

nuove, sul commercio delle spezie tra il Levante e l'Ungheria dal Cinque al Seicento: vale a dire che la scoperta della via oceanica ha messo in crisi solo temporaneamente fino ai primi decenni del Cinquecento le vie tradizionali delle spezie; che l'importazione delle spezie dal Mar Nero è giù, a cavallo dei secc. XV e XVI, molto più massiccia di quella occidentale passante per Venezia; che in conseguenza dell'occupazione turca di Buda (1541) si registra un incremento tale delle spezie importate attraverso la via continentale, che già nel 1573—1573 esse superavano di cinque volte e mezzo quelle provenienti dall'Adriatico, con le quali agli inizi del Seicento entravano in concorrenza persino sul mercato viennese; fino a che con la metà del Seicento il pepe «atlantico» di Inglese e Olandese non soppiantò quello «mediterraneo» a scapito e di Costantinopoli e di Venezia.

Naturalmente le cose dette alla Fondazione sono state molte di più di quante qui riferite: occorrerebbe prendere in considerazione il discreto numero di interventi in sede di discussione; occorrerà infine avere a disposizione i testi definitivi delle relazioni, con la relativa documentazione, per poter valutare appieno i risultati di un incontro interdisciplinare, come quello veneziano, che ha portato ad un confronto di notizie, di concetti e di termini quanto mai necessario per un terreno così variegato quale è la riflessione storico-critica sul Barocco e sul tempo ad esso intitolato. Ma contemporaneamente occorre dire che il bilancio del Convegno sarebbe incompleto se non fosse visto dentro il piano di politica culturale che la Fondazione Cini sta da tempo conducendo. Una delle sue «punte di diamante» è costituita appunto dal sistema delle iniziative scientifiche e culturali — soprattutto convegni — lanciate in direzione dei Paesi dell'Europa centro-orientale. La città della laguna è diventata così il terminal di una raggiera di ponti che unisce stabilmente l'Italia con Budapest e con Varsavia, con Belgrado e con Mosca. I convegni delicati allo studio dei rapporti passati tra l'Italia e il resto dell'Europa non vorrebbero limitare i loro obiettivi alla erudizione, ma aspirano anche a servirsi della storia (storia — maestra, comunque, non serva) per interpretare il passato e progettare il futuro sotto il segno di una comune civiltà.

*Sante Graciotti*

## The Concept of the Tragic from the Enlightenment to Romanticism

When speaking of the tragic, we take it for granted that it is possible to distinguish between tragedy as a genre, a concept in poetics, denoting a given structure, and the tragic as an aesthetic quality. This latter can and has been approached in five ways:

- 1) it can be interpreted as of immanently aesthetic character, which means that one regards the tragic as both objective and autonomous;
- 2) it can be approached from a philosophical point of view, as objective but not autonomous;
- 3) one can maintain that the tragic is, in the final analysis, of biological or/and psychological nature. Representatives of this approach would say that the tragic is subjective and not autonomous.

These three interpretations are static in character. Two dynamic approaches emerged in the history of the concept:

a) The historico-aesthetic view implies that the tragic is objectivated and relatively autonomous.

b) The last possible interpretation is made on the basis of a theory of value. Those who held the other four interpretations emphasized the fact that the tragic either expressed some value or provoked an evaluation. A theory of value leads to the question what kind of a structure of values produces an effect upon the reader which can be called tragic.

It is impossible to forget about any of these five interpretations in the analysis of any period lest the tragic be not conceived historically enough. Still, one can concentrate on one of the five aspects and use the others as correctives. For my part, I shall focus my attention on the value-oriented approach. In order to make it clear what I mean by this, I shall try to sum up the theoretical conclusions I have drawn from the history of the concept. A few hints must suffice.

This approach is based on the hypothesis that the tragic effect cannot be realized without the reader's awareness of some *loss of value*. We all know that the origin of the tragic can be traced back to the killing of man as a *sacrifice* to some deity. I hold that value is an attribute of existence, which means that I am opposed to the idealist belief that value comes first, existence next. It is beyond the possibility of doubt that existence is *eo ipso* valuable, but the tragic necessitates a certain degree and kind of value which is lost. To be less vague: man's biological self-preservation as such is valuable, but the tragic needs also some other value realized in man. From this one can infer that the sphere of the operativeness of the tragic is not the everyday existence. It forms part of the high mimesis — as it is called sometimes. If all secondary aesthetic qualities can be subordinated to primary qualities, the tragic belongs to *the sublime*. It is no accident that the Enlightenment saw a renaissance of both the sublime and the tragic. The creator of the tragic art expects that the reader should think in terms of aesthetic distance. Unlike the comic, the tragic is the result of a concentration of values; that is why the tragic hero is above us. I should even risk the hypothesis that only a *sudden loss of value* can be tragic. This loss of value can be observed in both the hero and the situation, as a harrowing experience, an utter intransigence of fate, an *inevorable process*. If this is not the case, the result can be tragic-comic, when, for instance, a mediocre man is put in a tragic situation or a great man falls in a way verging on the petty. From the fact that the superiority of the tragic hero to the reader is always manifest, we can presume that it also depends on the reader whether a loss of value has or has not a tragic effect. The tragic hero cannot be too much above us. In any case, the reader's historical, social, and psychological characteristics must be taken into account in any definition of the tragic. To prove this, one should only refer to the well-known facts that Napoleon could hardly become a tragic figure for the Russians or the English in the first half of the last century, Satan was not looked upon as tragic in Christian times, etc. The enemy is never tragic.

It is all too obvious that my starting hypotheses could be refuted with numerous examples, especially with those taken from our century. To most of the objections that I can imagine, I should answer that they refer to border-line cases, phenomena which represent mixed aesthetic qualities. Mr Veres, I suppose, will say more about the reformulation of the tragic along these lines in the 20th century. Here I should only mention the combination of the tragic with other qualities. If the loss of value is too inevitable because the hero has no resistance, we are close to irony; if the loss of value is made impossible because the hero cannot fall, we may be in the world of the fairly tale. When the reader can foresee exactly why and how some value will be lost, the effect is rather comic. In the opposite case, when the loss of value is entirely unexpected, we are in

the realms of tragic irony, and I would say the same about works — mainly written in the 20th century — in which the hero's conflict is with some power too much superior or inferior to him. Since the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries we have witnessed transformations of the tragic: before that change the tragic had been more homogeneous, since Romanticism it became a combination of the tragic and such more complex qualities as irony, the tragicomic, or the grotesque. Originally the tragic hero had to choose between a good and a bad possibility, the compulsory decision between two equally bad possibilities had been regarded as ironical; the tragic embodied some obvious value with a judicious self-consciousness, whereas the doubtful value and its unlawful self-consciousness were proofs of irony. To-day this distinction is far from clear. That loss of certainty is the result of various answers to the question whether the tragic precludes or not the possibility of a balance of values. The theory of the tragic fault has been undermined, and not only by theoreticians who draw on works written since the late 18th century but also by those who find the closure of earlier works contradictory and point to the unlawful death of Cordelia as contrasted to the Nemesis of Machbeth.

I shall refer to some points of the earliest phase of this transformation, two colleagues of mine will deal with later periods. Needless to say, in our brief historical analysis we shall make gross errors so far as one must simplify things to a great extent.

I wish to touch three types of defining the tragic.

The first I shall call a value-free approach by which I mean an effort to take an empirical position, free of metaphysical assumptions. Let us quote a few sentences by way of illustration: "L'homme paraît être à sa place dans la nature, supérieur aux animaux, auxquels il est semblable par les organes, inférieur à d'autres êtres, auxquels il ressemble probablement par la pensée. Il est, comme tout ce que nous voyons, mêlé de mal et de bien, de plaisir et de peine. Il est pourvu de passions pour agir, et de raison pour gouverner ses actions. Si l'homme était parfait, il serait Dieu, et ces prétendues contrariétés, que vous appelez *contradictions*, sont les ingrédients nécessaires qui entrent dans le composé de l'homme, qui est ce qu'il doit être."

This is the well-known doctrine of the Deist who believes in the great chain of being. The quotation is from Voltaire's *Remarques sur Pascal*, added to this *Lettres philosophiques*, in 1733. Voltaire's position can be taken as an early version of the Positivist attitude to the tragic. Life is not tragic, as Pascal maintained, for the tragic is a preconception, a value judgement, a normative statement, a recuperation of reality. To stress the Positivism inherent in Voltaire's opinion, I shall quote another refusal of the tragic of more than two hundred years later:

"La tragédie peut être définie, ici, comme une tentative de récupération de la distance, qui existe entre l'homme et les choses, en tant que valeur nouvelle; ce serait en somme une épreuve, où la victoire consisterait à être vaincu."

This sentence is taken from Alain Robbe-Grillet's essay *Nature, humanisme, tragédie*, published in 1958. As his predecessor, Robbe-Grillet relies on facts:

"Décrire les choses, en effet, c'est délibérément se placer à l'extérieur, en face de celles-ci. Il ne s'agit plus de se les approprier ni de rien reporter sur elles. (...) Se borner à la description, c'est évidemment récuser tous les autres modes d'approche de l'objet: la sympathie comme irréaliste, la tragédie comme aliénante, la compréhension comme relevant du seul domaine de la science."

Both Voltaire and Robbe-Grillet reject the tragic because they are phenomenologists (they see no difference between essence and phenomenon, appearance and reality) and nominalists (they stress the relevance of concrete individual objects as against that of general laws). For them the tragic is a false term because it reduces existence to a preestablished order. They favour the position of the observer *en face des choses*. It would be

easy to point out that this refusal of the tragic led, in the case of Voltaire, to the naive view that Pascal's idea of the tragic inherent in man's existence is ab ovo "aussi absurde que métaphysique", and to his increasing inclination to a disparagement of Shakespeare. It is more important for us to maintain that a value-free approach to literature is an illusion. Robbe-Grillet himself seems to have felt the anachronism of the Positivist view, when he admitted at the end of the essay quoted earlier that "vouloir combattre l'idée de la tragédie, c'est déjà y succomber; et il est si naturel de prendre les objets comme refuge . . .". In spite of the author's expressed wish, readers will continue to find the tragic in the fate of Wallas, the detective who kills his father as Oedipus did, in *Les Gommés*, they will attribute pathos to the soldier in *Dans le labyrinthe*, irony to the school teacher lost in a hostile town in *L'Immortelle*, and they will take *Topologie d'une ville fantôme* as elegiac. There is no doubt that the presence of the tragic in a work of art is a frame of expectations, it means the possibility of recognizing the already known in the unknown, but this is necessarily so: literature can have meaning only through conventions, and the tragic is a convention with a historical development. The significance of the Positivist refusal of the tragic is in its indirect contribution to a broadening and differentiating of the concept.

The Positivist attitude was dominant in the second half of the 19th century, especially in its more naive, biology- or psychology-oriented versions which will be analysed later on by Professor Németh. What is relevant to say here is that it was born in the age of the Enlightenment and underwent various changes until the post-Existentialist tendencies.

Besides the early Positivist tendency, one other interpretation of the tragic seems to me important in the 18th century, which I shall call briefly cathartic. With that term I should like to indicate the traditional character of the approach in question. Its origins can be traced back to Antiquity, particularly to those trends in the history of ideas which are generally known as Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Scepticism. The Rationalist-minded thinkers of the 18th century found comfort in those Greek philosophers who lived in the 4th century B. C. and maintained that the tragedies written in the 5th century aimed at a balance of human values. Characteristically enough, Nietzsche referred to a maxim of Socrates, when he later attacked the Stoic didacticism inherent in the concept of the tragic flaw. "Virtue is knowledge; man sins out of ignorance; the virtuous is happy", as the maxim reads. The cathartic view based on this principle derives an aesthetic quality from ethics: the tragic teaches moderation. It is understandable that Stoic explanators turned no so much to Aristotle's *Poetics* — where tragedy, the genre is analyzed, not the tragic as a world-view — as to his greater *Ethica*. The *Poetics* is useful so far as it defined the tragic hero as "a man who is not eminently good or just", but the *Ethics* supplied the interpreter with a key-term, that of hamartema. As I am absolutely incompetent to judge the original meaning of that Greek word, I can only observe that for most 18th-century readers it denoted amoral shortcoming. Tragic fault was traced back to hubris, which in turn, was identical with megalopsykhia, translated as pride. Walter Kaufmann and others have pointed out that the heroic Greeks took pride as a virtue; so it seems obvious that the theory of the tragic fault current in the age of Voltaire and Johnson was the result of Christian interpretations. Christianity promised an incipit vita nuova, an identity of de jure and de facto authorities, an even more satisfactory final plenitude of values than most other religions. The dead Jesus raised hope to dimensions such as no founder of religion had inspired yet. In the Christian system of ideas the configurations of fate were not unforeseeable, unintelligible, and indomitable. Doom was not blind, instead of rolling mechanically, it was caused and not simply occasioned. Ernst Bloch in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt, 1959) contrasted

the Christian sense of fate with the ancient Greeks' fatalism on the basis of its capability of being changed by men's morality and decisions. In the Bible "fate hangs in balance", and finally the spell is "woven to an ultimately and unquestionably good end". "Here fate is still wavering. It is not categorical but hypothetical throughout", destiny is presented "as something men have brought upon themselves". As Thomas Münzer wrote in his *Ausgedrückte Entblösung des falschen Glaubens* (1524), "it must occur to us all in the advent of faith, that we fleshly, earthly humans shall become gods by the incarnation of Christ, and shall be God's disciples with him, taught and deified by him, nay more, changed into him altogether, so that this life on earth may turn into heaven." In this system of ideas a loss of value could be only either transitory or exceptional: Shakespeare observed the laws of Nemesis far more than the Greek tragic playwrights, Racine emphasized that his figures were tragic because they lived before Christ, and therefore could not hope redemption. Possibly Kierkegaard was the only Christian thinker who touched upon the thought of an unresolved tragic loss, yet even he relegated it to what he called the ethic phase, which man must transcend if he wants to reach the superior stage, the religious.

The cathartic theoreticians of the Enlightenment did not reject the Christian-Stoic view of the tragic, although they laicized it. Diderot valued it as an antidote against prejudices, Lessing thought that catharsis turns passion into virtue. Thus, in the 18th century two conceptions seem to be dominant: the Positivist which on the whole can be considered an innovation of the Enlightenment, and the cathartic which was based on a very long tradition.

Non-cathartic definitions of the tragic gained ground only with the appearance of Romanticism. Roughly speaking, the originality of the Romantics consisted in the rejection of the tragic flaw. This, however, did not mean that the change of opinion was unanimous. One can mention at least two conceptions prevailing in Romanticism which can be regarded as later versions of the cathartic interpretation. For one thing, Stoicism survived the great stylistic change from Classicism to Romanticism. Winckelmann compared Laokoön to Philoctetes and upheld him as an *épitome* of endurance. Byron in the last canto of *Childe Harold* praised the camel which teaches us to bear suffering, and the wolf that dies in silence, and Vigny developed the second image in *La mort du loup*. Besides this more sophisticated version of the didactic view of the tragic, the Satanism characteristic of many Romantics also implies a cathartic interpretation: Satan known no more an unlawful or unredeemed loss of values than God. Romantic Titanism, after all, originated in a very old tradition which had been an ingredient of early Christianity. It survived even the priestly editing of the Bible. According to the Ophites the serpent of paradise was linked with Jesus, and about 150 A. D. the Gnostic Marcion carried even further the antithetical detachment of Jesus from Yahweh. Last but not least, the Romantic theory of the absence of catharsis was rejected by one of the greatest thinkers of the early 19th century. In Hegel's system the tragic is one stage or aspect in the evolution of the Absolute. Thesis and antithesis represent forces that are equally lawful in a moral sense, and they are followed by a synthesis in which the right wins even if the best falls.

All the same, the Stoic and the Satanic view had been more traditional, and Hegel's concept become influential only in a larger historical perspective; so we could conclude that the main contribution of the Romantics was a non-cathartic definition of the tragic. Madame de Staël spoke of a characteristic which enables one to do his best and becomes, at the same time, the cause of his fall. Later on Kierkegaard transformed Hegel's dictum about the opposition of equally justifiable forces, and in *Either/or* he hinted at the tragic as a series of equally valueless situations, equally bad possibilities. Both these paradoxical images of the tragic situation had their origin in German Romanticism. Hume may have

been the first to distinguish between final reconciliation and the tragic quality, and it is well known that Goethe rejected the tragic because of its cruelty. These are, however, views somewhat different from the Romantic: both Hume and Goethe stress the psychological rather than the ethical aspect. The great change is when the theoreticians turn the tragic into a question of existence. The German Romantics reject the idea that genres can be separated, they distinguish the tragic from tragedy and make the former autonomous. In Schelling's opinion the rôle of theology is taken by the tragic, which becomes the topmost level of existence where life can be known in all its complexity. The sociological explanation of this conviction is probably not too difficult: before the 1848 revolutions the bourgeoisie did not think in terms of a slow evolution, the history of the great French revolution taught him to have visions of rapid changes: both suddenly emerging earthly paradises, utopias and apocalyptic, demonic losses of all hopes. It was only in the next period that the sense of a possibility of a cosmic tragedy weakened, and for some Positivists the tragic became similar to the case when a machine goes wrong and must be repaired.

Towards the middle of the 19th century, the Romantic cult of the tragic as opposed to the cathartic was surpassed not only by the growing influence of Positivism but also by the conception of Marx. The letters which the young Marx wrote to Ruge clearly show that first he accepted Hegel's view. From *The German Ideology* it can be seen how far Marx developed from his early Hegelianism. Here history is presented as a process which is, on the whole, towards the growth, the creation of human values, but the reader is warned that in certain periods the loss seems inevitable. Marx not only accepted Hegel's critique of, but also rejected the Positivist reaction against Romanticism. Unlike Christianity, Marxism does not deny the relevance of the tragic. In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, Marx spoke of the tragic as a result of the struggle fought by an existing and a future world. Later in their correspondence with Lassalle, Marx and Engels characterized the historical situation of the Polish landowners as tragic, because in 1830 they fought for modern ideas, while representing reactionary class interests. In these letters the tragic is presented as an effect resulting from a conflict between a historically necessary demand and the impossibility of its realization. According to this argument, in the life of a community the tragic is not necessary, though historically it is possible. As to the level of individual life, as far as I know Marx never asserted that death was not tragic. In any case, we should bear in mind that Marx and Engels spoke of the tragic only in occasional writings, with reference to Lassalle's insignificant play. Their statements are not to be taken as definitions of the tragic as an aesthetic quality, only as cursory remarks on the tragic as manifested in history. Still, one cannot help observing that Marx rejected the Positivist attitude to the tragic and surpassed the cathartic and the non-cathartic by making a sort of synthesis of them. This synthesis was made possible because of a recognition of the dialectics of seemingly antagonistic conceptions. It cannot be denied that Marx could find traces of such a recognition in earlier theoreticians' statements. He must have been aware that when Plato expelled tragic playwrights from his state, a suspicion underlay his reasoning that tragedy did not bring reconciliation. He may even have known that in 1687 Nahum Tate wrote an optimistic ending to *King Lear* and that Samuel Johnson approved of this closure, and he may have felt a suspicion similar to that of Plato behind these Classicist pretenses. What is more, he might have been familiar with Solger's aesthetics, who based his belief in the tragic as the sine qua non of human existence on the presumption that a value is realized most through its being lost.

Some conclusions seem to be inevitable. Religion and Positivism are opposed to the tragic, for the tragic situation must be preceded by a freedom of choice. An awareness of the tragic implies a doubt in religious thinkers, and the fact that certain Positivists

admit the existence of the tragic only means that it is impossible to develop an entirely consistent Positivistic system of ideas. The tragic quality can hardly appear if the first step is not taken by the tragic hero. After that first step freedom of choice is denied and a sudden and unexpected loss of value is inescapable. The hero is irrevocably separated from the rest of the community; he must go on and cannot alter the course of events. Once the choice has been made, it appears doubtful whether the hero could have chosen otherwise and escaped the painful process. The obvious result is the loss of some value which has been made undeniable at the beginning of the work. The appearance of the tragic needs one further change in values: the hero must turn his fear of the outcome into a safeguard and take his suffering as a painful letting in of light. He shall be scorched by the consciousness of having committed an irremediable error into an awareness of the infinite. This higher insight makes the tragic hero exceptional. Thus, the tragic involves both a loss and a birth of value; the latter is a result of the former. That is why the tragic as an aesthetic quality and a structure of values is independent of the closure of the literary work. Consequently, what we called cathartic and non-cathartic interpretations cannot be opposed to each other. Both a loss and a birth of value must be present, only the degrees of their immanence may differ in works of art.

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## The "Tragic" from Romanticism to the End of the 19th Century

Mr Szegedy-Maszák has spoken of the tragic as interpreted by representatives of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. My task is to give a summary of the attitudes taken towards the tragic in the second half of the 19th century, dominated by Positivism. The tragic as an aesthetic quality will remain in the focus, though some of the principles of the treatment must be adapted to the changed historical context. Our starting point is a statement contained in the previous paper, according to which the Romantics looked upon the tragic as one of the main possibilities of the artistic representation and manifestation of the essence of humanity. The Positivists rejected that Romantic assumption, the tragic became a marginal case in their theory of art and in their ideology. The opponents of Positivism, accordingly, aimed at a rehabilitation and reinterpretation of the tragic.

Positivism has had numerous variants in history. It has been pointed out in Mr Szeged-Maszák's paper that its beginnings can be traced back to earlier periods than the 19th century, and it has survived into our period. Still, it can be safely maintained that its flowering age started about 1830 and ended about 1880, if not later, with the *fin de siècle*. With all its variants, it can be taken as an attempt at a re-furbishing of the philosophical basis of Liberalism, the ideology of a bourgeoisie that first struggled for power, then came to it, even later tried to keep it. The philosophical views of the 19th-century Positivists are well-known. On close view it becomes clear what is common in them: an inclination to systematize and regulate, rather than explain human life. A telling evidence for this is the appearance of the word sociology and the science denoted