clear figures of their gods" (§1).

Is Nietzsche's work possibly *Lucretian*? If so, the Schopenhauerianism of that work stands in need of recasting (Schopenhauer was an uncompromising critic of atomism.) However we decide the issue, we are still left with the puzzling suggestion that the Greeks *dreamt up* their gods, and that consequently we – Nietzsche's generation and our own – are the inheritors of those dreams. It may be that "in our dreams we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous" (§1). But this is the immediacy experienced by the mad and the deluded. How illusory is our grasp of the antique past if it comes to us channeled through dreams? The risk here is not only that dreams distort some original reality, but that they invent it to begin with.

That they do is a possibility contemplated in a draft of a text that never found its way into the final draft of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Nietzsche confesses that delusions are a necessary condition of life, and

> that this whole process [namely, of the Will and its miseries and actions] is only our necessary form of appearance and thus utterly lacking in any metaphysical reality... If above I dared to speak of Genius and appearance, as if I had access to a knowledge surpassing those limits, and as if I were able to look out from the pure, great eye of the world [*Weltauge*], let me explain after the fact that I don't believe that I have stepped beyond the anthropomorphic circle with that figurative language. *But who could endure existence without such mystical possibilities*? (14:541 = *KGW* 3.5.2:1060–1; emphasis added)

A parallel insight leads to Nietzsche's exposure of Greek religion, where he holds that the appearance of each of the gods, be they Olympian or pre-Olympian, is the work of Apollo, who "rules over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy" (*The Birth of Tragedy* §1), which is to say the work of Greek fantasy itself. Nor is Dionysus with his metaphysical underworld exempt from this retroactive invention:

> The divine world of beauty [namely, of Apollo] produces the chthonic divinities [viz., the "horrible" pre-Olympian dark underworld gods and "then Dionysus"] as its own supplement. These latter, more formless in themselves [*an sich*] and closer to the Concept, increasingly gain the upper hand and [then] cause the whole Olympian world to vanish together with the heroes, as symbols of their [sc., the chthonic gods' own] secrets. (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology*, *KGW* 2.3:415 n. 37; cf. 413)

In this light, the Dionysian may turn out to be not the index of some vaguely hottific realm of metaphysical truth lying beyond our ken but just a bad dream – the dream-work of Apollo ("the *dream-world* of a Dionysian intoxication," §14), or, what is worse, an idealization of the "horrible oppressiveness" of waking reality itself, that truest of all horrors, made metaphysically attractive. More horrible than any metaphysical horrors, in other words, is the *horror vacui*, the prospect of a world shorn of any metaphysical supplement and lacking any metaphysical justification. Beauty in that case would be how we confront or rather evade this void, by filling the void of metaphysics *with (the mere prospect of) metaphysics itself*, and then by converting that image into a reason for pleasure. "Metaphysical comfort" is on this approach simply the comfort of having a metaphysics: it is the ultimate aesthetic redemption of reality and daily life. *The Birth of Tragedy* is in this sense a story about the aestheticization of reality. It describes the historical process by which art felt its way into metaphysics, and it outlines the conditions of the possible reemergence of this high point in the history of appearances, in the hope that all human endeavor will acknowledge itself as the art, and the art of metaphysics, that it is.

The Dionysian, in other words, risks being part of a fantasy-construct, much like the veil (of *mâyâ?*) painted by Parrhasius so convincingly that it seemed to cover a

"real" painting, when all it concealed was the fact that there was nothing to conceal. Such is "the mysterious background" of tragedy (§24, a passage that directly echoes this anecdote from Pliny). Just when this elaborate construct first originated is a distinctly harder question to answer. One clue, which we've come across already, attributes this construction to the Greeks, and the point is reinforced a bit later on: "It was in order to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods [sc., the Olympians, but also, *a fortiori*, their Titanic and Chthonic counterparts] from a most profound need" (§3). The Greeks here retain their exemplary function familiar from Winckelmann and company. Only the state they model is not one of naïve moral perfection but of profound and all-too-human self-deception and disavowal (see also *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay, §§19–20, 23). Another possibility, which is not ruled out by the first, is that some or much of this construction is of modern origin, a modern myth about ancient myths. Either way, the argument of *The Birth of Tragedy* can no longer be taken at face value. The implications of this turn can be further traced in the finer details of Nietzsche's conception of the tragic phenomenon in its Greek form.

Tragedy, the Tragic, and the Dionysian

One of Nietzsche's signal innovations in his construction of the tragic is that he views tragedy above all from the perspective of its beholder, a fact that is entirely in keeping with the artists' metaphysics of that work. Tragedy is first and foremost an aesthetic phenomenon, which means that it is grounded in perceptual experience, but also at a remove from its objects. Nietzsche's model is constructed not from the viewpoint of the tragic hero but rather from that of the observer: what matters is not the experience of Oedipus, say, but that of the audience coming close to, but never really touching, his experience. It is thus a model not of any immediacy of experience, but of mediating distance and of that distance's sublimation in the very experience of immediacy.

For these reasons, Nietzsche's theory stands in contrast to its nineteenth-century predecessors in the German idealist tradition, such as those of Schelling, Hegel, Vischer, and Schopenhauer. These latter theories one could call essentializing, inasmuch as they reify the tragic in an objective event, or rather archi-Event, that takes place with all the immediacy of a schoolbook lesson. Thus for the early Hegel

> tragedy consists in the fact that the moral nature separates from itself its inorganic nature and opposes this to itself in the form of Fate, lest it get entangled with this latter; and it achieves a reconciliation with Fate through the recognition of the same in the struggle [*Kampf*] with divine nature, which is the unity of both moral and inorganic nature. (Hegel, *Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts*, 1802–3, cited in Szondi 1964: 20)

Schelling's definition from the same year breathes in the same atmosphere of romantic idealism, although the modern notion of the tragic owes its existence to still earlier

writings by Schiller and Schelling: "The essence of tragedy is an actual conflict between the freedom of the subject and objective necessity, which ends . . . in a complete [and mutual] indifference" (cited in Szondi 1964, 15; cf. ibid., 13; Schiller [1791–2] 1993; Schiller [1790–2] 2003; Courtine 1993).

The focus in these philosophies is the tragic action unfolding on the stage, emblematic of a world stage upon which larger-than-life metaphysical forces play themselves out, recklessly, and seemingly indifferent to the world. These forces impress themselves on the tragic form, but they do so from without, not from within: tragedy models itself on an action that can in principle take place without the benefit of an audience. The ultimate referent of tragedy, the Tragic or the Tragic Idea, shines translucently through the aesthetic performance, effacing it. Thus, a tragic figure like Oedipus is not interesting as an actor on the stage repeating a drama for a public: he is an idealist Subject moving and acting in the abstract landscape of a timeless metaphysical reality. Worse still, the peculiars of the tragic action in which Oedipus is enmeshed are not even interesting in their own right. Tragic actions are effectively interchangeable, and so too dispensable. As a result, we can say that in German idealism there are no tragedies, but only a singular Tragedy of which individual plays (optimally, Greek) are the pale reflection and a mere mnemonic, lacking any sense of history or phenomenology, and ultimately uninteresting as aesthetic phenomena.

Not so in Nietzsche, for whom the structure, circumstances, and the psychology of the tragic performance are everything. Nietzsche's theory of tragedy is, to be sure, permeated by metaphysics. But it is also historically located in a then and now, and it is a fundamentally theatrical theory, in the sense that it is about the staging, at specific historical conjunctures, of metaphysical appearances, or rather of the appearance of metaphysics itself through ritual, art, and drama. Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* thus offers something like an *affective* history of metaphysical consciousness, one of its aims being to demonstrate how metaphysics just is a psychological phenomenon, linked as it is to pleasure, pain, and disavowed self-consciousness, as we saw. But in one significant respect, Nietzsche's theory does resemble that of his landsmen. For it too claims to work out an allegory of reconciliation according to which

> not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man . . . Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him, as if the veil of *mâyâ* had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity. (§1)

But two characteristics set Nietzsche's theory apart from its predecessors. The tragic reconciliation may be of the highest metaphysical order, in theory transcending the individual who has become the "work of art" of the Will and so a "Dionysian world-artist." Nevertheless, this reconciliation is phenomenologically available to the individual and meaningless without him. Second, the metaphysical event remains *staged*

even in its culmination, as an object for viewing and consumption. The veil of *mâyâ*, of Illusion and Appearances, may be torn aside, but it remains firmly in place, "fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity," like a curtain in a theater.

These two characteristics are actually one and the same: tragic artistry is located in the experience of the individual, but that experience is of a phenomenon in which the categories of artist, subject, and spectator coalesce. There is an immediacy to the experience, which is rooted in the body and physiology of a subject. But the experience is, structurally speaking, that of a visual perception, not of a physical sensation, which gives the lie to the object of the experience, which is supposed to entail the dissolution of subject and object in a blinding immediacy, a moment of ecstatic union, and a loss of individuation. That is, the tragic experience must necessarily be that of an *individual*, even if it involves the momentary hallucination of her no longer being one.

Spectatorship is for this reason of the essence for Nietzsche. It is the point of departure in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the way it ends. Qualifying the effacement through rapt absorption of the self in the visionary world that it beholds is the fact that the spectacle of the tragic always comes framed, whether by the horizon of a dream, the circle of a chorus, the context of a ritual, or the *skênê* of the stage (these are formally indistinguishable Nietzsche, and they interpenetrate as well): "The form of the Greek theater recalls a lonely valley in the mountains: the architecture of the scene appears like a luminous cloud formation that the Bacchants swarming over the mountains behold from a height – *like the splendid frame in which the image of Dionysus is revealed to them*" (§8; emphasis added). *The Birth of Tragedy* traces the evolution of this revelation, which is to say the gradual manifestation (appearance) of the godhead (Dionysus, the One, representing – but not identical to – the Will, *das Ur-Eine*, the Primordial Unity of Being), effectuated through the ministrations of Apollo over time, from the visions of the lyric poet in the archaic age of Greece to the rise of the satyr chorus, to its transformation into the tragic chorus, and then to the demise of tragedy at the hands of Platonic philosophy. Tragedy thus has the structure of a revelation. But *is* it a revelation?

In point of fact, the revelation is described by Nietzsche as a projection. Consider how membership in the satyr chorus of Dionysian revelers, the original form of tragedy and "the dramatic proto-phenomenon," involves a complex chain of assignments: "the Dionysian reveler sees himself as a satyr, *and as a satyr, in turn, he sees the god*" (§8; emphasis in original). Further, "this process of the tragic chorus [namely, its projective mechanisms] is the *dramatic* proto-phenomenon: to see oneself transformed before one's own eyes and to begin to act as if one had actually entered into another body, another character. This process stands at the beginning of the origin of drama" (§8).[1] At every point along tragedy's evolution this doubling of consciousness is at work. But there is more, for as the revelations of the god intensify, which is to say as the god becomes increasingly present and concrete, so does the degree of consciousness of the tragic viewer, as he stands increasingly removed from the scene of action,

observing and delighting in appearances as such, but also watching the surrogates of his now increasingly vicarious experience (the actors and the chorus), which, as we saw, are in fact projections of himself. Ironically, the culmination of these two progressions results in the death of tragedy. This progression can be briefly sketched.

At the beginning of things stand the satyr chorus, who simultaneously comprise the spectators, dancing, as it were, round an empty stage, ecstatically, and projecting a vision of the god: "*Dionysus*, the real stage hero and center of the vision, *was . . . not actually present at first*, in the very oldest period of tragedy; *he was merely imagined as present*" (first emphasis added; last two in original). This is the strictly choral origin of tragedy, which involved dancing and music but no dramatic representation: the god was not permitted to appear except to the mind's eye. "Later the attempt was made to show the god as real to represent the visionary figure together with its transfiguring frame as something visible for every eye – and thus 'drama' in the narrower sense [sc., of "action" and "enactment"] began" (§8). So it happened, on Nietzsche's scheme of things (which in its rudiments may be historically accurate, if we take Aristotle as a witness), that tragedy evolved into a chorus with actors: first there was one, then two, and finally three actors, while the role and power of the chorus, and thus of the tragic form itself, correspondingly dwindled.[2]

The final blow to tragedy comes when Dionysus, "initially absent," finally takes the stage in Euripides' last and posthumously performed play, *Bacchae*, in 406 BCE – indeed, precisely in a play that turns on the contested appearance and the final, vengeful epiphany of the god ("I *am* a god. I was blasphemed by you," *Bacchae* v. 1347; cf. vv. 41–2). It is striking that tragedy should dissolve at the moment when Dionysus, "initially absent," finally claims his rightful due on the tragic stage.

Nietzsche is not falsifying history, but he is being quietly and creatively selective, and so too highly distortive, for the sake of his own plot line. Though you would never know it from *The Birth of Tragedy*, Dionysus did *not* make his first and only appearance on the Greek stage in 406 BCE. Aeschylus is responsible for two (now lost) Dionysiac tetralogies, and at least five other tragedians had composed plays with titles such as *Bacchae*, *Pentheus,* and *Semele*, while the comic stage had itself experienced as many or more sightings of Dionysus since the time of Aeschylus.[3] Euripides was closely following tradition in his own *Bacchae*, and many of the features of his passion play about Dionysus seem to be borrowed from Aeschylus.[4] Why is Nietzsche silent about these known facts? Evidently, Euripides must be shown to have innovated by rationalizing the imaginary devices of tragedy – whence his innovations in the tell-all prologues, his introduction of the *deus ex machina*, his realism, his debasement of tragic speech at the expense of music and in favor of the chatty and pattering language of the everyday. But most of all, Nietzsche says, Euripides flattens out the metaphysical dimensions of tragedy. Unable to make sense of what is no more than a blur to his keen eye, that "enigmatic depth, indeed infinitude" that lurks in the background of prior tragedy, which is to say its intimation of a deeper metaphysics, Euripides puts everything into the foreground and the broad daylight for inspection (§11).[5] Along with the spectator he brings Dionysus onto the stage as well: it is not enough that the

god should shine through the masks of tragic heroes (§10): he must literally *appear* and in human form at that ("disguised as a man," *Bacchae* v. 54). Whence his culminating epiphany as a literal *deus ex machina*, which has tragic consequences to those who deny him and to the form of tragedy itself.

Is Euripides' final "glorification of the god" a last-minute confession by the former unbeliever (§12), or is it not rather a sign of the god's declining grip on the Greek imagination that Dionysus must completely submit to appearances in order to be? It is as if the Greeks for Nietzsche no longer could sustain an imaginary connection to the Dionysian: they were obliged to bring Dionysus before their very eyes (and indeed, as a human masked as a god), their powers of projection having been fatally weakened by the diseases of their culture. But if so, then this decline in imagination had to have begun early on. The gradual concretizing of the god's presence defines the earliest evolution of tragedy, as we saw, and there is in fact nothing exceptional about Euripides' dramatic staging of the god. The development is in every way comparable to the puzzle of the metaphysical Will that *needs* appearances, which is to say the realm of degeneracy and derogation vis-à-vis Being, in order to be at all. What is more, far from being a progression that was willfully imposed on Dionysus by Nietzsche, the evolution of the god perfectly matches his original cultic functions. As a god of masks and appearances, of vision and theater (Otto 1960; Henrichs 1993, esp. 17), Dionysus was from the very beginning a perfect avatar of Apollo, indeed, his "supplement" (see p. 73 above).[6]

No sooner does Dionysus erupt into palpable reality, and in fully human form, than he is just as quickly banished again, forced to seek "refuge in the depths of the sea, namely the mystical flood of a secret cult which gradually covered the earth" (§12). Nietzsche has more to say about the postclassical cult of the Dionysian in his various notes and in later writings (some of them published). That cult, drawing as it does on the earlier forms of Dionysianism, with their eschatological fixation on rebirth and salvation in the afterlife and on revealed truth, is none other, it turns out, than *Christianity*. And if Greek tragedy's proximate, but not necessarily final, goal is buried in the latency of the Christian faith – that is, if Greek culture is indeed a preliminary stage of Christian culture – it ought to come as no surprise when Dionysus emerges on the other end as a seeming transfiguration of Christ (a connection already foreshadowed in §4 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in the analysis of Raphael's devotional painting, *The Transfiguration*). This story about the rise of Christianity out of the spirit of Dionysus may seem something of a stretch at first, but it, too, is a conventional topos in prior German thought. It is one of the ways by which modernity made legible to itself a distant pagan reality (and justified the need to do so).[7] Likewise, the symbolic link between Dionysus, violence, and the exotic, but above all the violence of alienated and vicariated identity, is another characteristic feature of modern German classicism, and yet one more form of "metaphysical comfort." Closely connected to both of these aspects of the Dionysian is the nineteenth-century brand of antisemitic Aryanism that is retrojected onto Greece and organized around Dionysus, and not only in §9 of *The Birth of Tragedy* (Porter 2000b, 274–86). Is Dionysus Greek or

Christian – or is he simply *German*? Whatever else he may be, Nietzsche's Dionysus is symbolic of this perplexity.

Is Nietzsche's Philosophy "Tragic"?

Nietzsche's first and best known book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, was an instant sensation and scandal. How much of an impact its initial reception had on Nietzsche can never be known, but emotional scarring aside (the book nearly cost him his career), it is conceivable that he would have enjoyed none of his later notoriety if he had not made such a spectacular début in 1872. It was perhaps inevitable that Nietzsche should have revisited the idea of tragedy in his subsequent writings, given the radically innovative nature of his views at the time. But opportunism cannot be ruled out as a motivating factor either. The reissue of the book in 1886, with its brash new preface, did as much to stir the ashes of the old controversy as it sought to realign Nietzsche's early and later styles of thought. And although tragedy nowhere receives the same intensity of focus in any of his subsequent writings, it does survive in them as a powerful and colorful leitmotif, not least because of the frequently retrospective nature of his own writing. Nietzsche is fond of playing the literary narcissist who cultivates his *curriculum vitae*, revising it as he revisits it. Tragedy was first and foremost a theme to be *cultivated* in Nietzsche's self-presentation, and not merely an abiding concern.

Tragedy, with its darkness and death-dealing attributes and its portentous thunder, held an immediate and irresistible appeal for Nietzsche. And having set himself up as a prophet of culture and announcing the arrival of a second tragic age that in effect never arrived, Nietzsche had something like a public relations crisis on his hands. A decade and a half on still finds him beating the same drum: "I promise a *tragic age*: the supreme art in the affirmation of life, tragedy, will be reborn when mankind has behind it the consciousness of the harshest but most necessary wars *without suffering from it*" (*Ecce Homo*, "The Birth of Tragedy," 4, emphasis in original). But to palliate the still unfulfilled promises of his youth, a few revisions are first in order. Wagner has to be dismissed as a typographical error, a slip for "Zarathustra," at least in *The Birth of Tragedy* (ibid.), while Dionysus and the Dionysian must be conjured forth again with a new and brutal energy, bidding adieu, or nearly so, to the all-too-classicizing attributes of the Apollonian, as Nietzsche claims in notes from 1875:

> The psychology of the orgy as an overflowing feeling of life and energy within which even pain acts as a stimulus provided me with the key to the concept of the *tragic* feeling, which was misunderstood as much by Aristotle as it was by our pessimists . . . Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types – *that* is what I called Dionysian, *that* is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet . . . And with that I again return to the place from which I set out – the *Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values: with that I again plant myself in the soil

> out of which I draw all that I will and *can* – I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus – I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence. (*Twilight of the Idols*, "What I Owe to the Ancients," 5; trans. Hollingdale)

"*Incipit tragoedia*" (*The Gay Science*, 342), indeed.

Yet even with these cosmetic changes there is something unsatisfying about Nietzsche's revised pronouncements. The tragic age remains as vague as ever, conceptually and temporally, banished as it is to the realm of the possible and the future, one that perhaps might be glorified as an Eternal Recurrence, though that is itself an eternal refrain in the later Nietzsche.[8] Just when *were* the Greeks properly *tragic*? The "tragic age of the Greeks" Nietzsche dates not to the fifth century but to the time of the Presocratics, assigning its acme to the sixth century during the *floruit* of Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Pythagoras, well before Aeschylus could arrive on the scene. What is more, the Tragic Age is populated not by artists or satyr choruses but by philosophers who are out of touch with their times and who inaugurate a revolution in thought that, Nietzsche claims, utterly failed: "they had a gap in their nature" (*KGW* 4.1:180). Consequently, decline in Greek culture sets in already with the Presocratics, which leaves that *other* tragic age, the age of Aeschylus to Euripides, and, indeed, the very meaning of "tragic knowledge," in a precarious state indeed. One has to suspect that the Presocratics inaugurated a tragic age because of what they tragically failed to achieve. "Tragic knowledge" can hardly be anything other than this intuited and repressed self-knowledge (Porter 2000b: 236–8).

All of this notwithstanding, Nietzsche would come to be identified as a latter-day Presocratic ushering in a second tragic age (an identification he also encouraged). The apparent goal of his later philosophy is to breed just such a type through a kind of Schillerian ascesis of the self (Schiller [1791–2] 1993: 4) – one strong enough to withstand the shocks of a fluxing world driven no longer by the Primal One agonizing in its reflection in appearances, but by the Will to Power coursing through all things in an endless and restless becoming, violently tossing up entities and engorging them again. The Dionysian man is someone capable of staring this meaningless surge in the face and deriving solace, indeed, a kind of "metaphysical comfort," from its very ceaseless quality: he dances on the edge of an abyss.[9]

All this is well and good, but wherein lies the tragic here?, we might well ask. One possibility is that tragic knowledge consists in the devastating realization that all meaning is in vain. Another is that it consists in the cathartic lessons learned from this agonizing revelation: tragedy encompasses an affirmation of life wrested from the moment of its regenerative extinction, the way this is embodied in the death (say) of a tragic hero, who is a stand-in for life's ultimate value and meaning. But the Dionysian man isn't pained by the destruction of meaning; he exults in it. Indeed, his exultation is the sign of life's inextinguishable powers working through him. But if so, then tragedy no longer seems the appropriate term. Or is it? Drawn to a point where it could encompass both total expenditure and total recuperation, the meaning of tragedy and the tragic seems stretched to an improbable limit. Perhaps Nietzsche is

not redirecting the meaning of tragedy and the tragic but is instead merely redescribing these things, demonstrating with chilling accuracy what they ever only were. Tragedy was always invested in the extraction of pleasure from pain, an eerie paradox that prior theory, from Aristotle to Schiller, could only domesticate but could never fully comprehend. Nietzsche may well be setting his face against the moralizers of tragic effect, but whether he has earned the label of tragic philosopher remains open to question. Is Nietzsche celebrating tragic violence or critiquing the established order's secret fascinations and hypocrisies in the realm of tragedy?

As it happens, much of the time Nietzsche's position stands a good deal nearer to comedy than to tragedy. The Free Spirit, delighting in his Gay Science – literally, cheerful knowledge, the direct opposite of tragic knowledge – is a light-stepping dancer "pregnant with lightning bolts that say Yes and laugh Yes, soothsaying lightning bolts – blessed is he who is thus pregnant!" (*Zarathustra*, Third Part, "The Seven Seals (Or: the Yes and Amen Song)," 1; trans. Kaufmann). Laughter, after all, is the other face of Dionysianism, represented perhaps less by the god than by his votaries and companions, the Sileni, the satyrs, the fools, and the buffoons – and now, Zarathustra. "*Learn* – to laugh!," the preface to the 1886 edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* urges at its close, quoting from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Perhaps comedy, hinging upon tragedy in the form of the burlesque satyr play in Greek practice (tragedy's supposed *Ur*-form), is tragedy in its most affirmative aspect, but then it is this minus any sense of the tragic, blissfully unaware of darkness and danger (and perhaps all the more dark and dangerous to an onlooker for that reason), blithely disengaged in its oneiric joyfulness and its redemptive, healing indifference. On this view of things, tragedy is forever "short," "vanquished by laughter," and "returned to the eternal comedy of existence," for " 'the waves of uncountable laughter' – to cite Aeschylus [!] – must in the end overwhelm even the greatest of th[e] tragedians" (*The Gay Science*, 1; trans. Kaufmann). In this mood, Nietzsche is no longer keen to proclaim the coming of a new tragic age. Quite the contrary, he is doing all he can to subvert the tragic spirit and to *exit* the tragic age of his own day: "For the present, the comedy of existence has not yet 'become conscious' of itself. For the present, *we still live in the age of tragedy*, the age of moralities and religions" (ibid.; emphasis added). To the previous tragic age (or is it two tragic ages?) we must now add a third: our own, teeming as it is with moral maladies and degenerative instincts.

To call Nietzsche either a tragic or a comic philosopher obviously won't do. His positions can hardly be confined to a genre, and the effect they leave us with is not one of tragic insight or giddy amusement but only a feeling of puzzlement and uncertainty and a need to ponder all the harder and more critically what we are about, and so too to examine the very terms by which we apprehend ourselves and our world. Laughter and gaiety shade off into various tonalities. At times they pass into intense superficiality and serenity – not Dionysianism now, but (of all things) Apollonian classicism, as Nietzsche in places allows: "Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of

appearance" (*The Gay Science*, Preface for the Second Edition, 3; cf. *Twilight of the Idols*, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," 10; *The Will to Power*, §§798–9). At other times, Nietzsche has to describe himself all over again lest his readers take him too literally and too seriously: " *'Incipit tragoedia'* we read at the end of this awesomely aweless book," he writes in his preface to the reedition of *The Gay Science*, which evidently stands in need of a corrective emphasis: "Beware! Something downright wicked and malicious is announced here: *incipit parodia*, no doubt" (ibid., 1).

The sudden and shifting positionalities that Nietzsche assumes and then drops like so many masks bespeaks a kind of perversity in itself. In a word, there is nothing self-evidently tragical about either tragedy or the tragic in the later writings, as indeed there never was even in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Greek cheerfulness was always tied to the subtle undertone of Nietzsche's first book, which was that of a disdainful comic artist gazing haughtily upon "the whole divine comedy of life" and upon "this comedy of art" by which the Primordial One "prepares a perpetual entertainment" for itself, by staring deeply into, and then somehow beyond, "the eternal joy of existence," healing life of its ills through the only "notions with which one can live: . . . the *sublime* . . . and the *comic*" (*The Birth of Tragedy* §§1, 5, 7, 17). There *is* something sublime and comical about mankind's persistent inability to live in the absence of metaphysical illusions. And that is the nub of the problem of tragedy in Nietzsche, who in the end stands mesmerized, as he did at the beginning, by the richest and yet most problematical of all phenomena, the dissonance that is "man."

Notes

1 Similarly, the musical effusions of the lyric poet, that Dionysian artist *par excellence*, are "only different projections of himself" (§5).

2 It is a sign of Nietzsche's powerful influence that Raymond Williams rakes over this conceit from him and its implications for cultural decline without compunction (1966: 18).

3 For the tragedians, see Euripides (1960: xxviii–xxxiii). Most of these titles are known to have antedated Euripides' play. For the comic playwrights, see Aristophanes (1996: 11). This omission by Nietzsche is rarely noted, although see Henrichs (1986: 393–6), who, however, does not mention the comic tradition and arrives at a different conclusion from the one presented here.

4 Euripides (1960).

5 It is worth toying with the thought that Euripides' reading is fatal to tragedy, not because he gets tragedy wrong, but because he has *correctly* analyzed its contrived and shadowy suggestiveness: "How questionable the treatment of the myths!" (§11), etc.

6 Dionysus was also, exceptionally, a frontally facing god: his images show him full-face and frequently surrounded by winged eyes – another index of his intimate connection to the visible realm.

7 Cf. Nietzsche's notebook entries such as the following from 1870/1: "The Hellenic world of Apollo is gradually overcome from within by the Dionysian powers. Christianity was already in place"; also: "With the rise of the Oriental–Christian movement the old Dionysianism inundated the world, and the work of Greek antiquity seemed all in vain." See Porter (2000a: 154 – to which one could add *Ecce Homo*, "The Birth of Tragedy," 1: "In one place

the Christian priests are alluded to as . . . 'subterraneans,' " a seeming reference to the last sentence of *The Birth of Tragedy* §12, "the mystical flood of secret cults which gradually covered the earth, " 2000b: 220–1 with 377n.161–381 n.179; Baeumer (1976) on the Romantic identification of Christ with Dionysus, which Nietzsche is playing off of – without, one should add, merely restating Heine's subversion of that identification; Henrichs (1982: 159–60), on the modern sequel, in the wake of W. Robertson Smith and Frazer.

8 A note from the spring of 1887, contemplating a future title, reads: "The Tragic Age: The Doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence."

9 The will to power is every bit as much a metaphysical postulate (*Annahme*) as the primordial One Will that antedates it in *The Birth of Tragedy*, offering perhaps not quite "a metaphysical comfort in the old style" (as a note from 1887/8 puts it), but at least one such comfort in a new style. The reasons why this is so cannot be argued for here. For the direct Kantian echoes, see *The Critique of Judgment* A33/B33, likewise postulating ("*wir . . . annehmen*") the existence of a "will."

References and Further Reading

Aristophanes. (1996). *Frogs*, ed. A. H. Sommerstein. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.

Baeumer, M. (1976). "Nietzsche and the Tradition of the Dionysian." In *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*, ed. James C. O'Flaherty, Timothy F. Sellner, and Robert Meredith Helm. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 165–89.

Behler, E. (1986). "A. W. Schlegel and the Nineteenth-century *Damnatio* of Euripides." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 27, 335–67.

Bishop, P., ed. (2004). *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*. Rochester, NY: Camden House.

Cancik, H. [1995] (2000). *Nietzsches Antike: Vorlesung* [Nietzsche's antiquity: lectures], 2nd edn. Stuttgart: Metzler.

Courtine, J.-F. (1993). "Tragedy and Sublimity: The Speculative Interpretation of *Oedipus Rex* on the Threshold of German Idealism." In *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question. Essays by Jean-François Courtine, et al.*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett. Albany: State University of New York Press, 157–74.

Euripides. (1960). *Bacchae*, ed. E. R. Dodds, 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Frazer, James George. (1890). *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols. London: Macmillan.

Henrichs, A. (1982). "Changing Dionysiac Identities." In *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition. Volume Three: Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Ben F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 137–60.

Henrichs, A. (1986). "The Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 27, 369–97.

Henrichs, A. (1993). " 'He Has a God in Him': Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysus." In *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 13–43.

Friedrich Nietzsche. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Werke [Nietzsche's critical works], ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (1967–) Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. (= *KGW*).

Otto, W. F. [1933] (1960). *Dionysos: Mythos und Kultus* [Dionysus: myth and cult], 3rd edn. Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Porter, J. I. (2000a). *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on "The Birth of Tragedy"*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Porter, J. I. (2000b). *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Rampley, M. (2000). *Nietzsche, Aesthetics, and Modernity.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schiller, F. [1790–2] (2003) "On the Reason Why We Take Pleasure in Tragic Subjects." In *Friedrich Schiller: Poet of Freedom*, trans. G. W. Gregory. Washington, DC: Schiller Institute, 4: 267–83.

Schiller, F. [1791–2] (1993). "On the Art of Tragedy." In *Friedrich Schiller: Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. New York: Continuum, 1–21.

Silk, M. S. and J. P. Stern. (1981). *Nietzsche on Tragedy.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univetsity Press.

Sloterdijk, P. (1989). *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*, trans. Jamie Owen Daniel. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Szondi, P. [1961] (1964). *Versuch über das Tragische*, 2nd edn. Frankfurt/Main: Insel-Verlag. (Available in English as *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. Paul Fleming. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.)

Williams, R. (1966). *Modern Tragedy.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

y periods and movements
istory. Extensive volumes
on canonical and post-
elds of study and provid-
ırrent and new directions,

Edited by Duncan Wu
Edited by Herbert F. Tucker
Edited by David Scott Kastan
Edited by David Punter
Edited by Dympna Callaghan
Edited by Peter Brown
Edited by David Womersley
Edited by Michael Hattaway

Edited by Thomas N. Corns
Edited by Neil Roberts
Edited by Phillip Pulsiano
and Elaine Treharne
Edited by Susan J. Owen
Edited by Anita Pacheco
Edited by Arthur F. Kinney
Edited by Richard Cronin, Alison
apman, and Antony H. Harrison
Edited by Patrick Brantlinger
and William B. Thesing
Edited by Richard Dutton
and Jean E. Howard
Edited by Charles L. Crow
Edited by Walter Jost
and Wendy Olmsted
Edited by Richard Gray
and Owen Robinson
Edited by Shirley Samuels
Edited by Robert Paul Lamb
and G. R. Thompson
Edited by Susan Schreibman,
Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth
Edited by Corinne Saunders
Edited by Brian W. Shaffer
Edited by David Krasner
Edited by Paula R. Backscheider
and Catherine Ingrassia
Edited by Rory McTurk
Edited by Rebecca Bushnell

A COMPANION TO

TRAGEDY

EDITED BY **REBECCA BUSHNELL**

Blackwell Publishing