

ing, in one way or another, the mass. Aristotle's coercive system of tragedy shows us the workings of this type of theater.

Later came the bourgeoisie and changed these protagonists: they ceased to be objects embodying moral values, superstructural, and became multidimensional subjects, exceptional individuals, equally separated from the people, as new aristocrats — this is the poetics of *virtù* of Machiavelli.

Bertolt Brecht reacts to this poetics by taking the character theorized by Hegel as absolute subject and converting him back into an object. But now he is an object of social forces, not of the values of the superstructures. Social being determines thought, and not vice versa.

What was lacking to complete the cycle was what is happening at present in Latin America — the destruction of the barriers created by the ruling classes. First, the barrier between actors and spectators is destroyed: all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformations of society. This is the process I describe in "Experiments with the People's Theater in Peru." Then the barrier between protagonists and choruses is destroyed: all must be simultaneously chorus and protagonist — this is the "Joker" system. Thus we arrive at the *poetics of the oppressed*, the conquest of the means of theatrical production.

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Buenos Aires
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Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy

[Athens] was governed in the name of the people, but in the spirit of the nobility. . . . The only "progress" consisted in the displacement of the aristocracy of birth by an aristocracy of money, of the clan state by a plutocratic rentier state. . . . She was an imperialistic democracy, carrying on a policy which gave benefits to the free citizens and the capitalists at the cost of the slaves and those sections of the people who had no share in the war profits.

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Tragedy is the characteristic creation of Athenian democracy; in no form of art are the inner conflicts of its social structure so directly and clearly to be seen as in this. The externals of its presentation to the masses were democratic, but its content, the heroic sagas with their tragi-heroic outlook on life, was aristocratic. . . . It unquestionably propagates the standards of the great-hearted individual, the uncommon distinguished man . . . it owed its origin to the separation of the choir-leader from the choir, which turned collective performance of songs into dramatic dialogue. . . .

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The tragedians are in fact state bursars and state purveyors — the state pays them for the plays that are performed, but naturally does not allow pieces to be performed that would run counter to its policy or the interests of the governing classes. The tragedies are frankly tendentious and do not pretend to be otherwise.

Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*¹

Introduction

The argument about the relations between theater and politics is as old as theater and . . . as politics. Since Aristotle, and in fact since long before, the same themes and arguments that are still brandished were already set forth. On one hand, art is affirmed to be pure contemplation, and on the other hand, it is considered to present always a vision of the world in transformation and therefore is inevitably political insofar as it shows the means of carrying out that transformation or of delaying it.

Should art educate, inform, organize, influence, incite to action, or should it simply be an object of pleasure? The comic poet Aristophanes thought that "the dramatist should not only offer pleasure but should, besides that, be a teacher of morality and a political adviser." Eratosthenes contradicted him, asserting that the "function of the poet is to charm the spirits of his listeners, never to instruct them." Strabo argued: "Poetry is the first lesson that the State must teach the child; poetry is superior to philosophy because the latter is addressed to a minority while the former is addressed to the masses." Plato, on the contrary, thought that the poets should be expelled from a perfect republic because "poetry only makes sense when it exalts the figures and deeds that should serve as examples; theater imitates the things of the world, but the world is no more than a mere imitation of ideas — thus theater comes to be an imitation of an imitation."

As we see, each one has his opinion. Is this possible? Is the

relation of art to the spectator something that can be diversely interpreted, or, on the contrary, does it rigorously obey certain laws that make art either a purely contemplative phenomenon or a deeply political one? Is one justified in accepting the poet's declared intentions as an accurate description of the course followed in his works?

Let us consider the case of Aristotle, for example, for whom poetry and politics are completely different disciplines, which must be studied separately because they each have their own laws and serve different purposes and aims. To arrive at these conclusions, Aristotle utilizes in his *Poetics* certain concepts that are scarcely explained in his other works. Words that we know in their current connotation change their meaning completely if they are understood through the *Nicomachean Ethics* or the *Magna Moralia*.

Aristotle declares the independence of poetry (lyric, epic, and dramatic) in relation to politics. What I propose to do in this work is to show that, in spite of that, Aristotle constructs the first, extremely powerful poetic-political system for intimidation of the spectator, for elimination of the "bad" or illegal tendencies of the audience. This system is, to this day, fully utilized not only in conventional theater, but in the TV soap operas and in Western films as well: movies, theater, and television united, through a common basis in Aristotelian poetics, for repression of the people.

But, obviously, the Aristotelian theater is not the only form of theater.

Art Imitates Nature

The first difficulty that we face in order to understand correctly the workings of tragedy according to Aristotle stems from the very definition which that philosopher gives of art. What is art, any art? For him, it is an imitation of nature. For us, the word "imitate" means to make a more or less perfect copy of an original model. Art would, then, be a copy of nature. And "nature" means the whole of created things. Art would, therefore, be a copy of created things.

But this has nothing to do with Aristotle. For him, to imitate (mimesis) has nothing to do with copying an exterior model. "Mimesis" means rather a "re-creation." And nature is not the whole of created things but rather the creative principle itself. Thus when Aristotle says that art imitates nature, we must understand that this statement, which can be found in any modern version of the *Poetics*, is due to a bad translation, which in turn stems from an isolated interpretation of that text. "Art imitates nature" actually means: "Art re-creates the creative principle of created things."

In order to clarify a little more the process and the principle of "re-creation" we must, even if briefly, recall some philosophers who developed their theories before Aristotle.

The School of Miletus.

Between the years 640 and 548 B.C., in the Greek city of

Miletus, lived a very religious oil merchant, who was also a navigator. He had an immovable faith in the gods; at the same time, he had to transport his merchandise by sea. Thus he spent a great deal of his time praying to the gods, begging them for good weather and a calm sea, and devoted the rest of his time to the study of the stars, the winds, the sea, and the relations between geometrical figures. Thales — this was the Greek's name — was the first scientist to predict an eclipse of the sun. A treatise on nautical astronomy is also attributed to him. As we see, Thales believed in the gods but did not fail to study the sciences. He came to the conclusion that the world of appearances — chaotic and many-sided though it was — actually was nothing more than the result of diverse transformations of a single substance, water. For him, water could change into all things, and all things could likewise be transformed into water. How did this transformation take place? Thales believed that things possessed a "soul." Sometimes the soul could become perceptible and its effects immediately visible: the magnet attracts the iron — this attraction is the "soul." Therefore, according to him, the soul of things consists in the movement inherent in things which transforms them into water and that, in turn, transforms the water into things.

Anaximander, who lived not long afterward (610-546 B.C.) held similar beliefs, but for him the fundamental substance was not water, but something indefinable, without predicate, called *apeiron*, which according to him, created things through either condensing or rarifying itself. The *apeiron* was, for him, divine, because it was immortal and indestructible.

Another of the philosophers of the Milesian school, Anaximenes, without varying to any great extent from the conceptions just described, affirmed that air was the element closest to immateriality, thus being the primal substance from which all things originated.

In these three philosophers a common trait can be noted: the search for a single substance whose transformations give birth to all known things. Furthermore, the three argue, each in his own way, for the existence of a transforming force, immanent to the substance — be it air, water, or *apeiron*. Or four elements, as Empedocles asserted (air, water, earth, and fire); or numbers, as Pythagoras believed. Of all of them, very few written texts have come down to us. Much more has remained of Heraclitus, the first dialectician.

Heraclitus and Cratylus.

For Heraclitus, the world and all things in it are in constant flux, and the permanent condition of change is the only unchangeable thing. The appearance of stability is a mere illusion of the senses and must be corrected by reason.

And how does change take place? Well, all things change into fire, and fire into all things, in the same manner that gold is transformed into jewelry which can in turn be transformed into gold again. But of course gold does not transform itself; it is transformed. There is someone (the jeweler), foreign to the matter gold, who makes the transformation possible. For Heraclitus, however, the transforming element would exist within the thing itself, as an opposing force. "War is the mother of all things; opposition unifies, for that which is separated creates the most beautiful harmony; all that happens, only happens because there is struggle." That is to say, each thing carries within itself an antagonism which makes it move from what it is to what it is not.

To show the constantly changing nature of all things, Heraclitus used to offer a concrete example: nobody can step into the same river twice. Why? Because on the second attempt it will not be the same waters that are running, nor will it be exactly the same person who tries it, because he will be older, even if by only a few seconds.

His pupil, Cratylus, even more radical, would say to his teacher that nobody can go into a river even once, because upon going in, the waters of the river are already moving (which waters would he enter?) and the person who would attempt it would already be aging (who would be entering, the older or the younger one?). Only the movement of the waters is eternal, said Cratylus; only aging is eternal; only movement exists: all the rest is appearance.

Parmenides and Zeno.

On the extreme opposite of those two defenders of movement, of transformation, and of the inner conflict which promotes change, was Parmenides, who took as the point of departure for the creation of his philosophy a fundamentally logical premise: being is and non-being is not. Actually it would be absurd to think the opposite and, said Parmenides, absurd thoughts are not real. There is, therefore, an identity between being and thinking, ac-

ording to the philosopher. If we accept this initial premise, we are obliged to derive from it a number of consequences:

- 1) Being is one (indivisible), for if it were not so, between one being and another there would be non-being, which in fact would divide them; but since we have already accepted that non-being is not, we have to accept that being is one, in spite of the deceptive appearance that tells us the opposite.
- 2) Being is eternal, for if it were not so, after being there would necessarily come non-being which, as we have seen, is not.
- 3) Being is infinite. (Here Parmenides made a small logical mistake: after affirming that being is infinite, he asserted that it was also spherical; now if it is spherical it has a shape, and therefore has a limit, beyond which there necessarily would come non-being. But these are subtleties which should not concern us here. Possibly "spherical" is a bad translation, and Parmenides might have meant "infinite," in all directions, or something like that.)
- 4) Being is unchangeable, because all transformation means that being stops being what it is in order to begin to be what it is not yet: between one state and the other there would necessarily be non-being, and since the latter is not, there is no possibility (according to this logic) of change.
- 5) Being is motionless: movement is an illusion, because motion means that being moves from the place where it is to the place where it is not, this meaning that between the two places there would be non-being, and once more this would be a logical impossibility.

From these statements, Parmenides ends by concluding that since they are in disagreement with our senses, with what we can see and hear, this means that there are two perfectly definable worlds: the intelligible, rational world, and the world of appearances. Motion, according to him, is an illusion, because we can demonstrate that it does not actually exist; the same for the multiplicity of existing things, which are in his logic, a single being, infinite, eternal, unchangeable.

Like Heraclitus, Parmenides too, had his radical disciple, named Zeno. The latter had the habit of telling two stories to prove the inexistence of motion. Two famous stories, which are worth remembering. The first said that in a race between Achilles (the greatest Greek runner) and a turtle, the former could never reach the latter if it were allowed a small lead at the start. Zeno's reasoning went like this: no matter how fast Achilles may run, he will first have to cover the distance that separated him from the

turtle when the race started. But no matter how slow the turtle may be, it will have moved, even if only a few centimeters. When Achilles attempts to overtake it once again, he will, nonetheless, have to cover this second distance. During this time the turtle will have advanced somewhat more, and to overtake it, Achilles will have to cover the distance — smaller and smaller each time — that will be separating him from the turtle, which, very slowly, will never let itself be defeated.

The second story, or example, states that if an archer shoots an arrow toward someone, the latter will not have to get out of the way because the arrow will never reach him. The same is true if a rock falls from above one's head: he does not have to flee because the rock will never break his head. Why? Very simple, Zeno would say (obviously a man of the extreme right), because an arrow or a rock, in order to move, like any thing or person, must move either in the place where it is or in the place where it is not yet. It can not move in the place where it is, because if it is there this means it has not moved. Neither can it move in the place where it is not, because of course it will not be there to make the move. The story is told that when rocks were thrown at him for engaging in reasoning like this, Zeno, in spite of his logic, used to flee.

Zeno's logic clearly suffers from a fundamental fault: the movements of Achilles and the turtle are not interdependent or discontinuous: Achilles does not first gain one part of the distance to be run, in order then to run the second stage; on the contrary, he runs the entire distance without relation to the speed of the turtle, or to that of a lazy bear that might happen to be moving along the same course. The movement does not take place in one place or in another, but rather from one place toward another: the movement is precisely the passing from one place to another, and not a sequence of acts in different places.

Logos and Plato.

It is important to keep in mind that our purpose here is not to write a history of philosophy but rather to set forth as clearly as possible the Aristotelian concept of art as an imitation of nature, and to clarify what kind of nature it is, what kind of imitation, and what kind of art. This is why we have passed so lightly over many thinkers. Socrates, too, must suffer from this superficial treat-

ment, since we want to establish only his concept of *logos*. For him, the real world needed to be conceptualized in the manner of the geometers. In nature there is an infinity of forms which are similar to a form generally designated as a triangle: thus the concept, the *logos*, of triangle is established; it is the geometrical figure having three sides and three angles. An infinity of real objects can thus be conceptualized. There exists, too, an infinite number of forms of objects that resemble the square, the circle, the polyhedron; therefore, the concepts of polyhedron, sphere, and square are established. The same should be done, Socrates said, with the *logos* of moral value in order to conceptualize courage, good, love, tolerance, etcetera.

Plato uses the Socratic idea of *logos* and goes beyond:

1. The idea is the intuitive vision we have, and precisely because it is intuitive, it is "pure": there is not in reality any perfect triangle, but the idea we have of the triangle (not of this or that triangle, that we can see in reality, but of the triangle "in general"); that idea is perfect. People who love, realize the act of love, but always imperfectly; what is perfect is the idea of love. All ideas are perfect; all the concrete things of reality are imperfect.
2. Ideas are the essence of things existing in the world perceptible to the senses; ideas are indestructible, immovable, immutable, timeless, and eternal.
3. Knowledge consists in elevating ourselves, through dialectics — that is, through the debate of ideas posed and counterposed, of ideas and the negations of those same ideas, which are other ideas — from the world of sensible reality to the world of eternal ideas. This ascent is knowledge.

What is the Meaning of "Imitation"?

This brings us back to Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), who rejects Plato:

1. Plato only multiplied the beings who for Parmenides were a single being; for him they are infinite, because the ideas are infinite.
2. The *mataxis*, that is, the participation of one world in another, is unintelligible; in truth, what has the world of perfect ideas to do with the imperfect world of real things? Is there movement from one to the other? If so, how does it take place?

Though Aristotle rejects Plato's system, he also utilizes it, introducing some new concepts: "substance" is the indissoluble unity of "matter" and "form." "Matter," in turn, is what constitutes substance; the matter of a tragedy is the words that constitute it; the matter of a statue is the marble. "Form" is the sum of the predicates we can attribute to a thing; it is all we can say about that thing. Each thing comes to be what it is (a statue, a book, a house, a tree) because its matter receives a form that gives meaning and purpose to it. This conceptualization confers on Platonic thought the dynamic characteristic that it lacked. The world of ideas does not coexist side by side with the world of reality, but rather the ideas (here called form) are the dynamic principle of matter. In the last analysis, reality for Aristotle is not a copy of ideas, though indeed it tends to perfection. It has in itself the moving force that will take it to that perfection. Man tends to

health, to perfect bodily proportion, etc., and men as a whole tend to the perfect family, to the State. Trees tend to the perfection of the tree, that is, to the Platonic idea of a tree. Love tends to the perfect Platonic love. Matter, for Aristotle, is pure potential, and form is pure act; the movement of things toward perfection is therefore what he called "the enactment of potential," the passage from pure matter to pure form.

Our concern here is to insist on one point: for Aristotle, things themselves, by their own virtues (by their form, their moving force, by the enactment of their potential), tend to perfection. There are not two worlds; there is no *mataxis*: the world of perfection is yearning, a movement which develops matter toward its final form.

Therefore, what did "imitate" mean for Aristotle? To re-create that internal movement of things toward their perfection. Nature was for him this movement itself and not things already made, finished, visible. Thus "to imitate" has nothing to do with improvisation or "realism," and for this reason Aristotle could say that the artist must imitate men "as they should be" and not as they are.

What, then, is the Purpose of Art and Science?

If the things themselves tend to perfection, if perfection is immanent to all things and not transcendent, what, then, is the purpose of art and science?

Nature, according to Aristotle, tends to perfection, which does not mean that it always attains it. The body tends to health, but it can become ill; men in the aggregate tend to the perfect State, but wars can occur. Thus nature has certain ends in view, states of perfection toward which it tends — but sometimes nature fails. From this follows the purpose of art and science: by "re-creating the creative principle" of things, they correct nature where it has failed.

Here are some examples: the body "would tend" to resist rain, wind, and sun, but it does not in fact do so since the skin is not sufficiently resistant. Thus we invent the art of weaving and the manufacture of fabrics to protect the skin. The art of architecture constructs buildings and bridges, so that men can have shelter and cross rivers; medical science prepares medications for organs that have ceased to function as they should. Politics likewise tends to correct the faults that men have, even though they all tend to the perfect communal life.

That is the purpose of art and science: to correct the faults of nature, by using the suggestions of nature itself.

Major Arts and Minor Arts

The arts and sciences do not exist in isolation, without relation to each other, but on the contrary, are all interrelated according to the activity characteristic of each. They are also, in a certain way, arranged hierarchically according to the greater or lesser magnitude of their fields of action. The major arts are subdivided into minor arts, and each one of the latter deals with specific elements that compose the former.

Thus, the raising of horses is an art, as is also the work of the blacksmith. These arts, together with others — such as that of the man who makes leather goods, etc. — constitute a greater art, which is the art of equitation. The latter, in turn, joins with other arts — such as the art of topography, the art of strategy, etc. — to make up the art of war, and so on. Always a group of arts combines to form a more ample, greater, more complex art.

Another example: the art of manufacturing paints, the art of manufacturing paint brushes, the art of preparing the best canvas, the art of the combination of colors, etc., together constitute the art of painting.

So then, if there are minor arts and major arts, the latter being the ones that contain the former, there will be therefore a sovereign art, which will contain all the other arts and sciences, and whose field of action and concern will include all the fields of action of all the other arts and all the other sciences. This

sovereign art, of course, will be the one whose laws rule over the relations among men in their totality. That is, Politics.

Nothing is alien to Politics, because nothing is alien to the superior art that rules the relations among men.

Medicine, war, architecture, etc. — minor and major arts, all without exception — are subject to, and make up, that sovereign art.

Thus we have established that nature tends toward perfection, that the arts and sciences correct nature in all its faults, and at the same time are interrelated under the domain of a sovereign art which deals with all men, with all they do, and all that is done for them: Politics.

What does Tragedy Imitate?

Tragedy imitates human acts. Human acts, not merely human activities. For Aristotle, man's soul was composed of a rational part and of another, irrational part. The irrational soul could produce certain activities such as eating, walking or performing any physical movement without greater significance than the physical act itself. Tragedy, on the other hand, imitated solely man's actions, determined by his rational soul.

Man's rational soul can be divided into:

- (a) faculties
- (b) passions
- (c) habits

A *faculty* is everything man is able to do, even though he may not do it. Man, even if he does not love, is able to love; even if he does not hate, he is able to hate; even if a coward, he is capable of showing courage. Faculty is pure potentiality and is immanent to the rational soul.

But, even though the soul has all the faculties, only some of them attain realization. These are the passions. A *passion* is not merely a "possibility," but a concrete fact. Love is a passion once it is expressed as such. As long as it is simply a possibility it will remain a faculty. A passion is an "enacted" faculty, a faculty that becomes a concrete act.

Not all passions serve as subject matter for tragedy. If a man, in a given moment, happens to exert a passion, that is not an

action worthy of tragedy. It is necessary that that passion be constant in the man; that is, that by its repeated exertion it has become a *habit*. Thus we conclude that tragedy imitates man's actions, but only those produced by the habits of his rational soul. Animal activity is excluded, as well as the faculties and passions that have not become habitual.

To what end is a passion, a habit, exerted? What is the purpose of man? Each part of man has a purpose: the hand grabs, the mouth eats, the leg walks, the brain thinks, etc.; but as a whole being, what purpose does man have? Aristotle answers; the good is the aim of all man's actions. It is not an abstract idea of good, but rather the concrete good, diversified in all the different sciences and the different arts which deal with particular ends. Each human action, therefore, has an end limited to that action, but all actions as a whole have as their purpose the supreme good of man. What is the supreme good of man? Happiness!

Thus far we are able to say that tragedy imitates man's actions, those of his rational soul, directed to the attainment of his supreme end, happiness. But in order to understand which actions they are, we have to know first what happiness is.

What is Happiness?

The types of happiness, says Aristotle, are three: one that derives from material pleasures, another from glory, and a third from virtue.

For the average person, happiness consists in possessing material goods and enjoying them. Riches, honors, sexual and gastronomic pleasures, etc. — that is happiness. For the Greek philosopher, human happiness on this level differs very little from the happiness that animals can also enjoy. This happiness, he says, does not deserve to be studied in tragedy.

On a second level, happiness is glory. Here man acts according to his own virtue, but his happiness consists in the recognition of his actions by others. Happiness is not in the virtuous behavior itself, but in the fact that that behavior is recognized by others. Man, in order to be happy, needs the approval of others.

Finally, the superior level of happiness is that of the man who acts virtuously and asks no more. His happiness consists in acting in a virtuous manner, whether others recognize him or not. This is the highest degree of happiness: the virtuous exercise of the rational soul.

Now we know that tragedy imitates the actions of the rational soul — passions transformed into habits — of the man in search of happiness, which is to say, virtuous behavior. Very well. But now we need to know what is meant by "virtue."

And What is Virtue?

Virtue is the behavior most distant from the possible extremes of behavior in any given situation. Virtue cannot be found in the extremes: both the man who voluntarily refuses to eat and the glutton harm their health. This is not virtuous behavior; to eat with moderation is. The absence of physical exercise, as well as the too violent exercise, ruins the body; moderate physical exercise constitutes virtuous behavior. The same is true of the moral virtues. Creon thinks only of the good of the State, while Antigone thinks only of the good of the Family and wishes to bury her dead, traitorous brother. The two behave in a non-virtuous manner, for their conduct is extreme. Virtue would be found somewhere in the middle ground. The man who gives himself to all pleasures is a libertine, but the one who flees from all pleasures is an insensitive person. The one who confronts all dangers is foolhardy, but he who runs from all dangers is a coward.

Virtue is not exactly the average, for a soldier's courage is much closer to temerity than to cowardice. Nor does virtue exist in us "naturally"; it is necessary to learn it. The things of nature lack man's ability to acquire habits. The rock cannot fall upward nor can fire burn downward. But we can cultivate habits which will allow us to behave virtuously.

Nature, still according to Aristotle, gives us faculties, and we have the power to change them into actions (passions) and habits.

The one who practices wisdom becomes wise, he who practices justice becomes just, and the architect acquires his virtue as an architect by constructing buildings. Habits, not faculties! Habits, not merely ephemeral passions!

Aristotle goes farther and states that the formation of habits should begin in childhood and that a youth cannot practice politics because he needs first to learn all the virtuous habits taught by his elders, the legislators who instruct the citizens in virtuous habits.

Thus we know now that vice is extreme behavior and virtue is behavior characterized neither by excess nor deficiency. But if any given behavior is to be seen as either vicious or virtuous, it must fulfill four indispensable conditions: willfulness, freedom, knowledge, and constancy. These terms call for explanation. But let us bear in mind what we already know: that for Aristotle tragedy imitates the actions of man's rational soul (habitual passions) as he searches for happiness, which consists in virtuous behavior. Little by little our definition is becoming more complex.

Necessary Characteristics of Virtue

A man can behave in a totally virtuous manner and, in spite of that, not be considered virtuous; or he may behave in a vicious manner and not be considered vicious. In order to be considered virtuous or vicious, human action must meet four conditions.

First Condition: Willfulness.

Willfulness excludes the accidental. That is, man acts because he decides to act voluntarily, by his will and not by accident.

One day a mason put a stone on a wall in such a way that a strong wind blew it down. A pedestrian happened to be passing by, and the rock fell on him. The man died. His wife sued the mason, but the latter defended himself by saying that he had not committed any crime since he had not had the intention of killing the pedestrian. That is, his behavior was not vicious — he merely had an accident. But the judge did not accept this defense and found him guilty based on the fact that there was no willfulness in causing the death, but there was in placing the stone in a position such that it could fall and cause a death. In this respect there was willfulness.

If man acts because he wishes to, there we find virtue or vice. If his action is not determined by his will, one can speak neither of vice nor virtue. The one who does good without being

aware of it is not for that a good person. Nor is he bad who causes harm involuntarily.

Second Condition: Freedom.

Here, exterior coercion is excluded. If a man commits an evil act because someone forces him with a gun to his head, one cannot in this case speak of vice. Virtue is free behavior, without any sort of exterior pressure.

In this case, too, a story is told — this time of a woman who, on being abandoned by her lover, decided to kill him, and so she did. Taken to court, she declared in her defense that she had not acted freely: her irrational passion forced her to commit the crime. According to her, there was no guilt here, no crime.

As before, the judge disagreed, ruling that passion is an integral part of a person, part of one's soul. Though there is no freedom when coercion comes from without, acts based upon inner impulse must be regarded as freely undertaken. The woman was condemned.

Third Condition: Knowledge.

It is the opposite of ignorance. The person who acts has before him an option whose terms he knows. In court a drunken criminal asserted that he had committed no crime because he was not conscious of what he was doing when he killed another man, and was therefore ignorant of his own actions. Also in this case, the drunk was condemned. Before he started drinking he had full knowledge that the alcohol was going to lead him to a state of unconsciousness; therefore he was guilty of letting himself fall into a state in which he lost consciousness of what he was doing.

In relation to this third condition of virtuous behavior, the conduct of characters such as Othello and Oedipus may seem questionable. With regard to both, we find discussions of the existence or nonexistence of knowledge (on which their virtue or vice would hinge). To my way of thinking the argument can be resolved as follows. Othello does not know the truth; this is correct. Iago lies to him about the infidelity of Desdemona, his wife, and Othello, blind with jealousy, kills her. But the tragedy of Othello goes far beyond a simple murder: his tragic flaw (and soon we will discuss the concept of *hamartia*, tragic flaw) is not that of having killed Desdemona. Nor is this habitual behavior.

But what indeed is a habit is his constant pride and his unreflective temerity. In several moments of the play Othello tells how he flung himself against his enemies, how he acted without reflecting upon the consequences of his actions. This, or his excessive pride, is the cause of his misfortune. And of these qualities, Othello is fully conscious, has full knowledge.

Also in the case of Oedipus, one must ask, what is his true flaw (*hamartia*)? His tragedy does not consist in having killed his father or married his mother. Those are not habitual acts either, and habit is one of the basic characteristics of virtuous or vicious behavior. But if we read the play with care, we will see that Oedipus, in all the important moments of his life, reveals his extraordinary pride, his arrogance, the vanity which leads him to believe that he is superior to the gods themselves. It is not the Moirai, (the Fates) that lead him to his tragic end; he himself, by his own decision, moves toward his misfortune. It is intolerance that causes him to kill an old man, who happens to be his father, because the latter did not treat him with the proper respect at a crossroads. And when he deciphers the enigma of the Sphinx, once more it is because of pride that he accepts the throne of Thebes and the hand of the Queen, a woman old enough to be his mother. And she really was! A person to whom the oracles (a kind of "voodoo witch doctor" or "seer" of the time) had said that he was going to marry his own mother and kill his own father would have to be a little careful and abstain from killing men old enough to be his father or marrying women old enough to be his mother. Why did he not exercise such care? Because of pride, haughtiness, intolerance, because he believed himself to be a worthy adversary of the gods. These are his flaws, his vices. To know or not the identity of Jocasta and Laius is secondary. Oedipus himself, when he recognizes his error, acknowledges these facts.

We conclude, therefore, that the third condition present in virtuous behavior consists in the agent's knowing the true terms of the option. He who acts in ignorance practices neither virtue nor vice.

Fourth Condition: Constancy.

Since virtues and vices are habits, not merely passions, it is necessary that virtuous or vicious behavior also be constant. All the heroes of the Greek tragedies act consistently in the same

manner. When the tragic flaw of the character consists precisely in his incoherence, that character must be introduced as coherently incoherent. Once more, neither accident nor chance characterize vice and virtue.

Thus those whom tragedy imitates are the virtuous men who, upon acting, show willfulness, freedom, knowledge, and constancy. These are the four conditions necessary for the exercise of virtue, which is man's way to happiness. But is virtue one, or are there different degrees of virtue?

The Degrees of Virtue

Each art, each science, has its corresponding virtue, because each has its own end, its own good. The virtue of the horseman is to ride a horse well; the virtue of the ironsmith is to manufacture good iron tools. The virtue of the artist is to create a perfect work of art. That of the physician is to restore the health of the sick. That of the legislator is to make perfect laws that will bring happiness to the citizens.

While it is true that each art and each science has its own virtue, it is also true as we have already seen, that all the arts and all the sciences are interdependent and that some are superior to others, to the extent by which they are more complex than others and study or include larger sectors of human activity. Of all the arts and sciences, the sovereign art and science is Politics, because nothing is alien to it. Politics has for its field of study the totality of the relationships of the totality of men. Therefore the greatest good — the attainment of which would entail the greatest virtue — is the political good.

Tragedy imitates those actions of man which have the good as their goal; but it does not imitate actions which have minor ends, of secondary importance. Tragedy imitates actions that are directed toward the highest goal, the political good. And what is the political good? There is no doubt: the highest good is the political one, and the political good is justice!

What is Justice?

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle proposes to us (and we accept) the principle that the just is that which is equal, and the unjust that which is unequal. In any division, the people that are equal should receive equal parts and those who (by any criterion) are unequal should receive unequal parts. Up to here we are in agreement. But we must define the criteria of inequality, because no one will want to be unequal in an inferior sense while all will want to be unequal in a superior one.

Aristotle himself was opposed to the *talion law* (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) because, he said, if the people were not equal, their eyes and teeth would not be equal either. Thus one would have to ask: whose eye for whose eye? If it was a master's eye for a slave's eye, it did not seem right to Aristotle, because for him those eyes were not equal in value. If it was a man's tooth for a woman's tooth, neither did Aristotle find here an equivalent value.

Then our philosopher utilizes an apparently honest argument to determine criteria of equality to which no one can object. He asks, should we begin with ideal, abstract principles and descend to reality or, on the contrary, should we look at concrete reality and from there ascend toward the principles? Far from any romanticism, he answers: obviously we should start with concrete reality. We must examine empirically the real, existing inequalities and upon them base our criteria of inequality.

This leads us to accept as "just" the *already existing* inequalities. For Aristotle, therefore, justice is already contained in reality itself as it is. He does not consider the possibility of *transforming the already existing inequalities*, but simply accepts them. And for this reason he decides that since free men and slaves do exist in reality (abstract principles do not matter), that will be the first criterion of inequality. To be a man is *more* and to be a woman is *less* — this is shown by concrete reality, according to Aristotle. Thus free men would rank highest; then would come free women, followed by male slaves, with the poor female slaves at the bottom.

That was Athenian democracy, which was based on the supreme value of "freedom." But not all societies were based on that same value; the oligarchies, for example, were based on the supreme value of wealth. There the men who owned more were considered superior to those who had less. Always starting with reality as it is. . . .

Thus we come to the conclusion that justice is not equality: justice is proportionality. And the criteria of proportionality are given by the political system actually in force in a particular city. Justice will always be proportionality, but the criteria which determine the latter will vary depending upon whether the system is a democracy, an oligarchy, a dictatorship, a republic, or other.

And how are the criteria of inequality established so that all become aware of them? Through laws. And who makes the laws? If the inferior human beings (women slaves, the poor) made them, they would, according to Aristotle, make inferior laws just as their authors are inferior. In order to have superior laws, it is necessary that they be made by superior beings: free men, wealthy men. . . .

The body of laws of a city, of a country, is put together and systematized in a constitution. The constitution, therefore, is the expression of the political good, the maximum expression of justice.

Finally, with the help of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can arrive at a clear conclusion regarding what tragedy is for Aristotle. Its widest and most complete definition would be the following:

Tragedy imitates the actions of man's rational soul, his passions turned into habits, in his search for happiness, which consists in vir-

tuous behavior, remote from the extremes, whose supreme good is justice and whose maximum expression is the Constitution.

In the final analysis, happiness consists in obeying the laws. This is Aristotle's message, clearly spelled out.

For those who make the laws, all is well. But what about those who do not make them? Understandably, they rebel, not wishing to accept the criteria of inequality provided by present reality, since they are criteria subject to modification, as is reality itself. In those cases, says the philosopher, sometimes war is necessary.

In What Sense can Theater Function as an Instrument for Purification and Intimidation?

We have seen that the population of a city is not *uniformly* content. If there is inequality, no one wants it to be to his disadvantage. It is necessary to make sure that all remain, if not uniformly satisfied, at least uniformly passive with respect to those criteria of inequality. How to achieve this? Through the many forms of repression: politics, bureaucracy, habits, customs — and Greek tragedy.

This statement may seem somewhat daring, but it is nothing more than the truth. Of course, the system presented by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, the functional system of tragedy (and all the forms of theater which to this day follow its general mechanism) is not *only* a system of repression. Other, more "esthetic," factors clearly enter into it. And there are many other aspects that ought likewise to be taken into account. But it is important to consider especially this fundamental aspect: its repressive function.

And why is the repressive function the fundamental aspect of the Greek tragedy and of the Aristotelian system of tragedy? Simply because, according to Aristotle, the principle aim of tragedy is to provoke catharsis.

The Ultimate Aim of Tragedy

The fragmentary nature of the *Poetics* has obscured the solid connection existing among its parts, as well as the hierarchy of the parts within the context of the whole. Only this fact explains why marginal observations, of little or no importance, have been taken to be central concepts of Aristotelian thought. For example, when dealing with Shakespeare or the medieval theater, it is very common to decide that such and such a play is not Aristotelian because it does not obey the "law of the three unities." Hegel's objection to this view is contained in his *The Philosophy of Fine Art*:

The inalterability of one exclusive *locale* of the action proposed belongs to the type of those rigid rules which the French in particular have deduced from classic tragedy and the critique of Aristotle thereupon. As a matter of fact, Aristotle merely says that the duration of the tragic action should not exceed at the most the length of a day. He does not mention the unity of place at all. . . .²

The disproportionate importance that is given to this "law" is incomprehensible, since it has no more validity than would the statement that only the works that contain a prologue, five episodes and choral chants, and an exode are Aristotelian. The essence of Aristotelian thought cannot reside in structural aspects such as these. To emphasize these minor aspects is, in effect, to compare the Greek philosopher to the modern and abundant professors of dramaturgy, especially the Americans, who are no

more than cooks of theatrical menus. They study the typical reactions of certain chosen audiences and from there extract conclusions and rules regarding how the perfect work should be written (equating perfection to box office success).

Aristotle, on the contrary, wrote a completely organic poetics, which is the reflection, in the field of tragedy and poetry, of all his philosophical contribution; it is the practical and concrete application of that philosophy specifically to poetry and tragedy.

For this reason, every time we find imprecise or fragmentary statements, we should immediately consult other texts written by the author. S. H. Butcher does precisely this, with crystal clear results, in his book *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*.³ He tries to understand the *Poetics* from the perspective of the *Metaphysics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, and above all, the three *Ethics*. To him we owe mainly the clarification of the concept of catharsis.

Nature tends toward certain ends; when it fails to achieve those objectives, art and science intervene. Man, as part of nature, also has certain ends in view: health, gregarious life in the State, happiness, virtue, justice, etc. When he fails in the achievement of those objectives, the art of tragedy intervenes. This correction of man's actions is what Aristotle calls *catharsis*.

Tragedy, in all its qualitative and quantitative aspects, exists as a function of the effect it seeks, catharsis. All the unities of tragedy are structured around this concept. It is the center, the essence, the purpose of the tragic system. Unfortunately, it is also the most controversial concept. Catharsis is correction: what does it correct? Catharsis is purification: what does it purify?

Butcher helps us with a parade of opinions of such illustrious people as Racine, Milton, and Jacob Bernays.

Racine.

In tragedy, he wrote:

the passions are shown only to reveal all the disorder of which they are the cause; and vice is always painted with colors that make us know and hate the deformity . . . this is what the first tragic poets had in mind, more than anything else. Their theater was a school where the virtues were taught fully as well as in the philosopher's schools. For this reason Aristotle wanted to provide rules for the dramatic poem; . . . It is to be desired that our works should be as solid and as full of useful instructions as the ones of those poets.⁴

As we see, Racine emphasizes the doctrinal, moral aspect of tragedy; and this is fine, but there is one correction to be made: Aristotle did not advise the tragic poet to portray vicious characters. The tragic hero should suffer a radical change in the course of his life — from happiness to adversity — but this should happen not as a consequence of vice, but rather as a result of some error or weakness (see Chapter 13 of the *Poetics*). Soon we shall examine the nature of this *hamartia*.

It is necessary to understand also that the presentation of the error of weakness was not designed to make the spectator, in his immediate perception of it, feel repugnance or hatred. On the contrary, Aristotle suggested that the mistake or weakness be treated with some understanding. Almost always the state of "fortune" in which the hero is found at the beginning of the tragedy is due precisely to this fault and not to his virtues. Oedipus is King of Thebes because of a weakness in his character, that is, his pride. And indeed the efficacy of a dramatic process would be greatly diminished if the fault were presented from the beginning as despicable, the error as abominable. It is necessary, on the contrary, to show them as acceptable in order to destroy them later through the theatrical, poetic processes. Bad playwrights in every epoch fail to understand the enormous efficacy of the transformations that take place before the spectators' eyes. Theater is change and not simple presentation of what exists: it is becoming and not being.

Jacob Bernays.

In 1857, Bernays proposed an intriguing theory: the word "catharsis" would be a medical metaphor, a purgation which denotes the pathological effect on the soul, analogous to the effect of medicine on the body. Basing his argument on the definition of tragedy given by Aristotle ("imitation of human actions that excite pity or fear"), Bernays concludes that simply because these emotions are found in the hearts of all men, the act of exciting offers, afterward, a pleasant relaxation. This hypothesis seems to find confirmation in Aristotle himself, who declares that "pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves . . ." (Chapter 13). (We will soon examine the meaning of the word "empathy," which is based on those two emotions.)

The feelings stimulated by the spectacle, adds Bernays, are not removed in a permanent or definitive manner. But they remain calm for a certain time and all the system can rest. The stage thus offers harmless and pleasant discharge for the instincts that demand satisfaction and that can be tolerated much more easily in the fiction of the theater than in real life.⁵

Bernays, therefore, permits the supposition that perhaps the purgation does not refer only to the emotions of pity and fear, but also to certain "non-social" or socially forbidden instincts. Butcher himself, trying to understand what is the object of the purgation (that is, of what is one purged?), adds his own belief that it is the pity and terror we bring with us in our real life or, at least, those elements in our life which are disturbing.⁶

Is this clear? Perhaps that of which one is purged is not the emotions of pity or fear, but something contained in those emotions, or mixed with them. We must determine the identity of this foreign body which is eliminated by the cathartic process. In this case, pity and fear would only be part of the mechanism of expulsion and not its object. Here would reside the political significance of tragedy.

In Chapter XIX of the *Poetics* we read: "The Thought of the personages is shown in everything to be effected by their language — in every effort to prove or disprove, to arouse emotion (pity, fear, anger, and the like), . . ." We ask why purgation should not have been dealt with before in relation to "like" emotions such as hatred, envy, pride, partiality in worship of the gods and in the obedience to laws, etc.? Why choose pity and fear? Why does Aristotle explain the obligatory presence of these emotions only?

Analyzing some of the tragic characters, we see that they may be guilty of many ethical errors, but we can hardly say that any of them manifest either an excess or lack of pity or fear. It is never there that their virtue fails. Those emotions indeed play so little part that they cannot even be considered a characteristic common to all tragic characters.

It is not in the tragic characters that pity and fear manifest themselves — but rather in the *spectators*. *Through those emotions the spectators are linked to the heroes*. We must keep this clearly in mind: the spectators are linked to the heroes, *basically*, through the emotions of pity and fear, because, as Aristotle says,

something *undeserved* happens to a character that *resembles ourselves*.

Let us clarify this a little more. Hippolytus loves all the gods intensely, and this is good, but he does not love the goddess of love, and this is bad. We feel pity because Hippolytus is destroyed in spite of all his good qualities, and fear because perhaps we are liable to criticism for the same reason of not loving all the gods, as the laws require. Oedipus is a great king, the people love him; his government is perfect, and for this reason we feel pity that such a wonderful person is destroyed for having one fault, pride, which perhaps we also have: hence our fear. Creon defends the right of the State and seeing that he has to bear the death of his wife and son causes pity in us because, together with all the virtues he possesses, he has the fault of seeing only the good of the State and not that of the Family; this one-sidedness could also be a fault of ours, hence the fear.

Once again, let us remember the relationship between the virtues and the fortune of the characters, ending with their downfall: Because of haughtiness and pride Oedipus becomes a great king; because he scorns the goddess of love, Hippolytus loves the other gods more intensely; and by caring excessively for the good of the State, Creon was in the beginning a great chief-tain, at the peak of happiness.

We conclude, therefore, that pity and fear are the minimal specific form linking the spectator and the character. But these emotions are in no way the objects of purification (purgation). Rather, they are purified of something else which, at the end of the tragedy, ceases to exist.

Milton.

"Tragedy . . . said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such-like passions; that is to temper or reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated." Up to here, Milton adds very little to what has already been said; but something better follows: ". . . in physick medicine, things of melancholick hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours." In effect, it is a kind of homeopathy — certain emotions or passions curing analogous, but not identical, emotions or passions.

Besides his study of the views of Milton, Bernays and Racine, Butcher goes to Aristotle's own *Politics* to find the explanation of the word *catharsis* which is not to be found in the *Poetics*. Catharsis is utilized there to denote the effect caused by a certain kind of music on patients possessed by a given type of religious fervor. The treatment "consisted in applying movement to cure movement, in soothing the internal trouble of the mind by a wild and restless music." According to Aristotle, the patients subjected to that treatment returned to their normal state, as if they had undergone a medical or purgative treatment — that is, cathartic.⁸

In this example we verify that through "homeopathic" means (savage music to cure savage interior rhythms), the religious fervor was cured by means of an analogous exterior effect. The cure was brought about through the stimulus. As in the tragedy, the character's fault is initially presented as cause of his happiness — the fault is stimulated.

Butcher adds that, according to Hippocrates, catharsis meant removal of a painful or disturbing element in the organism, purifying in this way what remains, free finally of the eliminated extraneous matter. Butcher concludes that applying the same definition to tragedy, one will arrive at the conclusion that "pity and fear" in real life contain a morbid or disturbing element. During the process of tragic excitation this element, whatever it may be, is eliminated. "As the tragic action progresses, when the tumult of the mind, first roused, has afterward subsided, the lower forms of emotion are found to have been transmuted into higher and more refined forms."⁹

This reasoning is correct and we can accept it totally, except for its insistent attribution of impurities to the emotions of pity and fear. The impurity exists, no doubt, and it is in fact the object of purgation in the character's mind, or as Aristotle would say, in his very *soul*. But Aristotle does not speak of the existence of pure or impure pity, pure or impure fear. The impurity is *necessarily distinct from* the emotions which will remain once the spectacle of the tragedy is ended. That extraneous matter — the eliminated impurity — can only be an emotion or passion other than the ones that remain. Pity and fear have never been vices or weaknesses or errors and, therefore, never needed to be eliminated or purged. On the other hand, in the *Ethics*, Aristotle points

to numerous vices, errors, and weaknesses which do indeed deserve to be destroyed.

The impurity to be purged must undoubtedly be found among the latter. It must be something that threatens the individual's equilibrium, and consequently that of society. Something that is not virtue, that is not the greatest virtue, justice. And since all that is unjust is forseen in the laws, the impurity which the tragic process is destined to destroy is therefore something *directed against the laws*.

If we go back a little, we will be able to understand better the workings of tragedy. Our last definition was: "Tragedy imitates the actions of man's rational soul, his passions turned into habits, in his search for happiness, which consists in virtuous behavior . . . whose supreme good is justice and whose maximum expression is the Constitution."

We have also seen that nature tends toward certain ends, and when nature fails, art and science intervene to correct it.

We can conclude, therefore, that when man fails in his actions — in his virtuous behavior as he searches for happiness through the maximum virtue, which is obedience to the laws — the art of tragedy intervenes to correct that failure. How? Through purification, catharsis, through purgation of the extraneous, undesirable element which prevents the character from achieving his ends. This extraneous element is contrary to the law; it is a social fault, a political deficiency.

We are finally ready to understand how the tragic scheme works. But first, a short glossary may serve to simplify certain words which represent the elements we are going to assemble in order to clarify the coercive system of tragedy.

A Short Glossary of Simple Words

Tragic hero.

As Arnold Hauser explains in his *Social History of Art*, in the beginning, the theater was the chorus, the mass, the people.¹⁰ They were the true protagonist. When Thespis *invented* the protagonist, he immediately "aristocratized" the theater, which existed before in its popular forms of mass manifestations, parades, feasts, etc. The protagonist-chorus dialogue was clearly a reflection of the aristocrat-people (commoners) dialogue. The tragic hero, who later begins to carry on a dialogue not only with the chorus but also with his peers (deuteragonist and tritagonist), was always presented as an example which should be followed in certain characteristics but not in others. The tragic hero appears when the State begins to utilize the theater for the political purpose of coercion of the people. It should not be forgotten that the State, directly or through certain wealthy patrons, paid for the theatrical productions.

Ethos.

The character acts and his performance presents two aspects: *ethos* and *dianoia*. The two together constitute the action developed by the character. They are inseparable. But for explanatory purposes we could say that *ethos* is the action itself, while *dianoia* is the justification of that action, the reasoning. *Ethos*

would be the act itself and *dianoia* the thought that determines the act. But one should bear in mind that the reasoning is also action, and there can be no action, no matter how physical and limited it may be, that does not suppose a reason.

We can define *ethos* as the whole of the faculties, passions, and habits.

In the *ethos* of the tragic protagonist all tendencies must be good.

Except one.

All the passions, all the habits of the character must be good, with one exception. According to which criteria? According to constitutional criteria, which are those that systematize the laws; that is, according to political criteria, since politics is the sovereign art. Only one trait must be bad — only one passion, one habit, will be against the law. This bad characteristic is called *hamartia*.

Hamartia.

It is also known as the *tragic flaw*. It is the only "impurity" that exists in the character. *Hamartia* is the only thing that can and must be destroyed, so that the whole of the character's *ethos* may conform to the *ethos* of the society. In this confrontation of tendencies, of *ethos*, the *hamartia* causes the conflict: it is the only trait that is not in harmony with what society regards as desirable.

Empathy.

From the moment the performance begins, a relationship is established between the character, especially the protagonist, and the spectator. This relationship has well defined characteristics: the spectator assumes a passive attitude and delegates the power of action to the character. Since the character resembles us (as Aristotle indicates), we live *vicariously* all his stage experiences. Without acting, we feel that we are acting. We love and hate when the character loves and hates.

Empathy does not take place only with tragic characters: it is enough to see children very excited, watching a "Western" on television, or the sentimental looks of the public when, on the screen, the hero and the heroine exchange kisses. It is a case of

pure empathy. Empathy makes us feel as if we ourselves are experiencing what is actually happening to others.

Empathy is an emotional relationship between character and spectator. A relationship which, as Aristotle suggests, can be basically one of pity and fear, but which can include other emotions as well: love, tenderness, desire (in the case of many movie stars and their fan clubs), etc.

Empathy takes place especially in relation to what the character *does* — that is, his *ethos*. But there is likewise an empathic relationship *dianoia* (the character's) — *reason* (the spectator's), which corresponds to *ethos-emotion*. The *ethos* stimulates emotion; the *dianoia* stimulates reason.

Clearly, the fundamental empathic emotions of pity and fear are evoked on the basis of an *ethos* which reveals good traits (hence pity for the character's destruction) and one bad trait, *hamartia* (hence fear, because we also possess it).

Now we are ready to return to the functioning of the tragic scheme.

How Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy Functions

The spectacle begins. The tragic hero appears. The public establishes a kind of empathy with him.

The action starts. Surprisingly, the hero shows a flaw in his behavior, a hamartia; and even more surprising, one learns that it is by virtue of this same hamartia that the hero has come to his present state of happiness.

Through empathy, the same hamartia that the spectator may possess is stimulated, developed, activated.

Suddenly, something happens that changes everything. (Oedipus, for example, is informed by Teiresias that the murderer he seeks is Oedipus himself.) The character, who because of a hamartia had climbed so high, runs the risk of falling from those heights. This is what the *Poetics* classifies as *peripeteia*, a radical change in the character's destiny. The spectator, who up to then had his own hamartia stimulated, starts to feel a growing fear. The character is now on the way to misfortune. Creon is informed of the death of his son and his wife; Hippolytus cannot convince his father of his innocence, and the latter impells his son, unintentionally, to death.

Peripeteia is important because it lengthens the road from happiness to misfortune. The taller the palm tree, the greater the fall, says a popular Brazilian song. That way creates more impact.

The peripeteia suffered by the character is reproduced in the spectator as well. But it could happen that the spectator would

follow the character empathically until the moment of the *peripeteia* and then detach himself at that point. In order to avoid that, the tragic character must also pass through what Aristotle calls *anagnorisis* — that is, through the recognition of his flaw as such and, by means of reasoning, the explanation of it. The hero accepts his error, hoping that, empathically, the spectator will also accept as bad his own hamartia. But the spectator has the great advantage of having erred only vicariously: he does not really pay for it.

Finally, so that the spectator will keep in mind the terrible consequences of committing the error not just vicariously but in actuality, Aristotle demands that tragedy have a terrible end, which he calls *catastrophe*. The happy end is not permitted, though the character's physical destruction is not absolutely required. Some die; others see their loved ones die. In any case, the catastrophe is always such that not to die is worse than death.

Those three interdependent elements (*peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, *catastrophe*) have the ultimate goal of provoking catharsis in the spectator (as much or more than in the character); that is, their purpose is to produce a purgation of the hamartia, passing through three clearly defined stages:

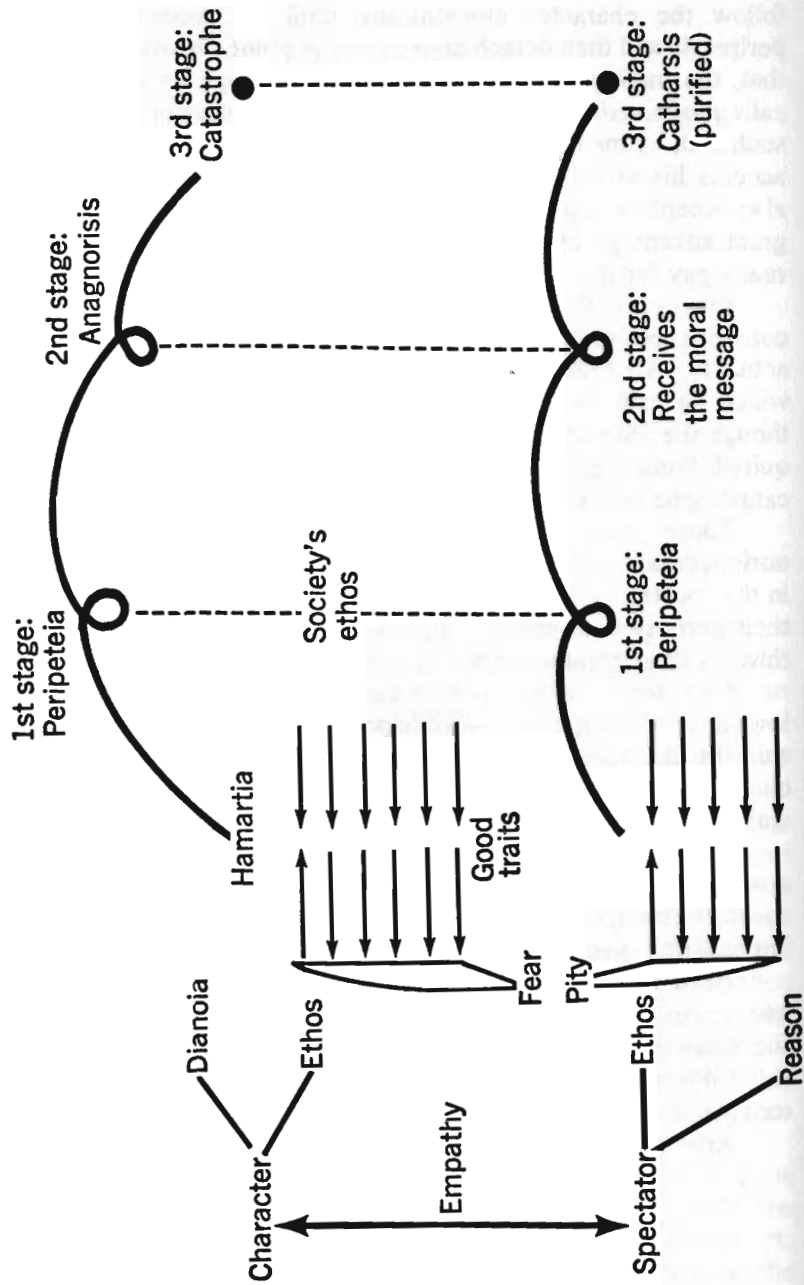
First Stage: Stimulation of the hamartia; the character follows an ascending path toward happiness, accompanied empathically by the spectator. Then comes a moment of reversal: the character, with the spectator, starts to move from happiness toward misfortune; fall of the hero.

Second Stage: The character recognizes his error — *anagnorisis*. Through the empathic relationship *dianoia-reason*, the spectator recognizes his own error, his own hamartia, his own anticonstitutional flaw.

Third Stage: Catastrophe; the character suffers the consequences of his error, in a violent form, with his own death or with the death of loved ones.

Catharsis: The spectator, terrified by the spectacle of the catastrophe, is purified of his hamartia.

Aristotle's coercive system can be shown graphically:



The words "Amicus Plato, sed magis amicus veritas" ("I am Plato's friend, but I am more of a friend of truth!") are attributed to Aristotle. In this we agree entirely with Aristotle: we are his friends, but we are much better friends of truth. He tells us that poetry, tragedy, theater have nothing to do with politics. But reality tells us something else. His own *Poetics* tells us it is not so. We have to be better friends of reality: all of man's activities — including, of course, all the arts, especially theater — are political. And theater is the most perfect artistic form of coercion.

Different Types of Conflict: Hamartia and Social Ethos

As we have seen, Aristotle's coercive system of tragedy requires:

a) the creation of a conflict between the character's ethos and the ethos of the society in which he lives; something is not right!

b) the establishment of a relationship called empathy, which consists in allowing the spectator to be guided by the character through his experiences; the spectator — feeling as if he himself is acting — enjoys the pleasures and suffers the misfortunes of the character, to the extreme of thinking his thoughts.

c) that the spectator experience three changes of a rigorous nature: *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, and *catharsis*; he suffers a blow with regard to his fate (the action of the play), recognizes the error vicariously committed and is purified of the antisocial characteristic which he sees in himself.

This is the essence of the coercive system of tragedy. In the Greek theater the system functions as it is shown in our diagram; but in its essence, the system survived and has continued to be utilized down to our own time, with various modifications introduced by new societies. Let us analyze some of these modifications.

First Type: Hamartia Versus the Perfect Social Ethos (classical type).

This is the most classical case studied by Aristotle. Consider

again the example of Oedipus. The perfect social ethos is presented through the Chorus or through Teiresias in his long speech. The collision is head-on. Even after Teiresias has declared that the criminal is Oedipus himself, the latter does not accept it and continues the investigation on his own. Oedipus — the perfect man, the obedient son, the loving husband, the model father, the statesman without equal, intelligent, handsome, and sensitive — has nevertheless a tragic flaw: his pride! Through it he climbs to the peak of his glory, and through it he is destroyed. The balance is re-established with the catastrophe, with the terrifying vision of the protagonist's hanged mother-wife and his eyes torn out.

Second Type: Hamartia Versus Hamartia Versus the Perfect Social Ethos.

The tragedy presents two characters who meet, two tragic heroes, each one with his flaw, who destroy each other before an ethically perfect society. This is the typical case of Antigone and Creon, both very fine persons in every way with the exception of their respective flaws. In these cases, the spectator must necessarily *empathize with both characters*, not only one, since the tragic process must purify him of two hamartias. A spectator who empathizes only with Antigone can be led to think that Creon possesses the truth, and vice versa. The spectator must purify himself of the "excess," whatever direction it takes — whether excess of love of the State to the detriment of the Family, or excess of love of the Family to the detriment of the good of the State.

Often, when the anagnorisis of the character is perhaps not enough to convince the spectator, the tragic author utilizes the direct reasoning of the Chorus, possessor of common sense, moderation, and other qualities.

In this case also the catastrophe is necessary in order to produce, through fear, the catharsis, the purification of evil.

Third Type: Negative Hamartia Versus the Perfect Social Ethos.

This type is completely different from the two presented before. Here the ethos of the character is presented in a negative form; that is, he has all the faults and only a single virtue, and not as was taught by Aristotle, all the virtues and only one fault, flaw,

or mistake of judgment. Precisely because he possesses that small and solitary virtue the character is saved, the catastrophe is avoided, and instead a happy end occurs.

It is important to note that Aristotle clearly objected to the happy end, but we should note, too, that the coercive character of his whole system is the true essence of his political *Poetics*; therefore, in changing a characteristic as important as the composition of the ethos of the character, the structural mechanism of the end of the work is inevitably changed also, in order to maintain the purgative effect.

This type of catharsis, produced by "negative hamartia versus the perfect social ethos," was often used in the Middle Ages. Perhaps the best known medieval drama is *Everyman*.

It tells the story of the character named Everyman, who when it comes time to die, tries to save himself, has a dialogue with Death, and analyzes all his past actions. Before Everyman and Death passes a whole series of characters who accuse Everyman and reveal the sins committed by him: the material goods, the pleasures, etc. Everyman finally recognizes all the sins he has committed, admits the complete absence of any virtue in his actions, but at the same time trusts in divine mercy. This faith is his only virtue. This faith and his repentance save him, for the greater glory of God. . . .

The anagnorisis (recognition of his sins) is practically accompanied by the birth of a new character, and the latter is saved. In tragedy, the acts of the character are irremediable; but in this type of drama, the acts of the character can be forgiven provided he decides to change his life completely and become a "new" character.

The idea of a new life (and this one is the forgiven life, since the sinning character ceases to be a sinner) can be seen clearly in *Condemned for Faithlessness (El condenado por desconfiado)* by Tirso de Molina. The hero, Enrique, has all the worst faults to be found in a person: he is a drunkard, murderer, thief, scoundrel — no defect, crime, or vice is alien to him. Wickedness that the Devil himself might envy. He has the most perverted ethos that dramatic art has ever invented. At his side is Pablo, the pure one, incapable of committing the slightest, most forgivable little sin, an immaculate spirit, insipid, empty, the image of perfection!

But something very strange happens to this pair which will cause their fate to be exactly the opposite of what one would

expect. Enrique, the bad one, knows himself to be evil and a sinner, and never doubts that divine justice will condemn him to burn in the flames of the deepest and darkest corner of hell. And he accepts the divine wisdom and its justice. On the other hand, Pablo sins by wanting to keep himself pure. At every instant he wonders if God will truly realize that his life has been one of sacrifice and want. He ardently wishes to die and move immediately to heaven, so that he can possibly begin there a more pleasant life.

The two of them die, and to the surprise of some, the divine verdict is as follows: Enrique, in spite of all the crimes, robberies, drunkenness, treasons, etc., goes to heaven, because his firm belief in his punishment glorified God; Pablo, on the other hand, did not truly believe in God, since he doubted his salvation; therefore, he goes to hell with all his virtues.

That, in rough outline, is the play. Observed from the point of view of Enrique, it is clearly a case of a thoroughly evil ethos, possessing a single virtue. The exemplary effect is obtained through the happy end and not through the catastrophe. Observed from the point of view of Pablo, it is a conventional, classical, Aristotelian scheme. Everything in Pablo was virtue, with the exception of his tragic flaw — doubting God. For him there is indeed a catastrophe!

Fourth Type: Negative Hamartia Versus Negative Social Ethos.

The word "negative" is employed here in the sense of referring to a model that is the exact opposite of the original positive model — without reference to any moral quality. As, for instance, in a photographic negative, where all that is white shows up black and vice versa.

This type of ethical conflict is the essence of "romantic drama," and *Camille (La Dame aux camélias)* is its best example. The hamartia of the protagonist, as in the preceding case, displays an impressive collection of negative qualities, sins, errors, etc. On the other hand, the social ethos (that is, the moral tendencies, ethics) of the society — contrary to the preceding example (third type) — is here entirely in agreement with the character. All her vices are perfectly acceptable, and she would suffer nothing for having them.

In *Camille* we see a corrupted society, which accepts pros-

titution, and Marguerite Gauthier is the best prostitute — individual vice is defended and accepted by the vicious society. Her profession is perfectly acceptable, her house frequented by society's most respected men (considering that it is a society whose principal value is money, her house is frequented by financiers) . . . Marguerite's life is full of happiness! But, poor girl, all her faults are accepted, though not her only virtue. Marguerite falls in love. Indeed, she truly loves someone. Ah, no, not that. Society cannot permit it; it is a tragic flaw and must be punished.

Here, from the ethical point of view, a sort of triangle is established. Up to now we have analyzed conflicts in which the "social ethics" was the same for the characters as for the spectators; now a dichotomy is presented: the author wishes to show a social ethics accepted by the society portrayed on stage, but he himself, the author, does not share that ethics, and proposes another. The universe of the work is one, and our universe, or at least our momentary position during the spectacle, is another. Alexander Dumas (Dumas fils) says in effect: here you see what this society is like, and it is bad, but we are not like that, or we are not like that in our innermost being. Thus, Marguerite has all the virtues that society believes to be virtues; a prostitute must practice her profession of prostitute with dignity and efficiency. But Marguerite has a flaw which prevents her from practicing her profession well — she falls in love. How can a woman in love with *one* man serve with equal fidelity *all* men (all those who can pay)? Impossible. Therefore, falling in love, for a prostitute, is not a virtue but a vice.

But we, the spectators, who do not belong to the universe of the work, can say the exact opposite: a society which allows and encourages prostitution is a society which must be changed. Thus the triangle is established: to love, for us is a virtue, but in the universe of the work, it is a vice. And Marguerite Gauthier is destroyed precisely because of that vice (virtue).

Also in this kind of romantic drama, the catastrophe is inevitable. And the romantic author hopes that the spectator will be purified not of the tragic flaw of the hero, but rather of the whole ethos of society.

The same modification of the Aristotelian scheme is found in another romantic drama, *An Enemy of the People*, by Ibsen. Here again, the character, Dr. Stockman, embodies an ethos identical

to that of the society in which he lives, a society based on profit, on money; but he also possesses a flaw: he is an honest man! This the society cannot tolerate. The powerful impact this work usually has stems from the fact that Ibsen shows (whether intentionally or not) that societies based on profit find it impossible to foster an "elevated" morality.

Capitalism is fundamentally immoral because the search for profit, which is its essence, is incompatible with its official morality, which preaches superior human values, justice, etc.

Dr. Stockman is destroyed (that is, he loses his position in society, as does his daughter, who becomes an outcast in a competitive society) precisely because of his basic virtue, which is here considered vice, error, or tragic flaw.

Fifth Type: Anachronistic Individual Ethos Versus Contemporary Social Ethos.

This is the typical case of Don Quixote: his social ethos is perfectly synchronized with the ethos of a society that no longer exists. This past society, now nonexistent, enters into a confrontation with the contemporary society and the resultant conflicts are inevitable. The anachronistic ethos of Don Quixote, knight errant and lordly Spanish hidalgo, cannot live peacefully in a time when the bourgeoisie is developing — the bourgeoisie which changes all values and for whom all things become money, as money comes to equal all things.

A variation of the "anachronistic ethos" is that of the "diachronic ethos": the character lives in a moral world made up of values which society honors in word but not in deed. In *José, from Birth to Grave*, the character, José da Silva, embodies all the values that the bourgeoisie claims as its own, and his misfortune comes precisely because he believes in those values and rules his life by them: a "self-made man," he works more than he has to, is devoted to his employers, avoids causing labor troubles, etc. In short, a character who follows *The Laws of Success* of Napoleon Hill, or *How to Win Friends and Influence People* of Dale Carnegie. That is tragedy! And what a tragedy!

Conclusion

Aristotle's coercive system of tragedy survives to this day, thanks to its great efficacy. It is, in effect, a powerful system of intimidation. The structure of the system may vary in a thousand ways, making it difficult at times to find all the elements of its structure, but the system will nevertheless be there, working to carry out its basic task: the purgation of all antisocial elements. Precisely for that reason, the system cannot be utilized by revolutionary groups *during* revolutionary periods. That is, while the social ethos is not clearly defined, the tragic scheme cannot be used, for the simple reason that the character's ethos will not find a clear social ethos that it can confront.

The coercive system of tragedy can be used before or after the revolution . . . but never during it!

In fact, only more or less stable societies, ethically defined, can offer a scale of values which would make it possible for the system to function. During a "cultural revolution," in which all values are being formed or questioned, the system cannot be applied. That is to say that the system, insofar as it structures certain elements which produce a determined effect, can be utilized by any society as long as it possesses a definite social ethos; for it to function, technically whether the society is feudal, capitalist, or socialist does not matter: what matters is that it have a universe of definite, accepted values.

On the other hand, an understanding of how the system func-

tions often becomes difficult because one places himself in a false perspective. For example: the stories of "Western" movies are Aristotelian (at least, all the ones I have seen). But to analyze them it is necessary to regard them from the perspective of the bad man rather than from that of the "good guy," from the viewpoint not of the hero but of the villain.

A "Western" story begins with the presentation of a villain (bandit, horse thief, murderer, or whatever) who, precisely because of his vice or tragic flaw, is the uncontested boss, the richest or the most feared man of the neighborhood or city. He does all the evil he possibly can, and we empathize with him and vicariously we do the same evil — we kill, steal horses and chickens, rape young heroines, etc. Until, after our own hamartia has been stimulated, the moment of the *peripeteia*: the hero gains advantage in the fist fight or through endless shoot-outs and re-establishes order (social ethos), morality, and honest business relationships, after destroying (*catastrophe*) the bad citizen. What is left out here is the *anagnorisis*, and the villain is allowed to die without feeling regrets; in short, they finish him off with gunshots and bury him, while the townspeople celebrate with square dances. . . .

How often — remember? — our sympathy has been (in a certain way, empathy) more with the bad guy than with the good one! The "Westerns," like children's games, serve the Aristotelian purpose of purging all the spectator's aggressive tendencies.

This system functions to diminish, placate, satisfy, eliminate all that can break the balance — all, including the revolutionary, transforming impetus.

Let there be no doubt: Aristotle formulated a very powerful purgative system, the objective of which is to eliminate all that is not commonly accepted, including the revolution, before it takes place. His system appears in disguised form on television, in the movies, in the circus, in the theaters. It appears in many and varied shapes and media. But its essence does not change: it is designed to bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists. If this is what we want, the Aristotelian system serves the purpose better than any other; if, on the contrary, we want to stimulate the spectator to transform his society, to engage in revolutionary action, in that case we will have to seek another poetics!

General Notes

A. The distinctive qualities of the character are related to the denouement. A totally good character who comes to a happy end inspires neither pity nor terror, nor does he create a dynamics: the spectator observes him acting out his destiny, but there is an absence of drama.

Likewise, a totally bad character who ends up in catastrophe does not inspire pity, which is a necessary part of the mechanism of empathy.

A totally good character who ends in catastrophe is not a model either and, on the contrary, violates the sense of justice. This is the case of Don Quixote, who from the point of view of the ethics of Knighthood is totally good and nevertheless suffers a catastrophe which functions "exemplarily." It can be said that he is totally good, but that he adheres to an anachronistic moral code, which is in itself a tragic flaw. That is his hamartia.

A totally bad character who ends happily would be entirely contrary to the purposes of Greek tragedy and would stimulate evil instead of good.

Thus we have to conclude that the only possibilities are:

- 1) character with a flaw, ending in catastrophe;
- 2) character with a virtue, coming to a happy end;
- 3) character with a virtue, but insufficient, ending in catastrophe.

B. For Plato, reality is as if a man were imprisoned in a cell with a single, high window: the man would only be able to distinguish shadows of true reality. For this reason Plato argued against artists; they would be like prisoners who in their cells would paint the shadows which they mistake for reality — copies of copies, double corruption!

C. The *anagnorisis* is a fundamental and very important element of the system. It can be the recognition made by the character himself, and thus empathically this recognition is transferred to the spectator. But in any case, the recognition is made by the character with whom an empathic relationship exists. It is risky not to produce *anagnorisis*, or to do it poorly or insufficiently. One must remember that the spectator initially has his own flaw stimulated, and failure to understand the fact that it is a flaw will increase its destructive power.

It can also happen that the spectator will empathically follow the character until the *peripeteia* begins and will abandon him from that moment on. There is the danger and there the system can work in reverse!

Likewise, the non-destruction of the *hamartia* (happy end) can stimulate the spectator: if the character did the harm he did and nothing happened to him, then "nothing will happen to me either." This frees the spectator and stimulates him to do evil.

D. "Becoming and not being": Fundamental to the thought of Aristotle was becoming, not being. For him, "to become" meant not accidental appearance and disappearance, but instead the development of what already exists in a germinal state. The individual, concrete thing, is not an appearance but a proper, embryonic, existing reality.

E. For Aristotle, esthetic pleasure is given by the union of matter with a form which in the real world is foreign to it. This union of matter with a (foreign) form produces the esthetic pleasure. For example, to express joy not as in real life, but by means of a flute. That is how esthetic pleasure arises. Aristotle also insists that "the fine arts imitate men in action." The concept is ample and includes all that makes up the internal and essential activity, all the mental and spiritual life, or that reveals the personality. The external world can also be included but only in the measure to which it serves to express the internal action.

Can one achieve happiness in life? For Aristotle, yes, since

to be happy is to live virtuously. A virtuous man can be an unfortunate but never an unhappy man.

Aristotle adds that in order to be happy a minimum of objective conditions is necessary, since happiness is not a moral disposition but rather is based on acts which are in fact carried out.

With that we are in agreement.

Notes for Chapter 1

¹Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, trans. Stanley Godman, 4 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 1957), 1:83, 84-85, 87.

²G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston, 4 vols. (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1920), 4:257.

³S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1951).

⁴"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 . . . 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. Aussi Aristote a bien voulu donner des règles due fussent aussi solides et aussi pleins d'utiles instructions que ceux de ces poètes." Cited in Butcher, pp. 243-244 note.

⁵Butcher, p. 245.

⁶Butcher, pp. 252-54.

⁷Cited in Butcher, pp. 247-48.

⁸Butcher, pp. 248-49.

⁹Butcher, p. 254.

¹⁰Hauser, 1:86.