C H A P T E R II

C L A S S I C A L T R A G E D Y :
T H E T R A G I C A R T

Chapter II

Classical Tragedy : The Tragic Art

1. Introduction

Oscar Mandel begins his discussion of tragedy in A Definition of Tragedy with the following observation: "Discussions of tragedy are numberless; definitions of the term few; and of those only one has endured longer than the attacks against it".[1] Mandel is right to hint that Aristotle's definition of tragedy is, up to now, the most fruitful approach to the subject. But, that, too, is not taken to be the perfect by some of the critics and theorists. The fact is that it is not easy to have a comprehensive and typical definition of tragedy. The three doyens of classical Greek tragedy, namely, Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), Sophocles (496-406 B.C.) and Euripides (c. 480-406 B.C.) were the first of the tragedians and it was upon their works[2] that Aristotle formed his conclusions about tragedy in the 4th century B.C. Now, if tragedy, like major art forms, is to be taken as an expression and reflection of man's nature and his vision of the universe and his role and position in it in any society or period, then the tone as well as the scale of tragedy is very likely to vary in the changing circumstances.

Still Greek classical tragedy is regarded to be the model of Tragic Art. During the fifth century before Christ, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides wrote tragedies of a power and beauty that has never been equalled. After that all through antiquity nothing was allowed to be a tragedy that was not constructed upon the Attic model. Such is the beauty and perfection of the classical

Greek tragedies that even in modern times dramatists who felt their power and spell, have tried to produce in their languages, the form of Greek tragedy. John Milton's Samson Agonistes (1671), Matthew Arnold's Merope (1858) and A.C. Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon (1865) and Erechtheus (1876) are some attempts to naturalise Greek tragedy in English. P.B. Shelley's Prometheus Unbound (1820), a lyrical drama, however, was written not so much as an experiment in a classical form of art; Shelley was determined to write his own version of what happened when Prometheus was unbound. Shelley's Hellas (1822) was written on the lines of Aeschylus' The Persians. In the twentieth century there were some attempts on the part of the dramatists to adapt the stories of Greek tragedies to a contemporary or near contemporary setting or to interpret them in the light of contemporary thought. Among the few dramatists who belonged to this category of dramatists, O'Neill was quite successful in his attempt to 'translate' a Greek trilogy, the Oresteia of Aeschylus into modern terms in Mourning Becomes Electra (1932). T.S. Eliot who wrote a choric play, Murder in the Cathedral (1935) transposed the actions of Greek tragedies (The Oresteia, The Alcestis,Ion and Oedipus at Colonus) to modern settings in The Family Reunion (1939), The Cocktail Party (1950) The Confidential Clerk (1954) and The Elder Statesmen (1958).

The classical stimuli acting upon English tragedy in its beginning, however, was the Roman Seneca (4 BC - A.D. 65). For the early Elizabethans classical tragedy meant Seneca. The Senecan model produced approximately two kinds of tragedy in English :

academic drama based on classical rules and the much more important genre of revenge tragedy. Tudor and Jacobean dramatists owed many debts to Seneca, whose influence extended through Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare to John Webster.

Considering the intense and profuse gusto of the English dramatists for the Greek tragedians and for Seneca, as the individual cases may be, it is necessary to characterize what **kind of** effect classical tragedy has on these poets. This attempt calls for a basic consideration of the form and spirit of Greek and Senecan tragedies.

Now, what is the essence of a tragedy proper? H.J. Muller in <u>The Spirit of Tragedy</u> observed : "In a historical view, the clue to its [of tragedy] essence is not form but content and purpose. Ultimately, it is the tragic spirit, the tragic sense of life"[3]. H.D.F. Kitto has a similar observation. He holds[4] that if we grope our way to the fundamental tragic conception of each play or a group of plays, we can hope to explain their form and style. In other words, it is the dramatist's sense of the tragic which gives meaning to his drama. Before going into any discussion of the form and spirit of classical tragedies in such a work as the present one, it is, therefore, important to trace in broad outlines, the salient traits of the tragic vision of the first tragedians, namely, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

The 'tragic sense of life' is hardly reducible to easy formulas. In a general sense it can be described as a certain apprehension about human life. The great Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno in his monumental book, The Tragic Sense of Life[5] describes it as an attitude toward life which is latent in every man and may be evoked by experience. George Satayana, while discussing the tragic experience writes, "where life is adventurous, combative and prophetic, inspiration must be so too. Ideas however spontaneous, will then claim to be knowledge of ulterior facts and will be in constant danger of being contradicted by the truth. Experience, from being Lyrical will become tragic; for what is tragedy but the conflict between inspiration and truth?"[6] Murray Kreiger has used the term in its relation with tragedy. In his essay, "Tragedy and the Tragic Vision" ("Kenyan Review", Spring, 1958) he uses it in the sense of the romantic, rebellious, demonic spirit which needs, in his words, the ultimate soothing power of the aesthetic form which contained it — of tragedy itself — in order to produce for the world a sanity which the vision itself denied".[7]

According to R.B. Sewall the tragic vision in its first phase "calls up out of the depths the first (and last) of all questions, the question of existence".[8] It sees man as "questioner ... facing mysterious and demonic forces"[9] in his own nature and outside, and in "the irreducible facts of suffering and death".[10] It impels the questioner "to fight against his destiny".[11] Ultimately this "instinctive"[12] phase of tragic vision was absorbed and "verbalized"[13] in tragedy. The artist, however, contemplates "the thrust and counter thrust of man against destiny".[14] Whatever

he finds man capable of in action or under external pressure, is to him "the truth".[15] That is what constitutes his tragic vision.

It follows then that the basic concern of a tragedian is with the root, nature and significance of human suffering. The tragic sense of life lies in the sense of the permanence and mystery of suffering.

2. Greek Tragedy

A. Tragic Vision of the Greek Poets:

Tragedy was an achievement of the ancient Greece, particularly of the Age of Pericles (c. 500-429 B.C.). Historically the very age offered a fitting soil for the birth of tragedy. Critics are unequivocal in asserting that tragedy is a Greek creation. The German scholar-critic Walter Benjamin unhesitatingly decides, "Tragedy begins with the Greeks, is extinguished with them, and after centuries, its 'rules' only are revived".[16] Edith Hamilton analyses the temper of the Periclean age in her inimitable style in The Greek Way. It was a time when life was seen exalted, "a time of thrilling and unfathomable possibilities".[17] Men were thinking more and more about human life and beginning to perceive that life was bound up with evil, that injustice was the nature of things. These people, — the Greeks, — had conquered at Marathan (490 B.C.) and at Salamis (480 B.C.) defeating the Persian invasion. Men knew that they could do heroic deeds. Peril, terror and anguish had sharpened men's spirits and deepened their insights. "This knowledge of something immediately wrong in the world", to quote Hamilton's words, "came to a poet with his poet's power to see beauty in the truth of human life and the first tragedy was written".[18]

Aeschylus was the first tragedian. He was born about 525 B.C. and he died in 450 B.C. The high spirit of his time was strong in Aeschylus. He realised that life was a perilous adventure, but the fulness of life was in the hazards of life. Hamilton sums up Aeschylus' outlook on life in the following words: "Mankind he saw fast bound to calamity by the working of unknown powers, committed to a strange venture, companioned by disaster. But to the heroic, desperate odds fling a challenge".[19]

Aeschylus' tragic vision, however, has a deeper realization. He seeks to comprehend the fundamental issues and deeper realities of life and death. And all this he did as a profound religious thinker. In his tragedies man's inordinate desires come into conflict with a divine order which reveals to man his own limitation and gives meaning to his downfall. His philosophy enunciates that gods do not send disaster without reason but allow disaster to develop out of sin previously committed by men. Such sin is fated for man but not in such a way that he is absolved of his responsibility. The suffering which ensues is the road which leads man to recognition of the eternal validity of divine decrees. To learn through suffering is the road, Xerxes must follow in The Persians. This idea is also found to dominate Aeschylus' trilogy, The Oresteia. That suffering leads to wisdom is put forward as the meaning of life in Agamemnon. Wisdom comes to us by the awful grace of God,

who in his eyes, is One and in him rests the final and reconciling truth or the mystery of undeserved suffering. Aeschylus says in the hymn of Agamemnon (176):

"From the gods who sit in grandeur
Grace comes somewhat violent"[20].

Sophocles, like Aeschylus, shared the temper of his age. He reached maturity at a time when Athens was great, but her greatness differed from that of the years of the Persian wars. During the Persian wars, rivalries, weaknesses and external pressure had brought the community to the brink of destruction. The spirit of patriotism became a legend and a new mental attitude conceived an image of the world in which the gods who had fought for them there were present. Over it all hung the threat of inevitable conflict with Sparta, a conflict that could only be solved by complete victory or utter defeat.

Sophocles' tragedies reveal that he was aware of the two aspects of the life of his day : the unbridled pride of human will and the powers that lie in wait to destroy man's hybris or pride. He could, therefore, depict the most terrible suffering in his tragedies and create the most tragic figures of the Attic stage.

Sophocles' world is full of gods and events are god-given. But the significance of divine activity is not revealed to men. The transcendent powers which Odysseus has to face in Ajax may end his life at any moment, but he will not be perplexed once he has realised the limitations of his existence and has made this knowledge his own.

Sophocles' characters develop from the very roots of human existence. There is an inner citadel where Sophocles' men rule their own spirits. In dying and suffering, they die and suffer nobly. His heroes confront harsh moral choices or irrational suffering. The transcendent powers which they have to face may crush their lives at any moment, but they will not be perplexed once they have realised the limitations of their existence. In this "calm, truly heroic acceptance", Lesky finds the secret of Sophoclean serenity [21].

Sophocles retained a cheerful outlook on life. Jones explains Sophocle' serene vision in the following words: "Life's darkness and its light are not opposed as negation to affirmation within the Sophoclean experience; indeed the entire antithetical sense is drowned in a vision of self-poise"[22]. Lesky understands, "He [Sophocles] saw into the darker depths of life over which we move unawares, and experienced the sheer joy of the radiance, with which, the gods suffuse the world"[23].

Sophocles believes in the eternal laws of justice and religion. Edith Hamilton would suggest that this is the spirit of acceptance. He is an upholder of established order, fair harmony and sobriety. He thinks divine justice and law are engraved in our conscience. Gods are immanent in this world. The hero's task is informed by a pattern, hitherto invisible, which he can discern.

It is found that in Sophocles' tragedies, human suffering visits the innocent as much as it does the guilty. The poet

has a tendency to sharpen the edge of suffering. In his works there is a conviction that suffering is inherent in human nature.

Euripides brought tragedy down to the level of ordinary human existence. He was in line with the sophistic thinking of his day in considering man himself as the centre of events. In his dramas (particularly in The Medea and the Hippolytus) destiny evolves entirely out of man himself and the strength of his passions. Euripides chose for his tragedies situations of violent stress, showing men and women in the grip of passion or torn by conflicting impulses. The firm belief in the traditional gods had declined and the influence of independent thought and feeling created divinities which were far more akin to the new concept of man than their mythical prototypes.

Artistotle considered Euripides "the most tragic of tragic poets" (Poetics, XIII, 9-10) modern critics, however, think that he is, rather, "the saddest of the poets"[24]. Many of his extant plays were produced during the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.). He looked at war through all the sham glory to the evil beneath. Jacqueline de Romilly writes, "One might say that in his tragedies he loved to echo and re echo the sobs of women in mourning, as wretched in one camp, as in the other, and a bitterness for a happiness for ever lost"[25]. Euripides is the great painter of the dark depths of pain what he knows best. In Hamilton's words, "he feels, as no other writer has felt, the pitifulness of human life as of children suffering helplessly what they do not know and

cannot understand. No poet's ear has been so sensitively attuned as his to the still sad music of humanity"[26].

The Greek tragic vision invariably centres on the suffering of a soul that can suffer greatly. It is the spiritual suffering that matters most for the Greek tragedians, — the suffering that squeezes and crushes the mind of man to the point of numbness and despair. Albin Lesky[27], however, comments that Greek classical tragedy in its greatest period does not represent a world-view which we may call totally tragic since such a view rejects the idea of the Absolute — of a meaningful universe that is divine in origin. Classical tragedy, on the contrary, presupposes such an order, and its tragic events confirm it. But we should bear one thing in mind. What the Greek masters are ultimately concerned with is Man. In J.A.K. Thomson's words, "it was man himself that interested the Greeks"[28]. To put it in a more categorical way, the Greek tragic poets were concerned with the dignity of human soul. Unamuno's analysis[29] of tragic vision strikes the same note. The tragic feature of the human predicament is that it originates in man himself; and secondly, it is not soluble by man but demands the rationally unprovable existence of God. Edith Hamilton quotes one of the characters in Euripides' tragedies in order to point out the significance of the existence of God in Greek tragic world. She writes, 'Pain could exalt and in tragedy for a moment men could have sight of a meaning beyond their grasp. "Yet had God not turned us in his hand and cast to earth our greatness", Euripides makes the old Trojan queen say in her extremity, "we would have passed away giving nothing to men. They would have found no theme for song in us nor made great poems from our sorrows" '.[30]

When Aeschylus began to write his plays, there was no complete form of tragedy made ready for him. As a matter of fact questions of form and technique are fully resolved only when fully related to the mind of the artist who makes and uses them. The technical history of Greek tragedy is largely an account of the efforts to make an ideal pattern to which the tragic vision of the individual writer may conform. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides — each have a different fashion of tragic thought, as we have seen. They invented and moulded the form because it enabled them exactly what they wanted to do, that is, to present their conception of the principles or forces that operate in life. As a result, Greek classical tragedy, during its years of efflorescene, passed through few distinct forms. The pre-Aeschylean drama was enacted by one actor and chorus. Aristotle says in the Poetics that Aeschylus introduced the second actor, reduced the part played by the chorus and attached primary importance to the spoken word. Sophocles introduced the third actor with some painting. Euripides, however, destroyed the inherited mythical infrastructure, retaining the mythical figures and drastically altering the legends. He went back, in nearly all his tragedies, to the drama of the generation before Aeschylus' time — a drama of simple style, which only needed a new leavening of Euripidean rationalism to become in his hands an instrument of propaganda for the fifth century Illumination.

B. Greek Tragedy : the Matter

For the Greek tragedians the myths were the source of the tragic matter. The subjects were regularly drawn from the legendary past, especially, that part of it which recounted the fortunes of the House of Atreus, the House of Labdacus and the House of Priam. No doubt, the tragic poets often went outside these three cycles for their subjects, but there was a marked tendency to keep to them. The old tragic legends were very useful for more than one reason. First, the legendary past was heroic. Secondly, it was known to the audience and at the same time removed from contemporary history. In the typical Greek tragedy the hero is found to walk unconsciously to his doom, the audience watching him in helpless foreknowledge. The art of the dramatist is employed in arousing and maintaining this suspense — this waiting for the blow to fall without knowing just when it will fall — until the soul of the spectator is purged by pity and fear.

The tragedians drew on the ancient myths. But owing to limitless variations down the centuries, very little was immutably fixed about the myths. The Greek tragedians were, however, not the obedient servants but the imperious masters of their sources. Aeschylus and Euripides, in particular, gave the old stories radically new meanings and adapted them to the vital concerns of their fellow Athenians. The great German scholar-critic

Walter Benjamin shows how tragic poetry is a tendentious re-shaping of the legend. He writes, "... the re-shaping of the legend is not motivated by the search for tragic situations but it is undertaken with a tendentious purpose"[31]. The tragic poetry, in his view, is based on the idea of sacrifice. 'The purpose' is to bring a fuller significance of the sacrifice of the tragic hero to the audience. Apart from being "an atoning sacrifice to the legendary gods, who are upholding an ancient right"[32], it acquires the sense of "a representative action, in which new aspects of the life of the nation become manifest"[33].

Besides the Greek tragedians made the mythic stories convey their own thoughts about the political, moral and religious issues of the fifth century Athens. It, however, does not mean that tragedy, in the hands of the Greeks, was a commentary on life with an "edifying idea"[34], which the dramatist would work up in his play; or, that the entire work was from the start subordinated to "pedagogic intention"[35]. It means that the play would be set up within a framework of accepted ideas which would receive "fresh strength and significance"[36] from the play. The Greek dramatist was, after all, an artist. He felt, thought and worked like a painter or a musician, not like a philosopher or a teacher. As H.D.F. Kitto[37] holds, each of the plays is a work of art, and therefore unique, each obeying the laws of its being.

The real basis of a classical Greek tragedy, however, is not the story. Nor is it the people who figure in the story. From

the material the Greek dramatist selected only what was immediately relevant to his task, and the task was to recreate "the inner reality"[38]. Both Aeschylus and Sophocles believed in a world-order which is ultimately rational. In case of Aeschylus the inner or unifying reality proves to be the conflict between the two laws of the Dike or world-order and Hybris. When Aeschylus depicts a conflict between one good and another, he is depicting a world-order in the process of evolution. In the Oresteia there is a forward movement from conflict to further conflict and to an ultimate reconciliation which ensures the establishment of a moral and social order out of chaos. With Sophocles there is a change in the conception of the Dike. It is something inherent in the nature of the universe, and of man; it is something eternal. When Sophocles represents Oedipus as being destroyed though essentially innocent, he is not presuming a flaw in the universe but recognising that its majestic order "may cut the thread of a single life and requite venial unwisdom with utterly disproportionate penalties"[39]. In his plays, the innocent do suffer; their suffering is seen to be part of a world-order which is definitely intelligible. With Euripides the inner reality is shifted to the inner world of contrary passions in man.

Taken as a whole, the Greek dramatist presents a problem or a question in such a way that we see what it really means for a human being. He asserts that the forces which shape or destroy our lives lie outside the governance of reason or justice. There are also around us demoniac energies which prey upon the soul and

turn it to madness or which poison our will so that we inflict irreparable outrages upon ourselves and upon those we love. Greek tragedy, in general, holds up the mirror to a disintegration in the life of an individual who feels himself a victim of antagonistic forces, dreams of a newer order, but is powerless to initiate it, resists and struggles against the doom but is crushed out of existence by opponent forces. For Aristotle Sophocles's Oedipus Tyrannus was the model tragedy. It is "the great drama of the defencelessness"[40], as Albin Lesky has characterised it. In it every step seems to be a wrong step, because it entangles Oedipus more and more in the coils of his destiny. It is, so to say, an overwhelmingly terrible demonstration of Ruin, of Death standing at the elbow to strike; but it is, at the same time, the demonstration of the strength of the human soul to dare all, see all, suffer all. It is in course of this kind of suffering that the Greek protagonist gets the truth about himself. The essence of the hero's personality is brought out by the suffering, he undergoes: "I suffer, I will to suffer, I learn by suffering; therefore I am". In the words of George Steiner, "... in the very excess of his suffering lies man's claim to dignity .... Man is ennobled by the vengeful spite or injustice of the gods. It does not make him innocent, but it hallows him as if he had passed through flame"[41]. The spectator is also touched by the dignity of soul in agony. The fall of the hero affects him, comes close to him, changes him. He is deeply stirred when he experiences the essential tragedy inherent in the fall.

The protagonist of the Greek tragedy, caught in an inescapable conflict, is fully aware of his situation. He suffers no doubt but he suffers knowingly. Lesky has a very important observation in this connection : "Tragedy was a product of Greek way of thinking, and one of its components is 'the need to explain' ... That is why the great figures of the Attic stage never tire of expounding, in long uninterrupted speeches the reasons for their acts, the agony of their decisions and the powers they have to contend with"[42].

The hero gets defeat and he dies ultimately. But his is a proud and grandiloquent acceptance of defeat and death. In his essay, "Tragic Philosophy", George Santayana explains the ultimate significance of the death of the tragic hero in the following words: "Tragedy must end in death, for any immortality which the poet or his hero may otherwise believe in is irrelevant to the passion that has absorbed him. That passion, at least dies, and all he cares for dies with it. The possibility of ulterior lives or alien interests destined in future to agitate the world makes no difference to this drama in this soul"[43]. The moment of the death of the tragic hero, he describes, as "the supreme moment, when a man is entering eternity, his measure taken, his heart revealed, and his pride entire"[44].

At the core of all Greek tragedies is the struggle of man against Fate. The action of the tragedy involves the gods and the

cosmic order of which both mortals and gods are part. In tragedy gods and mortals and gods and gods interact, explicitly or implicitly, sometimes to reaffirm an old order, sometimes to create new relationships and a new kind of consciousness in the cosmos. Behind these gods is Fate, determining the destiny alike of men and gods, and against Fate it is useless to contend.

It is, however, not Fate but Nemesis that is the prevailing note of a Greek tragedy. Nemesis appears strongest in Aeschylus, as a prophetic and awful law, mysteriously felt and terribly revealed. Sophocles uses it to point the deep moralities which govern human life. In Euripides it degenerates into something more akin to a sense of vicissitudes; it becomes more sentimental — less a religious and moral principle than a phenomenon inspiring fear and pity.

The undeniable powers of Fate are clearly recognized in Greek tragedy but they are not admired. The Greek tragedians looked to superhuman forces, personal or impersonal for a purpose behind catastrophe. But this purpose does not, within the whole compass of a drama, preclude the free will of the characters or their responsibility. Most of the time they are presented as free agents working out their own destinies. In Oliver Taplin's words, "never, are the characters of Greek tragedy portrayed as automata or marionettes"[45]. Walter Benjamin shows how in tragedy the hold of demonic fate is even broken by the hero: "Not, however, in the replacement of the inscrutable pagan concatenation of guilt

and atonement by the purity of men, absolved and reconciled with the pure god. It is rather that in tragedy pagan man realizes that he is better than his gods, but this realization strikes him dumb, and it remains unarticulated".[46] George Santayana put the matter in the following way: "Fate was inhuman; it was cruel, it excited and crushed every finite wish; yet there was something in man that ... triumphed in that ruthless march of order and necessity. Something superior, not inferior".[47]

The tone and tenour of the Greek tragedy were determined by the fact of its association with religion. Aeschylus was a profound religious dramatist and he was radical at the same time. He pushed aside the outside trappings of religion to search into the thing itself. He realised that pain and terror are the steps of the ladder of knowledge and in God rests the meaning of the world; in the knowledge of Him all wisdom is contained:

> "Cry aloud without fear the victory of Zeus,
> You will not have failed the truth". (Agamemnon)[48]

Sophocles believed in the eternal laws of justice and religion. To him all that happens is god-given. Divine justice and law are engraved in our conscience. Sophocles' religious essence comes closer to the percept of the Delphic Oracle , 'know thyself', which shows man his human limits.

Attempts have been made to find invariable ritual elements in Greek tragedy[49]. There were certainly some ritualistic procedures during the course of the events of the plays, for example, supplication, ghost-raising etc. But they are not

imposed from without. Modern critics think that Greek tragedy reflects and exploits the rituals of the real world, of course, but it is not itself a ritual. Oliver Taplin observes in this connection: "It was a necessary pre condition of the great age of Greek tragedy that the drama should not have been a ritual. It had to be human and various, beyond the control of repeated superstitions, ancestral taboo, actions stylized and conditions beyond anything mimetic — it had to exploit ritual, not just conserve or subserve it".[50]

C. The Dramatic Art and Pattern of Construction

Tragedy, says Aristotle, is the representation of a serious action performed by characters sufficiently like us to arouse our sympathy but better than we are. The action in a Greek tragedy shows the change in the hero's fortune. This change is from good to bad. The incidents comprised in the tragic action are indissolubly linked, admitting nothing extraneous to the action. This is what is called the Unity of Action in a Greek tragedy. Aristotle says that plot is the soul of tragedy. With a distinct beginning, middle and end, the plot is first complicated and then resolved. The complication consists of the group of incidents which precede the decisive turn in the action, and the resolution of the group of incidents which follow it. The complication culminates in 'the turn of fortune' which is known as 'peripeteia', meaning a change from good fortune to bad or from bad fortune to good. It may be

accompanied with recognition or, as it is called, 'anagnorisis', that is, a change from ignorance to knowledge.

In order to ensure perfect balance and harmony of design, the Greek tragedians observed certain basic principles. They insisted on simplicity in the evolution of plot, which is the pattern that shapes the action around a particular moment isolated from the current of life. Greek tragedy gives us an intense moment of life. Helen Bacon's proposition in this regard may be quoted: "Tragedy reenacts, not the whole event, but the moment of critical choice that has irreversible consequences, usually for everybody on the stage, the moment that is the culmination of many past events, the turning point after which everything is permanently different"[51]. The critic also notes that the magnitude of the tragic event is such that "spectators, even readers two millennia later, are participants"[52]. This is why Greek tragedy does not end in a disaster. The said critic puts the matter in a beautiful language : "Tragedy is ... an act of assimilation. Not only the occurrence but its implications must be lived through on the stage and by the audience. This living-through is part of the event, its completion and validation, the means by which, for all its brevity, the tragic moment becomes a permanent possession of humanity"[53]. Greek tragedy, thus, does not deal with the whole of life, but with a mythical moment, the moment between the deed and the expiation, the crime and the punishment.

Towards the same end, Greek tragedies allowed only a minimum number of characters. Aristotle insists that character is the secondary thing in the tragedy. He means to say that plot is of more importance than the character because plot is but the deployment of character in action. In a typical Greek tragedy the centre of interest is fixed on the protagonist who is an intermediate sort of personage — a man not too good or too bad, but essentially like ourselves, who is to take the initial step. Since this step would eventually lead to catastrophe, it is seen eventually to be taken with insufficient knowledge and in ignorance of the consequences. This is what is called the 'hamartia' in Greek tragedy. It may also be explained as the intellectual failure to grasp what is right, a failure of human insight amidst the confusion of life which surrounds us. Explaining the nature of hamartia, Lesky writes that it was a type of guilt for which no one was responsible, but "which none the less was objective, was real, a horror in the eyes of gods and men, capable of affecting an entire country like a pestilence"[54]. Oedipus [in Oedipus Rex] is a concrete and thoroughly Greek example. It is within the scope of this type of error or guilt that we find tragedy at its most impressive on the Attic stage.

But it should not be too readily assumed that the tragic hero or heroine is necessarily afflicted with a 'flaw'. Actually innocent people are also tripped by tragedy like Philoctetes and Antigone. It should be remembered that tragedy is deeply affecting because it projects the glory and good in man.

The so-called Unities of Time and Place were the consequences of the focus on the critical moment in the Greek tragedy. It is natural that the more concentrated the moment, the less room there is for long lapses of time or changes of scenes. Helen Bacon explains the significance of the tragic moment in the following way : "Because the brief tragic moment is the summation and fruition of all that has led up to it and determinant of what is to follow, most plays encompass much more than they enact .... It is the concentration of meanings, past, present, and future in the moment enacted on the stage, not just the fate of the individuals, that gives tragedy its impact"[55] Aristotle himself admired this intensity of tragedy, its ability to achieve its effect in a small compass (Poetics 1462a-1462b). It goes to the credit of the Greek tragedians who let the action play out within a strictly defined area of brilliant illumination. The Greek dramastist, in Kitto's words, "uses only one focus .... The mind of the Greek dramatist is a fixed light : there is the one area of illumination, and outside that, a darkness which nothing tempts us to explore, for we know that it conceals nothing which concerns us".[56]

The magnitude of the event depicted in the Greek tragedy is such as to affect, as we have already noted, people other than those directly involved. It is an event significant enough to call for the presence of a chorus. A choral performance is a response to an event that affects a community's sense of itself and its relation to the gods. The Chorus in Greek tragedy not merely

comments on the action or communicates universal truths but also represents the thought of the play. A group of persons occupying a place below the stage, it knows the past, observes the present and has a shrewd sense of the future, and it gives the audience not individual judgement but the collective wisdom of the community. But it is not a detached spectator; it participates in the action in the sense that it suffers its consequences. Its wisdom is rooted in the action and seems to emanate from the characters. The Chorus is one of the devices by which what would otherwise remain an individual experience is magnified and generalised. The static, almost the rigid presence of the Chorus throughout the action, overseeing, inciting, praising condemning every movement of the protagonist, symbolises a social formation in which the inherited family and social structure must be maintained at all cost.

The Chorus, being in a sense 'the ideal spectator' on the one hand, helps the protagonist to control his passions by sympathy, admonitions and instruction; and on the other hand, by their songs and dances, they provide an aesthetic relief to the overcharged feelings of the spectator. By fulfilling these functions, the Chorus, though not part of the action, became an integral part of the Greek tragedy. Taking this role of the chorus into account, Aristotle says in the Poetics that it should be an integral part of the whole, and make a share in the action.

Matthew Arnold in his Preface to Merope shows how the chorus in a Greek tragedy helps to safeguard the preservation of equilibrium and moderation — to combine, to harmonise, to deepen for the spectator the feelings naturally excited in him by the sight of what was passing on the stage — this is the one grand effect produced by the Chorus in Greek tragedy. He writes, "After tragic situations of the greatest intensity, a desire for relief and relaxation is no doubt, natural, both to the poet and to the spectator, but the finer feelings of the Greeks found this relief ... in lyrical song [of the Chorus]."[57]

Chorus is the most remarkable feature of Greek tragedy. Sophocles, unlike Euripides, was careful to secure the unity and symmetry in the structure of his choruses, so that each chorus, each choric expression of the lyrical element, produces in itself the same harmonious effect as the drama, in totality, produces. Thus by the systematic employment of 'strophe', 'anti strophe' and 'epode', a regular correspondence of part with part, a balanced antithesis of thought to thought, of emotion to emotion, is effected, while in an independent final stanza the 'epode', the balance of the whole is struck.

Next to consider is the frugality of expression which is a decided feature of Greek tragedy. There is a severe economy of details in Greek tragedy. The details are not extraneous but organic to the whole. The Greek tragedians make every detail a significant part of the illuminating design. There are no bypaths, no digression

or deviations — the road to catastrophe is rigorously straight. What was aimed at in Greek tragedy was simplicity and concentration. As a result Greek tragedy is very short in its compass. As is said by Pitto[58], the finished structure of Aeschylus' tragedy has the clarity and force of a single statement, the firmness and the cohesion which we find in a mathematical demonstration. Sophocles is as austere as Aeschylus in his methods. He never draws character where character is not necessary. The Greek dramatists had also a hatred of excess in statement, in colour, in ornament as the excess in anything, they thought, weakened the total effect of a work of art. Sophocles' dramas are distinguished by the purity of form and singleness of artistic purpose. About Sophocles' sense of proportion Edith Hamilton writes in her essay on Sophocles: "Excess — the word is not to be mentioned in his presence. Restraint is his as no other writer's. Beauty to him does not inhere in color, or light and shade ... it has its root not in the mystery but in clear truthfulness".[59]

Classical Greek tragedy is not only short in its compass; it is also perfect within limits. The limitations set by its religious origin were accepted as given; the form of the play and the treatment of the myth might develop and evolve, but always within the bounding line drawn by tradition. Greek tragedy is full of varied emotion. It allows a character to make a great, long, rich, continuous speech, with emotion surging and welling and falling back and surging upwards again. But the emotion and imagination are controlled and disciplined by reason. The emotional, the

incomprehensible elements are balanced by the known clarity, exactitude and mathematical precision. Both the striving for ultimate intellectual clarity and the desire to be consumed in the fire of passionate emotions are "profoundly and fundamentally Greek".[60]

Greek tragedy imparts not only significance but also order to suffering. We feel an overwhelming compassion for the hero who undergoes the tribulations and waste which are the stuff of tragedy. But the experience of a Greek tragedy is, by no means, a random series of sensations. The events of the tragedy are in an ordered sequence, a sequence which gives shape and comprehensibility to what we feel. Besides, the activities of the characters which move us are placed in a moral setting which is argued and explored in the play. Oliver Taplin puts it in the following way : "By enthralling its audience tragedy unites emotion and meaning so as to give us an experience which by creating a perspective on the misfortunes of human life, helps us to understand and cope with these misfortunes".[61]

The aim and end of tragedy, as conceived by the Greeks, is the purgation or catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear. We cannot appreciate a tragedy rightly, if we are too much under the sway of such emotions as pity and fear. In this view too much of pity and fear are considered to destroy the harmony in the human emotions and create a condition of mental imbalance. The catharsis

of these emotions, therefore, is necessary before the mind can be restored to harmony and balance and can reassert the powers of correct judgement.

In Greek tragedy, catharsis is coupled with the kommos in which mental equilibrium is finally restored, and the spectrator feels that there is no need to pity and fear. In this state he is purified of such disturbing experiences; in a heightened mood his mind is tranquilised, "calm of mind, all passion spent".[62] The fiery ordeal through which the virtue of the protagonist is made to pass reconciles us ultimately to all the sufferings caused and the final impression is "All is best, though we oft doubt".[63] This solemn and stately finale is what the Greeks called Kommos.

On the Attic stage there was a rigorous distinction drawn between tragedy and comedy. However, there is no objection to evanescent touches of humour even in the most sombre of Greek tragedies. Greek tragedy, besides, has never any admixture of prose. Every character speaks in a diction majestic and remote from ordinary conversation.

One of the remarkable features of the Greek dramatic design is the dramatic irony. It is the expression of contrast between things as they seem to be and things as they really are; it may reveal itself in circumstances and it may reveal itself in speech and in speech it may be either conscious or unconscious. The latter kind of irony is particularly noted in Sophocles' tragedies.

D. Poetry and Versification

Greek tragedy is very characteristic of its versification and style. The lyric measures employed were very various, and exquisitely adapted to express not only every phase of emotion and thought, but every note of both. It is, indeed, in its lyric that Greek tragedy is in any other language unapproached and unapproachable. In the dramatic portions of the plays, a very different form and system of verse was employed. This is known as Iambic Trimeter Acatalectic, a metre particularly appropriate for dramatic dialogue and soliloquy. It is of all metres the nearest to the language of nature and life, and it is at the same time susceptible, with certain modifications, of the utmost dignity and majesty. The Greeks had also a beautiful language for the expression of beautiful thought. In his definition of tragedy, Aristotle characterises the language of Greek tragedy enriched by a variety of artistic devices, appropriate to the several parts of the play.

Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were poets of the first order. Aeschylus' Oresteia is not only one of the greatest of the Greek dramas, but also one of the finest poems. Characters like Oedipus and Antigone are grappled inwardly and it is the absolute and essential contact with the psychic self of the characters that facilitates poetry in Greek tragedy. Music was also an essential part of the production. The Greek tragedians tried, therefore, by interweaving musical accompaniment with dramatic declamation and

lyrical comment, to heighten the emotion of the entire stage. The circumstances of the Greek stage — the open-air-theatre with some forty thousand men and women anxious to follow every word — asked for a massive articulation. For this a rhetorical style was employed. The grand recitative portions have the dignity and sublimity of epic poetry. Again, the high debates with constant references to religious and philosophical ideas intensify the intellectual appeal in significant ways. The stichomythia injects into the argument a sharp disputatious dialogue that varies the tension of the debates, with retorts and raillery. Song and dance of the chorus mingle freely with high-pitched argument. And the whole play would advance to its end with measured and stately movement.

E. The Stage Business

Classical Greek tragedy is marked by some peculiarities of its own. Changes of scenes were very seldom necessary in Greek tragedies. The tragedies are so constructed that the speeches and actions of which they are mainly composed, might, with perfect propriety, pass on one spot, and, indeed, ought generally to pass in the court in front of the royal house. The actions to which no speech is attached, and which do not serve to develop thoughts and feelings are imagined to pass behind or without the scene, and are only reported on the stage. The heralds or messengers are introduced for the purpose.

To prevent monotony, the characters in Greek tragedies are found to express their feelings by corresponding bodily movements. They strutted and stalked; they knelt down in prayer or prostrated themselves in adoration; they held their hands to high heavens or hurled defiance at their adversaries. Such movements heightened the passion. Secondly, the disposition of the chorus in front of the stage either in a single group or symmetrically arranged, and their rhythmic dance movements, added to the emotional and intellectual appeal of the play by simultaneous aesthetic appeals to the senses of the mind. Thirdly, the lyrical and the choral odes amply diversified the dialogue, which was stately. The dialogue had to conform to the requirements of the situation and the character of the speakers.

Greek tragedy did not permit any sensational or horrifying act on the stage; murder and bloodshed were completely ruled out. When they occurred they were reported by a messenger. The suffering of the protagonist is not shirked for it gives reality to the mental suffering. But there was no room for physical brutality on the stage, since it unnecessarily outraged civilised human feelings. The actors wore formal costumes, including head dresses, and high soled buskins. Actors so elaborately arrayed, could not easily manage a physical combat on the stage.[64]

The actors also wore masks that identified them to the spectators in the farthest rows. The masks in turn strengthened

the original tendency of the playwrights to portray types rather than individuals, elemental rather than complex emotions.

Greek tragedy in unique in another respect. Nowhere in it is there any direct address to the audience or any other reference to it. Nowhere in Greek tragedy does the dramatist use the first person of himself or refer to himself in any way and nowhere is there any reference to any kind of theatre.

F. Greek Tragedy : The Structure:

Greek tragedy has a definite structure. There are four main parts to a tragedy : the Prologos, the Parados, the Epeisodia and the Exodos.

The Prologos: It is the introductory scene of monologue or dialogue. This exposition establishes the subject and theme of the play and portrays one or more character.

The Parados: It is the song with which the Chorus would enter in a procession. Originally, it was prefaced by some anapaests delivered by the Coryphaeus, or the leader of the Chorus. Then the melic part was sung by the whole Chorus grouped round the altar in the middle of the orchestra.

The Epeisodia: It consists of four or five episodes which constitute the main action of the play. One or more characters take part in these with the Chorus. The episodes might contain lyrical passages, lamentations etc. They are of about the same length, are uniform in tone (as distinct from feeling), never

admitting prose or comedy, and are composed in the same strict metre and the same elaborate diction. Each episode is separated by a choral ode or Stasimon (song of the chorus in one place). In some plays, a part of the episode may involve a Kommos — a kind of lamentation in which both the characters and the chorus take part.

Each complete choral lyric is divided into strophe, antistrophe and epode. In its metrical structure the strophe corresponds with the antistrophe not merely line by line but syllable by syllable. So does epode with epode.

Exodos: It is the conclusion, which follows the last ode sung and danced by the chorus. The Exodos includes two features: the messenger's speech and the deus ex machina or the interference of the gods; deus ex machina was only used by Euripides.

G. Greek Tragedy : Final Appeal

In European literature tragedy starts with the Greeks and the theory of tragedy with Aristotle. Aristotle bases himself on the examples of the Greek masters. So does every theoretician, critic and philosopher. What they observe about tragedy applies primarily to Greek classical tragedy. In tragedy, Aristotle[65] says, a good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery or a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our tears. Nor, on the other hand, should an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse some human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves. There remains then the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgement, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and posterity, eg. Oedipus, Thyestes and the men of similar families. "The tragic pleasure", says the master, "is that of pity and fear"[66], not of either pity or fear but of both combined.

Next Aristotle stresses the proper function of tragedy. In section 6 of his Poetics he says that tragedy must deal with "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions".[67] In section 13 he adds that "it must

imitate actions arousing pity and fear, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation".[68] Section 14 reiterates that tragedy has its specific pleasure : "not every kind of pleasure should be required of tragedy, but only its own proper pleasure".[69] And he hastens to add that "the tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear".[70] The obvious fact, then, is that tragedy has a pleasure of its own, which is indeed not a little curious. For tragedy in life merely pains while tragedy in literature surely delights. What may be the explanation thereof?

Aristotle gives his answer by saying that the pleasure of tragedy consists in the catharsis of pity and fear. By catharsis he means purgation, a wash off, an elimination. The pleasure of tragedy, therefore, for Aristotle consists in the pleasure of relief from the oppressive burden of the painful feelings of pity and fear, feelings aroused in tragedy only to be worked off. It is in reply to Plato's charge that tragedy should be banned from the ideal Republic because it encourages painful and debilitating emotions which impede the due performance of daily duties, that Aristotle propounds his concept of catharsis. Aristotle's defence of tragedy consists in admitting all the charges and turning them to the accused's credit. Tragedy generates pity and fear. A mind heavily charged with them is thereby unfitted for practical life. Aristotle says the emotions generated by tragedy are not in fact allowed to remain burdening the mind of the audience. They are discharged in the experience of watching the tragedy. The emotional defecating

leaves the audience's mind finally lightened of pity and fear. The effect is the opposite of what Plato had supposed. So in Aristotle's opinion, tragedy is a safety-valve through which those painful and morbid feelings of pity and fear find a comfortable outlet, a happy release, and in this resulting calm of relief lies the precise pleasure of tragedy. We pass through the storm of tragedy only to escape at the end into a sense of soothing serenity. The rest we feel is silence and peace.

There are critics, however, who hold that pity is the principal passion aroused by tragedy. The Italian Renaissance critics fall into this category. According to Daniello tragedy should arouse the passion of grief in the mind. And so he writes, "Nor does one deny the right to the tragic poet to lower himself when he wishes, to humble speech in order to weep and lament".[71] Minturno[72], likewise, holds that we are moved by the fear and pity of the unhappiness of others and of the two passions pity is of stronger force in our mind. Castelvetro similarly observes that "tragedy without a sad ending cannot excite and does not excite, as experience shows, either fear or pity".[73] The sad ending is characteristic of tragedy and it generates the passion of grief accordingly. The French Renascence critic, Thomas Sibilet emphasises that the ending of tragedy is invariably "sad and dolorous".[74] Jean de la Taille understands that "the true province of tragedy is the depiction of ... tears and extreme misery".[75] The great French dramatist, Racine also puts greater emphasis on the passion of pity as the principal emotion roused

by tragedy. He writes, "He [Aristotle] does not want them [tragic characters] to be extremely good, because the punishment of good men would excite indignation, rather than pity in the audience; nor that they be excessively bad, because there can exist no pity for a scoundrel".[76] In Germany such renowned critics as G.E. Lessing (1729-1791), F.V. Schiller (1759-1805) and A.W. Schlegel (1767-1845) have made valuable contribution to the discussion of dramatic theories in general. According to Lessing, "every tragedy must have some form of suffering"[77] to awaken fear and pity. He hastens to add that the tragic poet should take care to create the sense of terror by spectacle full of sorrow and not by terrible and horrible incidents only. Schiller very categorically mentions that the duty of a tragic poet is to arouse the emotion of pity. He writes, "Tragedy might be defined as ... an imitation which shows us man in a state of suffering and which has for its end to excite our pity".[78] The concept of the true spirit of tragedy has been trenchantly expressed, too, by Schlegel when he writes, "When... we contemplate the relations of our existence to the extreme limit of possibilities; ... when we consider how weak and helpless, and doomed to struggle against the enormous powers of an unknown world, ...; how we are subject to all kinds of errors and deceptions, any one of which may be our ruin; that in our passions we cherish an enemy in our bosoms; how every moment demands from us in the name of the most sacred duties the sacrifice of our dearest inclinations, and how at one blow we may be robbed of all that we have acquired with much toil and

difficultly; ... when we think upon all this, ... every heart ... must be overpowered by an inexpressible melancholy ..." This is the tragic tone of mind"[79]. It appears that Schlegel considers the tone of sadness as the only pervading tone of tragedy and hence the passion of pity as the only passion aroused by tragedy.

The English critics, however, mostly support Aristotle's doctrine of tragedy. According to Sir Philip Sidney tragedy "stirs the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded".[80] John Dryden accepts Aristotle's definition of tragedy. He accepts Aristotle's doctrine that tragedy aims at purging the passions of fear and pity by depicting examples of human misery. Dryden, however, adopts the theory of Rapin, the French classical dramatist, in order to explain the process of catharsis. John Milton supports Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis insisting that tragedy arouses the emotions of pity and fear in the mind of the spectator. Joseph Addison writes (in Spectator No. 40) that the principal design of tragedy is to raise commiseration and terror in the mind of the audience.

Modern scholarship has shown that the word 'catharsis' is, in truth, a medical word used in the Poetics metaphorically and that its exact sense is that of purgation in the significance of 'aperient'. F.L. Lucas, in his Tragedy in relation to Aristotle's Poetics (1928), has demonstrated that Aristotle uses it almost with the modern idea of ridding ourselves of repressions, and

uses it, too, with the object of replying directly to Plato's Puritanic strictures on the art of poetry.

The scholar-critic, Allardyce Nicoll, however, does not support Lucas' theory. He writes, "It may be that in his words there is some truth, but we may believe that in itself the theory is far too moralistic to be a complete answer to our question. After all, we do not go to witness a tragedy with the idea of taking a medical medicine".[81] Nicoll does not support Aristotle's dictum either. According to him, there is undoubtedly something feerful in tragedy but fear cannot be a permanent feeling in the mind of the audience. We are not likely to shed tears for Prometheus or Orestes. They are far above us in nobility, personality and in the sublimation of their character. Tragedy, in his view, has for its aim, "not the arousing of pity but the conjuring up of a feeling of awe allied to lofty grandeur".[82]

Joseph Wood Krutch[83], author of the controversial essay, The Tragic Fallacy opines that the main sentiment aroused by tragedy is heroism. Tragedy, in his view, is not the imitation of actions which are noble or are considered noble. It is not to be confused with things merely miserable and pathetic. The final impression is one of exultation and triumph. His explanation is that tragedy arose in Periclean Greece and Elizabethan England when a people fully aware of the calamities of life, is nevertheless serenely confident of the greatness of man, whose mighty passions and supreme fortitude are revealed when one of these calamities overtakes him. If tragedy meant only the spectacle of misery it could not have been

executed in the happiest, most vigorous and most confident ages which the world has ever known, the ages which gave to the world Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Shakespeare. Pity, fear, pain are merely foils to the main sentiment, that of heroism. Hence tragedy is essentially an expression, not of despair, but of the triumph over despair and of confidence in the value of human life.

The interpretation of the Spirit of Tragedy by the philosophers like Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche also deserve mention in this connection. It was his study of Sophocles' Antigone which led the German philosopher and critic G.W. Hegel (1770-1831) to stress the importance of moral conflict in tragedy. Hegel's analysis of the spirit of tragedy is qualitatively different from that of Aristotle. The substance of tragedy, in his view, is conflict. The conflict is between two rights. In Sophocles' play of her name Antigone was caught between doing the right thing from a religious point of view, by giving proper burial to her brother, and doing the right thing, from the point of view of the law, by obeying Creon's orders. Creon himself was caught between his duty as a ruler and a protector of the city, and his duty as the uncle and protector of Antigone. With the example of this tragedy Hegel wants to show that the conflict in tragedy is between two ethical concepts or between two characters who become identical with two ethical concepts. Good is set up against good. The good chosen by the hero is only a partial good though the hero treats it as though it were an absolute good. In Antigone Hegel finds this uncompromising clash of the

absolutes. In the end, neither the claim of Antigone nor that of Creon is denied; what is denied is the absoluteness of the claim of each. On the destruction of both, what is established is a feeling of reconciliation which springs from the sense of eternal justice. This sense of eternal justice is, in his view, the true spirit of tragedy.

The explanation of the tragic spirit put forward by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) in the third book of The World as Will and Idea (1819) is equally interesting. According to him tragedy represents the terrible side of life, the unspeakable pain, the wail of humanity the triumph of the evil, the irretrievable fall of the innocent and the just. It is the strife of the will with itself. The true sense of tragedy is that the hero atones, not for his individual sin, but for 'the crime of individual existence', as Schopenhauer has called it. The representation of a great misfortune is essential to tragedy. The misfortune may be due to a character of extraordinary wickedness like Richard III in Shakespeare's play or through blind fate, chance or error, as in the Oedipus Rex of Sophocles. Or, and this Schopenhauer thinks the best form of tragedy, the misfortune is due to the mere position of the characters with regard to each other, without any one being entirely in the wrong. For such tragedies show us great misfortunes, not as exceptions to the general rule or life, but as arising easily and of themselves out of the ordinary actions and characters of men.

What Schopenhauer's present philosophy expounds is that life is a thing of misery and the wise man is he who finds, before death comes, a calmness of spirit expressed in resignation and in renunciation of all the fleeting and tormenting joys of existence. This calmness of spirit, effected by the resignation of the joys of existence, is, in his view, the true spirit of tragedy.

In his monumental work, The Birth of Tragedy, F.W. Nietzsche (1844-1900) used the terms 'Apollian' and 'Dionysian' to explain the nature of tragedy. 'Apollian' is thought to signify the 'sunny', 'serene', 'calm' and 'ordered', whereas the 'Dionysian' suggests 'stormy' and 'turbulent'. Nietzsche argued that these elements formed a unity in Greek tragedy where dialogue provided the Apollian element and the Dithyrambic choral songs, the Dionysian. The Greek tragic poets illustrated this combination on different levels of culture.

According to Nietzsche, tragedy is the art of metaphysical comfort, a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature. The tragic exultation lies not in the hero's triumph over despair but rather in the spectator's perception of the ultimately beneficial effect of the hero's suffering. The moral order may be destroyed through the hero's action but the spectator is made to feel that through the suffering of the hero a new world would be built on the ruins of the world. The spectator is thus filled with a profound human joy and a touch of surpassing cheerfulness is communicated to the whole play.

The interpretation of the spirit of tragedy by the philosophers follow their respective philosophical vision. Needless to say that mere philosophy cannot provide the proper guidelines to explain the function, spirit and effectiveness of the literary form of tragedy. And secondly, what the philosophers have observed may apply to a particular tragedy but may not be common to all. The ultimate feeling aroused in our mind by the sad fall of Oedipus is certainly not the sense of eternal justice as held by Hegel or the spirit of resignation as enunciated by Schopenhauer or the sense of eternal joy as recognised by Nietzsche. So far as some of the critics' views are concerned, it is feared, they have failed to catch the true implication of the word, 'pity', as it is used by Aristotle in connection with tragedy. Pity does not imply simply 'to shed tears'. Pity ultimately generates the feeling of awe allied to lofty grandeur. Pity or compassion primarily connects the spectator with the tragic hero. True tragic impression is not possible without it.

3. Seneca's Tragedies : Elements affecting the English Playwrights.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C. - A.D. 65), more renowned as a philosopher in Roman history than as a dramatist, wrote nine tragedies in his youth, which fifteen hundred years after his death, were to have a considerable influence on English tragedy. The subjects of his tragedies are taken from the whole field of Greek drama. Among the tragedies, Hercules Furens, Medea, Troades and Phaedra may be based on Euripides; Agamemnon is based on Aeschylus; Oedipus and Hercules Oetaeus are based on Sophocles; Phoenissae is based on Sophocles and other sources; the source of Thyestes, the most influential of his tragedies, is unknown. The plays, however, show departures in detail from their Greek originals. They also show different conception of tribulation and disaster from that which appears in Aeschylus and Sophocles. Seneca's sense of Fatalism is different from that of Aeschylus. It is philosophic instead of religious. The plays are brilliant works showing Seneca's cleverness in sententious rhetoric and his philosophic views. But as drama they have "gross and palpable"[84] faults. Long ago Schlegel in his Lectures on Drama pointed out that Seneca's plays were beyond all description bombastic and frigid, utterly devoid of nature in character and action, full of the most revolting violations of propiety and so barren of all theatrical effect. Other critics also, by and large, share Schlegel's opinion. J.A.K. Thomson, for instance, writes, "They [The plays] are full of blood, cruelty, natural, unnatural and supernatural horrors. There is hardly any truth

to life either in the incidents or in the character-drawing, and there is a great deal of rant and bombast in the style".[85] The plays are heavily burdened with an excess of declamation, moral disquisition, mythological lore and clever argument. They lack theatrical qualities because, as is generally agreed, they were intended not for performance but for reading or recital at private gatherings. That Seneca had nothing like public performance in mind is strengthened by the fact that in his plays Seneca represents persons talking in a way in which no living person ordinarily talks and suggests events which cannot literally take place before the eyes of an audience.

Action, therefore, in the realistic sense is not the main spring of Seneca's technique. In his tragedies there is, instead, "an illusion of action evoked by words".[86] There is, of course, an attempt on the part of the dramatist to create a dramatic tension but it is done by words and with the minimum of visual aid. Seneca suspends action for the recital of a monologue which is entirely relevant to the character or the speaker or his mood at that moment in the drama.

Seneca, however, has compensated for the reduction of action by the addition of the rhetorical descriptions. The speeches of the messengers in his plays may serve as a narrative almost detached from the action. The descriptive passages are of great charm. Seneca, presumably, seems to pack the maximum effect in the spoken words. The rhetoric of the Senecan

stage with its far-fetched and frigid epigrams, captured the popular imagination. The strong situations in his plays give an opportunity for sounding rhetoric.

Seneca was, most notably, the poet of extreme situation. Lever calls him "the projector of the terrible moment when the hammer blow of tyrannical force brings man to the edge of endurance".[87] But between the situations in his plays there is no organic connection. We have the feeling that the events in his plays just happen to the characters. The characters are no more than the embodiments of a ruling passion or mouthpieces of Senecan eloquence. In Thomson's words, "they are too prone to rant or rave".[88] In Seneca's tragedies the characters have little subtlety and no private life. But the characters are not timid figures. They move and express themselves with a certain tragic sublimity. Most of the characters in his plays are found, to choose, on being impelled, a course of destruction leading to their own doom. It is anguish that drives figures like Atreus in his Thyestes to insanity which leads to his destruction. Atreus declares himself as a monster. This recognition impels him to identify him, and to accept, with this identity, a need to commit further crimes. When the Thyestean banquet is being prepared, Atreus seems to be possessed by a kind of demonic force. Atreus is aware of what is happening to him, though he has no control over the catastrophe, initiated by his choice.

The characters in Seneca's tragedies are, therefore, persons given to self-examination. Phaedra, Hercules, Oedipus, Medea, Atreus — all are pre occupied with their own identity, absorbed in watching as well as experiencing their own moral struggles, until at the moment of choice they triumphantly recognise themselves for what they are. The characters are impelled to try to realise their identities by an ascending series of crimes. After Atreus has tricked his brother into eating the flesh of his own children, he cries out:

"O I am loftiest of all the gods, and king of kings".

(Thyestes, 911)

Seneca's tragedies, thus, can be described as simply a disastrous event pursued ruthlessly to its end. They are marked by a pervasiveness of bloody and unnatural acts. Descriptions of death, disease and physical afflictions are lengthy and detailed. Characters and choruses respond to them with intense horror and dismay. Sometimes the horrors seem to be enacted upon the stage. In the play after her name, Medea apparently stabs her children while standing on a roof top and then flings their bodies at Jason's feet; in Thyestes Atreus uncovers the heads of Thyestes' children before his face. Seneca's plays abound in horrors, piled on horrors.

This fondness for horrors accounts for Seneca's choice of themes, pregnant with the spirit of revenge. The three main themes of Seneca's tragedies are lessons on the inconstancy of fortunes as in Troades and in the tragic story of Oedipus;

portrayals of great crimes and examples of the evil result of murder, as in Thyestes, Medea and Agamemnon; and pleadings in favour of simplicity, of poverty, and of chastity as in Hercules Oetaeus and Hippolytus. Of the three themes that which treated revenge and murder is the most important and inevitably made the greatest impression upon the Elizabethan dramatists.

Seneca strongly emphasises blood-revenge for murder or flagrant injury, or a serious revenge from motives of jealousy. Revenge is looked upon as a sacred duty and it appears as the tragic motive at least in two of his plays, namely, Thyestes and Medea. In these plays the execution of the revenge is kept in mind from the start and let up to the end with little or no faltering in the course of the action.

In order to heighten the atmosphere of horror Seneca introduces ghosts in his plays. The ghosts in Seneca, in addition, prompt revenge spirit. They may be real, or at times, mere hallucinations. The ghost of Tantalus in Thyestes is a real ghost. He is there to mourn the misfortune that will come to his house. The ghost of Thyestes in Agamemnon anticipates the tragedy and heightens the atmosphere of horror. The revengers are occasionally spurred on by the hallucinations that they see the ghosts of the dead. Medea visualises the ghost of her mangled brother, Deianeira sees Nessus rising to demand revenge.

Seneca borrowed not only the themes of murder and revenge from Greek tragedies, but also devices like chorus.

But in Senecan tragedies the chorus is no more an integral part of the events of the play. It exists merely as a "purveyer of interludes".[89] Seneca's use of the chorus is for the most part "flaccid and unconvincing".[90] The chorus in his plays — the labours of Hercules, the lovers of Jupiter, etc., — is served up, in slightly varied forms, on more or less appropriate occasions. The long choral odes are often declamatory and wearisome. In Thyestes the chorus cannot inform the audience of the gruesome murders that are going to be committed. In act III scene iii of the play the chorus sings a long declamatory song that heightens the spirit of the play and reiterates the spirit of stoicism. But the chorus is no more 'the spectator idealised'. Seneca has divided each of his plays in five acts, and, therefore, the function of the chorus has been drastically curtailed.

Seneca has used some other devices of Greek tragedy in his tragedies. He has introduced the character of Nurse in some of his plays. The Nurse is a type character who consoles and advises the heroine. Innocent or deceived accomplices are sometimes used to help the revenge. Medea sends her children to Creusa with the poisoned robe. Among the other devices the Messenger is of a vital importance in Seneca's tragedies. The speeches of the Messenger fall into a stereotyped pattern — the description of a place, the honour of the act or the stoical courage of the sufferer.

Seneca also borrows the 'stichomythia' of Greek tragedy. Seneca's power of mind showed itself chiefly in epigrammatic aphorisms. 'Stichomythia' has been lavishly and exaggeratedly used by Seneca. Seneca also made use of tragic irony in his plays. It is present both in situation and dialogue.

The most remarkable element in Seneca's tragedies is the stoical attitude. This attitude is mingled with his conception of tragic experience. Seneca rejected any evidence of justice in the nature or the gods, who were indeed hardly more than names for the destructive urges in the cosmos and in man himself. Secondly, with Seneca the very nature of things was disastrous and the calamity was irresistible. In Seneca man was sure to be beaten by the blind and malignant forces of Fate. There was nothing left for man but endurance. Man could, by learning to be indifferent both to life and death, rob Fate of its triumph and become a victor in attitude in his ability to resist or meet courageously. Herein lies the essence of Seneca's stoical philosophy. Seneca was "the literary representative of Roman stoicism"[91], as T.S. Eliot has called him. In The Trojan Women, Hecuba, Andromache and Polyxena are all embodiments of stoical fortitude. In the Phoenissae, Oedipus is a stoical hero. In Hercules Oetaeus, Hercules is a stoic hero who, even in the throes of mental agony, retains his dignity and courage and faces death quietly. In Hercules Furens, the hero rises above suffering.

The stoical attitude in Seneca's tragedies is best expressed in his treatment of death and suicide. Death is seen in his plays as having a positive value and meaning. Suicide could mean a chosen withdrawal from the transient chaos of this world to another order of creation, the eternal providence beyond nature. Seneca sympathises with suicide when it saves honour or gives an escape from a life too full of pain; yet he feels it more courageous to combat misfortune than to succumb without a struggle. Death is a part of the order of nature and a part that does not lie within the realm of human corruption. Death is the culmination of the self-discovery that dawns on most of the Seneca's heroes.

Seneca's men and women aspire for death, but, when death comes, they defy it and triumph over limitations and sufferings. In life they are glorious; in death they become more glorious. Seneca did not regard death as the culmination of tragedy.

Seneca's plays are characteristic not only of the stoical philosophy but also of oratorical and lyrical declamation. Seneca's language is full of fine metaphors and ornamentation. Seneca strove to extract the utmost effect from the spoken work. The centre of value in his plays is, therefore, shifted from what the personage says to the way in which he says it. Watling has noted the significance of Seneca's language in the following words : "[Senecan Language] flamboyant with every rhetorical ornament, remained as a compost-heap to enrich the soil of English dramatic verse for a couple of generations".[92] Seneca

also possessed an authentic lyrical gift. He was the master of the moralising lyric. The odes sung by the chorus are graceful and have an ethical flavour.

Seneca was not a constructor of tragic plots. But his plays have a five-act structure with a chorus. Bowers has given an analysis of the composition of Senecan tragedy which is worth quoting : "The Senecan drama starts with a monologue or dialogue which either casts back to previous events or anticipates those to come. The ghosts which sometimes speak the prologue, take no part in subsequent action ... The whole of Act I is thus expository, since the play begins just after the crisis of the story and the drama is little more than the elaboration of the catastrophe. Act II consists of dialogue wherein the chief agent of the catastrophe plans the execution of his revenge. Act III brings the antagonists face to face and almost on equal terms, with the ascendant force of the chief agent growing swiftly. Act IV provides either a lull in the action or else a partial fulfilment of the catastrophe. In Act V the catastrophe is completed".[93]

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