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ANDRÉ GREEN

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TRANSLATED BY ALAN SHERIDAN

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If someone looks into the mirror, a man, and in it sees his image, as though it were a painted likeness; it resembles the man. The image of man has eyes, whereas the moon has light. King Oedipus has an eye too many perhaps. The sufferings of this man, they seem indescribable, unspeakable, inexpressible. If the drama represents something like this, that is why. But what comes over me if I think of you now? Like brooks the end of something sweeps me away, which expands like Asia. Of course, this affliction, Oedipus has it too. Of course, that is why. . . Life is death, and death is a kind of life.

Hölderlin, 'In lovely blueness. . .'

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Foreword

BY FRANK KERMODE

Three-quarters of a century and more after the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* there is still strong resistance to the suggestion that analysts of literary texts have anything important to learn from psycho-analysis. Psycho-analysts have a well-developed apologetic, know all about resistance, and may be left to look after themselves. But literary critics – and metacritics, whose number increases with such interesting rapidity – need to consider what they may be missing. It is true that twentieth-century criticism, even when it is innocent of direct allusion to psycho-analysis, often betrays its generalized influence. Where the manifest sense may be left to the naïve or incompetent reader, the institutionalized expert deals primarily in the latent, and teaches others to do the same; and Freud contributed to this change, rather as the mythographers and allegorists helped to defend the hidden meanings of Renaissance literature. But full consciousness of this debt is rarely found in critics who are not doctrinaire Freudians. Others avoid it, and point, if challenged, to the obvious differences between their own practice and that of the psycho-analyst. For the latter, the approach to latent sense is by way of the analysand's free association; and only if the analysand honours his contract, and says everything, will there be uttered that which is heard by the third ear, that which reveals what is concealed. But although the critic must conduct some kind of dialogue with his text, and must hope to have an interpretative organ in some way comparable to that third ear (or that 'eye too many' of which Hölderlin spoke in the verses that form the epigraph of André Green's book and gave it its title in French), he is probably unwilling to allow that the only free association that can be super-added to his text – namely his own – is an equivalent source of information, so far as what is latent in the text is concerned.

Psycho-analysts have their own institutional constraints, and their discipline has, almost since its origin, been an arena of ferocious hermeneutical disputes. There are sects or parties, more or less clearly labelled. Critics, at any rate in Britain and the United States, are much less likely to proclaim so full a doctrinal adherence, though they are by no means such free agents as this might make them appear; and the constraints of their institution are more rigorous than many suppose. For example, it is still the common wisdom that

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criticism must 'respect' what the author of any work under consideration meant, or could have meant, to say in it. This position has been attacked on many different fronts over the past thirty years, but it remains the orthodox position. Consequently it has generally been assumed that such use as psycho-analysis may have in literary criticism depends upon its power to illuminate, using the evidence of the text, what was going on in an author. And this has given psycho-analysis a bad name among many, perhaps most, critics, who think of it largely as a fantastic or tedious supplement to biography, a quest, mechanically prosecuted, for evidence of what one disenchanted practitioner has called 'the squeaking bedsprings of the primal scene', whether in Conrad's Congo or in Milton's Paradise.

For this state of affairs Freud, who left several examples of author-analysis, must certainly bear some of the blame. But his immense authority is not of the kind that excludes qualification, correction and development. His revolutionary approach to dream, to symptom and to parapraxis can be thought of as a preliminary to a fuller understanding of all discourse that one has reason to think less than transparent, which of course includes all literary discourse. Psycho-analysis cannot be a substitute for literary criticism; but they may be hermeneutical cousins, and it is worth asking whether the insights of psycho-analysis may not have a valuable application say to tragedy, and to particular tragedies, without regard to the psychical condition of Aeschylus, Shakespeare or Racine.

The isolated, defensive position occupied by modern American psycho-analytic criticism (there is very little, good or bad, in Britain) is almost certainly due to the way in which Freud has been transmitted to the critics. The over-confident positivism of the prevailing orthodoxy, ego-psychology, cannot appeal to the reader of today who finds himself engaged with the uncertainties of the literary text, with its negative modes of existence, with the problem of describing his precarious relationship to an object whose fundamental characteristic is that it 'is, and is not'. In England, there have been deviant schools of greater critical potential; one thinks of the work of Melanie Klein, of D. W. Winnicott, of W. Bion. But the potential has not been actualized. The adventurous critical employment of revisionist Freudian, or post-Freudian, approaches has been primarily the work of the French, who have perhaps benefited from the intermittency of Freud's effect on their own intellectual life. Whatever the reason, it is now commonplace that the *rifacimento* of Freud on the linguistic basis provided by Ferdinand de Saussure – the work, principally, of Jacques Lacan – has transformed French literary criticism. Associated with the school of Lacan, though very far from being a card-carrying epigone, is the author of the present work, Dr André Green.

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Green is an analyst of international distinction, exceptional in his sensitivity to theoretical developments achieved by other schools than the French, and to relevant scholarship outside the limits of his own discipline. He also happens to have a lifelong interest in, and practical experience of, the theatre. It is from this conjunction of interests that the present book has grown. Its main purpose is to apply the methods of 'psychological hermeneutics' to tragedy – with a strong emphasis on tragedy in performance – and specifically to the *Oresteia*, *Othello*, and Racine's *Iphigénie*. He includes studies of other works, providing, for example, a brilliantly original treatment of *The Bacchae* of Euripides.

At the heart of these essays is the psycho-analytical doctrine which holds that 'the access to truth. . . can only pass through an examination of its distortions'. The truth is always in disguise; and for Green the tragic theatre is a peculiarly rich location of the enigmatic, the disguised, the secondary sense. It is precisely because tragedy came *after* myth and made it opaque that he values it so highly. The theme that constantly engages him is the *après coup*, the delayed meaning, disclosures made after the event. He seizes upon the least obvious text or figure as his leading clue, and pursues it unremittingly. The truth is for him inseparable from what he calls *méconnaissance*; 'the ways of knowledge and truth are set up in opposition'. Obviously he claims no finality for his own recognitions of truth, for they too are subject to further disclosures *après coup*. So, it might be said, are all literary analysis and interpretation; it is what such interpretation has in common with psycho-analysis, and a part of what the book has to tell us.

The interpretative essays on Greek, English and French tragedies are the heart of the book, but Green's more general purposes required a theoretical Prologue and Epilogue. The latter is an extended study of the Oedipus complex. Unlike most modern psycho-analysts, especially Americans, he is concerned with this complex in its full form, feminine as well as masculine, negative as well as positive – a structure to which every individual is heir, as a consequence of his/her psychical bisexuality. 'For that is the essential nature of this complex. It never exists in the simple state, but is always double. It never exists in an integral state, but survives only in a vestigial state. It never exists in a conscious state, but remains an unconscious state.' In short, it is a deeper and more tragic concept than we have grown accustomed to think it; and it is necessary to the studies of the tragedies that we should understand it in its fullest Freudian sense. It is in that sense that the Epilogue expounds it.

The Prologue forms a difficult entrance to the main body of the book. Its manner may well be unfamiliar to Anglo-Saxon readers,

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but they should take courage from its subtle and unillusioned confidence in the value of psycho-analysis, and from the strength with which the author juxtaposes the psycho-analytic and the tragic scenes. The child, faced with the mystery of his origins and excluded from any sharing in it, must seek it through interpreting his parents; the spectator must interpret the dialogue, equally lacking in explicit commentary, which he listens to in the theatre. But there is always too much to interpret. And each requirement to interpret is complicated by the force of repression, which insists that truth may be disclosed only as a hidden, an absent, truth. Beyond the physical scene there is always that 'other scene'; the stage and the family are alike tragic spaces. Moreover, to interpret is to distort, in order to avoid the unpleasure that accompanies the revelation of the inadmissible. Truth endlessly repeated is endlessly deformed; every interpretative act has an element of *méconnaissance*. In the course of these preliminary deliberations, Green confronts many problems familiar to us in other guises: of representation, of the pleasure we find in tragedy, of the surprising interpretation which compels us to disregard the simpler conventions of the critic's craft, the requirement, for example, of coherence. When we have followed him through this long initiation we are ready for a genuinely psycho-analytical reading of tragedy, and of individual tragedies considered as representations of the phantasy or myth of the Oedipus complex.

Perhaps the matter is less familiar than at first appears, for we are already aware of the existence of what Green, after Freud, calls the 'other scene'. It is, in some form, a necessary hypothesis of all speculative criticism, all criticism that does more than merely 'double' the manifest sense of its text. What Green has done, in his interpretations of the *Oresteia*, of *Othello*, of *Iphigénie*, is not merely to confirm the affinity between tragedy and myth, but also to afford us means of understanding it. The radical instrument of this understanding is the full Oedipus complex, as, in all its complexity, its doublings and inversions, it informs these studies.

Green's proposals are not made in a spirit of aggression or conquest; it is characteristic of his whole approach that he disowns the desire to convince. Yet he is, boldly, a psycho-analyst, and rejoices in the analyst's destiny, which is to have, like the artist, an eye too many. I dare say he would be astonished if every one of his interpretations were to be found acceptable by his reader; I, for example, reject some of his propositions on *Othello*; but I think my understanding of that tragedy is increased, not only by what I accept but also by what I resist. So too with his effect on my general understanding of the problem of interpretation. For all that I demur at some of the paradoxes proposed, I value what I have learnt from the

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discussion, in the section on *The Bacchae*, of the transition from *plaisir* to *jouissance*, a Freudian variation that seems intuitively acceptable; and from what he says of 'disavowal' and *méconnaissance*. His book should alter our understanding of the spectator's response to tragedy, and modify, in a wholly beneficial sense, our thinking about the relation between the two kinds of analysis.

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Author's Acknowledgements

This work owes much to many. My discovery of *living* tragedy dates from the years I spent in the Groupe de théâtre antique at the Sorbonne. Without this concrete experience of ancient tragedy, I would have learnt nothing *true* about it. Later, other groups contributed to my understanding. Among these, I should particularly like to mention the students who attended my seminar at the Institut de Psychanalyse, Paris. They gave me the opportunity for an exchange of views for which I am truly grateful.

A number of friends have helped me to bring this work to birth. My thanks must first go to Michèle and Christian David. I must also thank Claude Monod for the valuable help that she has unstintingly given. Bernard Pingaud has given me valuable advice. I owe an especial debt of gratitude to Muguet Green for her unflagging patience and meticulous care in preparing the final version of this book.

Lastly, I wish to thank Jean Piel for the confidence that he has shown in my work, both in the journal *Critique* and in the series of books bearing the same name.

A.G.

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Translator's Note

In this English edition, footnotes have as far as possible been incorporated in the main body of the text. Where this would have resulted in an interruption of the author's argument, notes have been placed at the end of the book. I have added a few explanatory notes concerning certain psycho-analytic (and, more particularly, Lacanian) terms; these are contained within square brackets in the notes at the end of the book.

For works included in the Select Bibliography references are kept to a minimum: author, publication date and volume number where necessary, and act and scene or page number; e.g.:

Aristotle, 29

Delcourt, 1944, 23

Freud, *S.E.*, xxiii, 43

Bacchae, 186

In the case of the Racine play, the act and scene number are followed by a colon and the page number of the English edition: Racine, *Iphigenia*, II, 5: 81. Details of the editions used are given in the Select Bibliography. Where no English version is cited there, the translations are my own.

Where quotations contain italics added by Green in order to emphasize a particular point, there is a note to this effect; otherwise italics may be assumed to be part of the text quoted.

Green's argument is occasionally based on a version of the Greek texts that differs considerably from the version used for the Penguin translation. The Greek has been retranslated to fit Green's argument where necessary.

A.S.