

# Tragedy

Edited and Introduced by

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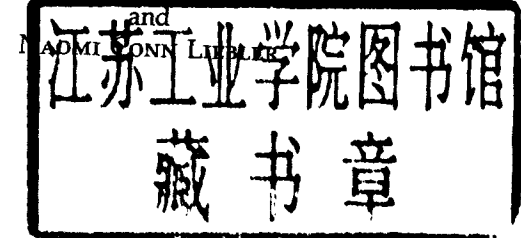
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## General Editors' Preface

The outlines of contemporary critical theory are now often taught as a standard feature of a degree in literary studies. The development of particular theories has seen a thorough transformation of literary criticism. For example, Marxist and Foucauldian theories have revolutionised Shakespeare studies, and 'deconstruction' has led to a complete reassessment of Romantic poetry. Feminist criticism has left scarcely any period of literature unaffected by its searching critiques. Teachers of literary studies can no longer fall back on a standardised, received, methodology.

Lecturers and teachers are now urgently looking for guidance in a rapidly changing critical environment. They need help in understanding the latest revisions in literary theory, and especially in grasping the practical effects of the new theories in the form of theoretically sensitised new readings. A number of volumes in the series anthologise important essays on particular theories. However, in order to grasp the full implications and possible uses of particular theories it is essential to see them put to work. This series provides substantial volumes of new readings, presented in an accessible form and with a significant amount of editorial guidance.

Each volume includes a substantial introduction which explores the theoretical issues and conflicts embodied in the essays selected and locates areas of disagreement between positions. The pluralism of theories has to be put on the agenda of literary studies. We can no longer pretend that we all tacitly accept the same practices in literary studies. Neither is a *laissez-faire* attitude any longer tenable. Literature departments need to go beyond the mere toleration of theoretical differences: it is not enough merely to agree to differ; they need actually to 'stage' the differences openly. The volumes in this series all attempt to dramatise the differences, not necessarily with a view to resolving them but in order to foreground the choices presented by different theories or to argue for a particular route through the impasses the differences present.



### General Editors' Preface

The theory 'revolution' has had real effects. It has loosened the grip of traditional empiricist and romantic assumptions about language and literature. It is not always clear what is being proposed as the new agenda for literature studies, and indeed the very notion of 'literature' is questioned by the post-structuralist strain in theory. However, the uncertainties and obscurities of contemporary theories appear much less worrying when we see what the best critics have been able to do with them in practice. This series aims to disseminate the best of recent criticism and to show that it is possible to re-read the canonical texts of literature in new and challenging ways.

RAMAN SELDEN AND STAN SMITH

The Publishers and fellow Series Editor regret to record that Raman Selden died after a short illness in May 1991 at the age of fifty-three. Ray Selden was a fine scholar and a lovely man. All those he has worked with will remember him with much affection and respect.

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We have unfortunately been unable to contact the author, Augusto Boal, of *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Pluto Press) and would appreciate any information which would enable us to do so.

We also wish to record our thanks to the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, for a grant which made possible the initial stages of the collaboration for this project.

## 1 Introduction

ANDREA: Unhappy the land that has no heroes!

[...]

GALILEO: No. Unhappy the land where heroes are needed.

Bertold Brecht, *Life of Galileo*

The search for a definition of tragedy', as the Shakespearean critic Stephen Booth astutely observes, 'has been the most persistent and widespread of all nonreligious quests for definition.'<sup>1</sup> It is a search that takes us back to Aristotle, and from there forward, through the Renaissance, to nineteenth-century European philosophers such as Marx, Nietzsche, Hegel and Kierkegaard, thence into the political science of Althusser and Goldmann, the stage theory of Augusto Boal and Antonin Artaud, the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and his successors, especially Jacques Lacan and André Green, and the social anthropology of Victor Turner and René Girard. Literary and cultural critics such as George Steiner and Raymond Williams have also joined the search, as indeed have linguistic philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, while playwrights such as Bertold Brecht (himself as much a political theorist as he was a dramatist), Arthur Miller and Wole Soyinka have all offered major pronouncements on this the most ubiquitous of Western dramatic forms. Some feminist writers, such as Eva Figes or Linda Bamber, have found the genre difficult to engage with on the grounds that it privileges a masculine ethos either by victimising women or by relegating them to the allegedly more hospitable form, comedy, which is presumed to afford women more positive role models. More radical forms of feminism, however, have suggested that tragedy implicates 'woman' in a hierarchy of discourses, the unravelling of which discloses, among other things, the constitutive features of gendered subjectivity itself. Indeed, as Nicole Loraux has provocatively argued, in the ancient world, tragedy was preeminently the genre that, 'as a civic institution, delighted in blurring the formal frontier between masculine and

feminine and freed women's deaths from the banalities to which they were restricted by private mourning'. In classical tragedy death is always violent, and it is Loraux's contention that 'men suffered from this convention no less than women. So for a while at least, a balance was reestablished between the sexes'.<sup>2</sup> Thus a central issue for modern critical theory involves the construction of the tragic subject as 'hero', and its definition within a range of social, political, sexual, moral, ethical, philosophical, cultural and aesthetic discourses.

Historically, tragedy is thought to have originated in a choral performance to celebrate the Greek god Dionysos, but it has evolved as the dramatic form which stages the relationship between suffering and joy in a universe which is often perceived as at best inimical, or at worst radical in its hostility to human life. It deals, above all, with the relationship between harmony and discord, which may be interpreted *inter alia* in positive terms, as Nietzsche has done when he argues that 'The delight created by tragic myth has the same origin as the delight dissonance in music creates. That primal Dionysiac delight, experienced even in the presence of pain, is the source common to both music and tragic myth',<sup>3</sup> or in negative terms as the pain and anguish attendant upon an assertion of will in the face of metaphysical despair. Instances of the latter might be the claim made by I. A. Richards that 'Tragedy is only possible to a mind which is for the moment agnostic or Manichean',<sup>4</sup> or A. C. Bradley's neo-Hegelian dialectical account of how 'order' generates its antithesis:

The whole or order against which the individual part shows itself powerless seems to be animated by a passion for perfection: we cannot otherwise explain its behaviour towards evil. Yet it appears to engender this evil within itself, and in its effort to overcome and expel it, it is agonized with pain, and driven to mutilate its own substance and to lose not only evil but priceless good.<sup>5</sup>

For Bradley tragedy is a 'painful mystery',<sup>6</sup> an experience articulated through the plight of the hero, which in the final instance resists analysis. That painful mystery is tied up with what it is to be 'human', a process which simultaneously recognises fatalism and elicits human fortitude in the face of irresolvable difficulty. That difficulty invariably involves suffering, which Adorno defined as 'objectivity that weighs upon the subject'.<sup>7</sup> It involves also an interiorising of the dynamic forces which contribute to the psychology of the human subject, and, paradoxically, an assertion of dignity set against irreparable loss. This is not the 'absolute tragedy' which George Steiner, following Schopenhauer, has recently described as the ethos in which 'it is the crime of man that he is, that he exists', but rather a 'negative ontology'<sup>8</sup> with some qualifications. Steiner goes on to observe:

in the theatre, more probably than in any other representational mode, likeness, credibility, the underlying gravitational force of the reality principle, are persistent. As they are in the Homeric epics, which are the font of drama. Niobe has seen her ten children slain. Her grief makes stones weep. But as it ebbs, she takes nourishment. Homer insists on this. It is an interposition of daylight truth cardinal also to Shakespeare. The organic is tragi-comic in its very essence. The absolutely tragic is, therefore, not only insupportable to human sensibility: it is false to life.<sup>9</sup>

It is not difficult to locate in this notion of 'nourishment' an *essential* humanity which inevitable suffering is alleged to disclose, but which tragedy is alleged to compensate for. It is with this inevitability of suffering, and with the compensatory creation of the figure of the 'tragic' hero that Brecht's Galileo takes issue, implying that heroism is, in fact, the result of a clash of determinate social forces rather than the metaphysically inaugurated means by which the human essence reveals its potential. At one level the 'human' is made to define itself against those transcendental forces from which it seeks liberation, but at another level, the challenge is to the liberal humanist notion that suffering is itself formative. However, even this conclusion can be problematical: as Morris Weitz has observed, no 'true, real definition' of tragedy is possible, since the form is ever open to new historical possibilities. Weitz insists that 'It is simply a historical fact that the concept, as we know and use it, has continuously accommodated new cases of tragedy, and, more important, the new properties of these new cases.'<sup>10</sup>

The force of Weitz's historical argument notwithstanding, the formal Aristotelian categories used to describe tragedy have, for the most part, remained current although their discursive force has been transformed over time. However we interpret the concept of *mimesis* – and the current shift from the emphasis upon imitation to representation offers us a case in point – the view that 'A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action', which is both 'serious' and has 'magnitude', and which is 'complete in itself', continues to provide the core of the representation of tragic action. Moreover, the tragic action consists of a series of related 'incidents' which are formally organised into elements of plot involving such processes as *peripeteia* (reversal) and *anagnorisis* (recognition). Through these processes tragedy arouses 'pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions'.<sup>11</sup> The overall effect is the production of *catharsis*, which has traditionally been translated as the 'purgation' of the specific emotions of pity and fear.<sup>12</sup>

The true tragic fear becomes an almost impersonal emotion, attaching itself not so much to this or that particular incident, as to the general course of the action which is ... an image of human destiny. ...

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For Artaud, the delight in tragedy is generated from another source, the danger of enslavement coming not from the gods but from the cultural and psychological constructions with which modern Western humanity has deluded itself. Those constructions have their anchoring point in a structure of representations which extends right back to the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis*. In his commentary on Artaud's 'Theater of Cruelty' Derrida identifies the theological power invested in a theatre 'dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance'. Such a theatre, whose structure is one 'in which each agency is linked to all others by representation, in which the irrepresentability of the living present is dissimulated or dissolved, suppressed or deported within the infinite chain of representations',<sup>19</sup> promotes in its audience an ethos of consumerism, and makes of theatre what Wole Soyinka has similarly rejected as 'a form of esoteric enterprise spied upon by fee-paying strangers'.<sup>20</sup> For Artaud, Derrida argues, the theatre of cruelty conducts a struggle with a tradition of logocentrism in order to return to its origins, which we may observe bears a striking resemblance to the operations of tragedy itself: 'The origin of theater, such as it must be restored, is the hand lifted against the abusive wielder of the logos, against the father, against the God of a stage subjugated to the power of speech and text'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Artaud himself argues that 'the theater is a formidable call to the forces that impel the mind by example to the source of its conflicts'.<sup>22</sup>

This is, however, a far cry from Schopenhauer's 'sublime', extending a tradition which effectively begins with Nietzsche, and which finds its way in different forms into a variety of twentieth-century materialist reimaginings and rewritings of tragic theory. It is also a far cry from the Aristotelian notion of *catharsis*, since the issue is not now the purgation of emotion, but rather the mobilisation of a radical energy against what Adorno identified as 'objectivity'. Thus Artaud may align with Brecht in referring the conflicts enacted in tragedy back to the human subject itself, enmeshed in webs of social, political, economic and psychological life. And yet, as Eva Figes has concluded, if in the past, 'the tragic pattern has been a way of justifying the ways of God to man', the substitution of an explicitly 'political' tradition would mean 'the development of a philosophy whereby the ends were seen to justify the means, a path with obvious pitfalls'.<sup>23</sup>

The difficulty which Eva Figes pinpoints is that the traditional notion of tragedy is dependent upon the concept of hierarchy which guarantees the essentially *public* nature of suffering consequent upon the act of transgression. Detached from that hierarchy suffering becomes private, having no meaning beyond the individual life of the sufferer. It is this notion of hierarchy which also guarantees the hubris of the transgressor,

and a larger critical valuation of any action which is perceived as a violation of its imperatives.

The *public/private* binary has to a very considerable extent dominated much modern thinking about tragedy. In the public world the protagonist is engaged in a metaphysical struggle with some transcendent force. These are the gods, or Fate, of classical tragedy, and the struggle they initiate postulates the human as 'other', alienated from divinity, seeking constantly to wrest control for itself. At a public and political level it is not difficult to see how this dialectic might serve a variety of positions: for Nietzsche the Dionysiac eruption of energy into the sphere of Apollonian rational control is something to be celebrated; for Hegel, the self-division of the Absolute Spirit is less a matter of celebration but more a struggle in which there is both gain and loss; for Bakhtin and Brecht the radical energy which tragedy releases signals the irrepressibility of the human; while for commentators such as Jan Kott, René Girard, Victor Turner or Wole Soyinka, the process is a ritualistic cleansing of the community from those energies which threaten to undermine its social practices. In each case the protagonist is pro-active, and, with only a few exceptions, gendered as male. But in almost every case, the tragic action is initiated as a result of a crisis of authority, one which in a very real sense draws attention to the behaviour of the protagonist. It is, in short, an action which has 'magnitude', to use Aristotle's terminology. But the struggle in the *public* arena is also accompanied by a *private* struggle in the inner life of the protagonist. We may perceive this as a psychic struggle, a failure to adjust to the demands imposed by the metaphysical order itself, or by an order which stands in its place, and which imposes its own demands upon the protagonist. Or, we may perceive this as a crisis of 'character', emanating from a deficiency or 'flaw' in the psychological makeup of the tragic hero which causes such exceptional behaviour. Bakhtin perceived the discomfort emanating from this kind of division arising from modern man's uncertainty of his own actions; in his *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* he observed that:

Contemporary man feels sure of himself, feels well-off and clear-headed, when he is himself essentially and fundamentally not present in the autonomous world of a domain of culture and its immanent law of creation. But he feels unsure of himself, feels destitute and deficient in understanding, where he has to do with himself, where he is the center from which answerable acts or deeds issue, in actual and once-occurrent life. That is, we *act* confidently only when we do so not as ourselves, but as those possessed by the immanent necessity of the meaning of some domain of culture.<sup>24</sup>



In tragedy generally the protagonist acts in ignorance of the larger context of his actions, and this lack of awareness is frequently folded back into psychological motivation. Acting in ignorance becomes the external manifestation of a deficiency within the character of the protagonist, thus betraying what is often labelled a 'flaw' in his inner life, his psychological makeup which effectively *causes* the tragedy. In Bakhtinian terms the tragic hero is and is not the centre of his actions, and the gulf between his ignorance and the knowledge which an audience possesses marks out the space of tragic irony. But we need also to remember that for Aristotle *action* and not 'character' is the dominant feature of tragedy.

The concept of 'tragic flaw' returns us to another Aristotelian term, one whose domestication has been a cause of some confusion: *hamartia*. We may begin here by glossing Bakhtin's phrase 'the immanent necessity of the meaning of some domain of culture' as the context of action provided by the larger phenomenon of community. If this is so, then the vilification of the tragic protagonist on account of some deficiency which he possesses, must be something other than an aversion to a strictly personal trait. We suggest that what is misrecognised as a flaw of 'character' is, in fact, a projection of something which has its roots, not in the inner psychological life of the protagonist, but in the larger domain of culture, and even in communal fear or desire. The term *hamartia* is properly glossed as 'missing the mark',<sup>25</sup> a phrase which answers more directly than the concept of a tragic flaw the Aristotelian insistence that *hamartia* is an action, something protagonists do and not something inherent in their 'characters'. It is possible that the transference of *hamartia* from the domain of action to that of character has something to do with a modern/postmodern insistence on domination and/or self-determination, neither of which figured very prominently in classical or early modern culture. 'Missing the mark' therefore redirects our attention away from modern modes of subjectivity and towards the issue of positionality; on the medieval and Renaissance stages, for example, *positions* were inscribed, as Robert Weimann has convincingly shown, as *figurenposition*,<sup>26</sup> the formal identification of a particular dramatic character with 'the actor's position on the stage, and the speech, action, and degree of stylization associated with that position'. This focuses the actor's position in relation to the audience, and points to a capability for breaking dramatic illusion, or for the more general violations of what Weimann calls 'spatial and sometimes moral positions'.<sup>27</sup>

This adjustment of the relation between actor and audience is of crucial significance when it comes to the question of *hamartia* since it is what the protagonist shares with the audience which is of primary

importance, as opposed to the audience's submerging of its own identity in the subjectivity of the protagonist. Here what we might read as the autonomy of the tragic subject is, in fact, primarily a *relation* between the action of a protagonist and the cultural milieu of an audience. To insist that *hamartia* refers primarily to the subjectivity of the tragic protagonist is to elevate the audience to a position of moral and ethical superiority, and to miss the complex transaction which is taking place between culturally over-determined spectator and stage representation.

Equally important in this regard is the relation of *hamartia* to another central idea in Aristotle's treatise, that of *dilemma*, the positioning of protagonist, represented community and audience alike between two choices of equal value both politically and morally. If one choice is seen to be clearly better than another, if one is 'right' and the other manifestly 'wrong' in the represented circumstances, then the drama takes on the shape of simple melodrama, pitting forces clearly identifiable as 'good' and 'evil' respectively against each other, and not tragedy. The centrality of the operation of dilemma to the shape of tragedy requires that the choices a protagonist makes must be difficult ones between options equally 'right'; thus *hamartia*, 'missing the mark', is understood not as an optional and avoidable 'error' resulting from some inadequacy or 'flaw' in the 'character' of the protagonist but as something that *happens* in consequence of the complex situation represented in the drama. It is this situation and the impossible or paradoxical nature of dilemma to which the audience responds, and which precludes any 'morally superior' judgement it might otherwise make.

This means that tragedy is not of itself satirical. It may involve elements of satire, but the information which the spectator possesses renders the protagonist's *situation* ironical, and it is with this, rather than with character, that spectators may identify. What, according to Aristotle, has the greatest impact on the spectators, are events which 'appear to have a background of design',<sup>28</sup> and which derive a larger meaning therefrom. The ironies generated by particular situations are frequently the result of the representation of divisions within the social formation itself, and raise crucial questions of epistemology which achieve some measure of clarification only at the moment of extreme suffering or death. Thus, Oedipus's quest for knowledge, initially concerned with the plight of Thebes and his responsibilities as king, turns into a quest for individual identity and implicates his actions in a larger, supernatural design over which he manages to gain, at best, only illusory control. As the action unfolds, both protagonist and spectator are implicated in patterns of discrepant knowledge, fissures in a hitherto integrated design, which discloses the conditions of its formation. In this context irony is disclosed at that moment when the

social contradictions, which it is the business of ideology to smoothe over, show through.

Repeated affirmation and celebration of the limits defined by social, political and religious domains are, in large part, the business of ritual, but these limits are only ever put into question when the ideologies which underpin ritual cease to function effectively. In one of the earliest Marxist accounts of tragedy, George Thomson shows, for example, how in the development of the formal properties of ancient Greek tragedy, what is at stake is a historic evolution from 'the mimetic rite of the primitive totemic clan' towards a secular hierarchical society. This hierarchy is a condition of the definition of tragedy for George Steiner; the form declines, he claims, when, with the rise of the urban middle class, tragedy loses its purchase on the 'public' world, and through the emergence of the novel, develops 'a literary form exactly appropriate to the fragmented audience of modern urban culture'.<sup>29</sup> It is to this essentially aristocratic view of tragedy that Arthur Miller's own play, *The Death of A Salesman*, and his essays 'Tragedy and the Common Man' and 'The Nature of Tragedy', as well as Raymond Williams's more extensive analysis of modern tragic form in *Modern Tragedy*, pose a challenge.

Clearly, discussion of tragedy oscillates between questions of form and content. If, as Susanne Langer observed, 'tragedy is a cadential form', a form which 'reflects the basic structure of personal life, and therewith of feeling when life is viewed as a whole', then what she calls the 'crisis' of tragic action is 'always the turn towards an absolute close' (p. 323). That absolute close is death itself, although accompanying the passage to death is what Langer identifies as a mental, emotional or moral growth of the protagonist, a growth demanded by the action. Whereas in Hegel the self-restitution of divided spirit is achieved through sublation, in A. C. Bradley's re-reading of Hegel that sublation is, through the conflicted experience of tragedy, never complete. What Langer perceives to be, among other things, the moral growth of the protagonist in adversity, Steiner resists in his emphasis on the non-Judaic reading of tragic catastrophe: that in classical tragedy it is manifestly *not* 'a specific moral fault or failure of understanding' (p. 145), and that the forces which determine human life 'lie outside the governance of reason or justice' (p. 145). In another version of this, Walter Benjamin notes that in tragedy 'pagan man realizes that he is better than his gods, but this realization strikes him dumb, and it remains unarticulated' (p. 112). Benjamin resists the notion that at the end of tragedy there is some restitution of the moral order, though he holds on to the notion that man is inherently moral: 'it is the attempt of moral man, still dumb, still inarticulate - as such he bears the name of hero - to raise himself up amid the agitation of that painful world' (p. 112).

We said a moment ago that discussion of tragedy oscillates between a perception of the relation between form and content. But that is only one side of the coin, albeit one which a number of commentators have chosen to emphasise. However, in focusing on the plight of the protagonist, we risk glossing over the possible response of an audience to the spectacle of suffering. For Brecht, as Raymond Williams has argued, this possible response juxtaposed suffering and affirmation:

We have to see not only that suffering is avoidable, but that it is not avoided. And not only that suffering breaks us, but that it need not break us. . . . 'The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary.' . . . Against the fear of a general death, and against the loss of connection, a sense of life is affirmed, learned as closely in suffering as ever in joy, once the connections are made.<sup>30</sup>

More recently, A. D. Nuttall has argued that, 'In the tragic theatre suffering and death are perceived as matter for grief and fear, after which it seems that grief and fear become in their turn matter for enjoyment'.<sup>31</sup> What it is that tragedy imitates (Aristotle's *mimesis*), and the attitude of the spectator towards that representation, are of crucial importance in this discussion, and they are not matters that admit of an easy resolution. Aristotelian *mimesis*, as Nuttall suggests, deals not in actualities but in probabilities.<sup>32</sup>

Georg Lukács, in his essay 'The Metaphysics of Tragedy', puts the matter a little differently when he says that 'Real life is always unreal, always impossible, in the midst of empirical life'.<sup>33</sup> However, Lukács goes on to suggest that tragedy is 'the becoming real of the concrete, essential nature of man'.<sup>34</sup> This is some way from Nuttall's insistence that tragic poetry is *made*,<sup>35</sup> in that its concern is not with a representation of empirical reality so much as a bringing into being 'the concrete, essential nature of man'. Lukács's concern in his essay is not so much with the probable events of the tragic action, but rather with the *essence* which tragedy discloses. In a manner which eschews a materialist reading, Lukács insists that 'Realism is bound to destroy all the form-creating and life-maintaining values of tragic drama'.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, Brecht insists that what the theatre represents is not essences but 'the structure of society' (p. 97). Even in classical Greek tragedy, as, for example, explicitly in the *Oresteia* and implicitly in Sophocles's Oedipus trilogy, the protagonists' offences, first and foremost, are against society. Divine power is not in these plays, as it clearly is for Lukács, an essential reality, but rather the objectified form which social prohibition takes. George Thomson, in his study *Aeschylus and Athens* (1941) offers an extended analysis of the social conditions which produced ancient Greek tragedy, and fleshes out historically Brecht's

insistence upon the social origins of all drama. Walter Benjamin's *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, by slight contrast, offers both a historical account, which would align it to some extent with Thomson's method, but at another level, anticipates, as Terry Eagleton has shown,<sup>37</sup> certain developments in post-structuralist thinking concerning the materiality of the signifier. Eagleton contends that Benjamin identifies the German *Trauerspiel* as being free from what he calls 'that fetishism of the "organic" which haunts an Eliot or Leavis'.<sup>38</sup> Rather, his concern is with an ontological division between what Eagleton calls 'an expressive ecstasy at odds with that fateful enslavement to meaning which the language of allegory entails'.<sup>39</sup> Benjamin's emphasis on the 'ostentation' of performance is coupled with a dialectical account of the history which these plays enact: 'Bound to the court, it yet remains a travelling theatre; metaphorically its boards represent the earth as the setting created for the enactment of history' (p. 120). It is this gulf between tragic, and possibly all, meaning and the material world, between the representation in Greek tragedy of the stage as 'a cosmic topos' and the stage as 'a space which belongs to an inner world of feeling and bears no relation to the cosmos', that draws attention to the materiality of the signifier and to a phenomenon which Derrida was later to explore more fully, that of 'writing' itself.

Traditional accounts of tragedy have sought to understand its operations as being crucial to the definition of what it is to be 'human'. The result has been to reaffirm confidence in an indestructible human 'essence' which is thought to emerge in the face of extreme suffering. Alain Robbe-Grillet was one of a number of writers to challenge this 'humanist' foundation of tragedy,<sup>40</sup> while Lucien Goldmann, remaining within the purview of a materialist account of tragedy, but at the same time following certain of Hegel's arguments, perceives the tragic moment to come at precisely the historical moment when the transcendent guarantor of structural harmony (God) ceases to inspire confidence: 'worldly existence changes into tragedy and into the universe of the hidden God, who is at one and the same time both absent and present; and, as an inevitable result of this change, tragic man ceases to be able to understand the life that he led before his moment of conversion, and sees that all his earlier values have been overthrown' (p. 70). It is Goldmann's contention, however, that 'facts concerning man always present themselves in a significant pattern, and this pattern can be understood only by explaining how it came into being' (p. 72). This emphasis upon scientific factuality is a product of Enlightenment rationalism, and concentrates on the question of the formative significance of structure. Its end-point in this collection is Augusto Boal's trenchant critique of Aristotelian tragic theory, in which the purging of emotion (*catharsis*) is perceived as a form of political

management. To be sure, Brecht had already begun to move along this trajectory, but Boal locates the theory of tragedy much more tersely within the purview of a dialectical materialist account of theatre. At one level this debate is played out in the opposition in this selection between George Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy* and Raymond Williams's *Modern Tragedy*, the one seeking to hold on to universalist categories, while at the same time articulating an ambivalence about the nihilistic force of tragic experience, and the other seeking to situate the philosophy of tragedy historically and thereby undermining its claims to an abstract universality.

The resituation of tragedy within the purview of the social, associated in the first instance with the tradition of Marxist thought, has however taken on a different guise through an association with that line of thought which takes its cue from Nietzschean anti-rationalism. At one level, Nietzsche's quest to illuminate *The Birth of Tragedy* is a search for origins which has an obvious affinity with social and anthropological accounts. However, its celebration of a radical Dionysiac spirit does much to pave the way for an equally radical attack on the structures of representation *per se* which are to be found in feminist, deconstructive and psychoanalytic accounts of tragic experience. Nietzschean anti-rationalism, in addition to providing a philosophical basis for post-structuralist thought, directs attention to the *conditions* under which certain categories are constructed. What is frequently taken to be the Derridean undermining of the metaphysical foundations of Western thought is, in fact, a critical attempt to demonstrate precisely how those foundations are authorised and receive their validation in the first place; it is emphatically *not* an attempt to dispense with them altogether. In Derrida's case, it has to be said, however, that all forms of foundationalist thinking are subjected to critical analysis.

While it would be quite misleading to generalise, it would seem that endemic to each of these different positions is a certain structural similarity: tragedy occurs when two antagonistic forms of energy encounter each other's force in such a way that the hierarchies which hold them in place undergo radical disturbance. However, despite these appearances of similarity, there are significant differences of interpretation of the relation between these elements of tragic conflict. For example, Hegel's self-division of the absolute spirit generates a dialectical narrative whose ultimate objective is to resolve conflict. For a critic such as A. C. Bradley, Hegelian sublation is accompanied by a consciousness of irreparable loss, and it is this sense of loss, allied to a renewal of the recognition of human dignity – not so much a poetic justice but rather an attenuated recognition of the operations of justice *per se* – that has sustained traditional notions of tragedy. For Bradley, this consciousness of loss reformulates the very irrationality which the

Nietzschean celebration of Dionysiac energies foregrounds so positively. Although Nietzsche eschews a dialectical account of tragic form, the opposition between 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysiac' seems to contain all the elements of a dialectical encounter. If we transpose this structure of constitutive oppositions into another dimension, one which recognises a productive tension between the conscious and the unconscious, then we are able to bring both Freudian and post-Freudian accounts of tragedy into a clearer focus.

The Freudian unconscious is emphatically not the Dionysiac energy which Nietzsche celebrated, though the challenge to the organising principle of the ego from the anarchic libidinal force of the id appears at first glance to be similar. For A. D. Nuttall, the Freudian descent into the libidinal depths is a descent into an 'unchanging psychic world . . . like Orpheus, like Aeneas finding the way to his dead father, to the dark place under our feet'.<sup>41</sup> What psychoanalysis brings to the surface is an archetypal triangulated Oedipal desire, a structure which determines the lineaments of both authority and gender identity. But what Nuttall also observes, shrewdly, is that the pleasure which the formal control of tragedy affords may also be offset by something much darker, and baffling, that something 'in us which actively *desires* death and violence'.<sup>42</sup> The question of pleasure is one that we need constantly to keep before us, and it goes without saying that different inflections of the meaning of tragedy entail different pleasures to be derived from its operation. For Nietzsche, for example, the pleasure derived from the revelation of Dionysian energy was contingent upon the celebration of its irresistible emergence, a pleasure different from that to be derived from the Hegelian notion of aesthetic harmony consequent upon the restitution of the self-divided spirit. One suspects that tragedy could afford no pleasure for Brecht, except insofar as it could disclose to a critical spectator the historical conditions of its own construction in a manner which Brecht himself sets out to uncover in a play such as *St Joan of the Stockyards*.

Nuttall's quest is for the more difficult terrain of the pleasure we take, and continue to take, in tragedy. Psychoanalytical accounts, and those dealing more specifically with questions of gender, especially in the wake of the Lacanian re-reading of Freud, have been more inclined to view tragedy as *expressive* of particular definitions of the human, definitions which eschew generalisation for more particularised accounts of the operations of the unconscious, and/or of the engendering of the tragic subject. Lacan is concerned with 'the dialectic of desire' (p. 191), and he uses the tragedy of *Antigone* to explicate its operations. It is important not to overlook this use of classical tragedy. Elsewhere in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan admits that the ecstatic praise for Dionysus involves his devotees in an activity in which they do not

'really know what they are doing', and he asks pointedly, 'Aren't Hades and Dionysos one and the same thing?'.<sup>43</sup> At issue is the request for happiness which, according to Lacan, the patient makes to the analyst, but the latter is in the position of denying this as a possibility: 'Not only doesn't he [the analyst] have that Sovereign Good that is asked of him, but he also knows there isn't any. To have carried an analysis through to its end is no more nor less than to have encountered that limit in which the problematic of desire is raised'.<sup>44</sup> Lacan's concern generally is with the signifying power of the phallus and its place in the dialectic of desire. His distinction between comedy and tragedy hinges on comic violations of the Law of the Father, a realisation that 'life slips away, runs off, escapes all those barriers that oppose it, including precisely those that are most essential, those that are constituted by the agency of the signifier'.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, tragedy raises fundamentally the question of *judgement*, and hence a recognition of limits; Lacan continues, 'And it is because we know better than those who went before how to recognize the nature of desire, which is at the heart of this experience, that a reconsideration of ethics is possible, that a form of ethical judgement is possible, of a kind that gives this question the force of a Last Judgement: Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?'<sup>46</sup> For Lacan, and for André Green, tragedy *enacts* that psychic drama, insofar as the dramatic 'scene' itself figures forth, represents, and is a projection of, what Green calls 'that "other scene" the unconscious' (p. 206).

It is out of that drama that the gendered human subject emerges. If traditional accounts of tragedy have an investment in the definition of what it is to be human, then discourses such as feminism seek to dismantle that universalist account in the interests of reinstating an occluded narrative. For Lacan hegemony is phallogocentric, that is to say, power is fundamentally patriarchal in its validating structures, deriving its authority from the phallus as signifier. However, certain feminist re-readings, such as that of Elizabeth Bronfen, attempt to displace the phallus from its supreme position as the legitimating source of signification.<sup>47</sup> Deprived of its controlling signification, its power must therefore be annulled. Moreover, as Sarah Pomeroy has argued, to apply the insights of psychoanalysis to classical texts is to illuminate the 'myths of the past' using 'the critical tools of the present' (p. 216). In resuscitating those ancient myths, she argues, Greek tragedy called into question the traditional social values and valences exemplified in such myths, especially where those principles govern gendered behaviour, as in the traditions of feminine submission to masculine hierarchy, social isolation, and a willingness to commit suicide. Nicole Loraux is specifically concerned with the kind of death Greek tragedy requires of its characters: death by sword or knife-wound is masculine; death by

hanging or suffocation – the closure of the voice and preservation of the intact body – ‘is a woman’s way of death’. The ways in which Greek tragedy represents not only such gendered codes of dying but also what occurs when these codes are violated, call into question the social constructs that inform the tragic drama of ancient Greece. Thus tragedy, even at its beginnings in Western culture, served both to reinforce and to challenge the structural principles of its producing culture.

As we noted earlier, tragedy’s origins have been located historically in performances associated with ancient Dionysian ritual. For the last group of selections in this volume, tragedy remains in important ways inseparable from the concerns of ritual that constitute its foundation. Jan Kott’s essay examines the vestiges in Greek tragedy of the rites of *sparagmos* and *omophagia*, the tearing and eating of the raw flesh of the sacrificial surrogate for the divine, and finds in these vestigial representations the pattern of death-and-rebirth not only of the represented god-head but, by extension, of social structure as well. René Girard retracts that extension; for him, the sacrificial surrogate substitutes not for the divine but for his own human community, whose conflicts and anxieties regarding the collapse of necessary social structures, which Girard calls the ‘sacrificial crisis’, are crystallised in the victim. Girard distinguishes ‘sacred’ or ‘pure’ violence – the sacrifice of such a victim – from ‘impure’ violence which is merely slaughter; thus the death or removal of the surrogate temporarily purges the community of violence which would otherwise destroy it. As tragedy represents this ‘sacrificial crisis’, the seeds of structural collapse and its redressive violence always remain immanent in the social and continually threaten to recur. Writing from the perspective of an African culture that, in his view, retains its ‘belief in culture as defined within man’s knowledge of fundamental, unchanging relationships between himself and society and within the larger context of the observable universe’,<sup>48</sup> the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka examines the relation between tragic drama and the traditional values, both present and lost, that attend on its production in post-colonial Africa as well as in the West, and asks whether it is possible to preserve, and to perform, a drama inextricably bound to such traditional foundations in societies dominated and driven by economic concerns. Aside from the commercialisation of such performance, Soyinka objects vigorously to interpretive and theoretical interventions that have made of this experiential form a matter for debate and for academic study, and have thereby depleted tragedy of its once-powerful spiritual and emotional impact. Departing from specifically ritualistic concerns but still anchoring discussion to a representation of natural order that Soyinka fears losing, Susanne Langer, in a different but related way, reminds us that

tragedy’s focus is always on the human within the natural community: ‘man’ is the subject of his own literary structures.

And yet, the issue of man’s essential humanity is one which recent critical theory has done much to bring into question. The Saussurean emphasis upon linguistic process as the model for different forms of knowledge, has served to draw our attention to questions of *difference* rather than issues of identity. The resultant emphasis on discontinuity serves, in the case of Jonathan Dollimore, to point up the lineaments of a social and political realism which disclose the relationship between the internal dissonances of literature and their connection with ‘social process, actual historical struggle and ideological contradiction’.<sup>49</sup> The difference between this position, and that of, say, Lucien Goldmann, is that the latter invests considerable energy in a totalising account of structures, which, in the wake of post-structuralism, and especially the writings of Michel Foucault, have been brought seriously into question. That radical questioning is represented in this volume in the final excerpt, from Jacques Derrida’s long essay ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’. Here Derrida takes up the ritual elements that Artaud, Kott and Soyinka identify as crucial to tragic experience, but he aligns the question of ritual with the debate in Plato about the beneficial and harmful effects of writing itself. For Derrida, and for Plato, the *pharmakon* is an ambivalent phenomenon, simultaneously beneficial and harmful. It is this ambivalence that constitutes ‘the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the difference of difference’ (p. 484). As in Sophocles’s *Oedipus*, or in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, the community becomes a ‘body’ which defines its own values through a form of violent exclusion of ‘the representative of an external threat or aggression’. What Derrida calls ‘the ceremony of the *pharmakos*’ is therefore ‘played out on the boundary line between inside and outside, which it has as its function ceaselessly to trace and retrace’ (p. 488). Derrida’s concern here is not so much with the *content* of this ritual activity – arguably the preoccupation of Girard, Kott, and Soyinka – but the *form* of the struggle, and what it discloses about precisely how boundaries are constructed and prohibitions articulated. We may, of course, argue that this is part of a larger Derridean project, the challenge to the exclusive efficacy of Enlightenment rationalism as the dominant mode of perception. It would also be misleading simply to emphasise the ‘play’ of language to which Derrida refers. Isolated from these other considerations, it becomes nothing more than a quest for an indeterminacy which is itself a domestication of a radical potential. To this extent deconstruction as a strategy designed to expose the strategic investments of all strategies, may be said to continually re-open the question of closure to which tragedy seems always impelled.



The selection which follows begins with excerpts from the writings of philosophers such as Hegel and Nietzsche, both of whom have been instrumental in shaping modern thinking. It then proceeds to take a path through materialist accounts which locate tragic experience in the social formation itself, and from thence to critiques of the role of the signifier in strategies for the demystification of the experience of the tragic. The question of whether in a secular world tragedy is at all possible is raised in the section headed 'Tradition and Innovation' by the discussion conducted between Raymond Williams and George Steiner. With the advent of Structuralism, and with the renewed interest in Freudian psychoanalytical method, the emphasis upon what we have called the materiality of the signifier has become more pronounced. The focus on tragic subjectivity constitutes a different emphasis upon material practice, and the re-articulation of the coordinates of triangulated Oedipal desire raises questions which are taken up in the section on 'Feminism and Tragedy'.

However, far from disintegrating the concept of tragedy these radical strategies serve to refocus our attention on the *ritual* basis of tragic experience. The question here is whether we are justified in perceiving tragedy as part of a larger rhythm of natural life, as the excerpt from Susanne K. Langer suggests, or whether the definitions of ritual serve, as we saw in Benjamin's discussion of the German *Trauerspiel*, to demystify the form itself. In concluding with Derrida, we raise the question of deconstruction more directly, and suggest that the concept of ritual, which has been present in all definitions of tragedy from its historical origins to the present, may itself be a 'writing', which when investigated further inscribes a radical *difference* at its core which discloses the material conditions of its own construction. We do not mean to suggest that such an account succeeds in disintegrating tragic form *per se*, rather that there are ways of locating and defining what many commentators have thought is an essentially religious, and therefore mysterious, experience. The Brecht epigraph with which we began this introduction confronts directly the question of the *need* for tragic heroism, and posits the question of whether human beings can ever feel sufficiently empowered to take control of or overcome the historical contingencies, sometimes represented as transcendent forces, in which they are enmeshed. So long as those contingencies remain beyond our grasp, then there will be a need to represent the resultant complexity in that agonistic form which we know as tragedy.

## Notes

1. STEPHEN BOOTH, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy* (New Haven, 1983), p. 81.
2. NICOLE LORAUX, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. Anthony Forster (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), p. 3.
3. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York, 1956), p. 143.
4. I. A. RICHARDS, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London, 1934), p. 246.
5. A. C. BRADLEY, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1904), p. 37.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
7. THEODOR W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London, 1973), p. 18.
8. GEORGE STEINER, 'A Note on Absolute Tragedy', *Literature and Theology*, 4 (2) (July 1990), pp. 147-56.
9. *Ibid.*
10. MORRIS WEITZ, 'Tragedy', in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, 8 vols (New York, 1967; rpt. 1972), vol. 8, p. 160.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
12. *Ibid.*
13. S. BUTCHER, ed., *Aristotle: The Poetics* (New York, 1951), pp. 262 and 267.
14. NORTHROP FRYE, 'The Mythos of Autumn', *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957).
15. MARY DOUGLAS, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966), pp. 35, 40.
16. ANTONIN ARTAUD, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York, 1958), p. 79.
17. ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane (London, 1883), vol. 3, p. 213.
18. *Ibid.*
19. JACQUES DERRIDA, 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), p. 235.
20. WOLE SOYINKA, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 38.
21. DERRIDA, 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', p. 239.
22. ARTAUD, 'The Theater of Cruelty', in *The Theater and Its Double*, p. 30.
23. EVA FIGES, *Tragedy and Social Evolution* (New York, 1976), p. 163.
24. M. M. BAKHTIN, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex., 1993), pp. 20-1.
25. Cf. NAOMI CONN LIEBLER, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre* (New York and London, 1995), pp. 42-3.
26. ROBERT WEIMANN, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, trans. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore and London, 1978), pp. 224 ff.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 233. See also BRECHT's discussion of the performer's relation to the audience in 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting', *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. John Willett (New York, 1966), pp. 91 ff., and ANTONIN ARTAUD, 'On the Balinese Theater', in *The Theater and Its Double*, pp. 53 ff.
28. BUTCHER, ed., *Aristotle: The Poetics*, p. 19.
29. GEORGE THOMPSON, *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*, 4th edition (London, 1980), pp. 165-84.
30. RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *Modern Tragedy* (London and Stanford, 1966), pp. 202-3.
31. A. D. NUTTALL, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (Oxford, 1996), p. 1.

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32. Ibid., p. 18.
33. GEORG LUKÁCS, 'The Metaphysics of Tragedy', *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London, 1974), p. 153.
34. Ibid., p. 18.
35. NUTTALL, op cit., p. 24.
36. LUKÁCS, op. cit., p. 159.
37. TERRY EAGLETON, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, 1981), pp. 6–19.
38. Ibid., p. 7.
39. Ibid., p. 5.
40. ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET, 'Nature, Humanism and Tragedy', *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel*, trans. Brabara Wright (London, 1965), pp. 75–95.
41. NUTTALL, op. cit., p. 49.
42. Ibid., p. 54.
43. JACQUES LACAN, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller and trans. Dennis Porter (London, 1992), p. 299.
44. Ibid., p. 300.
45. Ibid., p. 314.
46. Ibid.
47. ELIZABETH BRONFEN, 'From Omphalos to Phallus: Cultural Representations of Femininity and Death', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 3 (2) (Oxford, 1992), pp. 144–58.
48. SOYINKA, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 38.
49. See JOHN DRAKAKIS, ed., *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1994), pp. 24 ff.

## 2 The Philosophy of Tragedy

Of all the dramatic genres, tragedy is thought to be the most closely aligned with the discipline of philosophy. Its concern is with the production of knowledge and the human limits to its acquisition, and also with questions of politics, ethics and spirituality. In *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, Hegel perceived drama generally as having 'to exhibit situations and the spiritual atmosphere that belongs to them as definitely motivated by the individual character, who is charged with specific aims, and which makes these an effective part of the practical content of its volitional self-identity'. In his affirmation that 'the true theme of primitive tragedy is godlike', Hegel is concerned to emphasise the *ethical* content of tragic form. He goes on to insist that the godlike or divine here does not simply mean 'religious consciousness' as such, but the substance which informs ethical life: 'the divine in its secular or world realization, the substantive as such, the particular no less than the essential features of which supply the changing content of truly human actions, and in such action itself render this essence explicit and actual' (p. 26). In his essay 'Hegel's Theory of Tragedy', A. C. Bradley offers a partial interpretation of this position, which problematises the issue of identity articulated dialectically in Hegel. Where Hegel sees in the denouement of tragedy 'a feeling of reconciliation' (p. 29), a restitution of identity through the process of dialectics, Bradley is more sceptical, preferring to insist on the mystery of tragedy, while at the same time invoking the moral categories of good and evil and resisting the suggestion that tragedy is moral. The philosophical context of Hegel's theory is Enlightenment thought, which privileges rationality, the very movement which Nietzsche's own anti-rationalism challenged. *The Birth of Tragedy*, by contrast, aims to offer an alternative history of the emergence of the form, and in focusing upon the celebration of the cult of Dionysus, paves the way for those agonistic accounts of tragedy concerned much less with *identity* than with *difference*. Nietzsche locates tragedy in the ritual of celebration of the cult of the Greek god Dionysus, but a

secular version of the energy to which he points in *The Birth of Tragedy* has been of enormous influence within the sphere of post-structuralism generally, and particularly in relation to radical accounts of the subversive potential of tragedy. Hegel is the philosopher of harmony in this respect, while Nietzsche celebrates that energy which would undermine rationality altogether. By partial contrast, a philosopher such as Søren Kierkegaard re-reads Aristotle from the perspective of a 'modern' despair, where, as in Strindberg's famous *Preface to Miss Julie* (1888), forces such as Fate are replaced by the guilt which the hero feels as a consequence of his actions: 'the hero suffers his total guilt, is transparent to himself in his suffering of his guilt' (*Either/Or*, Part 1, p. 148). This important distinction between 'ancient' and 'modern' tragedy is that in the modern age the loss of 'substantial categories' such as 'the family, state, kindred' 'must turn the individual over to himself completely in such a way that, strictly speaking, he becomes his own creator' (Kierkegaard, p. 149). Kierkegaard chooses to focus on the tragic heroine Antigone, and to illuminate the profound nature of the tragic conflict in which she is involved, although he anticipates George Steiner in his suggestion that in the modern world 'suffering tragedy in the stricter sense has essentially lost its tragic interest, for the power that is the source of the suffering has lost its meaning' (*ibid.*). The question is whether there can be such a genre as 'modern tragedy' is taken up later in the section entitled 'Tradition and Innovation'.

## Tragedy as a Dramatic Art\*

G. W. F. HEGEL

### Types of dramatic poetry and the chief phases of their historical development

Viewing for a moment the course of our present inquiry in retrospect, it will be seen that we have, *first*, established the principle of dramatic poetry in its widest and more specific characteristics, and, further, in its relation to the general public. *Secondly*, we deduced from the fact of the drama's presenting an action distinct and independent in its actually visible development the conclusion that a fully complete sensuous reproduction is also essential, such as is for the first time possible under artistic conditions in the theatrical performance. In order that the action, however, may adapt itself to an external realization of this kind, it is necessary that both in poetic conception and detailed execution it should be absolutely definite and complete. This is only effected, our *third* point, by resolving dramatic poetry into *particular types*, receiving their typical character, which is in part one of opposition and also one of mediatory relation to such opposition, from the distinction, in which not only the end but also the characters, as also the conflict and entire result of the action, are manifested. The most important aspects emerging from this distinction, and carrying it into a many-sided historical development, are the tragic and the comic, as well as the counter-balancing of both modes of comprehension, which, in dramatic poetry, become for the first time so essentially important that they form the basis of classification of the different types.

In considering more closely the nature of these distinctions we shall do well to discuss their subject-matter in the following order:

*First*, we must define the general principle of tragedy, comedy, and the so-called drama.

\* Reprinted from *Hegel on Tragedy*, ed. with an introduction by ANNE and HENRY PAOLUCCI (New York and London: Harper Torchbooks, 1975).

Secondly, we must indicate the character of ancient and modern dramatic poetry, to the contrast between which the distinctive relation of the above-named types is referable in their historical development.

Thirdly, we will attempt, in conclusion, to examine the concrete modes, which these types, though mainly comedy and tragedy, are able to exhibit within the boundary of this opposition.

### **The Principle of Tragedy, Comedy, and the Drama, or Social Play**

The essential basis of differentiation among the types of epic poetry is to be found in the distinction whether the essentially substantive displayed in the epic manner is expressed in its universality, or is communicated in the form of objective characters, exploits, and events. In contrast to this, the classification of lyric poetry, in its series of varied modes of expression, is dependent upon the degree and specific form in which the content is assimilated in more or less stable consistency with subjective experience, as its inwardness reveals itself. And, finally, dramatic poetry, which accepts as its centre of significance the collision of aims and characters, as also the necessary resolution of such a conflict, cannot do otherwise than deduce the principle of its separate types from the relation in which *individual persons* are placed relatively to their purpose and its content. The definition of this relation is, in short, the decisive factor in the determination of the particular mode of dramatic schism and the issue therefrom, and consequently presents the essential type of the entire process in its animated and artistic display. The fundamental points we have to examine in this connection are, speaking broadly, those phases or features in the process, the mediation of which constitutes the essential purport of every true action. Such are from one point of view the substantively sound and great, the fundamental stratum of the realized divine nature in the world, regarded here as the genuine and essentially eternal content of individual character and end. And, on its other side, we have the *personal conscious life* simply as such in its unhampered power of self-determination and freedom. Without doubt, essential and explicit truth is asserted in dramatic poetry; it matters not in what form it may be manifested from time to time in human action. The specific type, however, within which this activity is made visible receives a distinct or, rather, actually opposed configuration, according as the aspect of substantive worth or in its opposition thereto, that of individual caprice, folly, and perversity is retained as the distinctive *modus* of operation either in individuals, actions, or conflicts.

We have therefore to consider the principle in its distinctive relation to the following types:

First, as associated with tragedy in its substantive and primitive form.

Secondly, in its relation to comedy, in which the life of the individual soul as such in volition and action, as well as the external factor of contingency, are predominant over all relations and ends.

Thirdly, in that to the drama, the theatrical piece in the more restricted use of the term, regarding such as the middle term between the two first-mentioned types.

(1) With respect to *tragedy*, I will here confine myself to a consideration of only the most general and essential characteristics, the more concrete differentiation of which can only be made clear by a review of the distinctive features implied in the stages of its historical process.

(a) The genuine content of tragic action subject to the *aims* which arrest tragic characters is supplied by the world of those forces which carry in themselves their own justification, and are realized substantively in the volitional activity of mankind. Such are the love of husband and wife, of parents, children, and kinsfolk. Such are, further, the life of communities, the patriotism of citizens, the will of those in supreme power. Such are the life of churches, not, however, if regarded as a piety which submits to act with resignation, or as a divine judicial declaration in the heart of mankind over what is good or the reverse in action; but, on the contrary, conceived as the active engagement with and demand for veritable interests and relations. It is of a soundness and thoroughness consonant with these that the really tragical *characters* consist. They are throughout that which the essential notion of their character enables them and compels them to be. They are not merely a varied totality laid out in the series of views of it proper to the epic manner; they are, while no doubt remaining also essentially vital and individual, still only the one power of the particular character in question, the force in which such a character, in virtue of his essential personality, has made himself inseparably coalesce with some particular aspect of the capital and substantive life-content we have indicated above, and deliberately commits himself to that. It is at some such elevation, where the mere accidents of unmediated individuality vanish altogether, that we find the tragic heroes of dramatic art, whether they be the living representatives of such spheres of concrete life or in any other way already so derive their greatness and stability from their own free self-reliance that they stand forth as works of sculpture, and thus the lofty tragic characters of the Greeks also interpret the essentially more abstract statues and figures of gods more completely than is possible for any other kind of elucidation or commentary.

Broadly speaking, we may, therefore, affirm that the true theme of primitive tragedy is the godlike. But by godlike we do not mean the Divine, as implied in the content of the religious consciousness simply