Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics
Vols. II-III : 1979-80

ARISTOTLE AND FREUD ON ART

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It is a critical commonplace that Aristotle and Freud present quite distinct accounts of art. And indeed there are important methodological differences between the teleological framework of the former and the causal orientation of the latter. Emphasizing such differences, however, tends to mask important similarities in the content of their theories, in particular the central role of the concepts of pleasure, imitation and knowledge in both accounts. In this paper we provide interpretations of both theories and argue that their content is remarkably similar. We begin, in section I, by briefly calling attention to certain important features of Aristotle's general account of art. The lengthier section II elucidates Freud's theory of art and draws detailed parallels with Aristotle's account. Section III develops our analogy with respect to the artistic species of tragedy, a central art form for both writers. We offer an interpretation of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis that points up its colse kinship to Freud's account of tragic pleasure.

I. Aristotle on Art :

Aristotle starts the *Poetics* with the claim that all the arts, including music, are modes of imitation, and he goes on to assert that the objects imitated are humans in action (1448a1).[1] It is not solely the external or behavioral dimension of human actions that art imitates, but, as Aristotle puts it, "character, emotion, and action" (1447a28) ; art imitates the inner motivational factors of human action as well as the overt dimension. Furthermore, unlike the historian, who is concerned with particular events and actions, the artist "tends to express the universal...how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity" (1451b6-8). And, whereas the historian merely mentions facts that have actually happened, the artist relates what may happen (1451a37-9); he focuses on situations that are possible irrespective of whether they have actually

occurred. The artist may make use of historical events, for "what has happened is manifestly possible" (1451b18), but if he does he abstracts what is typical or universal from the accidents of place and time. Assuming certain types of humans in a certain type of context, the artist traces out the probable or necessary course of events.

Now if the arts imitate the inner motives and behavioral dimension of human actions, and if they capture what is universal in such actions, then they essentially represent psychological laws. Aristotle stresses that tragedy, for example, imitates human actions, but "an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify actions themselves, and these — thought and character — are the two natural causes from which actions spring" (1449b37-1450a4). A drama represents human actions as the necessary or probable outcome of thought and character. In representing the actions of a number of interacting individuals, the global events of the play are structured. Thus, in focusing on actions and their motivational basis, in stressing that the arts imitate universals of human action, so that, for example, a tragic plot unfolds with necessity or probability, Aristotle is claiming that the arts essentially involve psychological laws.

It follows that there are basic similarities in the activities of scientists and artists. The psychologist abstracts laws from actual human behavior, but such laws do not simply apply to what has happened, they are subjunctive in form. The scientific law "All As are Bs" does not merely involve the claim that the particulars which have been observed to be As are Bs, but also that if one *were* to encounter another A (even though one may never actually encounter it), then it *would* also be a B. Similarly, the artist does not imitate the accidents of what has actually happened; he abstracts a subjunctive psychological law (a universal) from actual human actions. Unlike the scientist, however, the artist places this universal in a hypothetical context. The artist is free to set this context. He assumes certain things about a type of situation and about the type of persons involved, and within that hypothetical context delineates the probable or necessary course of action. Schematically: If we assume such and such type of situation (even though this may never have occurred and perhaps never will occur), and if one were to encounter in this context such and such types of human agents, then such and such types of human actions would result.

For artistic purposes, then, subjunctive psychological laws or universals are placed in a hypothetical context, but Aristotle also stresses that these laws are exemplified in a medium. From the standpoint of the scientist the medium is largely irrelevant. It is, for example, irrelevant whether a quantitative scientific

law is expressed in Arabic or Roman numerals. Media are, however, essential to the various art forms, and Aristotle builds them into his definitions of artistic species. Imitation is the genus of art, but media, such as color and shape, or language, serve to partially differentiate the species of art. Tragedy, for example, is an imitation of a human action that is "in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament" (1449b25). In art, then, the universal is not totally abstract; it is placed in a hypothetical context, but is also embodied in a medium.

This ties indirectly with Aristotle's account of the function of art. Humans imitate actions because they seek enjoyable activity and artworks provide a distinct sort of pleasure. In accordance with his emphasis on artistic media Aristotle says that humans derive pleasure from the specific media of the various sorts of imitations. For example, there is an instinctively based pleasure derivable from color itself, and harmony and rhythm are natural to man and hence pleasurable (1448b18-22). But artworks are necessarily imitations, and in virtue of that fact are also pleasurable. Aristotle claims that imitation is instinctive to humans, and that everyone naturally enjoys imitations (1448b5-10). The pleasure obtained from imitations is distinct from that derived from media and materials for he says that if one is not acquainted with the object represented in a picture, then "the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the coloring, or some such other cause" (1448b18-20).

While he leaves unexplained the pleasure obtained from materials and media, Aristotle does provide a reason why humans naturally enjoy imitations. Experiencing an imitation is a way of coming to learn or know, and the activity of knowing is pleasurable. The artist embeds a universal law of human action in a medium, and, for Aristotle, universals, not particulars, are the objects of knowledge. The spectator can then infer the universal law from the particulars of the medium. In doing so, he gains knowledge of the universal, and knowing is a pleasurable activity. Thus, Aristotle says that "to learn gives the liveliest pleasure...the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring" (1448b13-7).

Now the direct experience of certain human actions, such as murder, arouses fear and/or pity, both of which Aristotle regards as species of pain, and hence unpleasant (*Rhetoric* 1382a20-4; 1385b13-6). But humans do obtain pleasure from the imitation of actions that normally produce pain: "Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity" (1448b11-2). He makes the same point more explicitly in the *Rhetoric:* "since learning and wondering are pleasant, it follows that such things as acts of

imitation must be pleasant — for instance, painting, sculpture, poetry — and every product of skilful imitation; this latter, even if the object imitated is not itself pleasant; for it is not the object itself which here gives delight; the spectator draws inferences ('That is a so-and-so') and thus learns something fresh" (*Rhetoric* 1371b4-10; trans. Roberts). Thus, the "liveliest" pleasure art affords is obtained *through* imitation; for example, "the pleasure which the (tragic) poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation" (1453b13-4). Even if the action imitated would normally produce pain, inferring the universal embedded in the imitation is a form of knowing, and knowing is pleasurable.

To summarize : the arts afford what we might call "aesthetic" pleasure, derivable from the nonrepresentational properties of the various artistic media. But there is also a sort of pleasure that arises through imitation, and artworks are imitations, representations of what is universal in action and character. They capture, in a medium, laws that are essentially psychological, and thereby enable humans to procure the pleasure that attends understanding.

II. Freud on Art :

Turning to Freud, we find it clearly stated that pleasure is the central aim of life (XXI, 76).[2] But the program of the pleasure principle, i.e., the direct gratification of instinctive wishes, is at loggerheads with reality. Suffering is the ultimate lot of humanity, and the best that can be hoped for in the long run, as a corollary of the pleasure principle, is the avoidance of pain. Furthermore, civilization demands that the individual sacrifice his instinctive and selfish pleasure seeking for the common good. The result is that wishes that run counter to the demands of civilization are repressed and embedded in the unconscious.

Freud views the human organism as a system which seeks to equilibrate and economize the expenditure of energy (VIII,127). The effort to repress a wish involves an accumulation of energy, which is experienced as unpleasant or painful (V,598). Since the repressed wish is in the unconscious, the individual cannot voluntarily bring it to consciousness. However, it manifests itself in consciousness in the form of a disguised substitute, e.g., a dream, neurotic symptom, joke or artwork. Manifestation of the wish is accompanied by a discharge of the bottled-up energy, an equilibration of the energy system, which is experienced as pleasurable.

Taking dreams as an example, Freud posits a dual structure : there is a latent dream content which is formed in the unconscious and is based on a repressed wish, and a manifest content, i.e., the dream as experienced. Via the psychological mechanisms of condensation, displacement, representation, and secondary revision,

which are theoretically expressible as psychological laws, the latent dream content is transformed into a manifest form in which the repressed wish is not directly recognizable. Experiencing the manifest dream involves a discharge of accumulated energy, an equilibration of the energy system, which is pleasurable. The experienced dream is thus a disguised fulfillment of a repressed wish.

Although dreams are generally innocuous, neuroses can be disabling ; yet they share essentially the same structure. A neurotic symptom is akin to a manifest dream ; it is the end product of a repressed wish that emerges by somewhat similar transformation mechanisms. Experiencing the symptom yields an immediate, albeit *temporary*, relief — a substitute satisfaction. It does not, however, completely terminate the wish that is the origin of the symptom, for the wish, embedded in the unconscious, repeatedly gives rise to the symptom. Nevertheless, for Freud the laws governing the transformation of the wish to the overt neurotic symptom are deterministic. Via these laws the psychoanalyst can start with a manifest symptom and uncover the hitherto repressed wish. Bringing the wish to consciousness entails that it is no longer repressed, and hence, there is no causal basis for the symptom ; in Freud's words : "symptoms disappear when we have made their unconscious predeterminants conscious" (XVI, 280). In accordance with the corollary of the pleasure principle, the pain attendant upon the effort to repress the wish is avoided. Through the self-knowledge fostered by psychoanalysis the person gains a measure of control over his neuroses. In doing so he gains permanent relief, for he avoids the suffering that accompanies the neuroses.

Now Freud claims that artworks are manifest products of the same sorts of instinctive but repressed wishes that generate manifest dreams and neurotic symptoms (XVI, 376 ; XX, 64-5). But dreams and neurotic symptoms are generally asocial mental products. A dream, for example, produces only private satisfaction (VIII, 179), and a neurotic symptom is repulsive. In contrast, artworks are social in nature ; they afford pleasure to the artist and are "calculated to arouse sympathetic interest in other people" (XX, 65). The artist has techniques that enable him to make his wish-phantasies enjoyable to spectators. Let us examine these techniques, for this is where the parallels with Aristotle begin to surface.

We noted Aristotle's claim that the media and materials of art can give rise to a pleasure that is distinct from the pleasure obtained from imitation. But his remarks on the pleasure obtained from color, or rhythm and harmony, are brief, and he does not explain why we find these aspects of artworks to be pleasurable. Freud also asserts that, quite apart from the sense or meaning of words, there is "the pleasurable effect of rhythm or rhyme" (VIII, 125). In general, he grants

that the formal or nonrepresentational properties of an artwork can produce what he calls "aesthetic" pleasure (IX, 153; XX, 65). In contrast to Aristotle, however, Freud provides an explanation of the function of aesthetic pleasure based on an analogy with his account of the pleasure obtained from jokes.

In studying pleasure and the genesis of jokes, Freud accepts Fechner's principle of aesthetic intensification, i.e., when distinct pleasures are combined the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (VIII,135). Freud notes that we obtain pleasure from the syntactic or formal features of jokes, but claims that this pleasure, which he labels "fore-pleasure", is not sufficient to account for the quantity of pleasure obtained from tendentious jokes. He argues that the fore-pleasure of jokes often serves to release a greater and deeper source of pleasure from repressed wishes. Via Fechner's principle the combined yield of pleasure is greater than the two separate pleasures. Thus, Freud says that "tendentious jokes...put themselves at the service of purposes in order that, by means of using the pleasure from jokes as a fore-pleasure, they may produce new pleasure by lifting suppressions and repressions" (VIII, 137). Analogously, he claims that "all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has the character of a fore-pleasure of this kind" (IX, 153). The formal techniques of the artist enable us to obtain a satisfaction of instinctive wishes that would often be repulsive if they were not masked by and combined with aesthetic fore-pleasure : "the essential *ars poetica* lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us...The writer ..bribes us by the purely formal — that is, aesthetic — yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies" (IX, 153).

Thus, both Aristotle and Freud acknowledge what we have called "aesthetic" pleasure. Both also subordinate it : Aristotle by claiming that to learn (via imitation in the case of art) gives the "liveliest" pleasure, Freud by claiming that aesthetic fore-pleasure gives rise to the greater pleasure associated with the gratification of repressed wishes.

A second technique whereby the artist can make his repressed wishes enjoyable to others involves the creation of imitations. We have noted Aristotle's account of the pleasure derived from imitation, and Freud's explanation of this pleasure, which is basically similar to Aristotle's, can be grasped if we take a closer look at his account of the psychical apparatus (V, 565-8).

Freud assumes a person is an energy system that seeks equilibration. Considered in a primitive stage of development, this system seeks to remain free of stimuli ; it is structured as a reflex apparatus so that a stimulus input, and consequent build-up of energy, is discharged along a motor path. Apart from external stimuli, there are also internal somatic needs that generate an energy build-up which seeks discharge in movement. The hungry baby, for example,

kicks. His kicking, however, does not itself resolve the need, which continues until it is terminated in an experience of satisfaction. An ingredient of the typical experience of satisfaction is what Freud calls a "perception", e.g., nourishment. When the baby is nourished, a mnemic image of this perception is then associated with a memory trace of the energy build-up produced by the need. When the need arises again the energy build-up triggers the memory trace which is associated with the mnemic image of the perception. In this way the subject seeks to "re-evoke the perception itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction" (V, 566). The entire "current of energy", which starts with the unpleasantly experienced build-up of energy produced by the need, and which aims at satisfaction, is the *wish* ; the reappearance of the perception is the fulfilment of the wish.

The shortest path of wish-fulfilment starts with an energy build-up and terminates in the mnemic image of the perception, in which case we have a hallucinatory wish-fulfilment. The focus is on an *image* of the situation of the original satisfaction, not the real thing. There is a temporary pleasure associated with hallucinatory wish-fulfilment, but if this primary system were the only mechanism of the psychic apparatus the organism would soon come to grief. If such hallucinating were constantly repeated it would result in a series of temporary pleasures, but, since this would not effectively terminate the need, the organism would soon exhaust itself (V, 598). Thus, Freud posits a secondary psychic system through which it becomes possible to experience a real, non-hallucinatory based satisfaction (V, 566-7). Nevertheless, the primary system is psychically fundamental, and it plays a central role in Freud's account of the pleasure obtained from artistic imitations.

An artwork is, for Freud, a "reflection of reality" (XII, 224). In one sense, an artwork, such as a picture, is a physical object. But, qua picture of, say, President Carter, it is a *reflection* or image of Carter ; it is not merely physical, and, of course, it is not Carter himself. A picture of Carter, like a reflection in a mirror, may "look like" Carter, and in some cases, as with a *trompe l'oeil*, we may mistake one for the other. Thus, there is a basis for saying that a picture, as a reflection, presents an illusion of reality. Freud, in fact, often regards artworks as illusions. He says that art "does not seek to be anything but an illusion...it makes no attempt at invading the realm of reality" (XXII, 160). Furthermore, he claims that the pleasure obtained from art, apart from aesthetic fore-pleasure, is "based on an illusion" (VII, 306).

We then have an analogy : just as the unnourished baby may hallucinate nourishment, and its hallucination is based on a wish, so a spectator experiences

a reflection, an illusion, which for Freud is also based on a wish-phantasy. Both the hallucination and the artistic illusion originate, in Richard Sterba's words, "in a very early phase of psychic development at which the individual still looks upon himself as omnipotent because wishes are experienced at this period as if their fulfilment in reality were achieved by the mere act of wishing."[3] And an artistic illusion, as well as a hallucination, is doubly governed by the pleasure principle. The basic cause of either product, a repressed wish, is tied to the pleasure principle. Furthermore, both provide only temporary satisfaction, for the wish in either case terminates in an image that is linked with a mere substitute satisfaction of the wish.

In places, Freud indicates that, aside from aesthetic fore-pleasure, the only pleasure art affords is that akin to the pleasure attending hallucinatory wish-fulfilment. Where he draws a sharp distinction between art (=illusion) and reality, he often claims that art can, at best, yield a substitute satisfaction (XXI, 75), an imaginary satisfaction (XX, 64-5), or a "mild narcosis ... a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs" (XXI, 81). But an artwork is, for Freud, not merely a reflection (=illusion) ; it is a reflection *of reality*. He explicitly states that artworks enable one to "find a path back to reality" (XI, 50 ; XVI, 376 ; XX,64-5). The artist, like everyone else, has repressed wishes, but he "finds the way back to reality ... from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality" (XII, 224). The reality art reflects is, for Freud as well as Aristotle, psychological. The artwork is, in Freud's words : "a faithful image of (the artist's) phantasy ... a representation of his unconscious phantasy" (XVI, 376). Thus, a repressed wish *generates* the artwork, and the artwork in turn *represents* the wish.

Furthermore, Freud maintains that the wish represented by the artwork is not uniquely the artist's, but is common to all humans.[4] The Oedipus complex, for example, is ubiquitous to humans, and Freud concludes from his studies of *Oedipus Rex*, *Hamlet*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Macbeth* that these works represent "a universal law of mental life...in all its emotional significance" (XX,63). An artwok, like a dream, is generated by repressed wishes. yet artworks differ from the "asocial, narcissistic products of dreaming in that they (are) calculated to arouse sympathetic interest in other people and (are) able to evoke and to satisfy the same unconscious wishful impulses in them too" (XX, 65). But an artwork does not merely enable the spectator, as well as the artist, to engage in hallucinatory wish-fulfilment. Since his work represents a universal psychological law, an artist can, through his work, enable all of us as spectators to "*recognize*

our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found" (IV, 263, our emphasis).

As reflections of reality, then, artworks are not mere means to hallucinatory wish-fulfilment. A manifest artwork is a disguised representation of a repressed wish that is common to humanity. As such, it embeds general psychological truths about mankind. Because it captures general truths, an artwork has the potential for providing a "path back to reality", for through it the spectator may recognize a suppressed truth about himself.

Now according to Freud ; the artist's repressed wish is transformed by the mechanisms of condensation, displacement, representation, and secondary revision into a manifest artwork. The transformation laws representing these mechanisms are deterministic. Therefore, given a knowledge of psychoanalytic principles derived from the study of phenomena such as dreams, jokes, and neuroses, that is, a knowledge of repressed wishes and transformation laws, it should be possible to understand manifest artworks.[5] Conversely, artworks themselves can be a source of psychoanalytic knowledge. We can start with the observed artwork and, by inductive inference, gain knowledge of the repressed wishes and transformation laws.

Freud clearly maintains that psychoanalytic principles can be employed to reveal the real or deep meaning of an artwork. He claims the deep meaning of *Hamlet* was effectively concealed until revealed by psychoanalysis (VII, 310), and he provides a "deeper reason" for the attraction of the *Mona Lisa's* smile than those preferred by the standard interpretations (XI, 110). He allows that artworks are open to more than one interpretation, but claims that psychoanalysis, with its access to the "deepest layer of impulses" in the artist's mind, yields the deepest, most profound, interpretations (IV, 266).

Freud also maintains that artworks can be a source of psychoanalytic knowledge. In discussing Jensen's *Gradiva* he remarks that "creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their *knowledge* of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science" (IX, 8, our emphasis). Since the repressed wish represented by an artwork is, as we have noted, common to humanity, this knowledge is universal, not particular. The artist has an instinctive or intuitive grasp of psychoanalytic laws, which he exemplifies in his works, and which can then be grasped by the spectator. Freud's primary example is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* which "seizes on a compulsion which *everyone recognizes* because he feels its existence within himself.

Each member of the audience was once, in germ and in phantasy, just such an Oedipus" (I,265, our emphasis).

An artwork, then, exemplifies or presents "a universal law of mental life" (XX, 63) through which the spectator may uncover, and come to know, his hitherto repressed wishes. Experiencing an artwork fully is, in a sense, like undergoing psychoanalysis ; the spectator, like the patient, comes to recognize his own repressed wishes. Of course, whereas the psychoanalyst has explicit knowledge of psychoanalytic laws and is able to bring the wish fully to consciousness, the artist and spectator have an intuitive, implicit grasp of those laws (IX,8-9,92 ; XI,165), and hence a repression may only be partially lifted by the recognition afforded by an artwork. But the effect is similar. Freud explicitly allows that recognition is pleasurable (VIII,120-2), whether it be by artistic or scientific means, When a repressed wish is partially or fully brought to consciousness pleasure is experienced, for, in accord with the corollary of the pleasure principle, the pain attendant upon the effort to repress the wish is avoided.

Artworks, then, as "reflections of reality," produce a complex form of pleasure. As *reflections* they are, like mirror images, not "real." Like the mnemic image of a perception, an artwork arises from a repressed wish and provides a pleasure akin to that attending hallucinatory wish-fulfilment. But, as reflections *of reality*, artworks exemplify universal psychological laws which, when recognized by the spectator, enable him to at least partially lift the repression and avoid the pain accompanying the effort of repression. Furthermore, it is *through* the creation of an artwork qua reflection, representation, or imitation that this latter pleasure (or avoidance of pain) arises. It is the artwork that represents the repressed wish, and it is through the artwork that the wish is brought to consciousness and the repression lifted.

Thus, Freud's account of art turns out to be very similar to Aristotle's. Both acknowledge an "aesthetic" pleasure obtainable from the nonrepresentational aspects of artistic media. Both also subordinate this pleasure to that afforded by the representational or imitative dimension of art. According to Aristotle, an artwork represents a universal pattern of human action. In inferring the universal from particulars of a medium, the spectator recognizes or comes to know the universal, and knowing is the central pleasurable activity for a rational animal. For Freud, aesthetic pleasure is a species of fore pleasure that serves to release a greater source of pleasure from repressed wishes, and this latter pleasure derives from an artwork's status as an imitation or reflection. As a reflection (= illusion), an artwork provides a deep but temporary pleasure akin to that accompanying hallucinatory wishfulfilment. As a reflection *of reality*, however

an artwork is a disguised representation of an unconscious, repressed wish that is universal to mankind. Because it embeds a universal law, an artwork can provide a path back to reality from the domain of pure hallucination. Through it the spectator can recognize a suppressed truth about mankind in general, including himself. Recognizing the suppressed wish, coming to know it, raises it to the conscious level. Having brought the wish to consciousness, the spectator avoids the pain that accompanies the expenditure of energy necessary for repression. The recognition of psychological truths through artistic images is thus a pleasurable activity.

For both Aristotle and Freud, then, the deepest pleasure art provides is obtained *through* imitation. According to Freud, insofar as art leads one from mere hallucinatory wish-fulfilment back to reality, it must represent, or imitate in disguised form, a universal wish. It is through the artwork as a reflection of psychological reality that the wish is brought to consciousness, the repression lifted, and the accompanying pleasure experienced. For Aristotle, it is through imitation that the artist represents universals, the objects of knowledge. Art affords the pleasure of knowing in virtue of being imitative. Even if the action imitated would, in the normal context, produce pain, recognizing a psychological universal via imitation is a form of knowing, and hence pleasurable.

Since the central pleasure art affords is obtained through imitation, this holds true of the species tragedy. Indeed, it is this point, common to the theories of Aristotle and Freud, that is the key to understanding their accounts of tragedy, the central artistic genre for both theorists.

III. Aristotle and Freud on Tragedy

Aristotle claims that a tragedy is "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude ; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play ; in the form of action, not of narrative ; through pity and fear effecting the proper [catharsis] of these emotions" (1449b24.8). He does not elucidate "catharsis" in the *Poetics*, but in the *Politics* (1342a6-17) he says that the religious enthusiast is purged of his feelings by the sacred melodies. The music excites the person to a frenzy and enables him to give vent to his emotions, thereby returning him to a normal state and providing him with a pleasurable relief. This notion of catharsis, transferred to the *Poetics*, is the basis of the standard interpretation of the tragic catharsis. Originally advanced by Bernays, it is nicely summed up in S. H. Butcher's words : "Tragedy excites the emotions of pity and fear — kindred emotions that are in the breasts of all men — and by the act of excitation affords a pleasurable relief. The feelings called forth by the tragic spectacle are not

indeed permanently removed, but are quieted for the time, so that the system can fall back upon its normal course. The stage, in fact, provides a harmless and pleasurable outlet for instincts which demand satisfaction, and which can be indulged here more fearlessly than in real life."[6] There is evidence in the *Poetics* for this interpretation, since Aristotle does say that tragedy "inspires" (1453a5), and "arouses" (1453b1) fear and pity in the spectator. But in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle claims that fear and pity are species of pain. Fear is defined as a "pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future" (1382a21-2, trans. Roberts). Pity is defined as a "feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover to befall us soon" (1385b13-6, trans. Roberts). The difficulty, then, the tragic paradox, is how thearousal of pity and fear — both species of pain — can produce pleasure. Aristotle himself does not clarify the notion of tragic catharsis in the *Poetics*, and Butcher's claim that in tragedy the "painful element in the pity and fear of reality is purged away ; the emotions themselves are purged,"[7] seems inconsistent. If tragedy produces fear and pity, i.e., *species* of pain, how can it purge the "painful element" in pity and fear ?

On our interpretation of Aristotle, artistic imitations enable us to engage in the activity of learning or knowing, which is pleasurable. Each artistic genre aims to produce its own specific pleasure, thus "we must not demand of tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it .. the pleasure which the [tragic] poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear *through imitation*" (1553b10-3, our emphasis). As an imitation, a tragedy enables us to infer a universal concerning events that would normally arouse fear and pity. Inferring a universal from the particulars of a medium is a type of knowing, and hence is pleasurable, even if the events imitated are themselves unpleasant.

Now several classical scholars have suggested that the tragic catharsis is simply the process of inferring or learning via imitation when the events imitated are such that they would normally arouse fear and pity.[8] Leon Golden, for example, notes that "catharsis," in addition to signifying physical purgation or purification, can mean intellectual clarification ; it is "the act of 'making clear' or the process of 'clarification' by means of which something that is intellectually obscure is made clear to an observer... The process of inference described by Aristotle 'clarifies' the nature of the individual act by providing, through the medium of art, the means of ascending from the particular event witnessed to an

understanding of its universal nature, and thus it permits us to understand the individual act more clearly and distinctly."[9] Golden then suggests that the final clause of the definition of "tragedy" that Aristotle offers at 1449b24-8 in the *Poetics* should be translated as : "Tragedy is an imitation of an action... achieving, through the representation of pitiful and fearful situations, the clarification of such incidents."[10] Thus, the tragic catharsis is synonymous with the process of learning or inferring that Aristotle discusses at 1448b4-20 in the *Poetics*.

There are several advantages to this interpretation of catharsis : (1) it avoids the basic inconsistency of the purgation interpretation, (2) it is consistent with Aristotle's claim at 1449b22-3 that the definition of "tragedy" he offers is a consequence of his previous discussion, for that discussion focuses on the medium, the objects, and the manner of imitation, alongwith its aim — knowing or learning, (3) it is also consistent with Aristotle's assertion at 1451b7 that poetry expresses the universal in human action, and (4) it is consistent with his claim at 1453b13-4 that the proper pleasure of tragedy comes from the imitation of fearful and pitiful events.

Freud offers a similar account of tragedy in his article "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage", written in 1905-6, but never published during his lifetime. He starts the article with a comment that is in the tradition of Bernays' purgation account of catharsis : "If, as has been assumed since the time of Aristotle, the purpose of drama is to arouse 'terror and pity' and so 'to purge the emotions', we can describe that purpose in rather more detail by saying that it is a question of opening up sources of pleasure or enjoyment in our emotional life... the prime factor is unquestionably the process of getting rid of one's own emotions by 'blowing off steam'; and the consequent enjoyment corresponds...to the relief produced by a thorough discharge" (VII,305).

From his subsequent discussion, however, it is clear that Freud is not claiming that tragedy arouses fear and pity in the spectator. We must remember that the pleasure connected with a wish that terminates in an artistic product, like the pleasure derived from a wish that ends in a mnemic image of a perception, is based on an illusion. Artistic wish-fulfilment is grounded in a regression to the primary psychic system where pleasure is obtained from an illusion that substitutes for reality. The pleasure in artistic imitations, or illusions, only *corresponds*, as Freud puts it, to the pleasure one obtains from the normal non-hallucinatory gratification of a wish. Thus, Freud adds that the theater-goer's "enjoyment is based on an illusion ; that is to say, his suffering is mitigated by the certainty that, firstly, it is someone other than himself who is acting and suffering on the stage,

and secondly, that after all it is only a game" (VII, 306). In fact, Freud adds that it is a precondition of tragedy that "it should not cause suffering to the audience, that it should know how to compensate, by means of the possible satisfactions involved, for the sympathetic suffering which is aroused" (VII, 307).

As we have previously noted, this compensation is in part obtained from the formal fore-pleasure of art, which in turn releases deeper sources of pleasure from repressed wishes via hallucinatory wish-fulfilment. But an artwork is not a mere illusion ; it reflects reality, it is a disguised representation of the wish that generated it, and that wish is universal. In discussing *Hamlet*, Freud says : "The repressed impulse is one of those which are similarly repressed in all of us, and the repression of which is part and parcel of the foundation of our personal evolution...it is easy for us to recognize ourselves in the hero : we are susceptible to the same conflict as he is" (VII, 309). Similarly, we noted his claim that "everyone recognizes" the conflict in *Oedipus Rex* "because he feels its existence within himself. Each member of the audience was once, in germ and in phantasy, such an Oedipus" (I,265). Recognizing the repressed wish, coming to know it, is pleasurable because the pain attendant upon repression of the wish is avoided.

The central similarities between Aristotle's and Freud's accounts of tragedy are thus : (1) tragedies are imitations or representations of psychological reality, (2) they embed universal psychological laws, (3) we do obtain aesthetic pleasure from the formal features of tragedies but, (4) the central pleasure tragedies afford is that which attends learning, knowing or recognizing such laws, (5) this pleasure arises through imitation ; representations are enjoyable even though the actual experience of tragic events is painful, consequently, (6) neither theorist accepts the purgation theory.

Finally, it is perhaps not surprising that Freud's theory of art turns out to be a variation of a theme of Aristotle's ; the continued influence of the *Poetics* over the centuries inclines us to believe that Aristotle was close to the truth about art.[11]

Notes :

1. S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed. (New York : Dover, 1951). Butcher's translation is cited throughout this paper, and additional references are incorporated into the text. 2. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London : Hogarth, 1966). Additional references to these volumes are incorporated in the text. 3. Richard Sterba, "The Problem of Art in Freud's Writings", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2 (April, 1940),

p. 265. **4.** The artist's repressed wish, while common to humanity, may contain egocentric and personal details. But Freud stresses that the artist "understands how to work over his daydreams, in such a way as to make them lose what is too personal about them and repels strangers" (XVI, 37). **5.** Freud allows that in its present state psychoanalysis enables us to provide only a partial understanding of artworks (XI, 132), but, given his deterministic assumption, it is theoretically possible to give a more complete account. **6.** Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 245. **7.** *Ibid.*, p. 254. **8.** Leon Golden, "The Purgation Theory of Catharsis, "*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 31, no. 4 (summer, 1973), p. 478, fn. 2. **9.** Leon Golden, "Catharsis," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. XCIII (1962), p. 57. **10.** *Ibid.*, p. 58. **11.** That Freud's theory can be regarded as an extended footnote to Aristotle was first suggested to us by Professor Herbert Hochberg.

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