evil and pure good Shelley has made such a magnificent poem. It would indeed be surprising, if it were true, but, unlike Æschylus, Shelley was in the habit of writing prefaces to his poems with the object of explaining what they were about, and in his preface to the Prometheus Unbound he wrote as follows:

We owe the great writers of the golden age of our literature to that fervid awakening of the public mind which shook to dust the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian religion. We owe Milton to the progress and development of the same spirit; the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a republican, and a bold enquirer into morals and religion. The great writers of our own age are, we have reason to suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collective lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring, or about to be restored.

If we are curious to know what these institutions were that Shelley found in conflict with his opinions, we have only to read his Mask of Anarchy written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester:

'Tis to work and have such pay
As just keeps life from day to day
In your limbs, as in a cell
For the tyrants' use to dwell

So that ye for them are made
Loom and plough and sword and spade
With or without your own will bent
To their defence and nourishment.

This conflict was something more substantial, as well as more disturbing, than "a mere contest between pure good and pure evil," and it was also inherently dramatic, because it sprang straight out of contemporary strife. Only those who have studied the brutality, duplicity and hypocrisy of the ruling class of that date as revealed in their Enclosure Acts and Game Laws, their Speenhamland system and their truck system, and
who stand where Shelley would have stood in relation to the sufferings no less great that are the common lot of all but a fraction of mankind to-day, are in a position to appreciate the indignation which burns in the challenge of Prometheus:

Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind,
All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;
Foul Tyrant both of Gods and Human-kind,
One ohly being shalt thou not subdue.

During Shelley’s lifetime, the last of the English peasants had been turned out of their common fields on to the roads, and from there herded into the workhouses, prisons, cotton-mills and coal-mines, where they worked, men, women and children, in conditions still paralleled in such places as Jamaica, Johannesburg and Bombay. It was the period of the Industrial Revolution, which enriched the rich and impoverished the poor—the period in which the new manufacturing class was engaged in overthrowing the privileges of a corrupt landowning oligarchy, while the new proletariat, notwithstanding hunger and squalor and police persecution, was slowly and painfully learning how to organise for action.

Æschylus was a moderate democrat, who had seen the long struggle between the landowners and the merchants culminate in a concordia ordinum, marked by the abolition of aristocratic privilege and the extension of the franchise to the whole of the citizen body. It is essential, however, to remember that this concordia owed its completeness to the fact that there was another class which was not free. The slaves were the proletariat of ancient democracy, and if they had not been slaves, incapable of organisation and therefore politically powerless, the overthrow of the landed aristocracy would have been followed by a struggle between them and their masters. It was only by excluding this class from his very conception of democracy that Æschylus was able to regard the democratic revolution as a fusion of opposites symbolised in the reconciliation of Zeus and Prometheus.

Shelley was a member of the upper middle class who had transferred his allegiance to the proletariat. But this was not a slave proletariat; it was free, and already clamouring for the
suffrage. Between this class and the capitalists there was no room for compromise, because their interests were contradictory, and that is what made it impossible for Shelley to accept the Æschylean conclusion. He was bound to revolt against the idea of reconciling the champion with the oppressor of mankind. As for his alternative, even in those early days there were a few who saw more or less clearly that the only possible solution of the conflict was the expropriation of the ruling class by the class which it had expropriated; but, owing partly to the immaturity of the proletariat, which at this time was hardly conscious of its future, and partly to his own middle-class outlook, which he had not entirely outgrown, Shelley shrank from the idea of revolutionary action. Accordingly, his Jupiter is overthrown, but only by the mystical power of passive resistance.

In fairness to Shelley, it must be added that, whereas Æschylus was celebrating a revolution which he had already seen accomplished, Shelley’s revolution was at this time no more than a hope of the future; and so, for a century, it remained.
XVIII

AFTER ÆSCHYLUS

The latest work of Æschylus marks a turning-point in the evolution of Greek tragedy. In the first place, it concludes that process of expansion and co-ordination which had begun when the tetralogy first took shape. At this point the tetralogy ceases to develop and splits into its component parts. The satyr play persists, but with diminishing vitality. The new unit is the single tragedy, now self-contained. Thus, in the hands of Sophokles (495–405 B.C.) and Euripides (480–405 B.C.), the art-form reverted to an earlier phase of its development; but at the same time this single tragedy is marked by certain features which can be traced to the distinctive function of the third play of the Æschylean trilogy. It is therefore not simply a reversion to type, but a reversion to type on a higher plane.

In the second place, it is only at this stage that the art developed what came eventually to be regarded as one of its primary characteristics. According to Aristotle, the tragic plot should consist of a change from good fortune to bad.¹ This principle has only a very limited application to the work of Æschylus, because the normal conclusion of his trilogy was a change in the reverse direction. From this point of view, therefore, his work is still archaic, preserving the primitive sequence of the passion play, in which the god’s death had been followed by his resurrection.

These structural changes in the art can only be explained by reference to external factors; and therefore, before passing on to the work of Sophokles and Euripides, we must pause to consider the developments that were taking place in Athenian society.

The data for the population of Attica in the fifth century B.C. are too fragmentary and uncertain to permit of more than a conjectural estimate.² For the time of the Persian Wars all that can be said is that the number of citizens was probably

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less, the number of resident aliens and slaves certainly much less, than at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. In 431 B.C., according to the most recent estimate, there were at least 172,000 citizens, including their women and children, at least 28,500 resident aliens, and not more than 115,000 slaves. This means that the slaves already amounted to over half the free population, and that little more than a quarter of the total number of adults were in possession of the franchise.

Slave labour became one of the most productive fields for the investment of capital. Nikias owned 1,000 slaves, whom he hired out for labour in the mines; Hipponikos owned 600, whom he employed for the same purpose. Of the number employed in the mines, all we know is that in the year 413 B.C. over 20,000 slaves deserted to the Spartans, and it is probable that most of these were miners. Slaves were also employed in large numbers in quarrying and transport.

As the supply of slave labour increased, the demand for free labour declined, with the result that the free labourer was either unable to find employment or else compelled to work in conditions which reduced him to the economic level of a slave. Against this destructive competition, the resident alien had no protection, because he did not possess the franchise, and consequently the poorer aliens sank to a status which Aristotle describes as "limited slavery." But the position of the citizen was different. The lower classes used their newly won political rights to force the state to maintain them without working at all. During the twenty years from 450 to 430 B.C., under the leadership of Perikles, the principle of payment for public services, including attendance at the law courts, was adopted and extended as a permanent policy of state, with the result that, at the end of that period, over 20,000 citizens—that is, between one-third and one-half of the whole citizen body—were supported in one way or another at the public expense. This was the price at which Perikles retained popular support.

Where did the money come from? The fact that the policy was carried through without effective opposition is enough to show that the burden did not fall on the rich. It came partly from imposts on trade and taxes levied from the resident aliens,
in whose hands trade was concentrated; and it came partly from the empire into which Athens had now converted the league of free cities which she had organised for the war of liberation against Persia some thirty years before. The internal revenue at this period has been estimated at 400 talents, most of which was raised by taxes of the kind just mentioned, and the average annual assessment of the tribute exacted from the subject states was probably 460 talents. Thus, the wealth of the community was administered by that section of it which had the least part in its production. The citizens of Athens became a class of *rentiers*, living parasitically on the labour of others.

These measures, of course, did nothing to eliminate the tendency, inherent in an economy based on private ownership, for wealth to concentrate at one pole of society; and consequently they only served to intensify the inequalities which they were designed to remove. Fed by cheap corn imported from Athenian dependencies overseas, the city populace was swollen by a constant influx of peasants from the Attic countryside, for whom, owing to the competition of foreign corn, farming had ceased to pay; and so the demand for imported food only grew with the supply. In the same way, many of the impoverished citizens whom the state tried to get off its hands by settling them overseas on lands seized from the subject states, found it profitable to sell their holdings and return to Athens. The state could only maintain itself on this basis by continuous expansion. It had entered on a path which led inevitably to war. And the strongest advocates of this policy were naturally the radicals, representing all those who were struggling to maintain their standard of living against the growing menace of slavery. It was therefore the advanced democrats that now became the most ardent imperialists. So long as their own incomes were not affected, the rich citizens acquiesced, but, when the empire revolted, they were not slow to act. Shortly before the end of the war, when the empire was collapsing, the democracy was overthrown and replaced by a régime whose policy was "to secure for high civil offices men of special competence, to reserve the privileges of the commonwealth to Athenians who could afford them, and deny a voice in political
decisions to such as lacked an appreciable property-stake in the community”—in other words, rather than surrender their wealth, the rich aimed at holding the poor in check by depriving them of the franchise, which was their only protection against the competition of slave labour.

Such were the insoluble contradictions on which Athenian democracy wrecked itself. The constitution which had been founded at the beginning of the century in the name of equality was overthrown at the end by the class that had founded it in the name of inequality. The class which had risen to power on the strength of its claim that the state should be ruled by those who produced its wealth now saw its unearned income threatened by rival claimants to the proceeds accruing from the taxation of traders and the exploitation of a multitude of slaves. The cry of liberty, which had been raised with such fervour against the Persian invader, had taken on a hollow ring, because, though Perikles might clothe it in fine words, the policy for which he stood meant that liberty was to be maintained at home by suppressing it abroad. Democracy had been transformed into the negation of democracy.

These contradictions produced in the human consciousness an underlying sense of disillusionment and frustration which it sought to escape by formulating ideas designed to cast a veil over the reality—the idea that Athens was destined to be the “school of Hellas”; the idea that the slave was naturally inferior to the freeman; and, above all, the idea of sophrosyne, that virtue of moderation or restraint which was embodied in Athena. The notion of sophrosyne is the old aristocratic “nothing too much” in a new guise, but with one difference. In the aristocratic tradition, the man who sought too much had been simply blasted by the thunderbolt of Zeus. What happened to the man whose ambitions or desires led him beyond the limits of sophrosyne is that he got the opposite of what he was striving after. This notion, which from the fifth century onwards becomes a dominant element in Greek thought, must be traced back to its origin.

The social contradictions which came to a head after the democratic revolution were insoluble, because they were inherent in an economy based on private property, and it was
the growth of private property which through the democratic revolution had brought them to a head. And further, what had facilitated and accelerated the growth of private property was the development of money. In his discussion of this subject, which for depth of insight is one of the most remarkable in the whole range of his work, Aristotle says that the original function of money was to facilitate the process of exchange—selling in order to buy. So long as it was confined to this purpose, the use of money was limited by the fact that it was merely a means to an end—the satisfaction of immediate needs. This use of money (here his own social preconceptions come into play) is regarded as natural and just. But it was not long before money came to be used for a new purpose—buying in order to sell: the merchant buys cheap in order to sell dear. Money-making has become an end in itself, and in this form it has no limit. The same truth has been formulated in modern times by Marx:

The simple circulation of commodities (selling in order to buy) is a means for carrying out a process which lies outside the domain of circulation—a means for the appropriation of use-values, for the satisfaction of wants. The circulation of money as capital, on the other hand, is an end in itself, for the expansion of value can only occur within this perpetually renewed movement. Consequently, the circulation of capital has no limits.

This, in effect, is what Solon had said at the beginning of the Athenian monetary revolution: "Riches have no limit." And, as Aristotle points out, owing to various causes, such as depreciation in the value of money, the pursuit of wealth for its own sake is liable to result in the opposite of the intention: a man may amass money only to find himself like Meidas starving in the midst of his gold.

Under the landed aristocracy, the economic relations between peasant and landowner had been simple and clear. The peasant had paid over so much of his produce to his lord, and this relation was expressed in the simple formula, Nothing too much. But with the development of money economic relations became increasingly complex and obscure. The producer took his goods to market only to find them unsaleable,
because others had produced more of the same goods than there were purchasers to buy them. The speculator put his capital into an industrial enterprise only to find that a monetary crisis, which he had unwittingly helped to precipitate, robbed him of the expected return. He found himself the victim of a process which lay outside his understanding and control.

When money was first introduced, it was recognised as a new power destined to increase in an unprecedented degree man’s control over Nature. “Man is money”: such was the saying of a citizen of one of the first Greek states to strike a coinage.⁸ There is nothing money cannot buy; there is nothing the man with money cannot become. But this new power was soon seen to be ambivalent. As Sophokles wrote:⁹

Money wins friendship, honour, place and power,
And sets man next to the proud tyrant’s throne.
All trodden paths and paths untrod before
Are scaled by nimble riches, where the poor
Can never hope to win the heart’s desire.
A man ill-formed by nature and ill-spoken
Money shall make him fair to eye and ear.
Money earns man his health and happiness,
And only money cloaks iniquity.

And so we find the same poet denouncing money as the root of all evil:¹⁰

Of all the foul growths current in the world
The worst is money. Money drives men from home,
Plunders great cities, perverts the honest mind
To shameful practice, godlessness and crime.

The invention has returned to plague the inventor.

As money extended the range of its operations, penetrating every department of human life with its subversive influence, men came to perceive that this yellow slave had become their master; and, since its operation lay outside their control, they could only explain it by idealising it as a universal law. From this time forward there runs through Greek literature the persistent tradition that the excessive pursuit, not only of riches, but of health, happiness and all things good and desirable in themselves, is liable to produce their opposites.¹¹ As Isokrates
said, men who have acquired great riches cannot rest content, but risk what they have by reaching after more. As Bakchylides said, the spirit of pride or excess bestows on man his neighbour's wealth only to plunge him in the gulf of calamity. As Hippokrates said, extreme conditions of physical well-being are dangerous, because they cannot remain stable. Æschylus said the same of health and happiness:

If a man's health be advanced over the due mean,  
It will trespass soon upon sickness, who stands  
Close neighbour, between them a thin wall.  
So doth the passage of life,  
Sped by a prosperous breeze,  
Suddenly founder on reefs of disaster.

The idea received its most precise and comprehensive formulation in the words of Plato: "In the seasons, in plants, in the body, and above all in civil society, excessive action results in a violent transformation into its opposite."

Æschylus had been able to take the tide of democracy at the flood. His conception of progress as the result of conflict reflected the positive achievement of the democratic revolution; but in his last years, when he urged his fellow citizens to leave their laws unchanged, his outlook was ceasing to be progressive. He failed to see that his reconciliation of opposites was but a transitory equilibrium out of which new opposites must arise. And so the tide began to turn. In his hands, the tragic chorus had still preserved something of its primitive function: it was designed to evoke and organise the attitude of mind appropriate to the ensuing action. In Sophokles, it loses this dynamic quality, and in Euripides it tends to become a musical interlude unrelated to the action. Similarly, the Æschylean trilogy split up into a group of single tragedies, and the reconciliation survived only in the atrophied form of the deus ex machina, a summary conclusion bearing no organic relation to the plot. The centre of interest had shifted from the reconciliation to the conflict. And at the same time there emerged the figure of the tragic hero in its mature form—a good man destroyed by his own self-will; and this reversal of his fortune is brought about on the principle of peripeteia, which Aristotle defines as "the
transformation of the action into its opposite.”

The hero brings disaster on his own head by doing something which results in the reverse of what he had intended. His tragedy is therefore the tragedy of the community which has created him.

The principle of *peripeteia* can, of course, be traced in Æschylus. Xerxes lost his empire because he overreached himself, and the circumstances in which Eteokles met his death were of his own making; but the blindness of Xerxes is merely a manifestation of the pride that goes before a fall, and, although the position in which Eteokles finds himself is not what he anticipated, he has the opportunity to withdraw and makes his choice with full knowledge of the consequences. In these plays, therefore, the principle is still rudimentary. To see it in its prime, we must turn to the finest work of Sophokles.

Sophokles raised the single tragedy to a level of technical perfection as high as the Æschylean trilogy, and what makes this achievement still more remarkable is that, so far from seeking to shun comparison with Æschylus, again and again he chose as his material the same myths which his predecessor had already dramatised. Just as he adapted the form of the art to his own outlook, so, by reinterpreting its content, he made it thoroughly his own. Further, since his own interpretation was new, he was in a position to exploit the work of Æschylus, which was, of course, familiar to his audience, by consciously appealing to it in order to economise an effect or to point a contrast. A firm grasp of this principle is indispensable to the understanding of Sophokles. Where the corresponding work of Æschylus has perished—for example, his *Œdipus* and his *Philoktetes*—our appreciation of the Sophoclean plays on those subjects is necessarily incomplete; but fortunately we possess in the *Elektra* a play which covers exactly the same ground as the *Choephoroi*, and, as Headlam pointed out many years ago, “in the *Elektra* of Sophokles there is hardly any touch which in one form or another is not already to be found in Æschylus.”

To Sophokles, meditating on the *Oresteia*, the question presented itself: What happened to Elektra? Æschylus had shown how, through the agency of the ancestral curse, an innocent girl had been transformed into a second Clytemnestra;
but there he had left her, because the plan of his trilogy demanded that the attention of the audience should be concentrated on the consequences to Orestes of obeying the oracle of Apollo. Sophokles was not interested in working out the implications of the oracle, which accordingly, in striking contrast to Æschylus, he states in such terms as to throw on Orestes the responsibility for interpreting it as a command to kill his mother. By this means the theological issue, which for Æschylus had been fundamental, is carefully excluded. In the same way, he is not interested in the ancestral curse, or, rather, only in the reality of which it is a symbol—the effects of upbringing and environment on the characters of a young man and his sister.

In the case of Orestes, the function of the curse is performed by the Tutor, who accompanies him back to Argos. This energetic and heartless old man, who has been in charge of Orestes ever since he was sent away from home and has brought him up of set purpose for the mission on which he is now engaged, is a fitting embodiment of the political interests of the royal dynasty. It is he who, after pointing out to the boy the wealthy palace of his fathers and rehearsing him in the details of the conspiracy, roughly orders him out of the way when he hears his sister weeping in the early morning twilight; and it is he who interrupts their sobs of joy when the forlorn pair are for a moment happily united. He realises that, despite all his coaching, he has his work cut out to screw this tenderhearted boy up to the pitch of murdering his mother; and it is made quite clear that, without his constant vigilance and timely intervention, the plot would have ended in fiasco. In all this we recognise a development of one of the functions assigned by Æschylus to his chorus; and it is characteristic of Sophokles that this dynamic element is transferred to one of the actors.

The difference between Orestes and Elektra is that, whereas his conduct has been virtually dictated to him by the manner of his upbringing, hers is her own choice, obstinately maintained in face of tremendous opposition. By turns sullen and defiant, never ceasing to denounce the murderers and constantly reminding them of the hope on which she has staked everything—the coming of Orestes—she is subjected to every
insult and indignity and lives in misery and squalor like a slave, fortified by the conviction that only by refusing to compromise can she remain true to her father’s memory. The knowledge that in so doing she is forced to behave in a manner of which she is herself ashamed is a torment to her. Her sense of decency, which makes it impossible for her to condone her father’s murder, has involved her in a situation in which decency is impossible. She perceives the contradiction herself, but there is no escape from it. When her sister Chrysothemis pleads with her to be sensible, she retorts that to be sensible is to betray her father. Chrysothemis is what Elektra has deliberately chosen not to be—one who has decided “to obey her masters in all things in order that she may be free.” This allusion to the proverb quoted by Ἄeschylus in the Choephoroi—“Slave, obey your masters right or wrong”—expresses the heart of the dilemma. One sister enjoys a life of freedom because she has the spirit of a slave; the other is treated like a slave because she refuses to submit. And therefore, when the Chorus of her friends warn her that persistence in her attitude can only result in some fatal calamity, she does not deny it, but insists that her attitude has been forced upon her by sheer necessity. Confronted by her mother—a woman hardened by success in crime against all sense of shame (although even she will feel a momentary pang at the news of her son’s death, showing that her depravity, too, has a history)—Elektra becomes strident and aggressive. “You admit you killed my father,” she declares. “What could be more damning, whether it was justified or not?” To the audience the answer to this question is so obvious that it is left to speak for itself in the sequel of the play. The accusations which Elektra levels against her mother sound unpleasantly like the arguments with which Clytemnestra seeks to justify her murder of her husband, making us feel that what the mother is the daughter may become; and, indeed, the same feeling seems to disturb Elektra herself, for she says:

Though you will not believe me, of all this
I am ashamed—I see that it is wrong,
Unlike myself: I have been driven to it
By your misdeeds and by your hatred of me.
Dishonour is a teacher of dishonour.
The plan of action on which Orestes and his Tutor have agreed has been very thoroughly worked out; yet, when put to the test, it is all but wrecked by an unforeseen contingency. In the *Choephoroi*, when Orestes delivers the report of his own death, Elektra knows that it is false, because his identity has already been revealed to her. Sophokles reverses the order of these events. The Tutor dare not let Orestes reveal himself beforehand, because he does not trust him; and therefore he has to leave to chance the effect of the report on the girl who has declared that her hope in her brother is the one thing that enables her to go on living. The Tutor, of course, is quite indifferent to the feelings of Elektra, but not so Orestes. Had he possessed more imagination and initiative, he would have foreseen this contingency, which, as it is, takes both him and his adviser by surprise.

The message is that Orestes has been killed by a fall from his chariot when he was leading in the last lap of a race at the Pythian Games at Delphi. This is the mystical charioteer of the *Choephoroi*, who again runs his race under the direction of Apollo (p. 272); but Sophokles gives a novel turn to the theme by reminding us through his Chorus of the story, ignored by Æschylus, of the race of Pelops at Olympia; and with this in mind, as we listen to the headlong career of the latest champion of the House of Pelops, we realise that he is doomed.

It is at this point that Sophokles introduces the *motif* of the discovery of the lock of hair which Orestes has laid on his father’s tomb, and it is Chrysothemis, not Elektra, who discovers it. But when she brings the joyful news to her sister, she is met with the blank assurance that their brother is dead. Meanwhile Elektra, exerting all her strength of will to recover herself after the destruction of her sole hope, has conceived the desperate expedient, in which she now appeals to her sister for assistance, of killing Aigisthos herself. Chrysothemis, of course, will not hear of such a thing—as she says quite rightly, it is madness; and so Elektra, who had hardly expected any other answer, declares that she will make the attempt single-handed, since the worst that can come of it is her own death. By this time we share the feeling of Chrysothemis and the Chorus that her mind is becoming unhinged.

Za
Orestes appears in disguise, carrying an urn supposed to contain his own ashes. This, too, is part of the prearranged plan, being designed to reinforce the message already delivered in case it should have failed to carry conviction. Elektra takes the urn to her breast and breaks into lamentation. This is too much for Orestes. Disregarding his instructions, he tells Elektra, who has been pouring out her heart in a flood of passionate despair, that the brother, whose ashes she is still clasping in her arms, stands before her. It was a foolish thing to do, not because it jeopardises the conspiracy, but because this last stroke drives his sister mad. A few moments ago she heard that he was dead, and on meeting that situation she has spent the last ounce of her strength. The news that he is not dead after all is more than she can bear. She throws herself into his arms, then, tearing herself away, shouts at the top of her voice to all and sundry that Orestes has come home. Her brother strives in vain to calm her, and the situation is only saved by the resourceful Tutor, who, waiting until her fit of hysteria is over, keeps a close watch on the palace door.

The crisis has now come. Aigisthos, who is out in the country, has been sent for. Clytemnestra is at home. Orestes goes in, accompanied by his tutor. After they have gone, there is a short stasimon in which the Chorus, who show as little foresight in this play as in the Choephoroi, describe them as “hounds unescapable on the trail of crime,” reminding us, both in words and in rhythm, of the opening of the corresponding stasimon in the Choephoroi. A woman’s screams are heard—“Oh, I am struck!”—and Elektra shouts back, “Strike, if you have the strength, again!”

Their mother’s body is brought out, and a shroud thrown over it. Aigisthos returns. He has heard the report of Orestes’ death, and is anxious to have proof. The son and daughter point to the body lying at the door. Aigisthos asks them to call, Clytemnestra. Meanwhile he goes up to the body and lifts the veil. “Did you not know,” the murderer says, smiling, “you have miscalculated the living as though dead?” It is to Aigisthos that Sophokles gives the reading of this riddle: “Surely, it must be Orestes that addresses me?” He asks leave to speak a few words, but Elektra intervenes: “For God’s sake no more talk.
Kill him at once and throw his body into the fields.” Ordered into the house, Agisthos continues to prevaricate, evidently in the hope of catching Orestes off his guard. After some further badinage, he goes in, followed by Orestes, and Elektra remains on the stage alone, while the Chorus brings the tragedy to an end with the words: “O seed of Atreus, after much suffering thou hast come forth in freedom, by this enterprise made perfect.” These words recall the last stásimon of the Choephoroi, where the deliverance of the house was acclaimed in an ecstasy of ill-timed jubilation.

In order to bring out the full effect of this last scene, it would be necessary to study it in detail, showing how almost every line vibrates with memories of Æschylus; but enough has perhaps been said to indicate the method which the dramatist has adopted; and, when that has been understood, we shall hardly be in danger of falling into the egregious blunder of supposing that Sophokles really imagined that these two unhappy creatures were justified in murdering their mother. It is true that he does not expressly tell us that the next thing that happened was that Orestes saw the Erinyes, but that is because he does not wish to distract our attention from the silent figure of Elektra. So far as the future of Orestes is concerned, he leaves the audience to draw their own conclusions from the Oresteia. But what does the future hold in store for Elektra? Her hope has been fulfilled, she has won her deliverance, but the result is her utter desolation:

O Curse of this sad House, unconquerable,
How wide thy vision! Even that which seemed
Well-ordered, safe beyond the reach of harm,
Thou hast brought down with arrows from afar,
And left me desolate, stripped of all I loved.18

It is not an accident that Sheppard, the first modern scholar to explain this play correctly,19 was also the first to produce it on the stage; for the stagecraft of Sophokles, who in this respect excelled, is unanswerable. Nor is it an accident that, notwithstanding Sheppard’s interpretation, the play continues to be misunderstood, because of all Greek tragedies it presents that sense of contradiction which is the essence of mature tragedy, in
its sharpest and most inescapable form. Sophokles and his contemporaries could stand it, but for our dyspeptic culture it is too tough. Of those who seek refuge in the view that Sophokles regarded the murder simply as a justifiable homicide, it must be said that they have been deaf to his appeals to the Choephoroi, and that they have no right to father on Sophokles their own predilection for an easy answer to an insoluble problem. Others, less crudely, but with no more success, have tried to find some compromise, some middle point between Elektra and Chrysothemis, which will enable them to say that the heroine failed in some way to do what she ought to have done; but these critics (who might well be asked what they would have done in the circumstances themselves) are apparently unaware that they are attempting that very task of reconciling the irreconcilable in which Elektra so heroically failed. There is no way out, and that is where the tragedy lies—the tragedy of a passionate nature which by the very exercise of its vitality is caught as in a vice and crushed.

Let us now turn to the Ædipus Tyrannus, which Aristotle regarded as the type of all Greek tragedy.

Laios and Jocasta were King and Queen of Thebes. Kreon was Jocasta’s brother. To the south of Thebes lies Corinth; to the west, cradled in the cliffs of Parnassus, the Delphic Oracle of Apollo, on whose temple were inscribed the words, “Know thyself.” To Laios and Jocasta was born a son, Ædipus, of whom the Oracle predicted that he was destined to murder his father and marry his mother. Rather than rear such a child, Jocasta handed it over to one of the men-servants with instructions to leave it to perish in the hills. The man-servant, who was a shepherd, took pity on it and gave it to another shepherd, a Corinthian, who took it home with him. The King and Queen of Corinth were childless, and reared it as their own.

Some twenty years later the young Ædipus was taunted by one of his companions with not being the true son of his father. He consulted his supposed parents, who sought to reassure him without revealing the truth. Dissatisfied with their assurances, Ædipus made a pilgrimage to Delphi and consulted the Oracle. The only reply he got was a repetition of the old prophecy, of
which he now heard for the first time. Resolving never to set foot in Corinth again, he took the road to Thebes.

At this time the people of Thebes were afflicted by the ravages of the Sphinx, which took a daily toll of human life until some one could be found to read the riddle it had set them. Laios was now on his way to Delphi to consult the Oracle. He was driving a chariot, and one of his attendants was his man-servant, the shepherd. Meeting Õedipus, he tried to force him off the track. A quarrel ensued. Laios struck at Õedipus with his whip. Õedipus struck back and killed him. He killed the attendants, too—all except the shepherd, who took to his heels and brought back to Thebes the panic-stricken story that the King had been murdered by a band of robbers.

Pursuing his journey, Õedipus reached Thebes, where the first thing he did was to deliver the people by reading the riddle of the Sphinx. The answer, as we have seen, was Man. Õedipus knew himself. And yet he did not know himself: that he was yet to learn. The grateful people acclaimed him as their King. At this point the shepherd, who recognised in the deliverer of Thebes his master’s murderer, but resolved to keep the truth to himself, obtained Jocasta’s leave to spend the rest of his days in retirement in the hills. The new King married the widowed Queen.

Many years passed, and children were born to them. Then once more the Thebans were afflicted, this time with a plague. Determined not to fail them, Õedipus sent Kreon to consult the Oracle. The reply was that the plague would cease when the murderer of Laios had been expelled. Õedipus immediately instituted a search for the unknown criminal in their midst, on whom he pronounced a curse. There was one other besides the shepherd who knew the truth and, like him, had decided to keep it dark—the aged prophet, Teiresias. Questioned by Õedipus, he refused to answer. Õedipus lost patience and accused him of disloyalty to Thebes. Then Teiresias lost patience, too, and denounced Õedipus as the murderer. Õedipus flew into a passion, accused Teiresias of having been suborned by Kreon, and accused Kreon of conspiring against the throne. The quarrel was brought to an end by the intervention of Jocasta, who, in reply to her husband’s questions, told him
what she had heard of the death of Laios—that he had been killed on the road to Delphi by a band of robbers. The road to Delphi—Œdipus remembered. But a band of robbers—Œdipus had been travelling alone. Jocasta assured him that the second point could be proved by sending for the sole survivor, the old shepherd in the hills. This Œdipus instructed her to do in the hope that his evidence would clear him.

At this point a messenger arrived from Corinth with the news that the King of that city was dead and Œdipus his successor. Œdipus was now at the height of fortune—king of two cities; and Jocasta acclaimed the news as proof that, since his father had died a natural death, the old prophecy was falsified. Reassured on that point, Œdipus nevertheless insisted that he would never return to Corinth for fear of marrying the Queen. Eager to reassure him on this point, too, the messenger explained that he was not her true son, but a foundling.

Meanwhile the old shepherd had arrived and at once recognised the messenger from Corinth as the shepherd he had met long ago in the hills. He tried hard to evade the King’s questions, but was forced to answer by the threat of torture. The truth was out at last: Œdipus knew himself. Rushing into the palace, he put out his eyes with brooches torn from the dead body of his mother, who had already hanged herself.

Ah, generations of men!
I count your life as nothing.
None that mortal is hath more
Of happiness than this—
To seem and not to be, and then, having seemed, to fail.80

Since the beginning of the play, objectively nothing has changed, but subjectively everything has changed. All that has happened is that Œdipus has come to know what he is as apart from what he seemed to be. He ends life as he began it—as an outcast. The interval was only seeming. And yet, if seeming is being, this outcast who became a king, this king who has become an outcast, has twice become the opposite of what he was. And these strange mutations have been brought about
against the intention, yet through the unconscious agency, of the persons concerned. The parents exposed the child to avert the prophecy. The shepherd saved it out of pity, with the result that it grew up ignorant of its parentage. When doubt was cast on his parentage, Œdipus consulted the Oracle, and, when the Oracle revealed his destiny, he sought to escape it by taking the road that led to Thebes. He killed his father in self-defence. When the shepherd recognised him, he said nothing, thus leaving him free to marry his mother. When the Oracle demanded the expulsion of the murderer, Œdipus led the search and followed up each clue until he was brought face to face with himself. Teiresias would not have denounced him if he had not denounced Teiresias. His charges against Teiresias and Kreon were unjustified. His vehemence at this point was the error that brought about his fall. And yet this error was but the excess of his greatest quality—his zeal in the service of his people. And, finally, the old shepherd, summoned to disprove the charge that he had killed his father, played into the hands of the Corinthian messenger, who, by seeking to relieve Œdipus of the fear of marrying his mother, proved that what he feared to do he had already done. This constant transmutation of intentions into their opposites, carried on to the catastrophe with the automatic precision of a dream, is the motive that governs the whole conception. The Œdipus of Sophokles is a symbol of the deep-seated perplexity engendered in men's minds by the unforeseen and incomprehensible transformation of a social order designed to establish liberty and equality into an instrument for the destruction of liberty and equality.

This play differs from the Elektra in that the crisis is followed by an epilogue, which culminates in the prayer dictated by the sufferer to his children:²¹

Children, out of much
I might have told you, could you understand,
Take this one counsel: be your prayer to live,
Where fortune's modest measure is, a life
That shall be better than your father's was.

The purpose of this epilogue is, of course, to relieve the tremendous tension created by the crisis, and that purpose it serves
perfectly; but the release it provides is, as it was meant to be, purely emotional. If the lesson to be drawn from what has happened is the "modest measure" of conventional morality, the sufferer might have answered his god in the words of Augustine, "Thou hast counselled more wisely than thou hast permitted." But the strength of Oedipus is spent. Defeated and crushed by an irresistible and impenetrable power, which out of his own goodness has made the net that has enmeshed him, his wounded spirit instinctively seeks refuge in the simple, idle phrases that he learnt as a child.

Sophokles came of an aristocratic family, and in his conscious life he accepted the conventional outlook of his class. This is shown by his active support of the anti-democratic constitution which placed restrictions on the franchise in the last years of the Peloponnesian War (411 B.C.). It is also shown by his attitude to the Delphic Oracle, to which, owing to its reactionary policy, the democrats were hostile. In the Oedipus, as in the Elektra, he evades the religious issue, insisting that the oracle given to Laios is the interpretation put on the will of Apollo by his human agents, who are not infallible. For him, of course, that issue is dramatically irrelevant, but the fact that, unlike Eschylus and Euripides, he has chosen to make it irrelevant signifies that he accepted the aristocratic view of Apollo, or at least was not prepared to challenge it.

It is also true, as Webster has remarked, that he accepted the conventional attitude, which Euripides was already challenging, to slaves and women. These social prejudices were certainly limitations, and more severe in him than in Eschylus, because their true character was becoming increasingly apparent; but Webster is entirely mistaken in supposing that they constituted the essentials of his thought. As one who acquiesced in the privileges of his class, he was bound to accept the moral values designed to protect them, but where he differed from other members of his class, less intellectually gifted, was in his profound sense of the contradictions which those values involved; and this is the conflict that he sublimated in his art. He was far less conscious than Eschylus had been of his relation to society, but of course this does not mean that the relation was any the less close—merely that it was passive rather than
active; and indeed it was partly because of this that he was able to express the conflict in a symbol so true to the reality as the tragedy of Oedipus.

Euripides, like Æschylus, was actively conscious of his relation to society; but for that very reason his work was fundamentally different, because society had changed. Reared from the cradle in the democratic ideas of liberty and equality, he was dismayed to see them flouted by reality. He saw the decay of the state religion in consequence of the deepening division of interests among the worshippers; he saw the degradation of family life in consequence of the subjection of women; he saw the demoralising effects of imperialist aggression, waged in the name of democracy; and he even dared to challenge the validity of the distinction between freeman and slave, thus laying bare the irremediable evil which from this time forward was to gnaw at the vitals of ancient society—the condition both of its growth and its decay. Hence his outspoken individualism, the speculative inconsistency of his thought, and the experimental variety of his technique.

As a democrat, he delivered, in the Iphigœna, a scathing denunciation of the unscrupulous chicanery by which the Delphic priesthood maintained its hold over the masses. As a rationalist, he boldly declared, in the Madness of Herakles, that, in the absence of moral responsibility, the pollution of homicide was merely physical. But, like other rationalists, he failed to see that the evils of society could never be cured by an appeal to reason, because their origin lay, not in ignorance or unenlightenment, but in a conflict of interests. It is therefore not surprising that at the end of his life he turned to mysticism. In his Hippolytos, an early play, he had shown little sympathy with the Orphic way of life; but in the Bacchœnts, written shortly before his death in Macedonia, where the worship of Dionysus still survived in its primitive, orgiastic form, his position has changed. The self-abandonment of the mystic is attractive to one who has thought long and earnestly on the riddle of reality, but without achieving any positive result; yet at the same time it is repulsive, because he cannot bring himself to renounce the faculty which has made man what he is. Agaue and her Bacchœnts escape from the city into the wilds, where, in communion with the
divine, they dance their night-long dances, but she returns to
the city carrying in her arms the head of her son, whom she
has torn to pieces.

We have seen how the position of women at Athens had
deteriorated. Lysias gives a picture of Athenian family life in
his speech On the Murder of Eratosthenes, and it is not a pleasant
one. All that was permitted to the wife was housework in the
company of slaves and fidelity to a husband who spent most of
his time away from home and was free to associate with other
women. The result was the rapid growth of concubinage,
prostitution and also male homosexuality. This institution,
which seems to have been particularly widespread among the
aristocratic intellectuals, was an adaptation of the primitive
relationship between the newly-initiated boy and the young
man who had supervised his initiation—a relationship which,
in the conditions of Athenian city life, became predominantly
sexual. The extent to which the relations between husband and
wife were poisoned by these developments may be judged from
the complacent remark of another Athenian orator:26 "We
have courtesans for our pleasure, concubines for the daily needs
of our bodies, and wives to keep house for us and bear us
legitimate children." And, finally, having been reduced to this
condition in the interests of the men, the woman was told to
accept it as a dispensation of Nature. Perikles, who had
divorced his own wife for an Ionian courtesan, and conse-
quently quarrelled with his son, who then spread scurrilous
reports about his father's private life, delivered a public oration
in which he exhorted the widows of the men who had died for
Athens to make the best of their inferior natures by behaving
with such self-effacement as to excite neither applause nor
censure.26 The attitude towards women corresponded to the
attitude towards slaves. One wonders how Perikles explained
matters to Aspasia, who, being an alien, was free from dis-
abilities declared to be inherent in her sex; and one wonders
how Plato felt on the day when by an unlucky stroke of fortune
he was sold into slavery himself.27 The story was that Dionysios
of Syracuse, who ordered the sale, told him that no harm would
come to him, because, being a just man, he would be happy
though a slave. However, the philosopher's capacity to practise
what he preached was not put to the test, because, being rich, he was able to buy himself out.

All trodden paths and paths untrod before
Are scaled by nimble riches.

There was an Attic proverb that women had no fight in them. Jason returned home with Medea, a woman he had fallen in love with on his travels. After his return he ceased to care for her. She was a foreigner, his children by her were illegitimate, and he wanted a son who would be able to inherit from him. So he made a match with the King’s daughter, and, in case Medea should cause trouble, she was told to leave the country and take her children with her. Medea obeyed, but not before she had murdered the bride and her own children by the bridegroom. The arguments advanced by Jason in defence of his conduct are such as would be entirely acceptable to Athenian convention. As Medea says, we have to buy husbands with our money and serve them with our bodies like slaves.

In the year 416 the Athenians delivered an ultimatum to the islanders of Melos, who wished to remain neutral in the war, and, according to Thucydides, this is what the representatives of democratic Athens told the people of Melos:28

As therefore it is not our purpose to amuse you with pompous details—how, after completely vanquishing the Persians, we had a right to assume the sovereignty, we shall waive all parade of words that have no tendency towards conviction, and in return insist from you that you reject all hopes of persuading us by frivolous remonstrances. Let us lay all stress on such points as may on both sides be judged persuasive; since of this you are as strongly convinced as we ourselves are sensible of it, that in all human competitions equal wants alone produce equitable determination, and, in whatever terms the powerful enjoin obedience, to those the weak are obliged to submit.

Since the people of Melos refused to submit, the adult male population was put to the sword and the women and children sold into slavery. In the following year Euripides produced his *Trojan Women*, portraying the helpless misery of the captives and the cynical insolence of the conquerors, who are destined to be destroyed on the voyage home by thunder and lightning.
Thus, in the hands of Euripides, the age-old story of the Trojan War became prophetic, for a few years later Athens lost her empire as a result of her disastrous expedition to Sicily.

Euripides was a democrat who saw that democracy was being driven to self-destruction. That is the contradiction that underlies his work. He saw the evils inherent in contemporary society, and courageously exposed them. His influence was therefore disruptive: he helped to undermine the edifice which Æschylus had laboured to construct. But it was also, and for the same reason, progressive: the edifice was crumbling of itself.

After the war, the Greek city-state entered on its last phase, and Athenian thought became sharply divided in accordance with the cleavage between the few who had an interest in maintaining it and the many who had not. On the one hand, the idealists clung to their faith in the city-state at the cost of accepting social inequalities which were becoming less and less compatible with honest thinking. They were driven to deny the validity of the senses as a criterion of truth and to teach that happiness lay, not in pleasure, but in something called "virtue," which involved the acceptance of pain. Plato (428–348 B.C.) made slavery the basis of his ideal state, modelled on the parasitic communism of backward Spartan landowners, and, true to his model, passed imaginary laws narrowly restricting the activities of painters and poets, in whose creative imagination and fertile sense of human possibilities he recognised a danger to the established order; while, for the further security of his ruling class, he drew up a fantastic system of education designed to poison the minds of the people by dissemination of calculated lies.29 Plato's Republic is an implicit confession of the intellectual bankruptcy of the city-state. Similarly, the contradictions in which even Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), less reactionary and more honest than Plato, entangled himself in his justification of slavery are a measure of the extent to which the intellectual integrity of the ruling class was compromised by the maintenance of its privileges. He justified the subordination of slave to freeman by appealing to the subordination of woman to man and of body to soul; but the subordination of woman was a phenomenon of the same nature as slavery, and the subordination of body to soul, or of matter to form, was a
projection on to the plane of ideas of the cleavage that confronted him in society. The early Orphics had asserted the independence of the soul as a protest against the enslavement of their bodies; now the same dichotomy was used to reconcile the unfree to permanent subjection. We are reminded of those nineteenth-century thinkers, beginning with Malthus, who, accepting the manufacturers' demand for cheap labour, justified the poverty of the workers by inventing laws of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest, and, when on this basis Darwin had founded a new science of biology, they acclaimed his theories as a final proof that the poverty of the workers was a law of nature.30

Conversely, the materialists were only able to reaffirm the validity of sense-perception and to maintain their conviction that happiness lies primarily in the satisfaction of material needs, by renouncing their part in a society which no longer conformed to reason and by preaching the self-sufficiency of the individual. Epicurus (342–268 B.C.) taught that justice was relative, rescued the human soul from metaphysical abstractions (even his gods were material), and so completed the work, which Demokritos had begun, of formulating the Atomic Theory. The atomism of the Epicureans was the complement of their individualism. They made the elements of the universe impassive and imperturbable, because, in a society torn by discord, that is what they themselves strove to become. Their definition of pleasure as the absence of pain reveals the social desperation of the dying convulsions of the city-state, but it had a positive value in their insistence that the aim of human endeavour is pleasure and not self-frustration for an intangible idea or an illusory hereafter. Thus, between the rise and fall of the city-state, idealism and materialism had changed places. At the beginning of the urban revolution, when the Orphics were proclaiming the divinity of the soul, the philosophers of Miletos maintained the primitive notion that the soul is an activity of matter; but now, when the Greek city-states were about to dissolve like crystals into the cosmopolitan empire, the Epicureans suffered persecution in their endeavours to free the masses from the fables of infernal torment with which their rulers cowed them. The heir to Orphic mysticism was Plato;
the heir to Ionian materialism was Epicurus. In this, despite their limitations, the Epicureans were in the true line of progress; for at least they recognised that "the supreme being for man is man himself, and consequently all relations, all conditions in which man is humiliated, enslaved, despised, must be destroyed."

There was, however, one tradition which the Epicureans had inherited indirectly from the Orphics. We have seen in a former chapter how, in consequence of the transition from collective to private ownership, Moira had been transformed into Ananke (p. 158). During the maturity of the city-state, the idea of Ananke was developed and extended. Not only was the slave under the absolute control of his master and denied all share in the surplus product of his labour, but the master himself, in the conditions of a monitory economy, was at the mercy of forces which he was unable to control; and so the freeman, too, was enslaved to the blind force of Necessity, which frustrated his desires and defeated his efforts. But, if Necessity is supreme, and her action incalculable, all change appears subjectively as chance; and so by the side of Ananke there arose the figure of Tyche—opposite poles of the same conception.\textsuperscript{31} The belief that the world is ruled by Tyche can be traced through Euripides to Pindar, who declared that she was one of the Moirai and the strongest of them all;\textsuperscript{32} and during the next two centuries the cult of Tyche became one of the most widespread and popular in Greece.

It was precisely at this point that Epicurus made his most important advance over the cosmology of Demokritos. Parmenides, the forerunner of Plato, had taught that there was no empty space and consequently no motion; that the universe was one and unchanging, its apparent diversity and mutability being an illusion of the senses. Demokritos, the forerunner of Epicurus, had reasserted the existence of empty space and attributed the properties of the Parmenidean One to each of an infinite number of atoms, indivisible, indestructible, without weight, falling vertically through the void and by their collisions and combinations creating the world. The result was a mechanistic theory of the universe in which every event is the product of necessity—the slave of Ananke.

In the view of Epicurus, this theory was inadequate, because
it failed to take account of one of the faculties which differentiate man from the other animals—what we call freedom of the will. He agreed with Demokritos, as against Plato, that matter, not mind, is the *príus*, but he recognised that the human consciousness was capable of reacting on its environment, and hence, by applying what it had learnt from science, of controlling it. Accordingly, endowed in his theory with the property of weight, the *atom* possesses in itself the cause of its own motion; and, moreover, it possesses, besides the vertical, an oblique motion or swerve from the straight line. Thus, in his system, necessity was superseded by chance, Ananke by Tyche, and in this way the atom became free.

In keeping with this rift in society and thought there was a corresponding rift in art. The old type of comedy, perfected by Aristophanes, which had been intensely political, passed into the comedy of manners, composed almost entirely by resident aliens and devoted to the intrigues of illicit lovers and foundlings, who after many vicissitudes are restored by fortune to their lost heritage. The only other art form that remained popular at Athens after the end of the Peloponnesian War was the dithyramb, which was now developed as an extravagant musical spectacle supplying an opiate to the people’s unsatisfied desires. As for tragedy, which by its very nature was at the same time serious and collective, there was no scope for it in a community driven by internal dissensions to seek escape from a conflict that was to remain insoluble until the economic possibilities of slave labour had been exhausted; and, before that point was reached, it was necessary that Imperial Rome should bestride the world like a clay-footed colossus. The tragic festivals were maintained, but with a shift of interest to the stagecraft and the acting, and with an increasing dependence on revivals of the old masters, especially Euripides, whose prophetic individualism appealed far more strongly than the obsolete collectivism of Æschylus to an audience that had lost faith in social life. As a creative force, the art of tragedy ceased to exist, until the bourgeois revolution of modern Europe brought it once more into being out of conditions similar in certain essential respects to those which had prevailed under the merchant princes of early Athens.
XIX

PITY AND FEAR

Aristotle's account of Greek tragedy contains certain weaknesses, due to limitations inherent in his subjective attitude to the problem. It is in keeping with his general doctrine of the relation of matter to form that he treats the evolution of the art as a wholly internal process without reference to the history of the community of whose life it was a part. For this reason he is content to explain how tragedy assumed its final form without explaining why it assumed that particular form or why after that it ceased to develop. Again, his predilection, shared with his contemporaries, for the single tragedy, in which the element of reconciliation was atrophied or eliminated, makes it difficult for him to appreciate the work of Æschylus: indeed, he omits all mention of the Æschylean tetralogy, which, on his own assumptions, might well have been regarded as the highest point in the formal evolution of the art.

Notwithstanding these limitations, his work has a great positive value, which consists, first, in his conception of the drama as a product of organic development to be studied objectively like other natural phenomena, and, secondly, in his scrupulous attention to the known facts. In the latter respect, he reveals the same regard for detail that we find in his other work, scientific and historical, and for that reason we should beware of rejecting his statements of fact without good reason, even where we cannot check them. The theory of the origin of tragedy which has been propounded in these pages was worked out in its initial stages on the basis of the anthropological data at a time when I was inclined to accept Pickard-Cambridge's estimate of the Poetics, but in the course of further study it was slowly borne in on me that the conclusions to which the evidence was tending were precisely those which had been formulated by Aristotle. The man I had been cold-shouldering turned out to be my best friend. I had much the same experience
with the *Politics*. Even in this field, where, of course, his preconceptions are more active and disturbing, Aristotle reveals an insight into primitive institutions which the study of comparative anthropology shows to be far superior to that possessed by those modern historians who have rejected his authority. For these reasons, I feel entitled to claim as a confirmation of my argument the fact that it coheres so closely with the evidence of Aristotle.

There is one important statement of Aristotle’s that remains to be examined. He says that “tragedy is a representation . . . which by means of pity and fear effects the purgation of such emotions.” Plato had expelled the tragic poets from his ideal state because he considered them to be socially dangerous. Aristotle replies that the function of tragedy is socially useful. It will be noticed that both are agreed on one point: that the function of poetry is social.

Aristotle’s conception of purgation or purification (*katharsis*) is closely allied to the use of that term in medicine. In the doctrine of the Hippocratic school, disease is a disturbance of the bodily humours, leading to a crisis, in which, in the event of recovery, the morbid matter is evacuated or expelled, and the physician’s aim is to induce the crisis in conditions which will have that result. But Aristotle’s statement goes further than that, implying that, before the morbid affections can be expelled, they must first be artificially stimulated. To understand this point, we must trace it to its origin in the primitive treatment of epilepsy and hysteria.

Epilepsy was known in Greek as the “sacred disease,” and, according to Aretaios, it was so called because its cause was believed to be the entry of a god or spirit into the body. That this interpretation of the term is correct appears from what is said in the Hippocratic treatise on the disease of the “sorcerers, purifiers, charlatans and quacks” who attempted to cure it “by purifications and incantations.”

If the patient imitates a goat, if he roars, or is convulsed in the right side, they say that the Mother of the Gods is the cause. . . . If he foams at the mouth and kicks, the cause is assigned to Ares. If the symptoms are fears and terrors at
night, delirium, jumping out of bed and rushing out of doors, they are described as attacks of Hekate or assaults of spirits of the dead.

This implies that the patient is “possessed” (kátochos)—he has “a god in him” (éntheos).

The purifications in vogue among these magicians are described by the writer as consisting of abstention from baths and certain foods, the wearing of black as a sign of death and the observance of certain taboos. When the purification has been successfully accomplished, the off-scourings “are buried in the ground or thrown into the sea or carried into the mountains where no one can touch them or tread on them.” This means that through purification the spirit with which the patient has been possessed is expelled. The writer of this treatise does not specify the nature of the other part of the procedure—the incantations; but these can be studied in evidence from other sources.

The ritual of the Korybantes, whom we have seen reason to regard as a primitive magico-medical secret society, consisted of an orgiastic dance, to the accompaniment of flutes and drums, which induced in the participants what would be described in modern terminology as a fit of hysteria. Now, the Korybantes were credited with the power, not only of inducing madness, but of curing it, and the cure was effected by the same means as the inducement—by incantations, or songs “sung over” the patient, like the song which the Erinyes of Æschylus sang over Orestes in order to drive him mad. In the Kriton, after explaining the reasons why he refuses to escape from prison, Sokrates says that these reasons are ringing in his ears like the music of the flute in the rites of the Korybantes and make it impossible for him to hear any others. The effect of the music was hypnotic. In the Symposium, speaking of the eloquence of Sokrates, Alkibiades says: “Whenever I listen to him, my heart throbs harder than it does in those who take part in the rites of the Korybantes, and his words evoke in me floods of tears.” Here the effect is not so much hypnotic as hysterical.

The evidence relating to the Korybantes is fragmentary, but,
so far as it goes, it accords exactly with the psychiatric functions of primitive secret societies in all parts of the world. The following remarks are from a summary of the anthropological evidence by Fallaize.

Among the primitive theories of disease, causation by spirits who enter into and torment the patient holds a prominent place. The therapeutic measures of the medicine-man, in so far as they are not purely materialistic, like the extraction of a bone or pebble, are largely directed towards driving out or propitiating the demons or spirits responsible for the disease. . . .

The Bathonga hold that possession in the form in which it is recognised among them is caused by the spirits of the dead. . . . The preliminary symptoms are a nervous crisis, persistent pain in chest, hiccough, extraordinary yawning, and emaciation. If, after consultation of the divinatory bones, the medicine-man decides that the patient is possessed, the spirit is exorcised. In the course of the elaborate series of ceremonies which follows the patient in a frenzy declares the name of the spirit which possesses him. . . . He is given drugs which act as an emetic and the spirit is declared to have left him.

The pathological character of those affections which are regarded by primitive peoples as evidence of possession is such that the symptoms of the disease or weakness would recur at more or less frequent intervals. It is therefore not surprising to find that those who are subject to such nervous crises come to be regarded as a class apart—a class of peculiar sanctity. . . . The Bathonga who had been exorcised for possession, after a period of probation himself became a fully-initiated medicine-man and exorcist. The Melenau woman who has been under the influence of the tok [spirit], when she has undergone the full ceremony of exorcism, becomes a medicine-woman with full powers to summon the spirits to assist her in healing others. . . . Among some Siberian tribes the office of shaman tended to become hereditary, but the supernatural gift was a necessary qualification, and the shamans also adopted children who appeared suitable to succeed them, i.e. those who showed signs of an epileptic or neurotic tendency. . . . On the other hand, even where a predisposition or the actual
symptoms of previous disease were not a condition of becoming a priest, diviner or soothsayer, the novitiate often imposed conditions which could not fail to lead to an abnormal or unhealthy frame of mind. . . . Among the Chukchi, Koryak and Gilyak, during the long periods of seclusion in the forests, not only did the shamans learn and practise their professional arts—singing, dancing, ventriloquism, and playing the drum—but they endured hardships of cold and hunger which could not but intensify their natural predisposition towards hysteria. . . .

The theory of possession is not applied solely to those intermittent manifestations of abnormality to which it owes its origin. It could hardly be expected that those who are subject to attacks should not take advantage of the power given them by the feelings of awe and terror aroused by their supposed relation to the spirit world. But, as a crisis of their disease cannot be relied upon to coincide with the moment when their advice may be sought or their assistance invoked by the ordinary member of the community, possession is superinduced voluntarily by an artificial stimulus. . . .

A condition of the success of an attempt to exorcise the possessing spirit is that it should be compelled to declare through the mouth of its victim either its name, thus giving the operator power over it in accordance with a generally recognised rule of magical practice, or its desires (usually a request for offerings), knowledge of which makes it possible for it to be expelled by propitiation. It requires only a slight extension of the argument that these sayings are an expression of the will of the gods to transform them into a channel for the revelation of the future. There is abundant evidence in the recorded instances of possession to show that this is not merely an a priori view but is in accordance with the facts. . . . Those who are subject to possession by entering voluntarily into the state of exaltation at the request of their consultants attain the position of oracles. Analogies more or less close to the priestess of Apollo at Delphi and the Sibyl at Cumæ are found in almost every part of the world.

This evidence throws a flood of light on several fundamental elements in Greek life and thought—the close relation between mania, "madness," and mantiké, "prophecy," the psychical
associations of the musical modes, and the original nature of poetical inspiration; but what immediately concerns us is its significance for the ritual of the Dionysiac thiasos.

The primitive attitude to possession may be interpreted as follows. In the earliest stage, epilepsy and hysteria were treated simply like other diseases: the patient was subjected to a rite of initiation, in the course of which he died and was born again. The essential part of this process was the act of expulsion or purification, by means of which the spirit which had taken possession of the patient was first aroused into activity and then expelled. There is no reason to doubt that, granted implicit faith on the patient’s part, this cure by abreaction, to use the Freudian term, was to a considerable extent successful. The idea of possession was not originally confined to these diseases, but it came to be especially associated with them because of the peculiar violence of their symptoms and their tendency to recur. In this way there arose a special class of initiates, consisting of persons who had a predisposition to some form of dementia. These persons were organised in a magical society, modelled on the structure of the clan. At this stage, the pathological nature of their condition becomes increasingly obscured by the magical ideas to which it has given rise. The faculty of possession is regarded as a sign of exceptionally free and intimate intercourse with the spirit-world. Consequently, in pursuance of these magical powers, the members of the society are addicted to artificially inducing the symptoms in themselves, and, instead of curing them in others, they initiate the patient into their own mode of life, in which the disease is fostered because it is regarded as socially useful.

It is now clear why the Korybantes were credited with the power of both inducing and curing madness. They induced it in order to cure it and cured it in order to induce it. The same ambivalence is found in the cults of Dionysus. As Dionysos Bakheios, he induced hysteria in his worshippers, who, being possessed by him, called themselves by his name, becoming bákchoi or bákchai; as Dionysos Lysios, he withdrew from them and so restored them to their right mind. Similarly, in myth, driven mad by the god, the daughters of Proitos were pursued by the medicine-man, Melampous, who purified them by an
ecstatic dance and threw the off-scourings into a river. By this means they recovered their senses, but by the same means they had become initiates of Dionysus. The descriptions of the Dionysiac sparagmos—for example, the rending of Pentheus in the Bacchants—show that the participants were acting under the influence of artificially induced hysteria; and, conversely, the madness of Herakles, which, as related by Euripides, exhibits the symptoms of a hysterical seizure, is described in terms borrowed from the orgies of the Korybantes and the Dionysiac thiasos.

The prominence of hysteria and allied disorders among primitive peoples is not to be explained by the artificial value placed on them in consequence of the hypertrophy of magic. Rather, that hypertrophy is itself a response to the need for organising socially an existing tendency. Thus, as Fallaize points out, the areas where arctic hysteria is prevalent are precisely those in which the mediumistic functions of shamanism are most highly developed. The truth seems to be that in primitive society, the division of labour being still rudimentary, the members of the community are proportionately deficient in individuality and consequently lack the stability to withstand those acute maladjustments between the individual and society which are the recognised causes of these disorders. This point has been well expressed by Caudwell. After explaining that the contradictions generated by the development of society are necessarily reflected in man’s consciousness in such forms as moral problems and feelings of sin, he goes on:

In a primitive society, where man is as yet undifferentiated, conscience and consciousness are similarly simple, direct and homogeneous, and for this very reason lacking in depth and vividness. . . . When this consciousness is attacked, there is no complexity or balancing of forces to soften the blow; the collapse is complete. The primitive who is once convinced that he has sinned or is bewitched will promptly die—a fact well-attested by field-ethnologists. The shallowness of his consciousness is revealed in the simplicity of his disassociation, the ease with which his psyche can be precipitated in hysteria, his high degree of susceptibility and the “all-or-none” nature of his emotional reactions—all symptoms
pointing to a mentation more unconscious and instinctive than that of "civilised" differentiated man.

These considerations suggest that the disposition to these disorders in modern tribes has been accentuated by impact with European culture, the effect of which is seen in the familiar police-court cases of lascars "running amok."

In Chapter IX it was argued that the Orphic movement drew its impetus from the peasantry uprooted by the urban revolution. After the tribal ties of cult and kinship had been severed, they were recreated on the mystical plane in these religious brotherhoods. The form of the new cult was derived from Thrace, where the orgiastic features of Dionysiac worship were particularly prominent. Next to Thrace, the most fertile centre for the dissemination of orgiastic religion was Phrygia, the home of Attis and Kybele, the mother-goddess of the Korybantes, who was closely associated with Dionysus. And, next to Thrace, Phrygia was the principal area for the mining of gold and silver. The development of these industries must have induced among the neighbouring tribes, which supplied the labour, a spiritual crisis of the same kind as that which the urban revolution precipitated among the Attic peasantry. Speaking of one of the Thracian tribes, the Trausoi, Herodotus says:10

When a child is born, its kinsfolk sit round it lamenting the sufferings it must undergo and recounting all the sorrows of mankind; but, when a man dies, they bury him with rejoicing and merry-making, because they consider that he has been delivered from all those evils and lives in perfect bliss.

This attitude to life and death is not primitive. It is the attitude characteristic of mystical religion, which we have studied at Eleusis. It is the cry of a primitive people caught in the vortex of industrial exploitation.

The Orphic brotherhoods were modelled, as we have seen, on the earlier Dionysiac thiasos, which, as all the mythological data go to show, had its origin in the Mycenean period; and therefore we look for some analogous disturbance to account
for the emergence of the Dionysiac *thiasos* out of the primitive clan. The wide distribution and remarkable uniformity of this cult indicate that the need which it was evolved to satisfy was general and fundamental; and the fact that, apart from the priest or medicine-man at the head, the initiates were women, suggests that its origin lies in the stress imposed on women by the abolition of matrilineal institutions and the consequent decline in the social status of their sex.  

It appears therefore that, whether he was aware of it or not, when Aristotle declared that the function of tragedy was "through pity and fear to effect the purgation of such emotions," he was describing correctly the essential function of the Dionysiac ritual out of which tragedy had evolved; and his use of the term "purgation" or "purification," referring to the expulsion of the indwelling disease in order to induce newness of life, shows that in his view the function of tragedy was essentially akin to that of initiation, from which it was in fact derived.

I am inclined to think that he was aware of it. Several Greek writers describe in detail the emotional effects of mystical initiation, and the uniformity of the symptoms shows that they were recognised as normal. They consist of shuddering, trembling, sweating, mental confusion, distress, consternation and joy mixed with alarm and agitation. These are the characteristics of religious hysteria, such as might be extensively paralleled from the literature of Christianity. Now, Aristotle is quoted as saying that "the initiates were not required to learn anything but to experience certain emotions and to be put in a certain disposition." In view of what has just been said concerning the emotions of initiation, it may be inferred that what Aristotle meant by this statement was that through the artificial excitation of fear and distress these emotions were so to speak discharged from the system, and, so, the mental disposition of the subject was readjusted to its environment.

How, we are led to ask, did an Athenian audience react to the performance of their tragedies? In our own London theatres, the members of the audience usually keep their emotional reactions (other than laughter) to themselves; but in
the cinemas of the west of Ireland, where the spectators are peasants, the atmosphere is far more intense. At the critical moments of the plot, almost every face wears a terrified look and continuous sobbing may be heard. In this respect, an Athenian would undoubtedly have felt more at home in the west of Ireland than in the West End of London. In one of Plato’s dialogues, a professional reciter of the Homeric poems describes the effect of his performances on himself and on his audience.\textsuperscript{13}

When I am describing something pitiful, my eyes fill with tears; when something terrible or strange, my hair stands on end and my heart throbs. . . . And whenever I look down from the platform at the audience, I see them weeping, with a wild look in their eyes, lost in wonder at the words they hear.

This was a recital of Homer. At the dramatic festivals the excitement must have been even greater. No wonder there was a panic in the theatre at the first performance of the \textit{Eumenides}.

What this reciter did in his public performances—working himself into a frenzy and inducing some measure of the same condition in his audience—was not essentially very different from what was done by the Korybantes in their ecstatic dances. Indeed, the resemblance is pointed out in the same dialogue by Sokrates:\textsuperscript{14}

All good epic poets are able to compose good poetry not by art but because they are divinely inspired or possessed. It is the same with good lyric poets. When they compose their songs they are no more sane than the Korybantes when they dance. As soon as they start on rhythm and concord, they become frenzied and possessed, like the Bacchants who in their madness draw milk and honey from the streams. . . .

\textsuperscript{13} Poets are simply interpreters of the gods, being possessed by whatever god it may happen to be. "\textit{Ad.} \textit{Deo.} \textit{Ept.}!

The tone of this dialogue is light and playful, but that does not alter the fact that Sokrates has correctly identified the poet as a descendant of the priest-magician, medicine-man, or exorcist, whose hysterical cries appeared as the voice of an
immanent god or spirit. At the present day, the art of poetry has left its magical origin so far behind that, when we speak of a poet as inspired, it is only an empty phrase; but the ancient Greeks had the orgies of Dionysus to remind them that the art had grown out of ritual.

The actor was regarded in the same light. In the fourth century, when the profession was highly organised, actors were granted exemption from military service and their persons were treated as sacred. Evidence is lacking for the fifth century, but there is no reason to doubt that they were held in the same regard, because their sanctity flowed from their origin. They were mediums for expressing what had once been the voice of a god. The actor who spoke the part composed for him by the poet was descended from the poet-actor; and the poet-actor, who spoke the words which he had been inspired to compose, was descended through the leader of the dithyramb from the priest at the head of the thiasos, who, since the god had entered into his body, was the god.

It may therefore be concluded that, in keeping with their common origin, these three rites—the orgy of the Dionysiac thiasos, initiation into the Mysteries, and tragedy—fulfilled a common function—katharsis or purification, which renewed the vitality of the participants by relieving emotional stresses due to the contradictions generated in the course of social change. And this purpose was achieved by the expression of what had been suppressed. The different forms which this function assumed are explained by the increasing complexity of the social structure which rendered the mode of expression progressively less violent. In the Dionysiac orgy, all the participants were subjected to an actual hysterical seizure, involving automatism, paroxysms, and analgesia. When the orgy became a passion play, the active part was restricted to the performers, who may have exhibited acute symptoms themsevles, like the ecstatic dancers of many modern tribes, but in the spectators they excited nothing more than feelings of terror and floods of tears. In the Mysteries, the initiates still have to participate actively in many of the rites, but the chief of these is a mystical drama performed for them by others; and at the tragic festivals the role of all but a fraction of those present has
become entirely passive, being confined to expressing those emotions of pity and fear which are evoked in them by the climax of the plot. And, lastly, although the stresses have not grown less severe, the intensity of the symptoms has steadily diminished, because the growing individuation of society, resulting from the more manifold divisions of labour, has so deepened and enriched the emotional and intellectual life of the people as to render possible a proportionately higher level of sublimation.

The principle of kátharsis is accepted by modern psychologists. It provides relief by giving free outlet to repressed emotions through such channels as the practice of confession or participation in public festivals. The citizen who has purged himself in this way becomes thereby a more contented citizen. The emotional stresses set up by the class struggle are relieved by a spectacle in which they are sublimated as a conflict between man and God, or Fate, or Necessity. Plato banned tragedy because it was subversive of the established order; Aristotle replied that a closer analysis showed it to be conservative of the established order. For, like modern psychologists, he assumed that, where there is maladjustment between the individual and society, it is the individual that must be adapted to society, not society to the individual. Modern psycho-analysts have only been able to maintain this attitude because the majority of their patients have belonged to the wealthy classes. Applied to the community as a whole, their therapy would necessarily involve them in the task of investigating the laws governing the social environment with a view to adapting it to the patients. The psycho-analyst would become a revolutionary.

One of the effects of civilisation is undoubtedly to multiply the possibilities of nervous disorders. As society grows more complex, it develops fresh contradictions. If this were the whole of the matter, we should have reason to curse Prometheus; but it is not. The relation between the two processes is not a mechanical one, but dialectical. These internal maladaptations resulting from social development accumulate to a point at which they precipitate a reorganisation of society itself; and, after they have been thus resolved, there emerges a new set of contradictions operating on the higher level. This reciprocal
pressure between the members of the organism and its structure as a whole is the dynamic of evolution, both biological and social. Man learns by suffering. And it is these contradictions that find expression in the arts. The artist may endeavour to reform the world, like Shelley, or to escape from it, like Keats, or to justify it, like Milton, or simply to describe it, like Shakespeare, but it is this discord between the individual and his environment, which, as an artist, he feels with peculiar force, that impels him to create in fantasy the harmony denied to him in a world out of joint. And since these works of art embody the spiritual labour that has gone to their production, they enable the other members of the community, through the experience of seeing or hearing them, which is a labour less in degree but similar in kind, to achieve the same harmony, of which they too are in need, but without the power of constructing it for themselves. Therefore, the arts are conservative of the social order, in that they relieve the pressure on its members, but at the same time they are subversive, because they promote a recurrence of the stresses which they stimulate in order to relieve. They are a form of the organisation of social energy, and the flood which they set in motion may at any moment, in favourable conditions, reverse its direction. The artist leads his fellow men into a world of fantasy where they find release, thus asserting the refusal of the human consciousness to acquiesce in its environment, and by this means there is collected a store of energy, which flows back into the real world and transforms the fantasy into fact. This, then, is the connection between such masterpieces of human culture as Greek tragedy and the mimetic dance, in which the savage huntsmen express both their weakness in the face of nature and their will to master it.