ASPECTS OF DRAMATIC TRAGEDY

A Comparative Essay Based upon Aristotle's Poetics

John Dryden's An Essay of Dramatick Poesy

and Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man"

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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### CHAPTER

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ABSTRACT

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The rise and decline of tragedy in drama in at least two periods of Western society allows the possibility that this form of art will flourish again. The question may be asked whether tragedy should survive as an ideal, having perfected its form, or as an idea, allowing for further development. As it is possible that there is a development and continuity in the idea of tragedy which extends to and includes the present rather than being limited to the two great periods of tragedy, this thesis seeks to determine whether the critical theory and writing of dramatic art of one period has relevance to subsequent periods and other countries.

Therefore, this essay compares the approaches to tragedy in fifth-century Greece, sixteenth and seventeenth-century England and
France, and twentieth-century America, using Aristotle's Poetics, Dryden's An Essay of Dramatick Poesy, and Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man" as bases for a discussion of selected plays in each of the periods. It is apparent from the diversity of tragic forms which this essay considers that an application of rules to tragedy (either Aristotle's or those based upon modern writing or theory), rather than limiting by rigidly defining, should help to distinguish apparent tragic value from real tragic value. As Aristotle seems to allow the possibility of new development in tragedy and as great tragedy was written in the Elizabethan Age in a form different from Aristotle's criteria for the best kind of tragedy, the possibility of new development should include the present.

This essay concludes that the idea of tragedy exists in the drama written today, and that tragedy, to a greater or lesser degree, is vested in the representative of this age, the "common man" to whom Miller refers. While this paper does not suggest that Aristotle's rules are the only criteria which should be applied to dramatic tragedy, it does suggest that an application may be made of the wisdom derived from a study of Aristotle's Poetics to modern drama.
CHAPTER 1

ARISTOTLE AND TRAGEDY IN FIFTH CENTURY GREECE

The rise and decline of tragedy as drama in at least two periods of Western society allows the possibility that this form of art will flourish again. The question may be asked whether tragedy should survive as an ideal, having perfected its form, or as an idea, allowing for further development. It is possible that a rigid adherence to an ideal of tragedy would merely atrophy a vital form of art rather than preserving its integrity. Critics have for centuries pondered upon the form that drama should take. For instance, Aristotle, in his Poetics, offered precepts for the plays of fifth-century Attica; Dryden, in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, compared the drama of Elizabethan England and the French neo-classic period, both with each other and with the drama and theory of the Greek age of tragedy; and Arthur Miller, in "Tragedy and the Common Man," presented arguments for the possibility of tragedy in terms of man in modern society. As it is possible that there is a development and continuity in the idea of tragedy which extends to and includes the present rather than being limited to the two great periods of tragedy, this thesis seeks to determine whether the critical theory and writing of dramatic art of one
period has relevance to subsequent periods and other countries. Therefore, following a discussion of Aristotle's primary criteria for tragedy and their application in representative Greek plays, the procedure will be to consider selected examples of Elizabethan, French neo-classic, and modern American tragedies in terms of both the previous and contemporary approaches to the theory and writing of tragedy.

Any generalization made about Aristotle's *Poetics* is based upon an imperfect text. All that we have are translations of what are believed to be lecture notes, either Aristotle's own or those written down by a student. Of the three manuscripts which form the basis of later editions of the *Poetics*, the earliest and most authoritative, known as Parisium 1741, dates from the eleventh century; a later manuscript, Riccardianus 46, has independent readings; and the third, a tenth century Arabic translation, is derived from a Syriac translation (now lost, except for part of Chapter 6) of a Greek manuscript dating from before the seventh century A.D. The Arabic text is generally considered to be unreliable, neither the Syrians nor the Arabians having had any great awareness of the meaning of tragedy. As there are textual differences between the Parisium 1741, the Riccardianus 46, and the Arabic manuscripts, suggesting that scholia (explanatory notes) possibly were inserted and that changes were made to the language after Aristotle's death, systematic attempts have been made by scholars such as Montmollin and Else to remove "incoherencies and inconsistencies by distinguishing different layers of composition,"
a somewhat dangerous procedure, as evidence of later additions and interpolations is always indirect.

Because it is not possible to solve many of the textual problems presented by the Poetics, there is no definitive text. Even the most literal of translations is subject to a sort of "disguised commentary," for innumerable choices have to be made when rendering a Greek passage into English, and such choices are necessarily dependent upon assumptions which the translator makes about the larger meaning of Aristotle's argument.

Aristotle defines tragedy as "an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language that has been artistically enhanced by each of the kinds of linguistic adornment, applied separately in the various parts of the play; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents." According to Aristotle, plot is the most important part of drama. The tragic plot, being an imitation of the action, is the arrangement of the events, or incidents, in the play. He suggests that tragedy is the imitation of a complete and whole action having a proper magnitude, and that to be whole is to have a beginning.

a middle, and an end. He elaborates upon this definition:

By a beginning, I mean that which is itself not, by necessity after anything else but after which something naturally is or develops. By an "end" I mean exactly the opposite: that which is naturally after something else, either necessarily or customarily, but after which there is nothing else. . . It is necessary, therefore, that well-constructed plots not begin by chance, anywhere, nor end anywhere, but that they conform to the distinctions that have been made above. (1451a 8-17).

As a plot is a unity, being an imitation of a complete action, Aristotle suggests that "it is necessary that the parts of the action be put together in such a way that if any one part is transposed or removed, the whole will be disordered and disunified" (1451a 22-25).

He defines plot further, distinguishing between simple and complex action (1452a 1-10). While simple action represents a change of fortune without reversal of situation (a change by which the action veers round to its opposite) and without recognition (a change from ignorance to knowledge), a complex action upon which the best tragedies are based, is one in which the change of fortune is accompanied by reversal, or by recognition, or by both. He considers an episodic plot, one in which the events follow each other without regard for the laws of probability, to be the worst kind of plot (1452a 49-51).

Poets do not, according to Aristotle, create action in order to imitate character, although character is included on account of the action. Without action tragedy would be impossible, but without character it would still be possible (1450a 59). It follows that "since the imitation is of an action and is accomplished by certain agents, the sort of men these agents are is necessarily
dependent upon their character) (1450a 24-27). "Character" refers to the "element in accordance with which we say that agents are of a certain type" (1450a 34-35), for it is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids.

An application of these criteria for plot and character to representative Greek plays should be helpful in determining their relevance to the Greek period.

Although Prometheus Bound is of the proper magnitude, taking possible two hours to perform, has an action which is a unity in that it has a beginning (Prometheus is nailed to the precipice on the confines of the world), a middle (Prometheus' resistance to the tyrant god, Zeus), and an end (Prometheus is presumably buried in rock as the cliff face is shattered by lightning), a problem arises with respect to Aristotle's rule of natural continuity of events. As Prometheus is bound to a rock by "brazen bonds no hand can loose," he is literally rendered immobile and Aeschylus has to resort to various strategems in order to overcome the inactivity of his hero. Prometheus is therefore visited by a series of gods and one mortal, Io. The order in which these visits occur, does not appear to be based upon probability or necessity, for they could be transposed with little effect upon the whole. However, Aristotle states quite clearly that the tragic plot is the "imitation of an action," and that "plot means the arrangement of the incidents" (1450a 32-33). These visits made to Prometheus constitute a series

of incidents, albeit episodic, which contribute to an increasing tension. The Chorus of Oceanids offers Prometheus sympathy; Oceanus urges submission; Io reaffirms Zeus' cruelty; and Hermes, threatening even greater punishment, orders Prometheus to reveal his secret. Each of Prometheus' speeches contributes to the forward movement of the action, for his is the "authentic voice of will which rises superior to physical bondage." Prometheus knows what his fate is to be: "All this ere he [Hermes] uttered his message I knew" (p. 41), and yet he declares that Zeus will not destroy him. The incidents climax with Prometheus sinking slowly from sight, presumably to be "enfolded in the harsh and rock-ribbed embrace" of the "rugged cliff" as it is rent by "thunder and hurtling fires" (p. 40). Prometheus' change of fortune, although not from good to bad as Aristotle suggests, is at least of the type which Aristotle considers to be suitable for the best kind of tragedy, for it changes from bad to worse. The plot, finally, is simple; there is no reversal, since the act which results in his being nailed to the rock took place before the action of the play commenced, and there is no recognition, for Prometheus clearly foresees his fate.

Prometheus' character is clearly defined, in that it reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things he chooses or avoids. Prometheus has attempted to save mankind, or at least to provide them with fire, and his championing of a race which a stronger god had decided to destroy has led to his present plight.

Prometheus does not regret his act. He is disdainfully silent while he is being bound to the rock, indignant at Zeus' cruelty, and defiant when confronted with the threat of further torture. He is the unrepentant benefactor of mankind. As myth is basic to this drama, the concern is with divine purpose rather than with human motive, and therefore character elaboration is limited to the minimal requirements of the plot. Prometheus exhibits no development of character; what he was at the beginning, he is at the end. His first words, "Behold what I, a god, endure of evil from the gods" (p. 9), are echoed by his final words as he slowly sinks from sight, "Behold what wrongs I endure" (p. 42).

Although *Prometheus Bound* has unity of action, the play is in fact one of a trilogy. The other two plays, *Prometheus Unbound* and *Pyrphoros* have not survived. The only trilogy of Aeschylus which has survived is the *Oresteia*.

The *Oresteia*, consisting of the *Agamemnon*, *The Choephoroe*, and *The Eumenides*, presents a serious action which involves a noble family, the well-being of a city-state, the principle of justice, and the necessity of a law to govern men and gods. The theme concerns sin and punishment, which results in further pollution and punishment, leading toward eventual annihilation of the House of Atreus. Divine grace offers a solution, but not, however, until the final play of the trilogy. This fact suggests that Aeschylus' conception of unity of action may not be the same as Aristotle's for the *Oresteia's* unity of action extends over three plays. The murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra in the first
play compels Orestes' action in the second and provides grounds for his legal defense in the third. Thus, each of the three tragedies represents only a part of the total action, for it is only after the resolution achieved in the third play that "there is nothing else" (1451a 12).

The first part of this triadic unity of action is presented in the Agamemnon, where the emphasis, for most of the plot, is placed upon the justification for Clytemnestra's action. The sacrifice by Agamemnon of her daughter Iphigeneia is dwelt upon early in the play, and is recalled again after Agamemnon's murder when Clytemnestra, having been told by the Chorus to "go forth . . . accursed and forlorn/To hate and scorn!" defends her action:

Ye had no voice of old to launch such doom
On him my husband, when he held as light
My daughter's life as that of sheep or goat
Yea, slew in sacrifice his child and mine
To lull and lay the gales that blew from Thrace.

Another wrong to Clytemnestra is stressed by the concubine Cassandra: "Ay, 'tis for me, the prey he bore from Troy,/That she hath sworn his death, and edged the steel" (p. 97). Clytemnestra's adulterous relationship with Aegisthus is given prominence only at the end of the play, just before the second stage of the action, The Choephoroe, in which Orestes revenges his father's murder. The emphasis upon this relationship allows the audience to sympathize with Orestes' mission of matricide. At the end of The Choephoroe, Orestes, after having dutifully murdered his mother, is pursued by the avenging

Furies of his dead mother. The Chorus wonder whether Orestes is a savior or a "Doom," appearing to admit the possibility that the Law of Dike (requital of wrongs) and the Law of Hybris (one outrage begets another until the day of reckoning comes) may still prevail. Orestes, like his father, has defiled his hands with kindred blood. This is clearly an open ending to the play. The situation is resolved in The Eumenides, for the powers which had instigated the human actions in the first two plays appear in person. The avenging Erinyes, who feed on the blood of the murderers of kin, confront the Olympic gods, the representatives of the new order of civic justice. The Court of Areopagus, presided over by Athena, acquits Orestes. Athena placates the infuriated Erinyes by promising them that they will become earth deities of Attica, whose extended powers will include blessing the increase of crops, herds, and family. Thus the end of The Eumenides unifies the action of the whole trilogy, for it demonstrates an acceptable and possible reconciliation between Zeus and the Furies (Erinyes), and emphasizes the resultant prosperity of Attica.

Although the action of these three plays generally follows the cause and effect sequence of events advocated by Aristotle, in that each act of pollution engenders revenge which, in turn, is fresh pollution, certain instances are noted where the events are at variance with this rule of necessity. One such instance, in which

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effect does not follow from cause, occurs with the Chorus' reaction to the news that most of the returning fleet of Atreus has been destroyed in a storm. The Herald describes the "raving storm" which caused the "Aegian sea-field to be flecked with flowers of death, corpses of Grecian men and shattered hulls" (p. 73). He proffers the faint hope that Menelaus may have survived. The Herald departs and the Chorus proceeds to comment upon Helen, the ruin of Troy, hybris, and justice (pp. 74-77). The lost fleet is never mentioned again. Although this appears to be a less than natural reaction, Professor Kitto suggests that as the emphasis of the plot is focused upon the theme of crime and punishment, remarks by the Chorus on the loss of the fleet would have been redundant (p. 107). In contrast to this emphasis upon larger, more universal issues, much of the elaborate account of Orestes' supposed death in The Choephoroe is possibly redundant, for most of the details could be removed and the whole would not be disordered and disunified. Another instance of possible redundancy occurs in the same play. Orestes lays a lock of his hair upon his father's grave as a sign of mourning. Electra enters to pour libations in prayer upon the tomb, and discovers the lock of hair. As it resembles her own, she concludes that Orestes must have sent it. She next notices footprints which are also like her own. Although the lock of hair and the footprints appear to be tokens, or "external signs," Orestes' appearance, which follows immediately, seems to obviate their necessity.

Kitto suggests that the lock of hair and the footprints serve to display Electra's inner emotion, and for this reason appear to be necessary (p. 81).
Aristotle states:

Of the kinds of recognitions that occur, there is one... that is least artistic, which poets mainly use through poverty of their inspiration. This is the form of recognition that is achieved through external signs; some of these are birthmarks ... scars... necklaces... (1455a 2-11).

The lock of hair appears to belong to this category, for even inanimate things of the most trivial kind may be in a sense objects of recognition (1452b 17-18). Electra reasons (another kind of recognition (1455a 39)) that "none living could have shorn such hair--save one" (p. 48). She concludes, using a composite kind of recognition involving false inference (1455a 51-52), that Orestes sent the lock of hair "in homage to his sire" (p. 48). Aristotle also indicates that the use of tokens for the express purpose of proof is a less artistic mode of recognition (1455a 16-17). In order to prove his identity, Orestes shows Electra a piece of embroidery which is the work of her own hand. Although this token achieves the desired result, for it causes Electra to recognize him as her brother, Aristotle quite clearly would have preferred a more artistic mode of recognition--one, for instance, which "arises from the incidents themselves" (1455a 57-58), where the startling discovery is made by natural means.

The natural means which Aristotle stresses in plot construction is extended also to characterization. It is necessary, for instance, that the dramatist aim at propriety (1454b 9). There is, he suggests, a type of manly valor; but valor in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness, is inappropriate. Clytemnestra states that hers is merely the hand that slew Agamemnon, and that the will and
the revenge belong to the "Old Avenger":

The Old Avenger, stern of mood
For Atreus and his feast of blood,
Hath struck the lord of Atreus' house.
And in the semblence of his wife
The king hath slain--
Yea, for the murdered children's life,
A chieftain's in requital ta'en.

(p. 108).

Yet other characters in the play view the situation somewhat differently. Cassandra, for instance, considers Clytemnestra to be "loathsome," and her act to be unnatural for a woman:

O aweless soul! the woman slays her lord--
Woman? What loathsome monster of the earth
Were fit companion?

(p. 96).

The Chorus calls her "fiend of the race," "stern, manful, and imperious," like some "grim raven, perched upon the slain / Exulting o'er the crime..."(p. 107). These character traits are inappropriate for a woman. A woman's place in Greek society, while somewhat above a slave's, was below a man's. A man may be "stern, manful, and imperious;" a woman may not be. A "character must be true to life" (1454b 13).

Although Aristotle emphasizes the necessity of appropriate character traits, he is aware that dramatic practice does not always accord with dramatic theory. He therefore suggests that although the subject of the imitation, who suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be "consistently inconsistent" (1454b 19). Clytemnestra remains firm in her desire to revenge her daughter's death. She exhibits no weakness of resolution, no hint of nervous strain before her act of murder, and no suggestion of hysterical collapse after she has achieved her revenge. Although her character is inconsistent
with that of a woman, on Aristotelean terms she remains "consistently inconsistent."

In contrast to the consistency of Clytemnestra, the actions of Agamemnon in the "Carpet Scene" appear to be inconsistent with his character (p. 83). Agamemnon states that it would be wrong to tread upon the tapestry placed in his pathway by Clytemnestra and the servant-women:

Such pomp beseems the gods,  
Not me. A mortal man to set his foot  
On these rich dyes? I hold such pride in fear,  
And bid thee honour me as man, not god.  
(p. 83).

Yet even though he is aware that "to trample thus and mar a thing of price [is] wasting the wealth of garments silver-worth" (p. 84), he proceeds. Such an act would have been considered by a fifth-century Greek audience to be recklessly hubristic. Agamemnon knows that "mortal hubris and divine jealousy or envy (phthonos) are... interlocked," for as he is about to step upon the tapestry, he prays: "Let none among the gods look down / With jealous eye on me" (p. 84). It is possible that he is succumbing to temptation by Clytemnestra to commit an overt act of pride which may provoke the wrath of the gods. In this event, there could be also inconsistency in the characterization, for Agamemnon previously demonstrated a desire to accede to the demands of the gods when he dutifully sacrificed his daughter as Artemis commanded. He clearly desired, in that instance, to appease the gods rather than provoke their wrath.

But if he is acceding to Clytemnestra's wishes out of a sense of
courtesy or because he does not wish to offend those who honor him
as a returning hero, even though his action may bring swift
retribution from the gods, then his behavior seems to be consistent
with his character. However, apart from these possible interpreta-
tions of Agamemnon's act, the facts, according to the text, are
quite clear. Agamemnon, after stating that he would not walk on
the tapestry, does so. This, according to Aristotelean criteria,
can only be viewed as inconsistency.

Aristotle makes a further comment about portrayal of
character that is related to consistency when he suggests that the
poet should always aim "either at the necessary or the probable"
(1454b 28). Thus a person of a given character should speak or act
in a given way, by the rule either of necessity or of probability.
For the first time in the House of Atreus' cycle of pollution and
revenge, the motives of the avenger are pure, for Orestes is bound
by, and acts in accordance with, duty to the dead. Although his
duty is an act of revenge involving matricide, the horror of his
act is not emphasized as the conflict is cosmic rather than
psychological. Thus, Orestes' doubt at the moment of killing is
quickly resolved. He asks Pylades if his reverence must spare his
mother and his friend, in three lines, settles all doubt, for he
reminds Orestes that his act is Apollo's command. Orestes represents,
in this instance, a "few emotions speaking appropriate sentences."

11 Gilbert Norwood, Greek Tragedy (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.,
As it is the situation rather than the character which inspires the horror, elaboration of character would detract attention from the cosmic nature of the plot (Kitto, p. 103). Therefore, Orestes' character is consistent, for he speaks and acts according to necessity or probability.

It is evident from these plays of Aeschylus, that he was concerned with "order, and the way in which, once order is disturbed, 12 disorder grows and spreads." As his method was to present events in relation to a central event, the trilogy form which allows the presentation of events spanning generations was well-suited to his needs. It is clear that Aeschylus' drama, with its unity based upon the trilogy, its cosmic point of view, and its emphasis upon the interrelation of men and gods makes virtually no contact with Aristotle's system.

In contrast, Sophocles' tragedy, in spite of background which is similar to that of Aeschylus', appears to be much closer to Aristotle's concepts. For instance, although the three plays which comprise Sophocles' Theban series are concerned with the same legend, 13 they were neither conceived and executed at the same time, nor written with a single purpose, for in each play, Sophocles' treatment of the myth varied to some degree. For example, at the end of

13 The Antigone apparently was written first, about 440 B.C.; Oedipus Rex was second, written probably during the early or middle years of the Peloponnesian war which began in 431 B.C.; and Oedipus at Colonus was written last, presumably near the end of his life, for it was produced posthumously. D.W. Lucas, The Greek Tragic Poets (London: Cohen and West, 1950), p. 131.
Oedipus Rex, Creon has undisputed authority in Thebes, but in the Antigone it appears that after Oedipus' expulsion the loyalty of the Chorus is given to the sons of Oedipus rather than to Creon. In Oedipus at Colonus, the two sons, although at first willing to allow Creon to succeed, decide to take over the monarchy themselves and proceed to quarrel over the throne. Creon apparently has no voice in the matter. These thematic differences indicate that Sophocles intended each of the plays to be a single, complete action.

The action of Oedipus Rex represents the self-discovery of Oedipus. The blind seer Tiresias declares:

He shall be proved father and brother both
  to his own children in his house; to her that
  gave him birth, a son and husband both;
  a fellow sower in his father's bed
  with that same father that he murdered.14

The play's action, as the characters grope toward "something that was there before," unfolds the truth of this "god-inspired exposure of the myth's essentials" (Jones, p. 202). The plot of Oedipus Rex, therefore, represents a single, whole action.

An instance of reversal, a characteristic of the best tragedies according to Aristotle, occurs in Oedipus Rex. Aristotle states that "...in Oedipus the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus and to remove his fears in regard to his mother; but by showing him who he actually is he accomplishes the very opposite effect" (1452b 4-9). This example of reversal of situation is, as Aristotle notes, coincident with recognition, for recognition is a

change from ignorance to knowledge. Oedipus now knows that he himself is the murderer he seeks.

It is possible that Oedipus' fate was inevitable, for his destiny had been predicted by the oracle Phoebus at Pytho:

... he foretold other and desperate horrors to befall me, that I was fated to lie with my mother, and show to daylight an accursed breed which men would not endure, and I was doomed to be the murderer of the father that begot me.

(11. 790-793).

It would thus appear that Oedipus' character may not have been the determining factor of his fortunes. However, Oedipus was probably morally culpable, at least to some degree, in killing Laius. If this is so, his act fulfills another of Aristotle's requirements for tragedy, for "unqualifiedly good human beings must not appear to fall from good fortune to bad;[as] that is neither pitiable nor fearful; it is, rather, repellent" (1453a 8-11). In addition to his probable moral culpability, Oedipus displays other less admirable qualities. While he is portrayed as a good king, for his desire is to save his city by cleansing it of its pollution, and although he excells where others do not, for he alone was able to solve the riddle of the sphinx, he is quick to anger, as he demonstrated in his encounter with Laius, and quick to suspect that Creon and Tiresias are plotting against him; and he suggests, with near contempt, that the gods' human ministers are fallible (11. 369-371, 433-434). Oedipus, because of his hubristic qualities, is a man like ourselves, and as such is a necessary part of a well-constructed plot (1453a 21-33). Oedipus' hamartia is that he does not know who
he is. It is only with the combined knowledge of the Theban and Corinthian herdsmen that Oedipus' identity is revealed. The play ends with the choric gesture: "Behold, citizens of Thebes--this is Oedipus" (1. 1524). The single action is completed.

While it appears the Oedipus Rex fulfills Aristotle's requirements for the best kind of tragedy, Oedipus at Colonus, at least in some respects, does not. Aristotle contends that the misfortune of the tragic hero should be brought about by some error or frailty. Creon indicates Oedipus' tragic flaw when he says, "Anger has always been your greatest sin!" (p. 128); but Oedipus' fall occurred twenty years before the action of this play. There is no fall from prosperity to adversity in Oedipus at Colonus.

Aristotle designates as terrible or pitiful those circumstances which involve the killing of a person by one who is closely related (1454a 27-30). Oedipus sends his son Polyneices to his death; but that death does not take place within the unity of this action. Oedipus dies, but not as the result of an act of violence. No killing takes place in this play which will cause the audience to shudder and feel pity (1453b 6).

In section XIII, Aristotle states that plays which end unhappily have the right ending, and are the most tragic in effect. It is tragically ironic that only in death (or at least in departure from the world of men) can Oedipus find release from suffering. When Ismene informs him that the latest sentences of the oracle prophesy that the gods who threw him down sustain him now, he replies, "Slight favor, now that I am old! My doom was early" (p. 102). His acceptance of death does not imply joyful acceptance, for he weeps.
upon leaving his daughters. However, as he is regarded as a hero at the time of his death, the ending of the play, in terms of Greek tragedy, is a happy one. Aristotle does not consider a happy ending to be the best kind for a tragedy.

Although *Oedipus at Colonus* is, according to Aristotle's criteria, less tragic than *Oedipus Rex* (for in that play there is the tragic flaw, the change from prosperity to adversity, and the killing of a person by one who is closely related), the pity which the audience feels for this man whose misfortunes have been perhaps more than he deserved and the fear which is inspired as the audience identify with one like themselves fulfill the purpose of Greek tragedy which is to lead to an understanding of man's place in the universe, and by arousing pity and fear to affect the intellectual purgation of these emotions.

The *Antigone* also leads to an understanding of man's place in the universe, for the plot concerns the conflict between the decrees of Creon and the "gods' unwritten and unfailing laws." The conflict concerning the single action of Polyneices' burial, fulfills Aristotle's stipulation that tragedy should be an imitation, not of men, but of an action. Creon's original act around which the structure of the plot is built sets in motion a cause and effect sequence of events which involves Antigone's response to Creon's decree, her punishment by Creon, and her final vindication.

16 Kitto suggests that it is necessary to assume two central characters, otherwise the construction of the play would be faulty, with Antigone appearing only in the first half and Eurydice's death
Creon, like Oedipus before him, considers the interests of his city-state to be primary. As Polyneices is a traitor to the state, for he attempted to take Thebes by force, Creon denies him burial. Antigone, impelled by duty to the dead, claims a law higher than Creon's:

Nor did I think your edicts were so strong
That any mortal man should override
The gods unwritten and undying laws.
Their life is not today and yesterday
But always, and none knoweth whence they came.

(11. 450-7).

Exhibiting a strength of purpose and an arrogance inappropriate to a Greek woman, Antigone sets herself above Creon's law and, as religious duty to kin requires, buries her brother. Her apprehension and punishment follow. Creon changes his mind in response not to good advice, but to the threats of Tiresias:

Know well the sun will not have rolled its course
Many more days, before you come to give
Corpse for these corpses, child of your own loins.
For you have confused the upper and lower worlds.
You sent a life to settle in a tomb.
You keep up here that which belongs below
The corpse unburied, robbed of its release.
Not you, nor any god that rules on high
Can claim him now.
You rob the nether gods of what is theirs.
So the pursuing horrors lie in wait
To track you down.

(11. 1066-1078).

Creon realizes (or "recognizes), too late, that it is "best to hold relevant only to Creon. Antigone's tragic fate is decided in the first few verses, while Creon's grows through the play. This "double foundation" balances the structure of the plot (pp. 126,127).

17 Athenians denied traitors burial in Attic soil. They were, however, normally buried outside Attica, not simply left, their pres-in a realm to which they no longer belonged an offense to the gods. Lucas, The Greek Tragic Poets, p. 139.
the laws of old tradition to the end of life" (1. 1114). His statement that he "can fight necessity no more" (1. 1106) suggests, perhaps, that his decision is based not upon repentance, but upon common sense. But he has learned his lesson at the expense of kin, for before he can release Antigone from her tomb, she has taken her own life; her death causes Haemon's suicide; and his death, in turn, causes Eurydice's suicide. Creon learns his "lesson in sorrow" (1. 1271). Although it is "a god who struck...with disaster" (1. 1272), it is a "doom [Creon] brought on himself" (1. 1260). The play demonstrates that the gods "punish pride and irreverence" (Bowra, p. 68) and that men learn by suffering. Sophocles, in this play, provides a vision of life in which divinity shapes our ends; he neither guesses at divine purpose, nor pretends to find divine harmony with human justice. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the play leads to an understanding of man's place in the universe.

In these plays by Sophocles, the sense of an ever-present divine purpose lends thematic unity to his style. The beginning and end and the sequence of events are all part of a single action concerning prophecy and fulfillment (Lucas, The Greek Tragic Poets, p. 230). Although Sophocles' stories are derived from sources similar to those used by Euripides, the latter's treatment of his

19 Kitto states that there is "no dramatic canon that demands that victims should have faults: hardness and decisiveness were given to Antigone to explain her rebellion and suicide. The chief agent is Creon; his is the character; his the faults and merits, which are immediately relevant to the play. Therefore Antigone becomes much more natural, relieved of the burden of Aristotelianism, no longer the standard bearer of the Unwritten Laws" (p. 129).
subject matter is, as Aristotle notes in the *Poetics* (1453a 54-4), somewhat different. A necessity based on prophecy and fulfillment which characterizes the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles becomes transformed in the plays of Euripides into a necessity based upon individual character (Jones, p. 261). Rather than an imitation not of human beings but of action and life, involving a "god-like impersonal vitality" (Jones, p. 242), Euripides stresses the dramatic individual, imposing a new conception of individual responsibility upon traditional Greek ideas (Lucas, *The Greek Tragic Poets*, pp. 178, 242).

A vivid illustration of his method is the Medea, which presents man, not in relation to the gods but to the forces that work within him. The entire action of the play is determined by the passion of Medea. While her actions are motivated solely by revenge, her torment is occasioned by the contending forces of intellect and passion.

Although Medea is eminently dramatic, she is not Aristotelean, as she is not a "character compounded of good and bad, in whom what is bad tragically brings down in ruin what is good, for she was never really different from what we see her to be . . ." (Kitto, pp. 191-196). Prior to the action of this play, her love for Jason had caused her to betray her father, murder her brother, and arrange a horrible end to Pelias in Iolcus; and now, in this play, spurned by

20 Early Greeks had no word for "will." Decisions were considered to be arrived at intellectually. Powerful, seemingly irrational impulse was believed to be derived from an outside force, often a god, limiting the responsibility of the individual.
Jason and desiring revenge, she murders his new bride, the bride's father, and finally, the culminating horror, Jason's (and her own) children. According to Aristotle, the worst but one deed of violence is for kinsman to slay kinsman, knowing whom he is slaying (1454a 59-60). In the murder of the new bride, the bride's father, and the children, there is no tragic relief for they have done nothing to warrant such suffering. They are victims, not of the laws of nature or of gods or of tragic error, but of Medea's rage. There is no outlet for pity.

Medea also acts with the unscrupulous cleverness which Aristotle considers to be inappropriate in a woman. She uses guile to achieve her purpose, persuading Creon to allow her one day's grace before expelling her from the state, and convincing Jason that their children should be allowed to win favor with his new bride by presenting her with gifts.

In order for Medea's revenge to be complete, she must escape punishment. Euripides therefore breaks the sequence of causation, providing both a deus ex machina contrivance in the form of the sun god's chariot and, in Aegeus' fortuitous appearance and his willingness to provide for Medea in his own state, a haven to which she may flee. Aristotle states that the solution of the plot should emerge from the story itself; it should not require the use of the supernatural, as it does in the Medea (1454b 30-32).

Euripides uses a different approach to drama in the Alcestis which was presented as the fourth play in a tetralogy, the position

The Cretan Women, Alcmeone in Psophis, Telephus, and Alcestis.
usually reserved for a satyr-play. A satyr-play, however, such as the Cyclops (the only complete example of the genre to survive), is characterized by a chorus of satyrs who serve the nature god Dionysius and act as a "farcical backdrop to the traditional mythological heroes of tragedy." However, the Alcestis has no satyrs and no openly farcical scenes, although there are comic scenes. The play does have a happy ending, but this is not unusual in Greek tragedy as the Ion, Iphigenia in Tauris, and Helen demonstrate. An apparent flaw is the lack of a convincing unity of structure.

For instance, Alcestis sacrifices her life for a weak and selfish husband; her death scene is the setting for a coarse quarrel between Admetus and Pheres; the house of mourning echoes with the sounds of Heracles' tipsy revelry because Admetus, in spite of his wife's death, is the perfect host; and Alcestis is denied the full measure of her sacrifice, for she is brought back apparently from the dead, and is accepted by her husband. However, at the moment he accepts her, he believes her to be (the final irony) a stranger.

It is clear from these plays that each of the three Greek tragedians had a different approach to dramatic art. Aeschylus was concerned primarily with divine order in the universe; while Sophocles, according to Aristotle, said that he created characters as they ought to be; Euripides as they are (1461a 42-44). Aristotle was aware of these different approaches to tragedy, even acknowledging

23 Ivan Linforth, "The Importance of Admetus," in Wilson, p. 108.
that criteria other than his were valid in achieving a tragic effect, for he stated that "Euripides, even if, in other matters he does not manage things well, nevertheless appears to be the most tragic of the poets" (1453a 54-56).

With the death of Euripides in 407-6 B.C. and of Sophocles in 406-5 B.C., the period of great Greek tragedy as we know it was over. Although tragedy continued to be produced and theaters became more numerous, there were no longer writers of the stature of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

When Aeschylus died just before the middle of the fifth century, the Greek world view was about to undergo a radical change. The whole meaning of Greek society was being questioned. Where there had been acceptance of traditional beliefs there was now speculation. Pagan belief, with its close rapport between men and gods, slowly gave way to ideas which concerned fortune and chance. It may have been no more than a coincidence, but as the rift grew between the ideal and the real, in terms of a belief in the close interaction between men and gods, great tragedy such as Aristotle chose to lecture on became a thing of the past. Theophrastus, who succeeded Aristotle as head of the Peripatetic School, defined tragedy simply as "a change in a hero's fortunes" (De Poematibus, 8, 1), perhaps indicating that the concept of tragedy was changing in the late

During the third century B.C., in Alexandria, tragedy as an art was briefly revived. Great drama by poets such as the Pleiad was presented at Dionysian festivals. Although drama seems to have been produced down to the time of Hadrian, who died in A.D.138, after the era during which the seven dramatists who comprised the Pleiad flourished, the age of great tragedy was over.

fourth century, and that Aristotle's teaching that tragedy is not an imitation of human beings was being sceptically received in "light of their experience of Euripidean creations like Medea" (Jones, p. 276).

Although the tragic hero survived in popular tragic narratives during the Middle Ages, there was no dramatic tragedy. It was not until the Renaissance that tragedy as drama experienced a significant revival, developing along distinctly different lines in England and France.

CHAPTER 2

DRYDEN AND TRAGEDY IN SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND AND FRANCE

John Dryden compares this different development in An Essay of Dramatick Poesy, published in 1668, attempting to put "order and meaning into the literary past." His purpose in so doing, was to provide lessons which could be learned for the theater of his own time.

In his essay, which is presented in dialogue form, Dryden's speakers assume with Aristotle that the object of art is the imitation of nature. However, Dryden's definition of a play differs from Aristotle's. According to Aristotle, "tragedy is an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude" (1450a 5-6). Dryden, on the other hand, proposes that a play is "a just a lively Image of Humane Nature, representing its Passions and Humours, and the Changes of Fortune to which it is subject" (11. 232-6). A comparison of the two definitions reveals certain


basic differences in the concept of drama. Aristotle believes that a tragedy should imitate a single action; Dryden proposes that a play should imitate human nature. The action represented, according to Aristotle, should be noble and complete and of the proper magnitude; the representation of human nature, according to Dryden, should include its passions, humors, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject. These distinctions between Aristotle's and Dryden's definitions may be equated, with certain exceptions, with the distinctions between Elizabethan and French neo-classic tragedy, for French tragedy adhered closely to its interpretation of Aristotelian criteria for drama, while Elizabethan tragedy followed, in part, the tradition of English medieval drama.

Lisideius, the Francophile in Dryden's essay, commends the French for the "unity of Action in all their Plays . . . for they do not burden themselves with under-plots, as the English do." Two distinct actions carried on together, he proposes, confuse the audience, for "before they are warm in their concernments for one part, [they] are diverted to another; and by that means espouse the interest of neither" (11. 892-901). Neander, assumed to be the voice of Dryden, defends the national honor of the English, claiming that although the French are superior in contriving "their Plots more regularly" (11. 1215), such plots are not necessarily the best means of achieving a "lively imitation of Nature" (1. 1222), for "... those beauties of the French poesie ... are ... the Beauties of a Statue, but not of a Man" (1. 1224-7). A play should

The distinctions noted are limited, in terms of this paper, to those which concern plot and character.
imitate human nature (1. 232).

A play such as Marlowe's Doctor Faustus appears to be of the type decried by Lisideius. It has a main plot and a comic underplot which seem, at first glance, to be "two distinct webbs in the play, like those in ill wrought stuff" (11. 896-7). It may be argued, on this basis, that such a presentation could confound and divert the interest of the audience and "by that means espouse the interest of neither." However, as the comic prose scenes parody the incidents in the main plot, it is clear that they are intended to be "an integral part of the total design of the play." For example, the roast mutton scene (I, iv, 11. 5-12) parodies the bargain Faustus will make with the devil, and demonstrates that the clown Robin has a greater understanding of the value of his soul than Faustus has of his own.

This dual structure in Marlowe's play derives from a tradition distinct from the Aristotelean tradition followed by French neo-classic dramatists. Doctor Faustus is demonstrably linked with medieval dramatic form. For instance, medieval plays such as Mankind and some of The Towneley Plays such as Murder of Abel, Doomsday, and the Second Shepherd's Play mixed farce with solemn scenes. Similarly, solemn and comic scenes are presented sequentially in Doctor Faustus. Plays such as The Castle of Perseverence and Mary Magdelene presented good and bad angels and the "Seven Deadly Sins," all of which appear in Doctor Faustus (II, ii; V, ii). Morality

plays were concerned with the devil and temptation. Faustus, in spite of Mephistophilis' warning to "leave these frivolous demands / Which strike terror into [Mephistophilis'] fainting soul" (I,iii,81-2), is tempted to barter his soul in exchange for a period of twenty-four years during which the devil is to provide him with all that he demands:

Say he [Faustus] surrenders up to him [Lucifer] his soul,  
So he will spare him four and twenty years,  
Letting him live in all voluptuousness,  
Having thee [Mephistophilis] ever to attend on me,  
To give me whatsoever I shall ask,  
To tell me whatsoever I demand . . .

(I,iii,90-95).

Furthermore, like some morality plays, Doctor Faustus demonstrates the results of man's attempts to transgress the limits imposed upon knowledge by God. A desire for knowledge and power is, according to Renaissance concepts, a virtue; however, as the tragic end of Dr. Faustus illustrates, knowledge and power, if not directed towards the service of God and king, become negative and self-destructive. Finally, Doctor Faustus imitates "Humane Nature" generically, for there are "no details, no personal traits, no eccentricities or habits, nothing that is intimate or individual." The character of Dr. Faustus is the character of Everyman.

The relative merits of English and French drama are argued exhaustively in Dryden's essay. While Lisideius admires the unity of action of French plays and disparages English digressions, Neander proclaims the advantages of English plots over the

32 Una M. Ellis-Fermor, "Christopher Marlowe," in Ribner, p. 83.
"barrenness of French plots" (11. 1295). English plays, according to Neander, present a "variety and copiousness," for "besides the main design, they have under-plots or by-concernments, of less considerable Persons, and Intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main Plot . . ." (11. 1294-1302).

Shakespeare's tragedy King Lear presents an integrated plot such as Neander describes. The sub-plot concerning Gloucester, "a less considerable"person than Lear, affirms Lear's experience and increases the emotional intensity of the theme of regeneration. Both Lear and Gloucester progress from a state of spiritual blindness, in which each is unable to distinguish between the selfless affection and self-serving hypocrisy of others, to a state of spiritual regeneration. Both men die between extremes of joy and grief. Gloucester's heart "burst smilingly" when he becomes aware that he is reunited with his son Edgar; Lear dies, like Gloucester, "too weak the conflict to support" (V, iii, 197). However, the manner in which Lear dies has an ambiguity which is not apparent in Gloucester's death, for Lear is torn between the despair that he is eternally separated from his daughter Cordelia ("Thou'lt come no more./Never, never, never, never, never" (V, iii, 307-8)) and the poignant hope that she is alive ("This feather stirs; she lives! If it be so,/ It

Dryden demonstrates with Ben Jonson's The Silent Woman that English dramatists are capable of producing regularly formed drama. He states that "in the precepts laid down in Jonson's Discoveries, we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us" (11. 1674-7).

is a chance which redeems all sorrows. . ." (V, iii, 265-6)). Lear's death and the death of the innocent Cordelia present no moral conclusion; Shakespeare offers, rather, a vision of life which cannot, because of its "variety and copiousness," be resolved simplistically.

In addition to the sub-plot of Gloucester, all the elements of the play are "carried on with the motion of the main Plot." The Fool, for instance, is a reminder both to Lear and to the audience of Lear's initial folly (or hamartia). He tells Lear: "Thou had'st little within thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away" (I, iv, 177-8). His suggestion that "fathers that wear rags do make their children blind, but fathers that bear bags shall see their children kind" (II, iv, 48-50) is a harsh reality which is born out by the actions of Lear's daughters Goneril and Regan. The Fool also mirrors the basic conflict of good and evil forces in the play. Reason tells him that it would be wise to desert Lear. He advises Kent, Lear's loyal retainer, "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break they neck with following. . ." (II, iv, 72-4). The Fool himself, however, following an instinct which is not subject to the promptings of reason or to baser motives, remains loyal to Lear:

"That sin which serves and seeks for gain
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain,
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry; the Fool will stay,
And let the wise man fly.

The knave turns fool that runs away;  
The Fool no knave, perdy."

(II, iv, 79-86).

The "motion of the main Plot," after Lear's initial tragic error of dividing his kingdom and rejecting Cordelia, follows a continuous cause and effect sequence of events which culminates, with the last delayed act of Edmund, in the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. The inter-dependence of the fates of the characters in the main plot and sub-plot and the deaths of good characters as well as bad characters suggests that the conflict also concerns the universal powers of good and evil in the world. It is clear that the comprehensive theme and the "by-concernments . . . and Intrigues" impart the "variety and copiousness" to King Lear which Neander deems necessary for drama.

In addition to the distinction between the "variety and copiousness" of Elizabethan plays and the unity of action of French plays, the Elizabethan method of presenting stories which unfold the passions, humors, and changes of fortune to which human nature is subject contrasts with the French method of concentrating upon the dramatic moment. For example, while the events in Le Cid represent a period of twenty-four hours, those in Doctor Faustus represent twenty-four years. Faustus deteriorates, during this period, from noble mindedness to mere depravity. He trades his original eminent position in society for a place in Hell. A similar contrast may be

Lewis Campbell, in Tragic Drama in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare (New York: Russell and Russell, 1904), p. 264, suggests that the events, from beginning to end, appear to approach "the Aeschylean notion of moral chaos or inchoate morality." Clearly, there is no poetic justice in the final resolution.
made between the manner in which Phèdre and Macbeth are presented. While Racine presents the inception and growth of Phèdre's passion for Hippolyte as being antecedent to the action, preferring to limit the action to the day of Thésée's return, Shakespeare presents Macbeth's first hesitant, conscience-stricken yielding to ambition as the beginning of the action, tracing over an apparently lengthy period of time the passions, humors, and changes of fortune to which Macbeth is subject until the action ends with Macbeth's death.

In order to present the "Passions and Humours" of the characters in Macbeth, and to allow an insight into the conflicts which shape the action, Shakespeare makes effective use of the soliloquy. Each soliloquy traces the decline of the once "noble Macbeth" (I,ii,66), until, acknowledging the "moral isolation which he has brought upon himself" (Neilson, p. 1183), he muses:

I have lived long enough. My way of life Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf; And that which should accompany old age, As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have; but, in their stead, Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not. (V,iii,22-28).

He meets his prophesied end valiantly. The words used to describe Macbeth at the beginning of the action may be applied to his last act:

For brave Macbeth--well he deserved that name-- Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel, Which smoked with bloody execution, Like Valour's minion carv'd out his passage . . . (I,ii, 16-19).

Macbeth's original act of murder has achieved his own destruction.
This reversal of situation, represented in terms of a cause and effect sequence of events, unfolds the "passions and Humours" and the changes of fortune to which human nature is subject. While the play imitates, in terms of Aristotle's definition, a single action (the cause and effect sequence of events before and after the regicide) which is serious (the actions are those of persons of high degree and of public importance), complete (after Macbeth's death there is nothing else that follows naturally), and of a certain magnitude (the sequence of events representing the change of fortune is not so long that it cannot be easily embraced by the memory), the action nevertheless takes place over what must be a lengthy period of time. This clearly exceeds Aristotle's suggestion that tragedy should endeavor to confine itself as closely as possible to a single revolution of the sun (1449b 28-29).

In contrast to Elizabethan tragedy, the French neo-classic theater accepted on what it thought was the authority of Aristotle, the three unities of time, place, and action. Plot, therefore, was limited to a single action. For example, Racine, in his tragedy Phèdre, presents a single action which begins with the revelation of Phèdre's incestuous love for Hippolyte and ends with her suicide. All actions are subordinated to, and integrated with, the main action. The love between Hippolyte and Aricie, rather than being the basis for a sub-plot, serves to make Phèdre's jealousy possible, and allows Phèdre's "confession manquée" to appear both natural and probable. The love between Hippolyte and Aricie is therefore a necessary and integral part of the main plot. As the central figure, Phèdre

Bernard Weinberg, The Art of Jean Racine (Chicago: University
overshadows the other characters. Her incestuous passion for Hippolyte, with its attendant guilt, is the vital force which motivates all her actions, tragically bringing down in ruin what is good in her character, for her bondage to passion becomes bondage to evil. She reveals her love for Hippolyte to Oenone, declares her love to Hippolyte, allows Oenone to accuse Hippolyte falsely of incest, and remains silent about Hippolyte's innocence when she hears that he loves Aricie. Her guilt finally reaches unbearable proportions and she wishes, as she did at the beginning of the action, to die. Phèdre's statement to Oenone, "Je n'en mourrai pas moins, j'en mourrai plus coupable," made with her first confession of guilty love, becomes a reality, for her suicide, a slow death by poison, allows her, in the time it takes the poison to reach her heart, to exonerate Hippolyte, to admit her own guilty love ("C'est moi qui sur ce fils chaste et respectueux / Osai jeter un oeil profane, incestueux" (1. 1623)), and to blame Oenone for the false accusation against Hippolyte. Her death, she believes, will restore the purity which her presence defiles:

Dejà je ne vois plus qu'à travers un nuage
Et le ciel et l'époux que ma presence outrage;
Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté,
Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté.

(1. 1641).

She dies and the single action is complete.

Although Aristotle stresses the necessity of unity of action,
his reference to time is less restrictive; he merely suggests that tragedy should endeavor, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit (1449b 27-29). Dryden notes:

The unity of time, even Terence himself (who was the best and most regular of them) has neglected: His Heauton- 

or Self-Punisher takes up visibly two days . . . and Eurypides, in tying himself to one day, has committed an absurdity never to be forgiven him: for in one of his Tragedies he has made Theseus go from Athens to Thebes, which was about 40 English miles, under the walls of it to give battle, and appear victorious in the next Act; and yet from the time of his departure to the return of the Nuntius, who gives the relation of his victory, Aethra and the Chorus have but 36 Verses; which is not for every Mile a Verse.

(11. 608-620).

He states, with reference to French neo-classic dramatists:

In the unity of time you find them so scrupulous, that it yet remains a dispute among their Poets, whether the artificial day of twelve hours more or less, be not meant by Aristotle, rather than the natural one of twenty-four; and consequently whether all Plays ought not to be reduc'd into that compass?

(11. 880-885).

Although Corneille accepts the restriction of twenty-four hours, he nevertheless suggests, as alternative theories for the ideal management of time, that the rule be stretched to allow the representation of a period of thirty hours; that the time it takes to present the play (two hours) should be exactly represented; that if the two hours do not conform to probability, they be extended to four, six, ten, but not much beyond twenty-four hours; and that the length of the action should be left to the imagination of the audience. In

spite of his awareness of alternative methods for the representation of time, Corneille practiced the theatrical precepts of seventeenth-century France, adapting his material to the unity of time, and in Le Cid he crowded an extraordinary number of events into twenty-four hours, having Rodrigue declare his love to Chimène, fight his first duel, kill Chimène's father, repel a national invasion (in three hours), win a trial by combat, and lose and regain the favor of the king and Chimène.

Aristotle's reference to place is less definitive than his suggestions for the management of time. He merely notes that "it is not possible in tragedy to imitate many simultaneous lines of action but only that performed by the actors on the stage . . ."

(1460a 19-23). Dryden states:

The Unity of Place, however it might be practised by them, was never any of their Rules: We neither find it in Aristotle, Horace, or any who have written of it, till in our age the French Poets first made it a Precept of the Stage.

(11. 604-608).

He suggests, in the voice of Neander, the Anglophile:

By tying themselves strictly to the unity of place . . . the French Poets are often forc'd upon absurdities: for if the Act begins in a Chamber, all the persons in the Play must have some business or other to come thither, or else they are not to be shewn in that Act, and sometimes their characters are very unfitting to appear there.

(11. 1474-1483).

In Corneille's Le Cid, it is unfitting for Chimène to receive Rodrigue and to imply that she is willing, even anxious, to marry him. Such actions are improper for a woman in her position. However, as the final act of the play begins with this scene between Chimène and Rodrigue, and as a private interview between these characters is
necessary for the forward movement of the plot, the impropriety is based upon social convention rather than stage convention.

Aristotle's conception of the serious action proper to tragedy as one which imitates "noble actions and the actions of good men" is closely paralleled in seventeenth-century French tragedy. As described by Corneille in the first of his Discours, tragedy should concern royal persons (or at least eminent or illustrious persons) who are exposed to some form of danger, for instance, to their lives or positions.

His play Cinna reflects this critical position. It presents a serious action concerning a royal person, Octave-César Auguste, emperor of Rome, whose life and position are exposed to danger, for the other main characters in the play conspire to kill him. The plot imitates a cause and effect sequence of events which reveals the qualities of the characters. Cinna states, in order to incite other would-be assassins:

\[
\text{Le ciel entre nos mains a mis le sort de Rome,} \\
\text{Et son salut dépend de la perte d'un homme,} \\
\text{Si l'on doit le nom d'homme à qui n'a rien d'humain,} \\
\text{A ce tigre altéré de tout le sang romain.} \\
\text{(I,iii,165-168).}
\]

Auguste, however, perceives his role somewhat differently:

Chimène is able to dissuade Rodrigue from choosing a voluntary death only by pleading that Rodrigue save her from a fate worse than death (marriage with Don Sancho) and by reminding Rodrigue that as victor in the duel he will receive Chimène herself as prize.

French neo-classic tragedies could have happy endings and need contain little tragedy. Most of Corneille's tragedies, including Le Cid and Cinna, end happily. P.J. Yarrow, in Corneille (London: Macmillan Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 313, states that a play which deals with lesser persons, or noble persons exposed to lesser dangers, would be designated a comedy.
J'ai souhaité l'empire, et j'y suis parvenu; 
Mais, en le souhaitant, je ne l'ai pas connu: 
Dans sa possession, j'ai trouvé pour tous charmes 
D'effroyables soucis, d'éternelles alarmes. . .

(II,i,371-374).

He states: "Je consens à me perdre afin de la sauver"(II,i,624). He listens to the advice of his trusted subject Cinna and displays, in his desire to be a just ruler, a rare magnanimity: "Cinna, par vos conseils je retiendrai l'empire; / Mais je le retiendrai pour vous en faire part "(II,i,626-7).

Cinna has compunctions about his proposed action and he muses in soliloquy:

Pour jouir de ses dons faut-il l'assassiner?
Et faut-il lui ravir ce qu'il me veut donner?
Mais je dépend de vous, ô serment téméraire!
O haine d'Émilie! ô souvenir d'un père!

(III,iii,892-894).

In spite of his misgivings, and because of his love for Émilie (III,iv,97), Cinna remains firm in his determination not to betray his vow to avenge the death of Émilie's father. However, his determination is matched and surpassed by Auguste's determination to be a just and noble ruler: "Il n'est crime envers moi qu'un repentir n'efface" (IV,i,1117).

Auguste's resolution of the problem, after discovering the assassination plot, is to pardon the conspirators. He proclaims: 
"... que vos conjurés entendent publier / Qu'Auguste a tout appris, 
et veut tout oublier" (V,iii,1779-80). It is made clear that Auguste's past actions, by which he attained the rule of Rome, do not detract from his present state of nobility. Livia (the Empress of Rome) explains to Émilie:
Sa mort, dont la mémoire allume ta fureur,
Fut un crime d'Octave et non de l'empereur.
Tous ces crimes d'État qu'on fait pour la couronne,
Le ciel nous en absout alors qu'il nous la donne,
Et dans le sacré rang où sa faveur l'a mis,
Le passé devient juste, et l'avenir permis.

(V,ii,1607-1612).

The Emperor Auguste represents the "actions of good men."

Apart from fulfilling the Aristotellean requirement that
tragedy should imitate "noble actions and the actions of good men,"
the French tragedies considered in this essay are complete actions,
for they fulfill the requirements of a beginning, middle, and an
end. They are also of the proper magnitude, for the sequence of
events in each of these plays is such that a change of fortune is
presented in accordance with the law of probability or necessity
(1451a 46).

Certain parallels may be drawn between Elizabethan, French
neo-classic, and Attic tragedy. For example, Attic, Elizabethan,
and French neo-classic tragedians drew their stories from a few
sources. Each used stories that were already known, and that
generally were already in a literary form. The stories concern
events which have a beginning, middle, and end, a central crisis,
and a catastrophe which(at least for a time) is final. The fable
upon which the plot is based is such that it may be idealized in order

43 Campbell, pp. 3-67. Campbell restricts his comparison to
Attic and Shakespearean tragedy.

44 Shakespeare, for instance, made use of Holinshed's Chronicles
for Macbeth, and King Lear was derived from Holinshed and Sydney's
Arcadia; Racine drew upon Euripides and Seneca for Phèdre; and
Corneille based Le Cid upon the Spanish play Las Mocedades del Cid,
by Guilhem de Castro.
to produce an illusion of moral and material greatness. In each case an eminent person is exposed to some form of danger, either to his person or position. The tragedians of each great age of tragedy considered some striking aspect of human life and developed this aspect to its highest power. There is, in most cases, a crime in which the protagonist is either a criminal who triumphs for a time until the situation is reversed, such as Macbeth or Clytemnestra, or a sufferer, such as Lear or Oedipus when he is at Colonus. The plots may concern the question of excessive ambition (Macbeth), misuse of power (Dr. Faustus or King Lear), jealousy prevailing against love (Medea or Phèdre), situations in which the crimes of one generation are revenged by the next (Orestes, Rodrigue in Le Cid, or Émilie in Cinna (an attempted revenge)), and those in which curses invoked by a parent upon offspring are terribly fulfilled (Lear, Oedipus, or Thésée).

Tragedy involves a conflict between good and evil and between right and wrong. In Attic tragedy and in Racine's Phèdre, the opposition is presented in terms of human endeavor and destiny or the divine will of the gods; in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, the opposition is presented in terms of medieval beliefs (Satanic powers of evil, black magic); in Corneille's tragedies the conflict is between duty and passion, duty always being victorious; and in

45 Phèdre states: "Les Dieux m'en sont témoins, ces Dieux qui dans mon flanc / Ont allumé le feu fatal à tout mon sang" (II,v, 679-678).

Shakespeare's tragedies, the conflict is of human origin, involving moral good and evil. In each case, the necessity against which the will strives is not absolute, for suspense as to the outcome, in order that the action may move profoundly, is necessarily inherent in tragedy. Each of the great tragedians, in Attica, England, and France, imitates actions which are universal, for the relevance of these actions extends beyond an age or a class. Each of the tragedians exhibits a disinterested objectivity in the presentation of this universal action. Each implies an optimism, confronting "evil in the faith that there exist ... greater possibilities of good" (Campbell, p. 54).

It is clear from the plays which have been considered in this essay, that just as some Attic tragedy extends beyond the restrictions of Aristotle's Poetics, so some Elizabethan tragedy extends in its "variety and copiousness" beyond the restrictions of French neoclassic tragedy.

With the closing of the theaters in 1642 by the Puritans, the great age of Elizabethan tragedy ended. The Puritans were so successful in discrediting drama, stating, for instance, that the practice of male actors in dressing up as women contradicted the Word

Katherine Wheatley notes in Racine and English Classicism (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), p. 319, however, that in Corneille and in the theory of tragedy in seventeenth-century France, there is a survival of the caste system in the notion that nobility of birth ensures nobility of soul. For instance, Maxine, in a soliloquy, states:

Euphorbe, c'est l'effet de tes lâches conseils;  
Mais que peut-on attendre enfin de tes pareils?  
Jamais un affranchi n'est qu'un esclave infâme;  
Bien qu'il change d'état, il ne change point d'âme;  
(Cinna, IV,vi,1407-1410).
of God:

The women shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.

(Deuteronomy, 22, 5).

that the "best minds and finest spirits were no longer willing to write drama" (Cruttwell, p. 161).

Although tragedies were written and produced during the Restoration period (1660-1700), they were generally inferior to those of the Elizabethan-Jacobean era. The strong nationalistic feelings inspired by Queen Elizabeth and the strength of the established Elizabethan church were replaced, before and after the Restoration, with extremes of belief in religion and of opinions in politics. The conflict and uncertainty, the scepticism and cynicism, and the rifts in society which resulted in civil war in the mid-century (Abrama, p. 399), were paralleled by a decline in the art of tragic drama. These events (the rifts in society and scepticism) which paralleled the decline of Elizabethan tragedy and the similar events (the questioning of the meaning of Greek society and the speculation regarding traditional beliefs) which paralleled the decline of Greek tragedy are not necessarily causal, for it may be no more than a coincidence that in both eras the rise of scepticism paralleled the decline of tragedy.

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CHAPTER 3

MILLER AND TRAGEDY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

Arthur Miller, in his essay "Tragedy and the Common Man," seeks to justify tragedy in terms of the common man. He states that we "who are without kings" must find tragedy in the "heart and spirit of the average man," suggesting that an insistence upon rank in the tragic hero is a meaningless conformity to the outward form of tragedy, for if rank were necessary to tragedy, it would follow that the problems which are found in tragedy would be restricted to those with rank. On this basis, therefore, he proposes that the average modern man is as suitable a subject for tragedy as kings or those of high rank, for all men react with similar mental processes and emotions to similar situations. Tragedy, he suggests, is the "consequence of man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly." Miller makes further reference to his concept of tragedy in the "Introduction" to his Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), p. 31, suggesting that Aristotle's stipulation of the necessity of a fall from the heights by the hero is of limited relevance as it is based upon the values of a "slave society" such as that of fifth-century Greece.

50 In Greece during the fifth century, from Pindar to (but not including) Euripides, the belief in a superior class prevailed. A
In contrast, modern society is the age of the common man. Therefore, Miller's suggestion that an insistence upon rank in the tragic hero is a meaningless conformity to the outward form of tragedy appears to be reasonable, for the heroes of Greek dramas usually represented the nobility, generally restricted, as Aristotle observes, to a few well-known families; and those of Elizabethan England and neo-classic France also represented nobility, or at least, as in the case of Dr. Faustus, persons of stature. However, these characters have tragic relevance because their actions are of public concern. The natural setting for their actions is at the "heart of the body politic." As the world of classical tragedy requires a meaningful, larger-than-human order, it follows that these individuals should be larger and grander than the norm, in firmness, mind, character, and (possibly) social role, for the actions of the hero, who challenges the forces which transcend man (moral order, natural law, providence, or fate), resulting (with few exceptions) in the hero's death, give a sense, even if imperfectly understood, of ultimate justice.

In contrast to traditional tragedy, which implies a person's moira was his portion in life, suggesting limits within which that person was free to act. Each person had a part to play in a total pattern and disaster loomed when a man tried to step outside the limits of his moira, for some power, like the Erinyes, would intervene. Gods and men were in close rapport and heroes in the Greek tragedies of this period were either gods or princes. Even bad characters were represented as belonging to the nobility or to the Olympians. The theory which grew out of this practice, that noblemen were tragic and (an implied correlative) common men comic, was applied to Renaissance drama, for the Renaissance had inherited from the Middle Ages the belief that human conduct was related to a hierarchical scale of values.

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relationship between the hero and a larger-than-human order, Willy Loman, in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, is meant to be seen as "greater and better, at least in potential, than the world that destroys him" (Foster, in Hurrell, p. 84). His world does not represent a moral or natural order, but rather a mechanized social order. It is possible that his death is less an atonement than it is a victimization, and that his guilt is less a hero's guilt than society's guilt, in that Willy's social milieu contributes to his "frustration, paralysis, and ultimate destruction as a human being" (Foster, in Hurrell, p. 85). However, the remote beings who plan and direct Willy's life play a role similar to that of the gods who direct the lives of the Greek heroes. Oedipus' fate, in this respect, is not so remote from Willy's. Perhaps the problems which are found in tragedy need not be restricted to those with rank.

Miller's claim that the common man is "as apt a subject for tragedy in the highest sense as kings were," is ill-founded unless the common man achieves vision or perception, for his tragedy would then be lacking profound significance. Willy demonstrates an incoherence of mind. He states in Act I, for instance, that Biff is a "lazy bum" and a "hard worker;" and in Act II he advises Biff, in his forthcoming interview with Bill Oliver, to "talk as little as possible" and to "start off with a couple of . . . good stories" (pp. 168, 169). He states, with regard to himself, "I'm very well


liked in Hartford," and "... people just don't seem to take to me"
(p. 148). In addition to his incoherence of mind, Willy lives in a
world of illusion which he is not prepared, or is unable, to leave
in order to face reality. It is Willy's tragedy that he fails to
act "to save himself and put his world in order (Foster, in Hurrell,
p. 83). Although Willy's flaw, in this respect, resembles the flaw
of the traditional tragic hero, his muddled mind and his incapacity
to distinguish reality and illusion appear to detract from the
profound significance of his personal tragedy.

However, although Miller himself has expressed dissatisfaction
with Willy's lack of insight, he argues:

Had Willy been unaware of his separation from values that endure
he would have died contentedly while polishing his car ... But
he was agonized by his awareness of being in a false position ... That he had not the intellectual fluency to verbalize his situation
is not the same thing as saying that he lacked awareness ... that the life he had made was without form and inner meaning.


While it appears that Willy acquires a degree of insight or awareness,
for he comes to see that Biff loves him (p. 218) and, in telling Ben
that his suicide "would not be another damned-fool appointment"
(p. 213), he mildly condemns selling, it is possible that men who
die speaking as Macbeth does, are more tragic in effect than those
who are unable to express their agony clearly. Perhaps, however, the
manner in which Miller presents the inner torment of an inarticulate
character who is compelled to take his life, demands that the
concept of "insight" be redefined.

54 John and Alice Griffin, "Arthur Miller Discusses The Crucible,"
Theatre Arts, XXXVII (Oct. 1953), p. 34.
In addition to his defense of Willy's awareness, Miller cannot understand why critics claim that Willy lacks stature. He states, in his "Introduction" to the Collected Plays:

The play was always heroic to me, and in later years the academy's charge that Willy lacked the "stature" for the tragic hero seemed incredible to me. I had not understood that these matters are measured by Greco-Elizabethan paragraphs which hold no mention of insurance payments, refrigerator fan belts, steering knuckles, Chevrolets, and visions seen not through the portals of Delphi, but in the bare flame of the hot-water heater. (p. 31).

Because Willy pursues his conception of truth, albeit, a debased "American Dream," struggling to attain his goal no less "arduously and catastrophically" than Oedipus, it is possible that in this respect Willy represents, in spite of personal and social limitations, personal stature and heroism.

Miller believes that where a vast number of people are divested of alternatives, as in a slave society, it is "rather inevitable" that tragedy is conceived as being restricted to the higher ranks of society. He therefore proposes that provided the hero has alternates of a magnitude sufficient to change materially the course of his life, he cannot be debarred from the heroic role. He concludes, on this basis, that in Willy's case, in spite of his belonging to the common mold, there is a legitimate question of stature. It is made clear in the play that Willy possesses an alternative means of supporting himself and his family, for he

demonstrates the "self-reliant skills of the artisan" (Foster, in Hurrell, p. 85). However, he eschews such skills, for he has fully absorbed the standards of the commercialized society in which he lives. His values are based upon the "American Dream;" but in him individualism has become translated and corrupted into a belief in the jungle value of privilege for the strong: he encourages his boys to steal, calling it initiative and their right (Foster, in Hurrell, p. 85). Because of his inability to distinguish between reality and illusion, Willy fails to harmonize his dreams with his responsibilities. It seems that he is therefore denied a meaningful alternative of a magnitude sufficient to have changed materially the course of his life.

In addition to the requirement of stature and insight, Willy, in order to be a tragic hero, should be a representative character. To some extent Willy is a representative character. He has accepted the values of the commercialized society in which he lives. He has assumed, for the better part of forty years, that those who are well-liked are successful. In order to sell his product he sells himself; his customers buy, he believes, because they enjoy his stock of salesman's jokes. He yearns to be popular and to influence people. Even with his suicide, he attempts to perpetuate his view of life, for with his life insurance claim, he intends to provide his son Biff with the means to make good. Biff, however, no longer espouses the values upon which he has been nurtured. He has been forced, through the trauma of discovering the cheap liaison in which his father indulged while on the road, to re-assess the dreams which Willy has offered as a way of life. He therefore rejects his father's
standards for success and learns, as Willy does not, to evaluate himself realistically:

Biff: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

Willy: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman.

Willy has failed to impress his values upon his son. He has failed to be popular, for no-one comes to his funeral except his family and Charley and his son. Each of the mourners reacts differently to the suicide: Charley finds an excuse for it, Hap misinterprets it, Biff condemns it, and Linda cannot understand it. Willy's business associates pay no attention to it. While the character of Willy Loman may be representative of those whom modern society condemns to lives of frustration and eventual despair, it appears that the significance of his actions is limited both by his own perception and that of the other characters in the play.

Miller's belief that tragedy is the consequence of man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly is illustrated in The Crucible. John Proctor is motivated by such a compulsion when he signs a confession of witchcraft, for he is aware that "appearing to go like a saint" involves a greater dishonor than "frankly facing up to his own dishonesty and saving his life." He states:

57 Foster, in Hurrell, p. 84, notes that "the tragedy--if it is tragedy--is that they are both right."

I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint. It is a fraud. I am not that good man. Nothing's spoiled by giving me this lie that were not rotten long before.

(p. 322).

However, Proctor's dilemma is not so easily resolved. The judges require that his confession be made public, causing Proctor to realize (or recognize) that he may not live in society uncommitted. Rather than "forfeit his identity by siding with the murd-er-cus society" in which he lives, Proctor chooses to die. He states: "I lie and sign myself to lies! How may I live without my name? (p.328).

He tears up the confession. His act of will, a conscious choice between death and life without honor, has, to a greater degree than Willy Loman's final act, the heroic quality required of a tragic hero.

In addition to the apparent disparity between the heroic quality of the characters in Death of a Salesman and The Crucible, a comparison of the plots reveals significant differences. Miller originally called Death of a Salesman, The Inside of His Head (Collected Plays, p. 23), and this point of view, in effect, comprises much of the plot, for a series of seemingly episodic flashbacks or memories portrayed as emanating from Willy's conscious or sub-conscious mind, contribute to the presentation of Willy's personal tragedy. As the emphasis is upon character rather than plot, with the accumulation of enough significant details to portray the character of a man, the structure is clearly un-Aristotelean. In contrast to the manner in which Death of a Salesman is presented,

The Crucible is based upon a single action, the moment of decision and commitment by the protagonist, which climaxes a cause and effect sequence of events. Although Steinberg suggests that the play suffers structurally because Miller fails to resolve the confusion which results from focusing upon the social context as well as upon the hero, he qualifies his criticism by noting that the play, after the opening scenes, concentrates increasingly upon the role of one man, John Proctor, whose dilemma epitomizes the whole tragic situation. While it is true that the opening scenes involve other members of the community of Salem, the action sets the tone for the social context, and provides information necessary for an understanding of the cause and effect sequence of events which follows. It is made clear, for instance, that a group of girls has attempted to conjure up the Devil; that two of these girls have hysterical reactions which are diagnosed by respected members of the society as being caused by witchcraft; and that a sexual attraction exists between John Proctor and Abigail. Abigail privately assures John that the girls' hysteria has nothing to do with witchcraft (p.240), knowledge "which is to try John's honesty and lead to his death" (Hill, in Ferres, p. 89). These initial scenes are therefore necessary to the action of the play, for they provide the basis for the events which follow, including the deaths of other members of the community. Miller succeeds, in this manner, in fusing the

personal with the social and there is no dichotomy of plot structure which he fails to resolve.

It is apparent that *The Crucible* comes closer to an Aristotelean concept of tragedy than *Death of a Salesman* does, for the plot follows a cause and effect sequence of events which are, in terms of the action, both necessary and probable. For instance, Abigail denounces certain Puritan women in order to divert suspicion of witchcraft from herself; she accuses Elizabeth Proctor of witchcraft because she desires John (p. 270); John produces a witness (Mary Warren) who testifies that she and the other girls were lying; Abigail commits perjury in order to protect herself (p. 299); John desperately admits that he has "known" Abigail in order to invalidate Abigail's accusation against his wife ("She thinks to dance with me on my wife's grave!" (p. 305)); Elizabeth, an "honest" woman ("In her life, sir, she have never lied"), called upon to testify that John is a "lecher," lies in order to save his good name (p. 307); and, finally, Mary Warren defends herself when Abigail accuses her of "black art," by "confessing" that John, whom she calls the "Devil's man," had forced her, by threatening to murder her, to bear false witness against the other girls. The action is complex, for there is both recognition (John Proctor recognizes that he cannot live without honor) and reversal of situation (Elizabeth lies to protect John, but in doing so negates his own testimony and effectively seals his doom); and the protagonist exhibits the stature required of a tragic hero (he chooses death rather than life without honor).

Apart from plot and character, one other aspect of *Death of a*
Salesman and The Crucible, the universality of the themes, needs to be considered, for it is necessary that the setting of tragedy represent more than a temporary social or political climate if the hero is to have more than a transitory significance. Willy Loman, in Death of a Salesman, is presented in terms of a "shallow background of American superficiality, commercialism, and greed" (McCollom, pp. 16-17). Even if Willy were to possess the stature required of a tragic hero, his world limits the significance of his action. The Crucible was produced during the period when Senator McCarthy's "witchhunting" trials were flourishing. Although there is a similarity in the manner in which these hearings and the Salem witch trials of 1692 were conducted, parallels may also be drawn between The Crucible and the trial of Socrates, the Spanish Inquisitions, and the political trials in Russia in more recent times. As the theme has relevance to periods other than the one in which it was written, the play cannot be denied universality on the grounds that its theme is temporal.

Miller's two plays, then, depict man struggling to be at one with his society. His themes (and in this his plays resemble, to some extent, those of the Greeks) concern personal and social morality. Both Willy Loman and John Proctor choose to die, rather than live in what, for each of them, is clearly an inadequate society. However, the tragic significance of Willy's act of will is nullified, or at least diminished, by his limited vision and his lifelong acceptance of the degrading conditions which he seeks, in the end, to resist. John Proctor achieves a higher degree of consciousness than Willy, for he chooses with insight to become, using Faulkner's
phrase, "the arbiter of his own virtues." John's death is clearly a greater spiritual victory than Willy's. Tragedy requires that natural defeat involves spiritual victory.

Many critics contend that dramatic tragedy is no longer written today. Joseph Wood Krutch, for instance, suggests that tragic faith occurs at a certain stage in the development of the realistic intelligence of a people, and that while a more naive people produce legends which are essentially tragic, a more sophisticated people outgrows the simple optimism and faith in the nobility of man. A sophisticated culture, therefore, "can tell itself no stories except those which make it still more acutely aware of its trivial miseries" (p. 10). Despair becomes neither significant nor important. He suggests that as the tragic spirit sustains itself by assuming man's passions to be important throughout all time and space, the modern belief that the universe is indifferent causes faith in the correspondence between the inner and outer world to fade. With the gradual weakening of man's confidence in his ability to impose upon the phenomenon of life an interpretation acceptable to his desires, the tragic convention no longer represents the realities of thought and feeling, and tragedies, therefore, cease to be written. Instead, the tragic spirit, with its belief in the value of human life and its affirmation of universal order has been replaced, in the modern world, by "values without reference to an ultimate truth."


Modern American culture, an uneasy blend of idealism and realism, is not considered to be conducive to a sense of tragic victory. Naturalism, materialism, and mechanistic interpretation of human phenomena, in which man is submerged in an impersonal and sub-human nature, is an integral part of the American concept of world order. Cultural opiates, such as Puritanism (evil is ostracized as being the work of the Devil), fatalism (man is not responsible for evil), other-worldliness (reality is denied to material misfortune), and patriotism (death is sentimentalized), act as effective buffers against the most bitter blows. A sense of tragic victory is difficult to attain in such an atmosphere.

The average American extolls flexibility and the capacity of being able to adjust to adversity. In contrast to the ideal tragic figure, who makes an absolute commitment, the modern American is, in David Riesman's words, "other-directed." The tragic hero of today, such as Willy Loman, is an ordinary person, with such evident weaknesses and faults, that it is "often hard to muster more than forgiveness for him" (Klapp, in Hurrell, p. 36). It is clear that the argument against the possibility of writing tragedy is strong, for the mediocrity of the modern hero, the unfavorable ethos, and the distracting cultural images limit the tragic effect of personal victory.

However, it is possible that an effective argument for modern tragedy may be made. The assertion that a particular philosophy or a


63 Orrin E. Klapp, "Tragedy and the American Climate of Opinion," Centennial Review of Arts and Sciences, II (Fall 1958), rpt. in Hurrell, p. 34.
way of life has destroyed the tragic spirit, underestimates the resiliency of human nature (Gassner, in Hurrell, pp. 25-6), for man (at least in a large part of the world) is free to become "the arbiter of his own virtues." While it is clear that the modern dramatist, in order to speak for his own time and society, must take into account disillusionment, naturalism, and anxiety, he is not limited to the influence of his own time, for he is heir to the heritage of the past. If he is able to continue to place his faith in human potential, while acknowledging the imperfections of man and society, he should be able to write drama which effectively portrays the tragic spirit.

It remains to be considered whether or not modern tragedy is too far removed or too different from Aristotle's criteria to be called "tragedy" in the traditional sense of the word. Aristotle indicates that although tragedies should be composed of all those elements which produce the "best tragedies," those plays which do not do so in all respects are not, for this reason alone, to be denied the designation "tragedy." He states: "Now it is necessary to attempt, as much as possible to include all elements in the plays, but if that is not possible, then as many as possible and certainly the most important ones" (1456a 21-24). He stipulates that "... the soul of tragedy, is the plot; the second in importance is character" (1450b 80). The plot of *The Crucible* is complex; it follows a cause and effect sequence of events; and it imitates "pitiable and fearful incidents" (1453a 6-7). Although Aristotle believes the best tragedies are constructed around the fortunes of a few families (1453a 30), he admits that there are some tragedies
which "please us" (1451b 35), even though the incidents and names are fictitious. He concludes that we must not "seek to cling exclusively" (1451b 35-36) to the received legends which are the usual subjects for tragedy, suggesting that it would be absurd to attempt to do so. As Aristotle allows that tragedy is not restricted to characters with illustrious names, it appears reasonable that a man such as John Proctor, who is respected in his community, should qualify as a tragic hero.

Aristotle also states: "Whether or not tragedy is by now sufficiently developed in its formal elements . . . belongs to another discussion" (1449a 51-54). Clearly, a rigid adherence to an ideal of tragedy, either an isolated individual achievement (such Oedipus Rex) or an age (such as the golden age of fifth-century Attica), precludes the inclusion of other forms of tragedy (such as Macbeth, King Lear, and Doctor Faustus) and of subsequent ages (such as the Elizabethan Age of tragedy). As Aristotle seems to allow the possibility of new development in tragedy and as great tragedy was written in the Elizabethan Age in a form different from Aristotle's criteria for the best kind of tragedy, it appears reasonable that the possibility of new development should include the present.

The problem, then, allowing that this is so, is how to maintain reasonable standards without atrophying dramatic art. It is apparent from the diversity of tragic forms which have been considered in this essay, that an application of rules to tragedy (either Aristotle's or those based upon modern practice or theory), rather than limiting by rigidly defining, should help to distinguish apparent tragic value from real tragic value. A play may be less
tragic, or more tragic, without detracting from the merits of the play as drama. There is no doubt that the idea of tragedy exists in the drama written today, and that tragedy, to a greater or lesser degree, is vested in the representative of this age, the common man to whom Miller refers. It is not the purpose of this paper to suggest that Aristotle's rules are the only criteria which should be applied to dramatic tragedy, for that would imply that the critic should stand ready, Aristotle in hand, to pass judgment on plays. This paper does suggest, however, that an application may be made of the wisdom derived from a study of the *Poetics* to modern drama. The quotation from Aristotle with which this essay concludes is as valid today as it was when it was written over two thousand years ago:

> Now to judge the nobility or ignobility of any statement made or act performed by anyone, we must not only make an investigation into the thing itself that has been said or done, considering whether it is noble or ignoble, but we must also consider the one who does the act or says the words in regard to whom, when, by what means, and for what purpose he speaks or acts--for example, whether the object is to achieve a greater good or to avoid a greater evil.

(1461a 55-62).
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