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Theorising and Performing Oedipus' **hamartia** *in Early Modern Tragedy (Italy, France, England)*

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Abstract

"Do you pretend to solve the issue of free will in one minute?" asks Tiresias to Oedipus in Cocteau's 1934 *La Machine Infernale*. The issue of Oedipus's fault, who unwittingly commits parricide and incest, is still unresolved and becomes the subject of the Renaissance debate on the tragic hero's responsibility. Aristotle, in the *Poetics* (13 1453a7-16), locates the heart of tragedy in the 'failure' of human action: the concept of ἁμαρτία is the causal element productive of tragic hero's misfortune. He affirms that the ideal protagonist of the best kind of tragedy, who is neither pre-eminently good nor bad, must arouse pity and fear by falling into adversity through a ἁμαρτία μεγάλη. Therefore ἁμαρτία, within the Aristotelian framework, is the hinge of a good plot. And the best kind of tragic plot, according to Aristotle, is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. However, the notion of *hamartia* is the subject of a still-unresolved scholarly debate, since its semantic field is ambiguous and covers a wide range of nuance – "error of judgement", "character flaw", "moral fault" – and makes it difficult to determine the hero's degree of responsibility.

The interpretation of Oedipus' ἁμαρτία already played a crucial role in the Renaissance debate. Since Aristotle's normative theory was considered the only authoritative key to understanding ancient drama, interpretations of tragedy and the *Poetics* were inextricably intertwined. The most significant difficulty, however, was the attempt of reconciling ἁμαρτία with Christianity: its indeterminacy, admitting the presence of the contingency and implying that human agency can never be entirely autonomous, is not acceptable from the point of view of Christian free will. This is (one of) the reason(s) why early Latin and vernacular translations and commentaries interpreted the term by showing a growing notion of moral responsibility and using different lexical variants, such as (Lat.) *error*/*peccatum*, (It.) *errore*/*peccato*, (Fr.) *erreur*/*faute*/*péché*, (En.) *error*/*frailty*/*flaw*. Moreover, Renaissance scholars, to explain the meaning of *hamartia*, often refer to the discussion of voluntary and involuntary actions from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, or indirectly to the notion of Aristotelian *akrasia* (the 'weakness of will'). Hence, between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the theory of tragedy - mostly based on the (mis)interpretation of the *Poetics* – and rewritings of Oedipus' myth (both Sophocles' and Seneca's) influence each other, thus giving birth to a fruitful debate on tragic hero's moral responsibility and involving theological and philosophical issues, such as free will, determinism, predestination, Providence.

The present dissertation discusses the reception of the notion of *hamartia* by analysing, from a comparative perspective, the theory and the practice of tragedy in Italy, France, and England. After a preliminary chapter discussing the origins of the debate in Antiquity, the following chapters explore the early modern understanding of *hamartia* throughout a) Latin and vernacular translations of and commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*, b) the early modern theoretical treatises on tragedy, and c) the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reception of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Seneca's *Oedipus*.

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Introduction

i. Sophocles, Aristotle, and the Problem of Agency in the Early Modern Drama

In 1543 Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio, an intellectual at the Court of Ercole II at Ferrara, author of the first known "regular" tragedy in vernacular, *Orbecche*, wrote the apologetic *Lettera sulla tragedia* ("Letter on tragedy") in defence of criticism addressed to his play, *Didone*:

> Mi volgerò a rispondere alla sesta accusa ch'egli mi ha data, cioè che la *Didone* non è simile all'*Edipo tiranno*. E ciò gli concedo io senza questionare quanto alla materia, imperò che il soggetto dell'*Edipo tiranno* è tale che un simile non fu mai prima, né ora è, né sarà forse mai. E se Aristotele si scelse questa favola come per Idea del compor tragico, fece egli ciò con quel giudizio ch'egli ha usato in tutte le altre sue composizioni: perché questa materia è veramente tra le altre singolare […]. Confesserò io adunque, senza esser ponto celato, che la *Didone* in quanto alla materia è diversa dall'*Edipo tiranno*. Ma non voglio già concedere che nelle parti che alla tragedia convengono e nell'artificio ella non sia tale quale è l'*Edipo*, quanto ha potuto portarne il soggetto tratto da Vergilio che io ho avuto per le mani. E se forse in qualche parte mi son partito dalle regole che dà Aristotele per confrontarmi co' costumi de' tempi nostri, l'ho io fatto coll'esempio degli antichi.
>
> (I will answer the sixth accusation that he addressed to me, that the *Didone* is not similar to the *Edipo tiranno*. And I admit it without questioning as regards the subject, but the subject of the *Edipo tiranno* is such that a similar plot never existed before, nor it exists now, nor it will ever exist. And if Aristotle chose this plot as the Idea of composing tragedies, he did it with that judgment which he used in all his other works: because this subject is really singular among the others [...]. Therefore I will confess, without hiding myself, that the *Didone* as regards the subject is different from the *Edipo tiranno*. But I do not want to concede that in those parts specifically concerning tragedy and in the artifice it is not exactly the same as *Edipo*, as much as the subject taken from Virgil, that I had in my hands, could offer to me. And if perhaps I moved away, sometimes, from Aristotle's rules to meet the customs of our times, I did it with the example of the ancients.)[1]

Giraldi makes here an actual admission of guilt: he admits that his *Didone* is not similar to Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but he defends his play by arguing that, even if sometimes he departed from Aristotelian rules, he always followed the example of the ancient authors. It is clear that, in mid-sixteenth-century Italy, composing a tragedy without strictly following the plot-structure of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* means violating Aristotle's rules. This passage testifies the beginning of the theoretical debate developed in Italy in the second half

[1] Giraldi Cinzio, *Lettera sulla tragedia*, in Weinberg (1970) 1.484f.

of the sixteenth century, aiming at defining and eventually codifying the tragic genre. The "rediscovery" of the Classics and, especially, of Aristotle's *Poetics* gave rise to a theoretical debate on how to write a tragedy and how to deal with the Classical texts, first developed in Italy, then influencing the rest of European reception. Indeed, the main ambition of Italian writers during the *Cinquecento* was to recreate the tragic genre in vernacular; for this reason, it was necessary to find the more precise definition of such genre.[2]

The normative reference was Aristotle's *Poetics*, whose *editio princeps* was published in 1508 by Aldo Manuzio in Venice. According to Aristotle, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the best example of a tragic plot-structure, that is the reason why the Sophoclean play became the Classical model of the perfect tragedy in early modern Europe. What does it make the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the best kind of tragedy? Which are those elements that Renaissance scholars have to take into account to make a play "similar" to the ancient model? Bernardo Segni, a member of the Florentine Academy and author of the first vernacular translation of the *Poetics*,[3] in the prologue to his 1551 vulgarization of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in explaining the reasons of his choice referring to Aristotelian canon, sheds light on the dramatic elements that make the *Oedipus Tyrannus* a paradigmatic plot:

> È in questa tragedia tutta l'arte, che ha espressa Aristotile nella sua *Poetica*; dalla quale come da perfetta regola ha ei cavato tutti i documenti, che s'appartengono alla poesia tragica […]. Il fine che debbe aver la Tragedia; le persone da esservi introdotte, che non debbon esser cattivi Principi; la durazione del tempo; la ricognizione con la peripezia appariscono in questa eccellentemente: ed insomma, ci si esprime dentro, come in uno specchio, l'esempio bellissimo ed ottimo della perfetta Tragedia.
>
> (In this tragedy there is all the art which Aristotle expressed in his *Poetics* […]. The aim of the Tragedy, the characters to be introduced, who must not be wicked princes, the duration of time, and the recognition with the reversal appear in this tragedy excellently: and in short, it expresses, like in a mirror, the beautiful and excellent example of the perfect Tragedy.)[4]

According to Aristotle, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the only play in which there is a perfect correspondence between the *anagnorisis* (the "recognition") and the *peripeteia* (the

[2] On the history of Greek and Latin texts in the Renaissace, see Reynolds-Wilson (1991), esp. 122-206. On the reception of ancient drama in Renaissance Italy, see Schironi (2016).

[3] Segni, *Rettorica et Poetica d'Aristotile tradotte di greco in lingua vulgare fiorentina* (1549).

[4] Segni, *L'Edipo principe, tragedia di Sofocle, già volgarizzata da Bernardo Segni* (1811) [1551], 20f.

"reversal"): "la ricognizione con la peripezia appariscono in questa eccellentamente", Segni claims, thus referring to chapter 11 of the *Poetics*, where Aristotle explicitly declares the exemplarity of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[5] In fact, the discovery of parricide and incest by Oedipus who, unaware, starts investigating his real identity corresponds in the end to the reversal of the plot, that is his tragic downfall.

Most of all, Oedipus is considered by Aristotle the ideal "middling character", precisely because of his innocent guilt, his *hamartia*. In fact, in chapter 13, Aristotle locates the heart of tragedy in the failure of human action: the concept of *hamartia* is the causal element which leads to the protagonist's downfall. Aristotle affirms that the ideal protagonist of the best kind of tragedy is a middling character who is neither pre-eminently good nor bad and must arouse pity and fear – "il fine che debbe aver la Tragedia" – by falling into adversity not because of evil and wickedness ("le persone non debbon esser cattivi Principi", Segni claims) but because of a *hamartia*, a certain "fallibility" (Arist. *Po.* 13, 1453a7-14):

> ὁ μεταξὺ ἄρα τούτων λοιπός. ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτος ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ **δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά**, τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχίᾳ, **οἷον Οἰδίπους** καὶ Θυέστης καὶ οἱ ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων γενῶν ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρες.
>
> we are left, then, with the figure who falls between these types. Such a man is one who is not preeminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into affliction not because of evil and wickedness, but *because of a certain fallibility*. He will belong to the class of those who enjoy great esteem and prosperity, *such as Oedipus*, Thyestes, and outstanding men from such families. [6]

Thus, *hamartia*, within the Aristotelian framework, is the hinge of a good plot and, consequently, Oedipus is the ideal middling character. However, the meaning of *hamartia* (literally from ἁμαρτάνω, that means "miss the mark") is ambiguous, and it is the subject of a still-unresolved scholarly debate since its semantic field covers a wide range of nuance – including an "error resulting from ignorance", an "error of judgement", a "character flaw" or a "moral fault" – and makes it difficult to determine the degree of responsibility of the tragic character.

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[5] Arist. *Po.* 11 1452a32-34 δὲ ἀναγνώρισις, ὅταν ἅμα περιπετείᾳ γένηται, οἷον ἔχει ἡ ἐν τῷ Οἰδίποδι, "The finest recognition occurs in direct conjunction with reversal, as with the one in the *Oedipus*".

[6] I used here the translation of ἁμαρτία as "fallibility" proposed by Halliwell (1987).

The issue of Oedipus' *hamartia* already played a crucial role in the Renaissance theoretical debate on the tragic genre. What is interesting is that no univocal interpretation can be found in the early modern drama, neither in theory nor in practice of tragedy. The main difficulty was the attempt of reconciling *hamartia* with Christianity: its indeterminacy, admitting the presence of the contingency and implying that human agency is not entirely autonomous, is not acceptable from the point of view of Christian free will. This is one of the reasons why neo-Latin and vernacular translations and commentaries interpreted the term by showing a growing notion of moral responsibility and using different lexical variants, such as the neo-Latin *error*/*peccatum*, the Italian *errore*/*peccato*, the French *erreur*/*faute*/*péché*, the English *error*/*frailty*/*flaw*. Moreover, early modern scholars, to explain the meaning of *hamartia*, often refer to a number of philosophical and theological theories, such as, among others, the discussion of voluntary and involuntary actions from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, or indirectly the notion of Aristotelian *akrasia* (the "weakness of will"), or the theory of passions. Hence, between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the theory of tragedy (mostly based on the misinterpretation of the *Poetics*) and the translations and adaptations of Oedipus' myth (both Sophocles' and Seneca's) mutually influence each other, thus giving birth to a fruitful debate on tragic hero's moral responsibility and involving theological and philosophical issues, such as free will, determinism, predestination, Providence.

The aim of this dissertation is investigating, from a comparative perspective, the reception of the notion of *hamartia* by analyzing the theory and the practice of tragedy in Italy, France, and England, between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. After a preliminary chapter discussing the origins of the debate in Antiquity (especially focusing on Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Aristotle's *Poetics*), the following chapters explore the early modern understanding of *hamartia* throughout a) the influences of Late Antique and Medieval idea of tragedy, b) Latin and vernacular translations of and commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*, c) the early modern theoretical treatises on tragedy, and d) the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reception of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Seneca's *Oedipus*, throughout the analysis of significative case studies.

ii. Ancient and Early Modern Debate: Literature, Philosophy, Theology, Ethics

The issue of the interpretation of *hamartia* involves the notions of agency and responsibility and is part of the so-called "free will problem", which has played a

central role in Western civilisation since at least the classical Greek era. The free will problem has followed two main streams, often intertwined. One, running from the ancient Greeks to contemporary scientists and philosophers, has inquired into the question of human causation: to what degree are our choices and actions originated within ourselves, and to what degree are they externally determined? And what does imply in terms of responsibility and morality? The other one has investigated these questions in a specific theological context: to what degree are human actions and choices influenced or limited by transcendent agents?[7] The still-unsolved issue of the moral responsibility of Oedipus, as a literary character, has been used as a paradigmatic case study not only in the domain of the literary criticism (starting in fact from Aristotle's *Poetics*) but also in that of moral philosophy,[8] and it has also been the object of several theological interpretations, especially starting from the early modernity.[9] In fact, Greek tragedy "brings with it certain metaphysical, religious, social, political, and indeed moral presuppositions of a general nature, and these relate closely to causation, and thus to moral responses".[10]

The *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in particular, is the play that perfectly embodies the problems of divine and human agency, of voluntary and involuntary actions as well as the related moral responsibility. Nevertheless, if the understanding of Oedipus' "tragic error" in the early modernity is filtered by the (mis)reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is Aristotle himself who first applies a misleading interpretation to the Greek drama: his secularisation of tragedy excludes not only the gods from the plot but also any arbitrary misfortune. Human agency is the core of the Aristotelian dramatic theory. Thus, I will consider (in Chapter 1) from one side the interplay between human and divine causation in the Sophoclean play, and on the other the (still debated and ambiguous) Aristotelian interpretation of Oedipus' *hamartia* in the light of his theory of action. Aristotle's reading of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the first (and certainly the most popular until the Freudian interpretation) of several following exegeses.

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[7] For a discussion on free will in Classical antiquity, see especially Dihle (1982), Williams (1993) and Frede (2011). For a discussion on destiny, Providence and predestination, cf. also Magris (2016). For a discussion on free will from the Antiquity to the present day, see Pink-Stone (2004). For a study on agency in early modern literature, see Rosendale (2018).

[8] See Lawrence (2013) 4.

[9] See Rosendale (2018).

[10] Lawrence (2013) 13.

To discuss the issue of agency within the ancient texts, such as the Greek drama and the Aristotelian *corpus*, as well as throughout their reception in the Renaissance literary texts, we should take into account two main aspects: first, the cultural differences, implying a different conception of will, morality and inner responsibility according to the specific historical context and period; second, the consequent (literary, philosophical, and theological) interpretations proposed over the centuries. This perspective is necessary to make a clear cultural distinction between the ancient, the early modern and our contemporary point of view.

M. Frede rightly claims that "if we look at Greek literature from Homer onwards, dawn to longer Aristotle, we do not find any trace of reference to, let alone a mention of, a free will".[11] It would be undoubtedly anachronistic thinking of Greek culture in terms of modern conceptions of free will and determinism. However, as B. Williams underlines, we should not take for granted the "progressivist" view according to which "the Greeks had primitive ideas of action, responsibility, ethical motivation, and justice, which in the course of history have been replaced by a more complex and refined set of conceptions that define a more mature form of ethical experience".[12] Of course, there are differences in terms of modern moral consciousness; still, the fifth-century drama and the Aristotelian reflection on the tragic character are a privileged vehicle of ethical debate, both in the Renaissance and today. It is focusing on these cultural differences that my study aims at emphasising not only the distance between the ancient text and its early modern reading, but especially the value of the literary product derived from the contact with both the ancient model and the contemporary culture, thus offering an instrument of investigation on that specific cultural and historical moment.

The rediscovery of the tragic genre and the beginning of the European theoretical debate on how to rewrite a tragedy (and how to make the ideal tragic hero), thus, have been deeply influenced by a previous long tradition of different philosophical conceptions about causation.[13] In the fourth century BC, Plato connected choice with moral responsibility in the *Republic* (X) in his Myth of Er, whereas Aristotle thoroughly discussed on causation in the *Metaphysics* (V-VI) and ethical responsibility in the

[11] Frede (2011) 5.
[12] Williams (1993) 5.
[13] The history of interpretation of philosophical conceptions about causation cannot be explained here exhaustively. For a discussion on the free will problem, see p. 11 n. 7.

Nicomachean Ethics (especially in the books III and VIII that will be analysed in Chapter 1). The recognition of the free will problem is usually attributed to Epicurus and taken further by Lucretius, who introduced the expression *libera voluntas* and postulated that general causation is interrupted by the unpredictable swerve of atoms, thus making possible the indeterminacy and human agency.[14] The Stoics believed in causal determinism, that is, every event is the result of a combination of necessary causes; but they later recognised that causation "has the exculpatory potential to work against ethics" and admitted that "our actions are part of the casual order of fate but are also authentically our own, and this is the basis of ethical accountability".[15]

The Stoic notion of free will, developed by the late Stoic Chrysippus, was adopted in the second century by the early Christians who "were beginning to articulate their beliefs in what they themselves often thought of, and called, a new philosophy", Frede argues; "there is no doubt that the belief in a free will became so widespread, indeed for a long time almost universal, thanks to the influence of Christianity".[16] Augustine's conception of will and freedom is close to the Stoic compatibilism; he probably influenced voluntarist positions in the medieval and early modern period, notably those of "the theologians of the Reformation regarding the precedence of the will over the intellect in God concerning the order of creation and salvation, for example in the doctrine of predestination".[17]

This brief *excursus*, while not claiming to be exhaustive, makes evident how it is hardly surprising that the reception of both *Poetics* chapter 13 and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* was extraordinarily complicated and deeply influenced by a centuries-old philosophical and religious debate. As regards the early modern scholarly debate, J. M. Bremer, author of the first comprehensive study on the notion of *hamartia* in Classical antiquity, claims that

> there was not only the basic difficulty of the complex relationship between Greek tragedy, Plato, and Aristotle; there were also two smoke-century as it were, between postmedieval scholarship and their fifth-century BC object: Stoicism and Christianity. For Stoicism it

[14] Lucr. *Rer. Nat.* II 251ff.

[15] Rosendale (2018) 15. On Chrysippus' Epicurean notion of causation, cf. Cicero, *De fato* 29 who refers to the case of Oedipus. Cf. also Frede (2011) 66-88.

[16] Frede (2011) 89.

[17] Lössl (2004) 54.

> was impossible to consider human wrongdoings without putting human passions at the centre: Seneca's dramas bear abundant witness to this. For Christian belief, it was impossible to consider human wrongdoings without attributing them to the wickedness of fallen men, who had trespassed against the divine law.[18]

It is not a coincidence that the rediscovery of Classical texts occurred in sixteenth-century Italy. If the *editiones principes* of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Aristotle's *Poetics* were published respectively in 1502 and 1508, it is only between the 1520s and 1530s that the first translations became available and accessible: the Florentine Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici first translated the Sophoclean play both in Latin and in vernacular in 1525 ca., and then rendered Aristotle's *Poetics* in Latin in 1536. If the mid-sixteenth-century marked the widespread of the tragic genre and the beginning of the theoretical debate around the *Poetics*, it was also the period of the Catholic Reformation (or Counter-Reformation), initiated in response to the Protestant Reformation. Thus, the early modern tragedy, rediscovered and brought to light by a philological interest in recreating the ancient model, became an instrument of reflection of the contemporary religious atmosphere.[19]

Above all, the problematic exegesis of the notion of *hamartia* was necessarily influenced by the lively religious debate, first in Italy, then all over in Europe. Indeed, the question of the freedom of the will was considered the main problem between the evolving Catholic and Protestant positions concerning human nature, as significantly shown by the opening sentence of Erasmus's 1524 *De Libero Arbitrio*:

> Inter difficultates, quae non paucae occurrunt in divinis literis, vix ullas labyrinthus inexplicabilior quam de libero arbitrio. Nam haec materiam iam olim philosophorum, deinde theologorum etiam, tum veterum, tum recentium ingenia mirum in modum exercuit, sed maiore, sicut opinor, negotio quam fructu.
>
> (Among the many difficulties encountered in Holy Scripture – and there are many of them – none presents a more perplexed labyrinth than the problem of the freedom of the will. In ancient and more recent times philosophers and theologians1 have been vexed by it to an astonishing degree but, as it seems to me, with more exertion than success on their part.)[20]

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[18] Bremer (1969) 97.
[19] See Di Maria (2002) 58-228.
[20] Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, in Winter (2002) 3f.

Erasmus, though initially sympathetic to the Reformation movement, attacked the Lutheran version of the reform throughout his *De Libero Arbitrio*, followed by the fierce *pamphlet* written in response by Martin Luther in 1525 and entitled *De Servo Arbitrio.* The transition period which led eventually to Protestantism and post-Tridentine Catholicism not surprisingly coincided with the rediscovery and with an extraordinary production of tragedies.[21] Between the mid-sixteenth and the seventeenth century, in Europe, throughout the rediscovery of the tragic genre, playwrights contributed to the formation of both a Catholic and Protestant culture. As it will be shown in Chapter 3, the modern tragedy became a privileged instrument of religious debate, especially for instance in the Jesuit drama, and it was influenced by different theological doctrines (such as the Jansenism and the Molinism) or philosophical movements, such as the Neo-Stoicism (attempting to combine the beliefs of Stoicism and Christianity).

Aristotle's *Poetics*, as being the normative reference to recreate the tragic genre, is often the object of a process of moralisation and, in some cases, of Christianisation. However, as we shall see in Chapter 2, the Christianising terminology does not always imply a voluntary religious meaning, but it is instead the result of the domestication of language for a contemporary audience. This syncretism, as we shall see, is evident both in the dramatic theory and in the practice of tragedy in the early modernity.

G. Steiner, in his *Death of Tragedy*, claims that

> what impresses one is a sense of miraculous occasion. Over wide reaches of time and in diverse places, elements of language, material circumstance, and individual talent suddenly gather toward the production of a body of serious drama. Out of the surrounding darkness, energies meet to create constellations of intense radiance and rather brief life. Such high moments occurred in Periclean Athens, in England during the period 1580-1640, in seventeenth-century Spain, in France between 1630 and 1690.[22]

It was the specific historical, philosophical and religious context that contributed to the production of tragedy, both in fifth-century Athens and in Europe between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. Considering the Italian *Cinquecento* as the starting point of this study as well as analysing the development of the dramatic production and the

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[21] For a discussion on Italian tragedy and Counter-Reformatin, see Mastrocola (1996) 16-25.
[22] Steiner (1980) 106f.

theoretical debate both in seventeenth-century France and England, the resulting discussion on the tragic hero's moral responsibility will highlight how the early modern drama addressed ethical, philosophical and theological issues, thus contributing to the debate on free will in early modern Europe and to the subsequent development of the modern though.

iii. Methodology: 'Beyond Reception'

My research on the notion of *hamartia* thus consists of a study of the relationship between continuity and change in cultural phenomena, taking into account three aspects: classical reception, contemporary comparison, and intellectual history. My discussion (specifically within Chapters 2 and 3) can be considered part of what is now generally referred to as "reception studies". The reception theory, derived mainly from Gadamer and Jauss,[23] was articulated most influentially in the field of Classics in C. Martindale's 1993 *Redeeming the Text*, considered the pioneering contribution to the Classical reception studies and whose position is usually summed up in the statement that "meaning is always realized at the point of reception".[24] Within the past few decades, the term "reception" has been referred to that area of study that during the last century was called "classical tradition". While the "classical tradition" mainly focuses on how elements from antiquity fit into later ages, the term "reception" should suggest that the receiving culture plays a more active role in receiving the past than the earlier model suggested.[25]

To investigate a specific topic (such as the notion of *hamartia*) in the field of early modern classical reception, involving a discussion about Renaissance as a rediscovery of the Classical antiquity and considering the three abovementioned aspects (classical reception, contemporary comparison, and intellectual history), I took into account the methodology called "transformation theory".[26] This methodology aims at increasing the stress on the receiving culture and its active reception:

[23] See Gadamer (1975) and Jauss (1982).
[24] Martindale (1993) 3. See also Martindale-Thomas (2006).
[25] On the relationship between "tradition" and "reception", see Budelmann-Johannes (2008).
[26] For the "transformation theory", see Bohme (2011) whose English translation is provided by P. Baker in Baker-Helmrath-Kallendorf (2019) 9-26.

> not only is it inevitable that the receiving culture will transform the classical past during the process of reception, but even how that past is seen is shaped by the later culture through which it is viewed […]. At the same time, while the receiving culture modifies and constructs antiquity, the latter also has the power of its own to influence and transform later ages. The cultural changes that result from *transformations* are reciprocal, so we must indeed go beyond mere reception.[27]

This methodology has been recently devised by the members of the "Collaborative Research Centre 644, Transformations of Antiquity" based at the Humboldt University in Berlin and organized by H. Bohme and J. Helmrath, who provided a methodological framework applied to the Renaissance Humanism. The core of this methodology is represented by a term coined by the research team, that is 'allelopoiesis' (from the Greek ἄλληλον, "mutual", "reciprocal", and ποίησις, "creation") to describe the relationship of interdependency and reciprocity between the "reference sphere" and the "reception sphere". What they call "transformation process" are effected by "agents" belonging to the "reception sphere" who, while appropriating the "reference sphere", modify the "reception sphere". The transformation processes can occur both diachronically and synchronically, and are characterised primarily of one of three basic modes, *i.e.* the "inclusion", the "exclusion", or "recombination" of cultural phenomena, which "can be observed in relation to the object of the transformation as well as to the 'reception' and 'reference spheres'".[28]

The interdisciplinary nature of the "transformation theory", implying this relation of interdependency between Classical antiquity and the early modernity as well as between the three reference cultures analysed (Italy, France and England between sixteenth and seventeenth century), makes it possible to focus on the reciprocal cultural changes that result from the reception of the issue of *hamartia*, thus going "beyond mere reception".[29]

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[27] Baker-Helmrath-Kallendorf (2019) 3.
[28] *Ibid*. 16.
[29] *Ibid*. 3.

Chapter 1

Tragic Error: Understanding Moral Responsibility in Antiquity

1.1. Introduction: Tragicomic Oedipus and the Origins of the Debate

ΕΥ.	«Ἦν Οἰδίπους τὸ πρῶτον εὐδαίμων ἀνήρ,» –	
ΑΙ.	Μὰ τὸν Δί’ οὐ δῆτ’, ἀλλὰ κακοδαίμων φύσει.	
	Ὅντινά γε, πρὶν φῦναι μέν, Ἀπόλλων ἔφη	
	ἀποκτενεῖν τὸν πατέρα, πρὶν καὶ γεγονέναι,	1185
	πῶς οὗτος ἦν τὸ πρῶτον εὐτυχὴς ἀνήρ;	
ΕΥ.	«εἶτ’ ἐγένετ’ αὖθις ἀθλιώτατος βροτῶν.»	
ΑΙ.	Μὰ τὸν Δί’ οὐ δῆτ’, οὐ μὲν οὖν ἐπαύσατο.	
	Πῶς γάρ; Ὅτε δὴ πρῶτον μὲν αὐτὸν γενόμενον	
	χειμῶνος ὄντος ἐξέθεσαν ἐν ὀστράκῳ,	1190
	ἵνα μὴ ’κτραφεὶς γένοιτο τοῦ πατρὸς φονεύς·	
	εἶθ’ ὡς Πόλυβον ἤρρησεν οἰδῶν τὼ πόδε·	
	ἔπειτα γραῦν ἔγημεν αὐτὸς ὢν νέος	
	καὶ πρός γε τούτοις τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μητέρα·	
	εἶτ’ ἐξετύφλωσεν αὐτόν.	1195

(Ar. *Ra.* 1182-1195)

EURIPIDES: “Oedipus was a fortunate man at first – ”[1]
AESCHYLUS: No, by Zeus, he was *not*! He was born to misery. For a start, he was the man who, before his birth, Apollo said would kill his father – before he was even conceived! How can you say “a fortunate man at first”?
EURIPIDES: “ – but then became, contrariwise, the wretchedest of the mortals”.
AESCHYLUS: Not “became”, by Zeus; why he never *stopped* being that! How can you say he did? When as soon as he was born, they put him in a broken pot and left him in the open in winter-time, to make sure he never grew up to become his father’s murderer; then he went traipsing, on two swollen feet, to Polybus; then, when he was a young man, he married an old woman, and on top of that she was his own mother; then he blinded himself.[2]

The downfall of Oedipus becomes the tragicomic paradigm of unhappiness in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (ll. 1182-1195), performed at Athens in the early spring of 405

[1] This is the opening of Euripides’ *Antigone* (Eur. fr. 157, continued by v. 1187 below).
[2] Translation by Sommerstein (1996).

BC: the dead Aeschylus and Euripides, to help Dionysus to decide which tragic playwright should be 'resurrected' to save the theatre (and, in this way, the *polis*, ll. 1517-1519), are involved in a dramatic contest and take turns by quoting their plays. In the passage above, Euripides starts by reciting the prologue of his *Antigone* (of which a few fragments remain): "Oedipus was a fortunate man (εὐδαίμων) at first […] but then became, contrariwise, the wretchedest of the mortals (ἀθλιώτατος βροτῶν)". However, Aeschylus suddenly interrupts him and replies: "Oedipus was not fortunate (εὐδαίμων), he was miserable by nature (κακοδαίμων φύσει)". Also, he continues a few lines below: "Not 'became', by Zeus; why he never *stopped* being that (*i.e.* the wretchedest of the mortals)!". Therefore Oedipus, according to (Aristophanes') Aeschylus, was already fated to be miserable before he was even conceived; he did not have a choice.

Athenian comedy can be considered as an indicator of the audience's contemporary reception and view of fifth-century tragedy: in Aristophanes' treatment of Oedipus' *fabula*, by way of parodying Aeschylus and Euripides, three elements result to be evident and worthy to be pointed to introduce the study of the Sophoclean text.

a) Firstly, the theme of human unhappiness: Oedipus' suffering is undoubtedly the archetypal *topos* of the Theban myth. As L. Edmunds rightly observes, "suffering, which seems to supervene unexpectedly upon a hitherto prosperous Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy, is a primitive, pervasive trait in the myth".[3] Indeed, Oedipus' unhappiness constitutes a consistent *fil rouge* in all the different versions of his story, by starting from his earliest source, that is Homer (ca. eighth century BC). In the *Odyssey* (XI 271-280), in the context of the *Nekyia*, Odysseus tells the story of how he descended into the underworld, where he met Jocasta, here alternatively named Epicaste:

> μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἴδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,
> ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν ἀϊδρείῃσι νόοιο
> γημαμένη ᾧ υἷϊ· ὁ δ' ὃν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίξας
> γῆμεν· ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.
> ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων 275
> Καδμείων ἤνασσε θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλάς·

[3] Edmunds (2006) 31.

ἡ δ' ἔβη εἰς Ἀΐδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
ἁψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου
ᾧ ἄχεϊ σχομένη· τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσι. 280

> And I saw Oedipus' mother, the beautiful Epicaste, / who, in the ignorance of her mind, undertook a monstrous deed / as she married her own son; and when he had killed his father, / he made her his wife. And soon the gods made all known among men. / But in beloved Thebes he, with all his suffering woes, continued / to be lord of the Cadmeans [Thebans] through the destructive counsels of the gods, / while she went to the house of Hades, the mighty gate-keeper, / after knotting a noose and hanging from the high ceiling / overwhelmed by her sorrow; but to him she left woes behind, / very many, as many as the Erinyes of a mother bring to pass.

This is the very first evidence of Oedipus' myth, which, from the archaic period onwards, has been the object of many different reconstructions and innovations, by passing throughout its embodiment in the Theban tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, until Freud's appropriation in the late nineteenth century, thus influencing the entire modern perspective on the ancient myth. Here, in the O*dyssey*, Odysseus takes a few lines to tell the (almost complete) story of Oedipus: parricide and incest are not particularly emphasised, self-blinding is not even mentioned, neither the incestuous offspring. Oedipus' suffering, instead, is especially stressed: the occurrences of ἄλγεα, 'woes' (ll. 275, 279), and ἄχος, 'sorrow' (l. 279), make clear that the theme of unhappiness has a central role.[4] The ἄλγεα as referred to Labdacid suffering turn up again in a fragmentary lyric Thebaid by Stesichorus (sixth century BC), the so-called "Lille Stesichorus",[5] whose best-preserved part includes Jocasta/Epicaste's speech (PMGF 221b, 201-234). She uses the word ἄλγεα twice (ll. 202 and 215) in a context that is likely to be referred to whether her suffering or Oedipus' or rather to both.

Thus, unhappiness and generational suffering are a central theme in Oedipus myth before Sophocles, after Sophocles and, indeed, in the Sophoclean *fabula*. "With your

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[4] The term ἄλγεα is also used, in the *Iliad* (I 2), to describe the "countless woes" brought by the Achilles' "destructive wrath" upon of the Achaeans: it is undoubtedly a key-word and a central theme in the Homeric poem. Cf. also *Il*. XXIV 7.

[5] A complete *status quaestionis* about the "Lille Stesichorus" papyrus can be found in Neri (2008).

fate as my example, your fate, unhappy Oedipus, I say that nothing pertaining to humankind is fortunate" (*OT* 1192-1195), the Chorus says in the fourth stasimon (which will be discussed below), and in the epilogue confirms the former thought with the famous and debated final *gnome*:[6] "therefore, while our eyes wait to see the final destined day, we must call no mortal happy until he has crossed life's border free from pain" (*OT* 1528-1530).

b) The second Oedipean element emerging from Aristophanes' passage is the so-called "dramatic irony": the parodic contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs* testifies that the contemporary audience well knew the Sophoclean plot.[7] Of course, we all know that – as Sommerstein observes – "this is the major difference between the plots of Greek tragedies and those of most modern dramas: in Greek tragedy, the audience knew from the start what was going to happen by the end".[8] Thus, it is hardly surprising that the comic playwright Antiphanes (fourth century BC) ironically complained about the fact that the task of the tragedian is extracting the key-events from a myth of the common heritage and turning them into a tragic plot: "tragedy is a blessed art in every way, since its plots are well known to the audience before anyone begins to speak. A poet needs only remind. I have just to say 'Oedipus', and they know all the rest: father, Laius; mother, Jocasta; their sons and their daughters; what he will suffer; what he has done".[9] Therefore, about one hundred years after the production of the Sophoclean play, "we can see evidence […] of Oedipus' increasing emergence as an archetypal tragic figure".[10] Even at the time of the *mise en scène*, probably around 430s BC,[11] the Oedipean *fabula* (at least the key-facts mentioned by Antiphanes) was already crystallised.[12]

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[6] See Dawe (1973), Finglass (2009) 55-59, Condello (2009) 173f.

[7] "The gap between what the characters know and what the audience surmise from their general awareness of the myth ensures that a large proportion, perhaps even a majority, of its lines can be read as conveying degrees of dramatic irony" (Finglass [2018] X-XI). For a discussion on dramatic irony in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, see Rutherford (2012) 346-348 and Williams (1993) 147-149.

[8] Sommerstein (2010) 209.

[9] Fr. 189, 1-7 K.-A.

[10] Macintosh (2009) 1.

[11] On the date of the first performance, see Finglass (2018) 1-6.

[12] For a treatment of the ancient sources attesting the story of Oedipus, see Edmunds (2006) Condello (2009) Lauriola (2017), Finglass (2018) 13-27.

It goes without saying that the use of dramatic irony implies another specifically Oedipean aspect: his ignorance. The audience knows that Oedipus has already accomplished what he was foretold to and that he is now going to discover what he has done; meanwhile, he is totally blind during his (self-)investigation. The more he tries to get close to the truth, the more he moves towards his downfall, completely unaware. "This day will reveal your birth and bring your ruin" (*OT* 438), Teiresias says to Oedipus in the first episode. The unexpected discovery of parricide and incest by Oedipus eventually corresponds to his own downfall. This is the reason why, according to Aristotle's *Poetics* (11 1452a32-33), written in the 330s, the perfect correspondence between ἀναγνώρισις ("the recognition", described by Aristotle as "the change from ignorance to knowledge")[13] and περιπέτεια ("the reversal of the plot")[14] makes the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the perfect example of the best-structured tragedy.[15] Thus, in the fourth century BC, Antiphanes was not the only one to look at Oedipus as an exemplary tragic figure.

c) Last but not least, the third element emerging from Aristophanes' passage is the evidence that the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in the fifth century, was already the object of that never-ending debate about Oedipus' responsibility which is the core of this dissertation: is the final catastrophe part of a predetermined fate or is it due, totally or at least in part, to some avoidable errors on the part of Oedipus? Does he have a choice? What is the role, if there is any, of the gods in Oedipus' downfall? Although ironically,

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[13] Ar. *Po*. 11 1452a30-32 ἀναγνώρισις δέ, ὥσπερ καὶ τοὔνομα σημαίνει, ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν μεταβολή, ἢ εἰς φιλίαν ἢ εἰς ἔχθραν, τῶν πρὸς εὐτυχίαν ἢ μεταβολή, ἢ εἰς φιλίαν ἢ εἰς ἔχθραν, τῶν πρὸς εὐτυχίαν ἢ δυστυχίαν ὡρισμένων, "recognition, as the very name shows, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, bringing the characters into either a close bond, or enmity, with one another, and concerning matters which bear on their prosperity or affliction".

[14] According to Aristotle (*Po*. 11 1452a22-27), reversal (περιπέτεια) is "a complete swing in the direction of the action". In order to explain its meaning, he refers indeed to the messenger in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (vv. 924ff.): "take, for example, Sophocle's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, where the person comes to bring Oedipus happiness, and intends to free him from his fear about his mother; but he produces the opposite effect, by revealing Oedipus' identity".

[15] Ar. *Po*. 13 1453a7-1453a17 καλλίστη δὲ ἀναγνώρισις, ὅταν ἅμα περιπετείᾳ γένηται, οἷον ἔχει ἡ ἐν τῷ Οἰδίποδι, "the finest recognition occurs in direct conjunction with reversal, as with the one in the *Oedipus*". For 'recognition' as a theme in ancient and modern drama, see Cave 1988; for the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a recognition tragedy, see Finglass (2018) 51-57.

Aristophanes makes clear the contrast between the Euripidean and the Aeschylean view of the play and, most of all, of Oedipus' involvement in his own downfall: according to (Aristophanes') Euripides, Oedipus was happy at first but he becomes the wretchedest of the mortals at the end of his life; (Aristophanes') Aeschylus replies, instead, that he has *never* been happy, that he was already born unhappy, which means that the course of his life was already determined. The passage from the *Frogs* reflects very well, on the one hand, an archaic conception of the tragic fault (probably the 'doctrine of the inherited guilt')[16] and, on the other hand, a more evolved notion of human responsibility. Indeed, Greek culture went through a moment of significant changes, between Aeschylus and Euripides; and tragedy – emerged in Greece at the end of the sixth century – is undoubtedly one of the main witnesses of the social, religious, and political changes which the *polis* had to face.

The birth of tragedy, in fifth-century Athens, is deeply related to the development of the sense of personal responsibility which, according to J. P. Vernant, "makes its appearance at the point when, in human action, a place is given to internal debate on the part of the subject, to intention and premeditation, but when this human action has still not acquired enough consistency to be entirely self-sufficient".[17] Greek tragedy, indeed, arises from the question concerning the relation of the human subject to his actions: what is the degree of responsibility of the tragic character? Is he really the source of his actions? The interplay between human and divine causation in classical Greece is undoubtedly problematic, far from being solved, and treated differently by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. "The true domain of tragedy – Vernant points out – lies in that border zone where human actions are hinged together with the divine powers, where they derive their true meaning by becoming an integral part of an order that is beyond man and that eludes him".[18]

As is well known, both Aeschylus and Euripides put on the stage the myth of the Labdacides: Aeschylus' *Oedipus*, performed in 467 BC and awarded the first prize, was

[16] On the theme of the inherited guilt in archaic and classical Greece, see Gagné (2013); for a specific study about the inherited guilt in Greek tragedy, see Sewell-Rutter (2007).
[17] Vernant (2006) 47.
[18] For a complete discussion, see Vernant-Vidal-Naquet (2006) 23-84; also Magris (2016) 63-138.

part of a tetralogy consisting of *Laius, Seven against Thebes* and a satyr play entitled *Sphinx*; only *Seven against Thebes* survived entirely. In addition, there are two Euripides' extant plays: his fragmentary *Oedipus* and the *Phoenissae* (408-407 BC?), which, likewise Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, deals with the internecine strife between Oedipus' sons.

The name of the three Aeschylean plays makes clear that the myth is considered as multi-generational. As in the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus emphasises the traditional theme of the inherited guilt and of the curse on the family (referred to about twenty times in the *Seven*). Indeed, every play is about a new generation – first Laius, then Oedipus, lastly Eteocles – and a succession of calamities are transmitted from father to son to grandson. The key passage is the second *stasimon* (ll. 720-791, esp. ll. 740-755), sung by the chorus of Theban women, after Eteocles leaves the stage for a battle with his brother at the seventh gate:

πόνοι δόμων νέοι παλαι-
οῖσι συμμιγεῖς κακοῖς.
παλαιγενῆ γὰρ λέγω
παρβασίαν ὠκύποι-
νον, αἰῶνα δ' ἐς τρίτον
μένειν, Ἀπόλλωνος εὖτε Λάιος
βίᾳ, τρὶς εἰπόντος ἐν
μεσομφάλοις Πυθικοῖς
χρηστηρίοις θνῄσκοντα γέν-
νας ἄτερ σῴζειν πόλιν.
κρατηθεὶς δ' ἐκ φιλᾶν ἀβουλιᾶν
ἐγείνατο μὲν μόρον αὑτῷ,
πατροκτόνον Οἰδιπόδαν,
ὅστε ματρὸς ἁγνὰν
σπείρας ἄρουραν, ἵν' ἐτράφη,
ῥίζαν αἱματόεσσαν
ἔτλα· παράνοια συνᾶγε
νυμφίους φρενώλης.

> New pains of the family mixed with the old! For I speak of the ancient transgression, now swift in its retribution. It remains even into the third generation, ever since Laius – in defiance of Apollo who, at his Pythian oracle at the earth's centre, said three times that the king would save his city if he died without offspring. Ever since he, overcome by the thoughtlessness of his longing, fathered his own death, the parricide Oedipus, who sowed his mother's sacred field, where he was nurtured, and endured a bloody crop. Madness united the frenzied bridal pair.

The "transgression" (παραβασίαν), which remains over three generations, is both ancient (παλαιγενῆ) and swift in punishment (ὠκύποινον) throughout time.[19] Hence, which is the precise nature of this transgression? As the rest of the stanza shows, it is referred to Laius' transgression of the oracle, embodied by the birth of Oedipus which will lead to the fall of Thebes. However, according to Edmunds, this transgression "might be Laius' disregard of the prophecy, or it might be a deed which could motivate the prophecy in the first place"[20]. He clearly refers to the curse of Pelops to Laius for having abducted and raped his son, Chrysippus,[21] a curse which would be the very beginning of all evils and misfortunes of the House of Labdacids. This story is attested in an oracle quoted in a scholium to Euripides' *Phoenissae*[22] and is recalled by Jocasta at the beginning of Euripides' tragedy (ll. 17-20). The first of Aeschylean trilogy, *Laius* (which is a fragmentary text), also seems to focus on the homosexual rape of Chrysippus and Pelops' curse on Laius; whereas, as for *Oedipus* (also fragmentary), it

[19] For a complete discussion of the ancestral fault in the *Seven against Thebes*, see Gagné 2013, 351-362. "Here, as elsewhere, the long hold of the punishment over generations is presented as a manifestation of the special temporality of the gods, the fact that their swiftness is perceived differently by mortals […]. A distinctive aspect of the ancestral fault presented in the stanza is that it is not based on delay or substitution, but on duration" (Gagné 2013, 352f.).

[20] Edmunds (2006) 35.

[21] Laius was hired by Pelops to train his son, Chrysippus, in chariot-driving. Laius raped Pelops' son who committed suicide out of shame. According to some scholars, this story (attested in a fragment of an ancient mythographer called Pisander) would come from the *Oidipodeia*, but the question is still debated. There is no mention here of Pelops' curse on Laius which, instead, is attested in many manuscripts of Euripides' *Phoenissae*. On the Pisander scholion (FgrHist 16F 10), see Lloyd-Jones 2002 (esp. 9 for the scholium to Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1760).

[22] Eur. *Phoen.* 60: "Laius, son of Labdacus, you asked for the blessed offspring of children. | You will beget a dear son, but this will be your doom, | to quit life at the hands of your son. For thus has assented | Zeus, son of Cronus, obeying the hateful curses of Pelops, whose son you abducted; and he imprecated all these things upon you".

seems to attest one of Oedipus' curses on his sons, Eteocles and Polynices, which will be fulfilled in the *Seven* (where the theme of the curse recurs about twenty times) with the end of the line of the Labdacids. Therefore, the Aeschylean trilogy makes clear a view of the myth as multi-generational, with an emphasis on the family curse and the chain of transgressions and retributions leading to the dissolution of the *oikos*.

As for Euripides' fragmentary tragedies, *Chrysippus* likely dramatised the story of Pelops' curse, and *Oedipus* was probably a rewriting of the myth, characterised by strikingly Euripidean innovations.[23] The idea of the ancestral fault has an explicit role in the *Phoenissae*¸ produced after 412 BC, (almost) complete, and, since it was one of the most popular plays of late antiquity, attested along with many scholia about the crimes of the Labdacides.[24] The Phoenician women and other characters often refer to the family curse, and Oedipus himself, at ll. 1611-1612, says that he inherited the curse from Laius (Pelops' curse on Laius? Laius' on Oedipus?) and passed it on his sons.[25] As Gagné points out, Euripides presents a version of the myth which differs from the transgenerational fault dramatised by Aeschylus:

> the curse is the product of two forces, the fact that Oedipus is diseased, like the land, and the fact that he has been dishonoured by Eteocles and Polyneices. The sons of the last Labdacid generation provoke their punishment by their own acts, and Laius decided by himself to disobey the gods. But just as Oedipus' crime is a consequence of the fault of his father, the affront of Eteocles and Polyneices triggers a curse that is based on the disease of Oedipus, which itself has deep roots in a previous generation […]. It is wrong to call this transmission of interlocked disasters a 'curse' at this point in the text.[26]

Thus, the inheritance of the guilt, although approached differently by Aeschylus and Euripides, has undoubtedly an explicit and fundamental role in both tragedians' treatment of the myth. By contrast, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* there is no mention of a (Laius' or Oedipus') curse nor of rape or inherited guilt; Oedipus does not curse his daughters, he laments the future misfortunes they are going to suffer because of their

[23] See Edmunds (2006) 41-43; Macintosh (2009) 22-23; Lauriola (2017) 163-165.
[24] See Gagné (2013) 377.
[25] See Edmunds (2006) 38.
[26] Gagné (2013) 378.

social exclusion (ll. 1480-1514). Sophocles, by refusing the three-generational version of the myth, "turns this mysteriousness of divine justice and punishment into a tense drama of personal discovery".[27] Consequently, this – the fact that Oedipus is not the transmitter of a curse to his sons nor subject to a curse himself[28] – makes possible an interpretation which leaves more space to his personal responsibility and, at the same time, opens more interrogations about his downfall and his sufferings, especially one big question: why does Oedipus suffer as he does?

Sewell-Rutter, in his book *Guilt by Descent. Moral Inheritance and Decision Making in Greek Tragedy* (2007), whose focus is the problematic intertwining of supernatural and human causation in Greek Tragedy, makes clear that there is a crucial difference between Sophocles and the other two tragedians, since "the Oedipus of Aeschylus and the Oedipus of Euripides are not […] separable from their familial background".[29] The Oedipus of Sophocles, because of "the absence of any hereditary curse on the line that serves as the causal lynchpin of the action",[30] has a stronger impact on the audience – both the contemporary and the modern one – who, although already knows the end of the play, in front of his genuine ignorance and his terrible undeserved sufferings, cannot do anything except wondering: why? This question is the starting point for the following analysis of the problematic interplay between human and divine agency in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

[27] Segal (2001) 28.
[28] See *contra* Lloyd-Jones (1983) 104-128.
[29] Sewell-Rutter (2007) 114.
[30] *Ibid.* 129.

1.2. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*: 'Schicksalstragödie' or ''Schuldtragödie'?

1.2.1. Understanding Human Agency

The issue of Oedipus' moral responsibility has generated many different interpretations of Sophocles' play as a work of theodicy.[31] As M. Bowra says in his book *Sophoclean Tragedy*, "the tragic collapse of Oedipus cries for comment or justification";[32] likewise P. E. Easterling, in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, argues that "Sophocles creates a drama that explores unmerited suffering, without protest on the one hand or justification on the other".[33] The *locus classicus* of the contemporary scholarly debate is undoubtedly the influential article written by E. R. Dodds, in 1966, and entitled "On misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*". "In what sense, if in any, does the *Oedipus Rex* attempt to justify the ways of God to man?"[34]: this is the question that Dodds, as an examiner, asked his Oxford undergraduate students, complaining about the fact that they still read the Sophoclean tragedy, and Greek drama in general, by believing in those misconceptions that Wilamowitz thought he had put an end, seventy years before, in his article ("Excurse zum *Oedipus* des Sophokles") published in 1899.[35] Thus, Bowra, Easterling, Dodds, all of them wonder if, somehow, a *justification* for Oedipus' sufferings can be found in the Sophoclean play. His students, Dodds says, gave three main kinds of answers: the majority argued that Oedipus' downfall was due to a "tragic flaw", so that the play justifies the gods by showing that "we get what we deserve" and, consequently, by implying that his sufferings are caused by his defects of character; others argued that the play was a "tragedy of fate" which did not leave Oedipus any free choice; a third group held that Sophocles was "not interested in justifying the gods" who are simply part of the plot.

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[31] For an extensive bibliography on Oedipus' innocence and guilt, and the role of the gods, see Hester (1977).

[32] Bowra (1944) 163.

[33] Easterling (1985) 306; see also Lurie (2004) 2.

[34] Dodds (1966) 37.

[35] Wilamowitz (1899) 55f.

a) Tragedy of Fate

One of the most persistent misconceptions, today almost entirely surpassed, is that of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a tragedy of fate, a consideration probably based on the model of the so-called German *Schicksalstragödie*.[36] Indeed, if the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is "the great, authentic, real tragedy of destiny", as defined by Theodor Fontane,[37] and if his downfall is to be ascribed to an external factor, then he was not responsible for his actions but he was a mere puppet in gods' hands. If we accept this interpretation, there is no space for human free will in the play and, consequently, neither for the dramatic effect of the tragedy. Everything would happen *only* by chance.[38] Oedipus himself claims that *Tyche* is his mother: "I consider myself the child of Fortune, who gives good things" (Ἐγὼ δ' ἐμαυτὸν παῖδα τῆς Τύχης νέμων τῆς εὖ διδούσης, ll. 1080f.); his invocation of *Tyche* is a form of Sophocles' dramatic irony since Oedipus is "right to see himself as the 'child of fortune' but he is too quick to suppose Fortune is kind".[39] Eventually, chance *does* play a central role in the discovery of his identity, although making ironically clear his misunderstanding.[40]

The notion of "tragedy of fate" is also the starting point for Freud's first published statement of the Oedipus Complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), which deeply influenced all the following scholarship on the Sophoclean play:

> The Oedipus Rex is a *tragedy of fate*; *its tragic effect depends on the conflict between the all-powerful will of the gods and the vain efforts of human beings threatened with disaster; resignation to the divine will, and the perception of one's own impotence is the lesson which the deeply moved spectator is supposed to learn from the tragedy*. Modern authors have therefore sought to achieve a similar tragic effect by expressing the same conflict in

[36] The *Schicksalstragödie*, literally the "fate tragedy", more properly describes pieces popular in the early nineteenth century in Germany, during the Romantic period, in which there can be no escape from an inexorable fate, and individuals or the entire family perish usually as a consequence of a past crime. See Garland-Garland 1997, *s.v.* Schicksalstragödie. Cf. also von Fritz (1962) 1-112; Lurie (2004) 218-240; Condello (2009) LXX-LXXI.

[37] Fontane's statement is discussed by Pohlenz (1961) I, 255.

[38] A fatalistic view of *Oedipus Tyrannus* has been proposed by Schneidewin-Nauck-Bruhn (1910) 17-21; Wolff-Bellermann (1908) 136-142. Regarding this, see Ničev (1962) 583-590; Condello (2009) LXX-f.

[39] Taplin (1978) 151.

[40] For a discussion on *OT* 1075-1085, see especially Diano (1952).

> stories of their own invention. But the playgoers have looked on unmoved at the unavailing efforts of guiltless men to avert the fulfilment of curse or oracle; the modern tragedies of destiny have failed of their effect. If the Oedipus Rex is capable of moving a modern reader or playgoer no less powerfully than it moved the contemporary Greeks, the only possible explanation is that the effect of the Greek tragedy does not depend upon the conflict between fate and human will, but upon the peculiar nature of the material by which this conflict is revealed. There must be a voice within us which is prepared to acknowledge the compelling power of fate in the Oedipus, while we are able to condemn the situations occurring in *Die Ahnfrau* or other tragedies of fate as arbitrary inventions. And there actually is a motive in the story of King Oedipus which explains the verdict of this inner voice. His fate moves us only because it might have been our own, because the oracle laid upon us before our birth the very curse which rested upon him. It may be that *we were all destined to direct our first sexual impulses toward our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and violence toward our fathers*; our dreams convince us that we were. King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and wedded his mother Jocasta, is nothing more or less than a wish-fulfilment, the fulfilment of the wish of our childhood.[41]

Therefore, according to Freud, fate *is* the Oedipus Complex, which is now the fate of everyman (or every child), a universal desire common to every human being. The nineteenth-century scholarship has been undoubtedly influenced by the Freudian view of Sophocles' play. Freud has universalised Oedipus' fate, by turning his destiny into a compulsion that is an unconscious emotional mechanism; he made Sophocles' Oedipus "oedipal", *i.e.* affected by the complex named after him,[42] and he implied that the audience has an Oedipus complex as well and that this psychological condition allows them to relive the experience performed on the stage. In the well-known *Oedipe sans complexe* (1972), Vernant criticized the anachronistic point of view proposed by Freud, and the resulting application of modern psychoanalysis to a literary work belonging to the culture of fifth-century Athens. Thus, the Freudian misreading supposes a universal pathological condition[43] (the incestuous desire to marry the mother and the infantile desire to kill the father) that is not only inapplicable to every human being, but it is also

[41] Freud (1938) 108-109 (my emphasis).
[42] See Lauriola (2017) 207-210; Edmunds (2006) 113-116.
[43] *Contra* Knox (1957) 3-5; Dodds (1966) 42; Paduano (1988) 301-308.

absent in the plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. There is no doubt that Oedipus is absolutely ignorant about his real mother's and father's identity.

Among others, at least two main misconceptions become clear in *The interpretation of Dreams*: that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a tragedy of fate, whose "tragic effect depends on the conflict between the all-powerful will of the gods and the vain efforts of human beings", and that his fate corresponds to an unconscious desire of incest and parricide, which is a desire that we *all* share. This view also implies that Oedipus did not deliberately choose to do what he did, since he was *destined* to feel that repressed universal impulse leading him to the tragic downfall.

However, the role of human agency – wholly removed in case we accept the "fatalistic" interpretation – cannot be underestimated; it must be taken into consideration and analysed in relation to the role of divine agency in Sophoclean drama. Already debated since the very beginning of the Renaissance, the issue of the interplay between divine and human agency in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the subject of a lively debate especially starting from the 1960s[44] and enduring until the 1990s.[45] A recent resurgence of interest[46] has been marked, in 2004, by M. Lurie's monograph (*Die Suche nach der Schuld: Sophokles'* Oedipus Rex*, Aristoteles'* Poetik *und das Tragödienverständnis der Neuzeit*): by taking as a starting point the Sophoclean text, he reviews in detail the history of interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and tries to fill the gap in the scholarship existing between the early modern and the modern reception of tragedy. According to Lurie, after four centuries of misinterpretations, Wilamowitz[47] would be the first to understand the *Oedipus Tyrannus* correctly. In sixteenth-century Europe, since Aristotle's *Poetics* was considered the only authoritative key to understanding (and rewriting) ancient drama, interpretations of Greek tragedy and

[44] As we have seen, especially, Dodds' 1966 article. See also Vellacott (1964) Gould (1965a), (1965b), (1966), (1969). A few years later, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet wrote the influential *Mythe et Tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (1972), followed by a second volume (1986).
[45] Winnington-Ingram (1980), Scodel (1984), Paduano (1988), Manuwald (1992) (*contra* Lefèvre [1987] and Schmitt [1988]), Williams (1993), Griffith (1996) (*contra* Wilamowitz [1899]).
[46] See especially Witt (2004), Lawrence (2008), Kovacs (2009), Condello (2009), Harris (2010), Lawrence (2013), Cairns (2013), Finglass (2018).
[47] Wilamowitz (1899) (*i.e.* the same article that influenced Dodds [1966, 38] himself).

Poetics went hand in hand and seemed to be deeply intertwined.[48] According to Lurie, "the resulting interdependence […] proved to be a hermeneutical disaster" since it led – Lurie continues – to "the Aristotelization of both tragedy and tragic theory […], and then to the Christianization of Greek tragedy".[49] Lurie starts his 2004 book by acknowledging the influence of Wilamowitz[50] on the modern interpretation which refuses the view of the Oedipus' downfall as a deserved punishment for a moral fault:

> Die Deutungsgeschichte des Oedipus lässt man gewöhnlich heutzutage mit Wilamowitz und somit mit dem folgenden Satz beginnen*: „Sie haben so viel von Schuld und Strafe im Oedipus geredet. Das ist Unverstand."* So eröffnete Wilamowitz vor mehr als 100 Jahren seine harsche Attacke gegen zwei damals offenbar wirkungsmächtige, wenn auch von, wie es schien, anonymen und inzwischen auch in Vergessenheit geratenen Dunkelmännern vertretene Deutungen des sophokleischen Dramas.[51]

Lurie refuses, in particular, the interpretative approach that E. Lefèvre[52] and A. Schmitt[53] developed in the late 1980s: they both agree that the fall of Oedipus is the result of his wrong behaviour brought about by passion, *i.e.* a character flaw – interpretation famously rejected firstly by Wilamowitz in 1899 and later by Dodds in his influential 1966 article. However, if the old (Freudian) interpretation of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a tragedy of fate, as we have seen, cannot be accepted, it implies that Oedipus takes an *active* role in his own downfall, which has been consequently explained (as we shall see below) as caused by a character flaw, a moral fault, or rather an intellectual error by scholars supporting the thesis of the so-called "Schuldtragödie", literally the "guilt tragedy".

Indeed, in rejecting the theory of the tragedy of fate, Dodds affirms the relevance of human agency in the play. According to him, "certain of Oedipus' past actions were fate-bound, but everything that he does on the stage from first to last he does *as a free*

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[48] As we shall see, this issue – the relationship between the early modern reception of both Oedipus Tyrannus and Aristotle's *Poetics* (and *Nicomachean Ethics*), which is the aim of this study – will be the subject of the following chapters.
[49] Lurie (2012) 442.
[50] Wilamowitz (1899), that is the same article quoted by Dodds (1966).
[51] Lurie (2004) 1 (my emphasis).
[52] Lefèvre (1987).
[53] Schmitt (1988).

agent".[54] B. Knox as well argues that "in the play which Sophocles wrote the hero's will is *absolutely free* and he is *fully responsible* for the catastrophe. Sophocles has very carefully arranged the material of the myth in such a way as to exclude the external factor in the life of Oedipus from the action of the tragedy. This action is not Oedipus' fulfilment of the prophecy, but his *discovery* that he has *already* fulfilled it".[55] Thus, both Dodds and Knox seem to exclude from the play the action of the gods (which will be the subject of the following section)[56] and strongly affirm the full responsibility of Oedipus. Dodds and Knox make also a clear distinction between past and present actions: on the stage, Oedipus is free because the actions leading to the catastrophe have already been performed, the prophecy has already has been when the play begins. His (voluntary) actions on the stage correspond to the *discovery* of his past (involuntary) actions, *i.e.* the discovery of his identity and his ignorance at the same time. Likewise F. Condello, in his introduction to his 2009 edition of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, after tracing a *status quaestionis* on the issue of human and divine causation in the play, absolves the protagonist because "its action consists in discovering and knowing, not in doing, which is *already* a being done [...]; the plot of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a 'tragic analysis' and a discovery of what has already happened".[57] "Tragic analysis" is the well-known definition used by Schiller to refer to the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in a letter dated October 1797 and addressed to Goethe:

> […] what has happened, because it is inalterable, is by its very nature much more terrible. The fact that something might have happened affects the spirit quite differently than the fear that something might happen. Oedipus is, as it were, merely a tragic analysis. Everything is already present. It is simply unfolded.[58]

[54] Dodds (1966) 42.
[55] Knox (1957) 5f.
[56] *Vide infra* ch. 1.2.2. *Doubting Divine Agency*.
[57] Condello (2009) LXXI: "la sua azione consiste nello scoprire e nel sapere, non nel fare, che è già un esser fatto […]; la trama dell'*Edipo re* è un''analisi tragica' e scoperta di ciò che è già accaduto."
[58] For the letter written by Schiller and addressed to Goethe, see *Schillers Werke*, XXIX. *Briefwechsel Schillers*, hrsg. v. N. Oellers und F. Stock, Weimar 1977, p. 140-142. This passage is quoted by Szondi 1983, 21 and Condello 2009, XVI.

Thus, the Sophoclean plot – according to Schiller, Dodds, Knox, Condello – is wholly based on the *discovery* of past actions. According to this interpretation, Oedipus would be free on the stage because the parricide and the incest have already happened. His ignorance makes him free.

Therefore, we have seen that excluding the fatalistic interpretation (proposed as a solution – "a tragedy of destiny" – by some students examined by Dodds[59]) means that Oedipus *has* free will[60], but it does *not* mean that we should automatically exclude a theistic interpretation and the divine agency from the plot, as rather assumed by Knox[61] and Dodds.[62] We shall discuss the issue of the divine agency and the role of the gods in the next section. As for the human agency, different interpretations have been proposed to explain it: a) Oedipus is free and fully responsible for his actions on the stage, but innocent because his actions are *post eventum* (that is to say, everything he does on the stage happens *after* the parricide and the incest)[63] b) Oedipus is "guiltlessly guilt", because of his ignorance; c) Oedipus is free and consequently guilty, being his guilt variously interpreted as i) an intellectual error, ii) a moral fault, iii) a character flaw. In such a case, what would be the guilt of Oedipus?

b) Intellectual Error and Illogicalities

Mostly influenced by Voltaire who found several illogicalities "contre la vraisemblance"[64] (attributed to Oedipus in his way of investigating and, consequently, to Sophocles as a dramatist), many scholars have started a search for the

[59] Dodds (1966) 37.

[60] It should be specified that it is actually anachronistic to refer to the concept of free will in classical antiquity. For a complete discussion on free will in ancient thought, see Frede (2011).

[61] Knox (1957) 5f.

[62] Dodds (1966) 43: "in any case I cannot understand Sir Maurice Bowra's idea that the gods *force* on Oedipus the knowledge of what he has done. They do nothing of the kind; on the contrary, what fascinates us is the spectacle of a man freely choosing, from the highest motives, a series of actions which lead him to his own ruin".

[63] See Dodds (1966) 39; Paduano (1988) 300; Condello (2009) XCI.

[64] See Voltaire, *Lettres à M. de Genonville. Lettre III, contenant la critique de l'Oedipe de Sophocle* (1719).

inconsistencies and the anomalies in the plot.[65] Many arguments have been used to support the thesis of an intellectual error made by Oedipus, who – according to this view – should have been able to avoid the incest and the parricide or at least to discover the truth years before the outbreak of the plague at Thebes.

In his article *The Guilt of Oedipus* (1964), P. H. Vellacott tries to demonstrate, throughout a series of evidence in the plot, that Sophocles' intention is presenting Oedipus to the audience as consciously guilty. How? According to the traditional material preserving the myth, from Homer onwards, the central element of the plot is the ignorance of Oedipus who *was not aware* of Laius' and Jocasta's identity.[66] "How can there be a true tragedy without a sin? Where is the dignity, the awe, of *nemesis* without *hybris*?", Vellacott rhetorically asks.[67] Indeed, according to his interpretation, Sophocles added an essential detail to the traditional story: the so-called banquet scene (*OT* 779ff.), which represents (one of) the argument(s) used to confer a certain degree of culpability to Oedipus. Vellacott stresses the moment when a man who got drunk at a banquet told Oedipus that he was not the son of Polybos; this is the reason introduced by Sophocles – the doubt about his own parentage – which leads Oedipus to visit Delphi and ask for clarification. The prophecy, that he was fated to marry his mother and to kill his father, confirmed and even increased the mystery about his birth. Indeed, as Vellacott clarifies, "the doubt about his parentage doubled the menace of the prophecy […]: he knew that he might meet his true father and his true mother anywhere in Greece; no place was safe".[68] However, he decides to keep away from Corinth and he happens to kill an older man and to marry an older woman. "So now – Vellacott observes – if he was to avoid heinous pollution, he must make for himself two unbreakable rules: never to kill an older man, and never to marry an older woman".[69] According to this view, Oedipus should have had the elements necessary to avoid this mere intellectual error. "He is guilty; – Vellacott concludes – Sophocles, by inventing

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[65] For the inconsistencies found in the plot, see especially Vellacott (1964) and (1971) 114-122; Dawe (2006) 5 and 7-16; for a *status quaestionis* and a complete bibliography, see Condello (2009) XLV-LVI (especially n. 111). See also Bremer (1969) 154-157 and Paduano (1994) 46-54.

[66] *Od.* 271-280.

[67] Vellacott (1964) 139.

[68] *Ibid.* 140.

[69] *Ibid.*

and introducing the incident at the banquet, has entirely changed the moral situation of Oedipus in the story. He is no longer the innocent victim of malevolent powers. *Dike*, Justice, the daughter of Zeus, a goddess forgotten in the version of the myth which had been current for centuries, reappears, resuscitated by a single subtle creation of the poet".[70] This is the principal argument used by critics who want to make Oedipus (consciously) guilty of an intellectual error who could justify his downfall and, consequently, confer a moral meaning to the drama.

However, even though it is undeniable that there are several illogicalities in the plot (for example, Jocasta's reference to the maimed ankles, the explicit information given to Oedipus by Tiresias, the total lack of information about the circumstances of Laius' death until the outbreak of the plague), it is hardly possible to assume what Sophocles *actually* intended to say because, as Vellacott himself admits, the whole story so developed would take place within Oedipus' consciousness, and it would be impossible to present it on the stage to the contemporary audience. Most of all, choosing this method to analyse the Sophoclean text (rather "suitable for a writer of detective fiction", rightly states Bremer)[71] seems to be unjustified and inadequate. A few minor inconsistencies are justified and allowed to the dramatist during the construction of the plot: Aristotle in the *Poetics* admits the presence of some "irrational elements" (ἄλογα) in the dramatic plot – and he takes the example of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* – as long as they are kept outside the tragedy.[72] But how can we explain the irrationalities, the ἄλογα, which are rather within the play? H.D.F. Kitto seems to solve the question:

> the source of the difficulty is that we are thinking of the wrong *logos* – the logic of the ordinary life and not of the artistic representation […]. A work of art is something designed for a particular end – to express a certain conception, or mood. This conception is the logic of the work, and this is the logic that the dramatist obeys. How far the logic of the work

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[70] *Ibid.*

[71] Bremer (1969) 154.

[72] Ar. *Poet.* 15, 1454b 6-8: "No irrational element should have a part in the events, unless outside the tragedy, as for example in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*"; see also Ar. *Poet.* 24, 1460a 26-30: "so far as possible, there should be no irrational component; otherwise, it should lie outside the plot-structure, as with Oedipus' ignorance of how Laius died". The reference is to Soph. *OT* 112f.

> may diverge from the logic of the ordinary life is a matter for the artist's judgement to determine; the more powerful the artist is, the more successfully can he impose the logic of the work on the mind of his audience. These illogicalities in Sophocles have something in common with distortion in painting, for distortion is also a divergence from the logic of the ordinary life in the higher interests of the design of the picture.[73]

Thus, there is no valid reason to assume that, because of the several illogicalities in the plot, Sophocles wanted to represent Oedipus as consciously guilty, neither to ascribe any logical mistake to Sophocles as a dramatist, since we should make a necessary distinction between the logic of the ordinary life and the logic of work.[74]

Furthermore, the assumption that Oedipus (un)consciously repressed the information that would have allowed him to avoid the prophecy is in contrast with the explicit representation of his character: his research for the truth, his insistence on complete clarity and knowledge, his resolution in discovering the murder of Laius and, in the second half of the play, his own identity. Thus, this assumption of intellectual culpability is contrasted by what G. Paduano called "volontà d'innocenza" (*i.e.* the "will of innocence") that is the Oedipus' attempt to respect the taboo of incest and patricide:[75] the story focuses on his useless but tenacious effort to face the threat and the imposition of the prophecy. As we have seen above, one of the elements recurring in the traditional myth is Oedipus' ignorance: his lack of knowledge is indeed the premise that justifies all his following actions. V. Propp in his famous book *Oedipus in the Light of Folklore* (1944), rightly notices that "the attempt made by Oedipus to escape his own destiny is the peculiar trait of Sophocles' tragedy with against the fairytale versions of the myth, and it is what properly founds the tragic experience".

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[73] Kitto (1956) 89f.

[74] For some thoughts on the illogicalities and the irrational elements characterising the entire Sophoclean *corpus*, see Kitto (1956) 87-93. Cf. also Condello (2009) LV: "Quanto agli ἄλογα, 'tratti irrazionali', che Aristotele confinava 'al di fuor della struttura narrativa', sarà meglio riconoscere in essi incongruenze convenzionali, obbedienti alle leggi interne della narrazione drammatica […], prima fra tutte quella tipica ridondanza informativa che maschera da comunicazione intradiegetica – fra personaggio e personaggio, cioè fra narratore e narratario – quella che è in realtà comunicazione extradiegetica, tra autore e pubblico, cioè fra destinatore e destinatario". See also Dodds (1966) 40.

[75] Paduano (1988) 304f.: "nella tragedia la spinta che determina parricidio e incesto non è epifania di un desiderio represso, ma, tutt'al contrario, di una forza repressiva. E questa forza si esercita, simmetricamente, su un desiderio che è conscio ed adulto e si potrebbe appunto definire desiderio d'innocenza, volontà di rispettare i tabù la cui violazione viene minacciata e imposta".

Therefore, the repressed (un)conscious guilt could not coexist with this undeniable "will of innocence" ascribable to Oedipus' character. Indeed, the contrast between the final catastrophe and his strong "will of innocence" is what makes the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the paradigm of the tragic irony.

c) Moral Fault and Character Flaw

Oedipus is presented as an upstanding man determined to carry on his investigation and discovery his own identity, even when its disastrous consequences are clear. However, apparently, it is not enough to absolve Oedipus of his supposed "crimes": as Dodds testifies in his 1966 article, the first and biggest group of his students argued that "the play justifies the gods by showing that *we get what we deserve*. The arguments of this group turned upon the character of Oedipus. Some considered that Oedipus was *a bad man*: look how he treated Creon – naturally the gods punished him".[76] This misconception, aiming at moralising Oedipus' responsibility, is hard to die. Traditionally, the fault of character adduced to Oedipus' behaviour is primarily related to his anger and his rashness, especially during two moments of the story: his interactions with Tiresias and Creon, and his encounter with Laius at the triple crossroads.[77] Indeed, several scholars have accused Oedipus of a moral fault of ὀργή, his anger, which is a peculiar trait of his onstage actions during the disputes with both Creon and Tiresias. It is true, as D. Cairns admits, that "Oedipus' actions demonstrate a progressive unravelling of his initially positive presentation as a concerned, competent, and public-spirited leader at the height of his powers";[78] however, we should take into consideration the circumstances leading to his behaviour and, above all, the lack of proportion between these supposed faults and the final punishment. During the dispute

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[76] Dodds (1966) 37 (my emphasis).
[77] For a complete (also bibliographic) summary of Oedipus' supposed moral faults, see especially Paduano (1988) 299-306, and Condello (2009) LXXII-XCI; cf. also Cairns (2013) 149-151, Finglass (2018) 70-76.
[78] Cairns (2013) 150.

with Tiresias, his rage (also emphasised by the frequent recurrence of the term ὀργή and his cognates at ll. 335, 337, 339, 344f., 364, 405) develops slowly and for a specific reason: Tiresias' refusal to help the city and reveal the information requested about the identity of Laius' murderer. Oedipus' rage is the consequence of his concern for his citizens and the city of Thebes. Tiresias, after having refused more than once to tell the truth about the real identity of the murderer, finally accuses Oedipus himself of having killed Laius ("I say that you are the killer of the man whose killer you are seeking, l. 362). Tiresias' accusation increases the rage of Oedipus, leading him to suspect both Tiresias and Creon of involvement in an imaginary plot to take over the city and remove him from power (ll. 378-403).

Oedipus, at this point, does not doubt even for a moment of being the killer that he is looking for and he cannot do anything but (unfairly) suspect of Creon who – as soon as he has escaped a death sentence from Oedipus – says: "it is clear that you yield with hatred, and are grievous when far gone in rage" (ll. 673-675). Tiresias as well as Creon, although suspected of conspiracy, are released (therefore, we may conclude that Oedipus has not the ruthless behaviour of the typical tyrant).[79] Oedipus' killing of Laius at the triple crossroads is also taken as an example by the scholars supporting the exegesis of the moral fault:[80] the episode occurred before the action of the play, but it is relevant in our analysis as it displays the impulsive character described onstage in the course of the following investigation. It is Oedipus himself who admits that he overreacted to a provocation of this old man (whose identity was, of course, unknown) (*OT* 800-813):

> And to you, my wife, I will tell the truth. When I was travelling near this threefold road, at that moment I was met by a herald and by a man, of the appearance that you describe, mounted on a wagon drawn by colts. And the leader and the old man himself tried to drive

[79] Regarding this, Finglass (2018) 72 quotes Seaford (2003) 107: "Oedipus is not the typical tyrant: he does not banish or kill his co-regents, defy ancestral laws, outraged women, put men to death without trial, plunder his subjects, live in fear of his people, or have an armed bodyguard; he is in direct touch with the Thebans, calls an assembly, and so on".

[80] Finglass (2018) 72, citing Carawan (1998) 249: "the guilt of Oedipus […] arises unintended from his anger, *orgē*, but he is none of less culpable: the recklessness with which he slew a king is driven by wrath, heedless of the indirect but inevitable consequences of bloodshed – consequences that, from a normative perspective, he should have anticipated".

> me from the road by force. And *in anger* (δι' ὀργῆς) *I strike the man* turning me aside, the driver. And the old man, when he saw what was happening, waited for me to come past the wagon and struck me right on the head with a double whip. *It was no equal penalty that he paid* (οὐ μὴν ἴσην γ'ἔτεισεν), but, in short, he was struck by a sceptre from this hand and straightaway rolled prone right out of the wagon. I slew them all.

Therefore, Oedipus confesses to having (over)reacted (with his usual impulsiveness) to provocation and murdered the old man who will turn out to be Laius, but only because he was in mortal danger and he acted in self-defence. Scholars supporting Oedipus' moral innocence argue that since Oedipus killed Laius in self-defence, the Attic law of the time would have considered the circumstances of the homicide in favour of Oedipus.[81] Although the majority of scholars claim his moral innocence, yet there is not a complete scholarly agreement.[82] In any case, even if we admit that Oedipus could have avoided killing an old man (considering his prophecy) and that his impulsive character contributed to the murder at the crossroads, we should consider a) that illogicalities (ἄλογα) are allowed in the plot for dramatic reasons, 2) that there would be a great disproportion between his moral responsibility and the disastrous consequences of his acting in ignorance, and, 3) above all, that Oedipus is not at all presented in the play as having committed a moral fault in killing a stranger in self-defence. As for this last point, Lawrence rightly argues that "Oedipus' overwhelming concern in this narrative is not with his moral responsibility for the massacre but with whether he may have killed Laius",[83] that is the eventuality which would turn Oedipus into a polluted parricide and, then, the cause of the plague at Thebes.

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[81] See Dodds (1966) 37f.: "the Athenian courts took account of intention: they distinguished as ours do between murder and accidental homicide or homicide committed in the course of self-defence. If Oedipus had been tried before an Athenian court he would have been acquitted – of murdering his father. But no human court could acquitted him of pollution; for pollution inhered in the act itself, irrespective of the motive". Vernant (2006) agrees that Oedipus is morally innocent: "when he kills Laius, it is in a state of legitimate self-defence against a stranger who has struck him first". See also Bremer (1969) 153-159, Finglass (2018) 73.

[82] For a discussion of the guilt of Oedipus and its relationship with the Athenian law, see especially the article of M. Harris (2010) and (2012), who re-examines the legal issues in both *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Cf. also Harris (2001) 172.

[83] Lawrence (2013) 138.

The accusation of being irascible and impulsive is usually followed by other two supposed moral faults: on one side, he is been also accused of an excessive curiosity and an obsessive determination to discover the truth, almost (paradoxically) outrageous, as if he wanted to know too much and more than allowed to human beings; on the other side, he is been accused of an excessive rush, that is somehow linked to his impulsiveness (indeed, without taking time to think, he doubts right away not only of Creon and Tiresias, but also of the truthfulness of the oracles).[84]

Cairns, in his persuasive analysis of human and divine agency in the play, rightly argues that "fundamentally, these characteristics are aspects of Oedipus' ignorance",[85] (that is indeed the certain trait of the myth) since he is entirely unaware of what he has done and confident of his right behaviour. Cairns also adds that "because of their impact as visible aspects of the onstage action, they act as a kind of 'optical illusion' that complicates an audience' response. The effect is to underline the irony – we know that Oedipus has already done what he was fated to do and that he is now fated to discover that he has done so, yet the sympathy elicited by his initially positive characterisation is mixed with dismay that he can be so misguided and nervousness that his erroneous grasp of events should be expressed in ways that undercut the positive impression that he initially created".[86] However, none of these supposed faults can be considered the cause of Oedipus' downfall, and none would be sufficient to justify the terrible sufferings that he has to undergo.

d) *Tyrannos*

Last but not least, among the arguments proposed in support of the thesis of Oedipus' moral responsibility there is the second stasimon (ll. 863-910), one of the most debated choral odes in fifth-century tragedy. Scholars insisting on Oedipus' character flaw have been specifically referring to the l. 873, the assertion that opens the first

[84] The *curiositas* attributed to Oedipus as a defect of character could be meant, in a positive way, as his "will of innocence", quoted above by Paduano (1988) 304f. For a complete summary of the scholarship referring to the moral faults of curiosity and rashness, see Condello (2009) LXXIIIf., n. 178, 179, 180.
[85] Cairns (2013) 150, also looking at Wilamowitz (1899) 61.
[86] *Ibid.*

antistrophe: ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον,[87] "arrogance begets the tyrant". Now, usually before the fourth century, in tragedy in general (and in Sophocles in every occurrence except for this example) τύραννος and τυραννίς denote a monarch and a monarchy, without any pejorative meaning. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus,* there are fifteen occurrences of τύραννος, all of them with a neutral meaning ("king", "ruler", "monarch"), except for this case, whose negative connotation is clarified by the association with ὕβρις.

Is it the Chorus' (and Sophocles') accusation against Oedipus' tyrannical behaviour? Is Oedipus *hybristic*? Is this *hybris* the cause of his downfall? The meaning of this ode, maybe voluntarily ambiguous,[88] is still debated and has been variously interpreted.[89] The Chorus seems to react to the previous episode, to which it is likely to be related. The assertion ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον is part of a prayer claiming for divine help in preserving due reverence in deeds and words (ll. 863-865):

> Εἴ μοι ξυνείη φέροντι μοῖρα τὰν
> εὔσεπτον ἁγνείαν λόγων
> ἔργων τε πάντων
>
> My destiny assists me as I possess / reverent purity in all words / and deeds.

The words ἁγνείαν λόγων ("purity in words") have been considered as a criticism to Jocasta as well as Oedipus for disbelief in the oracles. It is necessary to note that it is Jocasta who explicitly disbelieves the oracles because one of them (that is, the oracle predicting the killing of Laius at the hand of his son) is (apparently) not fulfilled,[90] whereas Oedipus only assents to her statements.[91] The desire for purity (the εὔσεπτον ἁγνείαν, "reverent purity") has also been referred to Oedipus' fear that he may be

[87] This is the text offered by the manuscript tradition.
[88] Hester (1977) 41-43.
[89] The second stasimon is subject of scholarly debate; for a complete discussion on this ode, see especially Winnington-Ingram (1980) 179-204, Carey (1986), Sidwell (1992), Henrichs (1995), Kovacs (2009), Finglass (2018) 428-447.
[90] See *OT* 707-725.
[91] Carey (1986) 175: "Oedipus in fact must be excepted […]. Criticism to Jocasta is possible". As for the oracular scepticism arising from the second stasimon, it will be discussed in the following section relating to the divine agency in the play.

impure.[92] The due reverence and the intention to avoid impiety is then contrasted in the first antistrophe by "*hybris* which creates the tyrant" and hurtles to ruin, and with the following description in the second strophe which, though the word *hybris* does not occur, clearly describes a *hybristic* man who lacks piety and reverence.

Since I will discuss further some of the core issues of the stasimon in the following section (especially the question of the religious scepticism and the role of the divine), I am focusing here only on the supposed tyrannical behaviour employed by scholars as an argument in favour of Oedipus' moral fault. Thus, are *hybris* and τύραννος a reference to Oedipus? Actually, as rightly argued by the majority of modern scholars,[93] Oedipus' behaviour can hardly be defined as tyrannical or *hybristic*; neither the killing of the unknown man at the crossroads, nor his struggle with Creon and Tiresias (as we saw) can justify the label of tyrant (meant as a ruthless ruler). Furthermore, the actions described as characterising the *hybristic* man "go far beyond any actions imputed rightly or wrongly to any character in the play".[94] Likely, the Chorus is not referring here to Oedipus (nor to any other character) since they have constantly shown admiration and loyalty to their king in the first half of the play. However, there is the possibility that the Chorus *does* refer to Oedipus, not to blame him but only because they are afraid that he *may* abuse the royal power in the future and, by following Jocasta in her scepticism about the oracles, stop his search for Laius' murderer.[95] The Chorus, acting in ignorance as Oedipus does, is indeed not aware of the fact that Oedipus has already committed those deeds that will lead him to the final catastrophe. The Chorus too is a victim of the Sophoclean dramatic irony: "they pray the god not to put an end to his striving for the common good, but this striving leads only towards the disaster".[96]

Thus, the word τύραννος in its negative connotation (as it happens in the passage considered) is not at all appropriate for Oedipus, who – in the light of our analysis – is

[92] See l. 823 and l. 830.
[93] See especially Carey (1986) 176-177, Finglass (2018) 430-431.
[94] Carey (1986) 177-178.
[95] Kamerbeek (1966) 172-181, Bremer (1969) 157-159, Winnington-Ingram (1980) 201-204. For a discussion on *tyrannos* as a political reference to Oedipus and Athens, see Knox (1957) 53-106.
[96] Winnington-Ingram (1980) 202.

clearly presented by Sophocles as a positive character, as also the ancient scholium to l. 1 suggests: “the character of Oedipus is that of a lover of the people and one who takes measures for the common interests”.[97] Everything he does, it is the result of his attempt to avoid the terrible prophecy which would make him incestuous and parricide, and then to find the murderer of Laius and save the city from the plague. “The catastrophe of Oedipus – Knox points out – is a product not of anyone quality of Oedipus but of the total man. And the total man is, to use Aristotle’s phrase, more good than bad. The decisive actions are the product of an admirable character; with the possible exception of his anger (and even that springs initially from his devotion to the city), their source is the greatness and nobility of a man and a ruler”.[98]

e) Pity as ἀρχὴ κακῶν

The image of Oedipus that emerges from the play is thus that of a compassionate king concerned about his people and determined to help them. To conclude and clarify the description of Oedipus’ character, we should take into account the interesting observations made by P. Finglass in his 2018 commented edition of *Oedipus Tyrannus*: he examines the play under a number of approaches and goes through different themes, for instance, the analysis of the play as a suppliant drama.[99] The play starts indeed with a supplication scene: in the prologue, which Oedipus himself opens, the suppliants ask their own king to help and protect them from the plague. Sophocles voluntarily presents Oedipus as a caring ruler who pities the sufferings of people, addressed as “children” by him:

> Ὦ τέκνα, Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαι νέα τροφή,
> τίνας ποθ’ ἕδρας τάσδε μοι θοάζετε
> ἱκτηρίοις κλάδοισιν ἐξεστεμμένοι;
> […]
> δείσαντες ἢ στέρξαντες; ὡς θέλοντος ἂν

[97] Σ on l. 1: φιλόδημον καὶ προνοητικὸν τοῦ κοινῇ συμφέροντος τὸ τοῦ Οἰδίπου ἦθος.
[98] Knox (1957) 31.
[99] Finglass (2018) 41-51.

> ἐμοῦ προσαρκεῖν πᾶν· δυσάλγητος γὰρ ἂν
> εἴην τοιάνδε μὴ οὐ κατοικτίρων ἕδραν.
>
> Children, ancient Cadmus, latest offspring, why ever are you sitting like this before me, wreathed in suppliant branches? […] I want to give you every form of assistance. For I would be callous if I did not feel pity at such a supplication.[100]

Later, in the second speech, Oedipus shows his pity again to the suppliants (ll. 59-64):

> ὦ παῖδες οἰκτροί, γνωτὰ κοὐκ ἄγνωτά μοι
> προσήλθεθ' ἱμείροντες· εὖ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅτι
> νοσεῖτε πάντες, καὶ νοσοῦντες ὡς ἐγὼ
> οὐκ ἔστιν ὑμῶν ὅστις ἐξ ἴσου νοσεῖ.
> Τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὑμῶν ἄλγος εἰς ἕν' ἔρχεται
> μόνον καθ' αὑτόν, κοὐδέν' ἄλλον, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ
> ψυχὴ πόλιν τε κἀμὲ καὶ σ' ὁμοῦ στένει.
>
> Pitiable children, you have come here with desire known and not unknown to me. For I am well aware that you are sick. And yet although you are sick, there is no one of you who is sick as I am. For your grief comes to each one of you alone, and to no-one else, but my soul groans fort the city, for you, and for me.

The theme of pity is the element that, with a *Ringkomposition*, opens and closes the drama. When Oedipus asks the Theban Herdsman why he did not kill the baby but gave him to the Corinthian, he answered that he was moved by pity (ll. 1178-1181):

> Κατοικτίσας, ὦ δέσποθ', ὡς ἄλλην χθόνα
> δοκῶν ἀποίσειν, αὐτὸς ἔνθεν ἦν· ὁ δὲ
> κάκ' εἰς μέγιστ' ἔσωσεν· εἰ γὰρ οὗτος εἶ
> ὅν φησιν οὗτος, ἴσθι δύσποτμος γεγώς.
>
> Because I took pity, master, as thinking that he would take it to another land, where he himself was from. But he saved it for the greatest disaster. Because if you are the same person that this man says you are, know that you were born ill-fated.

[100] Soph. *OT* 1-3, 11-13.

Thus, pity is the driving force of the action in the play. Paradoxically, a chain of compassionate actions leads to the final catastrophe: the pity of the Herdsman set in motion the life of Oedipus, who, moved by pity towards his people, sets in motion the investigation. "We might think – Finglass says – of the Greek fondness for discovering the ἀρχὴ κακῶν, the original act that caused some present calamity. Usually, this act is violent or immoral – Paris' abduction of Helen, the Athenian intervention in the Ionian revolt, the adultery of Aerope with Thyestes. How much more moving, how much more terrifying, is the idea of disaster brought about by a very human act of kindness and altruism!".[101]

Pity is the *fil rouge* of the plot determining the events on the stage at a human level: but what happens at the level of the divine agency? Do the gods have an active role in the accomplishment of the final catastrophe? Does Apollo show pity towards Oedipus? As Finglass points out, in the *exodus* the Messenger after having movingly described Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-blinding, claims that even someone who hated Oedipus would pity him: "you will shortly see a sight of such a kind that would stir to pity even a man who hated him" (ll. 1295f.). But what about Apollo and his involvement, if any, in the downfall of Oedipus? If from one side we saw that human actions are moved by pity and compassion, *what* is instead the role of the gods, *how* do they reveal themselves to Oedipus (and to the audience), and *why* do they let the final catastrophe happen?

1.2.2. Doubting Divine Agency

Religious scepticism, as we previously saw, is the central theme of the second stasimon in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Indeed, the oracular authority is called into question by the Chorus of the Theban elders concerned about the fact that an oracle given by Apollo has failed to be fulfilled. It should be remembered that the role of the tragic Chorus in fifth-century Athens is closely related to the *polis* religion: the notion

[101] Finglass (2018) 48.

of χορεύειν, the choral dance, is correctly explained by a gloss occurring in a few manuscripts, πανηγυρὶζειν τοῖς θεοῖς: "to serve the gods through the medium of dance". Thus, if this premise is true, the self-doubt raised by the Theban elders is the proof of their religious scepticism: "why should I serve in a chorus?" (τί δεῖ με χορεύειν; l. 896) they ask, which thus means "why should I honour the gods?".[102]

Where does this crisis of religious identity come from? The last two stanzas of the second stasimon could help to find a possible answer (ll. 883-910):

> Εἰ δέ τις ὑπέροπτα χερ-
> σὶν ἢ λόγῳ πορεύεται,
> Δίκας ἀφόβητος οὐδὲ
> δαιμόνων ἕδη σέβων,
> κακά νιν ἕλοιτο μοῖρα,
> δυσπότμου χάριν χλιδᾶς,
> εἰ μὴ τὸ κέρδος κερδανεῖ δικαίως
> καὶ τῶν ἀσέπτων ἕρξεται,
> ἢ τῶν ἀθίκτων ἕξεται ματᾴζων.
> Τίς ἔτι ποτ' ἐν τοῖσδ' ἀνὴρ θυμοῦ βέλη
> εὔξεται ψυχᾶς ἀμύνειν;
> Εἰ γὰρ αἱ τοιαίδε πράξεις τίμιαι,
> Εἰ γὰρ αἱ τοιαίδε πράξεις τίμιαι,
> τί δεῖ με χορεύειν;

> But if someone travels arrogantly in deed or word, unafraid of Justice, and not honouring the seats of the gods, may an evil destiny overcome him, in return for his ill-fated pride, if he does not make his gain justly and keep away from what must not be spoken, or if he recklessly touches what must not be touched. What man could ever, in such a situation, ward away from his soul the shafts of the gods? For if such practices are held in honour, why should I serve in a chorus?

[102] Jebb (1887) *ad l.* makes clear this correspondence, by explaining that "the words πονεῖν ἢ τοῖς θεοῖς added in a few mss (including L) have plainly arisen from a contracted writing of πανηγυρὶζειν τοῖς θεοῖς which occurs in a few others. This gloss correctly represents the general notion of χορεύειν, as referring to the χοροὶ connected with the cult of Dionysus, Apollo and other gods. The χορός was an element so essential and characteristic that, in a Greek mouth, the question τί δεῖ με χορεύειν; would import, 'why maintain the solemn rites of public worship?'." Cf. Eur. Bacch. 181.

Thus, here the Chorus clearly says: if the oracles are not fulfilled, if the murderer of Laius is not punished, if there is no divine foresight nor divine justice, if men lose faith in religion (by referring to the *hybristic* man we analysed above), why should I serve in a Chorus, which is part of the worship of the gods? Then, they continue (ll. 896-910):

> Οὐκέτι τὸν ἄθικτον εἶ-
> μι γᾶς ἐπ’ ὀμφαλὸν σέβων,
> οὐδ’ ἐς τὸν Ἀβαῖσι ναόν,
> οὐδὲ τὰν Ὀλυμπίαν,
> εἰ μὴ τάδε χειρόδεικτα
> πᾶσιν ἁρμόσει βροτοῖς.
> Ἀλλ’, ὦ κρατύνων, εἴπερ ὄρθ’ ἀκούεις,
> Ζεῦ, πάντ’ ἀνάσσων, μὴ λάθοι
> σὲ τάν τε σὰν ἀθάνατον αἰὲν ἀρχάν.
> Φθίνοντα γὰρ <τοῦ παλαιοῦ> Λαΐου
> θέσφατ’ ἐξαιροῦσιν ἤδη,
> κοὐδαμοῦ τιμαῖς Ἀπόλλων ἐμφανής·
> ἔρρει δὲ τὰ θεῖα.

> No longer will I go with reverence to the untouchable navel of the earth, nor to the temple at Abae, nor to Olympia, if these things are not conspicuous in their application to all morals. But, o Zeus, you who have the power, if you are rightly so called, you who rule in all things, let it not escape the notice of you and your immortal, eternal empire. For they are now annulling the prophecies relating to Laius so that they perish, and nowhere is Apollo manifest in honour. And religious observance is dying.

The question τί δεῖ με χορεύειν; (l. 896) is balanced at the end of the antistrophe by ἔρρει τὰ θεῖα (l. 910), “religion is perishing”, which is the highest point of this *climax*. The locution τὰ θεῖα implies the entire range of divine and human interaction, the divine order, the observance of the cult and performance of rituals. Indeed, the failure of the oracles to be fulfilled and the failure of sinners to be punished are seen by the Chorus as destructive of the entire polytheistic system.

It is evident that the Chorus’ religious faith has been shaken by the scepticism about oracles and prophecies expressed by Jocasta in the previous scene (ll. 707-709):

Σύ νυν ἀφεὶς σεαυτὸν ὧν λέγεις πέρι
ἐμοῦ 'πάκουσον καὶ μάθ' οὕνεκ' ἐστί σοι
βρότειον οὐδὲν μαντικῆς ἔχον τέχνης·

Then you, releasing yourself from what you are talking about, listen to me, and learn that there is nothing mortal that possesses any of the prophetic art.

Thus, Jocasta tells Oedipus about the oracle which foretold to Laius that he should have been killed by his son, but according to reports Laius was killed by brigands and his son was exposed upon the mountain. And she goes on (ll. 720-725; 857f.):

Κἀνταῦθ' Ἀπόλλων οὔτ' ἐκεῖνον ἤνυσεν
φονέα γενέσθαι πατρός, οὔτε Λάϊον,
τὸ δεινὸν ούφοβεῖτο, πρὸς παιδὸς θανεῖν.
Τοιαῦτα φῆμαι μαντικαὶ διώρισαν,
ὧν ἐντρέπου σὺ μηδέν· ὧν γὰρ ἂν θεὸς
χρείαν ἐρευνᾷ, ῥᾳδίως αὐτὸς φανεῖ.
[…]
Ὥστ' οὐχὶ μαντείας γ' ἂν οὔτε τῇδ' ἐγὼ
βλέψαιμ' ἂν οὕνεκ' οὔτε τῇδ' ἂν ὕστερον.

And then Apollo did not bring it about that he became the killer of his father, nor that Laius should suffer the terrible thing that he feared at the hands of his son. Such is what the sayings of prophets have clearly ordinated, about which you should have no concern. Since whatever needful purpose a god is on the track of, he himself will easily bring it to light.
[…]
So after that, as far as the prophecy goes, at any rate, I would not look this way or that.

The second stasimon follows Jocasta's words and, as we previously saw, the Chorus confirms (or is rather likely to be worried) that "Apollo is nowhere manifest in his honour" (l. 909).[103] The episode following the choral ode shows the Messenger from

[103] Winnington-Ingram (1980) ties the choral ode to the previous episode and, in particular, to the scepticism about oracles and prophecies expressed by Jocasta. According to Carey (1986) 179, on the contrary, "the ode does not offer a detailed comment on the preceding scene. The chorus is not passing judgement on any character in the play but offering a broad emotional response, as they do throughout the play. Of all the things they could have commented on in the preceding scene they single out one fact, that the oracle has failed. If oracles fail there is no divine order and consequently no human morality".

Corinth revealing that the reputed father of Oedipus, Polybos, has died a natural death: so, not only the oracle given to Laius, but one half of the oracle given to Oedipus appears not to have been fulfilled. Jocasta ironically asks "o prophecies of the gods, where are you?" (ll. 946f.) and, addressing to Oedipus, says "listen to this man, and then ask where the god's revered oracles stand!" (ll. 952f.). Oedipus too is now convinced: "why should anyone look to the hearth of Pytho, or to the birds that screech above, under whose guidance I was going to kill my own father? He is dead and he is hidden below the earth" (ll. 964-967). The anti-Delphic sentiment reaches its highest point when Jocasta pronounces her famous words (ll. 977-979):

> Τί δ' ἂν φοβοῖτ' ἄνθρωπος, ᾧ τὰ τῆς τύχης
> κρατεῖ, πρόνοια δ' ἐστὶν οὐδενὸς σαφής;
> εἰκῇ κράτιστον ζῆν, ὅπως δύναιτό τις.
>
> What could a person fear when it is fortune that has the power, and there is no foresight of anything? It is best to live at random, however one can.

The religious scepticism and the growing anti-Delphic feelings expressed by Jocasta, Oedipus and the Chorus are all part of the Sophoclean "dramatic irony".[104] From the point of view of the audience, who already knows the end of the story, every single word about the failure of religion is ironically a confirmation of Apollo's presence which is deeply felt, as the drama develops. Oedipus' discovery of parricide and incest represents the fulfilment of both Laius' oracle and his own. Indeed, eventually, neither failure occurs: the disastrous downfall of Oedipus will show that the final words of the Choral ode analysed before, ἔρρει τὰ θεῖα (l. 910), ironically imply their opposite, the divine is *not* perishing at all.

[104] As Finglass (2018) X-XI claims, "the gap between what the characters know and what the audience surmise from their general awareness of the myth ensures that a large proportion, perhaps even a majority, of its lines can be read as conveying degrees of dramatic irony". Doubting the truthfulness of the oracles is certainly the highest point of dramatic irony in the play; the spectator does know that the prophecies have already been fulfilled. For a discussion on the dramatic irony in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, see Rutherford (2012) 346-358, Williams (1993) 147-149.

If religion is not perishing, if foreknowledge plays a key role in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, if the oracles are entirely fulfilled, what is the degree of the divine involvement in Oedipus' downfall? What is the interplay between human and divine agency in the play? Is Oedipus (totally or at least partially) free or is he a mere puppet in Apollo's hands?

Thus, we come back to the question asked by Dodds to his students: "in what sense, if in any, does the *Oedipus Rex* attempt to justify the ways of God to men?".[105] It goes without saying that this is one of the main issue of the Sophoclean interpretation, a never-ending debate which cannot be resolved right now nor discussed as it deserves and, above all, which has no definitive answers. However, the aim of this study is analysing the relationship between the concepts of human and divine causation in the ancient text as well as exploring a scholarly debate that, since the Renaissance, has had a profound impact on the modern exegesis of the play.

Oedipus could not have avoided his fate; the oracle was unconditional. It said "you *will* kill your father, you *will* sleep with your mother",[106] and equally unconditional was the oracle given to Laius who was told that any son born to him will kill him.[107] And oracles are bound to be fulfilled. According to A. W. Gomme,[108] "the

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[105] Dodds (1966) 37.

[106] See Soph. *OT* 791-793: ὡς μητρὶ μὲν χρείη με μιχθῆναι, γένος δ' ἄτλητον ἀνθρώποισι δηλώσοιμ' ὁρᾶν, φονεὺς δ' ἐσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός ("that it was fated that I should have intercourse with my mother, and display an unbearable progeny for mortals to see, and that I would be the murderer of the manwho fathered me").

[107] Soph. *OT* 711-714: χρησμὸς γὰρ ἦλθε Λαΐῳ ποτ', οὐκ ἐρῶ Φοίβου γ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, τῶν δ' ὑπηρετῶν ἄπο, ὡς αὐτὸν ἥξοι μοῖρα πρὸς παιδὸς θανεῖν ὅστις γένοιτ' ἐμοῦ τε κἀκείνου πάρ ("an oracle once came to Laius, I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his servants, that it would be his destiny to die at the hands of any child that would have him and me [sc. Jocasta] as his parents"). Many scholars claim that there is a difference in the way the tragic poets treated the oracle given to Laius: according to Wilamowitz (1899) 55, Aeschylus and Euripides make the oracle conditional ("if you have a son, he will kill his father and marry his mother") and then avoidable, whereas Sophocles makes the oracle unconditional ("you will die at the hands of your son") and thus an unavoidable prediction of the future. Wilamowitz's view, accepted also by Griffith (1996, 53), Lurie (2004, 392) and Garvie (2005, 50), has been rejected by Kovacs (2009, 366) who argues that "the aorist optative γένοιτο [...] does not predict, as a future optative would, that any child will actually be born to them [...] and leaves Laius the option of having no child". Although accepting the possible conditionality of Apollo's prophecy, as Finglass (2018, 392) suggests, no emphasis in the play is placed on the possibility that Laius could have avoided having children or that he was guilty of having procreated and thus having offended Apollo; "emphasis falls on the power of the oracle, not on the morality of the people who attempt to defy it".

gods know the future, but they do *not* order it". Also Dodds, in his 1966 article, claims that "certain of Oedipus' past actions were fate-bound, but everything he does on the stage from first to last he does as a *free* agent".[109] Now, is the fall of Oedipus just foretold by the gods or is it already pre-determined by them? Knox, as it was previously mentioned, argued that Oedipus "is absolutely free and fully responsible for the catastrophe" and that Sophocles excludes "the external factor in the life of Oedipus from the action of the tragedy".[110] A few years later, however, he had to admit the involvement of the Apolline intervention, in some way:

> This presentation of the hero's freedom and responsibility in the context of the dreadful prophecy already unwittingly and unwittingly fulfilled is an artistic juxtaposition, a momentary illusion of full reconciliation between the two mighty opposites, freedom and destiny. It is an illusion because, of course, the question of responsibility for what happened *before* the play, of Oedipus' freedom in the context of divine prophecies fulfilled, is evaded.[111]

Apollo never appears in person in the Oedipus Tyrannus, and Sophocles leaves the divine unexplained.[112] Nevertheless, in the play, we can find some features that could testify an external intervention in the action.[113] In the final scene the Messenger emphatically makes a distinction between Oedipus' voluntary and involuntary sufferings, referring to the self-blinding as voluntary and self-chosen, and to the parricide and the incest as involuntary and fated by the gods (ll. 1228f.):

> […] τὰ δ' αὐτίκ' εἰς τὸ φῶς φανεῖ κακὰ
> ἑκόντα κοὐκ ἄκοντα· τῶν δὲ πημονῶν
> μάλιστα λυποῦσ' αἳ φανῶσ' αὐθαίρετοι.

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[108] Gomme (1962) 111.
[109] Dodds (1966) 42.
[110] Knox (1957) 5f.
[111] Knox (1984) 134.
[112] See Parker (1999) 26.
[113] The following analysis is indebted to the reflections made by Cairns (2013) on the divine and human action in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as well as to Finglass' (2018) commented edition to *OT*, and Lawrence's (2013) book *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy* (esp. 42-45, 135-155).

> […] such are the evils that it contains, and that it will forthwith reveal to the light evils willingly, not unwillingly, undertaken.

However, in the first episode, Tiresias, after having revealed to Oedipus that he is the murderer of Laius and the source of the plague (and the audience knows that he is telling the truth), says to him (ll. 376f.):

> Οὐ γάρ με μοῖρα πρός γε σοῦ πεσεῖν, ἐπεὶ
> ἱκανὸς Ἀπόλλων ᾧ τάδ' ἐκπρᾶξαι μέλει.
>
> Indeed, it is not fated that you should fall by my hand, since Apollo is sufficient, whose business it is to bring that to its conclusion.

This passage suggests that Apollo is actively involved in the events that will lead to the final catastrophe. The oracle itself is a divine command from Apollo: "Lord Phoebus clearly orders us to expel from the country the pollution (*miasma*)" (ll. 96f.), which is the murderer of Laius. So, Apollo and Oedipus cooperate for a common end:[114] finding the source of the plague, which is Oedipus himself (as the audience, ironically, already knows). In the play, other characters make pronouncements about the intentions and actions of Apollo and gods in general.[115] Moreover, when Oedipus begins to suspect that he may be the murderer of Laius, he feels that he is the object of a divine plan ("O Zeus, what have you resolved to do about me?", l. 738) and of a divine intervention of a *daimon* (ll. 828f.):

> Ἆρ' οὐκ ἀπ' ὠμοῦ ταῦτα δαίμονός τις ἂν
> κρίνων ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τῷδ' ἂν ὀρθοίη λόγον;
>
> Would not someone who judged that this was the result of the action of a cruel *daimon* be right in what he said in my case?

In the last scene, the Messenger says that "some *daimon* showed Oedipus the way" (ll. 1258f.) towards his wife/mother Jocasta who, at that point, has hanged herself. When Oedipus finally enters the stage, after having found the corpse of Jocasta, and now blind, the Chorus, horrified by his self-mutilation, asks (ll. 1299-1302):

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[114] See Soph. *OT* 132-146.
[115] See Soph. *OT* 278-281, 149f., 154-157, 162, 203-206, 498-506.

[…] τίς σ', ὦ τλῆμον,
προσέβη μανία; τίς ὁ πηδήσας
μείζονα δαίμων τῶν μακίστων
πρὸς σῇ δυσδαίμονι μοίρᾳ;

What madness, wretched man, came over you? What *daimon* has leapt a leap longer than the longest towards your fate, itself the product of an evil *daimon*?

Incest and parricide are part of his fate (*moira*), which depends in some way on a *daimon,* but only an abnormal state of mind (*mania*) could have led him to blind himself, and such *mania* must depend in some way on a *daimon*.[116] The Chorus, indeed, says again (ll. 1327f.)

Ὦ δεινὰ δράσας, πῶς ἔτλης τοιαῦτα σὰς
ὄψεις μαρᾶναι; τίς σ' ἐπῆρε δαιμόνων;

You who have committed terrible deeds, how could you bring yourself to accomplish such a quenching of your eyes? What *daimon* drove you on?

It is clear that a divine influence, a *daimon*, has an active role in his self-blinding, and then in his downfall. Oedipus too confirms it (ll. 1329-1333):

ΟΙ. Ἀπόλλων τάδ' ἦν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι,
ὁ κακὰ κακὰ τελῶν ἐμὰ τάδ' ἐμὰ πάθεα.
Ἔπαισε δ' αὐτόχειρ νιν οὔ-
τις, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τλάμων.

It was Apollo, my friends, Apollo, who accomplished these things, my sufferings, my sufferings! But no other person struck me with his hand, except for me myself, wretch that I am"

Therefore, Oedipus self-blinding is something that Apollo causes, but at the same time it is something that Oedipus himself causes: he struck his eyes with his own hands, αὐτόχειρ (l. 1331).[117] As Cairns rightly suggests, this is the phenomenon of the over-determination: "Oedipus does execute Apollo's will, both in the self-blinding and in the

[116] Cairns 2013, 135.
[117] It is the same word applied at l. 266 to the murderer of Laius. Cf. Williams (1993) 191, n. 37.

parricide and incest, but even in the self-blinding he is not simply carrying out an order that happens to coincide with his own decision. The god's will is not merely prior but immanent in the human action".[118] Therefore, over-determination implies that a divine agent, Apollo, accomplishes its purpose "indirectly" through human actions, without denying to Oedipus his human responsibility and a degree of human freedom.

1.2.3. Over-determination, Double Motivation, Panoramic Intervention: a Scholarly Debate

How can we then say that Oedipus' self-blinding is actually a free act? Can we really speak of human freedom? It is undoubtedly a problematic definition, as also Cairns admits:

> Though there is a sense in which Oedipus' actions can be characterized as manifesting one kind of what ordinary English calls 'free will' and at the same time a sense in which the major events of his life are determined, the precise kinds of human action presupposed by the *OT* are not well captured in terms of either pole of the later philosophical antithesis of free will and determinism. Even though Oedipus takes ownership of his actions, the circumstances in which those actions were performed are such that it would be perverse call them 'free'.[119]

Hence, ultimately, how can we conclude that Oedipus has an active role in his own downfall, despite the undeniable involvement of Apollo? Since the mid-twentieth century, scholars have answered such a question by turning to the dominant concepts of "over-determination" and "double motivation". The classic formulation of "over-determination" has been proposed in Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) to describe situations in which a supernatural agent indirectly accomplishes its purpose through the direct action of a human agent.[120] However, quite unexpectedly, there is no trace of the theory of overdetermination in his treatment of Oedipus' self-blinding in his 1966 article. A. Lesky, in his 1961 *Göttliche und menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos*, to reject B. Snell's claim that Homeric characters lack responsibility

[118] Cairns (2013) 137.
[119] Cairns (2013) 146f.
[120] Dodds (1951) esp. 7, 16, 30-31, 51-52.

in their decisional choices,[121] theorised the concept of "doppelte Motivation" ("double motivation"), according to which human motivation and divine intervention coexist, forming "two sides of the same coin", both in Homer and in later Greek literature.[122] Recently, S. Lawrence, in his *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy* (2013), accepts the definition of "moral responsibility" proposed by W. Glannon, according to whom, it is grounded in the notion of "causal responsibility", which in turn is grounded in "causal control".

> all of the motivational states of the deliberating agent must be *autonomous*: if these states have been generated by coercion, compulsion, or various types of external manipulation, then one must have the *capacity for reflective self-control*. One must be able to eliminate or else modify or reinforce these states and come to identify with them as one's own.[123]

At the same time, Glannon rejects the traditional concept of freedom, according to which "a person chooses and acts *freely* and *responsibly* if and only if he can choose and act other than the way he in fact does; […] autonomy and responsibility do not require alternative possibilities of any sort in the casual pathway leading to action."[124] According to these two definitions, rightly accepted by Lawrence in his fine analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*,[125] if we apply them to Oedipus' case, we can affirm that, despite the divine involvement, the self-blinding is a deliberate act symbolising the identification of Oedipus' intention with Apollo's desires. Even if we admit that Oedipus did not have an alternative, that he could not have acted differently than he did, even in this case, rejecting the traditional but anachronistic definitions of 'free will' and 'determinism', we can say that he is an autonomous agent and responsible for his – voluntary and involuntary – deeds.

Then, in the play, if the divine intervention in human affairs cannot be denied, it is also evident the autonomy of Oedipus' actions leading him to the final catastrophe that Apollo not only predicted but planned in advance. Indeed the role of Apollo is not

[121] Snell (1928) and (1953).
[122] Lesky (1961).
[123] Glannon (2002) 25f.
[124] *Ibid.* 14.
[125] See Lawrence (2013) 135-155, esp. 147-150.

merely to predict parricide, incest and self-blinding (*pace* Gomme and Dodds), but to "over-determine" these actions.[126] Even more precise are the categories of divine intervention, as defined by Lawrence:[127] he argues that Apollo's involvement in the destiny of Oedipus is a case of "panoramic intervention", that according to Lawrence occurs when "the gods broadly shape the destiny of the characters or exercise a general control over a sequence of events without being represented as directly intervening in human mental states".[128] The panoramic intervention, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, reveals itself through several coincidences and, only once, incorporates what Lawrence calls a "psychological intervention" (in the form of a *daimon* acting into the agent's mind) in the case of Oedipus self-blinding.

Thus, Oedipus is autonomous and responsible for his deeds, which are in turn overdetermined by Apollo: the partition of responsibility between the two of them is purposely ambiguous, unclear and open to interpretation,[129] and also invites spectators to consider the central question of *why* does Apollo not only allows but *pursues* the downfall of Oedipus, that is the biggest albeit unanswerable question in the scholarship of the play. What is the purpose of Apollo in the play? Is Oedipus guilty and worthy of his sufferings?

1.2.4. Self-Knowledge and the Fragility of Happiness

The issue of the justification of Oedipus' sufferings arises at the end of the play, once Oedipus discovers the truth about his identity. Maybe, our question can find a possible clarification in the fourth stasimon: the Theban elders begin their song by lamenting not only the destiny of Oedipus but that of the humankind, for which Oedipus is seen as a παράδειγμα, an *exemplum* (ll. 1186-1195):

> Ἰὼ γενεαὶ βροτῶν,
> ὡς ὑμᾶς ἴσα καὶ τὸ μη-

[126] See Cairns (2013) 136 e n.55 (cf. Lesky double motivation)
[127] Lawrence (2013) 31-50.
[128] *Ibid*. (2013) 34.
[129] See Finglass (2018) 576.

δὲν ζώσας ἐναριθμῶ.
Τίς γάρ, τίς ἀνὴρ πλέον
τᾶς εὐδαιμονίας φέρει
ἢ τοσοῦτον ὅσον δοκεῖν
καὶ δόξαντ' ἀποκλῖναι;
Τὸν σόν τοι παράδειγμ' ἔχων,
τὸν σὸν δαίμονα, τὸν σόν, ὦ
τλᾶμον Οἰδιπόδα, βροτῶν
οὐδὲν μακαρίζω·

> Ah, generations of mortals, how I count you as living a life that is equal to nothingness! For what, what man wins more than enough for him to seem prosperous, and, after seeming, to decline? Having your fate, your fate, yours, as an example, o wretched Oedipus, I count nothing that pertains to mortals as blessed.

Oedipus is nothing but the universal paradigm of the instability of *eudaimonia*, the vulnerability of human happiness. He is the paradigm of the limitations of human knowledge. Oedipus' sufferings are shared by all humankind, even the most fortunate, even without any logic or any rational motivation. He "is a paradigm – Cairns says – not of human wickedness, not of culpable negligence, obtuseness, or intemperance, but simply of the instability of human happiness, of the principle of alteration that governs all human lives."[130] In the light of our previous considerations, we can say that Oedipus has acted rightly towards the gods and towards the *polis*, he did everything he could to avoid the prophecy of incest and parricide, and to save Thebes from the plague. The revelation of his identity does not highlight any moral flaw, any *intended* fault, but only some *unavoidable* errors. Irascibility, impulsiveness, and overconfidence do not justify the punishment that is meant to be shown, undoubtedly, as *undeserved*.

Moreover, as Lawrence points out, "the play is not critical of Oedipus' moral integrity; but it reveals the limitations of moral choice […]. Oedipus' failure is more fundamental than personal ignorance. It is a failure in *being*, and for that reason totally beyond his control. For no moral or rational reason, Oedipus is a freak who does not 'deserve' to live." Then, our initial question borrowed from Dodds – whether there is a

[130] Cairns (2013) 149.

justification for the divine involvement in Oedipus' sufferings – is going to remain unanswered. The answer is that ultimately there is no moral or rational reason, except for the final acknowledgement that human happiness is precarious and human knowledge is powerless and limited in the face of the divine, that remains mostly inscrutable, mysterious, impenetrable.

In this recognition lies the universal self-knowledge that Oedipus, as well as the contemporary audience, attain in the end: we act mostly in ignorance and, although we act according to strict moral rules and intelligence, we have no guarantee to attain *eudaimonia* (*pace* Aristotle) and risk to fail disastrously. The play is then pessimistic about the effectiveness of moral action.[131]

The universal meaning of the Sophoclean tragedy probably lies in the idea, shared by all humankind, of the fragility of happiness.[132] As Tiresias ironically claims in *The Dying of the Pythia*, a re-writing of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* published by Friedrich Dürrenmatt in 1976, "Pannychis, only ignorance of the future makes the present bearable; I was always boundlessly amazed at people's eagerness to know the future. They seem to prefer unhappiness to happiness".[133]

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[131] For a complete discussion about the final aim of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (with which I find myself in close agreement), see Lawrence (2013) 135-155, and Cairns (2013) 119-171.

[132] For an excellent (as well as debated) discussion of the theme of "vulnerability of the good human life" in Greek tragedy and ancient philosophy, see the 1986 book of B. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (2001^2).

[133] Dürrenmatt (2006) 292.

1.3. Aristotle on Oedipus' *hamartia*

Many of Sophocles' commentators, by referring at Aristotle's authority, have looked to one of the *Poetics*' most influential passage for support in interpreting the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a sin-and-punishment tragedy: the (still controversial) discussion on *hamartia* in chapter 13. The article *On misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex* (1966) written by Dodds and quoted above is demonstrative of this attitude: some of his students, by looking for valid arguments to blame the character of Oedipus, said that he was not "altogether bad, even in some way rather noble; but he had one of those fatal ἁμαρτίαι that all tragic heroes have, as we know from Aristotle. And since he had a ἁμαρτία he could, of course, expect no mercy: the gods had read the *Poetics*".[134] Dodds' irony makes evident that, even if we admit that in chapter 13 Aristotle is referring to a certain degree of Oedipus' fault, we should look for that "fault" in the *Poetics* rather than in Sophocles' play. That is to say, we should be able to demonstrate if and how Aristotle, as an exegete of Greek tragedy, intends to attribute causal or even moral responsibility to the term *hamartia* and, if so, by claiming that Oedipus made such a *hamartia*, to demonstrate which specific fault Aristotle blames Oedipus for.

The term is introduced in chapter 13 within a discussion on the reversals (περιπέτειαι) that best arouse pity (ἔλεος) and fear (φόβος) in the audience. The passage is as follows (*Po*. 13 1452b31-1453a22):

> ἐπειδὴ οὖν δεῖ τὴν σύνθεσιν εἶναι τῆς καλλίστης τραγῳδίας μὴ ἁπλῆν δεῖ τὴν σύνθεσιν εἶναι τῆς καλλίστης τραγῳδίας μὴ ἁπλῆν ἀλλὰ πεπλεγμένην καὶ ταύτην φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεεινῶν εἶναι μιμητικήν (τοῦτο γὰρ ἴδιον τῆς τοιαύτης μιμήσεώς ἐστιν), πρῶτον μὲν δῆλον ὅτι οὔτε τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς ἄνδρας δεῖ μεταβάλλοντας φαίνεσθαι ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, οὐ γὰρ φοβερὸν οὐδὲ ἐλεεινὸν τοῦτο ἀλλὰ μιαρόν ἐστιν· οὔτε τοὺς μοχθηροὺς ἐξ ἀτυχίας εἰς εὐτυχίαν, ἀτραγῳδότατον γὰρ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ πάντων, οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔχει ὧν δεῖ, οὔτε γὰρ φιλάνθρωπον οὔτε ἐλεεινὸν οὔτε φοβερόν ἐστιν· οὐδ' αὖ τὸν σφόδρα πονηρὸν ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν μεταπίπτειν· τὸ μὲν γὰρ φιλάνθρωπον ἔχοι ἂν ἡ τοιαύτη σύστασις ἀλλ' οὔτε ἔλεον οὔτε φόβον, ὁ μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιόν ἐστιν δυστυχοῦντα, ὁ δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, ἔλεος μὲν περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον, φόβος δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, ὥστε οὔτε ἐλεεινὸν οὔτε φοβερὸν

[134] Dodds (1966) 37.

ἔσται τὸ συμβαῖνον. ὁ μεταξὺ ἄρα τούτων λοιπός. ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτος ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ **δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά**, τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχίᾳ, οἷον Οἰδίπους καὶ Θυέστης καὶ οἱ ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων γενῶν ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρες. ἀνάγκη ἄρα τὸν καλῶς ἔχοντα μῦθον ἁπλοῦν εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ διπλοῦν, ὥσπερ τινές φασι, καὶ μετα ἁπλοῦν εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ διπλοῦν, ὥσπερ τινές φασι, καὶ μεταβάλλειν οὐκ εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκ δυστυχίας ἀλλὰ τοὐναντίον ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν μὴ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ **δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην** ἢ οἵου εἴρηται ἢ βελτίονος μᾶλλον ἢ χείρονος. σημεῖον δὲ καὶ τὸ γιγνόμενον· πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ οἱ ποιηταὶ τοὺς τυχόντας μύθους ἀπηρίθμουν, νῦν δὲ περὶ ὀλίγας οἰκίας αἱ κάλλισται τραγῳδίαι συντίθενται, οἷον περὶ Ἀλκμέωνα καὶ Οἰδίπουν καὶ Ὀρέστην καὶ Μελέαγρον καὶ Θυέστην καὶ Τήλεφον καὶ ὅσοις ἄλλοις συμβέβηκεν ἢ παθεῖν δεινὰ ἢ ποιῆσαι.[135]

Since, then, the structure of the finest tragedy should be complex, not simple, and moreover, should portray fearful and pitiful events (for this is the distinctive feature of this type of mimesis), it is to begin with clear that: (a) good men should not be shown passing from prosperity to affliction, for this is neither fearful nor pitiful but repulsive; (b) wicked men should not be shown passing from affliction to prosperity, for this is the most untragic of all possible cases and is entirely defective (it is neither moving nor pitiful nor fearful); (c) the extremely evil man should not fall from prosperity to affliction, for such a plot-structure might move us, but would not arouse pity or fear, since pity is felt towards one whose affliction is undeserved, fear towards one who is like ourselves (so what happens in such a case will be neither pitiful nor fearful). We are left, then, with the figure who falls between these types. (d) Such a man is one who is not preeminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into affliction not because of evil and wickedness, but because of a certain fallibility[136] (ἀλλὰ δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά). He will belong to the class of those who enjoy great esteem and prosperity, such as Oedipus, Thyestes, and outstanding men from such families. It is imperative that a fine plot-structure be single and not double (as some assert), and involve a change from prosperity to affliction (rather than the reverse) caused not by wickedness but by a great fallibility (δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην) on the part of the sort of agent

[135] The Greek text used is that edited by R. Kassel, *Aristotelis de Arte Poetica Liber*, Oxford (1965). The translation used is by S. Halliwell, *The* Poetics *of Aristotle*, London (1987).
[136] Here *hamartia* is translated as "fallibility" by S. Halliwell (1987) who explains in his commentary (128): "my translation of *hamartia*, 'fallibility', also reflects the fact that modern scholarship has moved predominantly towards much more limited understanding of the term thank traditional ideas of a 'tragic flaw' presupposed. It is true that the reaction against the latter has perhaps swung too far towards a neutral notion of *hamartia* as 'error' or 'mistake', but such translation at least do stay close to the factor of ignorance which we have seen is a necessary component in any plot-structure of the type Aristotle designates 'complex'".

stipulated, or one who is better, not worse, than indicated. Actual practice tends to confirm my thesis. For in the beginning the poets' choice of stories was arbitrary, whereas now the finest tragedies are constructed around a few families – Alcmaeon, for example, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and others who have suffered or committed terrible deeds.

Thus, Aristotle locates the heart of tragedy in the failure of human action: the concept of *hamartia* is the nodal point used to describe the causal element productive of tragic hero's misfortune. He affirms that the ideal protagonist of the finest tragedy, who is not pre-eminent in virtue and justice (ἀρετὴ καὶ δικαιοσύνη), must arouse pity (ἔλεος) and fear (φόβος) by falling into adversity not because of evil or wickedness (διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν), but through a ἁμαρτία μεγάλη.

Therefore *hamartia*, within the Aristotelian framework, is the hinge of a well-constructed plot. And the well-constructed plot *par excellence*, according to Aristotle's *Poetics*, is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Indeed, the Sophoclean play is mentioned twice in this passage, as a paradigmatic plot exemplifying the role of a *hamartia* carried out by a character who, because of this, is shown to pass from good fortune to misfortune. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle refers to Oedipus ten times, more than to any other play.[137] All of these references show the play as the model of what a well-constructed tragedy should be. In chapter 11 (1452a22-34), Aristotle explicitly declares the exemplarity of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, while explaining the fundamental notions of reversal (περιπέτεια) and recognition (ἀναγνώρισις):

Ἔστι δὲ περιπέτεια μὲν ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολὴ καθάπερ εἴρηται, καὶ τοῦτο δὲ ὥσπερ λέγομεν κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ ἀναγκαῖον, οἷον ἐν τῷ Οἰδίποδι ἐλθὼν ὡς εὐφρανῶν τὸν Οἰδίπουν καὶ ἀπαλλάξων τοῦ πρὸς τὴν μητέρα φόβου, δηλώσας ὃς ἦν, τοὐναντίον ἐποίησεν· […] ἀναγνώρισις δέ, ὥσπερ καὶ τοὔνομα σημαίνει, ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν μεταβολή, ἢ εἰς φιλίαν ἢ εἰς ἔχθραν, τῶν πρὸς εὐτυχίαν ἢ μεταβολή, ἢ εἰς φιλίαν ἢ εἰς ἔχθραν, τῶν πρὸς εὐτυχίαν ἢ δυστυχίαν ὡρισμένων· καλλίστη δὲ ἀναγνώρισις, ὅταν ἅμα περιπετείᾳ γένηται, οἷον ἔχει ἡ ἐν τῷ Οἰδίποδι.

[137] Arist. *Po.* 1452a 22-6, 1452a 32f., 1453a 7-12, 1453a 18-21, 1453b 1-7, 1453b 29-32, 1454b 6-8, 1455a 16-8, 1460a 27-30, 1462b 1-3.

> Reversal, as indicated, is a complete swing in the direction of the action; but this, as we insist, must conform to probability or necessity. Take, for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*,[138] where the person comes to bring Oedipus happiness and intends to free him from his fear about his mother; but he produces the opposite effect, by revealing Oedipus' identity […]. Recognition, as the very name shows, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, bringing the characters into either a close bond, or enmity, with one another, and concerning matters which bear on their prosperity or affliction. The finest recognition occurs in direct conjunction with reversal – as with the one in the *Oedipus*.

This passage, in preparation for the topics discussed in the following chapters (*i.e.* 13 and 14), concentrates on the so-called "complex" plot, preferred by Aristotle to the "simple" one.[139] Reversal and recognition are closely linked, and both presuppose a significant element of ignorance in the dramatic plot (μῦθος). As Aristotle says at the end of chapter 11, "reversal and recognition are two components of the plot-structure; the third is suffering (πάθος)".[140] Well, *hamartia* is the causal link that conducts to the fulfilment of these three dramatic elements: *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, and *pathos*. It is the causal element that leads the character from ignorance to knowledge, from good fortune to misfortune. However, unlike all the other dramatic components, Aristotle does not provide here any technical definition for this term, which remains ambiguous and still controversial among both translators and commentators, ancient and modern. The interpretation of *hamartia* (literally from ἁμαρτάνω,[141] that means "miss the mark") is the subject of a still-unresolved scholarly debate, since its semantic field covers a wide range of nuance including an "error resulting from ignorance", an "error of judgement", a "moral fault" or a "character flaw", and makes it difficult to determine the degree of responsibility implied.

It would be impossible here to retrace the history of the interpretation of the Aristotelian tragic error, whose immense scholarship testifies a large number of approaches adopted to go through this issue.[142] While the nineteenth century favoured

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[138] Soph. *OT* 924ff.

[139] See Arist. *Po.* 10 1452a12-22.

[140] Arist. *Po.* 1452b9-10.

[141] *DELG* 71 *ad l.*: "manquer le but (en tirant)", "se tromper", "commettre une faute".

[142] The scholarship about the meaning and the history of the interpretation of *hamartia* is impressive; see especially Manns (1883), Butcher (1897), van Braam (1912), Hey (1927), Harsh (1945), Glanville (1949),

an explanation of *hamartia* as a “moral flaw”,[143] more recently, starting from the first half of the twentieth century, scholarly opinion tended to understand it as a “mistake of fact”.[144] The article written by T.C.W. Stinton, *Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (1975), is undoubtedly a fundamental contribute which offers a global view of the previous scholarship and understands the tragic error as having a wide range of applications “from ignorance of fact at one end to moral defect, moral error, at the other”,[145] avoiding thus to restrict *hamartia* merely to mistakes of fact.[146]

In the previous sections (1.1. and 1.2.), we already analysed the issue of Oedipus’ fault in the Sophoclean play, and we tried to understand how Sophocles treated the characterisation of the tragic hero and the issue of his moral responsibility. Since the Renaissance, commentators have tended to confuse and overlap Sophocles’ with Aristotle’s Oedipus, sometimes taking for granted that the *hamartia* in chapter 13 necessarily referred to a moral flaw which deserves punishment (an element that, in the light of our analysis, seems to be absent in Sophocles). But would Aristotle agree? What is the meaning of *hamartia* in *Poetics*’ chapter 13? What does Aristotle mean for Oedipus’ *hamartia*? Especially between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, due to the exemplarity of the Sophoclean tragedy, as it is claimed in the *Poetics*, the reception of Oedipus is deeply filtered by a combination of both Sophocles’ and Aristotle’s

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Ostwald (1958), von Fritz (1962), Adkins (1966), Lucas (1968) 299-301, Dawe (1968), Bremer (1968), Stinton (1975), Golden (1978), Saïd (1978), Armstrong-Peterson (1980), Schütrumpf (1989), Sherman (1992), Hull (1993), Martina (1993), Donini (2004), Witt (2005), Kim (2010). See also the following commentaries to Aristotle’s *Poetics*: Else (1957), Lucas (1968), Dupont-Roc-Lallot (1980), Janko (1987), Halliwell (1987), Donini (2008), Taràn-Gutas (2012), Gallavotti (2003^{10}), Lanza (2016^{4}). Other in-depth analyses of the *Poetics* can be found in Jones (1980^{2}), Halliwell (1990) and (1998^{2}), Oksenberg-Rorty (1992), Nussbaum (1992).

[143] See Manns (1883) and Butcher (1897). The interpretation of *hamartia* as a “moral flaw”, as we shall see in the next chapter, is already found in Pietro Vettori’s commentary (1560) to the *Poetics* and later in the course of the early modern period.

[144] See Hey (1927) and Ostwald (1958).

[145] Stinton (1975) 221.

[146] Hey (1927) and Bremer (1968) analyse *hamartia* and its cognates from Homer onwards, meanwhile van Braam (1912) and Glanville (1949) compare the *hamartia*-text in *Poetics* 13 with specific passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*. Bremer and Hey, judging by the high frequency of *hamartia* and cognates meaning “mistake”, conclude that it has this meaning in *Poetics* 13. Glanville and Stinton find in their analysis a too different meanings to conclude that *hamartia* can be simply limited to a “mistake”.

works. This is one of the several reasons that caused a misinterpretation of the Sophoclean play in the early modern literature, as we shall see in chapters 2 and 3.

1.3.1. *Hamartia* within the *Poetics*: Towards Chapter 13

From Aristotle's perspective, it seems quite clear that *hamartia* is something that causes to the character *undeserved* suffering, which consequently excludes a character flaw of moral nature. Indeed, in chapter 6 (and even more clearly in chapter 13, as the passage above shows) Aristotle argues that the chief function of tragedy is the arousal of pity and fear, bringing with it a *catharsis* of such emotions.[147] Thus, the emotional response experienced when witnessing deserved punishment evokes our sense of justice and human satisfaction (φιλάνθρωπον),[148] but it is *not* tragic since it does not arouse pity nor fear, "since pity is felt towards one whose affliction is undeserved, fear towards one who is like ourselves".[149] However, the most appropriate sort of character who arouses pity and fear neither is the pre-eminent virtuous who falls from prosperity to misfortune, because our feelings would be of moral disgust and outrage (μιαρόν), not pitiful nor fearful. In contrast, to feel pity and fear, it is "necessary" (ἀνάγκη) for the spectator to see characters on stage who are "more good than bad" and who can err and suffer consequences of their *unwitting* deeds.

Oedipus' parricide and incest are indeed committed unknowingly, and then his tragic error would be involuntary. However, we have seen that the finest tragedy should be based on recognition (change from ignorance to knowledge) and *peripeteia* (reversal of fortune) which depict the character coming to understand what *he has* unwittingly *done*, and that *his own actions* have caused his reversal of fortune. As C. Witt rightly observes, the moment of recognition – which in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* coincides with the reversal of fortune – suggests that the question of agent responsibility is central to

[147] Arist. *Po*. 6 1449b24-28.
[148] Arist. *Po*. 13 1452b39. Donini (2008) *ad l.*: "dei due significati possibili per l'aggettivo *philanthropon* ('humanity' oppure 'moral sense'), pare più plausibile il secondo: il primo sarebbe estremamente inadatto per la successiva ricorrenza del termine in 1453a2."
[149] Arist. *Po*. 13 1453a5-8.

the meaning of tragedy: but how can the question of agent responsibility arise if, like in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the tragic error is involuntary?[150]

It also must be considered that the centre of Aristotle's theory of tragedy is human action: the finest kind of tragedy is defined by Aristotle as a μίμησις πράξεως (6 1449b24f.), a "mimesis of an action" arousing pity and fear, whose effect is the result of six formative elements of tragedy – plot (μῦθος), character (ἦθος), thought (διάνοια), diction (λέξις), music (μελοποιία), and spectacle (ὄψις). Of these elements, Aristotle says that the first category is the most important, that is the plot-structure of events (6 1450a15-24):

> μέγιστον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις. ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησίς ἐστιν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεων καὶ βίου· […] ὥστε τὰ πράγματα καὶ ὁ μῦθος τέλος τῆς τραγῳδίας, τὸ δὲ τέλος μέγιστον ἁπάντων.
>
> The most important of these elements is the structure of events, because tragedy is a representation not of people as such but of actions and life; […] so the events and the plot-structure are the goal of tragedy, and the goal is what matters most of all.

Therefore, Aristotle affirms that the ideal tragedy is possible only when the play has an excellent *mythos*-structure, which is "the first principle and soul of tragedy" (6 1450a38) as well as "the τέλος of tragedy" (6 1450a24); and the ideal plot, being a mimesis of action, is a "complex" plot constructed with *peripeteia* and recognition, whose causal factor conducting the protagonist from fortune to ruin is indeed the *hamartia*. Therefore, it means that the centre of the finest tragedy is human action, and the driving force of the drama is a *hamartia*, an unintentional action, committed in ignorance, leading the character to his downfall. According to Aristotle, such is the case of Oedipus.

Having determined Aristotle's argument on the ideal *mythos*-structure in the *Poetics*, I will try to define the meaning of *hamartia* that Aristotle had in mind while he wrote chapter 13, by referring to some of the most valuable studies on the topic,[151] and

[150] See Witt (2005) 69.
[151] See especially Bremer (1968), Stinton (1975), Sherman (1992), Donini (2004) and (2008), Halliwell (1987), (1990) and (1998^2), Witt (2004), Kim (2010).

especially considering four aspects: a) the meaning of *hamartia* in the Aristotelian ethical context (*i.e.* the distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*), b) the exegesis of *hamartia* in the light of the (controversial) comparison with the notion of ἄγνοια in *Poetics* 14, and c) the evident absence of any reference to religion and divine influence on the tragic action in the *Poetics*.

The purpose of this investigation is not to find a clear explanation nor a resolution of the meaning of *hamartia*: the extremely high number of studies conducted by scholars clearly testifies that there is no univocal definition. However, we could try to clarify some aspects that specifically characterise the *hamartia*, so that we could understand as clearly as possible what kind of tragic error Aristotle attributes to Oedipus in the *Poetics*.

1.3.2. *Hamartia* through the *Ethics*: Involuntary Actions, Errors and Misfortunes

The aporia emerging from the contrast between the issue of agent responsibility (which is central in Aristotle's theory) and the involuntary error of the ideal tragic character is one of the most relevant problems concerning the *hamartia*. In the *Eudemian Ethics* (II 6 1223a10-18) Aristotle argues that

> ἐπεὶ δ' ἥ τε ἀρετὴ καὶ ἡ κακία καὶ τὰ ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἔργα τὰ μὲν ἐπαινετὰ τὰ δὲ ψεκτά (ψέγεται γὰρ καὶ ἐπαινεῖται οὐ διὰ τὰ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ τύχης ἢ φύσεως καὶ ἐπαινεῖται οὐ διὰ τὰ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ τύχης ἢ φύσεως ὑπάρχοντα, ἀλλ' ὅσων αὐτοὶ αἴτιοι ἐσμέν· ὅσων γὰρ ἄλλος αἴτιος, ἐκεῖνος καὶ τὸν ψόγον καὶ τὸν ἔπαινον ἔχει), δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἡ ἀρετὴ καὶ ἡ κακία περὶ ταῦτ' ἐστιν ὧν αὐτὸς αἴτιος καὶ ἀρχὴ πράξεων. ληπτέον ἄρα ποίων αὐτὸς αἴτιος καὶ ἀρχὴ πράξεων. πάντες μὲν δὴ ὁμολογοῦμεν, ὅσα μὲν ἑκούσια καὶ κατὰ προαίρεσιν τὴν ἑκάστου, ἐκεῖνον αἴτιον εἶναι, ὅσα δ' ἀκούσια, οὐκ αὐτὸν αἴτιον.
>
> virtue and vice, and the deeds that derive from them, are praiseworthy and blameworthy respectively. Praise and blame are not given on account of what arises from necessity or chance or nature, but for what we are causes of ourselves. Where another is the cause, that person is the subject of praise or blame. So it is clear that both virtue and vice are

> concerned with what one is oneself a cause of, as the starting point of action. Now we all agree that one is the cause of all that is voluntary and in accordance with the decision of each, and that one is not the cause of whatever is involuntary.[152]

The term "voluntary" (ἑκούσιον), as Aristotle says in the *Eudemian Ethics*, is applied only to those actions 1) of which the person himself is cause and origin, and 2) which are performed knowingly.[153] Only those actions are the object of praise or blame, reward or punishment. If we accept this premise, we should conclude that tragic characters, especially Oedipus, that *unknowingly* commits a *hamartia*, are simply not responsible for their actions. This is problematic for the Aristotelian theory of tragedy whose primary element is, as we have seen, the "mimesis of actions" that makes the question of agent responsibility central to the meaning of tragedy. It is true that, to arouse pity and fear, the punishment must be *undeserved* (*Po*. 13 1453a5), but it is also true that the ideal tragic character is the agent of the action (*i.g.* the *hamartia*) committed. According to the *Poetics* 13, is Oedipus responsible or not for his involuntary actions? As C. Witt observes, tragic characters committing a *hamartia* satisfy the causal condition for voluntary actions (that is, they have their causal origin in the agent), but not the epistemic condition (that is, they are performed knowingly). It would follow that they would not account for their own actions. She tries then to distinguish two kinds of agent responsibility, culpability and accountability, by turning to B. Williams' argument that agent responsibility extends *beyond* what we voluntarily do.[154]

Before referring to the arguments supporting this distinction of two senses of agent responsibility, it is necessary to define the meaning of *hamartia* in the context of explanations of voluntary and involuntary action, so that we can understand how Aristotle makes a further distinction between actions we are responsible for and those from which we are exonerated (and try to answer to the following questions: in which

[152] The Greek text used is edited by F. Susemihl, *Aristotelis Ethica Eudemia*, Leipzig 1884 (repr. Amsterdam 1967), and translated by B. Inwood and R. Woolf, *Aristotle: Eudemian Ethics*, Cambridge 2013.
[153] Cf. Arist. *NE* III 1,1111a22-24.
[154] Witt (2004) 69-71. The text referred to by Witt is Williams (1993) 74: "As the Greeks understood, the responsibilities we have extend in many ways beyond our normal purposes and what we intentionally do."

case does Aristotle blame an action morally? Is *hamartia* one of these cases?).[155] The majority of scholars who treated the topic of *hamartia* usually begin with an analysis of *Poetics* 13 compared with the Aristotelian ethical background (the *Nicomachean Ethics* III 1 and V 8, and also the *Eudemian Ethics* II 6) by referring also to the *Rhetoric* I 13. The resulting interpretation is sometimes discussed in the light of a semantic analysis of *hamartia* and cognate words in Greek tragedy and, more generally, in archaic and classical texts. This was essentially the approach adopted by J.M. Bremer (*Hamartia. Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy*, 1969) and S. Saïd (*La faute tragique*, 1978) who dedicated their monographs entirely to the study of the interpretation of *hamartia*. An extremely high number of studies (both edited translations and commentaries to the Aristotelian *corpus*, and several articles) also deal with this topic and take part in the debate; they will be referred to where necessary.[156]

In different places, Aristotle explains the difference between voluntary and involuntary actions, and then which actions are to be blamed, which are to be praised.[157] As well as in the *Eudemian Ethics* (II 6), in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (III 1-3 and V 8), Aristotle distinguishes between ἑκών and ἄκων as, respectively, the knowledge and the ignorance of some factors relevant to the action. In particular, in *NE* III 1 he clarifies (as he does in the *EE* II 6) that voluntary actions (τα ἑκούσια) are praised or blamed, meanwhile involuntary actions (τα ἀκούσια) are pitied or pardoned.[158] As for the involuntary actions, they are of two kinds: those which take place under compulsion (βίᾳ) or through ignorance (δι’ ἄγνοιαν) are considered as involuntary. Compulsory means that the cause of the action is outside the agent and the person compelled contributes nothing to its cause.[159] The actions performed through ignorance are, by definition, involuntary. However Aristotle goes on to classify them into “involuntary” (ἄκων) and “non-voluntary” (οὐχ ἑκών): the errors resulting from the former – the “involuntary” – are performed “through ignorance” (δι’ ἄγνοιαν) of particular

[155] For a discussion on voluntary and involuntary actions in Aristotelian ethical works, see especially Broadie (1991).
[156] See the scholarship previously listed at p. 48, n. 134.
[157] See especially Bremer (1969) 16-24, Schütrumpf (1989), Sherman (1992), Witt (2004), Kim (2010).
[158] Arist. *NE* III 1, 1109B31-32.
[159] Arist. *NE* III 1,1110a1-4. Cf. also *NE* III 1,1110b2-17.

circumstances (καθ’ ἕκαστα)[160] and produce pain and repentance – in this case, the ignorance itself is the cause of the error; meanwhile the errors resulting from the latter – the “non-voluntary” – are performed “in ignorance” (ἀγνοῶν), as for instance when someone is drunk or in rage, so that the error is a result not of ignorance, but of drunkenness or rage (in this case Aristotle speaks of ignorance of the universal). Therefore, Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of ignorance (*NE* III 1,1110b24-1111a2):

> ἕτερον δ’ ἔοικε καὶ τὸ δι’ ἄγνοιαν πράττειν τοῦ ἀγνοοῦντα· ὁ γὰρ μεθύων ἢ ὀργιζόμενος οὐ δοκεῖ δι’ ἄγνοιαν πράττειν ἀλλὰ διά τι τῶν εἰρημένων, οὐκ εἰδὼς δὲ ἀλλ’ ἀγνοῶν. ἀγνοεῖ μὲν οὖν πᾶς ὁ μοχθηρὸς ἃ δεῖ πράττειν καὶ ὧν ἀφεκτέον, καὶ διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην ἁμαρτίαν ἄδικοι καὶ ὅλως κακοὶ γίνονται· τὸ δ’ ἀκούσιον βούλεται λέγεσθαι οὐκ εἴ τις ἀγνοεῖ τὰ συμφέροντα· οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει ἄγνοια αἰτία τοῦ ἀκουσίου ἀλλὰ τῆς μοχθηρίας, οὐδ’ ἡ καθόλου (ψέγονται γὰρ διά γε ταύτην) ἀλλ’ ἡ καθ’ ἕκαστα, ἐν οἷς καὶ περὶ ἃ ἡ πρᾶξις· ἐν τούτοις γὰρ καὶ ἔλεος καὶ συγγνώμη· ὁ γὰρ τούτων τι ἀγνοῶν ἀκουσίως πράττει.[161]
>
> Acting *through ignorance* however seems to be different from acting *in ignorance*; for when a man is drunk or in a rage, his actions are not thought to be done through ignorance but owing to one or other of the conditions mentioned, though he does act without knowing, and in ignorance. Now it is true that all wicked men are ignorant of what they ought to do and refrain from doing, and that this error is the cause of injustice and of vice in general. But the term ‘involuntary’ does not really apply to an action when the agent is ignorant of his true interests. The ignorance that makes an act blameworthy is not ignorance displayed in moral choice (that sort of ignorance constitutes vice) — that is to say, they result not from general ignorance (because that is held to be blameworthy), but from particular ignorance, ignorance of the circumstances of the act and of the things affected by

[160] The particular circumstances ignored are classified as it follows: “Perhaps then it will be as well to specify the nature and number of these circumstances. They are 1) the agent, 2) the act, 3) the thing that is affected by or is the sphere of the act; and sometimes also 4) the instrument, for instance, a tool with which the act is done, 5) the effect, for instance, saving a man’s life, and 6) the manner, for instance, gently or violently” (*NE* III 1111a2-6). Bremer (1969) 18 says that “Aristotle seems to have written the explanation of these cases with several tragic situations as mental background. A man, he says, should at least know who he is himself (Oedipus did not even know this). Or he might be ignorant of what he is doing, he might mistake his son for an enemy (as Merope does) or his father for an aggressor (as Oedipus does).”

[161] The text used is edited by I. Bywater, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, Oxford 1894 (repr. 1962).

it; for in this case the act is pitied and forgiven, because he who acts in ignorance of any of these circumstances is an involuntary agent.[162]

Therefore, the only kind of ignorance that deserves pity (ἔλεος) and pardon (συγγνώμη) is the "ignorance of particulars", that is the ignorance of the circumstances of the action and the objects with which it is concerned. This ignorance is the cause of "involuntary actions" (τα ἀκούσια), for which people are not blamed because they are *not* caused by wickedness, but by the ignorance itself.

It should be considered that, as Stinton rightly points out, in *NE* III 1,1110b29 "ἁμαρτία is applied to ignorance of moral principle",[163] through which the agents become "unjust and completely bad" (διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην ἁμαρτίαν ἄδικοι καὶ ὅλως κακοὶ γίνονται): this passage then suggests that also *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13 may have a moral meaning, since the term is here associated with ἀδικία and κακία, and would be consequently an error that could have been avoided. On the contrary, in *Poetics* 13 *hamartia* is an act of ignorance opposed to both μοχθηρία and κακία.[164] *Hamartia* is clearly an involuntary error, since it is committed unknowingly, but in the *NE* III it is not clear if it is an error committed *in* ignorance (thus avoidable and blameworthy) or *through* ignorance (thus warranting pity and pardon).

Nonetheless, we should look at other contexts that are relevant to our passage in *Poetics* 13. The discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* V 8 slightly differs from the text analysed before (*NE* III 1) and it deals with the issue of responsibility in the administration of justice (*NE* V 8,1135b10-25):

> τριῶν δὴ οὐσῶν βλαβῶν τῶν ἐν ταῖς δὲ ὅσ' ἀπροβούλευτα. τριῶν δὴ οὐσῶν βλαβῶν τῶν ἐν ταῖς κοινωνίαις, τὰ μὲν μετ' ἀγνοίας ἁμαρτήματά ἐστιν, ὅταν μήτε ὃν μήτε ὃ μήτε ᾧ μήτε οὗ ἕνεκα ὑπέλαβε πράξῃ· ἢ γὰρ οὐ βάλλειν ἢ οὐ τούτῳ ἢ οὐ τοῦτον ἢ οὐ τούτου ἕνεκα ᾠήθη, ἀλλὰ συνέβη οὐχ οὗ ἕνεκα ᾠήθη, οἷον οὐχ ἵνα τρώσῃ ἀλλ' ἵνα κεντήσῃ, ἢ οὐχ ὅν, ἢ οὐχ ᾧ. ὅταν μὲν οὖν παραλόγως ἡ βλάβη γένηται, ἀτύχημα· ὅταν δὲ μὴ παραλόγως, ἄνευ δὲ κακίας, ἁμάρτημα (ἁμαρτάνει μὲν γὰρ ὅταν ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐν αὐτῷ ᾖ τῆς αἰτίας, ἀτυχεῖ δ' ὅταν ἔξωθεν)· ὅταν δὲ εἰδὼς μὲν μὴ προβουλεύσας δέ, ἀδίκημα, οἷον ὅσα τε διὰ θυμὸν καὶ ἄλλα

[162] The text is translated by H. Rackham, *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics*, with an English Translation, London-New-York 1926 (repr. 1934).
[163] Stinton (1975) 224f.
[164] *Po*. 13 1453a9.

> πάθη, ὅσα ἀναγκαῖα ἢ φυσικὰ συμβαίνει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ταῦτα γὰρ βλάπτοντες καὶ ἁμαρτάνοντες ἀδικοῦσι μέν, καὶ ἀδικήματά ἐστιν, οὐ μέντοι πω ἄδικοι διὰ ταῦτα οὐδὲ πονηροί· οὐ γὰρ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἡ βλάβη· ὅταν δ' ἐκ προαιρέσεως, ἄδικος καὶ μοχθηρός.
>
> There are then three ways in which a man may injure his fellow. An injury done in ignorance is a *mistake* [ἁμάρτημα], the person affected or the act or the instrument or the result being other than the agent supposed; for example, he did not think to hit, or not with this missile, or not this person, or not with this result, but it happened that either the result was other than he expected (for instance he did not mean to inflict a wound but only a prick), or the person, or the missile. When then the injury happens contrary to reasonable expectation, it is (1) a *misfortune* [ἀτύχημα]. When, though not contrary to reasonable expectation, it is done without evil intent, it is (2) a *mistake* [ἁμάρτημα]; for a person makes a mistake when the cause of one's ignorance lies in oneself, but only a misfortune when the cause lies outside oneself. When an injury is done knowingly but not deliberately, it is (3) an *act of injustice* [ἀδίκημα]; such, for instance, are injuries done through anger, or any other unavoidable or natural passion to which men are liable; since in committing these injuries and errors a man acts unjustly, and his action is an act of injustice, but he is not *ipso facto* unjust or wicked, for the injury was not done out of wickedness. When however an injury is done from choice, the doer is unjust and wicked [ἄδικος καὶ μοχθηρός].

In *NE* V 8,[165] Aristotle then distinguishes the injuries (βλάβαι) into three groups: ἀτυχήματα, ἁμαρτήματα, and ἀδικήματα. The latter – the ἀδίκημα– is an injury done through anger (or any other natural passion), committed willingly, and it is a punishable offence. He also says that it is not done out of wickedness, meanwhile in this case the injury would be committed διά μοχθηρίαν. The ἀδίκημα is contrasted with ἁμαρτήματα, mistaken actions,[166] and ἀτυχήματα, misfortunes or accidents. Both of them, the ἀτύχημα, and ἁμάρτημα, are due to ignorance, but the former has the cause of the action outside the agent, the latter has its cause inside the agent. What actually distinguishes the accident from the mistake is whether or not what happens involuntarily is παράλογος, that is "contrary to reasonable expectation". As N. Sherman rightly points

[165] See the argumentation of Schütrumpf (1989), and also Braam (1912) 269f, Hey (1928) 137f., Ostwald (1958) 105.

[166] Lucas (1968) 300 clarifies that "*hamartia* and *hamartema* […] in many senses are indistinguishable, but Aristotle prefers in general to give *hamartema* its natural meaning of a particular case of mistaken action (this is the normal force of the termination -*ema*), and to use *hamartia* for the erroneous belief likely to lead to particular mistaken actions."

out, “what is crucial for our understanding of *hamartia* in the *Poetics* is the notion that what comes about as the result of accident is contrary to reasonable expectation; what comes about as the result of *hamartia* proper is not. An error can be accounted for; it is not reasonable unexpected”.[167] This might mean that the ἀτυχήματα are unavoidable, and the ἁμαρτήματα instead might have been avoided by care and forethought.[168]

A similar distinction of intentional wrongdoing, error and misfortune is made in *Rhetoric* (I 13,1374b5-9):[169]

> [ἔστιν] ἀτυχήματα μὲν <γὰρ> ὅσα παράλογα καὶ μὴ ἀπὸ μοχθηρίας, ἁμαρτήματα δὲ ὅσα μὴ παράλογα καὶ μὴ ἀπὸ πονηρίας, ἀδικήματα δὲ ὅσα μήτε παράλογα ἀπὸ πονηρίας τέ ἐστιν·
>
> Misfortunes are all such things as are unexpected and not vicious; errors are not unexpected, but are not vicious; wrong acts are such as might be expected and vicious, for acts committed through desire arise from vice.[170]

In the light of these passages, we can say that Aristotle does not give a precise meaning to the terms ἁμαρτία and ἁμάρτημα: although it is possible to affirm that the terms in the ethical context correspond to an involuntary action due to ignorance, it is difficult to say whether it is the kind of ignorance that has to be blamed or that deserves pity and pardon. This is an issue that brings us back to the initial questions: in which case does Aristotle blame an action morally? Is *hamartia* one of these cases? And, above all, is Oedipus’ *hamartia* – in *Poetics* 13 – a blameworthy error or is it not, according to Aristotle?

What we can undoubtedly say is that tragic *hamartia* is an action performed out of wickedness, since Aristotle, in *Poetics* 13, defines it as committed μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν (1453a9); thus, we can probably say that also *hamartia* does not coincide with *akrasia*, that can be defined as a “weakness of will”, a “lack of self-control”, or

[167] See Sherman (1992) 185f.
[168] See Lucas (1968) 301.
[169] For a similar distinction, cf. also Arist. *R. ad Alex.* 1427a31-43; the passage is discussed by Sherman (1992) 185ff.
[170] The text used is edited by W.D. Ross, *Aristotelis Ars Rhetorica*, Oxford 1964 (1959[1]). The translation is by J. H. Freese, *Aristotle*, Vol. 22, Cambridge and London 1926.

"the state of acting against one's better judgment".[171] Aristotle discusses ἀκρασία in *NE* VII 4,1148a2f. and he says that "ἀκρασία is censured not merely as a ἁμαρτία but as a kind of κακία".[172] Therefore, *hamartia* is contrasted with κακία (and with ἀκρασία) as it is affirmed in *Poetics* 13.[173]

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that, at least in the light of *NE* V 8 and *Rhetoric* I 13, ἁμάρτημα has not a clear definition and it seems to be a kind of culpable negligence, an error, committed unknowingly and due to ignorance, *but* avoidable, as it is "not unexpected" (παράλογος). But, if the tragic *hamartia* is a predictable mistake it follows that the fall into misfortune of the protagonist is not undeserved as the error would have been avoided and, in this case, there would be no room for pity - which is a necessary element in the Aristotelian theory of tragedy.

Several commentators and translators have been facing this interpretative issue, by trying to solve it in different ways. Sherman, after having noticed that the distinction between ἀδίκημα, ἁμάρτημα, and ἀτύχημα is also the origin of three kinds of liability in Roman law (*dolus*, "evil intent", *culpa*, "negligence", *casus*, "accident"), makes clear the tendency to consider the ἁμάρτημα in the *NE* as a culpable negligent injury, "less serious in degree of culpability than injuries due to evil intent, though more serious than accidents".[174]

As we have seen, this is a problem in the interpretation of the tragic error, as it is presented in the *Poetics*: Oedipus could have avoided parricide and incest, if he had interpreted the information he had in a different way; and Thyestes too, whose *hamartia* is referred to in chapter 13, could have avoided eating his own children in the meal served up to him. This is, of course, an impossible scenario: both tragic errors, Oedipus' and Thyestes', have to be due to ignorance and committed unknowingly. Or, alternatively, they would not be a *hamartia*.

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[171] See *contra*, Stinton (1975) 224. See Cyzyk (1990) for a discussion of both *hamartia* and *akrasia* in Aristotle's moral philosophy. For a complete discussion on the notion of *akrasia* and its modern reception, see Saarinen (1994) and (2011).

[172] *NE* VII 4,1148a2f.

[173] Cf. Bremer (1969) 19, and Stinton (1975) 224. Cf. *NE* 1135b18.

[174] Sherman (1992) 186.

Sherman, referring to the study of D. Daube,[175] argues against the interpretation of "negligence" by discussing the meaning of the term παράλογος, used in *NE* V 8 and *Rhetoric* I 13 to indicate what is "unexpected", "contrary to reasonable expectation", "incalculable".[176] As we have seen, the term παράλογος has been referred by Aristotle to misfortunes (ἀτυχήματα) in opposition to the ἁμαρτήματα, which are instead "not unexpected" and consequently liable to human calculation. But the term παράλογος is also used by Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics* (1247a33), when he says that "unexpected achievement is a matter of fortune (τύχη)", which is defined a few lines above as a "cause incalculable to human reasoning" (1247b7-8). Well, if τύχη (and so the ἀτύχημα) is contrary to reasonable expectation, it follows that ἁμαρτία/ἁμάρτημα – which is *not* παράλογος – is instead liable to human calculation. Sherman then rightly argues that

> it is not beyond our reason to account for what happened. Indeed, what happened may be psychologically surprising, even astounding, but at some level it is subject to coherent explanation. But, notice, this makes no commitment to the issue of the avoidability, so central to negligence […]. Intelligibility and avoidance are separate matters. Tragedy is about action that is causally probable and coherent. The mistake that brings a character to ruin does not emerge like a bolt from the blue but has a casual history in past sequences of actions which follow intelligibly one from the other with probability or necessity. What happens is contrary to belief but not contrary to reason (*me doken*, *me paralogos*). In a good play, the orderliness and flow of the events is inexorably logical. Oedipus sets out uncompromisingly to solve the mystery of Laius' murder. Each clue brings him closer to pinning the murder on himself. And though the discovery turns out to be of the unspeakable, it is not of the rationally impossible.[177]

According to this interpretation, the ἁμαρτία/ἁμάρτημα would be certainly intelligible and following logical and rational rules (contrarily to misfortunes and accidents), but it does *not* imply that it is a mistake that could be avoided. As for the *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13, the spectator feels pity and fear precisely because, as a human being, he assists to an event that, even if improbable, it is possible to happen to him too, from a logical point

[175] Daube (1973) 66-77.
[176] LSJ *ad l.* "beyond calculation", "unexpected", "unlooked for", or "casual", "uncertain".
[177] Sherman (1992) 187.

of view. And, as we saw above, to feel pity the downfall caused by the *hamartia* must be undeserved.[178]

Bremer, after having analysed the Aristotelian definitions in the *NE*, concludes that "it is possible to define *hamartia* in *Poetics* 1453a10 as an injurious act, committed because the agent is not aware of some vital circumstance (instrument, object, effect of action, etc.)".[179] Despite the ambiguities and the inconsistencies emerging from the different definitions of involuntary actions due to ignorance, Bremer excludes that *hamartia* in the *Poetics* could refer to a moral fault. He clearly thinks at *hamartia* as an involuntary (ἄκων) action performed through ignorance (δι' ἄγνοιαν) – and not in ignorance (ἀγνοῶν) – of particular circumstances and that produces pity (ἔλεος) and pardon (συγγνώμη).[180] Bremer also points out that the tragic characters (Oedipus, Thyestes, Orestes, Alcmeon, Meleager, Telephus) referred to by Aristotle in the *hamartia*-text in the *Poetics* are not presented as culpable of any defects of character: "this group of stories contains a remarkable collection of injurious deeds, committed (or almost committed) in ignorance, and recognitions". Furthermore "the moral status of the central character as βελτίων μᾶλλον […] eliminates any explanation of *hamartia* as a moral defect."[181]

Nevertheless, the evident lack of a specific definition of *hamartia* as well as the inconsistencies between the passages referring to the term in the different Aristotelian contexts (theory of tragedy, ethical, legal) do not allow us to give a definitive answer to the interpretative issue. We cannot deny that there are evident ambiguities and that ἁμαρτία/ἁμάρτημα covers a wide range of meanings, as Stinton clearly demonstrates in his article, "from acts done δι' ἄγνοιαν, at one end of the scale, through acts done by an agent ἀγνοῶν διὰ πάθος, and acts done through ἀκρασία (a kind of ignorance); what is common to all these is that the agent has some excuse for his act, ranging from a complete defence (when his act is pitiable in itself) to various degrees of extenuating circumstances permitting a plea in mitigation".[182]

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[178] *Po*. 13 1453a3-8.
[179] Bremer (1969) 20.
[180] Arist. *NE* III 1,1110b30-1111a2.
[181] Bremer (1969) 22-23.
[182] Stinton (1975) 254.

Taking into consideration that *hamartia* and its cognates are terms of wide application both in the Aristotelian *corpus* and in general Greek usage,[183] to find further elucidation of our *hamartia*-text in *Poetics* 13, we should look to the debated chapter 14, which may shed new light on the issue of the tragic error.

1.3.3. Acting δι' ἄγνοιαν: about Ignorance

The chapter 14 of the *Poetics* has received much less attention than chapter 13, but both of them deal with the same topic (*i.e.* how poets should construct a complex plot, a μῦθος πεπλεγμένος) for the same purpose (*i.e.* to arouse pity and fear most effectively). The term *hamartia* is not used in chapter 14, but the plot-structure is defined with reference to the knowledge and the ignorance of the agents: the issue of agency is again the core of the discussion. However, chapter 14 has been found awkward by many scholars, because of the discrepancies and the discontinuities between the types of plot recommended by Aristotle in the two chapters.[184] In chapter 13, he focuses on the ideal tragic agent, whereas in chapter 14 he focuses on the plot-structure which better arouses the tragic emotions. In chapter 14 two main issues are considered: 1) what is the ideal relationship between the characters in the plot, and 2) which are the circumstances that, in the ideal plot-structure, better arouse pity and fear. As for the first issue, Aristotle says that the ideal tragedy involves "dealings between those who are bonded by kinship or friendship" (*Po.* 14 1453b15-16) and then he specifies that

> ὅταν δ' ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις ἐγγένηται τὰ πάθη, οἷον ἢ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφὸν ἢ υἱὸς πατέρα ἢ μήτηρ υἱὸν ἢ υἱὸς μητέρα ἀποκτείνῃ ἢ μέλλῃ ἤ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον δρᾷ, ταῦτα ζητητέον.

[183] See Bremer (1969) and Said (1979).
[184] See Else (1963) and Lucas (1968) *ad l.*

> what must be sought are cases where suffering befalls bonded relations – when brother kills brother (or is about to, or to do something similar), son kills father, mother kills son, or son kills mother.[185]

As for the second issue, *i.e.* the circumstances, the main criterion to determine the best plot-structure is the "ignorance of identity", combined with the possibility of recognition before or after committing the tragic action. As Aristotle did in chapter 13, he introduces here four tragic cases involving blood-relatives and classifies them from the worst to the best:

1) an act intended in full knowledge of identity, but not performed (as the attempt of Haemon to kill his father in Sophocles' *Antigone*); this is the worst scenario, because the intentional evil of the act is morally repulsive (μιαρόν) and does not arouse pity nor fear;

2) an act committed in full knowledge of identity (such as Medea's murdering of her children), that implies the impossibility of *hamartia* (especially, for the factor of ignorance) as well as of reversal and recognition;

3) an act committed in ignorance, followed by recognition, such as the case of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which has been defined in chapter 13 as the ideal kind of plot-structure;

4) an act planned in ignorance of identity but, because of the recognition, not committed, as in Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris* and (lost) *Cresphontes*. This is the plot-structure recommended by Aristotle as the finest tragedy in chapter 14.

These are the four tragic cases allowed: as Aristotle points out, "either the deed is done or it is not, and the agents must either know the facts or be ignorant of them" (14 1453b37-38: ἢ γὰρ πρᾶξαι ἀνάγκη ἢ μὴ καὶ εἰδότας ἢ μὴ εἰδότας).

Summing up, the inferior cases are those in which the tragic deed, performed or not, happens with full knowledge of identity; the superior cases are those in which the tragic deed, performed or prevented by a recognition, happens in ignorance of identity. The *anagnoris*, already discussed by Aristotle in the previous chapters,[186] becomes clear

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[185] Arist. *Po.* 14 1543b20-23.
[186] Arist. *Po.* 11 1452a31-b8.

in chapter 14: it is the change from ignorance *of identity* to knowledge, and it is the necessary factor for the structure of a complex-plot (that, in this chapter, corresponds to the tragic cases number 3 (Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*) and number 4 (Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*).[187]

Now, as it clearly emerges from this brief overview of chapter 14, two main problems arise from this Aristotle's "renewed" definition of the best kind of tragic plot:

a) the preference for a plot-structure, such as the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, in which the downfall of the tragic character is *about to happen* but is eventually avoided: it noticeably contradicts what has been asserted in chapter 13, that a tragedy should end in misfortune (13 1453a15: ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν), such as the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, defined as the finest tragedy. This discrepancy, about the best kind of tragedy (either the *Iphigeneia*-structure or the *Oedipus*-structure), originates a problem in Aristotle's view of the tragedy.

b) the causal factor that determines the tragic action, that is said to be the *hamartia* in chapter 13, whereas it is the *ignorance* (*agnoia*) in chapter 14. As we saw in the previous section, *hamartia* (albeit barely definable) surely implies a factor of ignorance, *but* not always the notion of ignorance implies a *hamartia*. We also saw that, in the Aristotelian ethical works (the *Nichomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*), there are different kinds of *agnoia* implying different degrees of agent responsibility. Therefore, it is difficult to say whether the *hamartia* of chapter 13 is equivalent to the *agnoia* of identity of chapter 14, or the two argumentations result to be irreconcilable. How can we explain these evident discrepancies? And what can we deduce about the notion of *hamartia* in the light of the view of tragedy emerging from chapter 14?

S. Halliwell clearly admits the presence of some discrepancies between the two chapters, but he mostly insists on the substantial consistency which relates the discussion of chapter 14 to the previous one.[188]

Human fallibility is the causal element of the ideal tragic plot in both chapters 13 and 14: according to Halliwell, the factor of ignorance is the point of contact of the two

[187] These are the only two tragedies whose plot is fully known. Aristotle refers also to other tragedies, lost or fragmentary (Astydamas' *Alcmaeon*, Sophocles' *Odysseus Wounded*, Euripides' *Cresphontes*, *Helle*).
[188] See Halliwell (1987) 131-139, (1990) 173-175, (1998) 202-237.

chapters, since it is implicit in the nature of the complex plot (μῦθος πεπλεγμένος), whose components – *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* – are impossible to be performed without it. How does he justify the discrepancy of meaning, if there is any, between *hamartia* and *agnoia*? He argues that

> what this shows is not that *hamartia* should be simply equated with a character's active ignorance, but that ignorance *can satisfy* the conditions entailed in the doctrine of *hamartia*. Ignorance of a suitable kind (especially of one's true kinship bonds) can be seen to provide the most obvious way of realizing what Aristotle earlier used *hamartia* to define: namely, a dramatic situation in which grave moral culpability is avoided, but in which the agents move by their unwitting choices.[189]

Although the term *hamartia* does not recur, chapter 14 focuses on the factor of ignorance, which is its essential feature. Bremer too, although he admits that there is an inconsistency, sees a clear connection between *hamartia* and *agnoia*, as they are defined in the two chapters: "the phrase ποιεῖν τι τῶν ἀνηκέστων δι' ἄγνοιαν (*Po.* 14 1453b35) […] may be understood as an unofficial definition of *hamartia* as a device in drama."[190]

Even if we admit the equivalence between *hamartia* and *agnoia*, how does Halliwell justify the inconsistencies about the ideal ending of tragedy? We have seen that Aristotle, in chapter 13, prefers the *Oedipus*-construction (a tragedy ending in misfortune), whereas in chapter 14 he prefers the *Iphigeneia*-structure (a tragedy in which the misfortune is averted by a recognition). Thus, in the latter construction "the perfect tragedy depends on the imminent prospect of tragic 'suffering' (*pathos*), not on its actuality".[191] However, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, respectively illustrating two different kinds of ending, conform both to the requirement of the model of "complex plot". On this premise, Halliwell argues that

> the type of play in which recognition precedes and averts […] the irremediable tragic affliction which that would entail, is compatible with almost everything Aristotle has earlier said about the complex plot. It provides, in Aristotle's eyes, a suitable framework of action for a great instability to be dramatised in the lives of the agents, and it offers opportunities

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[189] Halliwell (1987) 135.
[190] Bremer (1969) 20 n.19.
[191] Halliwell (1990) 174.

> not only for the special elements of the complex plot, but also for *hamartia*, human fallibility. Although the ultimate *pathos* (archetypally, a killing) which the actions moves forward is not carried through, the prospect of the deed can still arouse pity and fear up to the moment at which suffering is averted.[192]

It means that, according to Halliwell, the plot-structure of *Iphigeneia* respects the major conditions of the ideal tragic plot described by Aristotle in chapter 13 (complex plot, *peripeteia* and recognition, arousal of pity and fear, error done through ignorance, change from prosperity to misfortune – until the final inversion to good fortune which, if we accept this view, does not exclude the satisfaction of tragic emotions).[193]

Nevertheless, a discrepancy does remain. More than once Aristotle argues the necessity of avoiding any risk of "moral repulsion" (from the audience), that is what he calls μιαρόν.[194] Aristotle clearly says that the ideal plot does not have to show an excessive disproportion between agent's deeds (as well as his moral stature) and his downfall: this is the reason why in chapter 13 he prefers, as the ideal tragic character, the μεταξύ, not pre-eminently good nor bad.[195] In chapter 14 it seems that what Aristotle wants is avoiding any possible hint of agent's culpability, and, according to Halliwell, "his preference for averted *pathos* rests on psychological end ethical grounds which go back to Plato's influence."[196] Even if Aristotle certainly did not follow Plato in his view of tragedy,[197] he still tries to minimise the gap between goodness and happiness, and to conciliate as much as possible his treatise on tragedy with his ethical beliefs.

> In the kind of actions which chapter 14's ideal presupposes, where someone is on the point of killing a close kinsman, there is no direct risk of moral revulsion. But the actualisation of the deed would still entail a terrible contradiction of fundamental ethical expectations and convictions: Aristotle's whole system of ethics posits a high degree of human responsibility, which would be severely undermined if too much weight were given to the

[192] Halliwell (1987) 136.
[193] So Bremer says that "both kinds of *peripeteia* are dramatically effective (there are several passages in the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle to confirm this point, such as *Rhet.* 1371b10, 1385b13, 1386a12) but still one expects Aristotle to be consistent in his preference."
[194] Arist. *Po.* 13 1452b36, 14 1453b39, 14 1454a3.
[195] Arist. *Po.* 13 1453a8.
[196] Halliwell (1987) 137.
[197] On the relationship between Plato end Greek tragedy, see Kuhn (1941).

> terrible possibilities of fallibility. But where the tragic deed is prevented by timely recognition, the final turn of the plot-structure in the direction of good fortune must in some degree mitigate the preceding experience of perspective suffering.[198]

We saw that Halliwell's analysis suggests that, after all, there is a closeness between the two chapters, which however implies, it should be admitted, a changing of mind on the part of Aristotle.

P. Donini[199] mostly focuses on the inconsistencies between the two chapters, especially on the difference between *hamartia* and ignorance, whose meaning according to him is clearly not the same in the Aristotelian *corpus*. However, chapter 14 has been usually accepted by scholars as a consistent argumentation, justified by the equivalence of *hamartia* with the factor of ignorance.[200] On the contrary, as we shall see, Donini, on the premise that "error" and "ignorance" have a different meaning and a different degree of responsibility, rightly argues that chapter 14 has been written by Aristotle as a correction and a reconsideration of chapter 13, as a sort of second thought. He emphasizes the supposed change of mind of Aristotle, and he points out that the (quite obvious) fact that *there are* relevant continuities between the two chapters does *not* solve the problem of the existing incongruences between them. The hypothetical theory of chapter 14 as Aristotle's amendment of his previous view of tragedy could actually be a convincing solution.

If this hypothesis is true, how can it be explained? Why did Aristotle omit *hamartia* and replace it with *agnoia* in chapter 14? And how did this change affect his view of tragedy and tragic character? Donini convincingly suggests that Aristotle is likely to have replaced *hamartia* with *agnoia* (then, with the distinction knowledge/ignorance) in consideration of his own distinction between different kinds of ignorance (as explained in the *Nicomachean Ethics* V 8,1135a-23b) which would have made even more ambiguous the notion of *hamartia*. It is also unlikely that Aristotle in the *Poetics* did not take into account the philosophical argumentation on agency

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[198] Halliwell (1987) 137.

[199] See Donini (2004) 87-106, and (2008) LXXI-XCII. The following argumentation is indebted to Donini's quoted writings.

[200] In addition to Halliwell, see also Else (1957) and Zierl (1994) 47-49. Sherman (1992), in the article quoted above, does not mention chapter 14 when she discusses the issue of ignorance in the *Poetics.*

because, as Donini argues, "those distinctions (between culpable ignorance and innocent ignorance) are not at all limited to the *Ethics*, but they seem to amount to a coherent Aristotle's way of thinking, referred to every time he has to examine questions relating the issue of agent responsibility."[201]

As we saw above, both in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Rhetoric*,[202] Aristotle distinguishes the ἀτύχημα, accident or misfortune, from the ἁμάρτημα, error or mistake, both due to ignorance, but the former has the cause of the action outside the agent, whereas the latter has its cause inside the agent. According to Donini, taking into account these technical definitions used in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Rhetoric*, the reference to *agnoia* of chapter 14 cannot be directly identified with *hamartia*, thus excluding the other kinds of ignorance. On the other hand, accepting the technical definition of ἁμάρτημα for *hamartia* could imply some negligence or a certain degree of culpability which could erroneously let the spectator think that the sufferings on the scene are deserved and then not arousing pity. Therefore, the choice of the antithesis knowledge/ignorance in the place of *hamartia* may have helped Aristotle to avoid any reference to an ambiguous human error, emphasising instead the simple aspect of ignorance of the characters (that is, Oedipus and Iphigeneia). According to Donini, chapter 14 ensures a major consistency of Aristotle's theory of tragedy as it is exposed in the *Poetics* (although, he admits, some ambiguities remain in the text).

Not only chapter 14 seems to be more consistent within the context of the *Poetics*, but also with Aristotle's moral philosophy. His choice to privilege here the happy ending (the *Iphigeneia*-structure) over the passage from good fortune to misfortune (the *Oedipus*-structure), as previously claimed, is undoubtedly closer to the philosophical view of the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, and closer to what Aristotle calls the ἀνθρώπεια φιλοσοφία, the "philosophy of human affairs",[203] whose purpose is the accomplishment of happiness (εὐδαιμονία). Since tragedy is an imitation (μίμησις) of action and life,[204]

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[201] Donini (2004) 99: "Quelle distinzioni non sono affatto limitate all'*Etica*, ma sembrano configurare uno schema di ragionamento costante del filosofo, impiegato da lui ogni volta che si trova a esaminare questioni di attribuzione di responsabilità."

[202] *Rhet*. I 13,1374b4-10 and *NE* V 8,1135a23-b25. Cf. also *NE* III 2,1111a18-b20.

[203] *NE* X 9,1181b15.

[204] Arist. *Po.* 6 1449b24-28 and 1450a15-18.

then happiness should be consequently the τέλος of the tragic μίμησις: "even if they have to face several and serious difficulties, anyway human beings have the possibility to pursue happiness; the message of the *Poetics* must and actually can agree with that of the *Ethics*, but if and only if it refers to what is stated in chapter 14 and not in chapter 13."[205]

Therefore, the interpretation proposed by Donini convincingly shows a more logical and coherent view of Aristotelian theory, by casting new light on the problematic chapter 14 but without completely excluding chapter 13 from a general view of dramatic theory. Chapter 13, with its discussion about *hamartia* and human sufferings, shows that Aristotle is aware of human fragility and the instability of happiness (as it is argued by M. Nussbaum in her influential 1986 book, *The Fragility of Goodness*),[206] so that, as Donini concludes, it seems to be influenced by Aristotle as a man more than as a philosopher because of the more pessimistic view that characterises the *hamartia*-passage in chapter 13.[207]

1.3.4. Agent Responsibility and Absence of Divine: a Secularisation of Tragedy?

In the *Poetics*, it has to be admitted, the issue of agent responsibility is far from being definitely solved: the choice of emphasizing the factor of ignorance that causes an involuntary deed and the attempt of avoiding any reference to some culpability of the tragic protagonist brings the reader to our starting point: how can the tragic hero be responsible for an involuntary deed (considering the discussion about voluntary and involuntary actions in the *Ethics*)? Two complementary considerations must be taken into account, in relation to human and divine agency: 1) as for the former, I refer to the distinction, made by Williams and accepted by Witt, between

[205] Donini (2008) LXXXIX: "Anche se devono attraversare molte e gravi difficoltà, gli uomini hanno pur sempre la possibilità di raggiungere la felicità: il messaggio della *Poetica* deve e può effettivamente concordare con quello delle *Etiche* – ma se e soltanto se è quello enunciato nel cap. XIV e non quello del cap. XIII."

[206] See Nussbaum (2001[2]).

[207] See Donini (2004) 105f.; (2008) XC-XCII.

responsibility/accountability, on one side, and culpability, on the other; 2) as for the latter, I refer to the significant exclusion, made by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, of any divine influence on human action in the plot and its consequences in regard to his interpretation of Greek tragedy.

As anticipated before, Williams in *Shame and Necessity* (1993) tries to solve the aporia due to the irreconcilability of agent responsibility and involuntary action (as it happens in the case of Oedipus) by extending agent responsibility *beyond* the category of voluntary actions. What kind of responsibility does he refer to? Williams, taking as an example the case of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, says that we understand how and why Oedipus feels the responsibility for what he has unwittingly done:

> The whole of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that dreadful machine moves to the discovery of just one thing, that *he did it*. Do we understand the terror of that discovery only because we residually share magical beliefs in blood-guilt, or archaic notion of responsibility? Certainly not, we understand it because we know that in the story of one's life there is an authority exercised by what one has done, and not merely by what one has intentionally done.[208]

According to Williams, agent responsibility is justified by the satisfaction of the causal condition ("what one has done", *i.e.* the cause of the action is inside the agent), even if the epistemic condition is not satisfied (*i.e.* the action is done unintentionally). However, the kind of responsibility relating to involuntary actions is certainly different from that relating to voluntary actions. Witt accepts Williams' view and rightly specifies that "in his discussion, Williams switches from agent responsibility in the sense of culpability to agent responsibility in the sense of accountability."[209] Lastly, responsibility concerns the category of "response": the appropriate response to culpability for voluntary deeds is blame and punishment, whereas in the case of accountability for involuntary deeds the appropriate response of the spectator is pity and fear. According to Witt, this view of responsibility as accountability could be applied to what Aristotle says about the tragic error.[210]

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[208] Williams (1993) 69.
[209] Witt (2004) 76.
[210] Witt (2004)78-81.

We can say that the distinction between two different senses of responsibility, the one blameworthy and the other not, is a valid interpretation: we saw, indeed, that Aristotle's tragic error (as intended both in chapter 13 and chapter 14) satisfies the causal, but not the epistemic condition for voluntary actions; then, it is clearly not a deliberate wrongdoing and the agent has not to be blamed as culpable. Reversals of fortune can have external causes to the agent's life, but Aristotle insists that in the best plot-structure the *peripeteia* cannot be caused by a simple accident (called ἀτύχημα in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and significantly absent in the *Poetics*) and instead must be something that the agent has done. As Nussbaum points out

> the unanswered question is why Aristotle insists that the causal mechanism must be an act of the hero's, rather than a (causally intelligible) network of events that bears down on him from outside.[211]

Hence, why does Aristotle insist on the agent's own actions? Of course, there is not a definitive answer. One might think that tragic emotions as pity and fear require that tragic characters have to fall in ruin because of their own actions, but we can certainly feel pity and fear for human sufferings caused by chance or accidents. It seems evident that Aristotle finds "more tragic" a play focused on agent responsibility (which we just defined as "accountability") for unintentional actions. Witt says that the reason why he might prefer actions performed by an agent rather than events caused by external occurrences regards the idea of recognition:

> Recognition is a moment of cognitive enlightenment in which the character comes to understand what he or she has really done, and how those actions have brought about the reversal of fortune. Priam will undergo a tragic reversal of fortune but will not experience a moment of recognition because his actions did not unintentionally cause his reversal. In this sense, he has no cognitive task in addition to his ethical one […]. Oedipus, too, needs to accept his reversal with dignity, but he has an additional, cognitive task, and that is to understand that who he thought he was and what he thought he did were deeply mistaken. Oedipus has learned that his famous cleverness is a double-edged sword. The blessedness and invulnerability that his cleverness secured are also destroyed by it. He has to forge a new understanding of himself in light of the fact that he bears responsibility for his own

[211] Nussbaum (1992) 278.

> downfall. In short, he is in the realm of accountability, a moral space outside the public arena of reward and punishment or praise and blame where questions of identity and self-understanding are located.[212]

This interpretation could explain why in the best kind of tragedy recognition and reversal occur in direct conjunction.[213] Recognition (*anagnorisis*), that is the passage from ignorance to knowledge of own identity,[214] entails then the agent's recognition of being "accountable", albeit not culpable, of his or her own unintentional actions. It goes without saying that the fear for what we could unintentionally have done and for that we should be accountable for is much more terrible than the fear for what simply could happen to us.

The last – but not less relevant – argument I would like to discuss is an element which emphasises, even more, the role of agent responsibility in Aristotle's theory of tragedy: the absence of any reference to religion.[215] Aristotle purposely avoids any divine or irrational element in his argumentation on tragedy, any reference to the will of Zeus, the *moira*, the *daimon*, the oracles, the role of the gods: all of them are excluded from his treatise on drama. This choice inevitably leads to the secularization of Greek tragedy. Why does Aristotle neglect the religious meaning of tragedy? And how does this choice affect his interpretation of Greek tragedy and the following literary criticism on Greek drama?

Aristotle deliberately chooses to refer to the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides as a merely human matter, with a human cause and a human meaning.[216] It is likely that he wants to neglect any irrational aspect since it would be incompatible with coherent dramatic causation of the tragic plot. In doing so, Aristotle definitely misunderstood the real sense of tragic texts, since we previously saw (in the case of

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[212] Witt (2004) 81.

[213] See Arist. *Poet.* 11 1452a32-34.

[214] We saw that in chapter 14 Aristotle specifies that in the passage from ignorance to knowledge, the latter is specifically the knowledge of identity.

[215] On the *Poetics*' neglect of religion, see especially Halliwell (1987) 12-17, Donini (2008) XCII, Lanza (2016) 36-37.

[216] The only reference to a deity that appears in the *Poetics* is the *deus ex machina* in chapter 15 (1454b3-7): "The *deus ex machina* should be used for events outside the play, whether earlier events of which human cannot have knowledge, or future events which call for a prospective narrative; for we attribute to gods a vision of all things."

Oedipus Tyrannus, but it can be applied to the entire genre) that human and divine agency are two complementary and indissoluble aspects of fifth-century drama. Human action, in tragedy, is never considered as completely autonomous and independent from external forces. On the contrary, Aristotle seems to insist on human causation exclusively. Halliwell points out that a similar rational reading can be found in modern criticism of Greek tragedy, that

> in moving away from naïve interpretations in terms of religious fate or destiny, itself rests on an ultimately secular reading of the plays. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* provides a pertinent instance. There has been a significant modern trend towards minimizing the religious dimension of the play, and *detaching* the dramatic foreground determined by human choices and intentions. But such a reading can be taken too far, and it is difficult to see how the constant presence of Apollo in both Oedipus' past and his present can simply be explained away: Oedipus' own words, 'These things were Apollo, Apollo' (*OT* 1329), give taut expression of this side of the myth. One need not suppose that a determinate, unambiguous meaning can be given to Apollo's function in order to see that it is nonetheless central to the work's dramatic force.[217]

Therefore, some modern criticism (especially of the *OT*) emphasises the role of human agency and leaves out the religious background, thus applying an interpretation much closer to the Aristotelian one but definitely unfaithful in respect to the fifth-century drama. As we shall see, in the early modern reception of Oedipus' myth there is a focus on human agency as well, but aiming at emphasising human free will and thus justifying the role of the (Christian) deity, which cannot be represented as responsible of human sufferings. Of course, there are exceptions and different trends in the European reception of ancient tragedy and dramatic theory. Starting from the early modern age until modern and contemporary literary theory, Aristotle's theory mostly represents a misleading lens throughout we look at the ancient drama,

In light of the previous observations, we can deduce that the absence of religion in the *Poetics* is the counterpart of Aristotle's stress on his notion of human agency. We saw that the core of his dramatic theory is precisely the fallibility of human action due to ignorance (the concept of *hamartia* in ch. 13 and the notion of *agnoia* in chapter 14).

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[217] Halliwell (1987) 13.

However, it is impossible to find a definitive answer to the problem of responsibility for this kind of human fallibility. Even if we accept that the notion of ignorance in chapter 14 is a reformulation of *hamartia* aiming at avoiding any possible agent's culpability, and even if we accept the theory of an accountability going beyond the category of voluntary actions and making tragic characters responsible for their involuntary actions, even in this case the issue of agent's causation in tragedy cannot be completely solved. This is due to the fact that divine agency has a key role in fifth-century tragedy in Athens, and the precarious balance between human and divine causation does not always clear the meaning of the drama itself – on the contrary, this interplay makes tragedy more ambiguous and cryptic – but it is the essential aspect of every tragic text. As Halliwell points out,

> tragedy does not offer simple or definitive solutions to the problems of human action and experience which it dramatizes, but it does place such problems in a light where divine forces are sensed to be themselves active […]. If it is right that Aristotle constructs a model of tragedy which puts all religious ideas aside, then this may help to explain the resulting void in his theory of tragic causation.[218]

Greek tragedy cannot – and it is not supposed to – be intelligible in purely human terms; the vagueness around the notion of *hamartia*, the impossibility of finding a satisfying solution to the issue of agent responsibility, the inconsistencies concerning the theory of action in the *Poetics*, and the difficulty of conciliating the theory of tragedy with the *Ethics*, perhaps, are due to the fact that Greek tragedy itself is by nature enigmatic and obscure. The interplay between human and divine causation within tragedy, indeed, is supposed to be barely decodable. As Virginia Wolf says in her 1925 *On not knowing the Greek*, "there is an ambiguity which is the mark of the highest poetry; we cannot know exactly what it means."

[218] Halliwell (1987) 15.

Chapter 2

Theorising *hamartia*:

Ethics and Poetics in Early Modern Theory of Tragedy

2.1. Late Antique and Medieval Influences on Renaissance Theory of Tragedy

"The theory of tragedy distrusts innocence":[1] as C. Savettieri rightly points out, the issue of innocence

> is a long-lasting story that begins with the *Poetics* of Aristotle, re-emerges in the glosses and writings of late ancient and medieval grammarians and theoreticians, continues in the Italian and French Renaissance debates and extends to modern theories, although without a '*telos'* and without any univocal interpretation.[2]

As we saw in the previous chapter, the issue of innocence – as being the counterpart of the notion of agent responsibility – plays a crucial role in Aristotle's *Poetics* and is far from being solved once and for all; there is no scholarly agreement about the agent's degree of responsibility implied by Aristotle in his theory of tragedy. Still, the notion of human agency implied by Aristotle's *hamartia* covers both the concepts of innocence (due to ignorance) and agent responsibility, leading then to a hermeneutical problem in defining the features of tragic error, character, and plot.

Aristotle, in his treatise, stresses the active role of the human agent in the tragic plot by excluding the possibility that a misfortune could accidentally happen to him (indeed, we saw that there is no reference to the ἀτυχήματα in the *Poetics*), and omitting also any reference to the divine influence on human agency. In the kind of tragedy that Aristotle is considering, there is no place for irrational elements such as religion and contingency.

What is interesting is that, on the contrary, the very first definitions of tragedy in the late ancient and medieval writings seem to be really far from the ambiguity of the notion of *hamartia* and, then, from Aristotle's theory itself. Aristotle's treatise, indeed, in Late Antiquity acquired a marginality that became even more pronounced in the Middle Ages. H. A. Kelly – author of an excellent study on the different meanings given to tragedy, from Aristotle's treatise, via Roman ideas and practices, to the Middle Ages – at the beginning of his book (1993), rightly points out that

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[1] Savettieri (2017) 1.

[2] *Ibid.*: "La teoria della tragedia diffida dell'innocenza. È una storia di lunga durata che comincia con la *Poetica* di Aristotele, riemerge nelle glosse e negli scritti dei grammatici e teorici tardo-antichi e medievali, prosegue nelle dispute rinascimentali italiane e francesi e si allunga fino alle teorie moderne, senza però un vero e proprio 'telos' e senza alcuna univocità".

> in any modern discussion of tragedy, Aristotle almost always has some role to play, whether on centre stage or whispering from the wings. But the *Poetics* was not known to Latin Antiquity, and it was badly misunderstood or neglected when it finally came to light in the thirteenth century.[3]

It is still too often asserted that Renaissance theoreticians remade tragedy and its theory from their rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* and Greek tragedians. However, even if it is true that the modern tragedy and its theory heavily flower between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, and that from the Late Antiquity to the fourteenth century there is no trace of any tragic text, what still endures in these centuries is at least an idea of tragedy. E. Zanin[4] clearly explains how, meanwhile in Antiquity there was a literal use of tragedy (meant as a dramatic genre) as well as a metaphorical one, during the Middle Ages tragedy – which was not performed anymore – became nothing more than an idea. And this metaphorical idea of tragedy, developed throughout the centuries, inevitably flowed in the rising theory of tragedy in the *Cinquecento*.[5]

The *editio princeps* of Aristotle's *Poetics* was published by the Aldine press in 1508. But tragedy was known throughout the Middle Ages thanks to Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Seneca's tragedies, Terentian commentaries of fourth-century grammarians Donatus and Diomedes, and, starting from the thirteenth century, Hermann the German's 1256 Latin translation of Averroes' Arabic gloss on Aristotle.[6] Nevertheless, the disappearance of ancient drama and the lack of knowledge about ancient theatre and dramatic theory inevitably led to the development of a concept of tragedy that was highly different from the one described in the *Poetics*.

In the following analysis, we shall try to trace the *fil rouge* which ties the elements characterizing the medieval idea of tragedy (specifically relating to the issues of agent responsibility, innocence and culpability) in order to show how the medieval theorization

[3] Kelly (1993) 1. H. A. Kelly's book, *The Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, is one of most valuable studies on the problematic reconstruction of the tragic genre between the Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The reflections made in the following pages mostly follow his reconstruction.
[4] Zanin (2017b) 2.
[5] For a treatment of tragedy in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in addition to the fundamental contribute of Kelly (1993), see also Cardinali-Guastella (2006). On the origins of the theory of tragedy in early modernity and its medieval influences, the studies considered are especially Reiss (1999), Zanin (2014a) and (2017a) and (2017b), Savettieri (2011), (2014), (2017). On the theatre in the Middle Ages, cf. also Davidson-Stroupe (1982) and (1991), Pietrini (2001), Pittaluga (2002).
[6] Cf. Reiss (1999) 232.

of the genre deeply influences the early modern theory of tragedy and the understanding of Aristotle's *Poetics*, concerning the concepts of human agency and tragic error.

2.1.1. Diomedes and Evanthius

It has been demonstrated that especially Horace's *Ars Poetica* and the writings of Latin grammarians deeply influenced the early modern definition and treatment of tragedy. The two fourth-century grammarians, Diomedes and Donatus, who drew upon earlier material, already play a key role in the tradition of tragedy in the Middle Ages.[7] In book III of his *Ars grammatica*, Diomedes attributes his definition of tragedy to Aristotle's disciple, Theophrastus (fourth century BC):

> Tragoedia est heroicæ fortunæ in adversis comprehensio. A Theophrasto ita definita est, *tragoidia estin eroices tuches peristasis*.
>
> (Tragedy is the comprehension of a heroic fortune in adversities. It is so defined by Theophrastus, 'tragedy is the reversal of heroic fortune'.) [8]

Diomedes quotes Theophrastus' definition of tragedy and translates it. It has been suggested[9] that Diomedes is likely to understand Theophrastus' term *peristasis* as Aristotle's *peripeteia*, so that his definition would mean "a reversal of heroic fortune". However, *peristasis* ("a standing around")[10] has a much broader and neutral meaning than *peripeteia* ("a falling around") which on turn does not necessarily imply a reversal from fortune to misfortune; but the fact that Diomedes adds *in adversis* ("in adversities") to Theophrastus' definition confers a negative nuance to the term initially used by Theophrastus (*peristasis*) as well as takes the distance from Aristotle's *peripeteia*.

Not only the definition provided by Diomedes widely affects early modern theoreticians in asserting that tragedy always ends unhappily,[11] but it also affirms the idea that tragic reversal is always a reversal of fortune caused by accident (Theophrastus uses

[7] On Diomedes and Donatus, see Kelly (1993) 9-15, Zanin (2014a) 110f.

[8] Diomedes, *Ars Grammatica*, book 3, 487.

[9] See Kelly (1993) 9, Zanin (2014a) 110.

[10] According to LSJ *s.v.*, περίστασις may also mean "crisis" or "difficult position". We do not know whether Theophrastus himself, by using this term, interpreted it with a negative nuance (*e.g.*, passage from prosperity to adversity) or rather Diomedes understood the term in this way, by adding *in adversis*.

[11] On the problem of the end of tragedy in early modern literature, see especially Zanin (2014a) and (2017a).

the term *tyche*, Diomedes the term *fortuna*), rather than a deed actively performed by the agent. Thus, there is no place for Aristotle's theory of action and his notion of *hamartia*, which rather implies that the agent is the cause and the origin of the tragic action. "The extinction of the concept of *hamartia* and its central role in the composition of the tragic plot – Savettieri argues – marks the maximum distance between the Aristotelian point of view and the medieval theoretical treatment."[12]

Donatus, in the fourth century, deals with tragedy and with comedy in his commentary on Terence's comedies, whose first part has been taken from the work of Evanthius, another fourth-century grammarian. Donatus, drawing on Evanthius, explains the difference between tragedy and comedy (that is, a topic already discussed by Theophrastus):

> Inter tragoediam autem et comoediam cum multa tum inprimis hoc distat, quod in comoedia mediocres fortunæ hominum, parvi impetus pericula lætique sunt exitus actionum, at **in tragoedia omnia contra: ingentes personæ, magni timores, exitus funesti habentur**; et illic prima turbulenta, tranquilla ultima, in tragoedia contrario ordine res aguntur; tum quod in tragoedia **fugienda vita**, in comoedia capessenda exprimitur.
>
> (Many things distinguish comedy from tragedy, especially the fact that comedy involves characters with middling fortunes, dangers of small moment, and actions with happy endings, whereas in tragedy it is just the opposite: imposing persons, great fears, and disastrous endings. Furthermore, in comedy what is turbulent at first becomes calm at the end; in tragedy, the action is just the reverse. Then too, tragedy presents the sort of life that one seeks to escape from, whereas comedy portrays the life that one seeks to obtain.)[13]

Hence, if Aristotle proposes different kinds of tragic reversals (by preferring the unhappy ending of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in chapter 13, and the happy ending of *Iphigenia among the Taurians* in chapter 14), here Donatus-Evanthius confirms the medieval idea that tragedy always ends unhappily and comedy always ends happily. According to Latin grammarians, tragedy consists of a reversal of fortune implying a downfall of heroes and kings from good fortune to ruin. Therefore, the instability of fortune and the unhappy

[12] Savettieri (2014) 35: "l'estinzione del concetto di *hamartia* e del suo ruolo centrale nella composizione del racconto tragico segna la massima distanza tra il punto di vista aristotelico e la sistemazione teorica medievale".
[13] Donatus-Evanthius, *Commentum Terenti* 4.2.

ending become, in the Middle Ages, the distinctive elements of the tragical plot. As Zanin rightly points out,

> in the medieval conception of the tragic genre, the sad ending is considered as the feature that distinguishes tragedy from the other genres. If according to Aristotle the style, the structure and the specific effects of tragedy are the criteria defining the genre, in the medieval theory, the subject and the theme are the elements that most accurately describe it.[14]

The idea of tragedy, passing from Aristotle to Theophrastus to the Roman late antique and medieval tradition, loses some features and stresses on others. Aristotle considers tragedy to be aimed at moving emotions, such as pity and fear; whereas the definitions of tragedies analysed above seem to show that a good tragedy should aim at provoking sadness, "but we are not told what kind of sadness is most proper, or it is best achieved, or what further effect the sadness is meant to have on the audience."[15] If Aristotle's theory of tragedy follows a prescriptive structure, Latin grammarians' approach to tragedy is mostly descriptive.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Aristotle's tragedy is said to be a *mimesis* of action and life,[16] whereas the general moral aim of Donatus-Evanthius definition of tragedy is described as follows: *tum quod in tragoedia fugienda vita, in comoedia capessenda exprimitur* ("tragedy presents the sort of life that one seeks to escape from, whereas comedy portrays the life that one seeks to obtain"). The medieval notion of *fugienda vita* and the consequent moralisation of tragedy seem to be really far from Aristotle's consideration on the tragic genre and its relationship with life, action and happiness.[17]

2.1.2. Tragedy and Fortune: Boethius

During the Middle Ages, references to tragedy do not appear only in the theoretical treatises, but they can be found always more frequently in philosophical and theological writings, where tragedy is conceived as a metaphorical idea. In the *Consolation of*

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[14] Zanin (2017a) 28.
[15] Kelly (1993) 15.
[16] Cf. Arist. *Po*. 6 1450a15-18.
[17] See especially Donini (2004) and (2008) XCIf.

Philosophy (*De consolatione philosophiae*), written in 523 AD, Boethius portrays himself in a discouraged state conversing with Lady Philosophy who attempts to console him. The *Consolation* was written during one-year imprisonment, while Boethius was waiting for trial, and eventual execution, for the alleged crime of treason under the Ostrogothic King Theodoric the Great. In this brief philosophical work, that is part of the *Consolatio* literary tradition, Boethius engages questions such as the nature of predestination and free will, the problem of theodicy, human nature, fortune, virtue, and justice.[18] The issue of the instability of fortune plays a crucial role in the *Consolation*. In the second book, Lady Philosophy asks him to listen to Fortune explaining her own nature, and Fortune, in the course of her monologue, asks:

> Quid tragoediarum clamor aliud deflet nisi **indiscreto ictu** Fortunam felicia regna vertentem?
>
> (What else does the clamor of tragedies bewail but Fortune overthrowing happy kingdoms with an indiscriminate blow?)[19]

Boethius' definition of tragedy stresses upon misfortunes that are undeserved and indiscriminate (*indiscreto ictu*); there is no reference to any agent's fault nor to a moral judgement of the protagonist who is meant to be innocent, as being merely a victim of the instability of fortune. Tragedy, metaphorically interpreted, is then a lament for undeserved sufferings.[20]

Nevertheless, Boethius' definition of tragedy, as strictly connected with fortune, is a very rare case which preserves, in the definition of tragedy, the factor of contingency without moralising it. His definition makes clear the fundamental issue of the modern tragedy: the problem of evil and of the innocent unjustly fallen in misfortune. However, in the *Consolation*, even if the theme of the instability of fortune is preserved, Boethius gradually adapts the notion of fortune to a providential plan.[21] Boethius has indeed the merit of having synthesised the two irreconcilable concepts of pagan fortune and Christian fortune.[22] In Roman religion, *Fortuna* was worshipped as the goddess of fortune

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[18] For a discussion on the literary tradition of Boethius' *Consolation*, see especially Courcelle (1967).
[19] Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, book II, prose 2.
[20] See Kelly (1993) 33, Savettieri (2014) 36, Zanin (2017a) 115f.
[21] On Boethius' interpretation of *fortuna*, see Frakes (1988) 30-63. Cf. also Zanin (2017a) 114-117. For the theme of fortune in the Middle Ages, see Patch (1927), Cioffari (1973).
[22] For an interesting discussion on the Pagan-Christian syncretism of ancient mythology in the Renaissance, cf. Seznec (1953).

and personification of good luck, often linked with prosperity, and also identified with the Greek *Tyche*. J. C. Frakes, in his book on the concept of *fortuna* in Boethian tradition, accurately explains how he inherits the concept from the previous Roman tradition and adapts it to Christianity:

> The growing dimension of *Fortuna's* divine power which temporality made her the supreme goddess of the Roman world, also brought her into open conflict with nascent Christianity. This conflict, which threatened to annihilate Fortuna altogether, was mediated by Boethius' treatment of the entire problem. The popularity of the *Consolatio* and Boethius' ubiquitous acceptance in the medieval world as a Christian, as one of the Church Fathers, in northern Italy even as a saint, lent authority and orthodoxy to his depiction of *Fortuna*, which, at least in the first sections of book II, is rather dramatically heathen. After this brief portrait, however, one finds that *Fortuna* as a goddess disappears […]. While the basic characterization of *Fortuna* depends on the tradition, the ultimate fate of the figure is an independent development on the part of Boethius. He strikes out on his own in taking the capricious *Fortuna*, hated and feared by the pagans and damned by Christians, and placing her on the side of the good. She is subordinated to Providence and thus becomes God's instrument of moral correction and divine punishment on earth.[23]

Therefore, if Boethius' definition of tragedy still reflects a pagan idea of fortune – indeed it is the personification of *Fortuna* herself who speaks to him in the II book – and it implies that the idea of tragedy is about sufferings due to the instability of human happiness and not about a fault-punishment moral scheme, later in the *Consolation* the pagan concept of fortune turns out to be identified with the Providence, which still preserves an idea of contingency, though acceptable in the context of Christianity. This process of syncretism will allow the concept of *Fortuna*, still problematic but closer to the Providence, to play a role in the early modern tragedy, thus avoiding the risk to be censured. In any case, this understanding of tragedy is really far from Aristotle's secularised tragedy (which on the contrary excludes both religion and casual accidents) and, paradoxically, it is closer to Greek tragedy itself, where human agency, divine necessity and contingency, albeit ambiguously, coexist.

Boethius' *Consolation* is widely commented during the Middle Ages and the early modernity, especially during the so-called "renaissance of the twelfth century".[24] One of

[23] Frakes (1988) 30f.

[24] This is also the title of the well-known book written by C. H. Haskins in 1927.

the most influential formulations of tragedy is the gloss to Boethius' passage on tragedy found in the twelfth-century commentary of William of Conches (written around 1125).[25] In the short version of his commentary, he glosses' Fortune's rhetorical question about tragedy analysed above and gives the following definition:

> *Quid tragediarum*. Tragedium [*lege* Tragedia enim] est scriptum **de magnis iniquitatibus** a prosperitate incipiens et in adversitate desinens. Et est contraria comedia, que ab aliqua adversitate incipiens in prosperitate finitur. Et dicta est tragedia quia descriptores illius **ad designandum fetorem viciorum** que in ea sunt hirco emunerabantur.
>
> (*Quid tragediarum.* Tragedy is a writing dealing with great iniquities, which begins in prosperity and ends in adversity. And it is contrary to comedy, which begins with some adversity and finishes in prosperity. And it is called tragedy because its writers ['describers'] were remunerated with a goat, in order to point up the filthiness of the vices it contains.)[26]

What is interesting for our analysis is that William of Conches goes beyond Boethius' definition of tragedy (meant as a lament for undeserved and unexpected misfortunes) and rather stresses on the great iniquities (*scriptum de magnis iniquitatibus*) and vices (*ad designandum fetorem viciorum*). Conches' moralised variation is based on the association of tragedy with the idea of a deserved punishment of human vices.

A similar interpretation can be found also in the *Parisiana Poetria* of John of Garland, written around 1220 (*pudibonda proferentur et celerata* [i.e., *scelerata*]: "[tragedy] sets forth shameful and criminal deeds")[27] and the *Consolation*'s commentary of Nicholas Trevet of Oxford, composed before 1304 (*unde tragedia est carmen de magnis criminibus vel iniquitatibus a prosperitate incipiens et in adversitatem terminans*: "hence tragedy is a poem about great crimes or iniquities beginning in prosperity and ending in adversity").[28] It is quite clear that Trevet has taken over from Conches the definition of tragedy as dealing with great iniquities and moving from prosperity to adversity. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that both William of Conches and Nicholas Trevet give a definition that corresponds to what Isidore of Seville says in the book 18 of

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[25] On William of Conches' commentaries to Boethius, see especially Bolton (1977).

[26] William of Conches, *Glose super Librum Boecii de cosolacione,* book II, prose 2, Vatican MS lat. 5202 fol. 13^{v}. Cf. Kelly (1993) 68-78: esp. 69.

[27] John of Garland, *Parisiana Poetria* 7.24-26. Cf. Kelly (1993) 100f.

[28] Nicholas Trevet, *Expositio super librum Boecii de consolatione*, book II, prose 2, fol. 29. Cf. Kelly (1993) 126.

his *Etymologies*. Nicholas Trevet indeed confirms his reference to Isidore in his *Consolation*'s commentary, precisely before giving his definition of tragedy:

> Et nota quod tragedi dicuntur, secundum Ysydorum, *Ethimologiarum* libro 18, *De ludo scenico*, illi qui antiqua gesta atque **facinora sceleratorum regum** luctuoso carmine spectante populo concinebant. unde **tragedia est carmen de magnis criminibus vel iniquitatibus** a prosperitate incipiens et in adversitatem terminans
>
> (And note that according to Isidore, in book 18 of his *Etymologies*, in the chapter *On the Scenic Play*, tragedians are said to be those who sang of the old deeds and crimes of wicked kings in a doleful poem while the people looked on. Hence tragedy is a poem about great crimes or iniquities beginning in prosperity and ending in adversity.)[29]

Therefore, Trevet in defining tragedy stresses on the "crimes" taken over from Isidore and the "great iniquities" taken over from Conches, who in turn, in his commentary to Boethius' *Consolation*, combines both Boethius' and Isidore's definitions of tragedy.

The commentators on the *Consolation* gradually abandon the *Boethian* definition of tragedy as a lament for unpredictable misfortunes – found in Diomedes and Donatus-Evanthius – and accept a definition of tragedy, as dealing with crimes and iniquities justly punished, thus accepting a moralising tradition which (throughout several intermediate sources) descends from Isidore of Seville and its Patristic influences.

2.1.3. Tragedy and Theodicy: Isidore of Seville and the Patristic Tradition

St. Isidore, bishop of Seville from 599 to 636, was the most important encyclopedist-lexicographer of the early Middle Ages. The *Etymologies*, also known as *Origins* (*Etymologiae, sive Origines*), is an encyclopedic work attempting to cover all areas of learning and widely known since the seventh century.[30] It must be considered that Isidore did not have direct contact with the classical dramatic sources, and even the late authors, such as Diomedes and Donatus, who seem to be present in his *Etymologies*, are likely to be known indirectly throughout a common source like Suetonius.[31]

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[29] *Ibid*.
[30] For a discussion about Isidore of Seville on theatre, see Kelly (1993) 36-50, Cardinali-Guastella (2006) 126-134.
[31] See Hillgarth (1961) 34, Kelly (1993) 37.

In the *Etymologies*, the most important entries about tragedy can be found in book 8, in the section on poets, and in book 18, on the theatre and public shows. Isidore deals with topics such as the etymology of tragedy (the Greek for 'goat'),[32] the tragic style and the theatre's structure, but what is most interesting for our analysis – and also for the medieval culture – is the tragic subject as well as its influences on ethical issues. In book 18, avoiding the terms *tragoedia* and *comoedia*, he deals with the practitioners of tragedy and comedy. As for the tragedians, he gives the following definition:

> *De tragoedis*. Tragoedi sunt qui antiqua gesta atque **facinora sceleratorum regum luctuosa**[33] carmine spectante populo concinebant.
>
> (*Tragedians*. Tragedians are those who sang in poetry of the ancient deeds and sorrowful crimes of wicked kings while the people looked on.)[34]

It seems that the idea of tragedy as dealing not with simple misfortunes (as in Boethius' *Consolation*) but with "sorrowful crimes of wicked kings" (*facinora sceleratorum regum luctuosa*) has been influenced by the patristic tradition, especially by the Christian Lactantius. His *Divine Institutions* (*Divinae istitutiones*), written between 303 and 313, is an apologetic work attempting to defend Christianity against the claims of pagan writers. Hence, Lactantius categorically denounces as immoral and corrupting the act of witnessing any kind of spectacle, not only gladiatorial games, but also comic and tragic plays, and in book 6 he affirms:

> In scaenis quoque nescio an sit correptela uitiosior […]. Item tragicae historiae subiciunt oculis parricidia, et incesta regum malorum et cothurnata **scelera** demonstrant.
>
> (And as for the stages, their power of corruption is for all I know still worse […]. Likewise, the tragic histories bring parricides before one's eyes, and set forth the unclean and incestuous deeds of wicked kings, and buskined crimes.)[35]

Lactantius refers to tragedy as dealing with crimes (*scelera*), and he speaks explicitly of parricides (*parricidia*) and incests (*incesta*) with an implicit reference to the tragedy of

[32] See Hor. *Ars Poetica* 220: Horace says that the tragedian was remunerated with a goat; hence, *tragos*, 'goat', is said to be the etymon for 'tragedy'.
[33] The manuscript tradition preserves two different *lectiones*: *luctuoso carmine*, on one side, and *luctuosa carmine*, on the other. The text of the *Etymologies* used here is edited by Lindsay (1911).
[34] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 18.45.
[35] Lactantius, *Divinae Istitutiones* 6.20.27-30.

Oedipus. The Patristic hostility to tragedy is thus justified by the "power of corruption" which the act of witnessing a spectacle would exercise over the audience.

The Patristic refusal of the tragic genre (which probably follows the Platonic critique of tragedy, well known by Lactantius)[36] is explicitly expressed also by Augustine in his *Confessions*,[37] and is strictly connected to the refusal of the Boethian concept of fortune. The concept of fortune as an unpredictable force, implying that human agency cannot be entirely autonomous but at the mercy of chance events, is not acceptable by the point of view of Christian free will. The origin of human sufferings cannot be due to contingency; the moral responsibility of the agent is the essential element in the fault-retribution scheme. Both innocence and fortune would be extremely problematic in the Christian context, with the only exception of a total correspondence of fortune with the concept of Providence (proposed, as we saw above, by Boethius' *Consolation*).

As for the Patristic reinterpretation of *fortuna*, as implied in Lactantius' association of tragedy with crimes and passed on by Isidore of Seville, Frakes rightly explains that

> by the beginning of the sixth century, the anti-Fortuna campaign seems to have won on all fronts except that of poetic usage and perhaps folk beliefs. As a goddess, Fortuna was dead, conquered by Stoicism and Christianity; as a poetic device and as a metaphor for the event brought about by obscure causes, she had survived and so permeated the consciousness of late antique culture that her symbols and her capricious character were commonplaces, even clichés, of literary and probably even non-literary usage.[38]

Therefore, the firm refusal of the tragic genre emerging from the Patristic tradition, starting primarily with Lactantius' definition and passed on by Isidore of Seville, joins eventually Boethius' commentators and begins the process of moralization of the tragedy which will influence its reception in the early modernity. This idea of tragedy, as dealing with the punishment of *scelera* and *iniquitates*, gradually excludes the (unacceptable as

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[36] Plato's critique of tragedy is the main focus of the famous tenth book of the *Republic*. According to Plato, tragic poetry (meant as a category not limited to Attic drama but embracing the work of Homer too) is condemned as being a mimetic art and then considered dangerous, because of the limitation of the mimetic poetry to a world of illusions as well as because of its capacity to corrupt the mind by instilling emotionally and ethically dangerous ideas in the audience. On Plato's critique on tragedy, see Hallwell (2002) 98-117 and Nannini (2014).

[37] Augustine, *Confessiones*, III, 2.

[38] Frakes (1988) 29.

unpredictable) role of Late Antique *Fortuna*, thus leaving no place for character's innocence.

2.1.4. The *Theatrum Mundi* and the Rediscovery of *Seneca Tragicus* (XII-XIII century)

Throughout the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, as we previously saw, tragedy disappears as a dramatic genre and continues to exist only as a metaphorical idea, mostly used in theological and philosophical texts.[39] Bernard of Cluny, a twelfth-century French Benedictine monk, in his well-known *De contemptu mundi*, describes hell as a tragedy lasting forever, spiritually and physically painful.[40] As for the twelfth-century views of metaphorical tragedies, it is noteworthy that John of Salisbury, English philosopher and bishop of Chartres, was famous for his concept of *theatrum mundi*. In his *Policraticus*, finished in 1159, inspired by Petronius' *Satyricon*, compares life to tragedy rather than a comedy:

> In eoque vita hominum tragedie quam comedie videtur esse similior, quod omnium fere tristis est exitus, dum omnia mundi dulcia quantacumque fuerint amarescunt, et extrema gaudii luctus occupant.
>
> (In this, the life of men seems closer to a tragedy than a comedy, because almost everyone's end of everything is sad, since all the sweet things in the world become bitter, and mourning takes the place of great joys.)[41]

This metaphorical idea of tragedy shows "the world as a theatre in which Fortune puts on plays, giving good fortune to some and bad fortune to others".[42]

Both metaphorical uses of tragedy, Bernard's and John's,[43] imply an ethical meaning since the reversal of fortune has to be interpreted as having a moral aim. As E. Zanin rightly points out,

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[39] On metaphorical tragedies, see Kelly (1993) 78-92 and Zanin (2017b) 2-4.

[40] Bernard of Cluny, *De contemptu mundi*, 1. 621-622.

[41] John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* 489D.

[42] Kelly (1993) 80.

[43] It should be noted that John of Salisbury was a student of William of Conches and he is likely to have known his definition of tragedy as dealing with great iniquities beginning in prosperity and ending in adversity. Cf. Kelly (1993) 80.

> la tragédie prend ainsi un sens plus large, et permet d'évoquer les malheurs de la vie et les punitions du ciel. Non seulement la tragédie est définie par son sujet, mais tout sujet malheureux peut prendre le nom de tragédie et autoriser ainsi une réflexion sur le mal. La tragédie sort du domaine poétique pour se lier étroitement à la morale et marquer de manière dysphorique et péjorative le sujet qu'elle détermine.[44]

The rediscovery of Seneca's tragedies in 13th century has a fundamental role in the development of the early modern definition of tragedy: if the Senecan *corpus*, on one side, has confirmed or shed new light on some medieval ideas of tragedy, on the other side, it has been (mis)interpreted by theoreticians and tragedians on the basis of the traditional ideas developed throughout Late Antiquity and Middle Ages.[45]

The English Dominican Nicholas Trevet of Oxford, whose commentary to Boethius' *Consolation* was previously cited, is also the author of the first commentary to Seneca's tragedies. It was written between 1314 and 1317, at the request of Nicholas Albertini of Prato, Dominican cardinal and bishop of Ostia.

We saw that Trevet, in commenting on Boethius' passage on fortune, refers to book 18 of Isidore's *Etymologies* to give his definition of tragedy as dealing with crimes of wicked kings. As for Seneca's tragedies, he makes some variations and argues that

> Seneca autem in libro qui pre manibus habetur non solum de materia tragica sed etiam scripsit more tragico; et ideo merito liber iste Liber tragediarum dicitur; continent enim **luctuosa carmina de casibus magnorum**, in quibus nusquam poeta loquitur, sed tantum persone introducte.
>
> (Seneca, however, in the book before us, wrote not only of tragic matter, but also in the tragic mode. For this reason, this book is deservedly called *The Book of Tragedies*; for they contain mournful poems about the falls of great men, in which the poet never speaks, but only introduced persons.)[46]

Trevet takes from Isidore's book 18 the idea of *luctuosa carmina*, but he does mention the *scelera* so that there is no reference to the wickedness of the kings fallen in adversity. However, Trevet does accept the fact that tragedy in general, and Senecan plays in

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[44] Zanin (2014a) 115.

[45] On the medieval tradition of Seneca's tragedies, see Franceschini (1938), Brugnoli (1957), Pastore-Stocchi (1964), MacGregor (1983).

[46] Trevet, *Expositio super tragedias Senece*, ed. Franceschini (1938) 6-7. For a study on Trevet's commentary on *Seneca tragicus*, see Marchitelli (1999).

particular, deal with great crimes and, indeed, his commentary makes clear his moralising interpretation of *Seneca tragicus*:

> in quantum hic narrantur **quedam laude digna, quedam vituperio**, potest aliquo modo liber hic supponi **ethice**, et tunc finis ejus est **correctio morum per exempla** hic posita.
>
> (insofar as some praiseworthy things are herein narrated, and also other things that are deserving of vituperation, this book can in some way be classified under ethics, and then its end is the correction of morals by the examples that are here presented.)[47]

In the prefatory letter to Cardinal Albertini, Trevet exposes similar ideas about the aim of Seneca's composition of tragedies. According to him, Seneca composed tragedies so that

> ethica documenta fabularum oblectamentis immersa cum jocunditate mentibus infirmis ingereret, per que, **eruderatis vitiis, uberem virtutum segetem** injectis seminibus procrearet.
>
> (he could enjoy ethical teachings on infirm minds in a delightful manner, by cloaking them in the appealing guise of fables, in order that by teaching the nature of vice and sowing the seeds of virtue, he might produce a fruitful harvest.)[48]

Trevet is likely to be influenced by Seneca's ethical writings (*Seneca Moralis*) in his definition of tragedies' aim. Indeed, according to Trevet's commentary, Seneca's tragedies would deal not only with a reversal of fortune causing the downfall of great kings and men (according to Diomedes-Eustatius-Boethius' tradition), but also with deserved punishment of vices (according to Lactantius-Isidore's tradition). What is interesting is the stress on the didactic aim of these plays, considered as *exempla* to follow or avoid, which reminds us of the concept of tragedy as *fugienda vita* described by Donatus-Eustatius. It is not surprising that, according to Pastore-Stocchi, Trevet brought the French moralistic interest in *Seneca Tragicus* to its culmination.[49]

Lovato Lovati confirms this idea of tragedy. At the end of 13th century, he discovered the eleventh-century *Etruscus* codex of Seneca's tragedies at the abbey of Pomposa, and thus worked on the manuscript together with his disciple Albertino

[47] *Ibid.* 8.
[48] *Ibid*. 3.
[49] Pastore-Stocchi (1964) 17-18.

Mussato in Padua. The *notamentum* of the manuscript mentions the definition of tragedy taken from book 18 of Isidore's *Etymologies*:

> Tragoedi sunt qui antiqua gesta atque facinora sceleratorum regum, luctuoso carmine, spectante populo, concinebant.[50]
>
> (Tragedians are those who sang in sorrowful poetry of the ancient deeds and crimes of wicked kings while the people looked on.)

This indication, founded in the introductory section of the manuscript, obviously influenced the understanding of *Seneca tragicus* read throughout a medieval moralizing lens, which has made a significant impact on the reception of tragedy in early modernity. The balance between innocence and culpability of the tragic character, at this point, is almost totally inclined to the latter, thus confirming Savettieri's initial argument according to which "theory of tragedy distrusts innocence."[51]

In light of these elements, we can conclude that throughout the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages the theoretical tradition preserves and transmits an idea of tragedy which turns out to be extremely different from Aristotle's: the definition of tragedy, the nature of characters, the function of the play, the construction of the plot, and especially the tragic error. Indeed, the concept of tragic error, as conceived by Aristotle, is totally removed. There is no place for the ambiguity on agent responsibility characterising the notion of *hamartia*.

The medieval definition of tragedy has developed around two alternative ethical traditions: a) a lament for unexpected reversal of fortune hitting indiscriminately virtuous and wicked agents, and b) a theodicy based on the deserved retribution for vices and crimes of wicked agents (thus anticipating the concept of "poetic justice").[52]

The idea of tragedy as an unpredictable misfortune, as we previously saw, begins with the fourth-century Latin grammarians (Diomedes and Donatus-Evanthius) and has taken by Boethius' *Consolation* (sixth century), where for the first time the pagan fortune

[50] *Notamentum*, Codex Laurentianus 37, 13, c.1r, reported in Pastore-Stocchi (1964) 20. As we can see, in this manuscript (the so called *Etruscus*) the *lectio* preserved is *luctuoso carmine*.
[51] Savettieri (2017) 1.
[52] For a complete discussion on the 'genealogies' of these two alternative traditions and their influences on early modern theory of tragedy, see Savettieri (2014).

is associated with the Christian Providence. This syncretism will allow the assimilation of tragedy as a genre dealing with a reversal of fortune in the Christian culture. Indeed, it is precisely at this point that the two alternative traditions intersect each other. As we saw, the idea of tragedy as a theodicy (that is, as dealing with crimes, iniquities and vices justly punished) descends from Isidore's *Etymologies* (seventh century) influenced in turn by the Patristic tradition (fourth-century Lactantius'*Divine Institutions*). The late commentators of Boethius' *Consolation* (like Williams of Conches, John of Garland, Nicholas Trevet) give their definition of tragedy combining, more or less consciously, the two alternative traditions: always more frequently, the reversal of fortune hitting great men and kings becomes an *exemplum* of punishment for crimes and vices, also implying a didactic and moral level of understanding. The moralization, as well as the attempt of Christianisation of tragedy, will also influence the reception of Seneca's tragedies in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century Europe, especially in Italy and in France.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Geoffrey Chaucer (fourteenth century), in translating Boethius, separates the original passage on fortune from the late moralising tradition, and in his *Monk's Tale* he writes in a gloss to Boethius' text that:

> tragedie is to seyn, a ditee of a prosperitee for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchedness.[53]

There is no reference to vices and virtues, but only to the reversal of fortune and to the passage from prosperity to adversity, thus allowing a little space for the action of contingency. As we shall see, the theme of the instability of fortune, as conceived by Chaucer, will influence the Sixteenth-century reception of tragedy in England as well as the development of theoretical treatises on drama, such as the *Defence of Poesy* written by Philip Sidney in 1595.

[53] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Monk's Tale*, II, 2 67-72.

2.2. Translating *hamartia* in Renaissance Italy: *error* and *peccatum*

In 1508, the first Greek text of the *Poetics* was published in Venice by Aldus Manutius, in a volume entitled *Rhetores in hoc volumine habentur hi*: this edition became the reference text to be copied, adapted or corrected by most of the sixteenth-century editors.[54] Above all, it represented the effective rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the West and the beginning of its highly intricated exegesis in the European history of literary theory and criticism. However, to understand the history of Aristotelian tradition in the Italian *Cinquecento*, we have to take into account the already existing literary, philosophical, and cultural context (which we analysed in the previous paragraph). Two elements especially affected the early modern interpretation of Aristotle's treatise:

> the first, an assumption that poetry was akin to rhetoric in its aims of producing an effect on the audience; the second, a deep conviction that literature needed to be justified in ethical terms if its status was to be respectable.[55]

Therefore, in the Italian Renaissance, the understanding of the *Poetics* was filtered by the rhetorical and ethical conceptions of literature, testifying the strong influence of Horace's *Ars Poetica* that, throughout the Middle Ages, continued to play a fundamental role in the theory of tragedy. Indeed, both the rhetorical and ethical functions ("delight" and "instruction") are considered to be the aim of all poets in the famous Horatian formula:

> Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae,
> Aut simul iucunda et idonea dicere uitae.
>
> (Poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse,
> or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life.)[56]

Horace's purposes, combined together, perfectly reflect the threefold aim of the classical rhetorical theory, that is, *docere*, *mouere*, and *delectare*.[57]

The two filters of rhetoric and ethics, through which sixteenth-century theorists looked at the *Poetics*, together with the will of reconciling the ideas of Aristotle and Plato,

[54] On the Aldine edition of the *Poetics*, see Weinberg (1961) 366-371.
[55] Halliwell (1987) 17. For an overview of the reception of the *Poetics* in Europe, see Halliwell (1998) 286-323.
[56] Hor. *Ars poetica*, 333-334.
[57] Cic. *Orat*. III 5,2.

influenced as well the early modern understanding of *hamartia*. Furthermore, the ethical ambiguity of the Aristotelian concept of human agency, as we shall see, makes the tragic error one of the most problematic issues in terms of the different exegesis it produced during the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. Scholarship on early modern interpretations of *hamartia* has significantly developed starting from the early 2000s. Michael Lurie, in his broader discussion on the history of interpretation of *hamartia* – significantly entitled *Die Suche nach der Schuld* (2004) – stresses on the moralising re-interpretation of the *Poetics* in the early modernity leading to a process of Christianization of Greek tragedy and, according to him, to a hermeneutical disaster.[58] Renaissance misinterpretations of *hamartia* had already been recognised, for instance, in fundamental works such as Bernard Weinberg's *A History of Literary Criticism* (1961) and Baxter Hathaway's *Age of Criticism* (1962), who surveyed the landscape of *Cinquecento* poetics: both emphasise the rhetorical influences exerted by Horace, Cicero, Quintilian, and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* itself on the reception of the *Poetics*, whose moral function – according to them – served as a justification and a response to Platonic condemnation of poetry.

This moralising critical tradition – proposed by Weinberg, Hathaway and lately Lurie – has been called into question only in recent years, starting from the studies of Brigitte Kappl, Daniel Javitch, Terence Cave, Cristina Savettieri and, especially, Bryan Brazeau.[59] In assuming for granted that all the early modern interpretations of the *Poetics* *are* misinterpretations, what these most recent studies point out is that the Renaissance misreading is not *only* due to the theorist's and tragedian's will of moralizing and justifying the tragic genre from an ethical (and even religious) perspective, but it seems to be part of a broader program of cultural translation and vulgarization, whose aim was

[58] See Lurie (2004) and (2012). In his *Die Suche Nach der Schuld. Sophokles' Oedipus Rex, Aristoteles' Poetik und das Tragödienverständnis der Neuzeit* (2004), Lurie broadly analyses the history of the interpretation of Aristotelian *hamartia* in relation with Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* between the early modern and the modern reception of tragedy. He claims that the early modern debates on tragedy "not only have shaped both the entire reception history of ancient drama and the history of dramatic theory in Europe, but have also deeply influenced all subsequent critical approaches and responses to Greek tragedy. They still retain their influence today", Lurie (2012) 441.

[59] Kappl (2006), (2011) and (2016), Javitch (2001), Cave (2001), Savettieri (2018), Brazeau (2018) and (2019). On the early modern reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see especially Lowry (1994), Javitch (1999), Conte (2003), Zanin (2012a).

both the domestication of the *Poetics* for a sixteenth-century Christian audience,[60] and the foundation of a modern theatrical practice as well as a modern theory on tragic genre.[61] Even admitting (as I did above) that the late antique and medieval filters of ethics and rhetoric do play a role, it does not imply that this filter was a fixed scheme applied to every interpretation of the *Poetics*. It would be extremely reductive and unrealistic to take for granted that every Renaissance reading of Aristotelian concepts, such as the *catharsis* or the *hamartia*, has been misread and mistranslated only because of moral and religious concerns.

Recently, scholars begun to highlight the fact that, in the early modern dramatic treatises, formal and aesthetic elements seem to be independent of medieval moral influences: this untraditional approach has been pointed out by Kappl, especially in relation to the concept of *catharsis*,[62] and by Javitch, who argues that the 1540's show "the emergence of a body of discourse about poetry that is much more genre-specific".[63] Contrary to the classic discussion of Weinberg, Javitch points out that the *Poetics* did not in itself stimulate new theorising about poetic drama, but rather that the production of modern tragedies based on Greek models provoked new attempts to define tragedy and its (renewed) theory.[64] Indeed, as Cave rightly explains,

> in practical terms, we can certainly say that some readings of the *Poetics* – for example, certain of the interpretations advanced by neo-Aristotelian theorists of the early modern period – are 'wrong', in the sense that they are incompatible with the linguistic, cultural and intellectual world which Aristotle and his treatise belonged. […] Yet a certain unease begins to creep in at the point where we find earlier interpretations being dismissed on the assumption that scholarship, like technology, gets better and better all the time. […] It follows that one should at least let the reception history of the *Poetics* have its full and independent value, rather than congratulating its approximations to what current scholarship regards as correct while deploring or mocking its aberrations and deformations.[65]

The aim of the following discussion is not to identify all the misreadings of *hamartia* in mid-sixteenth-century Italy by pointing out the distance from Aristotle's conception of

[60] See Brazeau (2018) and (2019).
[61] See Savettieri (2018).
[62] See especially Klapps (2011) and (2016).
[63] Javitch (2001) 128.
[64] *Ibid*.
[65] Cave (2001) 200.

tragic error (still ambiguous and problematic, after all), but rather to understand the sociocultural background affecting the development of Italian dramatic theory in the *Cinquecento*. We shall try to identify the various factors that contributed to the early modern definition of *hamartia* in Renaissance Italy, by analysing i) the philosophical and theological influences, ii) the socio-historical context, iii) the role of the reception of the *Poetics* in the broad process of Renaissance translation in Latin and vernacular, iv) the relationship between theory and practice of tragedy in the sixteenth century. Thus, in the light of the emerging scholarship, we will hopefully be able to trace a *fil rouge* of mutual influences between the *Poetics'* commentaries in the *Cinquecento* and, successively, we will try to define whether and how the Italian literary theory influenced the development of French and English theory of tragedy between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century.

2.2.1. Latin and Vernacular *Poetics* between Early and Mid-Sixteenth Century

According to Louis Kelly's *The True Interpreter* (1979), "Western Europe owes its civilization to translators".[66] Renaissance translation and, more specifically, Renaissance translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* and ancient drama played a crucial role in the dissemination of knowledge, the establishment of vernaculars, the development of political, religious, and epistemological debate in early modern Europe. As we previously saw, several factors contributed to the translation of the *Poetics* and, then, to the understanding of the ambiguous concept of *hamartia*.

In view of the most recent studies on the reception of *hamartia* in Renaissance Italy – including but not limited to Brazeau's and Savettieri's[67] – we will discuss how the sixteenth-century commentaries and translations rendered Aristotle's notion of *hamartia* in Latin and Italian vernacular, to understand the reasons of different lexical choices.

[66] Kelly (1979) 1.
[67] Brazeau (2018) and (forthcoming), and Savettieri (2018) specifically investigate the understanding of Aristotle's *hamartia* in sixteenth-century Italy. For an overview of the reception of *hamartia* in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, see Mattioda 2011. On the early modern commentaries to Aristotle's *Poetics*, it will be refer especially to Javitch (1999), Conte (2002), Schmitt (2002), Kappl (2006), Zanin (2012a) and (2014a), Leroux (2012) and (2014).

Indeed, early Latin and vernacular translations and commentaries interpreted the term by showing a growing notion of moral responsibility and using different lexical variants, such as *error*/*errore* and *peccatum/peccato* (and, as we shall see below, the French *erreur*/*faute*/*péché/fragilité* and the English *error*/*frailty*/*flaw*). It should be considered that, as Brazeau points out in his 2018 article,

> Aristotle's notion of *hamartia* was translated and adapted for sixteenth-century audiences within a context of fierce literary debates over Aristotle's *Poetics* and the religious upheaval of the Catholic Church's theological, political, and cultural responses to the threat of the Protestant Reformation. It may not be surprising, then, that a number of commentaries, translations, and poetic treatises in the period rendered Aristotle's *hamartia* with the Italian word for sin, *peccato*, rather than *errore*. Yet, this phenomenon leads us to ask *to what extent* did the religious culture of the sixteenth century impact the vernacular reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*?[68]

Our starting point is, indeed, the previous question: "*to what extent* did the religious culture of the sixteenth century impact the vernacular reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*?". Agreeing with Brazeau[69] on the necessity of a new attempt of re-reading the early modern reception of the notion of *hamartia*, eventually freed from the moralising lens of the traditional scholarship as well as from an almost exclusively religious interpretation, we shall firstly analyse and compare some key passages from sixteenth-century Italian commentaries and translations. Then, in the following paragraphs, we shall apply the same approach to the dramatic treatises of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England.

a) Before and After Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici (1536)

After the publication of the Aldine *editio princeps* of the *Poetics* in 1508, for almost thirty years, Aristotle's theory had little relevance for learned Italian readers. With the reacquisition of the Greek language as well as with the rediscovery of ancient Greek tragedy, the interest in the *Poetics* begins to develop rapidly. It is not surprising that the first relatively liable Latin translation was composed by Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici (in

[68] Brazeau (2018) 10 (my emphasis).
[69] Brazeau (2018) and (forthcoming).

1524 and published in Venice in 1536) who was also the author of the first Latin and vernacular translations of Sophocles and Euripides.

For the first time, Pazzi's volume presented Greek text and Latin translation together and separated from other works with which both were published before. Pazzi's text, even if far more reliable and complete, followed the first printed Latin translation of the *Poetics*, which however did not obtain any consideration among his contemporaries and fell into oblivion: Giorgio Valla's 1498 Latin translation of Aristotle's text. Valla's text is not a perfect translation, and his several errors are the result of both his too fragile scholarship and the imperfection of the Greek manuscript.[70] Above all, his text – echoing the late antique and medieval tradition – is much more indebted to Horace and Diomedes than to Aristotle, according to what he says about the aim and the subject of tragedy. For instance, Valla affirms that *est igitur tragedia imitatio actionis probae* ("tragedy is thus the imitation of a good action"),[71] whereas Aristotle says that ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας[72] ("tragedy is the imitation of a serious action"). As Zanin rightly points out,

> la version de Valla infléchit donc le sens du texte. La tragédie se définit moins par son style (élevé) que par sa qualité morale : l'action représentée ne doit pas être injuste, mais présenter au public une geste honnête, un modèle utile à sa formation morale […]. Elle s'inscrit dans une tradition plus vaste, qui fait de la tragédie, et plus largement de la poétique, une matière morale.[73]

Therefore, Valla's text is still characterized by the moralized idea of tragedy typical of the Middle Ages. In fact, Valla presumably looked at the Averroes' commentary on the *Poetics* (written in Arabic in the twelfth century, translated into Latin by Hermann the German in 1256 and first published in Venice in 1481), whose interpretation of tragedy was entirely ethical and implying the moral aim of poetry.[74] According to him, tragedy

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[70] The manuscript used by Valla is the Estensis gr. 100, now in the Biblioteca Estense at Modena. On Valla's translation of the *Poetics*, see especially Weinberg (1961) 361-366, and Tigerstedt (1968) 14-20. For a discussion of the manuscripts of Aritotle's *Poetics*, see Lobel (1993).

[71] Giorgio Valla, *Aristotelis ars poetica*, fol. r iiv.

[72] Aris. *Poet.* 6 1449b24-25. The term σπουδαῖος in the *Poetics* should not be intended in moral terms as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cf. Halliwell (2002) 219, Donini (2008) 39.

[73] Zanin (2014a) 93.

[74] For a discussion on Averroes' paraphrase of the *Poetics* and its influence in the Renaissance, see Weinberg (1961) 352-361.

(*ars laudandi*) and comedy (*ars uituperandi*), considered both as rhetoric poetry, aim at teaching virtue and discouraging vice.[75]

Therefore, Valla's translation of the *Poetics* is still part of a moralizing tradition which characterized the Late Antique and medieval idea of tragedy as well as the only two unsuccessful attempts of bringing back Aristotle's treatise, Averroes' commentary and William of Moerbeke's 1278 Latin translation (ignored and apparently in no way influential).[76] According to E. N. Tigerstedt,[77]

> with Giorgio Valla and his *De poetica* the first - or perhaps rather the second phase - of the Aristotelian *Poetics*' reception in the Latin West is accomplished. The *Poetics* has been translated into the language common to every educated man and, at least, some of its main ideas are expounded in a widely read book. In the following decades, knowledge of the *Poetics* becomes more and more common, even outside Italy.

Having clarified how the *Poetics* was (mis)understood until the first decades of sixteenth-century Italy, it will be easier to understand the fundamental role played by the publication of Pazzi' translation in 1536. It was a real turning point.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Valla's *De poetica* represented a "notable advance on everything that had preceded it".[78] Indeed, Pazzi undoubtedly looked at Valla's text to complete his translation. But it was far superior, especially from the philological point of view. It immediately became the most used translation of the *Poetics*, reprinted in Basel, in 1537, and in Paris, in 1538.[79]

Since Pazzi's translation was taken as the basis for the following commentaries such as those of Robortello, Maggi and Lombardi, his understanding of *hamartia* is fundamental for our study. Pazzi renders the passage of the *Poetics* 13 (1453a8-13) as follows:

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[75] Cf. Averroes, *Determinatio in poetria Aristotilis* fv-f2: Representatores et assimilatores per hæc intendunt instigare ad quasdam actiones que circa voluntaria consistunt et retrahere a quibusdam erunt necessario ea que intendunt per suas representationes aut virtutes aut vicia (Those who represent and those who imitate intend by means of their imitations to instigate to certain actions which spring from the activity of the will and to prevent certain other actions; whence those things that they seek through their imitations will of necessity be virtues and vices).

[76] Moerbeke's translation was discovered in 1931 by Lacombe and discussed by Lobel (1931). See especially the edition of *Aristoteles Latinus* by Franceschini-Minio-Paluello (1953). It is also worth noting that Moerbeke was a Dominican friar, collaborator of St. Tomas Aquinas.

[77] Tigerstedt (1968) 20.

[78] Weinberg (1961) 361.

[79] For a discussion on Pazzi's translation, see Weinberg (1961) 371-373.

> [R]eliquum est, ut ad haec maxime idoneus is habeatur, qui medius inter tales sit. Is autem erit qui nec virtute, nec iustitia antecellat minimeque per vicium pravitatemque in ipsam infelicitatem lapsus fuerit, verum **humano quodam errore**, ex magna quidem existimatione atque felicitate.
>
> (Finally, the most suitable person for this purpose [for tragic plots] should be considered to be the one who stands between two such men. He will be one who does not surpass others in virtue nor in justice. Also, he should not fall through great vice into unhappiness, but rather should fall from great reputation and happiness throughout some human error.)[80]

Pazzi, actually, seems to follow Valla's translation:

> Inter hos reliquum est sane is, qui neque virtute excellit et iusticia neque vitio et improbitate mutet in fortunam adversam, sed **errore aliquo eorum**.
>
> (Between those men that are left, there is reasonably that one who is preeminent neither in virtue nor in justice, and does not fall into misfortune by vice and wickedness, but on account of some error of his.)[81]

It is noteworthy Pazzi's addition of the adjective *humanus* to describe the error that, as Brazeau rightly suggests, "implies the protagonist's agency and human fallibility, an implication that had a marked impact in later discussions".[82]

As we shall see in the next paragraph, *hamartia* from the mid-sixteenth century on was increasingly translated as *peccatum*/*peccato*, but Valla's and Pazzi's translation as *error* was preferred by a few translators and commentators. In the first vernacular translation of the *Poetics*, entitled *Rettorica et poetica d'Aristotile* (1549), the Florentine Bernardo Segni interpreted *hamartia* in chapter 13 as *errore* (without the adjective 'human' used instead by Pazzi).[83] Based on Pazzi's translation and Robortello's commentary, it seems however that the main source for Segni was Robortello's text. (analysed in the next paragraph).

Antonio Sebastiano Minturno as well, in his Latin treatise *De poeta* (1559) understood *hamartia* as "error quidam humano", and in his Italian treatise *L'Arte poetica*

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[80] Pazzi de' Medici, *Aristotelis Poetica* 32.

[81] Valla, *Rhetorica aristotelis cum Egidii de Roma*, 4.

[82] Brazeau (2018) 24.

[83] Segni, then, renders δι᾽ἁμαρτίαν τινά as "per qualche errore". The text used is edited by Bionda (2015), who also provided a detailed and in-depth introduction to Segni and his works. For a discussion on Segni's translation, see also Weinberg (1961) 404-406.

(1563) as “humano errore”.[84] However, Minturno stresses as well the agent responsibility of the tragic hero, and he seems to be the first to refer to a fault of character before Vettori’s commentary (*vide infra*).

b) Francesco Robortello (1548)

The first extensive and influential commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics* written in early modern Italy is Francesco Robortello’s *In librum Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes*, published in Florence in 1548.[85] Not only this commentary replaced the earlier interpretations of *Poetics*, but it also profoundly influenced the future exegesis of Aristotle’s text, in Italy, France and England. In his translation of chapter 13, he followed Pazzi, thus translating *hamartia* as “humanus quidam error”, whereas in the commentary he chooses the terms *peccatum*/*peccare*:

> Quaerendum igitur est, qualis hic sit. Ac plane inter bonum ac malum is est collocandus, qui **peccat** quidem, sed **imprudens peccat**; huiusmodi enim neque bonus appellandus, quia iam **peccavit**; neque rursus malus, quia non consulto **peccavit**, sed **per imprudentiam**.
>
> (Therefore it ought to be asked, “what kind of person is this [ideal tragic protagonist]?” And plainly he is placed between good and bad, who sins, but sins imprudently; for indeed such a man ought not to be called good, because he sinned at that time; nor on the other hand ought he to be called evil, because he did not sin on purpose but through imprudence.)[86]

Robortello, then, refers to the book III of Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* to explain the tragic error on the basis of the distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions (*NE* III, 1):

> **Aristoteles libro tertio Ethicorum**, omnia quae homines agunt, aut voluntaria esse, aut non voluntaria appelanda. Voluntaria sunt, quae ἐκ τῶη προαιρεσεῶη idest ab electione

[84] For a discussion on Minturno’s works, see Weinberg (1961) 737-743. See also Leroux (2012) 318-325.
[85] For a discussion on Robortello’s *Explicationes*, see Weinberg (1961) 388-399. “Robortello prepared his own Greek text, using as a basis the Aldine text of 1508 but correcting it by consulting manuscripts; two of these were in the possession of the Medici family, and Robortello frequently argues for the superiority of their readings. He used the Pazzi’s translation; but again he corrected it, and a collation of the two Latin versions show many slight variations in detail”, Weinberg (1961) 388. For an in-depth study on Aristotle’s commentaries, see Zanin (2012a)
[86] Robortello, *In librum Aristotelis explicationes*, 131.

proveniunt. Non voluntaria sunt ea, quae aliquis invitus facit: atque sane invitius videtur agere aliquid tribus modis, aut vi coactus; **aut ignoratione & imprudentia adductus**; aut metu maioris alicuius mali […] Qui vero per **ignorationem agit**, scit quidem quid aequum, quid oportet; imprudenter tamen, & invitus agit. Hic quidem particulare ignorat, quod agit, **ut Oedipus, qui peremit Laium patrem, sciebat enim nefas esse perimere patrem; sed ignorabat illum esse patrem**. Hi quidem igitur, **qui per imprudentiam peccant, excusatione, & commiseratione digni**, ut idem ait Aristoteles libro tertio Ethicorum sub initium, his verbis. ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ἀκουσίοις συγγνώμης, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἐλέου, τὸ ἑκούσιον. Si igitur huiusmodi commiseratione digna patet referri posse ad tragoediam, quae eam perturbationem in primis studet excitare in animis auditorum.

(Aristotle in the third book of the *Ethics* [says that] all things which men do ought either to be called voluntary or involuntary. Those things are voluntary which are chosen or willed, that is which come from choice. Non-voluntary [acts] are those things which someone does against his will: and reasonably it seems that something is done against our will in these three ways, either 1) [being] compelled by force, or 2) having been persuaded by ignorance and imprudence, or 3) by fear of some greater evil. […] But he who acts on account of ignorance, indeed knows what is just and what is necessary; nevertheless he acts carelessly and against his will. Indeed this man ignores the particular element of what he does, just as Oedipus who killed Laius his father, for he knew it was an impious act to kill his father; but he did not know that that man was his father. So these men, therefore, who sin through ignorance are worthy of being excused and pitied, as Aristotle likewise says in the third book of the *Ethics* after the beginning with these words: those [actions] that are involuntary are condoned, and sometimes even pitied. Therefore, if such actions are worthy of pity, it is possible that [this] may be referred to as tragedy, which chiefly seeks to excite that emotion [i.e., pity] in the souls of spectators.)[87]

If Robortello's Latin translation follows Pazzi's text (he chooses, indeed, to translate *hamartia* as "humanus error"),[88] his *explicationes* try to clarify his exegesis: in his commentary to *Poetics* 13 (1453a8-13), where he uses the terms *peccatum/peccare* ("sin"/"to sin"), he refers to the book III of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, in order to explain the meaning of *hamartia* on the basis of the discussion on voluntary and

[87] *Ibid*.

[88] Robortello's translation of *Poetics'* chapter 13 (1453a8-13) follows exactly Pazzi's translation: Reliquum est, ut ad haec maxime idoneus is habeatur, qui medius inter tales sit. Is autem erit qui nec virtute, nec iustitia antecellat minimeque per vicium pravitatemque in ipsam infelicitatem lapsus fuerit, verum humano quodam errore, ex magna quidem existimatione atque felicitate quemadmodum Oedipus, Thyestes caeterisquae ex huiusmodi generibus illustres viri (Robortello, *Explicationes*, 113). *Vide supra*.

involuntary actions.[89] Robortello describes *hamartia* as an involuntary deed committed *per imprudentiam et ignorationem* ("through imprudence and ignorance") that is an involuntary action, according to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, committed δι' ἄγνοιαν: as we previously saw, this is the only kind of ignorance (the so-called "ignorance of particulars")[90] that deserves pity (ἔλεος) and pardon (συγγνώμη) because the involuntary actions are *not* caused by wickedness, but by the ignorance itself.[91] Thus, *hamartia* is said to be due to ignorance and imprudence: it seems that Robortello did not choose these terms accidentally as synonyms, but he rather wants to explain Aristotle' *Poetics* via Aristotle's *Ethics*. As Brazeau points out, in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "Aristotle qualifies prudence (φρόνησις) as being concerned not only with general principles, but also with particular facts. An imprudent action, then, is one that ignores particular facts but may still observe general principles."[92]

Thus, according to Robortello, *hamartia*, as being due to ignorance and imprudence, is defined as an involuntary sin (he uses the verb *peccare*) worthy of pity and pardon: *qui per imprudentiam peccant excusatione et commiseratione digni [sunt]*.[93] There is a complete overlap, then, between the concept of tragic *hamartia* and the notion of ἄγνοια as it is described in the *Ethics*. Indeed, whereas in the *Poetics* the tragic action is supposed to arouse pity and fear, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* the involuntary action committed through ignorance is said to deserve pity and pardon. On one hand, the use of the term *peccatum* and the concept of forgiveness stress on human agency, but on the other hand the justification of *hamartia* as an involuntary action committed δι' ἄγνοιαν aims at preserving the innocence of the tragic protagonist. Paradoxically, the use of *peccatum* does not imply, here, the culpability of the agent.

This ignorance of particulars is applied to the case of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, because, Robortello argues, a men acting *per ignorantiam* is "a man [that] ignores the particular elements of what he does, just as Oedipus who killed his father Laius, for he knew it was an impious act to kill his father; but he did not know that that man was his

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[89] For a discussion on voluntary and involuntary actions in Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* (and for the related bibliography), see chapter 1.4. Aristotle on Oedipus' *hamartia*.

[90] Arist. *NE* III 1,111a.

[91] Cf. Arist. *NE* III 1, 1110b24-1111a2.

[92] Brazeau (2018) 29f. See Arist. *NE* 6

[93] This is a reference to Arist. *NE* III.

father". Oedipus is, then, explicitly justified by Robortello who confirms that his involuntary action deserves to be forgiven.[94]

It is noteworthy for our analysis the fact that Robortello admits that the combination of an error committed in ignorance and the middling character can be applied only to *Oedipus Tyrannus* among the Greek tragedies. He rightly observes that any other tragic plot would be repulsive (μιαρόν) according to Aristotle's theory that tragedy cannot represent a virtuous person falling in misfortune, as it does not provoke fear but only repulsion, nor an evil person falling in ruin, as it does not provoke pity.

> Non debent igitur omnes veterum tragoediae perpendi hoc examine, aut redigi ad hanc normam; nam praeter actionem, personamque Oedipodis, qualem expressit Sophocles, nescio, an aliam reperias apud ullum ex veteribus.
>
> (Hence, not all the tragedies of the ancients should undergo this scrutiny, or be composed according to this criterion; in fact, beside Oedipus' action and character, as Sophocles gave shape to them, I do not know whether you could find another tragedy [of this kind] in any of the ancients.)[95]

Robortello, then, tries to explain why Aristotle prescribes as ideal protagonist a middling character, necessary to prevent human being from feeling repulsion (μιαρόν) towards to gods:

> sic τὸ μιαρὸν animos abalienat prorsus a Diis, qui quasi mortalia negligant, probitatemque hominum non intueantur, foveantque eos, qui virtute fuerint praediti, malis multis bonos viros conflictari permittant; ex qua re indignatio gravis oritur in animis hominum in Deos ipsos et opinio ipsos securum (ut ille ait) agere aevum, ac ociose dormitare in regendis mortalibus, **maximum enim providentiae Deorum signum esse iudicant homines, si viros bonos praemiis afficiant, improbos autem ulciscantur, maleque perdant**.

[94] Brazeau (2018) 30f. argues that Robortello's discussion on actions committed in ignorance of particulars may also refer to another passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the discussion on *akrasia* in book 7. Oedipus' *hamartia* due to ignorance of particulars, according to Brazeau, could be described in terms of *akrasia*: by referring to *NE* 7 3,182, Brazeau says that "the akratic person then may still be in possession of full knowledge of the right path of action, but makes a perceptual error by ignoring or incorrectly applying the particular premise […]. By shifting the problem of akrasia from the intellect to the realm of perception, Aristotle is able to explain how agents may act against their own better judgment by comparing the akratic agent to one influenced by passion."

[95] Robortello, *In librum Aristotelis explicationes*, 133. Cf. Savettieri (2018) 159-161 for an in-depth discussion on this passage.

> (Accordingly, repulsion alienates [human] souls from the gods, who would allow good men to undergo great harms, as if they neglected mortal matters and did not care about men's virtue and [did not] support the virtuous. And hence a grave indignation against the gods themselves originates in human souls, and the idea even arises that they live a safe life and are idly sleepy in ruling human things; in fact, men consider it to be the highest sign of divine providence when gods reward virtuous men and punish and badly destroy the evil.)[96]

Two elements, at least, are worthy of being highlighted in these passages: first, the claim that Aristotle's theory of the middling character does not reflect the corpus of survived ancient tragedies; second, the misinterpretation of the concept of μιαρόν ("repulsive"). As for the latter, it has to be considered that, whereas in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the concept of μιαρόν does not show any specific link with religion, here Robortello explains that undeserved misfortunes could undermine religious devotion and cause a feeling of alienation from the gods. Eventually, Robortello concludes that "in fact, men consider it to be the highest sign of divine providence when gods reward virtuous men and punish and badly destroy the evil".[97] Thus, Robortello confirms the idea of the doctrine that Thomas Rymer would later call "poetic justice", but he does not imply that an ideal tragedy should respect this moral scheme based on the casual connection of fault and retribution. Yet, what is interesting is the idea proposed by Robortello (and absent in the *Poetics*) of the repulsion that must be avoided in the audience in order to prevent any doubt towards the divine providence. The concept of "divine justice" will be deeply developed in the following years, both in theory and practice of tragedy, especially in France.

Savettieri, indeed, in her analysis of this passage, rightly points out that:

> a double movement occurs in Robortello's remarks on Chapter 13: on the one hand, he attempts to explore different plot configurations beside the Aristotelian; on the other, a sense of uneasiness and theoretical anxiety prevents him from inquiring how the agency of a virtuous character can engender errors, or to what extent a tragic plot can be developed in the absence of errors or human fallacy. Even though in Robortello's commentary no room is left for such an inquiry, the hypothesis of a tragic plot revolving around a virtuous agent who suffers a drastic reversal of fortune was widely discussed in the Italian Renaissance. Late antique and medieval scholarship that allowed an interpretation of tragedy as a lament upon

[96] *Ibid*.
[97] *Ibid*.

> undeserved misfortunes striking virtuous persons was still influential and, as some scholars claim, affected the circulation and interpretation of Aristotelian concepts.[98]

Thus, despite the fact that Robortello's *Explicationes* render the notion of *hamartia* sometimes as *error* and sometimes as *peccatum*, and even though it is evident a feeble Christianisation of lexical choices (*peccatum, peccare, providentia*), his discussion on chapter 13 is rigorously Aristotelian and aiming at explaining the *Poetics* throughout the *Ethics*.[99] As a result, though, his lexical choice of *peccatum* will have a profound impact on the fifteenth-century theory of tragedy.

c) Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi (1550)

The second of the great published fifteenth-century commentaries in Italy was that of Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi, entitled *In Aristotelis librum de poetica communes explanationes*. The text and translation are essentially those of Pazzi, whereas the commentary is influenced by Robortello's *Explicationes*.[100] In the *explanations*, the term *peccatum* occurs in a similar discussion on voluntary and involuntary action:

> Iam igitur apparet cuius conditionis homines Tragoediis materiam praestent, viri inquam illustres ac felices, hoc est, qui copiis ac imperio reliquos antecellunt, sed non virtute; cum non animi pravitate, sed **ignorantia** patrando scelus in infelicitatem labuntur. Quod hominum genus inter bonos ac pravos medium esse dicit: quoniam **peccantes** bonos non appellamus. **Qui vero peccant, neque ex proposito id praestant, sed ob imprudentiam efficiunt**, mali prorius [sic] dici non debent: iccirco inter bonos ac pravos medii erunt.
>
> (Now, therefore, it appears that men of this condition supply material for tragedies. I say illustrious men, and happy ones, that is those who surpass [others] in wealth and available power, but not in virtue; since they do not fall into unhappiness by the depravity of soul, but by having done an evil deed out of ignorance. [Aristotle] says that this kind of man is in the middle between good and bad men; since we do not call sinners [peccantes] good. But those

[98] Savettieri (2018) 161.
[99] See Brazeau (2018) 31. For a discussion on the tragic error in Robortello's commentary, see also Leroux (2014).
[100] For a discussion on Lombardi's and Maggi's commentary, see Weinberg (1961) 406-418. See also Zanin (2012).

who sin and do so, not on purpose, but rather on account of imprudence should not be called absolutely evil: therefore they will be midway between good and bad people.)[101]

According to Maggi and Lombardi, tragic heroes are not culpable because they "sin" (*peccant*) throughout "ignorance" (*ignorantia*) and "imprudence" (*imprudentia*). Even if outdistanced, the terms *ignorantia* and *imprudentia*, used by Robortello as a hendiadys, recur here in order to define *hamartia* as an involuntary deed committed in ignorance of particulars (as explained in the book 3 of the *Nicomachean* Ethics) and, then, deserving forgiveness and pity. The middling character is here, paradoxically, described as *peccans* ("sinner") whose action is caused by ignorance and imprudence. The innocence of the sinner is, thus, preserved.

d) The *Canace* controversy: Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio and Sperone Speroni (1542-1558)

Interpretations of *hamartia* played an important role in mid-sixteenth-century theoretical debates, not limited to translations and commentaries. In 1546 the playwright Sperone Speroni published a tragedy in Italian vernacular entitled *Canace*, already read and known in 1542 in Padua within the Accademia degli Infiammati. *Canace* is a controversial tragedy, mostly analysed in consideration of the quarrels it provoked in the contemporary literary circles.[102] It retells the story, based on an epistle in Ovid's *Heroides* (XI), of Aeolus' children, Canace and his brother Macareo, and their incestuous love, provoked by Venus. Indeed, the goddess, as being angry at Aeolus for creating the tempest that wrecked her son Aeneas' fleet,[103] to punish the god of the wind she makes them fall in love with each other. When Aeolus finds out about the incest, Canace is forced to kill herself, and Macareo commits suicide. Sperone's tragedy is the starting point of the most influential sixteenth-century literary quarrel about tragedy: an anonymous polemic dialogue criticising *Canace*, the *Giudizio sopra la tragedia di Canace et Macareo*, circulated in manuscript throughout the mid-sixteenth century and

[101] Maggi and Lombardi, *In Aristotelis librum…explanationes*, 124.
[102] For a discussion on the quarrel over Speroni's *Canace*, see especially Weinberg (1961) 912-953. See also Maślanka-Soro (2010), Oberto (2017), Savettieri (2018) 152-159, Brazeau (2018) 25-27.
[103] Cf. Virg. *Aen.* I.

was published in 1550. It was C. Roaf who attributed the *Giudizio* to Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio, one of the first playwrights to rediscover and stage ancient tragedies.[104]

The understanding of *hamartia* and the moral stature of the middling character are some of the issues debated in the *Giudizio*: Giraldi Cinzio argues that Sperone's tragedy transgresses (what he thinks are) the Aristotelian norms, thus compromising the quality of the play. Sperone's tragedy is condemned by a character of the *Giudizio* (Lodovico Boccadiferro) for presenting Canace and Macareo as immoral characters, whose downfall then does not arouse pity nor fear. S. Oberto rightly explains that

> as [Giraldi Cinzio] states in his *Giudizio*, in first place the didactic function inherent to the genre, the generation of "terrore" and "pietà" in the spectator, in Speroni's *Canace* is nullified by the recourse to "così sozza e scelerata materia"[105] and its teaching the wrong things. In no way do the two incestuous siblings correspond to Aristotle's "middle hero", because unlike Oedipus for instance, Canace and Macareo are aware of their kinship and nonetheless engage in a depraved affair. This way Speroni exhibits a "perseveranza volontaria nel male"[106] that is not instructive for the public and is opposed to the Aristotelian principle of only imitating illustrious actions in the tragedy.[107]

The crucial problem, as pointed out also by Brazeau,[108] is not the incestuous relationship itself, but rather what is called the "perseveranza volontaria del male", that is the fact that Canace and Macareo commit the incest in full knowledge of their familial relationship. This makes the characters immoral and, then, not arousing in the audience pity nor fear. To stress the element of willingness, Lodovico Boccadiferro compares the plot of *Canace* with that of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, by showing that in the latter the theme of the incest, since it is involuntary and due to ignorance, respects the moral condition of the middling character and arouses pity and fear, as prescribed in the *Poetics*:

> [Q]uello che potria essere di scelerato nella Tragedia non venne per scienza e volontà e consentimento o di Giocasta o di Edipo, ma **per errore** perché Giocasta **non conosceva** Edipo per figliuolo, né Edipo Giocasta per madre.

[104] See Roaf (1959) and (1982).
[105] Giraldi, *Giudizio*, 98.
[106] *Ibid*. 104 and 112.
[107] Oberto (2017) 77.
[108] Brazeau (2018) 25.

(Whatever aspects of wickedness there may be in the tragedy do not occur through the knowledge, will, and consent of either Jocasta or Oedipus, but rather through error. Jocasta did not know Oedipus to be her son, nor did Oedipus recognise Jocasta as his mother.)[109]

According to Giraldi Cinzio, the incest portrayed in the *Canace* is considered a voluntary action (thus inappropriate for a tragic plot) in opposition to the involuntary error committed in ignorance by Oedipus and Jocasta. As argued by Robortello and Maggi, here too the element stressed to define *hamartia* is ignorance. And here too the term *peccato* occurs as referring to Oedipus' deeds, but – as in the commentaries abovementioned – the ignorance of particulars and the lack of will make his sin worthy of pity and forgiveness:

La qual cosa non ha voluto alcuno de' buoni autori che fusse mai in Edipo; anzi hanno finto che 'l miser si congiunse colla madre **non di propria volontà** ma oltre ogni suo pensiero, e questo solo per farlo atto a Tragedia, il che non avria potuto avvenire (volendo far nascere sopra di lui la compassione) se senza riguardo alcuno si fusse colla madre congiunto; ma **l'ignoranza del suo peccato ha levato da lui ogni sceleraggine e l'ha fatto degnissimo di compassione.**

(No good authors ever wanted Oedipus to have this trait; rather, they pretend that the poor man lay with his mother, not of his own will but beyond any of his knowledge, and this was only done to make him appropriate for Tragedy (wishing to make him provoke compassion). This could not have occurred if he had slept with his mother without a care in the world; but the ignorance of his sin forgives him of any wickedness and makes him worthy of compassion.)

In the *Giudizio* the terms *errore* and *peccato* coexist and seem to have the same meaning: an involuntary error done throughout ignorance and worthy of pity and pardon (as described by Robortello referring to the book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*). The didacticism and the moralism (the claim that the tragedy has to be an *exemplum*), as well as the use of the term *peccato*, do not imply an unequivocal religious influence.[110]

[109] Giraldi, *Giudizio*, 100.
[110] For this argumentation it has been referred especially to Brazeau (2018).

What does Sperone Speroni reply in defence of his *Canace*? To justify his theatrical choices, he wrote the *Apologia* in 1554 and *Lezioni in difesa di Canace* in 1558.[111] According to Speroni, the incest of Canace and Macareo would be an error resulting from an excess of love:

> Ma quai persone potea trovare il mio amico, la cui fortuna di felice in infelice tornata, tanto in sé ritenesse di quel terrifico e miserando che alla tragedia è richiesta, quanto già n'ebbero gli infortuni di Canace e di Macareo? E ecco che, perché meglio due tali affetti si commovessero, non contento il poeta che i due fratelli fosser mezzo tra buoni e rei […] volle imitarli il poeta nella età lor giovenile, nella quale è men vergogna il fallire, e la **compassione** è maggiore. E volle insieme che **quello errore che fu cagion della lor miseria, fosse errore amoroso**, con esso il quale […] rade volte adiviene che da **pietade** si discompagni.
>
> ("But what persons could my fellow find, whose reversed fortune held as much of that terror and pity tragedy requires as the misfortunes of Canace and Macareo had? Hence, in order to arouse those two emotions, the poet not only made them middling but imitated them in their youth, in which errors are less shameful and pity is greater. And he decided also that the error causing their misfortune should be an error of love, which rarely is not accompanied by pity.")[112]

Speroni, in defence of his *Canace*, influenced by the contemporary Neo-Platonic philosophy, discusses the nature of love, by referring also to Dante and Petrarca and, thus, distinguishing three categories: a) desire of beauty, b) excess of friendship, and c) excess of love.[113] He argues that the case of Canace and Macareo can be included in the third category, the excess of love, that can be considered, according to him, a human mistake ("errori…umani").[114] Speroni's digression about love clearly aims at comparing the definition of the excess of love as a "human error" to the definition of *hamartia* made in Aristotle's early modern commentaries, as he explicitly points out:

> Gli **errori** de gli amanti non sono sceleratezze, ma si debbano chiamare **umani**, perché l'uomo ama come ragionevole e perciò **umanamente pecca**; e se così è che **l'error de gli inamorati sia umano**, adonque noi semo nella particola di Aristotele dove dice che persone

[111] See Roaf (1982) XIV-LXI and Oberto (2017) 79-88. For an in-depth discussion on Giraldi's and Speroni's understanding of tragic error, see Savettieri (2018) 154-159.
[112] Speroni, *Lezioni in difesa della Canace*, in Roaf (1982) 191.
[113] *Ibid*. 227f.
[114] *Ibid*. 228.

> tragiche sono quelle che *non per dedecus et pravitatem sed humano quodam errore in infelicitatem lapsi sunt*.

> For these reasons, lovers' errors are not crimes and should be deemed human, because the human being loves as a reasonable creature and hence faults as human; and if it is true that lovers' error is human, then we fall in the scope of that paragraph in which Aristotle says that tragic characters are those who non *per dedecus et pravitatem sed humano quodam errore in infelicitatem lapsi sunt*.[115]

Therefore, Speroni tries to justify the excess of love as a tragic *hamartia* referring to the passage of Aristotle's *Poetics* (in chapter 13) throughout Maggi-Lombardi's commentary on the *Poetics*. As Savettieri rightly points out, "Speroni bypasses the relationship between the moral quality of the characters and the need for fear and pity to be elicited, and subordinates the former to the latter."[116] However, it has to be considered that the relationship between human fallibility and the excess of passion has been discussed by Aristotle, not in the *Poetics*, but rather in the second book of the *Rhetoric*, where he affirms that most of the mistakes committed by young people are due to excess of passion.[117]

It is evident that Speroni, to define the tragic error, is not referring here to Aristotle's *hamartia*, but rather to the error of incontinence: to discuss the incontinence and neutralize any criticism of immoralism, though, he does not refer to the notion of Aristotle's *akrasia* (discussed in the book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), but rather to the lovers Paolo and Francesca in Dante's *Inferno* (V, 103-105) as well as to Petrarca's *Canzoniere* (LXXI, 57-60).[118] Speroni stresses on the feelings of pity and compassion that Dante feels in telling the story of the two lovers, who are not at all presented as wicked, but just unable to dominate their passion.[119]

In conclusion, at least three essential elements emerge from the analysis of the *Canace* controversy: the new interpretation of the middling character and the notion of *hamartia*, and the way how Aristotle is referred to as an authority to justify the incest.

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[115] *Ibid.*
[116] Savettieri (2018) 157.
[117] Arist. *Rhet.* II 1389b. The passage is mentioned by Oberto (2017) 83.
[118] Speroni, *Lezioni in difesa della Canace*, 225-227.
[119] *Ibid*. 226.

As we previously saw, in the *Giudizio*, Giraldi Cinzio accuses the *Canace* of portraying immoral characters, far from the prescribed middling character of *Poetics* 13 and, thus, not arousing pity nor fear because of their wickedness. To justify the moral stature of Canace and Macareo, Speroni at first tries to label them as middling characters by discuss the "error of excess of love" as a human mistake (and referring to previous translations of *hamartia* as *humanus error* chosen by Pazzi, Robortello and Maggi), then he justifies the immorality of the incest by recurring to the incontinent lovers described in Dante's *Inferno*. The also explains character, far from that prescribed in the *Poetics* and in the previous commentaries, becomes an incontinent lover, not evil, but dominated by his or her passion and, thus, arousing pity and compassion.

The notion of *hamartia* plays a crucial role in the literary quarrel, and it is rendered sometimes as *errore* and sometimes as *peccato*, but the latter does not have a specific religious meaning. According to Giraldi Cinzio, the *hamartia par excellence* is represented in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in opposition to the *Canace*: Oedipus' and Jocasta's incest is an involuntary action, committed throughout ignorance, and worthy of pity ad compassion. It is evident the influence of Robortello's and Maggi's commentaries who, as we know, refer to book 3 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Speroni, on the contrary, seems to take Aristotle as the normative reference (by defining the excess of love as a human error and, so, a *hamartia*), but later he takes the distance from Aristotle and refers to Dante's Paolo and Francesca as a justification for the incestuous lovers and their incontinent love. Canace and Macareo are not evil, just incontinent. [120]

Therefore, Speroni, definitely takes distance from Aristotelian theory and his traditional mid-fifteen-century interpretation. He proposes a new theorisation of middling character and his *hamartia*:

> Ma concesso anche questo, che queste persone siano scelerate, dico che anche sopra gli scelerati può farsi cader compassione.
>
> But allowed also this, that these people are wicked, I say that wicked people can also arouse compassion.[121]

[120] Speroni, *Lezioni in difesa della Canace*, 229: "Non saranno scelerati, adonque, i fratelli della tragedia, e per conseguente non si escluderanno da essa, perché sono incontinenti non malvagi".
[121] *Ibid*.

Speroni clearly stresses on the emotion of pity that tragedy should arouse in the audience rather than the moral stature of tragic characters: therefore, he says, evil agents can be tragic. “It is not Speroni’s tragedy that does not comply with the rule of the middling character – Savettieri points out – it is the rule itself that has no correspondence in the ancient tragic corpus.”[122] If at first Speroni tries to justify his *Canace* throughout Aristotle’s theory, he eventually offers a new exegesis of the ideal tragic character and of *hamartia*, thus claiming his independence from Aristotle’s normative theory, whose authority is the fundamental starting point for the mid-fifteenth-century theory of tragedy in Italy.

e) Pietro Vettori (1560)

After Robortello’s and Maggi’s works, the third of the great commentaries on Aristotle’s *Poetics* is Pietro Vettori’s 1560 *Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum*.[123] Vettori’s work is composed by the Greek text, followed by a new Latin translation and an extensive commentary. In translating the *hamartia*-passage of the *Poetics* (13 1453a7-17), Vettori uses at first the term *error*, then *peccatum*: his translation of δι’ ἁμαρτίαν τινά (1453a10-11) is *propter errore quondam*,[124] then a few lines below he translates δι’ ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην (1453a16) as *propter peccatum magnum*.[125] He explains the first passage as follows:

> Quid autem proprie ἁμαρτία foret, docuit ipse in quaestione xxvi segmenti eius, quo explicat ea, quae pertinent ad harmoniam. Inquit enim: ἁμαρτία | δέ ἐστι τοῦ χείρονος πρᾶξις. Cum igitur aliquis relicto eo, quod facere praestabat, **propter imprudentiam** id, quod est deterius gerit, tunc labitur ac **peccat**. Exempli causa. **Oedipus lapsus est quia ira commotus interfecit Laium: nec cognovit eum patrem esse**: praestabat autem iniuriam eam quam acceperat ab eius satellite aequo animo ferre, nec tantopere excandescere.

[122] Savettieri (2018) 158.
[123] For a discussion on Vettori’s commentary, see Weinberg (1961) 461-466. See also Brazeau (2018) 32-35, Zanin (2012a) and Bremer (1969) 69.
[124] Vettori, *Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum*, 123.
[125] *Ibid.* 124.

> (What, however, [Aristotle] specifically meant by hamartia, he teaches in question xxvi of the fragment, in which he explains it as that which pertains to harmony. For he says "hamartia is doing what is worse." Therefore, when someone leaves behind that which he ought to have done, and commits an act for which he is responsible on account of imprudence, he behaves wrongly, and thereupon falls and sins. For example, Oedipus acted wrongly because he killed Laius when moved by rage: he did not know him to be his father. However, it was better for him to bear his injury which he received from one of his [Laius's] attendants with a level head, rather than to burn up with rage.)[126]

Vettori starts his comment from a gloss of the *Problemata* (XIX, 26; 219 B) and, differently from his predecessors, he does not stress on the discussions of voluntary and involuntary actions of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but he rather defines *hamartia* as "doing what is worse", *i.e.* choosing the worse of two possible choices. By stressing the notion of agent responsibility, Vettori takes the case of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as an example and argues that his *hamartia* is due to the lack of control of his rage, when he kills Laius at the crossroad. Actually, despite the emphasis on moral responsibility, as Brazeau rightly suggests,[127] Vettori is influenced by both Robortello's characteristics of *ignorantia* and *impredentia* (that is Robortello's explicit reference to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*).[128] The notions of *imprudentia*, however, is shortly replaced with Vettori's explanation of Oedipus' *hamartia* as due to an impetuous rage, so that *hamartia*, as an error committed in ignorance, becomes here a moral failure, due to a wrong choice and dominated by rage. He should have controlled his anger. To define this moral failure, Vettori uses the verb "to sin": *tunc labitur ac peccat* ("thereupon he falls and sins"). On the basis of this passage, as Brazeau convincingly suggests, it comes naturally to suppose that Vettori may be referring here to the Aristotelian notion of *akrasia*,

> as ignorance of the particular premise when overcome by passions due to an error in perception […]. Indeed, later in book 7 [of *Nicomachean Ethics*], Aristotle characterizes anger due to *akrasia* in terms similar to Vettori's description of Oedipus's murder of Laius […]. Oedipus's error in perception would result from his ignorance of a key aspect of the particular premise: namely, that "this man" is his father.[129]

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[126] *Ibid*.
[127] Brazeau (2018) 33.
[128] Vettori, indeed, says that *hamartia* is "an act for which one is responsible on account of imprudence" and, by referring to Oedipus, he says that "he did not know him to be his father".
[129] Brazeau (2018) 34.

Anyhow, the emphasis on *Oedipus*' moral responsibility, thus adding the element of the protagonist' volition, for the first time introduces the interpretation of *hamartia* as a fault of character, exegesis that will deeply influence the subsequent theorists,[130] especially in France.

f) Reflections on Mid-Fifteenth-Century Translations of *hamartia*

In Latin and vernacular translations and commentaries as well as in dramatic treatises produced in mid-fifteenth-century Italy, we saw that *hamartia* has been translated using both terms *error/errore* and *peccatum/peccato* (except for Pazzi's 1536 Latin translation and Segni's 1549 vernacular translation of the *Poetics* who use only the former). It cannot be denied that it is evident a deep process of moralization of Aristotle's treatise, as shown by Lurie in his abovementioned book,[131] starting with Robortello's commentary and mostly stressed by Vettori's discussion on Oedipus' moral responsibility. Nevertheless, as anticipated before, Brazeau convincingly showed how the increased usage of *peccatum/peccato* rather than *error/errore* does not appear to be a sign of theological interpretations influenced by a Counter-Reformation (mis)reading of *hamartia* as sin. The use of *peccatum/peccato* and *error/errore* seems to be entirely interchangeable and usually integrated into the discussion on voluntary and involuntary actions. As for the passages analysed until this point, the moralising reading of the *Poetics* can be explained throughout the reference to Aristotle's moral philosophy rather than to a real process of Christianisation (which though will occur later in works such as Catelvetro's commentary).

The Christianising lexical choices characterising the pre-modern reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*, as Brazeau rightly argues,

> might instead be seen as an effort on the part of commentators to linguistically domesticate Aristotle's text for a Christian audience. Translators and commentators did not ask, for example, whether a tragic protagonist's *hamartia* was a venial or mortal sin, how it might be expiated through penance, or whether tragedies should represent the sacrament of confession

[130] Cf. Lurie (2004) 113-115, and Mattioda (2011) 41-42.
[131] Lurie (2004) 28-65.

> – all of which were concerns of great importance to the Tridentine Council. More importantly, despite the influence of Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* from Robortello onward, there appears to be no evidence of Augustinian influence, which would have made it easy for a commentator to link his discussion of akrasia to the Christian conception of sin. Precise and strictly theological definitions of sin thus appear to be less relevant than the translational strategy that motivated the translation of *hamartia* as *peccato*.[132]

Therefore, in mid-century discussions of *hamartia*, there is no specific influence of any theological interpretation. Indeed, according to Mattioda's recent work on sixteenth-century interpretations of *hamartia*, discussions on tragic error throughout the lens of moral philosophy testify a literature's need for autonomy from theological dogma in the period of the Counter-Reformation.[133] In the early *Cinquecento*, Aristotle's *Poetics* is still considered as a normative model to rediscover and preserve (although throughout the filter of moral philosophy) rather than an object of Christian reinterpretation.

2.2.2. Lodovico Castelvetro (1570): "la persona santissima" and *hamartia* Christianized

The year 1570 is a turning point in the reception of the *Poetics*. It is the year of the publication of the first Italian commentary and, hence, the first in any European vernacular, that is Lodovico Castelvetro's *Poetica d'Aristotile vulgarizzata et sposta*, printed in Vienna in 1570, and then in Basel in 1576. It is composed by the Greek text, followed by the vulgarisation ("vulgarizzamento") and a long commentary ("spositione").[134] Differently from his predecessors, Castelvetro not only tries to finally vulgarize Aristotle's theory[135], but he explicitly declares his intention of developing his own theory, so that "Aristotle was used partly as a point of departure, partly as an opponent."[136] He clearly explains his purpose as it follows:

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[132] Brazeau (2018) 34-35.
[133] Mattioda (2011) 38.
[134] For a discussion on Castelvetro's understanding of the *Poetics*, see Weinberg (1961) 502-511. See also Zanin (2012a).
[135] On the vulgarisation of Aristotle in Renaissance Italy, see Bianchi (2012) and Sgarbi (2016). More generally, on the major treatments on the theory of vulgarisation in Italian Renaissance (including also Castelvetro), see Sgarbi (2018).
[136] Weinberg (1961) 503. Cf. Zanin (2012a) 62f.

> Ho tentato, e forse con più ardore d'animo che con felicità d'effetto, di far manifesta l'arte poetica, non solamente mostrando e aprendo quello che è stato lasciato scritto in queste poche carte da quel sommo filosofo, ma quello ancora che doveva e poteva essere scritto, per utilità piena di coloro che volessero sapere come si debba fare a comporre bene poemi e a giudicare dirittamente se i composti abbiano quello che deono avere o no.
>
> (I have tried, perhaps with greater ardour of spirit than felicity of result, showing and displaying not only what was handed down to us in these few pages by that greatest of all philosophers, but also whatever should or could be written for the full benefit of those who might wish to know how one should go about composing poems correctly and how one should judge properly whether those already written do or do not have what they ought to have.[137])

His commentary explicitly proposes a reinterpretation of the *Poetics*, throughout a process of adaptation and refutation, that can be undoubtedly defined as providing "a profoundly spiritual and Christianizing interpretation of *hamartia.*"[138] Indeed, it is worth mentioning his relationship with the Counter-Reformation: he was compelled to flee Italy in 1561 after being accused of heresy for importing and distributing Protestant texts, and his commentary was composed after his forced departure.[139]

The discussion on the ideal tragic character and the Aristotelian prescription of the middling character is as it follows:

> Ma, prima che procediamo più oltre, è da por mente che Aristotele in questo luogo pare presupporre che Dio abbia cura speziale degli uomini particolari, e spezialmente degli uomini da bene, in quanto dice che non si deono **gli uomini di santissima vita** rappresentare che trapassino da felicità a miseria, percioché questa non sarebbe cosa né spaventevole né compassionevole, ma abominevole, cioè **sarebbe cosa che indurrebbe gli uomini a credere che Dio non avesse providenza speziale de' suoi divoti e che fosse ingiusto**, poiché così male meritasse coloro che gli rendono il debito onore, permettendo che caggiano di felicità in miseria.
>
> (Yet, before we continue, one must recall that in this passage Aristotle appears to presuppose that God takes special care of particular men, and especially of good men, where he says that

[137] Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotile*, 3.

[138] Brazeau (2018) 35. On Castelevetro's interpretation of *hamartia* and the ideal tragic character, see Brazeau (2018) 35-40, and Savettieri (2018) 162-164. On his relationship with the other sixteenth-century translations and commentaries on the *Poetics*, see Siekiera (2008) and Zanin (2012a).

[139] On Castelvetro's relationship with the Counter-Reformation, see especially Jossa (2014). See also Firpo-Mongini (2008), in particular the chapter wrote by Vasoli (2008).

> one should not represent men who lead most holy lives falling from happiness into misery, because this would not be frightening nor pathetic, but rather abominable, that is it would be the sort of thing that would induce men to believe that God does not have special providence over his faithful and that he is unjust, since he rewards those who pay him due honour so poorly, allowing them to fall from happiness into misery.[140])

In Castelvetro's commentary, virtuous men – who according to Aristotle do not have to be represented as passing from fortune to misfortune – become "uomini di santissima vita", *i.e.* men who lead most holy lives. Whereas for Aristotle the only reason to avoid this kind of tragic plot is due to the fact that "this is neither fearful nor pitiful but repulsive",[141] Castelvetro argues that, according to Aristotle, the tragic plot of virtuous men falling in misfortune would be abominable ("abominevole") as it would induce the audience to doubt the Providence of God and to distrust the divine justice. Castelvetro, then, ascribes to Aristotle a Christianizing meaning of μιαρόν that is not found in the *Poetics*. According to Castelvetro, Aristotle would forbid the plot of a virtuous character fallen in ruin not for the immorality of the plot nor for the lack of poetic efficacy, but exclusively because the downfall of men of very holy life ("uomini di santissima vita") could elicit resentment against God ("sdegno contra Dio").[142]

Furthermore, Castelvetro eventually refuses Aristotle's claim that the downfall of a virtuous man does not arouse pity nor fear, arguing rather that the resentment against God, if any, does not prevent the audience to feel pity and fear towards the downfall of an innocent (the "persona santissima") in the same way as in front of a middling character who is not completely guilty (the "persona mezzana") and whose punishment is undeserved. He also adds that the approach of the audience towards a wholly virtuous man as well as a middling character, who is partially innocent, would be any way repulsive because common people believe in the justice of God, who would not punish anyone undeservedly. Eventually, Castelvetro argues, no matter what kind of configuration people witness in a tragic plot (whether the downfall of a virtuous or bad or middling character), they will believe anyway

[140] Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotile*, 1:361.

[141] Arist. *Po*. 13 1452b34-37.

[142] Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotile*, 1:362: "Ma dice Aristotele che [la persona di singolare santità trapassando da felicità a miseria] non generà né spavento né compassione, ma sdegno contro Dio, il che è cosa abominevole" (Aristotle says that [a person of singular holiness passing from happiness into misery] does not generate fear nor pity, but resentment against God, il che è cosa abominevole).

that there is a greater unknown plan following the rules of a God who is just and cares about human matters.[143]

Castelvetro's Christianizing adaptation has a significant impact on the exegesis of *hamartia*:

> Ora, secondo Aristotele, se la persona santissima trapassa da felicità a miseria, presta cagione alla gente di mormorare contra Dio e di dolersi di lui che permette così fatto trapassamento; ma **se la persona mezzana trapassa da felicità a miseria, non dà cagione alla gente di mormorare contra Dio né di dolersi di lui**, percioché sì come ci possiamo immaginare, è assai ragionevole che avenga questo così fatto trapassamento a quella persona **per gli peccati suoi,** avegna che non sieno de' più orribili del mondo e sieno mischiati tra alcune buone operazioni.
>
> (Now, according to Aristotle, if a most holy person falls from a state of happiness into a state of misfortune, this gives the people reason to grumble against God and to complain about him, that he should allow such an unjust fall; but if a person of middle station falls from happiness into misfortune, this does not give the people any reason to grumble against God, nor to complain about him, thus, as we can imagine, it is quite reasonable that such a fall should happen to this person on account of his sins, so long as they are not the worst in the world, and that they are mixed in among several good acts.)[144]

For the first time, the term *peccato*, used to define the notion of *hamartia*, is considered as a Christian sin. This lexical choice is not only part of the process of vulgarisation of pagan text for a Christian audience, but it is rather an instrument allowing a broader discussion on the Christian doctrine. This substitution of the Christian sin for Aristotle's *hamartia* obviously modifies the way how the tragic plot and the ideal tragic character are considered; according to Castelvetro, common people's faith in divine justice is unshakeable: indeed, as Brazeau explains,

> if tragic events happen to a person who appears virtuous, the audience will not assume that God is unjust; but rather that this person is being punished for her sins, since there is no one who does not occasionally sin and since God as a fair judge will not let sins go unpunished.[145]

Therefore, we have seen how Castelvetro's commentary starts with Aristotle's theory, which is partially but explicitly refused in order to be adapted to his Christian values.

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[143] See *Ibid.* 1:361-364.
[144] *Ibid.* 1:370.
[145] Brazeau (2018) 38. Cf. also Savettieri (2018)162-164.

Brazeau suggests that Castelvetro's Christianizing interpretation, since it is really different from those of his predecessors, is likely to have been influenced by the contact with the Protestant theorists of North Europe, such as Joachim Camerarius (who published the 1531 *Argumentum fabulae* as an introduction to his commentary on *Oedipus Tyrannus*) and Philipp Melanchthon (whose 1545 *Cohortatio ad legendas tragoedias et comoedias* "marks a pivotal moment in the history of interpretation of Greek tragedy").[146] After Castelvetro fled Italy (where these Protestant texts were likely to be inaccessible), he would have easily been able to access them during his stay in Geneva, Lyon, and Vienna. It is likely that especially Melanchthon's theological works had an impact on his commentary: Castelvetro, indeed, played a fundamental role in the Italian reception of Melanchthon, since he translated for the first time in vernacular Italian Melanchthon's 1521 *Loci Communes Theologici*, printed by Manuce between 1530 and 1534. Furthermore, Castelvetro's library included fundamental works of Protestant Humanism influenced by Erasmus, aiming at facilitating the exegesis of Scripture, as well as other key polemical works, such as Calvin's *Institutio Christianae Religionis* and various works by Luther.[147]

Therefore, Castelvetro was wholly aware of theological implications of his lexical choices, which are interestingly influenced not by the Italian context of the Counter-Reformation, but rather by his interest in Scripture's exegesis and by the Protestant reception of Sophocles in Northern Europe.[148] His *Poetica d'Aristotile vulgarizzata et sposta* is an adaptation of the *Poetics* taken as an instrument to express a specific message in Reformed context.

The idea of a uniform theodicy, based on divine justice and clearly asserted in Castelevetro's commentary is perfectly in agreement with Melanchthon's interpretation of Greek tragedy in his 1545 *Cohortatio*:

> These events [sc. in Greek tragedies] impressed upon men the causes of human misfortunes, which they saw in these examples being brought about and exacerbated by depraved passions

[146] Lurie (2012) 442. On Camerarius' and Melanchthon's approach to Aristotle and Greek tragedy, see Lurie (2012).

[147] For an excellent discussion on the impact of the Reformation debate on the rediscovery of tragedy and Aristotle's *Poetics* (including an in-depth analysis on Castelvetro's relationship with Melanchthon's worka), see Leo (2019).

[148] Brazeau (2018) 40.

> […]. This is the thought they wish to impress upon the hearts of every man: that there is some eternal mind that always inflicts severe punishments upon atrocious crimes.[149]

Both Castelvetro's *Poetica* and Melanchthon's *Cohortatio* become instruments in the service of theodicy and against Platonist and Christian critics to the tragic genre. This moral interpretation will influence both French neo-classical doctrine and English doctrine of "poetic justice" during the following decades.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that in 1545 Melanchthon gave a series of lectures on Sophocles, published one year later, in which he tried to apply to Sophoclean tragedy the ideas developed in his *Cohortatio*. It is not too surprising that the only play that he did not comment was the *Oedipus Tyrannus*: he seemed to be unable to apply a providential interpretation based on divine justice to Oedipus' story. Eventually, in the third chapter, we shall see a few examples of early modern Oedipus (mis)understood through the point of view of a theodicy.[150]

2.2.3. *Contra* Castelvetro: *hamartia* as *error/errore* in Late-Sixteenth Century Italy

The analysis of the first Latin and vernacular commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* clearly suggests how, starting from the mid-sixteenth century, the approach of commentators becomes always less interested in philological issues, and more focused on the hermeneutics of the text, often leading to the development of their own personal reflections on dramatic theory. Indeed, as Zanin rightly explains,

> le commentaire de la *Poétique* tend ainsi à devenir un traité de poétique. Au lieu de commenter le texte pour en expliciter le sens particulier, les auteurs ont tendance à exposer la *Poétique* pour en dégager des définitions littéraires et des règles générales de composition.[151]

Commentators' and theorists' tendency to focus more on the development of a new early modern poetics (considering Aristotle's authority as a starting point) will be always more evident especially abroad, in Spain, in France, in England, and in Germany, by the end of the sixteenth century onwards. However, already in Italy, starting from Robortello's 1548

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[149] Melanchthon, *Cohortatio*, 568.
[150] See Lurie (2012) 442-444.
[151] Zanin (2012a) 63.

commentary, it starts to become clear the distance separating Renaissance commentaries from the humanist approach to ancient texts, developed along with the rise of philology during the fifteenth century.[152]

In the early- and mid-sixteenth century, as we previously saw, some commentators (such as Robortello, Maggi, Vettori) understand the notion of *hamartia* through the filter of moral philosophy (alternating the terms *error/errore* and *peccatum/peccato*), whereas Castelvetro explicitly proposes a Christianizing interpretation (thus using the term *peccato*) inspired by the Reformation context. Eventually, during the latter decades of the sixteenth century, as Brazeau rightly points out,[153] we can assist to a countertrend in the translation of *hamartia*, which is mostly rendered as *error/errore*, while the term *peccatum/peccato* is rather used to define poetical mistakes on the part of the author.[154]

Alessandro Piccolomini's 1575 *Annotationi nel libro della Poetica d'Aristotile* is the second of the commentaries in vernacular. He frequently disagrees with his predecessors, especially with Castelvetro, whose religious interpretation of the *Poetics* is criticised and rejected.[155] In the "particella 68", Piccolomini translates δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά (*Po*. 13 1453a10-11) with the sentence "per imprudentia e per qualche sconsiderato errore",[156] and again, in the "particella 69", he renders δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην (*Po*. 13 1453a16) with the periphrasis "per qualche grandemente incosiderato errore d'imprudentia".[157] Following Robortello, Maggi, and Vettori, he uses in the commentary the term *peccato*,[158] without attributing it any religious meaning nor the filter of the moral philosophy. In fact, he does not use the Robortellian hendiadys of *ignorantia* and *imprudentia*, but he only explains that the "ignorance of circumstances […] makes the sin less serious (*il peccato minore*), and consequently permits it to be excused and pardoned (*scusa et perdono*).[159] The use of *peccato*,

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[152] *Ibid*. 59.

[153] Brazeau (forthcoming). I would like to thank Dr Bryan Brazeau for letting me read a draft of his article that is going to be published soon: "I Write Sins, Not Tragedies: Manuscript Translations of *Hamartia* in Late Sixteenth-Century Italy", in *Acquisition Through Translation: The Rise of European Vernaculars*, Eds. A. Petrina and F. Masiero, Palgrave, Forthcoming, 2020.

[154] *Ibid*. 4.

[155] For a discussion on Piccolomini's commentary, see Weinberg (1961) 543-553. On the relationship between Piccolomini and Castelvetro, see Cotugno (2015).

[156] Piccolomini, *Annotationi*, 195.

[157] *Ibid*. 198.

[158] *Ibid*. 197.

[159] *Ibid*.

then, does not imply any religious meaning nor a specific reference to Aristotle's moral philosophy (though it is inspired by the previous moralising readings).

The emphasis on *hamartia* as an error of fact, and not as religious sin, is even more evident in the last two passages proposed, written by theorists connected to the intellectual circles in Padua: the Flemish scholar Nicasius Ellebodius and Antonio Riccoboni.[160]

Ellebodius' 1572 *Aristotelis librum de Poetica paraphrasis* is a manuscript translation and commentary that, according to Weinberg, can be "considered to belong to the Italian tradition of the Cinquecento, through its origins, its intellectual ties, and its ultimate destination."[161] Ellebodius' manuscript shows his Italian connections: it refers to the Aldine edition, to Vettori's, Riccoboni's, and Castelvetro's commentaries, and also to his correspondence with Gianvincenzo Pinelli and Antonio Riccoboni.

In translating the *hamartia*-passage, for both occurrences in *Po*. 13 1453a10-11, he uses the term *erratum*: first, *sed ob erratum aliquod* for δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά, then, *aliquod magnum erratum* for δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην.[162] Then, Ellebodius glosses *hamartia* with reference to the Aristotelian notion of ἁμάρτημα, as a midway between ἀδικία ("injustice") and ἀτύχημα ("misfortune"), thus quoting Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, *Nichomachean Ethics*, and pseudo-Aristotelian *Rhetoric to Alexander.* Ellebodius's work seems to be the first to refer to the various occurrences of ἁμάρτημα in the Aristotelian *corpus* in order to philologically explain the *hamartia* of *Poetics* 13. "Such a definition is all more notable – Brazeau argues – as Ellebodius would have been aware of Castelvetro's Christian-inflected interpretation of *hamartia.*"[163]

Antonio Riccoboni, who was close to Ellebodius, represents the final phase in the development of the sixteenth-century reception of the *Poetics*, since his 1587 work is the last Latin translation and commentary during the century. He defends Aristotle's text against Castelvetro's commentary and, following Ellebodius and correcting Vettori's *peccatum magnum*, renders δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην as *propter errorem magnum*. Yet he alternates *error* and *peccatum*, like some of his predecessors, and broadly explains the link between *hamartia* and voluntary act, as it follows:

[160] See Brazeau (forthcoming).

[161] Weinberg (1961) 519. For a discussion on Ellebodius' work, see Weinberg (1961) 519-523.

[162] B. Amb, D 510 inf., fol. 13^v. For the analysis of Ellebodius' interpretation of *hamartia*, see Brazeau (forthcoming).

[163] Brazeau (forthcoming).

Quamquam enim philosophica ratione scelus non est, **nisi cum voluntatis in peccando adest consensus**, **tamen scelus quoque est, si non verum, at saltem apparens, et ex communi quadam opinione, quam maxime spectat poeta**, cum aliquos maximum, et gravissimum malum, non modo consulto, sed etiam per errorem committitur; cuiusmodi fuit factu Iocaste, et Oedipodis, qui cum imprudenter errassent, se tamen tamquam scelestos, et flagitiosos punivisse finguntur.

(Yet, according to philosophical reasoning it is not a wicked act except when it approaches the agreement of the will in sinning; nevertheless, it is still a wicked act, if not truly so yet in all events appearing to be so, and according to that common opinion which a poet considers above all things, since the greatest and most serious evil is committed against men not only by design, but also through error; in this way was fashioned [the error] of Iocasta and of Oedipus, who although they erred imprudently, were nevertheless feigned to have punished themselves just as if they were wicked and shameful persons.)[164]

In discussing the issue of voluntary and involuntary actions (and taking as an example the case of Oedipus and Jocasta), Riccoboni argues that the notion of *hamartia*, as being an involuntary action, is not considered by philosophers as a wicked deed; on the contrary, poets should consider the common opinion of the audience, according to whom *hamartia* is still a wicked action and, consequently, the punishment of the tragic character is thus justified. Therefore, Riccoboni distinguishes the moral-philosophical perception of *hamartia* from the consideration of how the audience perceives the downfall of tragic characters. As Brazeau concludes, by observing the abovementioned passage,

Riccoboni brings together several of the different themes that emerged in sixteenth-century discussions of hamartia: the relationship of this error to moral philosophical discussions on voluntary and involuntary actions, the relationship between poetics and moral philosophy, and the problem of justly punishing a good protagonist who commits an action through imprudence or ignorance.[165]

The case studies that we analysed, starting from the 1530s to the last decades of the sixteenth century, show that:

a) the tendency to explicitly Christianize the notion of *hamartia* (represented especially by Castelvetro and the Protestant theorists) has been more or less consciously contrasted by two different tendencies: first, the interpretation of the

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[164] Riccoboni, *Poetica Aristotelis*, 71.
[165] Brazeau (forthcoming).

Poetics throughout the lens of moral philosophy, especially the discussion on voluntary and involuntary action, characterizing the mid-century commentaries that alternate translations of *hamartia* as *error/errore* and *peccatum/peccato*; second, the rise of a modern theatrical practice and, hence, the need of a modern critical theorization on tragic genre, that can be seen especially between the middle and the end of the century;

b) as just anticipated, the aim of commentaries on and translations of the *Poetics* deeply change in the course of the century: whereas commentators initially aim at making accessible Aristotle's treatise to a larger audience and explaining his theory of tragedy (even with moralizing or Christianizing mis/interpretations), in the last decades of the century, we assist at the "decline of the commentary",[166] due to the fact that commentators and theorists – often protagonists of literary quarrels – need to formulate their own ideas about tragedy;

c) lastly, there is no place for the ambiguity characterizing the notion of *hamartia*, as it emerges in chapter 13 of the *Poetics*: translators, commentators and theorists *need* to justify as much as possible the downfall of the middling character and his moral stature, inclining their exegesis sometimes towards the innocence (by recurring to moral philosophy), other times towards the culpability (by recurring to a "theodicy" scheme, based on what will be called the doctrine of "poetical justice").[167]

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[166] Zanin (2012a) 64. For a discussion on the evolution of the commentary-tradition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Humanism, see especially Jeanneret (1990) and Minnis-Scott-Wallace (1991).

[167] Schmitt (2002) 40, indeed, argues that "la mancanza di medietà è dunque caratteristica per tutta la teoria del Cinquecento. All'interno di questi limiti definiti sugli estremi di 'colpevole' cioè volontario e intenzionale, o 'incolpevole' cioè che agisce nei vincoli di costrizioni interne o esterne, c'è di nuovo una molteplicità di accentuazioni divergenti". For instance, Giason Denores, in a treatise published in 1586, speaking about the *Canace* controversy, defines the tragic error of the middling character as including an extremely wide range of meanings: Tra buone e cattive poi sono quelle altre le quali, per qualche errore umano d'ignoranza, d'incontinenzia, di intoleranzia, di temenza, d'ira, commettono alcuna volta casi atrocissimi, come per inavertenza, per vendetta delle ingiurie ricevute, per odio, per inimicizie, per amore o per qualche altra cagione somigliante. […] atrocità commesse per un certo errore umano intende Aristotele tutte quelle che fanno gli uomini per ignoranza, per impeto e per furor di odio, di lussuria, di vendetta, di timore, le quali passioni sono a noi communi naturalmente con gli altri animali senza ragione, e si dicono commesse per un certo errore umano (Between the good and the wicked are those others who, because of a certain human error caused by ignorance, incontinence, impatience, fear, or rage, commit atrocious deeds, such as for inadvertency, revenge for insults received, hatred, hostility, love, or for some similar reasons. […] By atrocities committed because of a certain human error Aristotle means all those that men perpetrate because of ignorance, impulse, and outburst of hatred, lust, revenge, and fear, all

The "decline of the commentary" leads, then, to the development of a new European poetics and the modern literary criticism: the rising theory of tragedy, in France and England, will abandon (with some rare exceptions) the genre of the commentary on the *Poetics* and will show the creativity as well as the mutual influences of theorists formulating their own ideas about tragedy, whose starting point is always more frequently not Aristotle's theory, but the practice of early modern tragedy and the necessity to define this new genre.

passions that we humans share with other animals with no intellect, and which are said to be performed because of a certain human error, Denores, *Discorso*, 385).

2.3. Middling Character, *hamartia*, and *catharsis* in Seventeenth-Century France

The year 1573 is a turning point in the French history of tragedy, especially in the dramatic theory. If the first tragedy written in French is considered to be Etienne Jodelle's 1553 *Cléopâtre captive*, only twenty years later the brief treatise *De l'art de la tragédie*, written by *Jean de la Taille*, introduced the knowledge of Aristotle's *Poetics* in France.[168] It is noteworthy that Jean de la Taille, close to moderate Reformists circles, wrote two tragedies exploring biblical subjects and following the Senecan model: *Saül le furieux*, written in 1562 and published in 1572, prefaced by *De l'art de la tragédie*, and *La Famine ou les Gabéonites* in 1573. His works constantly refer to themes such as the fragility of the human condition and the instability of fortune as well as their relationship with the broader debates about Providence and predestination. Concerning the issue of the tragic character, in his treatise he recommends

> que le subject aussi ne soit de Seigneurs extremement meschants, et que pour leur crimes horribles ils meritassent punition, n'aussi par mesme raison de ceux qui sont du tout bons, gens de bien et de saincte vie, comme d'un Socrates, bien qu'à tort emprisonné.[169]

The *status* of the middling character is thus preserved, yet adapted to the cultural and religious context of sixteenth-century France: it has to be considered, indeed, that this dramatic treatise is meant to be a preface for the biblical tragedy *Saül le furieux*, where the theme of the tragic fault plays a fundamental role. On the meaning of the middling character and his tragic error, O. Millet rightly points out that

> cette humanité moyenne correspond sur le plan dramaturgique à celle de la théologie morale protestante (cf. Ph. Mélanchton), qui distingue la condition pécheresse ordinaire, qui peut donner lieu à l'endurcissement ou à l'accueil de la grâce dans la repentance, des crimes tout à fait extraordinaires, inspirés directement par Satan. Dans le cas de l'accueil de la grâce, le pécheur pardonné et repenti est engagé dans un processus de sanctification qui n'empêche

[168] It is still debated whether Jean de la Taille knew Aristotle's *Poetics* directly or rather indirectly throughout Italians commentaries. For a recent discussion, including references to different interpretations, see Refini (2009). On the rediscovery of ancient drama in sixteenth-century France, see Cardinali (2006), including a paragraph on Jean de la Taille (271-272).

[169] Jean de la Taille, *De l'art de la tragédie*, 4. Jean de la Taille refers to the "saincte vie" (saint life) of Socrates; the quotation "O sancte Socrate, ora pro nobis" is attributed to Erasmus.

> cependant pas l'homme, justifié par Dieu, de rester simultanément pécheur (voir Luther : *simul justus et peccator*).[170]

Aristotle's *Poetics* is then varied and adapted to the religious and socio-cultural context. Jean de la Taille likely knew the *Poetics*, although partially, throughout the *Poetices Libri septem* of Julius Caesar Scaliger (Lione, 1561) and, also, the 1570 commentary of Castelvetro (whose relationship with the Reformation circles was previously mentioned). Moreover, his treatise seems to be still influenced by Horace's *Ars Poetica*, the Latin grammarians, and Ascensius' *Praenotamenta* as it emerges from his definition of tragedy (that is quite far from Aristotle's):

> Son vrai sujet ne traite que de piteuses ruines des grands seigneurs, que des inconstances de Fortune, que bannissements, guerres, pestes famines, captivités, exécrables cruautés des tyrans, et bref, que larmes et misères extrêmes.[171]

The theme of the instability of fortune plays a central role in his tragedies,[172] but at the same time Jean de la Taille tries to combine the element of contingency with a dramatic scheme based on a system of retribution and divine justice, thus facing some religious issues of that period such as the free will, the grace, the Providence and the predestination.[173] During the seventeenth century, as we shall see, these themes will be taken into account always more frequently in French tragedy. Jean de la Taille explains also the aim of tragedy:

> la vraie et seule intention d'une tragédie est **d'émouvoir et de poindre merveilleusement les affections d'un chacun**, car il faut que le sujet en soit si pitoyable et poignant de soi, qu'étant même en bref en nûment dit, **engendre en nous quelque passion**.[174]

Therefore, according to him, the aim of tragedy is arousing tragic emotions of pity and compassion in the audience. Although this definition seems to be quite close to Aristotle's reference to the elements of *pathos* and, then, of *catharsis* (actually based on pity *and*

[170] Millet (1995) 59.

[171] Jean de la Taille, *De l'art de la Tragédie*, 19-23.

[172] According to Refini (2009) 237, the theme of the instability of fortune is part of a long literary tradition including Scaliger, Peletier, Baif, Bochetel and, especially, the *Praenotamenta* of Josse Bade, better known as Ascensius (Lione, 1502), arguing that tragedy is about *fragilitas humanarum rerum* (ch. IV).

[173] For a discussion on the issues of tragic fault and divine justice in Jean de la Taille, see Tin (1999).

[174] Jean de la Taille, *De l'art de la Tragédie*, 28-31.

fear in the *Poetics*, whereas the latter is not mentioned here), the Renaissance treatment of *catharsis* and *pathos* leads to a process of moralization, especially in seventeenth-century neo-classical dramatic theory, the *doctrine classique*.

In this brief treatise, Jean de la Taille, considered the first French dramatic theorist, attempts to approach some of the most debated features of tragedy – deriving from medieval and humanist tradition as well as the Italian Aristotelianism – that will be developed in the following century: the middling character, the notions of *hamartia* and *catharsis*, the theory of passions, the instability of fortune, and the idea that tragedy must show sufferings, end badly and arouse *pathos*.

2.3.1. "La vertu récompensée et le vice toujours puni": French Neo-Classical Theory

In the seventeenth century, the development of French neo-classical dramatic theory, whose fundamental features are already discussed by Jean de la Taille, depends from several previous influences: the rediscovery of Seneca's tragedies, the late antique and medieval tradition, and the mistery-plays.[175] These literary influences have a noticeable impact on the interpretation of *hamartia*.

As we previously saw in our analysis on medieval and late antique sources,[176] the idea of tragedy as a genre dealing with *antiqua gesta atque facinora sceleratorum regum* ("ancient deeds and crimes of wicked kings") descends from Isidore's *Etymologies*, influenced by the Patristic tradition, and combines two alternative ethical traditions: a) the idea of tragedy as an unpredictable misfortune (taken by Latin grammarians and Boethius' *Consolation*), and b) the idea of tragedy as theodicy based on the punishment of wicked actions. We already discussed how this moralising interpretation had a substantial impact on the reception of Seneca's tragedies, which in turn profoundly influenced the development of early modern European drama, whose starting point is indeed the *facinora sceleratorum regum* (that is, Isidore's definition also founded in the introductory section of Seneca's *Etruscus* manuscript). Seneca's tragedies, interpreted in the light of the medieval moralising tradition, are considered to be mainly responsible for the widespread idea that tragedy was concerned

[175] See Bremer (1969) 71-80.
[176] See chapter 2.1.

with crime and punishment. J. Jacquot, in his book entitled *La tragédie de Sénèque et la Renaissance* (1962), points out that

> la dominante du théâtre Sénéquien est évidemment celle du crime et de la démesure […]. Les personnages de Sénèque discutaient des idées qui, au XVIe siècle, retrouvaient une valeur d'actualité : clémence ou sévérité, bonheur d'une vie modeste et campagnarde, malheurs subits des Grands. La violence meurtrière des passions, l'atrocité des crimes qui sont commis dans *Médée* et *Thyestes*, les récits affreusement réalistes des morts violentes ou de la mutilation d'Œdipe, les spectacles macabres, loin de rebuter le public moderne, lui plaisaient.[177]

Along with Senecan drama and the medieval tradition descending from Latin grammarians, it is worth mentioning the role of the mystery-plays (also known as miracle plays), that are the earliest formally developed plays in medieval Europe. Developed from the tenth to the sixteenth century, and reaching the height of their popularity in the fifteenth century, the mystery-plays focused on the representation of biblical stories. They traditionally represented man's temptation, fall and salvation (by punishment or grace), vice punished, and virtue rewarded.

Therefore, at the end of the century, both theory and practice of tragedy develop on the idea that the dramatic genre ought to be a didactic and moral representation of reversal of fortune of great men and kings, whose crimes and vices are rightly punished. The (not yet officially determined) idea of "poetic justice",[178] then, becomes an element that theorists and tragedians have to take into account. If Italian theorists in the *Cinquecento* still understand the notion of *hamartia* as relating to *either* culpability *or* innocence (thus abolishing the Aristotelian ambiguities), French theorists reinforce the literary mechanism of "poetic justice" and do not leave any room for a tragic plot dealing with a virtuous character falling into ruin.

With the constitution of the *Académie française* in 1635 and the controversial debate arisen around Pierre Corneille's 1636 *Le Cid* (better known as the *Querelle du Cid*), French theorists discuss always more frequently issues relating to how to write a tragedy, including the moral stature of the protagonist and the constitution of the tragic plot, that must respect the rules of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance* as well as the canons of the Unities of time, place,

[177] Jacquot (1962) 272; IX-X.
[178] Thomas Rymer coined the term "poetic justice in his 1678 essay *The Tragedies of the Last Age Considere'd*.

and action.[179] *Le Cid* received violent accuses of immorality, based on the idea that the theatre has to be a place of moral instruction.[180] Georges de Scudery, as part of the *Académie française*, in his *Observations sur le Cid* (1637), speaking of the ideal tragedy, argues that

> Aussi ne manque t'elle jamais, de nous montrer sur la scène **la vertu récompensée et le vice toujours puni**. Que si quelquefois l'on y voit les méchants prospérer, & les gens de bien persécutés, la face des choses, ne manquant point de changer, **à la fin de la Représentation ne manque point aussi de faire voir le triomphe des innocents, et le supplice des coupables** et c'est ainsi qu'insensiblement, on nous imprime en l'âme l'horreur du vice, & l'amour de la vertu. Mais tant s'en faut quel la Piece du Cid, soit faite sur ce modelle, qu'elle est de tres-mauvaise exemple.[181]

Even Jean Chapelain criticises *Le Cid* in his *Sentiments de l'Académie française sur la tragi-comédie du Cid* (1638). In his *Préface à l'Adonis* (1623), he also distinguishes the role of fortune in history and in poetry, by arguing that in the latter (thus including the tragic genre), whose aim is instructing the audience, virtue is always rewarded, and vice is always punished:

> C'est pourquoi dans les histoires, les cas et les événements sont tous différents et non réglés, comme dépendants de la fortune, qui fait aussi bien prospère les méchants que les bons, et ruine sans exception les uns aussi bien que les autres, là où la poésie, une des sciences sublimes, et un des membres non éloignés de la philosophie, met le premier en considération d'universel, et ne le traite particulièrement qu'en intention d'en faire tirer l'espèce, **à l'instruction du monde, et au bénéfice commun** ; et c'est pourquoi dans les poèmes, la suite des actions, ou bonnes ou mauvaises, est toujours semblable, chacune en son genre **; tout bon reconnu, tout méchant châtié**.[182]

The distinction between history and tragedy is already discussed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, in chapter 9, that is also the starting point for the discussion on the neo-classical notion of *vraisemblance*. From the 1630s onwards, Chapelain, along with the other members of the

[179] *Le Cid* is a five-act French tragicomedy written by Pierre Corneille, performed for the first time in 1636 at the Théâtre du Marais in Paris and published the same year. *Le Cid* obtained an enormous success, but it became the subject of a debate, known as the *Querelle du Cid*, over the norms of dramatic practice. Cardinal Richelieu acknowledged the success, but determined that it was defective, in part because it did not respect the classical unities. Therefore, he ordered to the newly formed *Académie française* an analysis of the play. The critical edition of the contributes to the *Querelle* can be found in Civardi (2004).
[180] For a discussion on the moral rules of seventeenth-century theatre, see Fumaroli (1990) 291-341, and especially Zanin (2014a).
[181] Scudery, *Observations*, 383-384.
[182] Chapelain, *Lettre ou discours de Monsieur Chapelain*, 197-198.

Académie française, determined *les règles* to be respected to write a so-called "regular" tragedy, taking as a normative authority Aristotle's *Poetics* and imposing the rules of *vraisemblance,* of *bienséance* (Horatian and rhetorical *decorum*), and the doctrine of the three unities (action, time and place). Not respecting these dramatic rules (that actually are *not* prescribed by Aristotle but instead inherited from the long Latin and medieval tradition as well as from the Italian commentaries) was the reason why Corneille was accused of not having written a "regular" tragedy.[183]

Among the French theorists prescribing these "classical" rules, it is worth mentioning Jules Pilet de la Mesnardière, who is the author of the *Poétique*, published in Paris in 1640, a commentary on selected passages of Aristotle's treatise.[184] He starts with a definition of tragedy:

> [La tragédie] est un poème grave et magnifique qui a pour sujet ordinaire la révolution des états, **la récompense des bons princes et la punition des méchants**.

Then, he discusses the issue of the Aristotelian middling character:

> Il suffit qu'il commette **une faute médiocre** qui lui attire un grande malheur […]. Aristote ne veut pas que le héros soit absolument vertueux de peur qu'il ne paraisse pas **digne des infortunes qui l'accablent**. Cela serait directement contre cette exacte **justice** qu'il veut qu'observe la scène.

La Mesnardière, thus, uses the term "justice" to define the literary mechanism of retribution that will be defined as "poetic justice" by Thomas Rymer more than twenty years later, but that is already largely diffused in French neo-classical dramatic theory. La Mesnardière defines even more precisely the nature of the tragic fault ("faute") relating it with the necessary mechanism of retributive justice:

> Il faut d'ailleurs considérer que le héros infortuné, qui parait dans la tragédie, ne doit pas être malheureux à cause qu'il est sujet à quelques imperfections mais pour avoir fait **une faute qui mérite d'être punie**. Les fautes seront médiocres si elles ne sont pas du nombre de ces détestables crimes qui partent d'une âme noire, mais de **ces fragilités que nous appelons des erreurs, et que le Philosophe nomme *hamartiai*, des péchés**, par example la jalousie, comme celle de Thésée,

[183] On the genesis of the *docrine classique*, see Bray (1927).

[184] For a discussion on La Mesnardière's *Poétique* and its relationship with the Italian commentaries, see Zanin 2012a.

> l'infidélité amoureuse, comme celle de Jason, ou de trop grandes présomptions, comme celle de Niobe et d'Ajax Télamonien.[185]

La Mesnardière tries to preserve the Aristotelian middling character, but he completely reverses the idea, prescribed in the *Poetics*, that the punishment has to be *undeserved* in order to arouse pity in the audience. On the contrary, here, he argues that the essential condition is that the tragic error has to be a "faute qui mérite d'être punie". He also discusses the nature of the tragic fault, which does not have to be a "detestable crime" committed by a wicked person ("une âme noire"), but rather a frailty ("ces fragilités ques nous appelons des erreurs"). He defines *hamartia* as a "fragilité" (a similar definition, "frailty", will be used by John Dryden in 1672): la Mesnardière also alternates the terms "erreur" and "péché", by arguing that this is a kind of fault deriving from a human weakness, such as infidelity, jealousy, or arrogance. His description seems to be close to the error of incontinence, due to the character's incapacity of dominating his or her passions.

The excess of passion (also reminding the abovementioned notion of Aristotelian *akrasia*, the "weakness of will"),[186] as we previously saw, has been discussed by some theorists, especially Pietro Vettori (discussing Oedipus not controlling his rage) and Sperone Speroni in his defence of *Canace*. However, it is the French neo-classical dramatic theory that specifically stresses the theory of passions.[187] Jean-François Sarasin, in his *Discours de la tragédie*, prefaced to the *Amour tyrannique* (a tragedy written by Scudery in 1639), tries to preserve the ambiguity of the middling character and the notion of *hamartia*, by recurring to the excess of passion that leads the character to his downfall:

> C'est de cette sorte que sont **ceux qui ont abandonné leur jugement à la violence de quelque passion**, qui n'en peuvent plus être les maîtres, qui se laissent emporter à ce torrent. Et comme les yeux malades sont de mauvais juges des couleurs, ces esprits, aveuglés de nuages et privés de toutes leurs lumières, **n'agissant plus que par la force de la passion**, trouvent juste ce qu'elle leur dicte, et sont sans doute à plaindre lorsqu'ils s'imaginent faire des actes héroïques en commettant des crimes épouvantables.[188]

Therefore, Sarasin claims that the tragic error is committed because the protagonist is unable to dominate his or her passions, whose violence is compared to the relentless flow of a river.

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[185] La Mesnardière, *Poétique*, 20.
[186] Aristotle discusses the notion of *akrasia* in chapter 7 of his *Nicomachean Ethics.*
[187] For the theory of passions and its role in tragedy, see Walfard (2008), Zanin (2014a) 332-336.
[188] Sarasin, *Oeuvres*, 334.

However, he aims at preserving the ambiguous state of the middling character: the excess of passion makes the character both responsible and victim of the violence of this passion. According to Zanin, Sarasin to define the tragic error tries to combine the *habitus* (a natural disposition to act badly, a frailty of character) and the "actual fault" (the willingness of the action), in order to explain (and justify) the ambiguity of *hamartia*. In her in-depth analysis, Zanin argues that

> Sarasin s'inscrit ainsi dans la tradition augustinienne et considère négativement les passions qui aveuglent les « esprits ». D'après la morale augustinienne, les passions – et notamment la concupiscence – sont le fruit du péché originel et servent à la fois à nuancer la gravité de la faute et à souligner la tendance au péché qui risque de condamner le sujet à la mort éternelle […]. La théorie des passions, aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles, informe l'explication courante des effets de la tragédie (crainte et pitié), mais aussi de la faute ambiguë du héros. Elle associe le blâme néo-stoïcien des passions à la théorie augustinienne du péché originel.[189]

In sixteenth-century France, indeed, the theory of passions deeply influences the development of dramatic theory: the excess of passion, as the cause of the tragic fault, allows theorists and tragedians to preserve the middling character. Love, meant as an irresistible impulse and, thus, as "habitual" fault, partially justifies an action voluntary committed. The *habitus*, that in this case is the concupiscence, according to Augustine's theory of passions, would be inherited from the original sin and, for this reason, the middling character would not be considered entirely culpable.

Piccolomini seems to be the first to have theorised the theory of passions, later diffused in French theory: indeed, he claims that errors due to "the violence of passions" are considered as both "constrained and voluntary".[190] In his 1575 *Annotationi*, he argues that

> È da sapere che parlando delle attioni dell'huomo […] quelle veramente volontarie si deon dire, le quali senz' alcuno impedimento che, o dalla parte di dentro, o dalla parte di fuori, gli sia dato. L'impedimento può esser dato, o dalla violentia, o dall'ignorantia; delle quai due cose, questa non può accadere, se non dalla parte di dentro; dove che quella dall'una, & dall'altra può venire. La violentia, che vien totalmente di fuora, è essa stessa manifesta. Quella, che vien di dentro, viene principalmente dalla **vehementia, & forza degli affetti**, li quali quando traboccano possono

[189] Zanin (2014a) 335f.

[190] On Piccolomini's theory of passions, see especially Walfard (2008) 274-276, and Zanin (2014a) 333-336.

> concorrere all'ignorantia, & alla forza […]. Quanto alla forza poi parimente **gli affetti trabocchevoli fanno alle volte poco meno che violenza alla volontà, inducendola a elegger quello che, posta nella sua stessa piena volontà, non eleggerebbe** […]. Le quali attioni vengon per questo ad esser **meschiate di violento & di volontario**.[191]
>
> (Speaking of human actions, it is to be known that the truly voluntary ones are those without any impediment either from the inside or from the outside. The impediment can be given either by violence or by ignorance; the ignorance can only come from the inside, the violence from both. The violence, coming totally from the outside, is itself manifest. The violence coming from the inside mainly comes from the vehemence and the strength of the affections, which, when they overflow, can contribute to ignorance and strength. As for strength, like the overflowing affections, sometimes do little less than violence to the will, inducing it to choose what, in its own full will, would not choose […]. These actions then come to be both violent and voluntary.)

Piccolomini argues that actions due to violent passions (*affetti*) are committed under constraint (*violentia*) and, then, they are both voluntary *and* involuntary. It is worth mentioning that Aristotle, in his discussion on voluntary and involuntary in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (III 1111b1-4) argues, on the contrary, that irrational actions, deriving from impulsivity and desire, are considered to be *voluntary* actions, as being typically human. It rather seems that Piccolomini, like some of his predecessors mentioned above, refers to the Aristotelian notion of *akrasia*, the "weakness of will" (discussed in chapter 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), that is said to be blamed and, as we previously saw, it is quite far from the notion of *hamartia*, because the former implies the willingness of the action and is blamed as a vice.

French neo-classical criticism, although inheriting the theories of the Italian *Cinquecento*, did not simply perpetuate them. The impetus behind the interpretation of the *Poetics* certainly passed from Italy to France, and Italian commentaries and translations deeply influenced the understanding of Aristotle in France. However, from the 1630s onwards, French theorists, as members of the *Academie française*, established rigorous and rational principles of poetic theory, imposed as a normative canon to follow in the production of new tragedies. Therefore, Senecan model, the reception of Horace's *Ars Poetica* and the influence of Neoplatonism, the moral and didactic function of the medieval idea of drama as well as the constitution of a canon of dramatic rules, especially the *bienséance*, influenced French neo-classical theory in the process of moralization of tragedy.

[191] Piccolomini, *Annotationi*, 196-197.

The idea of a dramatic scheme of retributive justice, already proposed by Castelvetro, becomes the *fil rouge* of the French treatises: the casual nexus between hero's moral fault and his downfall is confirmed by the *doctrine classique* developed in the 1630s, especially by the theoretical works of Scudery, Chapelain, la Mesnardière, and the Abbé d'Aubignac.

Moreover, the doctrine of poetic justice along, with the view of tragedy as having a didactic and moral function, lead theorists to recur to the above-mentioned theory of passions. As Zanin rightly points out, the theory of passions is applied to explain both the effects (pity and fear) that tragedy must arouse on the audience as well as the tragic error causing the downfall.[192] The notion of *catharsis* inevitably is interpreted as "purgation des passions vicieuses",[193] that is the moral purgation of our souls "from perilous vices, passions, and character flaws which the spectators see to be the true causes of the tragic hero's downfall".[194] Consequently, *hamartia* is rendered as an excess of passion, a fault due to an irresistible impulse. Now, theorists trying to preserve the moral ambiguity of the middling character – such as Piccolomini and Sarasin – accepted this moralising interpretation to stress the moral responsibility of the agent, on one side, and to reduce his culpability, on the other side, by considering an error due to passion or desire as a human inclination (a *habitus*) and, then, not wholly voluntary.

We already saw that the "weakness of will" has been theorised by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as *akrasia*, a notion that seems to have influenced, more or less, the discussions of Vettori, Speroni, Piccolomini as well as Sarasin, trying to preserve the ambiguous status of the middling character. Aristotle, however, clearly says that the *akrasia* caused by desire and impulsivity deserves to be blamed "not only as an error but also as a vice"[195] and he also specifies that an action is involuntary only if it is due to ignorance or constraint,[196] then the *akrasia* is a voluntary action, not applicable to the middling character. Then, as we saw in the first chapter, the "weakness of will" it is implausible to be referred to an error such as the *hamartia*, in Aristotle's theory.

[192] Zanin (2014a) 335.
[193] Chapelain, *La Préface à l'Adonis*, 205.
[194] Lurie (2012) 445.
[195] See Arist. *NE* VII 4 1147b30.
[196] See Arist. *NE* III 1.

Moreover, according to Aristotle, the *habitus* (that he calls διάθεσις)[197] is a disposition that can correspond either to virtue or vice, whose agent is responsible for and that is blamed or praised. It is evident that Italian and French theorists *do refer* to Aristotle as a normative canon to imitate, but only to "domesticate" and adapt his treatises (both *Ethics* and *Poetics*) in the context of Renaissance criticism. The theory of passions is applied by some theorists to stress the responsibility of the tragic character, thus preserving the doctrine of the poetic justice, but also to justify the ambiguity of the middling character, by considering the excess of passion as something both voluntary and involuntary. This concept also seems to be partially influenced by the platonic idea, opposed to Aristotle's ethics, that "no one does wrong willingly"[198] and, then, "everyone who does evil things does them unwillingly". There is no weakness of will, according to Plato.

Early modern tragedy, in referring constantly to the ancient theory of passions, is however inevitably influenced by the first Christian theory of passions, written by Augustine in the *De civitate dei*.[199] In conciliating Neoplatonism and Christianism, Augustine sets up a close connection between passions and original sin. According to book 9 of the *De civitate dei*, passions are unavoidable. As such, they are evils because they threaten the dominion of reason over the soul, but since they do not presuppose consent, they cannot be called sin. According to book 14, however, since passions are grounded by a consent given by will, the soul is implicitly guilty for these passions. For Augustine, it was Adam's original sin to weaken human will; therefore passions (such as concupiscence) are caused by a weakness of will inherited from the original sin.

As we shall see in the third chapter (specifically in the analysis of Anguillara's *Edippo*), in their treatment of the tragic fault, to preserve the ambiguity of *hamartia*, some theorists and tragedians adapted the Aristotelian *hamartia* to the contemporary cultural and religious context, by implicitly referring to the Augustinian theory of the original sin. Early modern tragedy and theory of tragedy become, then, a place where religious and philosophical ideas are debated. Zanin rightly points out that

> la structure de la tragédie moderne – où un héros « moyen » commet une « faute » et tombe dans le malheur – semble ainsi configurer poétiquement la conception augustinienne de l'action de

[197] See NE II 8 1108b11-20.
[198] Plato, *Prt.* 345 d-e.
[199] Augustine, *De civitate dei*, IX and XIV

> l'homme affectée par le péché originel […]. La tragédie de la première modernité se fait écho des débats sur le pouvoir de la grâce et sur l'héritage du péché, qui reviennent au premier plan lors de la Réforme et des guerres de religion. Si, pour le parti catholique, le péché originel n'empêche ni la liberté ni la justification du fidèle mais appelle au combat spirituel, pour le parti réformé, en revanche, il limite fortement la liberté du sujet et l'*habitus* qu'il induit peut manifester la prédestination du croyant.[200]

Between the end of the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth century, different interpretations of the tragic fault are debated in literary criticism: the doctrine of the poetic justice (claiming that punishment has to be *deserved*) has become at this point a fixed scheme to follow – as showed by Castelvetro, Scudery, Chapelain, la Mesnardière, d'Aubignac – and the theory of passions is usually applied to explain the moral stature of the character as well as the notions of *hamartia* and *catharsis*. Some theorists tried to solve the ambiguity of the fault by representing a middling character, not virtuous, nor wicked (Jean de la Taille, Piccolomini, Sarasin), others proposed an interpretation of the character as exclusively culpable (la Mesnardière). Yet, the issue of the exegesis of the *hamartia* was still unresolved and problematic.

2.3.2. Jean Racine on Vettori's edition of the *Poetics*: "une faute sans crime"

The two major tragedians of the period, Jean Racine and Pierre Corneille, undoubtedly knew Aristotle's *Poetics*, and are worth to be discussed as both theorists and dramatists. Racine was one of the few French scholars who read Aristotle in original Greek; he attempted his own translation of some passages and gave his contribution to the contemporary theoretical debate on the tragic genre.[201] We still possess his Vettori's edition of the *Poetics*, edited in 1951 by E. Vinaver and extremely useful for our understanding of Racine's reception of theory of tragedy: this brief edition is entitled *Principes de la tragédie en marge de la Poétique d'Aristote*. In a letter dated 1756 and addressed to the Abbé Sallier, the *garde des manuscrits* of the *Bibliothèque du Roi*, Louis Racine writes:

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[200] Zanin (2014a) 331.

[201] For a discussion on Racine's approach to Aristotle's treatise, see Vinaver (1951) and Alonge (2017). On Racine in relation to French neo-classical theory, see Bremer (1969) 76-78, and Halliwell (1986) 305-308.

> Hier au soir je retrouvai un livre qui mérite bien d'accompagner les autres. C'est *Petri Victorii Commentarii in librum Aristotelis de Arte poetarum, 2a editio, Florentiae in officina Juntarum*, 1573, in-folio. À la marge de ce petit in-folio on trouve plusieurs passages de la *Poétique* d'Aristote traduits par mon père.[202]

By using Vettori's 1573 edition, Racine translated and annotated parts of Aristotle's treatise, especially those passages relating the composition of tragedy. While translating, he has available both Aristotle's Greek text and Vettori's Latin translation and commentary, that we previously analysed. Since he is able to understand ancient Greek, Racine is a rigorous translator and interpreter of Aristotle, but his creativity and his attempt to conciliate the *Poetics* with the neo-classical theory lead him to misread and adapt the original text. Racine – Vinaver points out – "ne se contente pas de traduire: paraphrases et commentaires se mêlent çà et là à la traduction, précisant ou modifiant l'original".[203] It follows that the resulting translation is a combination of three different ways of interpreting drama, each one reflecting its own culture and historical background.

Let us look at the *hamartia*-passage (*Poet.* 1452b30-1453a12), concerning the tragic character and his *hamartia*. Following quite closely Aristotle (and Robortello), he claims that to arouse pity ("compassion" or "pitié") and fear ("terreur" or "crainte"), the ideal tragic character should not be wicked ("meschant") nor virtuous ("verteux") falling in ruin:

> il faut donc que ce soit un homme qui soit entre le deux, c'est-à-dire qui ne soit point extrêmement juste et vertueux, et qui ne mérite point aussi son malheur par **un excez** de meschanceté et d'injustice. Mais il faut que ce soit un homme qui, **par sa faute**, devienne malheureux, et tombe d'une grande félicité et d'un rang très considérable dans une grande misère ; comme Œdipe, Thyeste, et d'autres personnages illustres de ces sortes de familles.[204]

Racine adds two new elements to Aristotle's text: Aristotle says that the character's downfall is not due to "evil and wickedness" (διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν),[205] whereas Racine adds the idea of excess, thus specifying that the middling character does not fall into misfortune "because *of an excess* of evil and injustice" ("par un excez de meschanceté et d'injustice"). It is indeed "his fault" that causes his downfall: Racine renders δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά (translated by Vettori as *propter errorem quendam*) with "par sa faute". Not only he translates Aristotles'

[202] Racine, *Principes de la tragédie*, 5.
[203] *Ibid*. 6
[204] *Ibid*. 19-20.
[205] Arist. *Po.* 13 1453a9.

hamartia and Vettori's *error* with "faute" (instead of using the French equivalent term *erreur*), but he also adds the possessive adjective, thus stressing the personal responsibility of the agent. Therefore, the tragic character does not fall in ruin because of an *excess* of evil and injustice (hence, can *just* evil and injustice lead to a tragic fault?), but because of an action whose responsibility lies inside the character.

If Aristotle's notion of *hamartia* refers to the tragic action (*praxis*), here it seems that Racine's translation rather focuses on the character (*ethos*). It is worth noticing that Racine could also look at Vettori's commentary, where it can be found the first reference to *hamartia* as a fault of character (specifically, he takes the example of Oedipus who, in an excess of rage, killed a man who turned out to be his father).[206] Even Racine, maybe influenced by the contemporary *doctrine classique*, translates *hamartia* as a fault of character, by referring perhaps to the excess of passions (as it emerges in his tragedies). Vinaver clearly explains Racine's interpretation of *hamartia* as it follows:

> La faute tragique ne sera pour lui [Racine] ni une tare morale qui « mérite d'être punie », ni un geste ou une parole irréfléchie, mais un égarement inhérent au personnage et qui vient d'une passion irrémédiable et meurtrière. C'est à de telles passions, ignorées d'Eschyle et de Sophocle,que le dix-septième siècle français avait appliqué les images de fureur, de transport, et de folles douleurs […]. À l'arbitraire de la fortune se substitue un choix judicieux des victimes, celles-là qui, comme Phèdre, ne seront « ni tout à fait coupables ni tout à fait innocentes », et qui porteront en elles le principe de leur défaillance et de leur supplice. […] Les malheurs illustres viendront de la nature même des personnages, de leurs désirs les plus profonds auxquels jamais ils ne sauront échapper.[207]

According to Vinaver, Racine understands the notion of *hamartia* as an excess of passion, interpretation that can be found in Vettori's commentary (that inevitably influenced his translation) as well as in Piccolomini's and Sarasin's (abovementioned) works, and frequently in the neo-classical theory, where the theory of passions plays a fundamental role. As pointed out by Vinaver, Racine's understanding of *hamartia* is far from the treatment of the tragic fault in Aeschylus and Sophocles drama; indeed he rather tries to apply Aristotle's theory to Euripides' tragedies, whose description of the tragic fault is often related to unrestrained passions.[208]

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[206] Vettori, *Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum*, 124.
[207] Vinaver in Racine, *Principes de la tragédie*, 48-49.
[208] For a discussion on Racine and his relationship with Aristotle and Euripides, see Alonge (2017).

Racine's theorisation of dramatic practice also emerges in his *Préfaces*, allowing us to analyse his own theory of tragedy. In the *Préface* to *Andromaque* (1667),[209] he describes the ideal tragic character, by referring to chapter 13 of the *Poetics*:

> Et Aristote, bien éloigné de nous demander des Héros parfaits, veut au contraire que **les Personnages tragiques**, c'est-à-dire ceux dont le malheur fait la catastrophe de la tragédie, ne **soient ni tout à fait bons, ni tout à fait méchants**. Il ne veut pas qu'ils soient extrêmement bons, parce que la punition d'un homme de bien exciterait plus l'indignation que la **pitié du spectateur** ; **ni qu'ils soient méchants avec excès**, parce qu'on n'a point pitié d'un scélérat. Il faut donc qu'ils aient une **bonté médiocre**, c'est-à-dire **une vertu capable de faiblesse**, et qu'ils tombent dans le malheur **par quelque faute** qui les fasse plaindre sans les faire détester.[210]

The ideal tragic character is close to the Aristotelian middling character: he has to own "une bonté mediocre, c'est-à-dire une vertu capable de faiblesse" ("a mediocre goodness, that is a virtue capable of weakness"). A sort of frailty is what characterises the Racinian tragic hero, as he points out in the *Préface* to *Britannicus* (1669):[211]

> Les autres se sont scandalisés que j'eusse choisi un homme aussi jeune que Britannicus pour le Héros d'une Tragédie. Je leur ai déclaré dans la Préface *d'Andromaque* les sentiments d'Aristote, sur le Héros de la Tragédie, et que **bien loin d'être parfait, il faut toujours qu'il ait quelque imperfection**. Mais je leur dirai encore ici qu'un jeune Prince de dix-sept ans, qui a beaucoup de cœur, beaucoup d'amour, beaucoup de franchise et beaucoup de crédulité, qualités ordinaires d'un jeune homme, m'a semblé **très capable d'exciter la compassion**.[212]

The same concept is stressed in the *Préface* to *Iphigénie* (1674) – an adaptation of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* – while discussing the character of Ériphile (another princess who, called "Iphigenia", is revealed to be the true victim required by the gods to be sacrificed):

> J'ai été très heureux de trouver dans les anciens cette autre Iphigénie que j'ai pu représenter telle qu'il m'a plu et qui tombant dans le malheur où cette amante jalouse avait voulu précipiter sa rivale, **mérite en quelque façon d'être punie, sans être tout-à-fait indigne de compassion**.[213]

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[209] Euripides' *Andromache* and the third book of Virgil's *Aeneid* are the point of departure of Racine's tragedy.

[210] Racine, *Préface d'Andromaque*, 197-198.

[211] Britannicus is a five-act tragic play, first performed in 1669 at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Paris; it is the first play in which Racine depicted Roman history, whose source is Tacitus' *Annales.*

[212] Racine, *Préface de Britannicus*, 372.

[213] Racine, *Préface d'Iphigénie*, 698.

What clearly emerges from the prefaces to Racine's mythological tragedies is not only the consistent reference to the middling character, but especially the fact that the duality of this character, not too wicked nor too virtuous, is the instrument used by the dramatist to achieve his aim: arousing compassion and pity in the audience. As Racine frequently claims, his tragedies follow one fundamental rule: "de plaire et de toucher, toutes le autres ne sont faites que pour parvenir à cette première".[214] What kind of pleasure does he try to arouse? He specifies that the pleasure aroused by tragedy consisted of "les larmes des spectateurs"[215]: the audience, in front of the pain suffered by the character, innocent and guilty at the same time, feels compassion and pity, that is a kind of understanding or empathy towards the protagonist, a feeling defined by Racine as "cette tristesse majestueuse qui fait tout le Plaisir de la Tragédie."[216]

Therefore, Racine only focuses on one of the two Aristotelian tragic effects (pity and fear), he only aims at provoking compassion throughout the spectacle of ungovernable passions caused by a human weakness, a "faiblesse". "Ces passions internes, propres aux personnages – T. Alonge points out – ont comme conséquence récurrente dans ses préfaces « les lasmes des spectateurs », ce que G. Forestier appelle « des passions externes »".[217] The theory of passions then explains both the notions of *hamartia* (as "internal passion") and *catharsis* (as "external passion"). However, differently from the theorists of the *Académie française*, the *catharsis* that Racine prescribes does not seem to be a moralised (or even Christianised) purgation of passions, it is rather the spectator's internalisation of the passions performed on the stage. The so-called "plaisir des larmes" is evident in theory and practice of tragedy during the second half of seventeenth-century France. As E. Hénin rightly explains,

> cette esthétique modifie en profondeur la réception de la tragédie, puisque l'effet tragique n'est plus formulé en termes moraux, de purgation ou de modération des passions, mais en termes entièrement sentimentaux (larmes, transport, tendresse), rendant problématique sa parenté avec la terreur et la pitié aristotéliciennes. À partir de 1660, les théoriciens décrivent l'effet de la tragédie comme une émotion intime et non plus comme un éblouissement subjuguant la raison.[218]

[214] Racine, *Préface de Bérénice*, 452.
[215] *Ibid.*
[216] *Ibid.*
[217] Alonge (2013) 7. He quotes Forestier (2010) 112-129.
[218] Hénin (2007) 223.

Racine is clearly one of those dramatists interested in showing the deepest emotions of characters in order to obtain the strongest impact on the spectator. His tragedies, indeed, are deeply influenced by Euripides' treatment of emotions. André Dacier, in his *Poétique* (1692), argues that "personne ne connaît mieux qu'Euripide le chemin du coeur, et ne place plus à propos les paroles tendres et affectueuses qui peuvent *arracher des larmes* aux plus endurcis".[219] Then, the aim of tragedy is *arracher des larmes* ("tear off the tears"), moving the audience. According to Hénin, the expression "arracher des larmes" is used by La Mesnardière, Boileau, Longepierre and even Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to describe the effect of tragic emotions. Of course, this way of understanding the *catharsis* (as well as the *hamartia* and the middling character) is problematic from the moral point of view.

In the *Préface* of one of his last and most famous tragedies, *Phèdre* (1677), Racine seems for the first time to be worried about the moral function of his play and then he applies a more traditional scheme of poetic justice, which would have been appreciated by his contemporaries. He firstly describes both Phèdre and Hippolyte as not completely guilty nor completely innocent,[220] both characterized by a human frailty ("faiblesse") that (this time) has to justify their downfall, according to the rule of divine justice. In the conclusion of his preface, he says that human passions are the cause of the tragic ruin:

> Ce que je puis assurer, c'est que je n'en ai point fait où la vertu soit plus mise en jour que dans celle–ci. **Les moindres fautes y sont sévèrement punies** ; la seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même ; les faiblesses de l'amour y passent pour de vraies faiblesses ; les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer tout le désordre dont elles sont cause ; et le vice y est peint partout avec des couleurs qui en font connaître et haïr la difformité. C'est là proprement le dut que tout homme qui travaille pour le public doit se proposer,

[219] Dacier, *La* Poétique *d'Aristote traduite en français avec des remarques*, 207.
[220] Racine, *Préface de Phèdre*, 817. "Phèdre n'est ni tout à fait coupable, ni tout à fait innocente. Elle est engagée, par sa destinée et par la colère des dieux, dans une passion illégitime, dont elle a horreur toute la première. Elle fait tous ses efforts pour la surmonter. Elle aime mieux se laisser mourir que de la déclarer à personne, et lorsqu'elle est forcée de la découvrir, elle en parle avec une confusion qui fait bien voir que son crime est plutôt une punition des dieux qu'un mouvement de sa volonté [...]. Pour ce qui est du personnage d'Hippolyte, j'avais remarqué dans les Anciens qu'on reprochait à Euripide de l'avoir représenté comme un philosophe exempt de toute imperfection ; ce qui faisait que la mort de ce jeune prince causait beaucoup plus d'indignation que de pitié. J'ai cru lui devoir donner quelque faiblesse qui le rendrait un peu coupable envers son père, sans pourtant lui rien ôter de cette grandeur d'âme avec laquelle il épargne l'honneur de Phèdre, et se laisse opprimer sans l'accuser. J'appelle faiblesse la passion qu'il ressent malgré lui pour Aricie, qui est la fille et la soeur des ennemis mortels de son père."

et c'est ce que les premiers poètes tragiques avaient en vue sur toute chose. **Leur théâtre était une école où la vertu n'était pas moins bien enseignée que dans les écoles des philosophes**.

Therefore, Racine claims here that his tragedy, in representing Phèdre and Hippolyte, shows the excess of passion justly punished and concludes that the theatre, the modern as well as the ancient (codified by Aristotle), is "a school of virtue", whose actual aim is not only to entertain but also instruct the spectator. It seems that Racine, at the end of his career and in the middle of the debate about the morality of theatre, wanted to stress upon the ethical and didactic function of theatre.[221] His reference to ancient tragedy as a school of virtue, and to Aristotle's codification of this ethical function, to be applied *a posteriori* to his works, reflects the pressure felt from the contemporary *doctrine Classique*.[222]

Nevertheless, what emerges from his tragedies is an idea of *hamartia* and *catharsis* both relating to the human condition. The notion of *catharsis* seems to represent a kind of interiorization of human emotions leading to the knowledge of oneself and the others.[223] In the light of Racine's annotations on the *Poetics* and his theoretical discussions in the prefaces, his interpretation of *hamartia* seems to be really clear. C. Batteux, who perfectly explains the *faiblesse* of Racinian drama, rightly points out that "le malheur sera produit par une faute, non par une crime […], c'est une faute humaine de l'usage ordinaire des passions, une sorte de fatalité que l'on sent attachée à la condition humaine". For Racine, then, *hamartia* is *une faute, sans crime*.[224]

2.3.3. Pierre Corneille (1660): Oedipus' *hamartia* as ἀτύχημα

Corneille knew Aristotle throughout the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century translations of and commentaries on the *Poetics*. After the criticism of *Le Cid* in 1637, he put into practice the neo-classical canons of the *tragédie régulière*, but only during the 1650s, after all his major works had already been written, he approached the *Poetics* as a theorist

[221] Bremer (1969) 77 argues that "about the time of *Phèdre*, Racine was preparing his honourable retreat from the stage to the very respected status of 'historiogaphe du Roi', and he had to be careful about his moral reputation."
[222] Cf. Halliwell (1986) 307-308.
[223] See Hénin (2007) 243.
[224] For a complete discussion of the notion of culpability in Racine's tragedies, see Pot (1995).

more than as a dramatist.[225] Then, for the 1660 edition of his *Théâtre* – including all Corneille's plays from *Mélite* (1629) to *Œdipe* (1659) – he wrote three *Discours* that confronted Aristotle and, through him, the French theorists of the *Académie française*. "It is indeed the awkward relation between these two sources of authority which is Corneille's main subject", Halliwell points out.[226] The three *Discours* are entitled *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique*; *Discours de la tragédie, et des moyens de la traiter, selon le vraisemblable ou le nécessaire*; *Discours des trois unités, d'action, de jour, et de lieu*. According to C. Fricheau,

> les *Discours sur le poème dramatique* sont une réponse personnelle aux trente années de critiques, sévères ou élogieuses, que les doctes ont pu formuler sur ce théâtre. Les trois *Discours* sont, en tout cas pour Corneille, la résolution de la crise autant publique qu'intime ouverte en 1637 par la Querelle du Cid et plus particulièrement une réplique à *La Pratique du Théâtre* de l'Abbé d'Aubignac, traité commencé en 1640, sous l'auspice de Richelieu et de l'Académie […]. Dans ce contexte, on pourrait penser que la *Poétique* a pour Corneille la fonction du bastion imprenable à partir duquel lancer ses contre-attaques et conquérir pour tout son théâtre l'espace intellectuel qui lui revient, en montrant comment ce théâtre donne finalement aux règles tirées du Philosophe une actualité si pleine qu'on pourra lui passer quelques « irrégularités ».[227]

Corneille expresses his doubts on some topics, so that it seems that the *Poetics* is not the subject of his discussion, but rather an instrument to propose his own view of the tragedy. In his *Discours de la tragédie*, he shows his independent and critical view about the most debated tragic subjects, such as the *catharsis*, the *hamartia* and the middling character. In order to reject the notion of *catharsis*, meant as moral purgation of passions and vices by his contemporaries, he explicitly criticises the *hamartia* of Oedipus and the ideal tragic character. Indeed, the problem of the relation between the interpretation of *hamartia* and the moral stature of Sophocles' Oedipus was still unsolved: it was difficult to apply the moralistic scheme of divine justice to the plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, considered by Aristotle the perfect example of *hamartia*, that, in the specific case of Oedipus, is a deed committed in ignorance. He discusses the passage of the *Poetics* 13 as it follows:

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[225] For Corneille and his treatment of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Conradie (1975), and the more recent Fricheau (2012). Cf. also Bremer (1969) 75-76, Halliwell (1986) 305-306, Mattioda (2011) 43-44, Lurie (2012) 446.
[226] Halliwell (1986) 305.
[227] Fricheau (2012) 414.

> Il reste donc à trouver un milieu entre ces deux extrémités, par le choix d'un homme, qui ne soit ni tout à fait bon, ni tout à fait méchant, et qui **par une faute, ou foiblesse humaine**, tombe dans un malheur qu'il ne mérite pas. Aristote en donne pour exemples **Œdipe**, et Thyeste, en quoi véritablement je ne comprends point sa pensée. **Le premier me semble ne faire aucune faute**, bien qu'il tue son père, parce qu'il ne le connaît pas, et qu'il ne fait que disputer le chemin en homme de cœur contre un inconnu qui l'attaque avec avantage. Néanmoins comme la signification du mot grec ἁμάρτημα peut s'étendre **à une simple erreur de méconnaissance**, telle qu'était la sienne, admettons-le avec ce philosophe, bien que **je ne puisse voir quelle passion il nous donne à purger, ni de quoi nous pouvons nous corriger sur son exemple**.[228]

According to Corneille, Oedipus is morally innocent, and his *hamartia* is undoubtedly something that he is not responsible for ("il me semble ne faire aucune faute", he argues): he is an *homme de cœur*, a man of courage, who killed an unknown only by defence. Hence, the dramatic scheme of divine justice cannot be applied to Oedipus' *hamartia* and, hence, Aristotle is unlikely to consider the notion of *catharsis* as a moral purgation of the spectator's soul from vices and passions. It is evident that Aristotle's treatise is the instrument to refuse the neoclassical theory and the idea of a moralising *catharsis*.

Corneille proposes his own view of tragedy: "si la purgation des passions se fait dans la tragédie, je tiens qu'elle se doit faire de la manière que je l'explique".[229] To arouse pity and fear, the ideal tragic character does not need to be necessary a middling character, he can be especially virtuous or especially wicked,[230] and his *hamartia* is not a moral flaw nor a simple error of fact nor a human weakness. His characters show what he calls the "pathétique d'admiration".[231] In his *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique*, Corneille accepts the possibility of a wicked character, like Cléopâtre:

> Cléopâtre dans *Rodogune* est très méchante ; il n'y a point de parricide qui lui fasse horreur, pourvu qu'il la puisse conserver sur un trône qu'elle préfère à toutes choses, tant son attachement à la domination est violent, mais tous ses crimes sont accompagnés d'**une**

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[228] Corneille, *Discours de la tragédie*, 145.
[229] *Ibid.*
[230] *Ibid.* 150: "j'estime qu'il ne faut point faire de difficulté d'exposer sur la scène des hommes très verteux, ou très méchants dans le malheur."
[231] Corneille uses this definition in his *Examen de Nicomède.* See Bray (1927) 319, Bremer (1969) 75, and Georges (1987).

> **grandeur d'âme** qui a quelque chose de si haut qu'en même temps qu'on déteste ses actions, on admire la source dont elles partent.[232]

And in his *Examen de Nicomède*, in presenting the subject of the play, he says that:

> la **grandeur de courage** y règne seule, et regarde son malheur d'un œil si dédaigneux, qu'ils ne sauraient arracher une plainte.[233]

Corneille also refuses the idea that the tragic character cannot be virtuous:

> L'exclusion des personnes tout à fait vertueuses qui tombent dans le malheur, bannit les martyrs de notre théâtre : Polyeucte y a réussi contre cette maxime, et Héraclitus et Nicomède y ont plu, bien qu'ils n'impriment que de la pitié, et ne nous donnent rien à craindre, ni aucune passion a purger, puisque nous les y voyons opprimés, et près de périr, **sans aucune faute de leur part, dont nous puissions nous corriger sur leur exemple**.[234]

Therefore, according to Corneille, the *conditio sine qua non* of his characters is a "grandeur d'ame", going beyond their innocence or culpability, with the only requirement of being able to move (though not necessarily purge) the spectator's soul.[235]

His adaptation of Oedipus' myth confirms this approach. For Corneille, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not responsible for parricide and incest; hence, his tragic error is closer to the Aristotelian notion of ἀτύχημα, a misfortune, whose responsibility is completely outside the agent. Corneille, in 1659, writes a tragedy on the myth of Oedipus, whose innocence makes him too close to the concept of Protestant predestination: thus, Corneille, to defend the notion of free will, describes Oedipus as an evil tyrant who, at the end of the play, turns out to be a martyr. As we shall see in the next chapter, his adaptation is a play explicitly influenced by the religious and political debate of the period. Corneille, Jesuit, supporting the doctrine of Molinism against the determinism of the Jansenists, could not portray a character whose downfall is caused by external forces. Moreover, as we shall see, the issue of free will plays a key role in the story.

His *Oedipe* is not only a practical example of the *mise en scène* of the "pathétique d'admiration", but it also shows how Corneille takes as a starting point Aristotle's best

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[232] Corneille, *Discours du poème dramatique*, 129.

[233] Corneille, *Examen de Nicomède*, 639.

[234] Corneille, *Discours de la tragédie*, 147.

[235] For a discussion of Corneille's treatment of *catharsis*, see Merlin (1997). More generally, on the theatre of Corneille, see Forestier (1996).

example of *hamartia*, i.e. the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and applies his own dramatic rules, although aware of the authority of his sources, as himself declares in the *Examen.*

2.3.4. André Dacier (1692): "la faute d'Œdipe emporté de colère"

The criticism made by Corneille on the notion of *hamartia* as it is described in Sophocles' play, because of its similarity with the concept of Protestant predestination, is one of the arguments used to reject Greek tragedy as amoral and anti-Christian in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. Begun in France – officially on January 27, 1687 with the public reading of Charles Perrault's poem *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* – quickly engaged all Europe.

André Dacier, the author of the first French translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and an influential commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, both written in 1692, discusses the issue of Oedipus' fault to defend the ancient drama and deny the accusations of predestination made by the *Modernes*.[236] Aiming at reinforcing the moralizing rules of the *doctrine classique*, he defines *hamartia* as an involuntary action, resulting from an excess of passion and, then, morally culpable. Following Vettori's (and Piccolomini's) definition of *hamartia*, Dacier makes Oedipus culpable of a character flaw. In commenting the chapter 13 (1453a10) of the *Poetics*, he argues that

> ces mots δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά ne signifient pas simplement par une faute ou foiblesse humaine ; mais par **une faute involontaire qu'on a commise ou par ignorance ou par imprudence**, **et malgré soy, vaincu par une violente passion dont on n'a pû être le maître**, ou enfin par une force majeure et extérieure, pour exécuter des ordres ausquels on n'a pû ny dû désobéir. La faute d'Œdipe est de la première espèce, & tient aussi de la seconde ; celle de Thyeste est de la seconde ; celle d'Oreste, & celle d'Alcméon sont de la troisième.[237]

Then, Dacier openly criticises Corneille who deprived Oedipus of every responsibility, and after having quoted Corneille's passage that we previously analysed, he argues:

> M. Corneille fait icy deux fautes considerables : la première c'est d'avoir mal entendu ce mot δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά et d'avoir ignoré par conséquent la nature de la faute d'Œdipe. Et la seconde

[236] For a discussion of Dacier's approach to the issue of Oedipus' fault, see Bremer (1969) 79-80, Mattioda (2011) 45-46, Lurie (2012) 446-447.
[237] Dacier, *La Poétique d'Aristote*, 182-183.

> c'est d'avoir peu connu le caractère de ce prince parricide, ce qui l'a empêché de voir quelles passions son exemple nous donne à purger. Le terme grec a été suffisamment expliqué par la remarque precedente. Pour **la faute d'Edipe, c'est la faute d'un homme, qui emporté de colère** pour l'insolence d'un Cocher, qui veut le faire ranger malgré lui, tue quatre hommes deux jours après que l'oracle l'a averti qu'il tuerait son propre père. […] **Cette seule action marquerait assez son caractère**, mais Sophocle lui a donné partout des mœurs si conformes à cette action, & qui répondent si parfaitement aux Règles d'Aristote, qu'on voit partout un **homme qui n'est ni bon ni méchant, & qui est mêlé de vertus & de vices** ; **ses vices sont l'orgueil, la violence & l'emportement, la témérité & l'imprudence** ; ce n'est proprement, ni son inceste, ni son parricide qui le rendent malheureux, cette punition aurait été en quelque manière injuste, puisque ces crimes étaient involontaires **; il ne tombe dans ces affreuses calamités que par sa témérité & par ses violences**. […] Et voilà les vices dont Sophocle veut que nous nous corrigions ; c'était donc dans sa pièce qu'il fallait prendre le véritable caractère d'Edipe, pour trouver ce juste milieu qu'Aristote demande ici.[238]

Therefore, Dacier applies the dramatic scheme of the poetic justice to Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus,* providing a link with Aristole's definition of *hamartia*. He accepts the definition of *hamartia* as ignorance and imprudence (it is evident that he compares the passage of the *Poetics* with the book 3 of the *Nicoachean Ethics*), but at the same time he associates this definition with the excess of passion, the incontinence (i.e. the Aristotelian *akrasia*), which is the moral fault of Oedipus. He deserves his punishment; his character flaws – la colère, l'orgueil, la violence, l'emportement, la témérité, l'imprudence – makes him culpable and his vices are "les vices dont Sophocle veut que nous nous corrigions". Thus, Dacier reconfirm the moralising definition of *hamartia* (as a passion or vice) and *catharsis* (as a purgation of passions and vices) supported by the neo-classical dramatic theory, thus providing an enduring argument for the *Modernes* in the *Querelle* against the *Anciens* in the course of the eighteen century.

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[238] *Ibid.* 183-184.

2.4. Acting and Being in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Criticism

The first significant English document of neo-classical poetics is considered Philip Sidney's 1595 *Defence of Poetry*.[239] His definition of poetry is the following: "an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis* […] with this end, to teach and delight".[240] The traditional scholarship supports the view that Sidney's conception of literature is a mixture of elements deriving from different classical sources, juxtaposed into a consistent view of poetry, whose major literary debts would be Horace and Aristotle.[241] This is true, as it emerges from his definition of poetry. What has been recently questioned, especially by M. Lazarus,[242] is instead the belief that Sidney did have access to the *Poetics* only indirectly, throughout Italian commentaries, and that the *Poetics* did not circulate in England until the Latin translation of Theodore Goulston in 1623, that was not translated into English until 1705. If the first obstacle for Sidney would have been the access to the text, the second one was linguistic: even if available, the *Poetics* was written in Greek and thus inaccessible for the Greekless English.

The widespread idea that Sidney was unlikely to have direct access to the *Poetics*[243] and that "from the first these English interpretations of Aristotle's theories were hopelessly adulterated with Horatian maxims and Continental scholarship"[244] penetrated twentieth-century scholarship, thus leading to the hard-to-die belief that the knowledge of the *Poetics* was marginal and slow in England. Even if the history of Aristotle's *Poetics* is not the focus of our discussion, it is necessary to look at the new developments and discoveries in order to understand which was the relationship of the English theorists with their primary sources. Indeed, Sidney's *Defence* faces a number of features which influenced the English neo-classicism:

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[239] Sidney's treatise exists in two forms: *The defence of poesie* printed by William Ponsonby in London in 1595 and *An apologie for poetrie* printed by Henry Olney in London in the same year. For a discussion of Sidney's work, see Trimpi (1995) and Lazarus (2015).

[240] Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, 22-25.

[241] See Halliwell (1987) 18-20, Trimpi (1999).

[242] See Lazarus (2015), (2016) and his forthcoming book on *Aristotle's* Poetics *in Renaissance England.*

[243] See Maslen (2002), Pollard (2010).

[244] Herrick (1930). For a discussion on the literary debt to Horace in the English Aristotelianism, see the really influential works of M. Herrick (1930) and (1946).

> first, the mixture of elements from the *Poetics* with those from other classical authorities; second, the strong tendency toward regularising Aristotelian ideas into fixed precepts, both technical and ethical; this, the use of the *Poetics* in the growing debate over the respective merits of ancient and modern poetry.[245]

Therefore, in taking into account these three fundamental features, we can now consider how some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English critics address the idea of *hamartia*.

2.4.1. Theodore Goulston (1623): *propter erratum aliquod humanum*

Theodore Goulston, a physician and a classical scholar, in 1623, published in London his *Aristotelis de Poetica liber Latine conversus et analytica methodo illustrates*, the first publication of the *Poetics* in England. Significantly, he had translated first Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in 1619. In translating the passage of the *Poetics*' chapter 13 (1453a9-11), he says that the ideal tragic character

> qui neque virtute insigni eminet, et Justitia, neque propter animi vitium, et pravitatem, mutatur, caditque in Adversam Fortunam: sed **propter Erratum aliquod humanum**.[246]
>
> (who is not preeminent in virtue and justice, is changed and falls into Adverse Fortune not because of evilness of spirit or depravity, but because of some human error.)

Thus, Goulston renders δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά (*Po*. 13 145a10-11) as *propter Erratum aliquod humanum*, following Robortello's, Vettori's and Pazzi's influential Latin translations (that added the adjective *humanus*), and a few lines later he translates μὴ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην (*Po*. 13 1453a15-16) with *non propter improbitatem, sed propter errorem magnum*. Goulston's *erratum*/*error* seems to follow the sixteenth-century Latin translations, produced in Italy, but he refuses to render the second reference to *hamartia* as *peccatum* (used by Vettori in his translation and by Robortello in his commentary). Nothing in the text refers to the moral responsibility of the agent, as also a

[245] Halliwell (1987) 19.
[246] Goulston, *Aristotelis de Poetica*, 166-167.

marginal note clarifies: *neque ex animi pravitate, sed prae inscitia, infeliciter agat* ("he acts unfortunately not out of depravity of spirit, but out of ignorance").[247]

As we previously saw, from medieval drama theorists and playwrights inherited two patterns for explaining the downfall of the character: either 1) the protagonist sins and is punished (the "theodicy" pattern, used in the morality plays), or 2) the protagonist falls through the constant reversal of Fortune (the "lament" pattern), as in Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*.[248] According to B. R. Smith, Goulston's Latin translation implies the latter dramatic pattern: there is no room for the poetic justice here; the term *infeliciter* "transposes the whole matter out of a providential universe ruled by rewards and punishments into one governed by chance turnings of Fortune's wheel".[249] Goulston's understanding of *hamartia* seems to be closer to Aristotle's theory as compared with the contemporary moralising neo-classical criticism: the middling character is preserved, and his *hamartia* is described as a human mistake committed in ignorance.

2.4.2. From Daniel Heinsius to Thomas Rymer's "poetical Iustice"

Thomas Rymer coined the definition "poetical justice" in 1678 and formulated the "doctrine" more fully than his predecessors; indeed, the idea as such played a fundamental role in the moralising theory of drama since Plato.[250]

Before analysing a passage from Rymer's 1678 treatise, it is noteworthy to mention those critics that most influenced his works as well as the development of English criticism in the seventeenth century. Undoubtedly, Daniel Heinsius' *De tragoediae constitutione* considerably influenced the English neo-classic literary theory. His sixteen-chapter treatise was first published in Leiden in 1611, then reprinted with stylistic

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[247] *Ibid*. 166.
[248] See chapter 2.1. *Late Antique and Medieval Influences on Renaissance Theory of Tragedy*. Cf. also Margeson (1967), and Savettieri (2014).
[249] Smith (1988) 46.
[250] Cf. Pl. *Rp*. III 392a-b "Because I presume we are going to say that so it is that both poets and writers of prose speak wrongly about men in matters of greatest moment, saying that there are many examples of men who, though unjust, are happy, and of just men who are wretched, and that there is profit in injustice if it be concealed, and that justice is the other man's good and your own loss; and I presume that we shall forbid them to say this sort of thing and command them to sing and fable the opposite".

revisions in 1643. Shortly after its publication, *De tragoediae constitutione* became known in England and France. It was meant to be a sort of manual for playwrights, and as such profoundly influenced the *Discoveries* (1640) of Ben Jonson, and directly or indirectly the works of John Milton, John Dryden and Thomas Rymer, as well as the French neo-classical criticism.

As for the *hamartia*-passage, Heinsius, like Robortello, invokes the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and distinguishes voluntary from involuntary actions, and, among the involuntary actions, those that the agent commits as *ignorans* or *per ignorantiam*.[251] Oedipus is said to have acted *per ignorantiam*, as being someone who knows the difference between right and wrong, but his *hamartia* is due to the ignorance of particular circumstances:

> sicut Oedipus, qui cum parricidium summum esse crimen non ignoraret, Laium tamen miser, & per ignorantiam peremit. Hinc commiseratio.
>
> (So Oedipus, who does not ignore that the parricide is the worst of the crimes, he, miserable, killed Laius through ignorance. Hence, [he deserves] compassion.)[252]

Thus, Heinsius interprets the tragic error through the filter of moral philosophy: he explains how Oedipus can be justified, as acting through ignorance, and then deserving compassion. However, his definition of Oedipus' *hamartia* is problematic, since it does not completely justify his downfall and seems to contradict his following discussion. He indeed accepts the idea – that will be developed in France and England – of the didactic and moral function of the theatre. This is evident in Heinsius' discussion of the tragic character. The adjective σπουδαῖος, used by Aristotle to define the "seriousness" and the "elevation" of the protagonist, as we previously saw, does not refer to its moral meaning used instead in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (with the sense of "excellent in virtue"). Heinsius, as the majority of seventeenth-century critics, identifies σπουδαῖος with moral uprightness, and he explains his preference for good characters by attempting to conciliate Aristotle's and Plato's view of tragedy:

[251] For Heinsius' treatment of *hamartia*, see Smith (1988) 41-50 and Walfard (2008) 273-274.
[252] Heinsius, *De tragoediae constitutione*, 77.

> Aristotle points out that four principles must be adhered to in the delineation of character. First, **the character must be good** – which calls for further explanation. Among the faults which Plato found with Tragedy was the fact that its imitation changes and is inconsistent. It imitates, as occasion offers, good and bad alike, and sometimes it imitates the bad alone. As we warned before, the mind of man is easily deceived by this representation. Whereas he seeks only what is seemly, a man often fails to distinguish between the good and the bad which is presented to him and, like the tragic poet, he imitates both kinds of character. There is no pernicious principle than this in the *Republic*, because, by this token, the theatre becomes a school for vice rather than virtue – indeed all the more so because we are all more inclined to do the wrong thing in preference to what is right. When Plato's commentators explain the types and formulae laid down in the *Republic* by the law-giver, they say that no poet is to be allowed into the ideal state except the one who imitates God and the actions of good men. The rest give pleasure but teach nothing; often they infect and corrupt character and, hence, they do more harm than good.[253]

Heinsius takes Aristotle's *Poetics* as a starting point and, contrary to what Aristotle does, he conceives the tragic character in moral terms: in order to do this, he refers to Plato's view of tragedy (albeit opposite to Aristotle's), thus claiming that tragic hero ought to be as good as possible. This is the only way for the theatre to be a "school of virue" (a definition also used by Racine in his *Préface de Phèdre*).

Thomas Rymer follows Heinsius and seventeenth-century critics in understanding σπουδαῖος in moral terms, and shares the belief of a moral and didactic function of the theatre.[254] He is likely to own his idea of poetic justice mostly to the French *doctrine classique*: he studies the French literary criticism and, in 1674, he translates Rapin's *Réflexions sur la Poétique d'Aristote*. This book brought Rymer to the theorisation of his doctrine of poetic justice, in his 1678 *Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients, and by the Common Sense of All Ages*.

Rymer states that the Greek dramatists found in history "virtue often opprest, and wickedness on the Throne". Now, according to J. Loesberg, "the concept of poetic justice rises both from the perceived connections between the design of art and the possible orders of the world and from an evident disconnection between them".[255] Indeed, Rymer bases his argumentation on the fact that unfair distribution of punishments and rewards

[253] *Ibid*. 138-139.
[254] For a discussion of Rymer's poetic justice, see Bremer (1969) 84, Smith (1988) 48-50.
[255] Loesberg (2005) 42.

to moral characters and actions could let us doubt of divine providence.[256] Thus, he argues that

> finding also that this unequal distribution of rewards and punishments did perplex the wisest, and by the Atheist was made a scandal to Divine Providence, they [*i.e.* Greek tragedians] concluded that a Poet must of necessity see justice exactly administrated, if he intended to please.[257]

Then, Rymer says that to satisfy the concept of poetic justice and to arouse pity in the audience, ancient tragedies admit characters that ought to be not too evil:

> The Poets consider'd, that naturally men were affected with *pitty*, when they saw others suffer more than their fault deserv'd; and *vice*, they thought, could never be painted too ugly and frightful; therefore, whether they would move *pitty*, or make *vice* detested, it concern'd them to be somewhat of the severest in the punishments they inflicted. Now, because their hands were tied, that they could not punish beyond such a degree; they were oblig'd to have a strict eye on their Malefactor, that he transgrest not too far, that he committed not two crimes, when but responsible for one: nor, indeed, be so far guilty, as by the Law to deserve death. For though historical Iustice might rest there; yet poetical Iustice could not be so content.[258]

Rymer more than the hero's mistake emphasises his morally good or bad character; the "poetical Iustice" is based on punishments or rewards of the agent who is "judged" on the basis of his or her moral stature.

2.4.3. John Dryden (1672): *hamartia* as "frailty"

The idea of poetic justice was accepted by John Dryden even before it was formally theorised by Dryden in 1678. Poet, dramatist, and literary critic, he wrote marginal notes to his own copy of Rymer's essay:

> **The punishment of vice and reward of virtue are the most adequate ends of tragedy because most conducing to good example of life**. In Greek tragedy innocence is unhappy

[256] This is the same issue discussed by Castelvetro to justify the idea of poetic justice in the tragic plot.
[257] Rymer, The Tragedies of the Last Age, 23
[258] *Ibid.* 27.

> often, and the offender escapes. The Ancients did not administer poetical justice (of which Mr. Rymer boasts) as well as we do.[259]

However, Dryden early realizes that a guilt-punishment plot does not move the spectator as much as a plot showing an undeserved punishment. Following Hensius' understanding of σπουδαῖος in moral terms, he identifies the tragic character with a morally virtuous man, whose downfall arouses pity and fear in the audience. In the preface of his *Troilus and Cressida*, he argues as it follows:

> when we see that the most virtuous, as well as the greatest, are not exempt from such misfortunes, that consideration moves pity in us, and insensibly work us to be helpful to, and tender over, the distressed, which is the noblest and most god-like of moral virtues. Here 'tis observable that it is absolutely necessary to make a man virtuous, if we desire he should be pitied: we lament not, but detest, a wicked man, we are glad when we behold his crimes are punished, and that poetical justice is done upon him.[260]

Then, Dryden specifies that tragedy does not have to banish the villains; the character fallen in misfortune ought to have a "frailty" (a definition similar to what La Mesnardière called *fragilité* in his 1640 *Poétique*):

> Shall we therefore banish all characters of villainy? I confess I am not of that opinion; but it is necessary that the hero of the play be not a villain; that is, the characters which should move our pity ought to have virtuous inclinations, and degrees of moral goodness in them. As for a perfect character of virtue, it never was in nature, and therefore there can be no imitation of it; but *there are allays of frailty to be allowed for the chief persons*, yet so that the good which is in them shall outweigh the bad, and consequently leave room for punishment on one side, and pity on the other.

For Dryden, then, *hamartia* is a frailty, which preserves the status of the Aristotelian middling character, although accepting the seventh-century idea of a tragic hero defined (and punished or rewarded) in moral terms.

The idea of poetic justice, theorised in England by Rymer in the 1670s, has been the consequence of the influence of the *doctrine classique*. Moreover, at the end of the century, Dacier's French translation of the *Poetics* (1692) was in turn translated with its

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[259] See the edition of Watson (1962) 218.

[260] Dryden, *Preface to Droilus and Cressida* in Watson (1962) I: 245.

notes into English in 1705: this edition was widely diffused. John Dennis – who was "at least as fanatical as La Mesnardière and Rymer in exacting an absolutely correct distribution of justice for every character in the play"[261] – was a faithful reader of Dacier. Dennis' literary debt to Dacier, who translated for the first time in French both the *Poetics* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, is evident in his essay entitled *The Impartial Critick* (1693), containing an analysis of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*:

> The faults for which Oedipus suffers are his vain curiosity in consulting the oracle about his birth, his pride in refusing to yield the way in his return from that oracle, his fury and violence in attacking four men on the road the very day after he had been forwarded by the oracle that he should kill his father.[262]

Curiosity, pride, fury, and violence are the accusations made to Oedipus (in a description really close to that of Dacier). Eventually, *hamartia* becomes a fault of character, an excess of passion, a weakness of will, thus following the previous theorisations of Vettori and Piccolomini in Italy, Sarasin and La Mesnardière (among others) of the *Académie française*, and lastly Dacier who applies the pattern of the poetic justice to Sophocle's drama, to defend Greek tragedy in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* which will engage all Europe from the late-seventeenth century onwards.

To sum up, this overview of the understanding of *hamartia* in English literary criticism shows the gradual substitution, in the course of the seventeenth century, of the idea of *hamartia* as a mistake in action with the idea of a "frailty" in character. The discussion on voluntary and involuntary actions (mostly developed by Robortello and Heinsius) and the reference to ignorance clearly influence Goulston's translation, which still interprets tragic error (*erratum*/*error*) as relating to the action (*praxis*), not the character (*ethos*) nor his/her moral stature. The reception of Italian commentaries (such as Vettori's and Piccolomini's), the theory of passions inherited from the *doctrine classique* along with the already concrete idea of poetic justice, the interpretation of σπουδαῖος as morally virtuous lead to the widespread concept of *hamartia* as a flaw in character (Rymer, Dryden, Dennis). According to J. Jones' 1962 *On Aristotle and Greek*

[261] Bremer (1969) 85.
[262] Spingarn (1908-9) III 163.

Tragedy, the reason why neo-classicists misunderstood the *Poetics* is their interest in the character, above all the tragic hero. "We have imported the tragic hero into the *Poetics*, where the concept has no place", Jones argues.[263] Indeed, Aristotle clearly says:

> ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησίς ἐστιν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεων καὶ βίου.
>
> (tragedy is an imitation not of human beings but of action and life.)[264]

Jones insists that chapter 13 and the notion of *hamartia* do not deal with the ideal tragic hero: the concept of *hamartia* defines the action that causes the change of fortune, it is a concept (albeit ambiguous) related with Aristotle's theory of action, as the related passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric* imply. We saw how the twentieth-century critics rightly tried to refuse the moral emphasis put to *hamartia* from the Renaissance onwards. Aristotle, later in chapter 6, specifies that

> ἔτι ἄνευ μὲν πράξεως οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τραγῳδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἠθῶν γένοιτ' ἄν.
>
> (a tragedy is impossible without an action, but there may be one without characters.)[265]

The bigger distance between Aristotle's view of tragedy and the early modern understanding of theatre, of both its theory and its practice, can be summarised in the distinction between *ethos* and *praxis*, being and acting. As we shall see in the next chapter, the early modernity focuses on the shades of character, on passions, virtues and vices of the tragic hero that, according to Jones, is an invention of the modern drama.

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[263] Jones (1962) 13.
[264] Arist. *Po*. 6 1450a15-16.
[265] *Ibid*. 6 1450a24-25.

Chapter 3

Performing *hamartia*:

Moral Awareness of Early Modern Oedipus

3.1. Translating and Adapting Oedipus: Intersections between Theory and Practice

It has been rightly argued that "every Aristotelian commentary written in the *Cinquecento* should be correctly read in relation to the dramatic text, and not *vice versa*".[1] In fact, not only theory and practice of neoclassical drama go hand in hand, but it is often the dramatic theory that refers to existing tragedies as a paradigm to follow. As N. Frye points out, "most theories of tragedy take one great tragedy as their norm: thus Aristotle's theory is largely founded on *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and Hegel's on *Antigone*".[2] Sixteenth-century Italian theorists and playwrights are deeply interested in translating, commenting and performing Sophoclean drama, especially the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and – anticipating Hegel – the *Antigone*.

As we saw in the previous chapter, according to Aristotle, the perfect correspondence of ἀναγνώρισις ("recognition") and περιπέτεια ("reversal of fortune") makes the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the perfect example of a well-structured play. Now, in sixteenth-century Italy, since Aristotle's *Poetics* is considered the only normative key to understanding ancient drama, Oedipus becomes the tragic hero *par excellence.* Moreover, we have seen how chapter 13 of the *Poetics* (referring to Oedipus as the ideal middling character and discussing his *hamartia*) plays a crucial role in the theoretical debate. Though, the ambiguity of Oedipus' *hamartia* is problematic for Renaissance writers, who will try to solve the issue of his moral responsibility by opting as clearly as possible *either* for his innocence *or* for his culpability.

As it happened for the neo-classical literary theory, the development of neoclassical drama in Europe was the effect of the rediscovery of the ancient texts in Italy.[3] The theoretical debate about how to (re)write a tragedy had to take into account the fact that two different models were now available: the Greek plays and the Roman Seneca. The *editio princeps* of Sophocles was printed by Manutius in 1502, followed a

[1] Ferrone (1996) 921.
[2] Frye (1971) 212
[3] For a discussion on the rediscovery of tragedy in Italy, see Di Maria (2002), Pieri (2006), and Schironi (2016).

few years later by Aristotle's *Poetics* (1508).[4] According to E. Borza, in the course of the sixteenth century, there appeared in print as many as ninety-one editions and translations of Sophocles, whereas forty-four works, including translations and commentaries, exist in manuscript and are still unpublished.[5]

Renaissance translations and adaptations of ancient drama played a crucial role in the dissemination of knowledge, the establishment of vernaculars, and the development of political, religious, and epistemological debate in early modern Europe. If early- and mid-fifteenth-century Italian humanists had concentrated on new translations from Greek into Latin, rather neglecting the vernacular, the situation changed at the end of the century. The sixteenth century was characterized by a proliferation of vernacular tragedies and, especially from the 1530s on, by intense translation activity from the classical languages into the vernaculars of the peninsula.

The high number of works based on Sophocles' tragedies (Aeschylus, on the contrary, shows thirty) helps "to correct the impression that Seneca was the main influence on humanist tragedy".[6] Seneca's *Oedipus* is rediscovered first, since the first edition of his tragedies was published in 1475 by Andrea Belfort in Ferrara. Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, Seneca *tragicus* became widely known through the commentaries of the Paduan humanists, such as Albertino Mussato (1261-1329) and Lovato Lovati (1241-1309). His influence on the development of European drama was undoubtedly considerable.[7] In Italy, Sophocles' drama, as a result of the authority conferred to Aristotle's *Poetics*, was granted a privileged space not only in literary criticism but also in the practical reworkings of drama.[8] The treatment of Oedipus myth in the practice of tragedy is nevertheless problematic because of the philosophical and religious issues relating to his "innocent guilt". Sophoclean and Senecan elements are

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[4] The manuscript used for the first edition of the Sophoclean *corpus* is the *Vindobonensis phil. Philos. Gr 48* and the *Graecus* 731 (see Borza [2003] 51). Aldus Manutius published, also, for the first time the Greek texts of Aristophanes (1598), Euripides (1503, except *Electra*), and Aeschylus (1518).

[5] Borza published several studies on the tradition Sophocles in sixteenth-century Italy (and Europe). For an excellent discussion on Sophocles' manuscript tradition, early modern printed editions as well as Latin and vernacular translations, see Borza (2003a), (2003b) and (2007).

[6] Edmunds (2006) 84.

[7] See especially Citti-Iannucci (2012).

[8] See especially Edmunds (2006) and Guastella (2013) *contra* Giazzon (2016).

sometimes creatively mixed in order to produce a specific emotional effect on the audience or to face (and justify) different political, philosophical, or religious themes.[9]

As clearly argued by F. Schironi, in the reception of ancient drama (and of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in particular), we can distinguish three categories, in decreasing order of faithfulness to the ancient model:[10]

1. translations into vernacular of an original Greek or Latin tragedy;
2. adaptations of Greek or Latin tragedies with a more or less high degree of creative freedom;
3. tragedies based on a story that does not derive from Greek or Latina drama, but is rewritten following an ancient mythical archetype derived from an ancient tragedy.

These three categories are not always easy to distinguish, especially the first two of them. As we shall see, sixteenth-century Italian tragedians mostly show a philological interest in translating the original Sophoclean text as closely as possible (*i.e.* Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici, Bernardo Segni, Orsatto Giustiniani, Pietro Angeli), with the exception of Lodovico Dolce's translation of Seneca *tragicus* and Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's own adaptation inspired to Senecan, Sophoclean, and Euripidean tragic plots. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Emanuele Tesauro, for his adaptation of *Edipo* (1661), explicitly borrows from Seneca's play.

The predominance of Seneca's *Oedipus* is evident instead in seventeenth-century France, not only in those translations explicitly referring to Seneca's play (*i.e.* Benoit de Bauduyn, Pierre Linage, Michel de Marolles), but also in those adaptations of the myth variously influenced by both Greek and Latin versions (*i.e.* Jean Prévost, Pierre Corneille, Tallemant des Réaux). The first translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* appears not before 1692 with André Dacier's *Œdipe de Sophocle.*

In England, it is Senecan tragedy that most influences the reception of Oedipus' myth: the first English translation of Seneca's play is Alexander Neville's 1560 *Oedipus*, which clearly influenced the following translations and adaptations of the myth (*i.e.* William Gager's Latin translation, and two English translations – still in the

[9] See Giazzon (2016).
[10] Schironi (2016) 138. Cf. also Edmunds (2006) 85-86.

form of a manuscript – the one by Aristotle Knowsley, the other one is anonymous[11]). The seventeenth-century England sees two versions of Oedipus myth: Thomas Evans' 1615 *Oedipus* (adapting elements deriving from Seneca and morality plays) and the most influential English adaptation, written in the Restoration period and clearly in response to Corneille's tragedy, that is Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus* of 1678. It is worth to mention, eventually, other two indirect engagements with Sophocles' play, not dealing directly with the tragedy of Oedipus, but undoubtedly inspired by his myth: William Joyner's 1670 *The Roman Empress* and John Milton's 1671 *Samson Agonistes*.

How has the notion of *hamartia* been treated in the reception of the myth of Oedipus? How do Renaissance playwrights solve the ambiguities and the contradictions of his plot? How do tragedians relate to the contemporary theoretical debate on tragedy? We shall consider a few significative case studies among the abovementioned translations and adaptations of (both Greek and Latin) Oedipus written and/or performed between the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

3.2. *Oedipus Tyrannus* in Sixteenth-Century Italy: a Christian-Pagan Syncretism

The process of translation is never a mere and neutral transposition from one language to another; it is always productive of new linguistic, stylistic, and cultural elements. Especially in the Renaissance, all translation involves a degree of exegesis.[12] Charles Martindale, in his 1993 book *Redeeming the text*, significantly claims that "meaning is always realised at the point of reception":[13] this claim makes clear that Classical reception, especially in the Renaissance, cannot be considered an unmediated instrument of knowledge of an exemplary past.

Italian rewritings of Oedipus' myth, as we just clarified, follow different impulses: the philological interest and the creative imitation.[14] If Anguillara's *Edippo* is a unique attempt to redefine completely the character of Oedipus, the other translations

[11] The anonymous translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* is the MS Rawlinson poet. 76, preserved at the Bodleian Library, in Oxford.

[12] Norton (1981) 179.

[13] Martindale (1993) 3.

[14] Edmunds (2006) 85-86,

(more or less) *ad verbum* are also productive of new interpretations. Let us look at the case of Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici's *Edipo Principe*.[15]

3.2.1. Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici: *Edipo Principe* (1526)

Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici, whose Latin *Aristotelis Poetica* (1536) has already been mentioned,[16] made the first translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* in Italian in 1524-26 ca. Pazzi de' Medici had already translated in Latin the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Electra* in 1525. Both his Latin and Italian translations remain in manuscript and have been recently studied by E. Borza.[17]

The text of Pazzi's *Edipo Principe*, preserved in two manuscripts, respectively in Rome and in Florence, is a quite faithful translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*: yet, there are additions to the original text that reveal the presence of a Christianising language.[18] Here, a few examples: the adjective "sancto" ("holy"/"saint") is frequently used throughout the play (it occurs almost thirty times),[19] as well as the terms "peccato"/"peccatore" ("sin"/"sinner") referring to Creon, and "martire" ("martyr") referred to Oedipus. Moreover, the concept of "being exiled" is referred to with the term "scomunicato" ("excommunicated"), which derives from the fourteenth-century ecclesiastic Latin *excommunicare*.

There can be found additions and omissions that probably aim at avoiding an explicit accusation of the gods (and, then, of God): in Sophocles' play, Oedipus - at the

[15] For a general discussion on the reception of (Senecan and Sophoclean) Oedipus in early modern Italy, see Bosisio (1989), Mastrocola (1996), Javitch (2001), Chiodo (2007), Guastella (2012) and (2013), Giazzon (2016).

[16] See chapter 2.2.1. (a).

[17] The Italian text of Pazzi's *Edipo Principe* is preserved in two manuscripts: the first one is preserved in Florence (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II, IV = *Magl.* VII, 972), the second one in Rome (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Barb. Lat.* 4002). The Greek test is not included in any of the two manuscripts. The Latin translation of Pazzi's *Oedipus* is preserved (along with the translation of Sophocles' *Electra*) in two manuscripts: the first one is in Florence (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II, IV, 8 = *Magl.* VII, 950, bis.), the second one is preserved in Ravenna (Biblioteca Classense, cod. 372). For an in-depth discussion on Pazzi's works, see Borza (2007) 167-204, and (2013). The preface of Pazzi's vernacular translations is published by Solerti (1887) 43-53.

[18] I am referring here to the text of the manuscript preserved in Florence (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II, IV = *Magl.* VII, 972), that I have recently consulted.

[19] The adjective "sancto" can be occur as it follows: "numi sancti", "sancto augurio", sancto Apollo", "sancto oracolo", "sancta giustizia", "sancti Dei", "sancta leggi", "sancto propheta".

exact moment when he starts to suspect to be himself the killer of Laius – desperately asks Zeus:

> Ὦ Ζεῦ, τί μου δρᾶσαι βεβούλευσαι πέρι;
>
> (O Zeus, what have you decided to do with me?) [20]

Pazzi de' Medici translates as it follows:

> O Giove che far deggio in tal caso? Spirami.
>
> (O Zeus, what should I do in this case? Inspire me.)[21]

Thus, it is evident an inversion of the subject which aims at limiting Zeus' responsibility of Zeus and stressing Oedipus' free will. In fact, as Finglass points out in his commentary, "the perfect βεβούλεθσαι of Zeus suggests a fixed and irrevocable decision; the βουλή of Zeus could be associated with profound and unexplained human suffering".[22] The downfall of Oedipus cannot be explained by Pazzi exclusively as the consequence of the will of Zeus, as it clearly emerges in another passage. Oedipus sees the working of a δαίμων as responsible for his sufferings:

> Ἆρ' οὐκ ἀπ' ὠμοῦ ταῦτα δαίμονός τις ἂν / κρίνων ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τῷδ' ἂν ὀρθοίη λόγον;
>
> (Would not someone who judged that this was the result of the action of an evil spirit be right in what he said in my case?) [23]

Pazzi de' Medici completely modified the sentence, omitting the reference to a δαίμων acting against him:

> Per ch'io temo ch'el fato che mi discaccia / di qui non mi conduca a tai casi horrendi.
>
> (Because I'm afraid that the fate that banishes me from here will lead me to such horrible sufferings)[24]

The last example refers to the last scene, when Oedipus entrusts his daughters to Creon, rendered by Pazzi de' Medici as it follows:

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[20] Soph. *OT* 738. I used the translation of Finglass (2018).
[21] Pazzi de' Medici, *Edipo Principe*, f. 116^r.
[22] Finglass (2018) 399.
[23] Soph. *OT* 828-829.
[24] Pazzi de' Medici, *Edipo Principe*, f. 119^r.

La colpa mia non imputando allor, prendati d'esse misericordia.

(Not blaming them for my fault, please offer mercy to them)[25]

Not only Oedipus here explicitly admits to being culpable, but he also uses the term "misericordia" that is properly the Christian pity. Now, the passages analysed could let the reader think that Pazzi attempted a process of Christianisation of the text. Moreover, it is noteworthy that his translations have been composed to be addressed to Pope Clement VII, as it is explained in the preface. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy as well that throughout the text there can be found several references to pagan divinities (followed or preceded by the adjective "sancto"), and there are several references to the concept of fate and fortune (thus preserving the Sophoclean image of Oedipus represented both as a lucky "child of *Tyche*" and victim of an unlucky fate).[26] It is evident that Christian and pagan lexicon coexist in the play, which does not actually propose a specific religious message. As we saw in the previous chapter, the theory proposed by Brazeau[27] according to whom a Christianising terminology does not necessarily mean that the text is supposed to have a religious meaning, can be applied to this text too. Even in this case, like in the case of Pazzi's contemporary theorists (Giraldi Cinzio, Robortello, Maggi, Vettori), Christianising and moralising mistranslations seem to be part of a broader program of cultural translation, aiming at domesticating the text for a Christian audience. Of course, this process of Christian domestication implies a sort of limitation of divine necessity in Oedipus' downfall, in order to obtain the sympathy of the Christian spectator.

S. Di Maria clearly explains the process of translation characterising Renaissance tragedy:

> Communality of religious beliefs […] contributed to the sense of realism with which playwrights sought to bring the world of the stage even closer to the world of the audience […]. However, it presented serious obstacles when dealing with plots based on mythological sources, which, as we know, constitute a large part of Renaissance dramatic production. The contrast between the beliefs prevailing in ancient plays and those of the

[25] *Ibid*. f. 134r.
[26] Cf. Soph. *OT* 1080. For a discussion of Oedipus "child of *Tyche*", see Diano (1957). For the references to fate and fortune in Pazzi's *Edipo*, cf. (fato) ff. 106r, 199r, 130r, 133v, (fortuna) 99r, 101v, 109r, 117v, 122r, 123v, 127r, 130r, 135r.
[27] See Brazeau (2018) and (forthcoming).

intended audience could undermine the favourable disposition of the audience towards the representation. Perhaps unwittingly, Christian spectators would tend to withhold their sympathy from characters who placed their faith in promiscuous and petty gods […]. Following the poetics of "dressing" classical tragedy in contemporary attire, most playwrights opted to endow pagan gods with Christian attributes. In this way, they preserved the atmosphere while proposing a notion of the divine closer to their own. They were most careful not to limit the presence of the divine, which was a major force in the universe of mythological characters.[28]

The case of Pazzi's *Edipo* is not part of the (later) Christianisation process that we shall see in other Classical rewritings: his philological interest is preserved, and his additions and omissions testify a cultural domestication of the Greek text for a hypothetical Christian audience. Moreover, as we saw in the analysis of his Latin translation of the *Poetics* (composed ten years after his translation of Sophcoles' tragedies), he translates *hamartia* as close as possible to the Greek text, rendering the Greek term not as *peccatum* but as *humanus error*.

What M. Mastroianni argues about sixteenth-century French tragedy could be perfectly applied to the early tragedy of Italian *Cinquecento*:

We are in the presence of a continuous oscillation between two expressive and ideological registers, the one pagan, the other Christian, an oscillation based on a continuous overlap between different semantic fields. This phenomenon characterises as much as possible the rewritings of classical tragedies, where the shifts of meaning can take the form of syncretism.[29]

This kind of syncretism, pagan and Christian, finds its perfect realisation in Anguillara's 1565 *Edippo*, which is the only sixteenth-century Italian rewriting of Oedipus' myth which can *actually* be considered as the result of a process of Christianisation.

[28] Di Maria (2002) 63-64.

[29] Mastroianni (2010) 540: "siamo pertanto in presenza di un'oscillazione continua da un registro espressivo e ideologico all'altro, oscillazione che si fonda anzitutto su una continua identificazione, o sovrapposizione, di differenti campi semantici: fenomeno, questo, che caratterizza in massimo grado le rielaborazioni di tragedie classiche, ove gli slittamenti di senso possono configurarsi, come si è accennato, a una forma di sincretismo.

3.2.2. Anguillara's *Edippo* (1556-1565): "pecca, e nulla sa del suo peccato"

The *Edippo* by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara was one of the most criticised versions of *Oedipus* in sixteenth-century Italy. It was printed twice, in 1565, once in Padua and once in Venice. It was both the first printed vernacular edition of the *Oedipus* story in the Renaissance and the first to be performed in Italy (first in Padua in 1556 or 1560, and a second time in Vicenza in 1561).[30] Both Anguillara's contemporaries and modern scholars have agreed in their condemnation of its additions to Sophocles text.[31] He recreates the original Greek tragedy by combining Sophocles' and Seneca's play and adding a variety of ancient sources from Euripides' *Phoenician Women* and Statius' *Thebaid*. No one else in sixteenth-century Italy completely redefined Oedipus, as Anguillara did.

At the centre of his play there is Oedipus' innocence. In the first scene, Tiresias reveals to the audience the true origins of the hero, described on one side as "il saggio Edippo, / il re nostro prudente, invitto e giusto",[32] and on the other side as "incestuoso e parricida".[33] Then, he explains the moral dilemma of the play and, speaking of Edippo and Jocasta, he says: "Ciascun di lor la mente have innocente, / e pecca, e nulla sa del suo peccato".[34] Edippo is shown to be an innocent, as he was unaware of what he did. He says in the fourth act: "ho peccato / contra mia voglia: e l'animo innocente ho sempre havuto, che la man peccò, non peccò il core".[35] Anguillara's Oedipus is innocent, he's a loving father and a good king, and no one considers him to be responsible for his crimes. The messenger from Corinth, after Oedipus' recognition of his true identity, says: "Peccaste non sapendo il fatto a pieno, / non siete in questo degno di castigo […] che l'error che si fa per ignoranza non partorisce infamia".[36]

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[30] See Fabrizio (1995) 178.

[31] For a discussion on Anguillara's *Edippo*, see Paduano (1994) 266-270, Fabrizio (1995), Mastrocola (1996) 100-112, Di Maria (2005), Zanin (2008), (2010), (2012b) and (2014a) 340-343, Lauriola (2017) 183-184.

[32] "The wise Edippo, our prudent King, invincible and just" (I 1,5^r^).

[33] "Incestuous and parricide" (I 6^r^).

[34] "Each one of them has an innocent conscience, yet he sins, and knows nothing of his sin" (I 1,5^r^).

[35] "I sinned against my will and I have always had an innocent conscience, because it was my hand to sin, not my heart" (IV 3,34^v^).

[36] "You sinned without knowing the whole truth, therefore you do not deserve any punishment [...] because a mistake made out of ignorance does not produce infamy" (III 5, 38^r^).

Moreover, there are many references to fate and destiny throughout the text. In the first dialogue between Tiresias and Manto, they explain to the spectator the moral issue of the play with the following unanswered rhetorical questions: "Edippo casto e pio nel suo pensiero, si governò da saggio e da prudente ma che val la prudenza contra il Fato?", "Chi può fuggir quel che destina il cielo?", "Perché condanna il Fato un innocente?".[37] The Chorus, then, concludes that "si può veder come il giuditio humano / scorge poco lontano / contra il voler della malvagia sorte".[38] Thus, we can see how Anguillara's conception of fate appears quite close to Protestant assumptions about predestination and free will. Yet, we should not confuse the cruel destiny, "la malvagia sorte", with the Christian God, who cannot be considered as responsible for Oedipus' sufferance and is the only one who can guarantee the salvation. Indeed, Anguillara's text is characterised by a strong presence of a Christianised language and pious sentences revealing a religious feeling of gratitude and faith towards the Christian God.[39] In fact, the Chorus claims: "sol chi si fonda in Dio / può dir d'havere un fin stabile e fermo".[40]

On the contrary, Sophocles' *Oedipus* does not implore divine help, but questions his fate and laments the god's cruelty and lack of compassion. He blames Apollo who "brought to him these terrible sufferings" (*OT* 1329s.):[41] he sees himself as "abandoned by the gods" (*OT* 1360) and "the most cursed, the most hateful of mortals to the gods" (*OT* 1344s.).[42] And again he concludes, at the end of the play, "I have become the most hateful to the gods" (*OT* 1519).[43] In Seneca's *Oedipus* the Theban Chorus blame the "gods' ancient wrath" (*veteres deum irae*) for Thebes' plague: "No! You did not cause this crisis. No fates of yours pursue the Labacids. The gods' ancient wrath hounds us"

[37] "Edippo, with a chaste and pious conscience, acted as a wise and prudent man, but how can prudence face Destiny?" (I 1,6[r]); "who can escape what Heaven has already determined?" (I 1,6[v]); "why does Destiny condemn an innocent?" (I 1,7[v]).

[38] "We can see how human judgment cannot look forward against the will of the cruel Destiny" (III 5,38[v]).

[39] For an in-depth analysis of the Christianising language of Anguillara's *Edipo*, see Di Maria (2002).

[40] "Only those who act according to God can say that they have a stable and firm purpose" (III 5,40[r]; cf. I 2).

[41] Soph. *OT* 1329f.: Ἀπόλλων τάδ' ἦν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι, ὁ κακὰ κακὰ τελῶν ἐμὰ τάδ' ἐμὰ πάθεα ("It was Apollo, my friends, Apollo, who accomplished these things, my sufferings, my sufferings").

[42] Soph. *OT* 1360: Νῦν δ' ἄθεος μέν εἰμί. ("As it is, I am abandoned by the god"); *OT* 1345 ἔτι δὲ καὶ θεοῖς ἐχθρότατον βροτῶν ("and moreover the most hateful of mortals to the gods").

[43] Soph. *OT* 1519: Ἀλλὰ θεοῖς γ' ἔχθιστος ἥκω ("but I have turned out to be the most hateful to the gods").

(ll. 709-712).[44] This view of a hostile deity contrasts with the pious tone used by the Italian Oedipus every time he mentions the name of God.

Hence, how does Anguillara solve the moral issue of Oedipus' innocent guilt? The hero's subjective innocence is contradicted by the terrible punishment he has to suffer in the end. But the author cannot accuse God of being evil. He then avoids the tragic ambiguity and stresses Oedipus' free will by presenting the hero's punishment as self-inflicted, as Oedipus claims after his recognition: «Mi rimorde tanto la coscienza il mio peccato / Vo punirmi al tutto da me stesso, / se non come vorrei, come potrò. / En tanto penserò di trovar via / da soffrire ogni giorno mille morti".[45] However, this explanation for Oedipus' sufferings may does not seem fully satisfactory. The last Chorus may solve the moral paradox of the play:

> Quindi si può veder che'l sommo Dio
> Non sol dispon che i volontari eccessi
> Condannin l'huomo al debito castigo
> Ma quei peccati anchor ch'alcun commette
> Per ignoranza e contra il suo volere
> Vuol che condannin l'huomo a penitenza
> E la debita pena ne riporti.
>
> Thus we may see the great God / not only commands that willful excesses / condemn man to his due punishment, / but also he orders that those sins committed / out of ignorance and unwillingly / should condemn man to punishment / and require the due penalty to be paid.[46]

Thus, Oedipus' fault becomes Christian sin, maybe the original sin: Anguillara ends his play with a reference to the dangerous power of involuntary sins committed in ignorance. Oedipus is innocent but eventually responsible for his involuntary crimes and, in the end, aware of his guilt. According to Zanin,[47] however, *Edippo* would have had the possibility of redemption throughout the grace of God, represented by

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[44] Sen. *Oed*. 709-712: Non tu tantis causa periclis. / non haec Labdacidas petunt / fata, sed veters deum / irae secuntur.

[45] "My sin pricks my conscience […] / I will punish myself thoroughly, if not as I wish, as I will be able to. Meanwhile I will think out how to suffer every day thousands of deaths" (III 5,39^{r}). Cf. Sen. *Oed*. 948f. Quod saepe fieri non potest fiat diu; / mors eligatuer longa ("what cannot happen often must be slow. Choose a long death").

[46] Anguillara, *Edippo*, (V 3, 62^{r-v}).

[47] Zanin (2008) 70f., (2012b) 214-216, and (2014a) 340-343.

Anguillara in the scene of the sacrifice (that clearly derives from Seneca's *Oedipus*). In the second act, the sacred ox is illuminated by the sunlight, but it refuses to look at it and throw itself onto the sword. The ox would be a metaphor for Oedipus; Anguillara, rewriting Seneca's text, seems to give a religious interpretation of the sacrifice. "Edippo refuses to receive God's light, therefore he suffers for blindness and exile – Zanin argues – Edippo might have overcome the original sin by accepting God's light, *i.e.* God's grace, but he refuses the light and receives eternal exile".[48]

Therefore, Anguillara explicitly christianises his *Edippo*, by preserving his status of middling character: the theory of the original sin seems to justify his involuntary and unwitting sin, whereas his self-blinding (and, then, his refusal of God's grace) reconfirms his free will.

3.2.3. Oedipus *optimus vir*

In the Italian *Cinquecento* the reasons which cause the downfall of Oedipus alternate between culpability and misfortune. The ambiguity of the notion of *hamartia* is usually avoided. As we saw, Anguillara justifies the "due punishment" of God ("debito castigo") for Oedipus' involuntary sins ("peccati […] per ignoranza e contra il suo volere") and, even if he describes Oedipus as a positive character, the play is clearly integrated into a theodicy-pattern. However, the most common interpretation of Oedipus in sixteenth-century drama derives from the medieval pattern of the lament for unexpected misfortune, according to which Oedipus is represented as an exemplum of Boccaccio's *casi virorum illustrium*.[49]

It would be interesting to look at the sixteenth-century rewritings of the final lines of the exodus of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in which the Chorus shares the pessimistic idea (that is commonplace in tragedy) that no-one can be called happy until he is dead. The passage is the following (*OT* 1524-1530):[50]

> Ὦ πάτρας Θήβης ἔνοικοι, λεύσσετ', Οἰδίπους ὅδε,
> ὃς τὰ κλείν' αἰνίγματ' ᾔδει καὶ **κράτιστος ἦν ἀνήρ**,

[48] Zanin (2008) 71.

[49] On the two dramatic patterns inherited in the early modern tragedy ("theodicy" and "lament for misfortunes"), see Savettieri (2014).

[50] The passage is scholarly debated because it is said to be probably an interpolation. See Finglass (2009).

> οὗ τίς οὐ ζήλῳ πολιτῶν ἦν τύχαις ἐπιβλέπων,
> εἰς ὅσον κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς ἐλήλυθεν,
> ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἰδεῖν
> ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν' ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἂν
> τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεινὸν παθών

> Inhabitants of Thebes our fatherland, behold, this is Oedipus, who knew the famous riddle and was **a most mighty man** who, not looking upon the envy of the citizens and fortunes, **has come to what a great billow of terrible misfortune**. The result is that someone who is a mortal looks as he gazes on that final day does not consider anyone blessed, before he passes the limit of his life without suffering anything painful.[51]

The Chorus presents here Oedipus as "the most excellent man" fallen in misfortune: the κράτιστος ἀνήρ (*OT* 1525) becomes the *optimus vir* in the Latin translations of Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici (f. 72^{r}) and of Giovan Battista Gabia (131). Pazzi, in his Italian *Edipo*, defines him "sopra agli altri optimo" (f. 135^{r}). Orsatto Giustiniani, in his well-known vulgarisation chosen for the inauguration of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza in 1585, translates it as "huom d'eccellente Virtù" (46^{r}).[52] Similarly, Pietro Angeli Bargeo, in his 1588 *Edipo Tiranno* refers to him as "il valoroso Edipo" (62). In Lodovico Dolce's *Giocasta* (mostly influenced by Euripides and Seneca), the message of the Chorus is the same: the reversal of fortune is unpredictable, and Oedipus perfectly exemplifies this tragic downfall: "con l'esempio d'Edipo impari ognun che regge come cangia fortuna ordine et stile" (53^{r}).[53]

In the Italian *Cinquecento* the widespread interpretation of Oedipus as an outstanding king fallen in ruin because of misfortune coexists with Christianising lexical choices (with the exception of Anguillara's *Edippo*) which do not imply any specific theological meaning, but contribute to the abovementioned Christian-pagan

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[51] Text translated by Finglass (2018).

[52] For a discussion on Giustiniani's *Edipo* perfromed in 1585 in Vicenza, see especially Schrade (1960). Cf also Vidal-Naquet (2006), Mazzoni (2013), Guastella (2013), and Restani (2015).

[53] On the relationship of Oedipus with the theme of fortune in Italian fifteenth-century tragedy, see Guastella (2012).

syncretism that is, for us readers, “a window into the cultural dynamism behind the revolution of Renaissance thought”.[54]

[54] Di Maria (2002) 77.

3.3. (Re)writing Seneca's *Oedipus*: Fate, Fortune, and Neo-Stoicism

Seneca's *Oedipus* is a controversial play. Its hermeneutical difficulty concerns the relationship between Fate and the seeming guilt of the protagonist.[55] The most striking difference between Sophocles' and Seneca's plays is the psychological characterisation of the protagonist: Seneca's *Oedipus* is continuously afflicted by tormenting doubts leading him to consider himself guilty (even *before* discovering his own identity). The concept of Fate is also central in the play: the terms *fatum* and *fata* occur 26 times in the text.[56] To the eternal question on how can Oedipus be guilty if his actions are already predetermined by Fate, Jocasta declares: *Fati ista culpa est: nemo fit fato nocens* (*Oed.* 1019), "Fate is to blame. No guilt stems from fate".[57]

In the course of the *Cinquecento*, the interest in Seneca's *Oedipus* is not elicited (yet) from his psychological characterisation, but rather from the role of fate in the story which, as we previously saw, makes the sixteenth-century Oedipus the perfect *exemplum* of a good king fallen in ruin because of misfortune, following the moralising tradition of the *casi virorum illustrium* and the blows of unpredictable Fortune.

3.3.1. Lodovico Dolce's *Giocasta* (1549)

The vulgarisation of Seneca's tragedies is first due to Lodovico Dolce who translated the tragic *corpus* in 1560.[58] Dolce is one of the best representatives of the balance between translation and adaptation of classical texts. He not only translated many ancient texts, but he also composed original tragedies. The latter mostly consist of free translations/adaptations from Seneca (*Thieste* and *Troiane*) and Euripide (*Hecuba, Giocasta, Ifigenia, Medea*), and in two original plays (*Marianna* and *Didone*).[59]

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[55] For a complete discussion of the notions of Fate and human responsibility in Seneca's *Oedipus*, see Paduano (1988) and Davis (1991).
[56] See Davis (1991) 150.
[57] Translation by Boyle (2011) *ad l.*
[58] Dolce's edition is entitled: *Le Tragedie / di Seneca* / Tradotte da M. / Lodovico Dolce […] / in Venetia / Appresso Gio. Battista / et marchion Sessa F. (MDLX). The *Oedipus* can be found at pp. 122^{v}-151^{v}.
[59] For a discussion on Dolce and his works, see Terpening (1997), Cremante (1998), Neuschäfer (2004), Giazzon (2011) and (2016). Cf. also Schironi (2016) 139-140.

If Dolce's translations are as close as possible to the Senecan text (like in the case of his *Oedipus*), it is in his "original" rewritings that he added new elements deriving from various classical influences. In the light of our analysis of Oedipus' *hamartia*, it is perhaps more interesting to consider his characterisation of Oedipus in his rewriting of *Giocasta* more than in his translation of *Oedipus.*

Giocasta, performed and published in Venice in 1549, is included in the 1560 edition of Dolce's tragedies.[60] He used the Latin translation of Euripides' *Phoenician Women* by Doroteo Camillo (because he did not know the Greek) and, changing the title[61] and adding some characters, "he was able to produce a tragedy typical of the mid-sixteenth-century Italy […] following a canon already set by Trissino, Giraldi, Rucellai, and Aretino".[62] Dolce gave his Giocasta a Senecan, moralistic atmosphere and added some features deriving from Seneca's *Oedipus*.[63] In the prologue, Giocasta tells the servant her own story, which becomes then a summary of the Oedipus backstory. Here, the issue of Oedipus' responsibility is raised from the servant:

S.: Com'esser può, c'havendo conosciuto
Sì gran peccato, egli restasse in vita?
Gi.: Non pecca l'huom, che non sapendo incorre
In alcun mal, da cui fuggir non puote:
et egli a maggior suo danno e cordoglio
et a pena maggior la vita serba:
ch'a miseri la vita apporta noia,
e morte è fin de le miserie humane.[64]

Servant: How can it be possible that despite having committed such a great sin he remained alive? Giocasta: The man who, without knowing it, meets some evil which he cannot escape does not sin. And life reserves him more harm and grief and sorrow; because life annoys who is miserable, whereas death puts an end to human sufferings.

[60] For a complete analysis of Dolce's *Giocasta*, see especially Montorfani (2006) and Giazzon (2011). Cf. also Mastrocola (1996) 112-114, and Guastella (2012) 147-153.
[61] Dolce is the first to change the title of Euripides' *Phoenician Women* in *Giocasta*. Cf. Giazzon (2011) 6.
[62] Montorfani (2006) 717.
[63] Cf. Montorfani (2006) 733-739 and Giazzon (2011) 24-28. Cf. also Guastella (2012) 151.
[64] Dolce, *Giocasta*, Act I, f. 8r.

The "great sin" ("gran peccato") committed by Oedipus is thus justified by Jocasta since it has been committed in ignorance. This passage reminds Anguillara's claim of Oedipus' and Jocasta's innocence who unwittingly sin: "ognun di lor la mente ave innocente, e pecca, e nulla sa del suo peccato".[65] It However, Oedipus, though innocent, is not exempt from punishment: Dolce (throughout Jocasta's words) uses the Senecan image of life as a *longa mors* as a punishment worse than death, image used by Anguillara too.[66] In Seneca's *Oedipus*, indeed, the messenger argues that there is no reason to fear death, as it would rather put an end to his sufferings (*Oed*. 933-934):

> Nuntius: *Anime, quid mortem times? Mors innocentem sola Fortunae eripit.*
>
> Messenger: Why fear death, my soul? Death alone frees the innocent from Fortune.

It is evident the influence of Senecan characterisation of Oedipus in Dolce's *Giocasta*. His innocence is clearly affirmed. Oedipus himself claims to be a victim of a "crudel destin" ("cruel destiny") and of a "stella nimica" ("hostile star").[67] The theme of the instability of Fortune plays a fundamental role in the play. The prologue, in fact, is a moralistic invitation to the audience to pity others' sufferings in the name of the universal human nature: misfortune can afflict us as well, there is no way to predict the blows of *Fortuna*:

> Debito officio è d'huom, che non sia privo
> D'humanitade, ond'ei riceve il nome,
> Haver pietà de le miserie altrui:
> Che chi si duol de li accidenti humani,
> Con che sovente alcun Fortuna afflige,
> Conosce ben, che quelli, e maggiori mali
> Avenir ponno similmente a lui;
> Ond'ei per tempo s'apparecchia et arma
> A sostener ciò che destina il cielo.
> E tanto più nel suo dolor conforto
> Prende costui; quant'ha veduto, o letto

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[65] Anguillara, *Edippo* (I 1,5^{r}):"Each one of them has an innocent conscience, yet he sins, and knows nothing of his sin".

[66] *Ibid.* III 5,39^{r}. Cf. Sen. *Oed.* 948f. Quod saepe fieri non potest fiat diu; / mors eligatuer longa ("what cannot happen often must be slow. Choose a long death").

[67] Dolce, *Giocasta*, Act. V, ff. 49^{r}-49^{v}.

> Alcun, che più felice era nel mondo,
> esser nel fine a gran miserie posto.[68]

> The human being who is not devoid of humanity, from which he receives his name, has the duty to pity others' miseries: since whoever pities human accidents, whose Fortune makes use to afflict human beings, knows well that those evils, and even greater, can happen to him as well. Hence, he prepares and arms himself in advance to face what heaven destined for him. And the more he is taken by discouragement when he sees that even who was the happiest in the world eventually fell into great misery.

The story of Oedipus is then the exemplary representation of the theme of reversal of fortune and instability of human happiness. Greek and Latin elements coexist in Dolce's drama: the reference to Aristotelian tragic emotions (such as pity and fear) and the explicit use of Senecan elements and themes as well as the presence of the Boethian concept of *Fortuna*. The last words of the Chorus significantly are the following: "così ingegno e virtù cede a Fortuna".[69] This is clearly one of those cases that Braden describes as "an apparently instinctive Senecanizing of the Greek".[70]

Dolce's *Giocasta* is also important for its reception in England: it was translated by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh in their *Jocasta*, the first "regular" play performed at Gray's Inn in London in 1566.[71] In the "Argument of the Tragedie", Oedipus is presented as "myrrour of misery" and defined as "Fortunatus Infoelix"[72]. The epilogue, pronounced by the Chorus, is quite close to Dolce's *Giocasta*:

> Example here, loe! Take by Oedipus,
> You kings and princes in prosperitie,
> And every one that is desirous
> To sway the seate of worldlie dignitie,
> How fickle tis to trust in Fortune whele:
> For him whom now she hoyseth up on hie,
> If so he chaunce on any side to reele,
> She hurles him downe in twinkling of an eye:
> And him againe, that grovleth nowe on ground,

[68] *Ibid*. 4^{r-v}.
[69] *Ibid*. 50^{v}.
[70] Braden (1985) 66-67.
[71] See Dewar-Watson (2010).
[72] Gascoigne-Kinwelmersh, *Jocasta*, 131.

And lieth lowe in dungeon of dispaire,
Hir whirling wheele can heave up at a bounde,
And place aloft in stay of statelie chiare.
As from the sunne the moone withdraws his face,
So might of man doth yeelde dame Fortune place.[73]

3.3.2. Alexander Neville's *Oedipus* (1563)

The theme of kings and princes fallen in ruin under the shifts of Fortune is central in Alexander Neville's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* (entitled *The lamentable tragedie of Oedipus the sonne of Laius Kyng of Thebes out of Seneca*).[74] Neville completed his English translation (that is actually a free adaptation) in 1560, when he was an undergraduate at Trinity College, in Cambridge. His text was probably used for a production of *Oedipus* and staged (together with the *Hecuba*) in 1559-60 in Cambridge.[75] Neville's *Oedipus* was first printed in 1563, then collected nearly twenty years later by Thomas Newton in his famous *Seneca, his Tenne Tragedies Translated into Englysh* (1581).

In his Preface, Neville explains the purpose of his play:

> Wherein thou shalt see, a very expresse and lively Image of the inconstant change of fickle Fortune in the person of a Prince of passing Fame and Renown, midst whole fluds of earthly blisse: by meare misfortune (nay rather by the deepe hidden secret Judgements of God) piteously plunged in most extreme miseries.[76]

Neville's play aims at showing Oedipus as the *exemplum* of a "prince passing from fame and renown to misfortune". In fact, Neville at the end of the third act takes the distance from Seneca and he adds a new choral ode indebted to another main tradition that influences English Renaissance tragedy: the medieval (and Boethian) *exempla* of "Fall from Grace", epitomised in the *complaints* of the influential *Mirrour for*

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[73] *Ibid*. 413.
[74] For a detailed discussion of Neville's *Oedipus*, see Smith (1988) 205-211, Dall'Olio (2018). On the reception of *Oedipus* in early modern England, see Hall-Macintosh (2008) 1-29, Macintosh (2009) 46-49, Ziosi (2012).
[75] See Smith (1988) 205-211, Macintosh (2009) 47.
[76] Newton (1927) [1581] vol. 1, 189.

Magistrates.[77] Neville's additions make his Oedipus into a medieval mystery play showing him as "mirror for princes", whereas the Chorus plays a role of moral authority:

> Let Oedipus example bee of this unto you all,
> A Mirrour meete, A Pattern playne, of Princes carefull thrall.
> Who late in perfect Joy as seem'de, and everlasting blis,
> Triumphantly his life out led, a Myser now hee is.[78]

Neville omits any reference to "the ancient wrath of the gods" (*Oed.* 710f.) and to Oedipus' guilt as the result of the family curse of the Labdacides. As F. Dall'Olio suggests, this omission "deprives Oedipus' actions of their mythical resonances, leaving him to cope with his own personal guilt"[79], thus highlighting his personal responsibility.

Seneca's *fatum* becomes Neville's fortune: what does this change imply? Smith rightly points out that "inscrutable fate in Roman Stoic becomes very scrutable Fortune in the Christian humanist […]. Beyond the shifts of Fortune stand changeless Christian verities."[80] Neville's play is ruled by Fortune, but it does not necessarily imply Oedipus' innocence. On the contrary, he is presented as fully culpable of his "horrible crimes". If Seneca's Oedipus (although responsible for his actions) is still presented as a victim of fate deserving the empathy of the audience, Neville's Oedipus – as a protagonist of morality-play tradition – deserves his punishment. Being represented as a tyrant, his pride and his arrogance justify his downfall.[81] Thus, Oedipus, in the end, acknowledges his guilt and pronounces his final lament:

> (Alas) the fault is all in mee.
> O cursed head: O wicked wight, whom all men deadly hate.
> O Beast, what meanst thou still to live in this unhappy state?
> The skies doe blush and are ashamed, at these thy mischiefes great.[82]

[77] See Smith (1988) 210-211, Ziosi (2012) 168. On the "mirror for Magistrates", see Budra (2000). For a complete discussion on the rediscovery of tragedy in England, see Coronato (2006).
[78] Newton (1927) [1581] vol. 216.
[79] Dall'Olio (2018) 704.
[80] Smith (1988) 210.
[81] For the interpretation of Neville's *Oedipus* as a tyrant, see Dall'Olio (2018).
[82] Newton (1927) [1581] 229-230.

3.3.3. Jean Prévost's *Edipe* (1613)

Especially from the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards, the Renaissance France becomes the hotbed of Oedipus' reception.[83] A series of translations and adaptations, interpreted as responses to the ideological turmoil of the French monarchy,[84] begins with the 1614 *Edipe* of Jean Prévost.[85] The play is an adaptation of Seneca's play, quite close to its ancient source, but characterised by some worth-mentioning additions.[86] As F. Macintosh suggests, whereas *Edipe* "is less Senecan than Greek in terms of its form, it is Senecan in its presentation of an Oedipus (abandoned by the gods) who ends up killing himself with his son's sword in the final moments of the play".[87]

First of all, the theme of virtue becomes one of the central topics of the tragedy, as it emerges in the following lines (ll. 1341-1346):

> Il vaut mieux vertueux estre issu d'un bas sang,
> Acquerant sur les siens un honorable rang,
> Que noble diffamer ses parens par son crime:
> Il n'est que la vertu qui met l'homme en estime,
> L'esleve, l'ennoblit, et le rend grand seigneur,
> Par elle il va gaignant son bien et son honneur.
>
> It is better to be virtuous and of humble birth, achieving an honourable rank in front of his own relatives instead of being noble and defaming them by his crime: only the virtue makes a man worthy of estimation, it improves him, it ennobles him and makes him a great lord, thanks to virtue he is going to earn his goodness and his honour.

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[83] See Lauriola (2017) 185.

[84] Regarding the political influence on the reception of Oedipus' myth, see especially Biet (1994). Cf. also Macintosh (2009) 49-50; 73-74.

[85] The text of reference is the edition, including introduction and commentary, of Sandrone (2001).

[86] On the reception of Seneca *tragicus* in France, see Jacquot (1964) and especialle Caigny (2011). In particular, on the reception of Oedipus' myth in France, see Balmas (1989) and Biet (1994).

[87] Macintosh (2009) 49.

Prévost seems to propose a moral lesson, innovative in relation to the Latin source and influenced by the Jesuit drama:[88] virtue is the central topic of this passage, as it is able to elevate and ennoble human beings more than their passive belonging to a noble family. The theme of virtue is fundamental to the Neo-Stoicism, a syncretic philosophical movement that, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, attempted to combine the beliefs of Stoicism and Christianity.[89] Cultivating virtue, according to the Neo-stoicism's vision, is the only way to face the unpredictable nature of fate.[90] Thus, it is significant that the author introduced this variation into a tragedy dominated by fate, such as Seneca's *Oedipus*, which on the contrary seems to assert a fatalistic Stoic theology, as it emerges from the final Chorus (*Oed.* 980-992):

> Fatis agimur: cedite fatis;
> non sollicitae possunt curae
> mutare rati stamina fusi.
> quicquid patimur mortale genus,
> quicquid facimus venit ex alto,
> servatque suae decreta colus.
> Lachesis nulla revoluta manu.
> omnia secto tramite vadunt
> primusque dies dedit extremum:
> non illa deo vertisse licet
> quae nexa suis currunt causis.
> it cuique ratus prece non ulla
> mobilis ordo: multis ipsum
> metuisse nocet, multi ad fatum.

[88] For the Jesuit drama, see Wetmore (2016). As Wetmore explains, "the historic Jesuit theatre represents two centuries of didactic theatre in which the Society of Jesus, following both the organizational instructions and Spiritual Exercises of founder Ignatius of Loyola, used theatre to inculcate virtue in both performer and audience member while teaching Latin, dance, poise, rhetoric, oratory, and confidence to the students who performed".

[89] On the development of Neo-Stoicism in the sixteenth century, see Zanta (1914). One of the most striking problems of the Neo-Stoicism, founded by the Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius, is the relationship between Providence, free will and predestination. In fact, "le stoïcisme avait parlé de liberté, mais il ne pouvait la concilier avec l'universel déterminisme, avec la doctrine de Dieu confondu avec le Destin" (Zanta 1914, 107).

[90] On the influence of Neo-Stoicism on Prévost's *Edipe*, see Sandron (2001) 12-42 and Dalla Valle (2006) 116-143.

> Fate is our master: yield to fate. Anxiety cannot alter the destined spindle's threads. What we effect, comes from above. The stern hand of Lachesis guards the laws spun from her distaff. All progress on paths preset; The first day has fixed the last. No god can change these things As they speed their causal web. A fixed order proceeds for all immune to prayer. Fear itself unfixes many; Many come to their fate Through fear of fate.[91]

Prevost does not eliminate this passage, but relegates it to a secondary position and omits the lines denying the value of the prayer. However, he makes some radical changes just below in the text: in Seneca's *Oedipus*, Jocasta, intending to convince Oedipus of his innocence, claims: *fati ista culpa est. Nemo fit fato nocens*, "Fate is to blame. Nobody can be guilty of his own fate". Such a fatalistic justification cannot be accepted by Christian morality, which cannot admit that God is subject to destiny and that there is not any human free will. Hence, Prévost partially modifies Jocasta's reply and submits destiny to the gods' will (ll. 1799-1802):

> Edipe, le mes-faict que nous avons commis
> En doit estre imputé au Ciel qui l'a permis,
> Il a forgé ce mal par un destin contraire :
> Celuy ne mes-faict point qui ne veut point mesfaire.

> Oedipus, the misdeed that we made must be imputed to the Heaven who allowed it, he forged this evil thanks to a hostile destiny: He who does not want to commit a misdeed does not commit it.

Prévost tries then to justify the divine action, in order to demonstrate how it is never subject to the fate which unreasonably leads to human downfall.[92]

Moreover, he tries to show how Oedipus' blinding and exile represent the salvation for Thebes: he emphasises his self-punishment as an act of purification, by adding another verse, absent in the Latin source and showing Oedipus admitting his guilt (ll. 1808-1810):

> Arrestez vous ma mere, et ne vous empeschez
> A me rencourager : ma faute est sans excuse,

[91] The translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* is by Boyle (2011).
[92] For a discussion on Christian beliefs on the interpretation of Prévost's *Edipe*, see Zanin (2012b).

> Sans excuse le tort dont coulpable on m'accuse.
>
> Stop, my mother, avoid to encourage me
> again: my fault is inexcusable,
> the wrongdoing I am accused of is inexcusable.

Therefore, it is evident the coexistence of a clear fidelity to Seneca's play along with the will to modify its ideological message: the Neo-stoicism's adaptation proposed by Prévost will be accomplished by Corneille in his 1659 *Œdipe*, in the most important rewriting of Oedipus' tragedy in seventeenth-century France.

3.4. *De Libero Arbitrio*. Free Will and Determinism in the Early Modern Oedipus

3.4.1. Pierre Corneille's *Œdipe* (1659)

Undoubtedly, the most influential rewriting of Oedipus' story in seventeenth-century France is Corneille's *Œdipe*, published and first performed in 1659.[93] His sources, Sophocles and Seneca, are explicitly mentioned, as well as Corneille's divergences from them. He consciously decided to break with the traditional plot, as it emerges in his preface *Au lecteur* and in his *Examen*:

> Les pensées de ces grands génies qui l'ont traité en grec et en latin me faciliteraient le moyens d'en venir à bout assez tôt […]. J'ai reconnu que ce qui avait passé pour miraculeux dans ce siècles éloignés, pourrait sembler horrible au nôtre […]. Cela m'a fait perdre l'avantage que je m'étais promis, de n'être souvent que le traducteur de ces grands hommes qui m'ont précédé. Comme j'ai pris une autre route que la leur, il m'a été impossible de me rencontrer avec eux.[94]

> Je ne déguiserai point qu'après avoir fait le choix de ce sujet, sur cette confiance, que j'aurais pour moi les suffrages de tous le savants, qui le regardent encore comme le chef-d'œuvre de l'Antiquité, et que les pensées de Sophocle et de Sénèque, qui l'ont traité en leurs langues, me faciliteraient les moyens d'en venir à bout, je tremblai quand je l'envisageai de près […]. Ces changements m'ont fait perdre l'avantage que je m'étais promis de n'être souvent que le traducteur de ces grands génies qui m'ont précédé- La différente route que j'ai prise m'a empêché de me rencontrer avec eux, et me parer de leur travail : mais en récompense j'ai eu le bonheur da faire avouer qu'il n'est point sorti de pièces de ma main où il se trouve tant d'art qu'en celle-ci.[95]

Corneille, then, chooses a different path: not only does he emphasise the political atmosphere of the story, stressing the theme of the Senecan *regnum* as an allusion to the contemporary French monarchy,[96] but he also adds a "romantic" subplot involving Dirce, daughter of Laius and Jocasta (that is, the stepdaughter of Oedipus), and Theseus, king of Athens. Oedipus opposes their marriage because he is afraid of losing his

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[93] For a complete discussion on Corneille's *Œdipe*, see Paduano (1994) 270-285, Edmunds (2006) 91-93, Dalla Valle (2006) 157-186, Zanin (2012b), Lauriola (2017) 185-189.

[94] Corneille, *Oedipe*, *Au lecteur*, 18-19.

[95] *Ibid*. *Oedipe, Examen*, 20-21.

[96] Regarding the political theme, see Biet (1994), Macitosh (2009) 49-50; 73-75, Bilis (2010).

kingdom. The love story and the political theme of the *regnum* make Corneille's *Œdipe* accessible to the contemporary audience.

What is most interesting for our analysis is Corneille's characterisation of the protagonist. We saw in the previous chapter that, in his *Discours de la tragédie*,[97] Corneille rejected the interpretation, shared by his contemporaries, of Sophocles' Oedipus as culpable and justly punished. According to him, Oedipus' *hamartia* is not at all a moral flaw nor a mistake of fact: Oedipus is said to be an *homme de coeur* who "did not commit any fault". His tragic error, as meant by Corneille, is closer to the Aristotelian concept of ἀτύχημα, a misfortune, whose responsibility is entirely outside the agent. Of course, Corneille could not represent an innocent tragic hero, whose downfall is due to divine agency or fate. To preserve the free will of the character, he completely reinvents his Oedipus.

The issues of free will, predestination, and fate are indeed explicitly debated in the play. Corneille proposes a specific view of freedom of choice. Being Jesuit, he supported the doctrine of Molinism against the determinism claimed by the Jansenists. The Molinism was a philosophical doctrine attempting to reconcile the Providence of God with human free will. He then recreates Oedipus' play throughout a real process of Christianisation. Of course, the theme of free will plays a central role in his play, deeply characterised by an interpretation based on Neo-stoicism's vision. According to Neo-stoicism, every human being is free and, then, responsible for his own actions, but everything is also determined by Providence.[98]

The Christianisation of the plot is based on the complete transformation of Oedipus' character. Politics becomes the tragedy's central issue. The question is: how can a tyrant become a good king? Here, Oedipus is guilty. However, he is not responsible for his parricide and his incest, he is instead a bad king, an oppressive tyrant. He is described from the beginning as a Machiavellian character; his guilt is a character flaw, which justifies his downfall. The play's innovation consists in the rewriting of Oedipus' character, who is seen eventually as a martyr: the final discovery of his double fault leads him to a real conversion. He gradually becomes conscious of

[97] Corneille, *Discours de la tragédie*, 145.

[98] For a discussion on the influence of Christianity and Neo-Stoicism on Corneille's *Oedipe*, see Dalla Valle (2006) 157-173, and Zanin (2008). On the development of Neo-Stoicism in the Renaissance, see Zanta (2007).

his fault. To the question asked by Dirce in the fifth act, “quell crime avez-vous fait, que d’être malheureux?”,[99] he answers as it follows:

> Mon souvenir n’est plein que d’exploits généreux ;
> Cependant je me trouve inceste et parricide,
> Sans avoir fait un pas que sur les pas d’Alcide,
> Ni recherché partout que lois à maintenir,
> Que monstres à détruire et méchants à punir.
> Aux crimes malgré moi l’ordre du ciel m’attache :
> Pour m’y faire tomber à moi-même il me cache ;
> Il offre, en m’aveuglant sur ce qu’il a prédit,
> Mon père à mon épée, et ma mère à mon lit.[100]

If initially Oedipus seems to accuse “l’ordre du ciel” for his crimes, he then acknowledges that he has the chance to personally make a decision for himself and for his people:

> Hélas ! Qu’il est bien vrai qu’en vain on s’imagine
> Dérober notre vie à ce qu’il nous destine !
> Les soins de l’éviter font courir au-devant,
> Et l’adresse à le fuir y plonge plus avant.
> Mais si les dieux m’ont fait la vie abominable,
> **Ils m’en font par pitié la sortie honorable**,
> Puisqu’enfin leur faveur mêlée à leur courroux
> Me condamne **à mourir pour le salut de tous**,
> Et qu’en ce même temps qu’il faudrait que ma vie
> Des crimes qu’ils m’ont faits traînât l’ignominie,
> **L’éclat de ces vertus que je ne tiens pas d’eux**
> **Reçoit pour récompense un trépas glorieux**.[101]

As D. Dalla Valle rightly explains,[102] here, the Oedipus is divided into two parts: one is ruled by fate and the gods, who destined him to commit his crimes, and the other one consists of his ability to control his own life, since it depends from his virtue and not from the gods (“l’éclat de ces vertus que je ne tiens pas d’eux”). His virtue (a fundamental concept in Neo-Stoicism) leads him to choose the death “for the salvation”

[99] Corneille, *Oedipe*, l. 1819.
[100] *Ibid*. ll. 1820-1828.
[101] *Ibid*. ll. 1829-1840.
[102] See Dalla Valle (2006) 169.

of the citizens. Oedipus becomes then a Christian martyr, and his self-punishment is the only way to save Thebes: his terrible discovery is beneficial for his city, so he is redeemed since he will receive a "reward", that is a "glorious death" thanks to his virtue. He does not accuse God's cruelty; he rather affirms God's "pity". So, the play begins as a tragedy of fate and ends as a tragedy of martyrdom[103]. The notion of free will is preserved: in the end, in fact, Dirce says about Oedipus that, throughout his act of courage, "il s'est rendu par là maître de tout son sort".[104]

Moreover, the most explicit apology of free will in Corneille's *Oedipus* is undoubtedly the monologue claimed by Theseus, who openly protests against the concept of predestination and destiny:

> Quoi ? La nécessité des vertus et des vices
> D'un astre impérieux doit suivre les caprices,
> Et Delphes, malgré nous, conduit nos actions
> Au plus bizarre effet de ses prédictions ?
> L'âme est donc toute esclave : une loi souveraine
> Vers le bien ou le mal incessamment l'entraîne ;
> Et nous ne recevons ni crainte ni désir
> De cette liberté qui n'a rien à choisir,
> Attachés sans relâche à cet ordre sublime,
> Vertueux sans mérite, et vicieux sans crime.
> Qu'on massacre les rois, qu'on brise les autels,
> C'est la faute des dieux, et non pas des mortels.
> De toute la vertu sur la terre épandue,
> Tout le prix à ces dieux, toute la gloire est due ;
> Ils agissent en nous quand nous pensons agir ;
> Alors qu'on délibère on ne fait qu'obéir ;
> Et notre volonté n'aime, hait, cherche, évite,
> Que suivant que d'en haut leur bras la précipite.
> D'un tel aveuglement daignez me dispenser.
> Le ciel, juste à punir, juste à récompenser,
> Pour rendre aux actions leur peine ou leur salaire,
> Doit nous offrir son aide, et puis nous laisser faire.[105]

[103] For the interpretation of Corneille's *Oedipe* as a martyr, see Zanin (2008) and (2014a) 348-350.
[104] Corneille, *Oedipe*, l. 1975.
[105] *Ibid.* l. 1149-1170.

This excellent *tirade* pronounced by Theseus has been defined as "explicitly molinist".[106] It is not surprising that Voltaire, in his *Commentaires sur Corneille*, says that this passage was extremely influential in the contemporary debate on free will:

> Les disputes sur le libre arbitre agitaient alors les esprits. Cette tirade de Thésée, belle par elle-même, acquit un nouveau prix par les querelles du temps, et plus d'un amateur la sait encore par cœur.[107]

Corneille, throughout Theseus' words, takes a specific stand in the debate about grace and free will. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that in 1656 Blaise Pascal published his *Lettres Provinciales*: they are a series of letters written in the midst of the controversy between the Jansenists and the Jesuits, as a defence of the Jansenist Antoine Arnauld, Pascal's friend who in 1656 was condemned by the Faculté de Théologie at the Sorbonne for views that were claimed to be heretical. It is not accidental that Corneille, Jesuit and openly anti-Jansenist, chose to stress this specific theme. The purpose of his *Oedipe* then emerges explicitly: the opposition to the Jansenist thesis of the predestination and the defence of Catholic orthodoxy in matters of free will and human responsibility.

3.4.2. Emanuele Tesauro's *Edipo* (1661)

In seventeenth-century Italy, the only rewriting of Oedipus' story is that of Emmanuele Tesauro. His tragedy, entitled *Edipo. Tragedia tirata da quella di Lucio Anneo Seneca*, is published in 1661, two years later Corneille's *Œdipe*.[108]

Born in Turin, at the age of twenty, Tesauro entered the Jesuit order and worked as a professor of Rhetoric and as a preacher. Among his works, there are four dramatic

[106] See Regoliosi Morani (2000).
[107] Voltaire, *Commentaires sur Corneille*, 465.
[108] The edition of reference is by Ossola (1987). In addition to his introduction and commentary, for a discussion on the play, see Paduano (1994) 285-288. Cf. also Zanin (2012b).

plays: two of them on Christian subject (the *Ermenegildo* and *Il libero arbitrio*)[109], and the other on mythological topics (*Edipo* and *Ippolito*).[110]

Tesauro's *Edipo* seems to be indebted to Corneille's *Œdipe*:[111] moreover, both the playwrights share the same interest in the problem of free will. Regarding this, it is interesting to notice that Tesauro, between the forth and the fifth act, after a choral ode entitled "il Fato", feels the need to specify that everything is said about Fate is taken from Seneca: "in questo Coro, e in tutta la tragedia, ciò che si dice del Fato, è detto da Seneca secondo la filosofia de' Gentili".[112] Evidently, Tesauro may need to defend his play from any possible accusations of predestination.

Hence, how does the issue of the interplay between determinism and free will is treated in the text? It has been highlighted that in the dialogue between Edipo and Giocasta (Act I, scene 2) there is a reference to the contemporary theological debate on predestination.[113] Oedipus (like in Seneca's play) suspects to be the only responsible for the plague,[114] condemned to this miserable destiny because of an inscrutable plan ("per noi mortali gira l'orbe immortale, e tutti gli astri per ciascuno di noi vagano in giro").[115] Giocasta, on the contrary, answers as it follows:

> Lungi un folle pensier da un cor sì saggio.
> […]
> Onde, come fra i miseri mortali
> nuoce a' privati un sol privato fallo;
> così della natura un fallo insigne
> abbatte le città, spopola i regni,
> nuda le selve, e gli animanti ancide.
> Non recasti tu dunque i mali in Tebe,

[109] According to Regoliosi Morani (2000), the play *Tragedia intitolata Libero arbitrio* may have been written by Tesauro as a response to the play *Il libero arbitrio* written by the Protestant Francesco Negri in 1538.
[110] On Tesauro's biography and works, see Ossola (1987) 65.
[111] Regoliosi Morani (2000) 7.
[112] Tesauro, *Edipo*, in Ossola (1989) 154: "in this Chorus, and throughout the tragedy, what is said about Fate is said by Seneca according to the philosophy of Gentiles".
[113] See Ossola (1989) 175, Regoliosi Morani (8).
[114] Tesauro, *Edipo*, ll. 129-144. "Il duolo, la fame, lo spavento, l'arsura, i morbi, e i pestilenti afflati, prima di me non conosciuti in Tebe, meco in Tebe guidai. Finch'io non parto giamai non partiranno: e i cittadini inocenti cadran finch'io non caggio".
[115] *Ibid*. ll. 167-169.

ma da' mali di Tebe il tuo dipende.
Poiché il Fato comun regge il privato;
e da' bassi accidenti, e singolari
la gran ruota del ciel non prende il moto.[116]

According to Giocasta, there is a "Fato commun" that affects human beings' actions without determining them. Thus, she admits a degree of freedom that coexists with a bigger inexplicable plan (this is, in fact, a specific feature of Molinism). Thus, Giocasta is sure that Oedipus, an honest and virtuous king ("senza crime, e con integrità pari all'ingegno"), is undoubtedly innocent and, then, with nothing to worry about.

Eventually, as we know, Oedipus suffers terrible consequences of his involuntary deeds: hence, how does Tesauro solve this aporia? Teiresias solves it, considering the example of Oedipus as a case of deserved punishment (according to the pattern of poetic justice):

Oratore: Or con qual fronte porterò a Corinto
alla misera donna un tal messaggio,
ch' Edipo, non più suo, benché innocente,
da' fieri numi a tal supplicio è spinto?
Tiresia: Ospite, tu t'inganni: **un innocente**
mai dal ciel fu punito. Il re che piangi,
contaminò le nozze e 'l padre uccise.
Or.: Ma in buona fede.
Tir.: E come in buona fede
dopo un delfico avviso?
Or.: Incontanente
di Corinto fuggì.
Tir.: Non dalle nozze.
Or.: E chi le avria credute incestuose?
Tir.: **Dovea sempre temer ciò ch'era incerto**.
Creder madre ogni moglie, e creder padre
Ancor un ladron, senza macchiar la mazza
Di sconosciuto sangue entro alle selve;
ed arrischiarsi a marital legame.
Questo non è fuggir; ma farsi' ncontro
Al periglio evidente: e chi al periglio

[116] *Ibid*. ll. 145; 152-161.

> Premostrato si espon, **non è innocente.**
> È ver che **il fallo suo è degno di scusa,**
> **e la pena di lagrime e pietade**;
> perché **umano è'l delitto, e senza frode,**
> da giovine malcauto, e sfortunato.
> Ma l'opra è così atroce, e scelerata,
> che anco dal cielo ha la pietà scacciata.[117]

Tesauro, trough the words of Teiresias, proposes his interpretation of Oedipus' *hamartia*: it is a human error ("umano […] delitto"), more precisely an error of judgement, since he should have avoided to kill an old man and marry an old woman. "Dovea sempre temer ciò che era incerto", says Teiresias. Oedipus' *hamartia* is then an error committed trough ignorance and imprudence, deserving of pity and compassion. It reminds us of the sixteenth-century Italian theorists recurring to the *Nicomachean Ethics* to explain Oedipus' deeds. However, Tesauro seems to make instead an implicit reference to the Christian prudence, that Oedipus should have to take into consideration. Being his free will affirmed here, Edipo is eventually considered culpable.

3.4.3. John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee's *Oedipus. A Tragedy* (1678)

Corneille's *Œdipe* was well-known in England, since it was of particular interest in the Restoration period especially for the theme of the kingdom. Among the imitators of Corneille, there are John Dryden[118] and Nathaniel Lee, whose *Oedipus: A Tragedy* is still considered one of the most influential adaptations of the early modern period. First performed in 1678 at the Dorset Garden Theatre in London, it was a highly successful play.[119] Dryden and Lee brought from Corneille the romantic subplot (of Euridice and Adrastus), but they refused his characterisation of the protagonists. In fact, they insist on the innocence of Oedipus and Jocasta, and in the preface clearly take the distance from Corneille:

[117] *Ibid*. 155-182.
[118] Dryden has been discussed as a literary critic in the previous chapter (2.4.3.).
[119] For a discussion on Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*, see Smith (1988) 249-257, Paduano (1994) 288-301, Edmunds (2006) 93-95, Sironi (2014), Lauriola (2017) 192-193. On the "English Oedipus", see also Ziosi (2012) and Hall-Macintosh (2008) 1-29. On Oedipus in the English Restoration period, see Macintosh (2009) 52-64.

> The truth is, he [Corneille] miserably failed in the character of his hero: if he desired that Œdipus should be pitied, he should have made him a better man. He forgot that Sophocles had taken care to show him, in his first entrance, a just, a merciful, a successful, a religious prince, and, in short, a father of his country. Instead of these, he has drawn him suspicious, designing, more anxious of keeping the Theban crown, than solicitous for the safety of his people.[120]

Thus, Dryden's ideal protagonist is not wicked as the *Œdipe* portrayed by Corneille nor an Aristotelian middling character. His *Oedipus* is innocent. In discussing the ideal tragic character, a few years before, Dryden had argued that "it is absolutely necessary to make a man virtuous, if we desire he should be pitied".[121] Like in Seneca's play, Jocasta proclaim Oedipus' innocence, and her own innocence, blaming exclusively the fate:

> In spight of all those Crimes the cruel Gods
> Can charge me with, I know my Innocence;
> Know yours: 'tis Fate alone that makes us wretched,
> For you are still my Husband.[122]

Oedipus as well proclaims his own innocence; he is far from the self-doubting Seneca's character:

> To you, good Gods, I make my last appeal;
> Or clear my Vertues or my Crime reveal:
> If wandering in the maze of Fate I run,
> And backward trod the paths I sought to shun,
> Impute my Errours to your own Decree;
> My hands are guilty, but my heart is free.[123]

Like Anguillara's *Edippo*, who claims "l'animo innocente ho sempre havuto, che la man peccò, non peccò il core",[124] here Oedipus strongly argues that his hands are guilty, but his heart is innocent.

Hence, how can Dryden justify Oedipus' punishment for his involuntary actions? Dryden and Lee to arouse the sympathy of the spectator of the Reformation tragedy,

[120] Dryden-Lee, *Oedipus*, *Preface*, 351.
[121] Dryden, *Preface to Troilus and Cressida* in Watson (1962) 245.
[122] Dryden-Lee, *Oedipus*, Act V, 420.
[123] *Ibid*. Act III, 397-398.
[124] "I have always had an innocent conscience, because it was my hand to sin, not my heart" (IV 3,34ᵛ).

produced an alteration in the moral universe of Sophocles' drama. As Smith points out, "the fate that rules Dryden and Lee's play, cruel and arbitrary as it may appear, is nonetheless an instance of Providence".[125] The poetic justice is thus preserved in the play:

> The Gods are just. —
> But how can Finite measure Infinite?
> Reason! alas, it does not know it self!
> Yet Man, vain Man, wou'd with this shortlin'd Plummet,
> Fathom the vast Abysse of Heav'nly justice.
> Whatever is, is in it's causes just;
> Since all things are by Fate. But purblind Man
> Sees but a part o'th' Chain; the nearest links;
> His eyes not carrying to that equal Beam
> That poises all above.[126]

"Gods are just", claims Tiresias. In the Renaissance and Restoration period, the spectators need to see the poetic justice accomplished on the stage.[127] This is the reason why in his preface Dryden, even admitting the superiority of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, also claims that "the Athenian theatre had a perfection differing from ours".[128]

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[125] Smith (1988) 255.
[126] Dryden-Lee, *Oedipus*, Act 3, 388.
[127] See Hall-Macintosh (2008) 9.
[128] Dryden-Lee, *Oedipus*, *Preface*, 351.

Conclusions

If, according to Martindale, "meaning is always realised at the point of reception",[1] the literary, philosophical, and theological debate on *hamartia* arisen in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe undoubtedly contributed to shaping the meaning that we confer to the tragic genre today as well as to the development of the modern thought.

I started the present investigation with a question, borrowed from Dodds' 1966 *On misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex*, the same question that pushed Renaissance translators, theorists, and playwrights to find a meaning in their process of reception of the ancient model: "in what sense, if in any, does the *Oedipus Rex* attempt to justify the ways of God to man?"[2] The end of my analysis is marked instead by the words of Tiresias who, in Dryden's *Oedipus*, answers that "Gods are just",[3] thus satisfying the need of the contemporary audience to see the poetic justice accomplished on the stage. Dodds' question and Tiresias' claim clearly summarise two opposite view, both part of the complicated old-centuries investigation on Oedipus' *hamartia*.

In Chapter 1 I tried to show that Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not a play about innocence or culpability, it is not about the justice of gods, it is rather about ignorance and the blinding of the human condition, it is about the self-knowledge, and the strength to pursue the truth and to accept it. Sophocles' Oedipus is about knowledge. Modern Oedipus is about interpretation. In the Renaissance rewritings of Oedipus, *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* are read through the filter of those misconceptions deriving from Stoicism, Christianity, Platonism, and from Neo-Stoicism. Seneca's *Oedipus* not only is a filter between Sophocles and his modern reception, but it is himself misread trough the lens of late antique and medieval moralising tradition. Early modern tragedians and critics need to solve any ambiguity, they need to choose between innocence and culpability.

If divine and human causation coexist in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Aristotle in his *Poetics* rather emphasises the role of human agency, excluding any possible presence of

[1] Martindale (1993) 3.

[2] Dodds (1966) 37.

[3] Dryden-Lee, *Oedipus*, Act III, 388.

religion or misfortune in ancient drama and thus effecting his interpretation of Greek tragedy and the following literary criticism. Thus, Aristotle, considered the normative reference to understand and rewrite the *Oedipus Tyrannus* in the early modernity, is the first to apply a misleading reading to the Sophoclean play, thus insisting exclusively on the agent's own actions.

In light of the analysis proposed in Chapters 2 and 3, it seems clear that the more significant distance between Aristotle's idea of tragedy and the early modern drama can be summarized in the distinction between *ethos* and *praxis*, being and acting, and how Renaissance scholars and playwrights understood both the character and the actions of the tragic protagonist. As we previously saw, in the *Poetics* Aristotle clearly says that

ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησίς ἐστιν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεων καὶ βίου.

tragedy is an imitation not of human beings but of action and life.[4]

Also, later in chapter 6, he specifies that

ἔτι ἄνευ μὲν πράξεως οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τραγῳδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἠθῶν γένοιτ' ἄν.

a tragedy is impossible without an action, but there may be one without characters.[5]

As Jones argues, chapter 13 and the notion of *hamartia* do not deal with the character of the tragic hero (that, according to him, is a concept that the modern reader has imported into the *Poetics*),[6] but they rather define the action that causes the reversal of fortune. The early modern reception of Oedipus' *hamartia*, indeed, is based on the attempt of explaining the tragic error by referring alternatively either to theories of action or to theories of character, often influenced by philosophical and theological elements.

In the early sixteenth-century Italy, the notion of *hamartia* (translated both as *error/errore* and *peccatum/peccato*) is mainly explained throughout the reference to Aristotle's moral philosophy (especially the discussion on voluntary and involuntary actions in the book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) rather than throughout a real process of Christianization (despite the use of a christianising terminology that testifies instead a process of domestication of language). If the common reference (first proposed by

[4] Arist. *Po*. 6 1450a15-16.
[5] *Ibid*. 6 1450a24-25.
[6] See Jones (1980) 11-20.

Robortello) to explain the *hamartia* is the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (as an involuntary action due to ignorance and imprudence), it is Vettori's emphasis on Oedipus' moral responsibility (due to the lack of control of his rage, and then close to the notion of Aristotelian *akrasia*) that introduces first the interpretation of *hamartia* as a fault of character, exegesis that will profoundly influence especially the French neoclassical theory.

The tendency to explicitly christianise the notion of *hamartia* is represented exclusively by Castelvetro and the Protestant theorists, and has been contrasted by two different tendencies: first, the interpretation of the *Poetics* through the lens of the moral philosophy (*hamartia* as an involuntary action); second, the rise of the modern theatrical practice and the need of a modern theorization of the tragic genre (*e.g.* Speroni, Giraldi).

French neo-classical criticism, although inheriting the theories of the Italian *Cinquecento*, did not simply perpetuate them. The idea of a dramatic scheme of retributive justice, already proposed by Castelvetro, become the *fil rouge* of the French treatises: the causal nexus between the hero's moral fault and his downfall is confirmed by the *doctrine classique* developed in 1630, especially by Scudery, Chapelain la Mesnardière, and the Abbé d'Aubignac. Moreover, the doctrine of 'poetic justice' with the view of tragedy as having a didactic and moral function lead theorists to recur to the theory of passions and to the notion of "weakness of will", the Aristotelian *akrasia* (*e.g.* Piccolimini, Sarasin, Dacier).

During the seventeenth century, both in France and in England it is evident a gradual substitution of the idea of *hamartia* as a mistake of action with the idea of "frailty" in character. The discussion on voluntary and involuntary actions (mostly developed by Robortello and Heinsius) and the reference to ignorance clearly influence Goulston's translation, which still interprets tragic error (*erratum*/*error*) as relating to the action (*praxis*), not the character (*ethos*) nor his/her moral stature. The reception of Italian commentaries (such as Vettori's and Piccolomini's), the theory of passions inherited from the *doctrine classique* along with the already concrete idea of poetic justice, the interpretation of σπουδαῖος as morally virtuous lead to the widespread concept of *hamartia* as a flaw in character (*e.g.* Rymer, Dryden, Dennis).

As for the early modern translations and adaptations of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, they followed two models: the Greek tragedy and the Roman Seneca. In the

Italian *Cinquecento* the reasons leading to Oedipus' downfall alternate between culpability and misfortune. The ambiguity of the notion of hamartia is usually avoided. As we saw, Anguillara justifies the "due punishment" of God ("debito castigo") for Oedipus' involuntary sins ("peccati […] per ignoranza e contra il suo volere") – close to Robortello's interpretation – and, even if he describes Oedipus as a positive character, the play is clearly integrated into a theodicy-pattern. However, the most common interpretation of Oedipus in sixteenth-century drama (*e.g.* Pazzi de' Medici, Segni, Gabia, Angeli) is based on a more philological interest and could be influenced sometimes by the medieval pattern of the lament for unexpected misfortune, according to which Oedipus is represented as an exemplum of Boccaccio's *casi virorum illustrium.* If during the Italian *Cinquecento* the interest in Seneca's *Oedipus* is mostly due to the role of the fate in the story (*e.g.* Dolce), the reference to the Senecan psychological characterization becomes clearer later, for instance, in England and in France (*e.g.* Neville, Prévost). The psychologization of the character, the fulfillment of the poetic justice, the moralization of the plot mostly characterize the seventeenth-century rewritings of the ancient model (both Greek and Roman): this is the case, although with some variations, of Corneille, Tesauro, and Dryden.

To conclude, we can say that in both theory and practice of tragedy there is a gradual substitution of Oedipus' *hamartia* as a mistake of action to *hamartia* as a fault of character, as well as a parallel transition from the dramatic pattern of the "lament for misfortunes" to a "theodicy-oriented" drama. Most of all, it seems that not only the dramatic theorisation determined the new tragic production, but it is the neoclassical theory itself to be influenced by the early modern tragedy.

The problem of the interpretation of *hamartia* in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century relates thus to the categories of action and character. As Rosendale argues, "things get aver more interesting when we consider *the actions of the characters*, and their ethical value and significance".[7] The association of action and character is necessary for moral responsibility. It is during the eighteenth century that we can observe a rehabilitation of passions and emotions, leading to what David Hume called "a morality determined by sentiment".

[7] Rosendale (2018) 22.

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