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A Re- Configuration Of Aristotle's *Poetics* As The Basis For Modernist Tragic Construction

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Abstract: Commentary on modern tragedy tends to revolve around two major arguments. First, is the question of whether there is modern tragedy and second, if yes, on what ground is the term justified. The argument is caused by the differing opinions as to the necessary ingredients of tragedy as identified by Aristotle. The focus of this discourse is to analyse to what extent Aristotle's *Poetics* has influenced tragic construction and theory of later periods. *Poetics* is not only the first significant work in dramatic theory but its major concepts and lines of arguments have influenced the development of theory and construction of tragedy throughout the centuries. An examination of the tragic conception from the time of the Greeks to the present reveals that tragedy has undergone a metamorphosis in definitions and experience. Based on this premise, this study emphasizes the diversity of the tragic conception and characteristics, its continuity and deviations. Even though there have been changes over the centuries in the concept of the tragic genre, its essence remains the same. For the purposes of this study, the researcher employs extensively, the Historical Research Methodology. Using the historical research methodology and Alfred Whitehead's Process Philosophy, this study submits that even though a precise and detailed discussion of the tragic forms begins with Aristotle, it did not end with him because Aristotle based his theory on the only examples available to him: The works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Many new types of serious plots ending in a catastrophe have been developed – types that Aristotle had no way of foreseeing. The *Poetics* should therefore be seen as Aristotle theorizing according to the great tendency of his time. His theory is descriptive and not prescriptive, and should not be regarded as many generations following its appearance have: an unchallengeable law to be applied as whole to all tragic art without question. The study also proposes the Patho-Cathartic approach to the interpretation and determination of the tragic vision.

Index Terms - Tragedy, poetics, patho-cathartic, modernist, modernism, Aristotle.

I. INTRODUCTION

The most generally accepted etymology of the word tragedy is the Greek 'tragoidia' (literally goat song), from tragos 'goat' and aeidein 'to sing'. There appears to be no satisfactory explanation of this name. The reason for associating tragedy with the goat still remains a matter of speculation: Emeka Nwabueze¹ is of the opinion that the goat played an important function in ancient tragedy because, "Firstly, a goat was sacrificed during the performance of a tragic play; second, the best writer of tragedy was given a goat as prize. Finally, the performers in ancient tragic plays wore goatskins". (66) Esquil, citing Rose, also remarks that, "The chorus quite possibly wore goatskins as a disguise, chosen because of the mythical lustiness and fertility of the he-goat: hence 'tragedy' or 'goat'. (Cited in *Eleven Plays of the Greek Dramatists*: Introduction) However, in spite of its meaning tragedy came to signify a dramatic presentation of high seriousness in which people are tested by great suffering and must face decisions of ultimate consequence. Tragedy, as a dramatic genre has faced a lot of interpretations. As one peruses the different interpretations and definitions of tragedy, one is bound to discover an avalanche of definitions sometimes leading to generalizations on the subject. According to McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama, tragedy is, "one of the basic forms of drama

treating in a serious style the misery and misfortune that man suffers as a result of conflicts within himself, with his fellowmen or with the inescapable and uncontrollable forces of fate". (305). The tragic writer in all ages has always been chiefly concerned with man's struggle with fate.

Greek literature in the ancient period boasts of the epic and the dramatic traditions. The two major poets are Homer and Hesiod. Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*, the two major epics that have survived from Greek antiquity are the most influential works of Western literature. The tragic sense of life that became the basis for tragedy as a dramatic form is first evident in Homer's *Iliad* which depicts man's nobility and heroism in the face of certain defeat, and a world in which man's power is limited or dominated by the gods. In a direct way, Homer was the parent of all succeeding Greek literature. Tragedy was born in Greece in 534 B.C. The most generally accepted origin is that it evolved from the improvisations of the leaders of the *dithyramb*, which were hymns, sung and danced in honour of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and fertility. John Gassner endorses the emergence of tragedy out of Greek rituals in the following terms:

It was on the Greek Peninsula that tragedy emerged out of ritual into art. In Greece, the ancestral tomb, the magic circle, and the temple became the theatre. The ancestral spirit became the living hero, the wraith of the primitive 'vegetation spirit' assumed the body of a god, and the god took the shape of a man. (...) the god was displaced or made subordinate in the subject matter of the drama. (2)

The three great writers of tragedy whose works are extant are Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Tragedy in the Greek world of the fifth century B.C assumed the face of an orderly art of "poetic dialogue and choral lyricism". (Gassner, Introduction XIII) It is almost impossible to make generalizations about the matter of Greek tragedy that are true without exceptions. Nevertheless, it remains true that almost all tragedies tell stories of suffering, of mental and physical anguish, of the waste of life and prosperity. Medieval drama evolved from the liturgical services of the church. The beginnings of that evolution were usually traced back to the *Quem Queritis* trope, an elaboration of the Easter mass inserted in the regular service sometime in the tenth century. From this seed developed the popular drama of the middle ages-the mysteries, miracles and moralities which served to instruct by example and to lead the faithful from tragedy to redemption. While the Medieval notion of drama persisted, the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the fifteenth century along with the general secularization of European culture brought about a revival of classical conception of tragedy. Aristotle's work or rather the neoclassical interpretation of Aristotle's work became law. During the Renaissance period, there was a rise of tragedy that is, "full of the bustle of human desire on the part of extraordinary men bent upon self – realization or gratification of their will – to – power". (Gassner XIV) Classical and Renaissance tragedy focused on the life of a protagonist of a high birth who, because of a fatal moral law or an error of judgment, experienced a disastrous reversal of fortune, and proceeded from happiness into suffering and even death. In the Modern period, we arrive at an age in which the destiny of man is no longer considered the effect of a malevolent superior star, a morally determined doom or an act of independent will but the result of biological, psychological and social factors.

It is apparent that tragic drama since the Classical Greece has had some distinct changes in the course of its development. Since the time of Sophocles, tragedy has been shaped by different theatrical conventions and philosophies. It has experienced different kinds of change under various kinds of situations, pressures etc, which obviously came from the changing world about it. Each period sees the development of a special orientation and emphasis, a characteristic style of theatre. Vera Robert observes that "The consideration of the three great periods of tragedy (Classical, Renaissance and Modern) is demonstration enough that no theatrical period ever repeats itself; there are wide differences among the great three as there must be, since the theatre of any given period reflects the world in which it exists". (161) In apparent support of Vera Roberts, Kenneth Burke in his *Counter – Statement* accepts the argument that "any work of art reflects to some extent its own time". (Cited in Carlson 394) Mark Harris follows a similar argument when he states that "aside from the philosophic and esthetic concerns, one must always keep in mind the sociological concerns of the drama, the values which happened to be cherished by the spectator's era and which are objectified for him in the dramatic spectacle". (Cited in Carlson 400)

The classic discussion of Greek tragedy is Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle first defined tragedy in the *Poetics*, around 330 BC and all subsequent discussions of the tragic form have been influenced by his concept. He begins his analysis of tragedy with this well-known definition:

Tragedy, then, 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 an action, not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation for these emotions. (36)

Aristotle divides his analysis into six basic parts: Plot, Character, Thought, Language, Music and Spectacle. The following are the essential components of his definition and analysis: First, the writer of tragedy imitates

a serious and complete action, of a certain magnitude, represented by what characters on stage do and say. Second, Plot, which is the spine of tragedy, is the arrangement of carefully selected, carefully sequenced tragic incidents to represent one complete action; the plot consists of quantitative parts like prologos, parados etc and organic parts- reversal, recognition. Plots vary in kind: complex versus simple; ethically motivated versus pathetically motivated. Plot is divided into two main parts- Complication and Unraveling or Denouement. Third, the story must seem probable. Fourth, characters should be carefully delineated to contrast with one another, should be full of life individually, should vary ethically, and should be probable and consistent and the tragic hero should be a ruler or leader whose character is good and whose misfortune is brought about by some error or frailty. Fifth, the chorus most directly represents the action of the play. Sixth, language should be elevated and in verse and finally, the special quality of man's pleasure in tragedy comes from the purgation of the emotions of pity and fear.

A debate has raged for some time over whether modern tragedies are true tragedies because they do not have queens or kings as central figures and they are written in prose rather than poetry. Critics like Joseph Wood Krutch argue that small men and women lack the stature of tragic figures. In his "Tragic Fallacy" he said that it is impossible to write tragedy in twentieth century because to him:

We consider human beings too petty to be capable of tragedy. The idea of nobility is inseparable from the idea of tragedy which cannot exist without it (...) A tragedy must have a hero, and from the universe as we see it both the Glory of God and the Glory of man have departed. Our cosmos may be farcical, or it may be pathetic but it has not the dignity of tragedy... (879)

Arthur Miller defended tragedy as a possible modern genre and proposed a rethinking of the genre in the light of contemporary concerns. In his "Tragedy and the common Man", Miller disagrees with Krutch, when he opines that, "(...) I believe that the common man is apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were". (267)

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that tragedy has assumed different faces in different periods. Clearly tragedy has been able to change or adapt even in periods when standards seemed to be most firmly established in fifth century B.C and seventeenth century France. The focus of this discourse will be on answering the following questions: Is the *Poetics* to be regarded as an immutable law to be applied as a whole to all theatrical phenomena without question or specifications? And based on the fact that the modern society does not view life in the same way as the Classical or the Renaissance, does our Contemporary society allow for a tragic view on its own term?

II. THE FACES OF DRAMATIC THEORY FROM THE CLASSICAL TO THE MODERN PERIOD.

In the Fourth Century BC, Aristotle in his works, *Poetics*, gave the Western civilization a definition of tragedy which has greatly influenced the writers and the forms of tragedy over seventeen centuries. The dominance of Aristotle's *Poetics* in literary theory is unchallenged. It is not only the first significant work in the tradition but its major concepts and lines of arguments have continually influenced the development of theory throughout the centuries. Western literary and dramatic theory indeed begins with Aristotle. The Greeks were the first tragedians and it was upon their work only that Aristotle formed his conclusions. For centuries, Aristotle's *Poetics* offered the only definition of tragedy available to dramatic critics and the six principles of drama have stood as the backbone of dramatic expression. His ideas concerning dramatic structure established the terms of the debate and were never seriously challenged. Based on his unquestioned authority, critics who discussed tragedy assumed his categories to be valid for all time. Unfortunately, numerous types of drama have developed over the centuries which Aristotle never envisioned. Objectively, differences and similarities in the historical manifestations of tragic theatre can easily be identified.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle concerns himself with the structure of incidents, the proper constitution of the plot, the nature and status of the character, the diction and language of tragedy, etc. In the Centuries following the *Poetics*, Aristotle's account of tragedy was amplified, differently interpreted and even changed into strict norms binding upon all playwrights. The *Poetics* was translated into Latin by Giorgio Valla in 1498 and by the Sixteenth Century, especially in Italy an extraordinary examination of the *Poetics* had begun. The story of dramatic criticism during the Italian Renaissance is essentially that of the establishment of *Poetics* as a central reference point in dramatic theory and of attempts to relate this work to the already established critical tradition. The *Poetics* provided the basis for a neoclassical theory of tragedy that would deeply influence practical criticism through the 18th century. The question of whether the writing of tragedy is possible in the modern world has been under constant debate since Joseph Wood Krutch's essay "The Tragic Fallacy" in *The Modern Temper*. The argument is caused by the differing

opinions as to the necessary ingredients of tragedy as identified by Aristotle- Anagnorisis and Peripeteia; the status of the tragic hero and the greatness of language. Critics like Krutch suggest that perhaps it is impossible to write true tragedy in democratic times when our heroes are also our equals, when kings are scarce and kingliness is not often sought after.

In the "The Tragic Fallacy", Krutch argues that "The idea of nobility is inseparable from the idea of tragedy, which cannot exist without it. (...) A tragedy must have a hero, and from the universe as we see it both the glory of God and the glory of man have departed. Our cosmos may be farcical or it may be pathetic but it has not the dignity of tragedy".(879) Krutch believes that the modern skeptical and scientific outlook has pitifully reduced man's stature, consequently we do not write about kings because we do not believe that any man is fit to be one. Francis George Steiner, a critic of Comparative Literature like Krutch argues that, the triumph of rationalism and a secular worldview, has removed the metaphysical grounds for tragedy in the modern world. Steiner examines the concept of tragedy in his book, *The Death of Tragedy* and finds the modern world unsuitable for tragedy. In his view, the idea and the vision of tragedy are Greek and the tragic forms Hellenic. To him, tragedy is concerned with fate and humanity's inability to defeat the forces beyond its control. Fate consumes the will and these are the grounds on which tragedy exists and in the modern age fate's significance has diminished rendering tragedy ineffectual. Steiner opines that:

Tragic drama tells us that the sphere of reason, order, justice are terribly limited and that no progress in our science or technical resources will enlarge their relevance. Outside and within man is l'autre or 'otherness' of the world. Call it what you will: a hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell, or the brute fury of our animal blood. It waits for us in ambush at the crossroads. It mocks us and destroys us. In certain rare instances, it leads us after destruction to some incomprehensible repose. (335)

Raymond Williams in 1962 published *Modern Tragedy*, a theoretical work that absolutely responds to Steiner's theory. In defending modern tragedy in the light of critics like Steiner who dismiss it as a relic of the past, Williams opines that:

Contemporary life may not hold fate in the same regard, but our fears warrant tragic consequences. Ancient tragedy depended on order and the disarray occurring within the purview of the tragic hero. In modern tragedy, the issue of stability remains since violence and catastrophe are still the main current of tragedy. (373)

Williams provides persuasive arguments for the possibility and existence of tragedies in which the structures of capitalism, democracy, and secularism provide the surrogates for the inexorable and unanswerable forces of divinity and fate that constitute Steiner's sine qua non of tragic drama. Steiner perhaps forgot that in the modern dispensations, characters still face forces beyond their control, though not fate. From the modern period, life and the society are such that man is faced with the fear of the revolving problem of industrialization, constant wars, crisis, terrorism, corruption, poverty, diseases- COVID-19 as an example, and capitalism etc. Man seems to be a helpless victim of this society filled with chaos. In his lectures on *History of Philosophy*, Hegel records that:

Napoleon in a conversation which he once had with Goethe on the nature of tragedy, expressed the opinion that its modern phase differed from the ancient through our no longer recognizing a Destiny to which men are absolutely subject and that policy occupies the place of ancient fate. This therefore he thought must be used as the modern form of Destiny in tragedy- the irresistible power of circumstances to which individuality must bend. (289)

The contentions of Krutch and Steiner against Modern tragedy are primarily based on the status of the protagonist and the language of modern tragedy. The German critic Herman Hettner, American dramatist Arthur Miller, French dramatist Beaumarchais and American critic John Gassner challenged the views of Aristotle, Krutch and Steiner and argue in favour of the common man as subject. Hettner's work can be seen as an antecedent to Miller's "Tragedy and The Common Man". In his book, *The Modern Drama*, Hettner writes that,

Tragedy searches for its protagonist not on the throne of kings or from the heights of history, rather, in the lower circles of life amidst plain and simple relationships. Hence if the modern era is distinguished from the Ancients and Middle Ages chiefly through emancipation which has granted the individual as individual, through the impartial recognition of the purely human in everyone, without consideration of person and rank, then it is altogether in accordance with the nature and necessity of progressive historical development that the so called middle-class drama must arise together with the beginning of modern history. Hence, in every respect, its origin corresponds in time with the origins of modern thinking: each person has his fate; the neediest Burger as well as the mightiest monarch. (266)

Like Hettner, Miller challenges the notion of tragedy reserved merely for the lofty. The central theme of Miller's theory, "Tragedy and The Common Man", is not the definition of tragedy but the defence of the

common man as a tragic hero. He defended tragedy as a possible modern genre and proposed a rethinking of the genre in the light of contemporary concerns. In his theory, Miller maintains that tragedy is “(...) the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly”. (267) He believes that “the common man is apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense”. (267) To him, the fall of a common man can be just as tragic, even if the fall does not occur from the ruling class. In fact, the French dramatist Beaumarchais insists that, “the nearer the suffering man to my station in life, the greater is his claim upon my sympathy” (852). And on the contrary, the use of exalted characters like kings in tragedy rather than increasing his interest diminishes it. Miller, on the other hand` maintains that:

Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. (...) the quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. (...) in fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best. (268)

John Gassner also wondered what stature has to do with it when he says, “I fail to understand why a character’s failure to measure up to the stature of Hamlet or Othello must be a deterrent to pity and fear”. (285) He goes on to say that it is precisely because Willy Loman of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was a common man that American audiences felt pity for him and feared for themselves. Gassner describes Loman as a “sort of suburban everyman with whom audiences readily established a connection, if not indeed an actual identification”. (285) Gassner also noted in a review titled, “The Possibilities and Perils of Modern Tragedy”, that critics like Steiner seem to believe that because tragedy developed out of religious ritual in Greece, the modern theatre that does not have any religious origin is unable to engender tragic art. This, Gassner considers a genetic fallacy. A reason which assumes, “that a thing must remain what it was at its inception”. (5) Steiner is perhaps too rigid; he regards tragedy as something which remains the same for all time. He obviously does not make any allowance for the effects of change – social, political, scientific etc.

John Gassner, Antonin Artaud and Vera Roberts address the issue of language and the necessity to bring it into a modern context. In defending the language of modern tragedy, Gassner asked and answered a very pertinent question: “shall we say that we had no tragedies because Playwrights stopped writing poetry? No! Since there is no evidence that Catharsis is directly dependent on poetry”. (285) Even Aristotle treated the language of tragedy separately, almost as an embellishment, so language in the drama is not an end itself. In the ranking of the elements of tragedy, Aristotle places Diction in the fourth position. According to him, “Fourth among the elements enumerated comes diction by which means, as has been already said, the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose”. (37) And like Antonin Artaud rightly points out, “(...) we have a right to say what has been said and even what has not been said in a way which pertains to us, which is immediate and direct, which corresponds to present modes of feeling and which everyone will understand”. (197) He reiterates that the authors should speak to the spectators in their own language and not “over defined language which belong to dead ages, ages that will never be brought to life again”. (198)

Vera Roberts insists that “The language of tragedy may be poetry, or prose. The choice depends upon the accepted convention of the time in which it is written”. (137) Indeed, Tragedy has become realistic in the modern age and this has to be reflected in the language. The 20th Century upwards is rightfully called, the age of prose, unlike in the Classical western tradition regarded as the age of poetry and playwrights were called dramatic poets.

Aristotle in discussing construction made a point of the recognition scene as essential to tragedy and noted the powerful dramatic effect of a recognition scene. As earlier pointed out, he described recognition simply as a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune.

In the “Essence of Tragedy”, Anderson Maxwell weighs in on Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the possibility of tragedy in the modern age. He avers that recognition in modern tragedy is a discovery by the hero of some element in the environment or in his own personality of which he has not been aware or which he has not taken sufficiently into account. He then proposed the following formulation:

A play should lead up to and away from a central crisis and this crisis should consist in a discovery by the leading character which has an indelible effect on his thought and emotion and completely alters his course of action. (...) the leading character must make the discovery, it must affect him emotionally and it must alter his direction in the play. (230)

Gassner, on his own side expanded the idea of anagnorsis or recognition to be “legitimately extended to the discovery of hidden facts as well as disguised or hitherto unidentified persons”. (Modern Theories, 279)

Aristotle had noted the powerful dramatic effect of a recognition scene. For instance, one can cite the discovery that Oedipus, Othello, Creon, made about themselves which gave us the greatest tragic scene in literature as cases in point. Nevertheless, though Aristotle discusses recognition as an essential part of the plot of tragedy, it is not unique to tragedy alone. It occurs in comedy, epic and at a later date in the novel as well, and therefore cannot be used to determine tragedy. Even Aristotle conceded that plots can be either simple or complex. Simple plots are the ones without peripeteia and without recognition. Though Aristotle concludes that a perfect tragedy should not be arranged on the simple but on the complex plan, it does not follow that every tragic plot must have Peripeteia and Recognition in order to qualify as tragedy.

Of the ingredients and the construction of the plot, according to Aristotle, what are left to be discussed are the three unities. There is no doubt that the unities of action, place and time by Aristotle and the Renaissance critics have been postulated as an ideal of stage action. The position of this study is that the above statement can only be unchallengeable from the logical and hence the aesthetic point of view. In other words, the three unities of action, time and place are good, but not compulsory as they do not determine the tragic tone, vision or mood of a play. For instance, most Greek tragedies observe the unities while Shakespearean plays do not. But their absences do not reduce the tragic nature of the latter. Speaking of the neoclassical unities, Samuel Johnson contended that insistence on unities of time and place involved confusion between art and life. Representation, he says, “is mistaken for reality, (...) the truth is that, the spectators are always in their senses and know from the first Act to the last, that the stage is only a stage and that the players are only players”. (857)

III. A RECONFIGURATION OF ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS* AS THE BASIS FOR MODERNIST TRAGIC CONSTRUCTION

The contentions about modern tragedy are primarily based on the status of the hero, the language of tragedy and the ingredients of the plot as identified by Aristotle. A combination of *Patho-Cathartic* concept is used in this paper to arrive at a suitable interpretation or determination of tragedy. In his well known theory of tragedy, Aristotle opines that Tragedy is a representation of action, serious, through the arousal of pity and fear affecting the catharsis of such emotions. The most important of the components of tragedy to him is the structure of events, because tragedy is the representation not of people but of actions and life and both happiness and unhappiness rest on action.

The *Patho-Cathartic* concept argues that a perfect Tragedy should imitate events, terrible and serious that excites pity and fear. Through witnessing the suffering of the characters, human emotions and consequently empathy arises. This ability to elicit empathy in the viewers is the key element of the tragic vehicle. It supersedes the status of the character and grand or elevated language to that of a human scale. Philosophers and Theologians through the ages have debated the question of the origin of suffering but tragedy offers no single solution. Some people suffer because of their own actions, miscalculation which turn out to be fatal, example Oedipus in Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex*; Mistake based on ignorance and deceit – Othello in Shakespeare's *Othello*, or evil deeds which return to haunt them – Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. At times, people suffer simply because they live in a cruel and unjust universe where gods or the society are unkind or nonexistent – Willy Loman, Duncan, Desdemona, Macduff, etc.

The *Patho-Cathartic* point of view aligns with Vera Roberts opinion that, “The thought or governing concept of tragedy is always one of some magnitude or seriousness according to the value judgement of the period in which it is written”. (134) As well as *Cassel's Encyclopedia of World Literature's* definition that, “Tragedy is the dramatic representation of some serious action, arousing pity and fear”. It is the view of this paper that tragedies of all ages from Greek to the present time share the above elements in common: seriousness, suffering, pity and fear and these elements are unique to only tragedy, unlike the other ingredients of plot like *Anagnorsis*, *Peripeteia*, and the Unities that are also present in the other literary forms like the Novel, Comedy and Epic. Even Aristotle opined that, “Perfect tragedy should imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation”. (42) It is not enough for an audience to see what happens on the stage, the action of the play must affect them in such a way that they feel with the characters and events: We feel for Oedipus and Jocasta as they woefully discover the gravity of their actions. We feel pity for Antigone in her deep sorrow, helplessness and aloneness. We feel pity for Macduff, who after leaving the country returns to find his wife and child murdered. We feel pity for Willy Loman: broken, disillusioned and tossed about on the waves of disappointment;

The experience of pity and fear is aroused, first, not due to language but it is an experience of action. It is the result of our observing the doing and suffering of a thing. Aristotle rightly pointed out, “It clearly follows

that the poet should be the maker of plots rather than of verses, since he is a poet because he imitates and what he imitates are actions". (39)

Secondly, Pity and Fear are aroused by the action of the play, not merely by the downfall of the protagonist. If otherwise, for instance, how can the audience feel pity and fear at the downfall of Macbeth whose doom was caused by his own doings? For Macbeth is not a great noble figure who does good, moral deeds in the course of the play or is he a good person who does deeds of horror in ignorance of the facts. He is not only a tyrant, but also too evil for us to sympathize with him. We feel pity not for him but for his victims. It is on this premise that some of Shakespeare's plays succeed as tragedy for when a man suffers because of his own actions, there may not be much pity and fear in the mind of the audience. As Aristotle pointed out, the audience will believe that the person deserves his punishment and this destroys the tragic feelings. We feel pity and fear as a result of things that happen to innocent people like Jocasta, Duncan, Banquo, Macduff, Haemon and Desdemona who, for instance, loved deeply and honestly, gave up even her family, yet was accused wrongly by the same person she made the sacrifice for, and paid dearly with her life. Thirdly, it does not matter whether a modern tragedy concerns itself with a common man or a president. Neither does it matter whether the hero falls from a great height or a small one for tragedy imitates what people do and not who they are. This is because height is not necessarily an architectural place, but a moral height, for someone can have that height yet lack moral authority from which to fall. According to Aristotle:

Dramatic action therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character; character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence, the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy and the end is the chief of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy, there may be without character. (36)

From the *Patho-Cathartic* point of view therefore, it is the argument of this thesis that first, true tragedy can exist on the Modern stage. Secondly, its existence is rooted in forms, and not because they fulfill any particular theory – Aristotelian or otherwise. Thirdly, as long as they channel tragic content out to the audience eliciting pity and fear whether in the classical theatre or modern day stage. Finally, like every other form of drama, tragedy has undergone a series of changes in conventions which obviously is an attribute of various dramatists' understanding of the form and the society at the period of their writing. Consequently, in the contemporary society, as there are multiplicity of styles, as style today is a personal but not a general matter, so also we have dramatic theories and we opine that Aristotle's theory should be seen as one of them.

The logical framework of this research is hinged on Alfred Whitehead's Process Philosophy. Change and permanence have always been a philosophical issue right from the beginning of philosophy. The Ionian philosophers in their search for the 'stuff' in nature proposed different elements; water, air and boundlessness. Their propositions suggested a kind of permanence in the faces of change that is witnessed in our world order. Parmenides of Elea tried to perfect the proposed permanence of the Ionian philosophers by maintaining that Being is, and non-being is not, and that only the unchanging belongs to the world of Being. So there is permanence in every change we experience. It was Heraclitus who first challenged the philosophy of permanence of the first philosophers. For him, all things are in flux (*omnia flux*) and the only constant or permanent thing in the universe is change itself, thus, 'you cannot step into the same river twice as fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you'.

Whatever shapes and sizes it assumes, the perennial philosophical problem of change and permanence still rears its head in our current discourse. Modern philosophers like Rene Descartes, Benedictus de Spinoza, and Wilhelm Leibniz hungered for certainty of knowledge (which they sought for in Mathematics) as their own version of permanence. But the Process Philosophy of Alfred Whitehead turns out as a veritable option to explain the permanence of change. Describing the part he wished to trail, Whitehead opines that, "The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation". (5)

Like the flight of an aeroplane, reality is ever in motion; moving to greater revelations. If this is so, there is no point where permanence or certainty is guaranteed. In Process Philosophy propounded by Whitehead, reality is ever in process of change. Everything changes and there is no account of permanence except change, the manifestation of tragic form inclusive.

It follows therefore that Aristotle's theory of tragedy, while an important place to begin, should not be used to prescribe one definitive form which applies to all tragedies past and present, especially as the present day theatre has multiplicity of dramatic theories.

IV. CONCLUSION

Life and theatre have much in common and one of the strongest similarities is that they are always in a flux. The surface styles and values that underlie them change all the time. Theatre has always changed, it has always been a changing art, and change is one of its most exciting aspects. Each change in the theatre is important. It not only mirrors the times but leads the way to emerging attitudes.

Aristotle did not set down rules for dramatic composition rather his observations record the practices of the Greek playwrights of the preceding centuries. It is important to point out that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides did not write according to law-like rules, but constructed their plays to meet the conventions of the theatre and their own imaginations.

In modernist literature, the definition of tragedy has become less precise. The most fundamental change has been the rejection of Aristotle's dictum that true tragedy can only depict those with power and high status. Arthur Miller's essay, "Tragedy and the Common Man" exemplifies the modern belief that tragedy may also depict ordinary people in domestic surroundings. Modern heroes and heroines are molded and controlled by their society. They have no power to alter society; instead, they are at the mercy of the society for their own character. Thus, the fate decreed from the gods of classical Greek tragedy is replaced by the will of the institutions that shape the fate of the individual through policies and practices. Modern tragedy therefore as pointed out by Maeterlinck:

Does not make serious appeal to a determined divinity or fatality, it has fallen back on itself and seeks to discover in the regions of psychology and of moral problems, the equivalent of what once was offered by exterior life". (70)

The above is in line with O'Neil Eugene's remark that, "the playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today – the death of the old God and the future of science and materialism". (329)

The Twentieth century forward is the time when the common man could be noticed, exalted and compared to characters and tragic figures of earlier periods. Realism breeds proximity and the closer to the real world the audience is, the more it feels for the characters.

In conclusion, the basic difference between tragedy and other genres such as comedy and epic is, according to Aristotle, tragic pleasure of pity and fear the audience feel watching a tragedy. This is the stand of Patho-Cathartic perspective, the new opinion proposed in this work: that witnessing the tragedy and suffering of the characters on stage, the emotions of pity and fear are aroused in the audience; thus, for a play to be classified as tragedy, it must produce the tragic effect of pity and fear.

Tragedy like every other drama has undergone series of changes in convention which is obviously an attribute of various dramatists' understanding of the form and the society at period of their writing.

The crucial question is: Is tragedy really dead? The answer is that tragedy is neither dead nor will it ever die. It simply wears a different costume in the present day theatre. How has the costume changed today? The first ancient accessories to disappear were the king's crown for the hero. Modern theorists and playwrights, who live in a more or less democratic world where kings and queens are a thing of the past, have placed the idea of nobility in man – any man – as man: a tragic hero can be the archetypal common citizen – a salesman, a worker, a farmer etc. But the hero must be able to face his destiny with courage and nobility of spirit. In addition to losing the crown, tragedy also lost the paraphernalia of poetry for the writers wrote in prose, a language they felt was much more suited to their characters and subject matter. The language of modern tragedy is infused with simplicity. Furthermore, tragedy also lost its religious inclination. Tragedy in the classical Greek period was part of a religious celebration. It developed from ritual and at its zenith still retained many ritualistic characteristics. The performances were given at festivals in honour of Dionysus, the greatest being the City Dionysia held at the end of March. The world of the years following the ancient was quite different from it. In the Renaissance period, there was absolutely no connection between theatre and religion. One of the developments of the Renaissance was the secularization of the arts, literature and theatre and the individualization of the human being as distinct from society in general. In the modern period going forward, the world of the mundane material life is central. As long as the real, the tangible, the ordinary is represented on the stage, then the audience can have a 'pathotic' response to the material. The issue is not man-god relationship or the loftiness of language and the subject matter is not drawn from myth or legend.

A precise and detailed discussion of the tragic forms begins with Aristotle, but it did not end with him. Aristotle based his theory on the only examples available to him: The works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Many new types of serious plots ending in a catastrophe have been developed – types that Aristotle had no way of foreseeing. Aristotle did not live to see a Shakespearean, 'Ibsen's, 'Miller's nor 'O'Neil's tragedies. The *Poetics* should therefore be seen as Aristotle theorizing according to the great tendency of his time. His theory is descriptive and not prescriptive, and should not be regarded as many

generations following its appearance have: an unchallengeable law to be applied as whole to all tragic art without question. John Dryden was convinced that tragedy was not a historically fixed form. In his view, “it is not enough that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides and if he had seen Shakespeare’s, (Miller’s or O’Neil’s) he might have changed his mind” (856).

Modern tragedy may not wear the Aristotelian costume nor conform to the typical traditional tragic plays like Shakespeare’s tragedy and Sophocles’ tragedy, but it is tragedy after all, a tragedy that fits with the views, worries and concerns of the modern people. It has a tragic plot that arouses pity and fear, a tragic theme, tragic characters and a tragic end. It is obvious that modern tragic dramatists probe the same depths and ask the same questions as their predecessors. The ultimate test of a play therefore, is not whether it meets someone’s definition of tragedy but what effect it produces in the theatre and how successful it is subsequently in standing up to continued scrutiny.

Critics like Krutch, Steiner maintain that there is no modern tragedy, that tragedy is dead. Some say that it died after Shakespeare; some placed the obsequy after the great French tragedies. But they are looking in the wrong places for the wrong things. Vera Roberts opines that “Certainly, no one should expect modern playwrights to produce Greek tragedies, or French, or Elizabethan, nor even Romantic, we live in a different world”. (161)

The society in the classical and the modern are totally different considering the mechanical and the social factors, which control individuals unlike the classical period where they are concerned about the gods and what they declare or demand of them. So, the modern age allows for a tragic vision on its own view. The contention that tragedy does not and cannot exist in the modern times is erroneous. Tragedy is not dead. It is not like that of the Greeks, or the Elizabethans or the Neo-classicists but it is a mirror held up to our world. Francis Ogier, in the preface to Jean de Schelandre’s play, *Tyr et Sidon*, appealed to the validity of contemporary genius rather than to classical precedent. He maintains that, “The Greeks wrote for the Greeks, (...) we shall imitate them much better if we allow something to the genius of our country and to the taste of our language than if we force ourselves to follow step-by-step both their style of invention and their poetic form”. (856)

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