

THE TRAGIC VALUE*

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Ryuanji,¹ an old Buddhist temple in the ancient city of Kyoto, is particularly famous for its 'rock-garden'. It is a unique garden, which is entirely composed of rocks and sand. It is said that the designer of it was Soami, an eminent and versatile artist of the mid-Muromachi period (the fifteenth century). The garden is rectangular in shape, and relatively small. Standing or squatting in the veranda of the temple which extends along one of the longer sides of the garden, one may take its whole view in a glance. The three sides of the garden are fenced with old, time-stained plaster walls of yellowish grey. The whole ground is covered with rough white sand, which retains on the surface a somewhat regular pattern of semi-circular traces of the rakes that have swept and cleaned it. In this dry sea of sand are planted, in several groups, fifteen natural blocks of rock of different shapes and sizes. The arrangement of those rocks is exquisite. But the rocks and sand are all that is there. No trees, no grass, no flowers are to be found in the whole space. It is a complete denial of the usual notion of a garden.

Ryuanji is a temple of the Zen sect of Buddhism.² My knowledge of Zen is so limited that I cannot say exactly what explanations Zen priests or specialists will give of that unusual garden of their temple. But I am faithful to my own experience in saying that while in contact with a certain kind of tragic drama I am reminded of that dry garden of rocks and sand.

The garden of Ryuanji is one which has excluded all vegetation. There is not a hint of green or bloom anywhere in the garden. As there are no trees in it, no birds come to sing there. As there are no flowers, no butterflies come to play there. It is a bare garden; it is dry, cold, silent, and still. It looks like part of the surface of the moon-world as we conventionally imagine it to be.

It would be easy for anyone to see that there is a considerable difference between Western countries and Japan in the aesthetics of horticulture, as in many other things. Symmetrical or geometrical patterns which Western gardens so often present to our sight are not what we normally see in traditional Japanese gardens. The leading principle of the art of garden-making in Japan seems to have been that a garden should be an embodiment, in any scale, of a vision of nature. A garden should be, according to the traditional understanding in

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¹ It is also known as Ryoanji. It was built in 1450 under the sponsorship of Katsumoto Hosokawa, the political and military magnate of the time.

² More precisely, it is a cathedral of the Myoshinji school of the Rinzaï sect of the Zen Buddhism.

Japan, an artistic epitome of natural landscape; or, rather, a refined part of the natural landscape itself. That seems to be the general theory we perceive in all Japanese gardens of the traditional style, both large and small, and including miniature ones called *hako-niwa* or 'box-gardens'. A traditional Japanese garden is, so to speak, a three-dimensional landscape painting.

The rock-garden of Ryuanji is very special in that it is entirely composed of rocks and sand, driving all vegetation out of it; yet, we cannot think that it is a garden which is alien to the Japanese tradition. If it is not outside the tradition, it must follow that it also is an embodiment of a vision of nature or the world in which we live and die, no matter how strange it may appear to the ordinary eye. In a view, trees and grass are nothing but a layer of moss that covers the surface of the earth. That layer is subject to vicissitude and mutability. It forms a world of changes. Beyond this phenomenal world lies a world of solid reality which is immutable and everlasting. My conjecture is that the rock-garden of Ryuanji is a physical equivalent of the mental visualization of that metaphysical world. And my further conjecture is that Soami, the designer of the garden, and some, at least, of those Zen priests who were around him had a realization that they were really living in a world just like that which their bare garden of rocks and sand represented or symbolized.

I am inclined to agree with Professor McLuhan in saying that we take pleasure in experiencing an identical thing through different senses or through different media of information. When, for instance, a man feels he is in the Christmas mood himself, it will be agreeable to him to know that his surroundings—the TV he watches, the radio he listens into, the newspapers and magazines he reads and looks at, the streets he walks in, and so on—have all become Christmas. Aristotle said that sad music is agreeable to a man who is sad, and merry one to a man who is merry. It is a statement which can and does be used as a basis in attempts at explaining his controversial theory of catharsis in his *Poetics*. It seems to be a right psychology that a work of art which arouses the feelings of pity and fear should be agreeable and give satisfaction to those who are suffering from those feelings in their life. Aristotle's statement may also give a clue to the simple but embarrassing question why people want to see a tragic drama, even if they must pay time and money for it. It may also suggest an approach to the question why tragedies flourish in an age but not in another.

A garden is, essentially, something for people to look at. Even if it has paths and lanes running through it, they are there only for the purpose of enabling men to move and shift their point of view, so that they can look at it in different perspectives and from different angles. The rock-garden of Ryuanji has no paths running through it, but it is so designed that a man is to look down over it from anywhere he likes in the veranda extending along its side.

Generally, a garden will be made so as to give delight to those who look at it. A thing which gives delight to a man must have in it something which is congenial to him. It must be, as a whole, in harmony with his emotional state in the wide sense of the phrase, which includes his intellectual sanction. The very fact that the rock-garden of Ryuanji was made tells us that there were some people to whom the view of it was agreeable because it was in harmony with their habitual emotional state. The view of that cold, silent and changeless garden, entirely of rocks and sand, and without any hint of life in it, must have been felt by them to be in right correspondence to their own vision of the world in which they thought they lived. Strip the earth of all its green, the layer of moss, a surface of vicissitude and muta-

bility, and then rocks and sand, a world of solid reality will come out. The rock-garden of Ryuanji is not a garden which has driven vegetation out, but one which has been stripped of it. Would it be too abrupt and rash to call that garden of rocks and sand an existential garden? Would it be wrong? I do not think it is.

Imagining in my mind a world of which the rock-garden can be either a representation or a symbol, I should like to call it the existential world. This world of stark reality is covered with a surface of the networks of values of every sort, just as the world of rocks and sand is covered with a layer of trees and grass, its moss. A world where estimations of values by every standard—right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, or ‘fair’ and ‘foul’ as Shakespeare comprehensively expressed them—form intricate and vacillating networks, or a world which is composed of such networks of values, is laid upon the existential world.

Since tragedy is the main subject of my consideration here, I should like to take, of all the networks of values covering the existential world, only the networks of moral values as most relevant to my subject, so that I can simplify my argument that follows. Even then, it is true that the networks of moral values are in themselves complex and involved, and are not to be grasped as a single entity of one meaning. But if we take a position to regard them in contradistinction to the world of sheer existence, we can make a single notion of them as a whole. Thus we get a new sphere. It is a new world of compound nature, a world composed of two different worlds; that is, the world of moral values and the world of sheer existence. It is in this two-layered world that a tragedy of the finest sort occurs.

Formally, the tragic hero passes, in the course of the tragedy, from the moral out into the existential world; and in the last phase of the formal tragedy, the hero, now with the moral world far behind him, will find himself gazing at the infinite, all alone in a desolate as well as serene world of profound silence and stillness. He has now come far away from the human habitation, and, in complete solitude, is surrounded by silence and infinitude.

In a tragedy we can easily single out a character who is its hero. A tragedy is always somebody's tragedy. In a comedy, on the other hand, we cannot distinguish a single character as its hero in the way we do in a tragedy. Indeed, we do not think there is any single hero in a comedy. That is natural. A tragedy is, by nature, that type of drama in which a particular character becomes gradually isolated from those around him as the drama develops itself, while a comedy is the type in which all the characters gradually become reconciled with one another and tied together in fellowship until the play ends, so to speak, in a communal festival. In a comedy, people who were initially separate, envious or hostile gradually become reconciled and united as friends, all sharing the sense of community and all joining hands, either actually or metaphorically, to form a circle of convivial dancers. ‘Conviviality’ is appropriate to describe the end of a comedy. Impossible persons are only to be expelled out of the company and forgotten for ever.

In a tragedy, on the contrary, we soon perceive a person who begins to lose communication with his neighbours and becomes more and more isolated from them as we watch him. He becomes aware, as he gains new things in his consciousness and acquires a new insight, that it has become difficult for him to keep adequate communication with those who are around him. The number of the people to whom he feels he can impart what he is seeing “in his mind's eye” goes on decreasing, and when at last he finds that it has become utterly impossible for him to communicate any longer with anyone around him, he becomes completely isolated and solitary. The archetypal form of Greek tragedy in which the protagonist stands

against the chorus represents, after all, the essential quality of tragedy. What becomes more and more evident in that juxtaposition of protagonist and chorus is the division and the distance between the two, and the solitariness of the protagonist who has gone far beyond the choric consciousness of the ordinary people.

While in a comedy the action moves towards a social reconciliation, until, in the end, all the characters are united in communal fellowship and join their hands to form a circle of festive dancers, a tragedy, as it proceeds, develops and isolates an unsocial or anti-social character as the focus of the whole drama. Perhaps we had better reverse the statement and say that we call the former type of drama a comedy and the latter a tragedy. A person who is isolated in a society is not always a tragic hero, but a tragic hero is always an isolated person, or an "outsider", if you like to call him so. The unsocial or anti-social person whom a tragedy both develops and pursues during the course of it is what we call the hero of the tragedy.

I said earlier that in a tragedy of some kind the hero passes out of the moral into the existential world. It is, ultimately, by that that he becomes isolated, really solitary in the universe. That is also the reason why any moral judgment of him becomes, ultimately, irrelevant to him. To describe him as good or evil in any moral sense or by any moral principle becomes not inadequate but irrelevant. Good and evil belong to the moral world. They are, after all, matters of the human habitation. What ultimate validity and meaning can it have to call a man good or evil who has left the human habitation far behind and entered a world beyond morality.

The world of tragedy is one in which 100 in the negative is just a hundred times as great as 1 in the positive. It is a world of absolute values, where the signs of plus and minus are dropped. In that world of absolute values, a petty good person is petty and a great evil person great. A great evil person is great just in the same sense that a great good person is great. The world of tragedy is one in which an equation holds good that the quantity of an existence is equal to its value. And the theory of values expressed by that equation is that of the tragic value. It is different from the usual theory or theories of moral valuation. It is the principle by which values in a world beyond morality—values in the world of existence—are estimated.

The absolute quantity of an existence in a world beyond morality can be taken, here in a consideration of the formal tragedy and its hero, to be the same as the magnitude of an individual soul. And the magnitude of an individual soul is to be estimated by the dimensions and weight of what it has gained by way of experience. A tragic hero excels those around him by the dimensions and weight of what he has gained within him by his spiritual experience. He is really an excellent man, far surpassing in his experience and his consequent insight the common level of human beings, and is justly worth the appellation of a hero. That he has ever been able to have a spiritual experience which is beyond the ordinary human scope means that his is a soul which is capable, by its innate quality, of having that experience. A tragic hero is a hero by the natural and original quality of his soul.

Good and evil are correlative. Indeed, they are a unity. The existence of good causes evil to exist, and *vice versa*. They come into existence simultaneously. In other words, an idea of good is only possible by containing in it an opposite idea of evil, and an idea of evil an opposite idea of good. Good and evil are thus in the action-reaction relationship, and so in a dynamic tension with each other. A force is inevitably accompanied by a counter-force

exactly equal to it. Just as the existence of a great good causes an evil of exactly equal greatness to exist, so the existence of a great evil causes a good of exactly equal greatness to exist. Good and evil are the results of a judgment formed according to some moral principle, whatever moral principle that may be; for principles of moral judgment are always more or less in vacillation. Good and evil are values which a matter bears to any degree when it is considered in terms of morality. But a matter exists as itself before it is given any moral value. The tragic value is a kind of value which a matter as an existence carries in itself or we think it does.

Murder is usually asserted, in a moral judgment, to be an evil, and very often the blackest evil. That morality is sound. But the deed of murder exists as the deed itself before it is morally judged as an evil or the blackest evil or anything else. The tragic valuation of a murder is a valuation of it which is made apart from its moral valuation. It considers mainly the spiritual significance it bears to the man who has had the experience of committing it. The experience is sometimes of great tragic value, and sometimes petty. When we consider *Macbeth*, for instance, we do not think it an essential question how evil, in the moral sense, Macbeth's murder of Duncan is. Not that a moral valuation of Macbeth's deed is quite irrelevant here, but it is subsidiary. Our primary consideration should be about the spiritual weight which the deed carried in Macbeth, and the magnitude of the soul which was laden with that weight; and, more fundamentally, the tremendous quality of the soul which was capable of the whole experience. Macbeth is, ultimately, neither morally good nor evil. He is simply a tragic hero. And if he had not committed the murder of Duncan, he would not have realized the full magnitude of his soul and would not have become a tragic hero as we know him.