

C H A P T E R I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

CHAPTER I

Introduction

It is almost difficult to register one's claim to an original contribution to the vast repositories of studies on the influence of Greek and Seneca's tragedies on English drama. Yet there is always a room for a serious student of literature to look at the subject from his own angle of vision. The proposed study is of a similar nature. The present chapter may be treated as an introduction to the proposed study. An attempt is made here to give an idea of the nature, objective and scope of the said study on the impact of classical tragedy on English drama.

Title of the Thesis: The title of the thesis is The Influence of Greek and Latin Tragedies on English Drama. By 'Greek Tragedies' is meant the Attic tragedies, — those extant, — of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and by 'Latin Tragedies', the nine rhetorical tragedies of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the Roman philosopher (4 B.C. - A.D. 65). When used in the thesis in a general sense 'Greek tragedy' suggests Attic tragedy in the period of its full efflorescence, more precisely, Sophoclean tragedy. 'The Influence' implies the influence of the form and spirit of Greek or Seneca's tragedy as a whole or individually as the cases may be. 'English drama' suggests a few English tragedies, duly selected for case-studies in 'influence'.

Nature of the study: As the explanation of the title shows, an attempt is made in the thesis to ascertain the exact nature of the impact of classical tragedies (Greek and Seneca's) on their English counterparts and its significance.

To that end an attempt is made first (Chapter II) to show how the constituent elements of Greek and Seneca's tragedies have contributed to render them 'models' of Tragic Art. Thereafter the study is divided into five self-component parts.

The first part (Chapter III) deals exclusively with the impact of Seneca's tragedy on English tragedies. This chapter is divided in the following sections and sub-sections in order to show the different dramatic impulses and traditions represented by Seneca in the growth and development of English tragedy:

(1) The Influence of Seneca on the Elizabethan Tragedy:

- A. The first invasion of Seneca on the popular stage;
- B. The popularised Senecanism in Elizabethan tragedy : Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy;
- C. Senecan stance of self-sustained defiance : Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great;
- D. The re-making of the Senecan tradition : Shakespeare's early tragedies;
- E. Combination of the rival conceptions of Senecan and popular drama; Chapman's 'Bussy plays';
- F. A pure Seneca fit for public stage : Jonson's Roman tragedies;
- G. Seneca cast in the rigours of the classical form : English imitations of the French Seneca.

(2) The revived Senecanism in Jacobean tragedy: Webster's The Duchess of Malfi.

(3) Addison's Cato and Dr. Johnson's Irene : Plays constructed on the neo-classical model.

The second part (Chapter IV) deals with the impact of Attic tragedy on the following English plays:

1. Milton's Samson Agonistes;
2. Shelley's Hellas and Prometheus Unbound;
3. Arnold's Merops; and
4. Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon and Precious Blood.

The third part (Chapter V) examines the nature and significance of the classical analogues in

1. Bridges' Prometheus the Fire Giver;
2. O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms and Mourning Becomes Electra;
3. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, The Confidential Clerk and The Elder Statesman.

The fourth part (Chapter VI) is in the form of a summary of the observations made on the impact of Greek and Seneca's tragedies on English drama. This part also deals with the possibility of writing high tragedy in the modern age.

The last part is in the form of an appendix showing the list of consulted readings.

Objectives of the study: The proposed study, as already stated, seeks primarily to ascertain the nature and significance of the impact of classical tragedies on some of their English counterparts.

By way of examining the nature of the said impact, the study seeks to establish the fact

(i) that Seneca exercised a profound, and at times, salutary influence on the English tragedies in matters of structure, thought and style;

(ii) that the English plays, confessedly written on the Attic model, fail to capture the Greek spirit and that they are interesting not as experiments in Greek tragic form but as tragedies, sincere and moving, in such feelings as they evoke and

(iii) that the use of Greek myth toward the modern ideology requires an acute awareness of the great changes in meaning and intonation but the same awareness is so often lacking in the English plays which recast the ancient action in a modern setting.

The study arrives at the conclusion that classical impact on English tragedies was profound only when it was conditioned by ²historical as well as a literary movement, that is the Renaissance. But when the imitation of classical tragedy is a self-imposed rule or deliberate, it fails to produce any significant effect. Each work of art (and tragedy as such) is controlled by its own inherent laws and animated by the writer's vision of life. Tragic conception of life has changed since the days of the Greeks. So any attempt to construct tragedy on the Greek model is bound to meet failure.

Research questions: While analysing the significance of the impact of classical tragedies on English plays, the proposed study attempts to answer the following principal questions:

- (i) What are the basic constituents of classical tragedies that affect the English dramatists so powerfully?
- (ii) To what extent the impact of Seneca's tragedies has contributed to the development of the Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies?
- (iii) Why do the English neo-classical tragedies, namely, Cato and Irene fail as drama?
- (iv) How far the English plays on the Attic model have been successful as attempts to naturalise Greek tragedy in English?
- (v) How far the classical analogues in English plays have been effective in enriching the content of the plays?

Attempts have also been made to touch the following allied questions:

- (i) What is the implication of 'the Tragic Sense of Life'?
- (ii) What is the nature of the tragic conception of the Greek tragic poets?
- (iii) Is the modern outlook congenial to the writing of tragedies on the Attic lines?
- (iv) Is it possible to make use of the device of chorus even in modern tragedies?

Methodology: The proposed study, literary in approach and content, is essentially based on the text and on the analytical methodology. For this the primary sources, i.e. the texts have been collected from original writings or compilations. Secondly, the whole ranges

of literature on the impact of classical tragedies on English plays have been analysed for the preparation of a meaningful framework. To that end relevant plays have been selected and, in case of a group of English plays coming under the same category of the impact, the most representative one is taken up for study. Chapters III, IV and V constitute the main part of the argument and as such each of these chapters ends with a concluding portion showing a summary of the observations made in course of the discussion. In the last chapter the focus is concentrated on the impact of classical tragedies as a whole. In regard to the collection of primary data and critical references, the libraries and institutes have been utilised in Calcutta and at other places.

Overview of the Literature covering the Area of the Study:

Having stated the problem of inquiry and its significance, it would be useful to recount the work done in the area of the proposed study. Available literature may be classified into five broad categories.

The first category covers the primary sources, i.e. the texts of the individual plays selected for study in original, or in case of Greek and Seneca's tragedies, in translation.

In the second category are included those critical studies that deal with (i) various theories of tragedy, (ii) the spirit of tragedy, (iii) the nature of tragic pleasure, (iv) the form and spirit of Greek and Seneca's tragedy and (v) the possibility of modern tragedy. There is a large literature covering these aspects of tragedy. Only those are consulted which are found useful for preparing a conceptual framework. Some of the books consulted may be mentioned in a short space like this.

Allardyce Nicoll's Theory of Drama¹ (Indian Reprint, 1974) is a standard study of the dramatic theory. Renaissance criticism as regards the theory of drama is available in Barret H. Clark's European Theories of Drama (1947). F.L. Lucas' Tragedy in relation to Aristotle's Poetics (1928) deals critically with Aristotle's ideas. J.S. Smart's stimulating essay, "Tragedy" (English Association Studies, vol. viii) challenges Aristotle's views, particularly about the nature of the tragic protagonist. Among the commentaries of Aristotle's Poetics consulted for the thesis, mention may be made of Butcher's Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (1932), Bywater's Aristotle on the Art of Poetry (1909), Cooper's The Poetics of Aristotle, its Meaning and Influence (1927). For twentieth century views on tragedy the books consulted are R.P. Draper's (ed.) Tragedy : Developments in Criticism (1992), Laurence Michael's (ed.) Tragedy : Modern Essays in criticism (1963), George Steiner's The Death of Tragedy J.L. Styan's The Dark Comedy (1968), Raymond Williams' Modern Tragedy (1966), Dorothea

Krook's Elements of Tragedy (1969), Jenneette King's Tragedy in the Victorian Novel (1978) etc.

W. Macneille Dixon's Tragedy (1924) makes an effort to capture the prime essential of tragic spirit. In R.B. Sewall's The Vision of Tragedy (1960) an attempt is made to explain what is implied by the tragic sense of life and how did it evolve the literary form of tragedy. Herbert H. Muller's The Spirit of Tragedy (1956) is self-explanatory by its very title. Geoffrey Brereton's Principles of Tragedy (1956) offers a rational examination of the tragic concept in life and literature.

C.D. Montague's "The Elements of Tragedy" (Atlantic Monthly, CXXXVIII, September, 1936) offers an illuminating discussion on the nature of tragic pleasure. Joseph Wood Krutch's essay, "The Tragic Fallacy" in The Modern Temper (1921), George Steiner's The Death of Tragedy (1961) and Lewis Mumford's Achilles' Choice (1975) deal primarily with the possibility of modern tragedy.

The relevant portions of G.F.W. Hegel's Dramatic Poetry (1818-1829) and Arthur Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea (1819), F.W. Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy (1872), Miguel de Unamuno's The Tragic Sense of Life (1921) and George Santayana's essay, "Tragic Philosophy" (in Essays in Literary Criticism of George Santayana, ed. Irving Singer, 1956) provide philosophical interpretation of the spirit of tragedy and of the tragic pleasure.

The form as well as the spirit of Greek classical tragedy and the individual Greek writers and their plays provide the subject of literary study and critical analysis for many a critic and scholar in the past hundred years. Some, among these critics consulted for the thesis, are John Jones (On Aristotle and the Greek Tragedy, 1962), Gilbert Murray (A History of Ancient Greek Literature, 1967; Aeschylus, the Creator of Tragedy 1940 and Euripides and His Age, 1946), Albin Lesky (Greek Tragedy, 1967), H.D.P. Kitto (Greek Tragedy, A Literary Study, 1973 and Form and Meaning in Drama, 1968), A. Ricciardi-Cambridge (Lithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy, 1962), R. Lattimore (The Poetry of Greek Tragedy, 1958) and Edith Hamilton (The Greek Way, 1964). Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy (ed. Erich Segal, 1983), a collection of recent studies on individual Greek plays adds further to the consulted readings. Walter Benjamin's The Origin of German Tragic Drama (trans. John Osborne, 1977) offers a brief but illuminating discussion on the use and significance of myth in Greek tragedy and the significance of the tragic hero's suffering and death.

There is a well-written account of Seneca's works by J.L. Lucas in Seneca and Elizabethan tragedy (1972). Gordon Bracer's "The Rhetoric and Psychology of Power in Seneca's tragedies" (Arion, 9 : 5-41), T.S. Eliot's "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" (Selected Essays, 1961), C.S. Harrington's "Senecan Tragedy" (Arion, 5 : 422-427, 1966), J.W. Cunliffe's introduction chapter in Early English Classical Tragedies (1912), Elizabeth Henry's "Seneca the Young" in Ancient Writers (ed. T.

James Luce, Vol. II, 1982) and L.F. Matting's Seneca, Four Tragedies with Octavia, 1974) deal with the theme, style and spirit of Seneca's tragedies.

The list of studies on the classical tragedy is far from complete. The scholars and critics as mentioned above and those not now referred to but formally acknowledged in the relevant sections of the thesis have furthered the researcher's understanding of tragedy in general and classical tragedy in particular. The researcher, however, has restricted his study to those aspects of Greek tragedy which constitute its beauty and power, taking into special consideration Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus. As far as Seneca is concerned, he has concentrated on the peculiarities of his (Seneca's) dramatic art and outlook (as manifest ^{mainly} in Thyestes) that appealed most to the English dramatists who took him as their literary guide.

The third category includes the studies on the impact of Senecan drama on some of the tragedies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. There is a good number of critical studies with apparent adequacy, right from G.W. Cunliffe's Early English Classical Tragedies (1912) and The Influence of Seneca upon English Tragedies (1893, reprint 1925) to Gordon Braden's Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition (1985). Many competent scholars have been in the field with their exegesis: J.W. Hanly ("The Influence of Seneca's Tragedies upon English Drama" in The Tragedies of Seneca, Trans. Frank Justus Miller, 1907), A. L. Witherspoon (Influence of Robert Garnier on Elizabethan Drama, 1924), C. Mancell (Our Seneca, 1941), F.P. Wilson (Elizabethan and Jacobean, 1945),

T.S. Eliot ("Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" in Elizabethan Dramatists, 1958; "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" in Selected Essays, 1961; and Introduction to Seneca, his Tenne Tragedies, Translated into English, ed. by Thomas Newton Anno 1581), Wolfgang Clemen (English Tragedy before Shakespeare, 1961), Harold Craig ("The Shackling of Accident : A Study of Elizabethan Tragedy" in Elizabethan Drama, Modern Essays in Criticism, 1961), Eugene M. Waith (The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden, 1962), G.K. Hunter (Introduction to Marston's Antonio's Revenge, 1965), J.L.R. Ferguson (The Origins of English Tragedy, 1967), Fredson Bowers (Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1971), F.L. Lucas (Seneca and the Elizabethan Tragedy, 1972), H.B. Charlton (The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy, 1974) etc. and Ellis-Fermor in The Jacobean Drama : An Interpretation (1961) and Irving Ribner in The Jacobean Tragedy : The Quest for Moral Order (1962) deal with the impact of Seneca's tragic outlook on the Jacobean tragedies succinctly if not exhaustively.

The importance of Seneca on English drama is minimised by Howard Baker (Introduction to Tragedy, 1339, 1965) and G.K. Hunter ("Seneca and the Elizabethan : A case-study in Influence" in Shakespeare Survey, 20, 1967).

Stephen Orgel's The Influence of Power : Political Theatre in the English Renaissance (1975), Stephen Greenblatt's Renaissance Self-Fashioning, from More to Shakespeare (1980), Jonathan Dollimore's Radical Tragedy (1984) and Alan Sinfield's Literature in the Protestant England 1560-1600 (1985) throw light on the forces other than Senecan working in the literature of the Elizabethan and

Jacobean periods.

Critics and scholars have analysed the various facets of Senecan influence on English drama, fragmentary, palpable, extensive or obscure, as the nature may be. There is, however, no agreed opinion on the nature and significance of the said impact. For instance, while John W. Cunliffe² holds that what English tragedy would have been without the example of Seneca, it is hard to imagine, Gordon Bracken³ argues that the real case for Elizabethan Senecanism rests on a few generic features and matters of technique, a certain sense of mood and feeling, and primarily, a general wash of sentiments and topics that can be called Senecan. The researcher does not support either of the views. He tries to establish the fact that the English dramatists assimilated much of the Senecan drama but they added their imagination to it and reshaped its characters and conventions to suit their audience.

The fourth category covers the kind of literature that deals with the impact of Attic tragedy on the plays of Milton, Shelley, Arnold and Swinburne. There are some studies that cover the whole range of literature bearing the subject. They, however, lack elaborate analyses of the said impact on the individual playwrights and plays. Gilbert Highet's The Classical Tradition (1967), J.A.K. Thomson's Classical Influences on English Poetry (1962) and The Classical Background of English Literature (1950), G. Wilson Knight's The Golden Labyrinth (1962), Anniah Gowda's Dramatic Poetry (From Medieval to Modern Times) 1972, belong to this category. There are again independent studies on the individual

plays showing their ineffectiveness to Greek tragic form and spirit, but they, too, ^{naturally} do not help to assess, in full, the impact of Attic tragedy on English drama in general. The two essays, one each, on Prometheus Unbound and Atalanta in Calydon in Maurice Bowra's The Romantic Imagination (1976), the clever analysis of Atalanta in Calydon and Erechtheus and Merope in Douglas Bush's Mythology and Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (1977), the revealing study of Milton's adherence to the form and spirit of Greek tragedy in Samson Agonistes in W.K. Barker's Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes (1937), the commendable edition of Prometheus Unbound by Vida ^{D.} Scudder (1892) and that of Merope by J. Churton Collins, W.K. Rulland's reading of Swinburne's classical style in Swinburne : A Nineteenth Century Hellene (1931), the admirable analysis of Shelley's response to the myth of Prometheus in Prometheus Unbound in O.W. Campbell's Shelley and the Unromantics (1924) are useful for one working on the subject.

The objective of the proposed study, in this section, is to systematise a hitherto incoherent discussion on the Attic impact on English drama in an assimilable form. To that end six relevant plays have been brought under one fold and an analysis of the said impact on these plays is made in an attempt to see how far the English poets have been successful in adhering to the form of the Greek tragedy and in capturing its spirit and with what result.

The last category covers the critical studies on the nature and significance of the classical analogues in English plays, particularly in the selected plays of Bridges, O'Neill and Eliot. It is found that systematic study of the kind is not readily available. However, the individual plays and playwrights have been the haunts of several critics. Bridges' handling of the Promethean myth forms a part of discussion in F.R. Leavis' New Bearings in English Poetry (1961). Loris Y. Falk's Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (1958), Leavis Bogard's Contour in Time, the plays of Eugene O'Neill (1972), Thomas L. Porter's Myth and Modern American Drama (1969), to name only a few, offer valuable discussion of O'Neill's recasting of the Greek tragedies in Mourning becomes Electra. Eliot's use of the Greek tragic myth and chorus forms critical studies in Grover Smith's T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning (1967), F.O. Matthiessen's The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (1959), D.E.S. Maxwell's The Poetry of T.S. Eliot (1961), Raymond Williams' Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (1954), Carol H. Smith's T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice (1963), Helen Gardner's The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949), L.E. Jones' The Plays of T.S. Eliot (1960), E. Martin Browne's The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays (1969) etc. There are, besides, hundreds^d of critical essays on the nature and significance of the classical analogues in Eliot's and O'Neill's plays rendering impossible to mention all of them in such a short space like this.

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The nature of the proposed work in this section relates primarily to two basic questions — to what extent does the presence of the classical analogues influence the technique of the concerned plays; and is this presence necessary to establish the meaning of the plays? A further consideration relates specifically to the value of using analogues from Greek drama in an age when the classics are not common knowledge.

Conclusion:

From the above analysis it is very clear that there is no coherent and comprehensive study on the subject undertaken for the present research. And if there are any, they are not exhaustive. Several of the studies mentioned above deal with the influence either of Greek tragedy or of Senecan tragedy on English drama. This brief overview further highlights the fact that there exists a major gap in understanding the exact nature and significance of the impact of classical tragedy on English drama as a whole.

Moreover a truly comparative perspective has not been followed in any of the works cited above. Whenever comparative analysis has been attempted it has been piecemeal. Hence this study has been undertaken to bridge a genuine research gap in an important field in the history of English tragedy.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The complete bibliography of this as well as of the other books as mentioned in this chapter is given in the appendix of the thesis.
2. Cunliffe, John W., The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy. Archon Books, Hamden, Conn., 1965, p. 126.
3. Braden, Gordon, Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition. New Haven : Yale University Press, 1965, p. 175