

Lessing's Interpretation of Aristotle

Author(s): J. G. Robertson

Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Jul., 1917), pp. 319-339

Published by: [Modern Humanities Research Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3714096>

Accessed: 28/06/2014 08:47

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Modern Language Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

LESSING'S INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTLE¹.

III.

THE DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY.

'A TRAGEDY,' says Aristotle, 'is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions².' The chief difficulty of the definition lies in its last words: δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν. What is meant by the terms ἔλεος, φόβος and κάθαρσις? What is the end or purpose of tragedy?—these are the questions round which the main controversies of Aristotelian interpretation have always turned. Lessing's contribution to these controversies forms, as might be expected, one of the most interesting aspects of his critical theory. It will be convenient to begin by considering what he understands by the words ἔλεος and φόβος.

i. 'PITY' AND 'FEAR.'

Aristotle's words, ἔλεος καὶ φόβος are, throughout the first part of the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, translated by Lessing 'Mitleid und Schrecken³.' But in Stück lxxiv he corrects 'Schrecken' to 'Furcht,' and in the remainder of the work renders the phrase 'Mitleid und Furcht⁴.'

It is difficult to reconcile this with the fact that, as far back as

¹ Continued from *Modern Language Review*, xii, p. 168.

² I quote from the late Professor Bywater's translation, Oxford, 1909.

³ Stück xxxii (*Schriften*, ed. Lachmann and Munkler, ix, pp. 316 f.), xxxvii (p. 339), xxxviii (p. 344), li (p. 403), lxxiv (*Ibid.* x, p. 98), lxxv (p. 102); also in earlier writings: *Theatralische Bibliothek* (*Ibid.* vi, p. 6); Translation of Diderot, 1760, i, pp. 235, 282; unchanged in the edition of 1786.

⁴ Stück lxxiv (pp. 99 f.), lxxv (pp. 102 f.), lxxx (p. 125).

April 2, 1757, he had written to Nicolai with considerable emphasis, that 'Schrecken' was a mistranslation. He said: 'Nun behalten Sie, durch die ganze Dichtkunst des Aristoteles, überall wo Sie Schrecken finden, diese Erklärung der Furcht in Gedanken, (denn Furcht muss es überall heissen, und nicht Schrecken), und sagen mir alsdann, was Sie von der Lehre des Aristoteles dünkt¹.' In the face of this letter of ten years previously, one is tempted to suggest that the earlier passages in the *Dramaturgie* dealing with the definition of tragedy, are based on older notes; but even then, it seems an inadequate excuse for the lapse of memory which the reversion to 'Schrecken' implies.

It may help to elucidate this point, if we look to the usage of some earlier writers. Heinsius—to go no further back—had, in his Latin version of the *Poetics*, accepted Victorius's 'misericordia et metus'² as the translation of ἔλεος καὶ φόβος, but in his *De Tragoediae Constitutione*, which profoundly influenced eighteenth-century interpretation of Aristotle's theory, he wrote 'affectus proprii illius sunt duo: misericordia et horror,' and again, 'misericordia et terror'.³ Boileau translated φόβος by 'terreur'⁴. Corneille wrote 'crainte,' but he clearly meant 'terreur'.⁵ Dacier used 'terreur,' but in his notes to Aristotle's thirteenth chapter he frequently substitutes 'crainte'.⁶ Brumoy, too, wrote both 'terreur' and 'crainte,' mainly, however, the latter, and he would seem to give it the significance claimed for it by Lessing⁷. The older German writers invariably translated 'Schrecken und Mitleiden'.⁸

As the eighteenth century moved on, the word 'terreur' established itself more firmly in France as the translation of Aristotle's φόβος. It will be found, for example, in Dubos' *Réflexions critiques sur la Poésie et sur la Peinture*⁹, and in Batteux's *Les Beaux-arts, réduits à un*

¹ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 98; but in a letter to Mendelssohn of November 5, 1768, Lessing again uses the word 'Schrecken' (*Ibid.*, p. 270).

² *Aristotelis de Poetica*, Leyden, 1611, p. 54.

³ Leyden, 1643, cap. ii, pp. 10, 19. It might be noted in this connection that La Mesnardière, in his *Poétique* (Paris, 1640), discussed at great length the difference between 'horror' and 'terror.'

⁴ *L'Art poétique*, iii, 18.

⁵ *Trois Discours* (*Oeuvres*, ed. Marty-Laveaux, i), pp. 22, 52 ff. The translation in Lessing's *Beyträge zur Historie und Aufnahme des Theaters* follows with 'Furcht.'

⁶ *La Poétique d'Aristote*, Paris, 1692, 'terreur,' pp. 73, 80 ff., 192, etc.; 'crainte,' pp. 185 ff.

⁷ *Théâtre des Grecs*, Paris, 1730, i (*Discours sur l'origine de tragédie*), pp. li, liii, lv. Cp. especially p. li: 'D'où il arrive que la crainte nous est plus naturelle, et nous donne des secousses plus fréquentes que toute autre passion, par le sentiment intime et expérimental qui nous avertit toujours que les maux assiègent de toutes parts la vie humaine.'

⁸ For instance, Gottsched, *Critische Dichtkunst*, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1737, p. 675; Breiinger, *Critische Dichtkunst*, i, p. 69; Curtius's translation of Aristotle; Mendelssohn, *Briefe über die Empfindungen and Rhapsodie* (*Gesammelte Werke*, Leipzig, 1843, i), pp. 173, 249.

⁹ Vol. i, Sections xiv and xv (Edition of 1755, pp. 114, 120).

même Principe, and the enlarged form of that treatise, *Principes de la Littérature*¹; and the German translators of these works render 'terreur' by 'Schrecken'. Both Rousseau and Diderot keep to 'terreur'. Marmontel, in his *Poétique Française*, a work with which Lessing was familiar, translated the phrase in Aristotle's definition: 'la terreur et la pitié'; but in the text of his work he also wrote 'la crainte et la pitié'.

Lessing was not the first writer to insist upon this distinction between 'terror' and 'fear'; it had been already urged by Louis Racine, in his *Traité de la Poésie dramatique ancienne et moderne*, appended to his commentary on his father's works (1752)*:

Nous sommes depuis long-temps en usage de rendre ce mot φόβος par celui de terreur; cependant la terreur est un trouble de l'âme fort différent de celui qui cause la crainte, et φόβος ne signifie que crainte. L'auteur de l'argument qui est à la tête de l'Agamemnon d'Eschyle, pour dire que le discours de Cassandre excite la terreur et la pitié, emploie ces deux mots, ἐκπλήξιν καὶ οἶκτον. Metus est le mot dont les interprètes latins d'Aristote se servent ordinairement. Castelvetro s'est servi d'*ispavento*, et non de *terrore*; un commentateur espagnol se sert du mot *miedo*, qui veut dire crainte; enfin Corneille, dans son Discours sur la Tragédie, nommant les deux passions qui en sont l'âme, suivant Aristote, nomme toujours la pitié et la crainte.

It is an open question how far Louis Racine may have been responsible for Lessing's suggestion that φόβος should be translated 'Furcht' rather than 'Schrecken.' I cannot bring forward any evidence of Lessing's knowledge of Racine's book: but it is worth noting that in a review of Racine in the *Mercure de France* for January, 1751 (pp. 75 f.) prominent notice was given to this very statement: and we know that Lessing possessed a set of this periodical down to the year 1758.

Lessing's attitude to the question of the precise meaning of φόβος seems to have been as follows. When he first busied himself with the matter, and before he had reason to doubt the correctness of 'Schrecken'

¹ *Principes de la Littérature*, Paris, 1764, iii, pp. 72 f., 76 f., etc.

² It is, however, interesting to note that Ramler, the translator of Batteux, who did not hesitate to bring Batteux up to date and impute to him views which he could not possibly have held, changed 'Schrecken' to 'Furcht' in editions of the work published subsequently to Lessing's *Dramaturgie*.

³ Rousseau, *Lettre à M. D'Alembert*; Diderot, *Le Fils naturel, Entretiens* (Ed. of 1772, i, pp. 204, 236; see above, p. 319, note 3).

⁴ Tome ii, pp. 96 ff., 120 ff., etc. Lessing quotes from this work both in his *Laocoon*, xvii (*Schriften*, ix, p. 107; see my note in *Modern Language Review*, vi, pp. 216 ff.) and in the *Dramaturgie*, St. xiv (p. 239); there is also a reference to Marmontel's book in the materials for the *Dramaturgie* (*Schriften*, xv, p. 44).

⁵ Edition of Amsterdam, 1752, pp. 83 f.; *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1808, iv, pp. 379 f. Attention has, I find, already been drawn to this by J. Meyer in an article on *Lessing und die Franzosen in Alemannia*, xvii, 1889, pp. 187 ff.

⁶ Letter to Gleim, February 1, 1767 (*Schriften*, xvii, p. 229). Cp. also pp. 238, 251, 253, 269, 311 of the same volume. Lessing refers repeatedly to the *Mercure* in his *Collectanea* (*Schriften*, xv, pp. 193, 224, 283, 302, 318); also in *Laocoon* (*Schriften*, ix, p. 28).

as the German translation of *φóβος*, he was content to accept Mendelssohn's definition of the word. He wrote to Nicolai on November 13, 1765: 'Das Schrecken in der Tragödie ist weiter nichts als die plötzliche Ueberraschung des Mitleides, ich mag den Gegenstand meines Mitleids kennen oder nicht¹'; which is clearly an echo of Mendelssohn's: 'Dasjenige, was in den Trauerspielen unter dem Namen des Schreckens bekannt ist, ist nichts als ein Mitleiden, das uns schnell überrascht; denn die Gefahr droht niemals uns selbst, sondern unserm Nebenmenschen, den wir bedauern².' It is that first shock which we feel when misfortune suddenly befalls the hero, and which has, as its consequence, the awakening of our pity. But with the more careful study of Aristotle—which would seem to have taken place between November 13, 1756, and April 2, 1757—Lessing was obliged to discard the word 'Schrecken.' *Φóβος* has now become 'Furcht' and referred to the fear which we, as spectators, have, lest we might possibly become the object of a tragic pity—the fear for ourselves. Lessing's standpoint in 1757 is thus precisely that which he takes up in the *Dramaturgie* in 1767. Only in the early note he explained a little more clearly why *φóβος* should be translated 'Furcht' and not 'Schrecken,' and in 1767 he is a little more insistent that that emotion is irrelevant to the actual tragic effect. And in both passages he supports his view by quoting Aristotle's definition of fear and pity from the second book of the *Rhetoric*. The two passages might be put side by side³:

1757

Lesen Sie, bitte ich, das zweyte und achte Hauptstück des zweyten Buchs der aristotelischen Rhetorik...Aristoteles erklärt das Wort *φóβος*...durch die Unlust über ein bevorstehendes Uebel, und sagt, alles dasjenige erwecke in uns Furcht, was, wenn wir es an andern sehen, Mitleiden erwecke, und alles dasjenige erwecke Mitleiden, was, wenn es uns selbst bevorstehe, Furcht erwecken müsse.

1767

Die authentische Erklärung dieser Furcht, welche Aristoteles dem tragischen Mitleid beyfüget, findet sich in dem fünften und achten Kapitel des zweyten Buchs seiner Rhetorik...Er erklärt daher auch das Fürchterliche und das Mitleidswürdige eines durch das andere. Alles das, sagt er, ist uns fürchterlich, was, wenn es einem andern begegnet wäre, oder begegnen sollte, unser Mitleid erwecken würde: und alles das finden wir mitleidswürdig, was wir fürchten würden, wenn es uns selbst bevorstünde.

The phraseology is so similar in these passages that we cannot but again conclude that Lessing was here utilising in 1767 the materials

¹ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 65; R. Petsch, *Lessings Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel*, Leipzig, 1910, p. 53.

² *Briefe über die Empfindungen*, Beschluss (*Schriften zur Philosophie, Aesthetik und Apologetik*, ed. by M. Brasch, Leipzig, 1880, ii, p. 79).

³ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 98; Petsch, p. 104; *Dramaturgie*, Stück lxxv (p. 102 f.).

of 1757 which he put together when he asked Nicolai and Mendelssohn to return his letters.

With regard to the possible occasion of Lessing's change of view, Zerbst has pointed to Heinsius, who, in his *De Tragoediae Constitutione*, referred to the 'books of the Rhetoric' for Aristotle's definition: 'Etenim quae, ne sibi eveniant, metuunt homines, ea aliis cum evenere, miserationem movent, et hunc gignunt affectum'.¹ But this, as most other cross-references from the *Poetics* to other works of Aristotle, had already been noted by Robortelli in his commentary². Dacier also refers on this matter to the *Rhetoric*³; so, too, does Louis Racine⁴. There is consequently no reason, here at least, for claiming Heinsius as Lessing's immediate source. As a matter of fact, the view that 'fear' in Aristotle's definition is the fear for ourselves, was more generally held in the eighteenth century than the contrary opinion maintained by Mendelssohn⁵. It will suffice to quote Batteux, who had stated it quite unequivocally:

La pitié émeut nos entrailles, parce que nous voyons notre semblable malheureux. La terreur nous resserre le cœur, parce que nous craignons pour nous le malheur que nous voyons dans les autres : mais cette crainte est mêlée d'une certaine douceur qui vient de la comparaison secrète que nous faisons de notre état avec celui du malheureux qui souffre⁶.

I turn now to Lessing's interpretation of the Greek ἔλεος as a resultant emotion of tragedy. In 1757 Lessing—whose opinion was Mendelssohn's—held that a great deal more was included under 'Mitleid' than under ἔλεος. In his letter of December 18 he refers to Mendelssohn's 'bessern Begriff' of 'Mitleid,' that is, better than Aristotle's⁷. And this 'Begriff,' as stated in the 'Beschluss' of the *Briefe über die Empfindungen*, is as follows:

Allein was ist das Mitleiden? Ist es nicht selbst eine Vermischung von angenehmen und unangenehmen Empfindungen?...Diese Gemüthsbewegung ist nichts, als die Liebe zu einem Gegenstande mit dem Begriffe eines Unglücks, eines physikalischen Uebels verbunden, das ihm unverschuldet zugestossen⁸.

¹ *De Tragoediae Constitutione*, Leyden, 1643, p. 96; M. Zerbst, *Ein Vorläufer Lessings in der Aristotelesinterpretation*, Jena, 1887, p. 28.

² F. Robortelli, *In librum Aristotelis de Arte poetica Explicationes*, Florence, 1548, pp. 151 ff.

³ *La Poétique d'Aristote*, Paris, 1692, p. 189.

⁴ *Oeuvres*, vi, p. 389.

⁵ Mendelssohn was never convinced that Aristotle was right in considering a subjective fear essential to tragedy. 'Ich für meinen Theil leugne diese Rücksicht auf uns selbst. Wenigstens ist sie nicht nothwendig, wenn wir mit andern sympathisiren sollen.' (Later note to the *Rhapsodie*, Brach's ed., ii, p. 112.)

⁶ *Principes de la Littérature*, v, ii, ch. iii (Ed. of 1764, iii, pp. 73 f.); Ramler's German translation, Leipzig, 1802, p. 294.

⁷ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 85; Petsch, p. 87.

⁸ Ed. Brach, ii, p. 79.

The limitations of Aristotle's 'falscher Begriff von dem Mitleiden¹,' he goes on to say, are clearly seen where Aristotle declares in his thirteenth chapter that the misfortune of a too virtuous hero would not induce 'Mitleid,' but 'Entsetzen und Abscheu.' But according to the 'better' modern conception of 'Mitleid,' the emotion which such a misfortune induces is 'Mitleid' of the highest kind; and if Aristotle's statement is true, then 'Entsetzen und Abscheu' are the highest form of 'Mitleid,' which they are not. Thus Aristotle is clearly wrong.

Such is the standpoint of the Correspondence of 1756-57. By the time Lessing came to write his *Laocoon*, an English thinker, Adam Smith, had given him occasion to reflect once more on the nature of 'Mitleid': and the thoughts which he expresses on the subject in Section iv of the *Laocoon* are drawn exclusively from the first chapter of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, London, 1761. This writer's discussion of the nature of sympathy and his condemnation of Greek tragedy for attempting 'to excite compassion by the representation of bodily pain²,' might have called forth further speculation on Lessing's part on the subject of sympathy in tragedy; but the *Laocoon* afforded no opportunity of pursuing the matter, and when he came to discuss 'Mitleid' in the *Dramaturgie*, he fell back on Mendelssohn. As we have seen, he had accepted Mendelssohn's definition in 1756; he accepted it again now; but between 1756 and 1767 Mendelssohn had himself given a more exhaustive definition of 'Mitleid' in his *Rhapsodie über die Empfindungen*, published in 1761³. Here, referring to what he had formerly written in the *Briefe*, 'über die verwischten Empfindungen, die von Lust und Unlust zusammengesetzt sind,' Mendelssohn defines 'Mitleiden' as:

eine vermischte Empfindung, die aus der Liebe zu einem Gegenstande und aus der Unlust zu dessen Unglück zusammengesetzt ist. Die Bewegungen, durch welche sich das Mitleiden zu erkennen giebt, sind von den einfachen Symptomen der Liebe sowohl, als der Unlust unterschieden, denn das Mitleiden ist eine Erscheinung. Aber wie vielerlei kann diese Erscheinung werden!... (After referring to various tragedies: *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, *Oedipus*, etc.): Was empfinden wir da? Immer noch Mitleiden! aber mitleidiges Entsetzen, mitleidige Furcht, mitleidigen Schrecken. Die Bewegungen sind verschieden, allein das Wesen der Empfindungen ist in allen

¹ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 98; Petsch, p. 105.

² 'Pain never calls forth any very lively sympathy, unless it is accompanied with danger. We sympathize with the fear, though not with the agony of the sufferer. Fear, however, is a passion derived altogether from the imagination, which represents, with an uncertainty and fluctuation that increases our anxiety, not what we really feel, but what we may hereafter possibly suffer.'

³ Ed. Brasch, ii, pp. 111 f. The *Rhapsodie* appeared in Mendelssohn's *Philosophische Schriften*, Berlin, 1761, from which Lessing quoted the passage in full in his *Dramaturgie* (Stück lxxiv; x, p. 100); he also refers to the *Schriften* in the *Laocoon* (*Schriften*, ix, p. 139).

diesen Fällen einerlei...Warum sollten also nicht auch Furcht, Schrecken, Zorn, Eifersucht, Rachbegierde und überhaupt alle Arten von unangenehmen Empfindungen, sogar den Neid nicht ausgenommen, aus Mitleiden entstehen können?

Lessing does not see any possibility of anyone disagreeing with this definition of Mitleid—not even Aristotle¹. But he finds in Aristotle not merely this *ἔλεος*, but also mention of another kindred emotion which is described by the adjective *φιλάνθρωπον*. He says:

Aristoteles betrachtet das Mitleid nach seinen primitiven Regungen, er betrachtet es bloß als Affekt....Mitleidige Regungen, ohne Furcht für uns selbst, nennt er Philanthropie: und nur den stärkern Regungen dieser Art, welche mit Furcht für uns selbst verknüpft sind, giebt er den Namen des Mitleids².

In this 'Philanthropie,' that is, disinterested, 'unfearing' sympathy for our fellow men, Lessing believed he had found a solution to the difficulty which confronted him in 1756, when he spoke of the 'falsche Erklärung' of 'Mitleid' in Aristotle—'falsch' in so far as it prevented the application of the word 'Mitleid' to the feelings awakened in us by the sufferings of a perfect character. The too virtuous hero may awaken our pity, but as we ourselves, not feeling ourselves perfect, are not touched by his undeserved sufferings, we have no fear for ourselves; consequently the emotion in question is not *ἔλεος* but *φιλάνθρωπον*.

Wir haben Recht, (Lessing concludes), wenn wir sie mit [that is to say 'Philanthropie'] unter dem Namen des Mitleids begreifen. Aber Aristoteles hatte auch nicht Unrecht, wenn er ihr einen eigenen Namen gab, um sie, wie gesagt, von dem höchsten Grade der mitleidigen Empfindungen, in welchem sie, durch die Dazukunft einer wahrscheinlichen Furcht für uns selbst, Affekt werden, zu unterscheiden³.

As will be seen later, Lessing returns to these 'philanthropischen Gefühle' for an explanation of *τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων* in the definition of tragedy.

As early as his letter of November 1756, Lessing had expressed the opinion that the only passion which it is the business of tragedy to awaken in the spectator is 'pity': 'Kurz, ich finde keine einzige Leidenschaft, die das Trauerspiel in dem Zuschauer rege macht, als das Mitleiden⁴.' He does not, however, deny that it also awakens both 'Schrecken' and 'Bewunderung': but these 'sind keine Leidenschaften, nach meinem Verstande.' He objects to the inclusion of 'Schrecken' in the definition, because, as we have seen, he had learnt from his friend Mendelssohn that this was a mere modification of 'Mitleid⁵.' But

¹ Stück lxxv (p. 101): 'Diese Gedanken sind so richtig, so klar, so einleuchtend, dass uns dünkt, ein jeder hätte sie haben können und haben müssen.'

² Stück lxxvi (pp. 107 f.).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 65; Petsch, p. 52.

⁵ Cp. also the summary of the controversy which Nicolai sent to Lessing on May 14, 1757 (*Schriften*, xix, p. 79; Petsch, p. 115): 'Das Mitleiden begreift als das nomen generis alle Modifikationen der Unlust in sich, die wir über eines andern Unlust empfinden.'

then comes the question, if 'Schrecken' is only a subordinate form of 'Mitleid,' why should Aristotle have expressly mentioned it? Mendelssohn was frankly of opinion that it ought not to have been mentioned, and proposed the substitution of 'Bewunderung'.¹ In 1757, when Lessing discovered that he ought to have written 'Furcht,' he still had a difficulty in explaining its presence in the definition. 'Die Furcht,' he said, 'kann keine unmittelbare Wirkung des Trauerspiels seyn, sondern sie muss weiter nichts als eine reflektirte Idee seyn,' and the reason why Aristotle mentioned it at all was because it was the means whereby the ἔλεος brought about the κάθαρσις. But if this was Aristotle's view, he was wrong. 'Das Mitleiden reiniget unsre Leidenschaften, aber nicht mittelst der Furcht, auf welchen Einfall den Aristoteles sein falscher Begriff von dem Mitleiden gebracht hat'.² In the *Dramaturgie* Lessing returned to the matter. 'Aristoteles würde nicht sagen, Mitleiden und Furcht; wenn er unter der Furcht weiter nichts als eine blosser Modification des Mitleids verstünde'.³ But a little later he has frankly to admit that it is such a 'Modification.' The reason which Lessing now offers for its mention is that, although superfluous in view of the inclusive character of 'Mitleid,' 'fear' had to be mentioned in the definition, as being one of the passions which tragedy had especially to purify.⁴ Thus Lessing returns, after all,—although with a different justification for Aristotle's mention of 'fear'—to his first conviction, that the business of tragedy is to awaken 'Mitleid' and 'Mitleid' only. 'Die Tragödie ist ein Gedicht, welches Mitleid erreget'.⁵

Lessing, as we have seen, is particularly insistent that 'fear,' that is fear for ourselves, is an essential element in tragic pity; in fact, that it is the one thing which distinguishes 'pity' proper from mere 'philanthropy.' It is perhaps worth noticing that this close alliance of tragic pity and fear had also been urged by Brumoy: 'La pitié qui n'est qu'un secret repli sur nous à la vue des maux d'autrui, dont nous pouvons être également les victimes, a une liaison si étroite avec la crainte, que ces deux passions sont inséparables dans les hommes, que le besoin mutuel oblige de vivre dans la société civile'.⁶ And this view is repeated in the *Dramaturgie*:

¹ See below, p. 329.

² *Schriften*, xvii, p. 98.

⁴ Stück lxxv (p. 104).

³ Stück lxxiv (p. 100).

⁵ Stück lxxvii (p. 111).

⁶ *Théâtre des Grecs*, i, p. li. Brumoy, it might be noted, emphasises (p. lv) the subjective nature of both fear and pity: 'La crainte en un mot, et la pitié qui l'accompagne presque toujours, sont les premiers fruits de l'amour de nous-mêmes, parce qu'elles ont pour objet direct le mal présent que nous voulons fuir sur toutes choses.'

Nicht als ob diese Furcht hier eine besondere, von dem Mitleiden unabhängige Leidenschaft sey, welche bald mit bald ohne dem Mitleid, so wie das Mitleid bald mit bald ohne ihr, erregt werden könne...sondern weil, nach seiner Erklärung des Mitleids, dieses die Furcht nothwendig einschliesst; weil nichts unser Mitleid erregt, als was zugleich unsere Furcht erwecken kann¹.

One result of this conviction was that it made Lessing the more ready to attack Corneille on a point which had escaped the attention of both Dacier and Curtius. Corneille insisted that Aristotle's use of the disjunctive conjunction—*neither fear nor pity*—implied that it was sufficient for the purpose of tragic effect, if only one of these were present². Although Dacier had overlooked this vulnerable point in Corneille's theory, it had not escaped the notice of other anti-Cornelian critics, and it is possible that Lessing's attention had been drawn to it by Bodmer's Italian friend Calepio, the author of the *Paragone della Poesia tragica d'Italia con quella di Francia*, published by Bodmer at Zürich in 1732, and paraphrased by him in German in his *Critische Briefe* (1746). The passages in question are as follows:

Paragone (Cap. I, art. i).

Dopo le predette testimonianze dee parere strano che il Sig. Dacier, benché nelle osservazioni sopra la poetica d'Aristotile mostri conoscere nelle favole Francesi del disviamento; abbia asserito nella prefazione, che Cornelio sostenuto dalle regole di questo filosofo ha restituito lo splendore alla tragedia appresso il suo lungo smarrimento.

Hamburgische Dramaturgie (pp. 105 f.).

Ich kann mich nicht genug wundern, wie Dacier, der doch sonst die Verdrehungen ziemlich aufmerksam war, welche Corneille von dem Texte des Aristoteles zu seinem Besten zu machen suchte, diese grösste von allen übersehen können.

Without insisting dogmatically on Calepio's little book as a 'source'—and other evidence of Lessing's acquaintance with it may be found in the *Dramaturgie*—the parallelism of these passages is worth, I think, drawing attention to³.

ii. 'ADMIRATION.'

In his *Dramaturgie* Lessing has avoided a controversy on which he had a good deal to say in 1756, namely, as to how far 'admiration' ('Bewunderung') may be regarded as an emotion legitimately called forth by tragedy. The question is, in fact, only twice touched on, and merely in passing, in the *Dramaturgie*: in Stück i (p. 187): 'Wenn heldenmüthige Gesinnungen Bewunderung erregen sollen: so muss der

¹ Stück lxxv (p. 104).

² *Discours sur la Tragédie* (Ed. cit., pp. 60 ff.); *Dramaturgie*, Stück lxxvi, p. 105.

³ O. F. Walzel has discussed the influence of the *Paragone* on Lessing at some length in his review of F. Braitmaier's *Geschichte der poetischen Theorie und Kritik*, Frauenfeld, 1888, in the *Anzeiger f. deut. Altertum*, xvii (1891), pp. 55 ff. I hope to return to this matter.

Dichter nicht zu verschwenderisch damit umgehen; denn was man öfters, was man an mehreren sieht, höret man auf zu bewundern': and in Stück lxxv (p. 103): 'Von dieser Ursache wissen sie nichts, und ich möchte wohl hören, was sie aus ihrem Kopfe antworten würden, wenn man sie fragte: warum z. E. die Tragödie nicht eben so wohl Mitleid und Bewunderung¹, als Mitleid und Furcht, erregen könne und dürfe?'

In his *Abhandlung vom Trauerspiel* Nicolai had distinguished three classes of tragedies: (1) those which excite merely terror and pity, 'moving' tragedies: that is, 'bürgerliche Trauerspiele': (2) tragedies which, with the help of terror and pity, awaken admiration: and (3) those whose end is to awaken terror and pity, and also admiration in the case of certain characters ('mixed tragedies'). Of Corneille's 'heroic tragedies,' which excite admiration, without the assistance of terror and pity, he says: 'Wir glauben aber, dass eine solche Gattung, wo nicht unmöglich, dennoch sehr schwer auszuführen, und deswegen gar nicht anzurathen sey².' Lessing did not object to the inclusion of admiration, but he insisted on the subordination of both admiration and terror to pity, the real purpose of tragedy being to awaken pity; whereas terror and admiration are, he says, 'der Anfang und das Ende des Mitleids³.' He expressed himself still more emphatically a little further on in the same letter:

Die Bewunderung ist das entbehrlich gewordene Mitleid. Da aber das Mitleid das Hauptwerk ist, so muss es folglich so selten als möglich entbehrlich werden; der Dichter muss seinen Held nicht zu sehr, nicht zu anhaltend der blossen Bewunderung aussetzen, und Cato als ein Stoiker ist mir ein schlechter tragischer Held. Der bewunderte Held ist der Vorwurf der Epopee; der bedauerte des Trauerspiels⁴.

This distinction is repeatedly insisted on by Batteux⁵. Lastly, in his letter of December 18, 1756, Lessing stated his view in its most complete form, namely, that admiration in tragedy must only be an element in pity, pity being an emotion made up of admiration and pain.

Die Bewunderung findet also in dem Trauerspiele nicht als ein besonderer Affekt

¹ This was what Mendelssohn demanded; see below. Vossius (*Poetices*, 1647, cap. xix) was apparently the first to suggest the addition of τὸ θαυμαστόν to the effects of tragedy; he was, no doubt, influenced by Corneille. Cp. C. Arnaud, *Les théories dramatiques au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1888, pp. 154 f.

² Petsch, pp. 19 f. In his letter to Lessing, Nicolai calls his second class 'heroische Trauerspiele.'

³ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 66; Petsch, p. 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68 (p. 56). Petsch (p. xxi) draws attention to the fact that Lessing's phrases echo the comment of the German translator of Le Bossu (*Abhandlung vom epischen Gedicht*, übersetzt von Z*, Halle, 1753). This was reviewed by Lessing (*Schriften*, v, pp. 193 f.). Calepio had already maintained, in his *Briefwechsel* with Bodmer, that Cato was not suited to be a tragic hero.

⁵ See especially *Traité* iv, ch. v and *Traité* v, 2, ch. iii (*Ed. cit.*, ii, pp. 198 f., iii, pp. 71 ff.).

Statt, sondern blos als die eine Hälfte des Mitleids. Und in dieser Betrachtung habe ich auch Recht gehabt, sie nicht als einen besondern Affekt, sondern nur nach ihrem Verhältnisse gegen das Mitleiden zu erklären. Und in diesem Verhältnisse, sage ich noch, soll sie der Ruhepunkt des Mitleidens seyn¹.

Mendelssohn and Nicolai, on the other hand, came to an agreement: 'dass sowohl Bewunderung als Mitleiden den moralischen Geschmack beschäftigen können, und ich wünsche mit dem Herrn Nicolai, dass man künftig statt Schrecken und Mitleiden, Bewunderung und Mitleiden setzen möchte, weil das Schrecken blos eine besondre Modifikation des Mitleidens ist²': but Mendelssohn also realised that 'Bewunderung ohne Mitleiden, ohne Schrecken, ist für die Dichtkunst überhaupt und um so viel mehr für das Theater, ein gar zu kalter Affekt³.'

Walzel is inclined again to see the influence of Calepio, who, in his *Paragone* (Cap. ii, art. i), had insisted on the subordination of admiration because it introduced an untragic moral purpose into tragedy⁴. But the matter had been put quite trenchantly enough by Dacier; he says that Aristotle would have excluded Corneille's *Nicomède* from his tragedies, for the poet here

n'a travaillé qu'à exciter l'admiration dans l'âme du spectateur, et qui en s'éloignant des préceptes d'Aristote, a cru trouver une manière nouvelle de purger les passions; mais ce n'est nullement le but de la Tragédie, de purger les passions par l'admiration, qui est une passion trop douce pour produire un si grand effet; elle n'emploie que la crainte et la pitié, et laisse régner l'admiration dans le poème épique auquel elle est plus propre et plus nécessaire, et où elle a plus de temps pour agir sur les habitudes et sur les mœurs⁵.

I think we may safely infer that Lessing's views on the subject did not undergo any material change between the Correspondence and the *Dramaturgie*; that is to say, he still considered that 'Bewunderung' might be an element of tragic effect, but it must be a strictly subordinate one, and employed in moderation; it could not, any more than 'fear,' be regarded as essential to tragedy.

iii. THE PURPOSE OF TRAGEDY.

In his *Abhandlung vom Trauerspiel* Nicolai had proposed to substitute for the 'Satz, den man dem Aristoteles so oft nachgesprochen hat, es sey

¹ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 80; Petsch, p. 81.

² *Schriften*, xix, pp. 83 f.; Petsch, p. 119.

³ In a review of Wieland's *Clementina von Porretta* (*Litteraturbriefe*, cxiii, August 21, 1790; *Schriften*, iv, 2, p. 146). Lessing echoes this in his *Laocoon* (*Schriften*, ix, p. 10): 'Sieht man ihn sein Elend mit grosser Seele ertragen, so wird diese grosse Seele zwar unsere Bewunderung erwecken, aber die Bewunderung ist ein kalter Affekt dessen unthätiges Staunen jede andere wärmere Leidenschaft, so wie jede andere deutliche Vorstellung, ausschliesset.'

⁴ *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum*, xvii, pp. 55 ff.

⁵ *L'Art poétique d'Aristote*, p. 148. Cp. also note to ch. xiii (pp. 185 f.).

der Zweck des Trauerspiels die Leidenschaften zu reinigen oder die Sitten zu bilden,' another, namely: 'der Zweck des Trauerspiels sey die Erregung der Leidenschaften'.¹ Lessing replies cautiously: he admits the practical disadvantage of the utilitarian doctrine of tragedy: 'das Trauerspiel soll bessern'—for so he interprets Aristotle's meaning—and recognises that Nicolai's definition will produce good tragedies²: but he is not satisfied that Nicolai is right in throwing over the old theory. The one view represents the end, the other the means: both may be right.

Das meiste (he says) wird darauf ankommen: was das Trauerspiel für Leidenschaften erregt. In seinen Personen kann es alle mögliche Leidenschaften wirken lassen, die sich zu der Würde des Stoffes schicken. Aber werden auch zugleich alle diese Leidenschaften in den Zuschauern rege? Wird er freudig? wird er verliebt? wird er zornig? wird er rachsüchtig? Ich frage nicht, ob ihn der Poet so weit bringt, dass er diese Leidenschaften in der spielenden Person billiget, sondern ob er ihn so weit bringt, dass er diese Leidenschaften selbst fühlt, und nicht bloß fühlt, ein andrer fühle sie³?

This is clearly an echo of Batteux:

Elles [passions, such as anger, envy, cruelty, despair] peuvent se trouver dans les acteurs; mais ce ne doit être que pour en produire d'autres, différentes d'elles, dans les spectateurs. Car il faut observer que les sentimens ne sont pas les mêmes dans les uns et les autres; l'orgueil dans les acteurs produit l'envie dans les spectateurs: la cruauté produit l'horreur, la douleur la compassion, la perfidie l'indignation; ainsi du reste. Le sceau qui caractérise la Tragédie est donc l'espèce du sentiment, non qu'elle contient, mais qu'elle produit⁴.

And Batteux concludes that the only passions which tragedy awakens in the spectator are 'la terreur et la pitié.' Lessing, no doubt, would have agreed, had not—as we have seen—Mendelssohn's more comprehensive definition of 'Mitleid' absolved him from the necessity of mentioning 'Schrecken.' But, in any case, it was the awakening of pity on which Batteux laid emphasis: 'Vous avez l'idée d'une Tragédie parfaite. Il n'y a point de doute que ce ne soit celle qui touche le plus vivement, et le plus longtemps le Spectateur⁵.' Thus Lessing concludes that the essential business of tragedy is to awaken 'Mitleid': 'Kurz, ich finde keine einzige Leidenschaft, die das Trauerspiel in dem Zuschauer

¹ Letter of August 31, 1756 (*Schriften*, xix, p. 40; Petsch, p. 47); *Abhandlung*, ed. Petsch, p. 5. Nicolai's view really comes from Mendelssohn, who, in his *Briefe über die Empfindungen*, xiii (Ed. Brasch, ii, pp. 63 f.) says: 'Der Zweck des Trauerspiels ist, Leidenschaft zu erregen, und das schwärzeste Laster, das zu diesem Endzwecke leitet, ist auf der Schaubühne willkommen.'

² Lessing himself says (*Abhandlung von dem Wesen der Fabel*; *Schriften*, vii, p. 438): 'Der heroische und dramatische Dichter machen die Erregung der Leidenschaften zu ihrem vornehmsten Endzwecke.'

³ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 65; Petsch, p. 52.

⁴ *Traité* vii, Partie ii, ch. iii (*Ed. cit.*, iii, pp. 74 f.).

⁵ *Partie* ii, ch. viii (*Ed. cit.*, i, pp. 120 f.).

rege macht, als das Mitleiden'; and later in the same letter: 'Das Trauerspiel soll so viel Mitleid erwecken, als es nur immer kann'.¹

When Lessing insists on the object of tragedy being to awaken our 'Mitleid,' to 'move' us, he is expressing a conviction that had been borne in on him by his predilection, practical as well as theoretical, for the 'bürgerliche Trauerspiel.' He already gave expression to it in the Preface which he wrote to the volume of *Les Herrn Jacob Thomson sämtliche Trauerspiele* (1756); he says there that he would rather be the author of *The Merchant of London* than of *Der sterbende Cato*:

Denn warum? Bey einer einzigen Vorstellung des erstern sind, auch von den Unempfindlichsten, mehr Thränen vergossen worden, als bey allen möglichen Vorstellungen der andern, auch bey den Empfindlichsten, nicht können vergossen werden. Und nur diese Thränen des Mitleids, und der sich fühlenden Menschlichkeit, sind die Absicht des Trauerspiels, oder es kann gar keine haben.²

And some years later, in the famous seventeenth *Litteraturbrief* (1759), in which he places Shakespeare above the French classics, he states that the tragic quality is the 'Gewalt über unsere Leidenschaften',³ in other words, that the more Shakespeare 'moves' us, the greater he is. Finally, it is unnecessary to say where the sympathies of the translator of Diderot (1761) were likely to lie in this matter.

But to return to Lessing's letter of November, 1756. At the end of his discussion of the rôle which 'Mitleid' plays in tragedy he recalls the fact insisted upon by Corneille, but a fact on which Lessing at no time laid much emphasis⁴, namely, that one function of tragedy is to please:

Beyder Nutzen, des Trauerspiels sowohl als des Lustspiels, ist von dem Vergnügen unzertrennlich; denn die ganze Hälfte des Mitleids und des Lachens ist Vergnügen, und es ist grosser Vortheil für den dramatischen Dichter, dass er weder nützlich, noch angenehm, eines ohne das andere seyn kann.⁵

And in this connection a definition of the drama might be quoted from the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, which gives unmistakably the impression of going back to a period considerably anterior to that publication. It is in Stück xxxv. Lessing, with reference to his *Abhandlung von dem Wesen der Fabel*, is comparing the drama with the fable:

Das Drama hingegen macht auf eine einzige, bestimmte, aus seiner Fabel fliessende Lehre, keinen Anspruch; es gehet entweder auf die Leidenschaften,

¹ *Schriften*, xvii, pp. 65, 67; Petsch, pp. 52, 55.

² *Schriften*, vii, p. 68. Even in the *Dramaturgie* we still hear of the 'angenehmen Thränen, die das Trauerspiel erregen will' (St. i, p. 187).

³ *Ibid.*, viii, p. 43.

⁴ Cp. *Laocoon*, ii (*Schriften*, ix, p. 13): 'Der Endzweck der Künste hingegen ist Vergnügen; und das Vergnügen ist entbehrlich. Also darf es allerdings von dem Gesetzgeber abhängen, welche Art von Vergnügen, und in welchem Maasse er jede Art desselben verstatten will.'

⁵ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 67; Petsch, pp. 54 f.

welche der Verlauf und die Glücksveränderungen seiner Fabel anzufachen und zu unterhalten vermögend sind, oder auf das Vergnügen, welches eine wahre und lebhaftige Schilderung der Sitten und Charaktere gewähret; und beides erfordert eine gewisse Vollständigkeit der Handlung, ein gewisses befriedigendes Ende, welches wir bey der moralischen Erzählung nicht vermissen, weil alle unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf den allgemeinen Satz gelenkt wird, von welchem der einzelne Fall derselben ein so einleuchtendes Beyspiel giebt¹.

This again clearly comes from Batteux's chapter 'Qu'elle peut être la fin morale de la Tragédie' from which I have already quoted. Batteux is controverting Le Bossu:

Nous pouvons cependant dire en général que ce n'est point une maxime comme dans l'Apologue, ni aucune leçon d'instruction, qui s'adresse d'abord à l'esprit pour être ensuite appliquée à la conduite. Si on veut que la Tragédie soit une leçon d'instruction, j'ose dire qu'on va contre son objet².

The important thing to notice in all this is that there is not a word about the Aristotelian idea of 'purging' or 'purifying'; and, in fact, Lessing does not face the problem of the meaning of *καθαρσις* until he comes to the *Dramaturgie*; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that he never faced it at all. The word 'katharsis' is to him, as to the majority of eighteenth-century theorists, nothing more than a metaphorical expression; Aristotle's statement is regarded as equivalent to saying that tragedy improves us morally.

The beginnings of Lessing's theory of the 'Endzweck' of tragedy may, however, be traced back to the Correspondence with Nicolai and Mendelssohn. In the first letter to Nicolai he says:

Wenn es also wahr ist, dass die ganze Kunst des tragischen Dichters auf die sichere Erregung und Dauer des einzigen Mitleidens geht, so sage ich nunmehr, die Bestimmung der Tragödie ist diese: sie soll unsre Fähigkeit, Mitleid zu fühlen, erweitern³.

And in the letter to Mendelssohn of December 18, 1756:

Das Trauerspiel soll das Mitleiden nur überhaupt üben, und nicht uns in diesem oder jenem Falle zum Mitleiden bestimmen....Ich lasse mich zum Mitleiden im Trauerspiele bewegen, um eine Fertigkeit im Mitleiden zu bekommen...ohne Zweifel ist derjenige der beste Mensch, der die grösste Fertigkeit im Mitleiden hat⁴.

This again clearly comes from the chapter of Batteux which I have just quoted:

¹ *Schriften*, ix, p. 331. Similarly, in Stück xii (p. 231): 'Ich will nicht sagen, dass es ein Fehler ist, wenn der dramatische Dichter seine Fabel so einrichtet, dass sie zur Erläuterung oder Bestätigung irgend einer grossen moralischen Wahrheit dienen kann. Aber ich darf sagen, dass diese Einrichtung der Fabel nichts weniger als nothwendig ist,' etc. Curtius (*Abhandlung von der Absicht des Trauerspiels* in his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, p. 392) had also said: 'Es ist deswegen nicht nothwendig, dass ein jedes Trauerspiel nur eine moralische Wahrheit in sich fasse. Man hat zu geschwinde von der Einheit der Handlung auf die Einheit der Moral geschlossen.'

² *Ed. cit.*, iii, p. 88.

³ *Schriften*, xvii, p. 66; Petsch, p. 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83; Petsch, p. 84.

On ne peut guères disconvenir, je crois, que la Tragédie ne soit généralement parlant, un exercice de l'âme par des émotions tristes. Il n'est point de Tragédie qui ne s'annonce ainsi dès le premier vers. Les émotions répétées, doivent, comme tous les autres actes de l'âme, se changer en habitude, et l'effet de cette habitude, vertu ou non, ce que je n'examine pas encore, doit être nécessairement de rendre notre âme plus aisée à remuer et moins facile à abattre par le malheur : toute habitude ayant pour effet essentiel de rendre plus facile l'exercice de la faculté qui est exercée, et d'accoutumer l'âme à l'objet qui l'exerce¹.

Turning now to the *Dramaturgie*, I fail to see that Lessing has made any essential advance on these ideas which he learned from Batteux ten years before, unless to express them a little more fully and exactly, a little more trenchantly. He continues to accept the word 'katharsis' or 'Reinigung' as a mere metaphor or figure of speech ; and he states it as his final view that the business of tragedy consists 'in der Verwandlung der Leidenschaften in tugendhafte Fertigkeiten' ; in other words, that the end of tragedy is 'sittliche Besserung,' 'moral improvement.' The paragraph is so important that I must quote it in full :

Da nemlich, es kurz zu sagen, diese Reinigung in nichts anders beruhet, als in der Verwandlung der Leidenschaften in tugendhafte Fertigkeiten, bey jeder Tugend aber, nach unserm Philosophen, sich disseits und jenseits ein Extremum findet, zwischen welchem sie inne stehet : so muss die Tragödie, wenn sie unser Mitleid in Tugend verwandeln soll, uns von beiden Extremis des Mitleids zu reinigen vermögend seyn ; welches auch von der Furcht zu verstehen. Das tragische Mitleid muss nicht allein, in Ansehung des Mitleids, die Seele desjenigen reinigen, welcher zu viel Mitleid fühlet, sondern auch desjenigen, welcher zu wenig empfindet. Die tragische Furcht muss nicht allein, in Ansehung der Furcht, die Seele desjenigen reinigen, welcher sich ganz und gar keines Unglücks befürchtet, sondern auch desjenigen, den ein jedes Unglück, auch das entfernteste, auch das unwahrscheinlichste, in Angst setzt. Gleichfalls muss das tragische Mitleid, in Ansehung der Furcht, dem was zu viel, und dem was zu wenig, steuern : so wie hinwiederum die tragische Furcht, in Ansehung des Mitleids².

Critics have registered with disappointment and regret this seeming relapse into a Gottsched-like faith in the moral purpose of poetry. And Lessing had expressed himself even more emphatically elsewhere ; in the end of the seventy-seventh part of the *Dramaturgie*—that is to say, only a page or two before the passage just quoted—he wrote : 'Bessern sollen uns alle Gattungen der Poesie : es ist kläglich, wenn man dieses erst beweisen muss ; noch kläglich ist es, wenn es Dichter giebt, die

¹ *Ed. cit.*, p. 92. The bridge from Batteux's French terms to Lessing's German terms is supplied by Mendelssohn ; in his *Von der Herrschaft über die Neigungen*, which he sent Lessing in manuscript in January, 1757 (cp. *Schriften*, xix, p. 64 ; Petsch, p. 95), he says : 'Durch die Übung (welche mit der Gewohnheit einerley Wirkung hat) wird eine jede Fähigkeit in unserer Seele zu einer Fertigkeit. Eine Fertigkeit besteht in einem Vermögen, etwas so geschwind zu verrichten, dass wir uns nicht mehr alles dessen bewusst bleiben, was wir dabey vorgenommen ?' (*Ges. Schriften*, iv, 1, Leipzig, 1844 ; also Petsch, p. 131). Cp. also Ramler's translation of Batteux : 'Wiederholte Bewegungen müssen, wie alle übrigen Beschäftigungen der Seele, sich in Fertigkeiten verwandeln....'

² Stück lxxviii, pp. 117 f.

selbst daran zweifeln¹. There is no ambiguity here. But the criticism of Lessing, to which I have referred, involves an injustice. Even Corneille, who insisted that the primary object of tragedy was to give pleasure, has much to say about its 'utilité'²; and the movement of French eighteenth-century theory through Voltaire to Marmontel³ and Diderot, was all in favour of laying greater emphasis on the moral end of tragedy⁴. In Germany, which was entirely dominated by French thought in these matters, it could not be otherwise: and I am very doubtful whether, in respect of the moral question, Nicolai, and, after him, C. H. Schmid, Gerstenberg and the other theorists of the 'Sturm und Drang' would have felt themselves very much at variance with Lessing. These critics, it is true, demanded as the first business of tragedy, that it should 'awaken passions,' move the feelings; but this was very far from defending an 'amoral' drama; on the contrary, they recognised as clearly as Diderot himself, that the more the feelings of the spectator were harrowed, the greater the moral effect was likely to be. It was only a question of keeping apart two distinct issues⁵.

Bywater sums up acutely the criticism which may be brought against Lessing's theory⁶: its confusion of the purgation of an emotion and the purgation of the soul from an emotion; of purging and moderating; and the very questionable statement that the excessive indulgence of a strong emotion weakens it; but all this criticism has to be brought, in the first instance, not against Lessing, but against his predecessors from whom he drew his ideas.

The eighteenth century had, in respect of the nature of the Aristotelian 'katharsis,' a choice between a medical and a religious

¹ Page 114. One might compare, from what seems to me unmistakably older elements in the *Dramaturgie*, the opinion that the good dramatist's object is 'den Pöbel zu erleuchten und zu bessern' (Stück i, p. 188); and Stück ii (p. 188): 'Das Theater soll die Schule der moralischen Welt seyn.' Cp. Voltaire's 'la véritable Tragédie est l'école de la vertu' (Dissertation to *Sémiramis*); and Dacier's: 'Leur Théâtre étoit une école où la vertu étoit souvent mieux enseignée que dans les écoles des Philosophes' (*La Poétique d'Aristote*, Préf., p. xxiii).

² 'Purification' means to him, too, the moral improvement of the spectator. Cp. Arnould, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

³ 'La Tragédie,' says Marmontel (*Poétique Française*, ii, pp. 99 f.), 'peut avoir deux fins, l'une prochaine, et l'autre éloignée. La première est de plaire en intéressant, et celle-là est indispensable: la seconde d'instruire et de corriger, et celle-ci, quoique moins essentielle au Poëme, en fait l'excellence et le prix.' And again, p. 145: 'Le but de la Tragédie est, selon nous, de corriger les mœurs en les imitant.'

⁴ This has been clearly brought out by M. Gaiffe in his work on *Le Drame en France au XVIIIe Siècle*, Paris 1910, especially pp. 78 ff.

⁵ *Abhandlung vom Trauerspiel* (Petsch, p. 11): 'Doch folget hieraus nicht, dass das Trauerspiel gar nichts zur Verbesserung der Leidenschaften beytragen, und also gar keinen moralischen Nutzen haben könne; man muss nur diesen entfernten Nutzen des Trauerspiels nicht zu weit ausdehnen und zum Hauptzweck desselben machen....'

⁶ *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, Oxford, 1909, pp. 160 f.

interpretation. According to the former the purging is to be taken as strictly analogous to the medical use of the term. This is the most generally accepted view to-day; it was first firmly established by Jakob Bernays in 1857¹. Bernays was under the impression that his interpretation was new; but this is not in accordance with the facts. He had not only a German predecessor in Weil², but, as Spingarn has shown, similar views are to be found in Minturno's *De Poeta* (1559) and *L'Arte poetica* (1564); and from Minturno the interpretation passed to Milton (Preface to *Samson Agonistes*, 1671)³. But there is more to be said than this: the medical interpretation was entirely familiar to the whole eighteenth century, and was—as is to be seen even in Milton—accepted by authors who put the matter from the ethical point of view. It is, for instance, quite unequivocally expressed by Dacier:

On peut comparer en cette occasion Platon et Aristote à deux Médecins, dont l'un condamneroit une médecine, et l'autre l'approuveroit... La Tragédie est donc une véritable médecine, qui purge les passions, puisqu'elle apprend à l'ambitieux, à modérer son ambition; à l'impie, à craindre les Dieux; à l'importé, à retenir sa colère, et ainsi du reste. Mais c'est une médecine agréable, qui ne fait son effet que par le plaisir⁴.

And the mere fact that Dacier gave the idea currency meant that it became the common property of the eighteenth century⁵. The religious interpretation would appear to go back to Lambin, a French commentator on Aristotle in the sixteenth century, who translated *κάθαρσις* 'lustratio seu expiatio,' and saw in it a kind of religious purification, a cleansing from some spiritual impurity⁶. This religious interpretation appears again in Heinsius, but in combination with the idea of moral purification.

Whatever the explanation of the cathartic process, the ethical end of tragedy had, as we have seen, been almost invariably conceded or tacitly accepted. But here again there was room for different opinions as to the precise nature of the method whereby this ethical purpose was achieved by tragedy. The eighteenth-century critics incline to one or

¹ *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie*, Breslau, 1857; reprinted in *Zwei Abhandlungen über die Aristotelische Theorie des Dramas*, Berlin, 1880.

² H. Weil, *Über die Wirkung der Tragödie nach Aristoteles* (*Verhandlungen der zehnten Versammlung deutscher Philologen in Basel*, 1848, pp. 131 ff.).

³ J. E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, 2nd ed., New York, 1908, pp. 79 ff. Minturno, *De Poeta*, p. 64: *Arte poetica*, p. 77 (cp. I. Bywater, *op. cit.*, p. 134 and *Journal of Philology*, xxvii (1900), p. 54).

⁴ *La Poétique d'Aristote*, pp. 83.

⁵ Louis Racine even compares the cathartic action of tragedy with inoculation for smallpox! (*Oeuvres*, vi, p. 395).

⁶ Cp. J. H. Reinkens, *Aristoteles über Kunst, besonders über Tragödie*, Vienna, 1870, p. 85.

other of two interpretations of the ethical katharsis. One of these is that the fear and pity of tragedy render us so familiar with these emotions that we cease to shrink from them; that is to say, tragedy works ethically by moderating, damping, or rendering less acute our emotions; the other is that tragic pity and fear excite instead of damping our pity and fear, and thus make our souls more sensitive, more ready to extend our sympathies and our fears, in other words, render us more 'humane.' The first of these views comes down from the Italian commentators Robortelli, Victorius and Castelvetro; Nicolai mentions it in his *Abhandlung*, quoting Brumoy's authority in his support¹. It is also, as we have just seen, Dacier's view.

The second interpretation goes back to Heinsius. In his *De Tragoediae Constitutione* he says:

De affectibus autem ita judicabat Aristoteles. Nec virtutes eos neque vitia esse. Caeterum habitum quendam, quatenus et quando, gaudendum, dolendum, commiserandum, reliquique, e praescripto rationis admittendi essent, comparare virum sapientem posse. Talem e tragoediae representatione nasci....Ad talem autem habitum reduci posse affectus, multa sunt, quae docent....Iisque actionibus horrorem et commiserationem movet. Quae duo, eosdem in humano animo affectus mitigant aut sedant, et si recte adhibeantur, defectum eorum atque excessum expiant ac purgant. Mediocritatem vero relinquunt².

This view was espoused by Batteux in France, and, as we have seen, it passed over from Batteux to Lessing: the latter's 'Verwandlung in tugendhafte Fertigkeiten' is clearly Batteux's 'changer des émotions en habitude' together with his subsequent demand that the emotions in question must be 'passions vertueuses³.' Batteux's theory had, however, already been enunciated in German by Curtius, who, in his *Abhandlung von der Absicht des Trauerspiels*, had said:

Wenn das Unglück eines Fremden auf der Bühne uns lebhaft rühret, so wird das Mitleiden und Erbarmen zu einer Fertigkeit der Seelen, und der Menschenfreund in den Logen und dem Parterre, bey dem die auf der Bühne vorgestellte Begebenheiten das Gefühl der Menschlichkeit rege gemacht haben, wird auch in den Handlungen seines Lebens sich als ein Menschenfreund erweisen⁴.

Lessing, however, was not content with the phrase 'Verwandlung in tugendhafte Fertigkeiten'; he endeavoured to find an explanation of the process by which the 'Verwandlung' is carried out. All Dacier

¹ Lessing, finding in Curtius's *Abhandlung von der Absicht des Trauerspiels* some lines of Timocles, quoted in Latin translation from Athenaeus, vi, cap. i, p. 223, suggested them to Nicolai as older evidence of the theory than that of Brumoy. It is Athenaeus who refers to Stobaeus (cp. Lessing's letter of April 2, 1757; Petsch, p. 106). The source of the matter is really Robortelli, *In Aristotelis de Poetica*, Florence, 1548, pp. 53 f.

² *Ed. cit.*, pp. 22 ff. Quoted by M. Zerbst, *Ein Vorläufer Lessings in der Aristoteles-interpretation*, Jena, 1887, pp. 49 f.

³ *Ed. cit.*, pp. 92 and 96. See above, p. 333.

⁴ *Aristoteles Dichtkunst*, p. 390.

could tell him on this point is contained in a statement that the 'Péripéticiens' regarded the expression 'purger les passions' as equivalent to 'emporter l'excès des passions par où elles pèchent, et les réduire à une juste modération.' Here again, Batteux was much more explicit and helpful:

Purger la terreur et la pitié, je crois que c'est les purifier, c'est-à-dire, leur ôter ce qu'elles peuvent avoir ou de trop ou d'étranger, qui les empêcheroit d'être aussi profitables qu'elles le seroient sans cela. On conçoit bien que la *pitié* et la *terreur* même peuvent être utiles à l'humanité ; mais comment l'une et l'autre peuvent-elles cesser de l'être, faute d'être purifiées, ou *purgées*, puisque c'est le terme d'Aristote ?... Il faut donc que la terreur et la pitié, pour en faire deux vertus secourables, soient sans mélange et sans excès. Si la terreur est mêlée d'horreur, elle effarouche l'âme, plutôt qu'elle ne l'affermir ; si la pitié est mêlée de foiblesse, elle dégénère en pusillanimité. Si elles sont l'une et l'autre en-deçà d'un certain point, elles ne font qu'effleurer l'âme sans la ramuer ; si elles sont au-delà, elles l'emportent au loin, ou la pétrifient. Il falloit donc les réduire à leur point juste, les épurer, les dégager de tout ce qui pouvoit altérer leur nature, pour les rendre vraiment utiles à l'humanité¹.

But Lessing carries the matter a step further ; recalling the theory of the passions possessing two extremes, which Aristotle had set forth in his *Ethics*, he claims that the business of the pity and fear of tragedy is not merely to remove the excesses of these passions in the spectator, but also to add to them in case of deficiency. If tragedy is to be considered as an instrument of moral betterment, it is confessedly not easy to see how the second claim can be defended ; nor does Lessing try to defend it. I cannot help thinking that it was one of those moot points in the *Poetics* which Lessing might have reconsidered later, had he ever written his proposed commentary. In any case, the view had already been expressed by one of Lessing's predecessors, and a predecessor whom he could not have failed to read, namely, Rapin². In his *Réflexions sur la Poétique d'Aristote et sur les ouvrages anciens et modernes* (1671) that writer had advanced the following argument :

Elle [la Tragédie] rend l'homme modeste, en luy représentant des Grands humiliés ; et elle le rend sensible et pitoyable, en luy faisant voir sur le théâtre les étranges accidens de la vie, et les disgraces imprévues ausquelles sont sujettes les personnes les plus importantes. Mais parce que l'homme est naturellement timide, et compatissant, il peut tomber dans une autre extrémité, d'être ou trop craintif, ou trop pitoyable : la trop grande crainte peut diminuer la fermeté de l'âme, et la trop grande compassion peut diminuer l'équité. La Tragédie s'occupe à régler ces deux foiblesses : elle fait qu'on s'apivoise aux disgraces, en les voyant si fréquentes dans les personnes le plus considérables, et qu'on cesse de craindre les accidens ordinaires, quand on en voit arriver de si extraordinaires aux Grands.

¹ *Ed. cit.*, pp. 97 ff.

² Cp. G. Kettner, *Zu Lessings Hamburgischer Dramaturgie in Zeitschr. für deutsche Philologie*, xxx (1898), pp. 237 ff., to which I am indebted for this reference. Louis Racine had also cited Rapin's views in his *Traité de la Poésie dramatique* (Oeuvres, vi, p. 393). Kettner points out that Lessing shows knowledge of Rapin in the *Critische Briefe*, 1753, No. xvi (reference to Dante ; *Schriften*, v, p. 80) and in his *Anmerkungen über das Epigramm* (*Schriften*, xi, p. 218).

Et comme la fin de la Tragédie est d'apprendre aux hommes à ne pas craindre trop foiblement des disgrâces communes, et à ménager leur crainte : elle fait état aussi de leur apprendre à ménager leur compassion, pour des sujets qui la méritent. Car il y a de l'injustice d'être touché des malheurs de ceux qui méritent d'être misérables¹.

Lessing broaches a further refinement of the question, namely, as to the precise manner in which the pity and fear of tragedy act on the pity and fear of the spectator: whether pity excites fear or pity, and whether the tragic fear excites pity or fear. But this, again, was a question which he left to be decided at a later date².

The translation of *τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων* had given—and still gives—trouble to the commentators. Robortelli, for instance, restricted the phrase to fear and pity only; so, too, did Castelvetro, while Maffei, in the Preface to his *Merope*, proposed the omission of the phrase altogether from the definition. Corneille held that 'all passions' could be cured by the pity and fear awakened by tragedy; such was also Dacier's view, although he qualifies his statement in an interesting way. He translates the text: 'achève de purger en nous ces sorts de passions, et toutes les autres semblables,' but in his note he enlarges and distinguishes between two functions. The first is that tragedy 'purge la terreur et la compassion par elles-mêmes.' In the second place:

En purgeant la terreur et la compassion, elle purge en même temps toutes les autres passions qui pourroient nous précipiter dans la même misère, car en étalant les fautes qui ont attiré sur ces malheureux les peines qu'ils souffrent, elle nous apprend à nous tenir sur nos gardes pour n'y pas tomber, et à purger et modérer la passion qui a été la seule cause de leur perte³.

Here, again, Lessing holds with Batteux; he says: 'Das *τοιούτων* bezieht sich lediglich auf das vorhergehende Mitleid und Furcht⁴.' And Batteux:

Aristote dans la définition même qu'il donne de la Tragédie, nous dit que ce poème est fait pour *purger la terreur et la pitié qu'elle produit*. (And in a note): Il faut faire attention à la lettre du texte. Corneille s'y est trompé, lorsqu'il a dit (Disc. 2) que la pitié purgeoit les passions qui causent les malheurs. C'est la pitié même qui est purgée⁵.

Lessing admits that there is a possibility of a further purgation: 'Zwar können sich in der Tragödie auch zur Reinigung der andern Leidenschaften, nützliche Lehren und Beyspiele finden'; but these are alien to the specific 'Absicht' of tragedy as tragedy. So, too, does Batteux:

Il est certain que la terreur et la pitié sont l'effet de la Tragédie....J'ajoutera

¹ *Les Oeuvres du P. Rapin*, ii, Amsterdam, 1709, pp. 159 f.

² Stück lxxviii, p. 117. It is perhaps worth noting that Brumoy had said (*Théâtre des Grecs*, i, p. lii): 'Ce qu'il y a de particulier et de surprenant en cette matière, c'est que la Poésie corrige la crainte par la crainte, et la pitié par la pitié; chose d'autant plus agréable, que le cœur humaine aime ses sentimens et ses faiblesses.'

³ *Poétique d'Aristote*, p. 82.

⁴ Stück lxxvii, p. 113.

⁵ *Ed. cit.*, iii, pp. 96f.

pourtant que tous les autres effets qu'elle peut produire, toutes les vues politiques qu'on lui donne quelquefois, toutes les allégories, toutes les allusions qu'on peut y trouver, toutes les maximes, toutes les belles sentences, n'y sont, comme dans l'Épopée, que des finesses de l'artiste, et non l'objet de l'art. Une Tragédie avec ces beautés, ou sans elle, n'en sera ni plus ni moins une Tragédie, si elle exerce l'âme au malheur, et qu'elle le conduise par degré aux deux passions que nous avons dites, et dont on peut faire deux vertus¹.

Lessing recognises, however, that there is some difficulty in the fact that Aristotle writes *τοιούτων* and not *τούτων*. His attitude to Aristotle being what it is, this must be accounted for. With the common modern acceptance of *τοιούτων* as practically equivalent to *τούτων*—an equivalence which is, however, by no means beyond question²—Lessing could hardly be expected to agree. And he ingeniously interprets the 'like' passions as the 'philanthropischen Gefühle' which, it will be remembered, formed a constituent of his own and Mendelssohn's definition of 'Mitleid,' but were excluded from Aristotle's *ἔλεος*. I am doubtful, however, whether Lessing put forward this explanation with much conviction, or indeed, as anything more than an attempt to justify the word in the interests of philological accuracy. At least, a little later, he expresses himself quite unambiguously that the purgation is strictly limited to fear and pity. 'Aristoteles, um es abermals und abermals zu sagen, hat an keine andere Leidenschaften gedacht, welche das Mitleid und die Furcht der Tragödie reinigen solle, als an unser Mitleid und unsere Furcht selbst³.'

There is one other point. In all the editions of the *Poetics* available in Lessing's time, the text reads: *οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας ἀλλὰ δι' ἐλέου*, which Lessing translates (p. 111) 'nicht vermittelt der Erzählung, sondern vermittelt des Mitleids und der Furcht.' Lessing saw the difficulty—or hiatus—as both Dacier and Curtius had seen it: but, unlike them, he, being a stickler for the letter of Aristotle, endeavoured to justify it. His attempt has no value in view of the fact that *ἀλλά* is now known to be an interpolation of the Aldine edition; but, like Lessing's discussion of *τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων*, it is interesting as an illustration of his determination at all costs to justify—not to say 'accommodate himself with'—Aristotle.

(To be concluded.)

J. G. ROBERTSON.

LONDON.

¹ *Ed. cit.*, iii, pp. 100 f.

² Cp. Bywater, *op. cit.*, p. 152: 'τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων is a general expression for this whole group of disturbing emotions (enthusiasm, pity, fear, etc.) instead of being, as is so often thought, either limited to the two emotions (pity and fear) which appear in the context, or applying to the emotions in general.'

³ Stück lxxviii, p. 116.