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Plutarch, Aristotle, and the Nature of Poetry*

III. ARS IMITATUR NATURAM

The question of imitation is not an easy one. All of the meaning and all of the meanings of *ars imitatur naturam* are not within the limits of my intention. An exhaustive treatment would be a work all to itself. My aims are to examine a most common and most fundamental sense of the idea and to show its relation to the role of *Plot* in poetry.

Certainly two senses of imitation come into play. The first sense is that of the simple imitation of objects in poetry and we have seen something of that already. It suffices to call this sense material imitation for reasons already discussed. The second sense I will call formal imitation, not only to distinguish it from the former sense, but also to relate it to *Plot*, which in poetry has a formal character. This latter sense is far more subtle and far more extensive since it applies to all that involves *recta ratio factibilium*. The course of this chapter will pursue some understanding of this second sense.

As a point of departure let us look at the word *imago*, for the word imitation has its roots in *imago*. Before I proceed further it must be said that *imago* as related to imitation has a very contracted meaning and therefore to base our analysis too much on its narrow sense would be misleading. Nonetheless, it may be of assistance to begin with St. Thomas' general treatment of the word for the sake of orientation in search of a broader significance :

> dicendum quod sicut Augustinus dicit . . ., ubi est imago continuo est et similitudo ; sed ubi est similitudo non continuo est imago. Ex quo patet quod similitudo est de ratione imaginis, et quod imago aliquid addit supra rationem similitudinis, scilicet quod sit ex alio expressum : *imago enim dicitur ex eo quod agitur ad imitationem alterius*. Unde ovum quantumcumque sit alteri ovo simile et aequale, quia tamen non est expressum ex illo, non dicitur imago ejus. Aequalitas autem non est de ratione imaginis : quia ut Augustinus ibidem dicit, ubi est imago, non continuo est aequalitas ; ut patet in imaginis alicujus in speculo relucente. Est tamen de ratione perfectae imaginis ; nam in perfecta imagine non deest aliquid imagini, quod insit illi de quo expressa est.[1]

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* See the first part of this study in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, Vol.XIX, 1963, n.2, pp.305-334.

1. *Ia*, q.93, a.1.

We discover through the idea of *imago* that an imitation is a species of similitude, but a similitude not involving an *aequalitas*. *Aequalitas* will be included in the similarity between two eggs, as the text states, but in the similitude that is imitation there will be a priority as there is in the reflection of something in a mirror, for the thing reflected is prior to the reflection in the order of reflecting. In our investigation, therefore, we are not seeking an identification or equality between art and nature, but a certain similitude in which nature shall have a priority within the order of imitating.

That nature enjoys a priority is clear for two reasons. First, man, the author of art, is himself a natural creature, and secondly, he first learns through his senses and the objects of his sense knowledge are natural things.[1] He only later turns his practical intellect to the work of making.

The text above also gives us a certain measure by which we may judge the excellence of an imitation. If the image, or imitation in our case, includes all that is imageable or imitable it is by that reason more perfect. We may by this standard search for a most excellent mode of imitation in one that is most comprehensive. We are, as I have indicated, out of the order of the material imitation of objects, so it is not a verisimilitudo in portraying that is our canon, but a formal similitude far removed from the elemental notion of *figura*, or the sensible shape of things imaged.

As observed in the preceding chapter, St. Thomas begins the second book of his commentary on the *Physics* stating that *entia sensibilia* may be divided among three species ; namely, those things that come to be by nature, those by art, and those that come to be through chance. I propose to speak briefly about each with the purpose of turning up a basis of imitation. The priority in imitation belonging to nature, it is fitting, therefore, to consider nature first.

A. *Nature* — Aristotle sets down this definition at the beginning of book II of the *Physics* :

> Nature is a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily in virtue of itself and not in virtue of a concomitant attribute.[2]

Whatever has a " source " or principle of this kind is said to have a nature. Moreover, each thing of this sort has a substance, for a substance is a subject and nature implies a subject in which to inhere.[3]

As we saw in *De Partibus Animalium* which is a Physical investigation, the " fittest mode " is to begin with what is first known *quoad*

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1. St. Thomas, *In II Phys.*, lect.4, n.171 (6).
2. *Physics*, Bk. II, ch.1 (McKeon).
3. *Ibid.*

nos and these are the material elements. Following the natural order, therefore, Aristotle first considers the natural subject as involving matter.

Because of their apteness in manifestation he uses several examples from art to show his meaning. One might say, he says, that the wood of a bed or the bronze of a statue is its nature. One might begin by saying that the wood of a tree is its nature but the relation of matter and form in natural things is not so distinct as it is in art where the form has clearly an external imposition. A sign that matter may be taken as nature is that the ancients spoke of the whole of a substance, viz., its affections, dispositions and states, as being reducible to the elements fire, air, earth and water.[1]

Briefly, therefore, nature may be accounted for in one fashion as the " immediate material substratum of things which have in themselves a principle of motion or change."[2]

The insufficiency of this accounting has already been suggested in a preceding paragraph, for the natural subject includes a form as well as matter. It is by the form of the subject that the matter or material cause is reduced to act ; that is to say for instance, that those elements which are potentially " flesh and bone " though not as yet having such a nature require a formal cause that shall specify them as flesh and bone. Hence, it is such a form (inseparable from matter, save as in statement) that is a second sense of the nature predicated of a subject having in itself a source of motion or change. Because the formal cause reduces matter, or the potential, to act, it is more eminently called nature. (*Forma est finis materiae*). To underline this notion we have but to allude to art where it is evident that it is the form in art that we call art. In like manner in nature we designate by form as when we realize that man is born of man. It is this form that specifies his nature and it is this specific perfection by which he engenders his kind.[3]

The fact of movement or change in the natural subject indicates a further sense of nature, namely, an end or term of the motion or change, a " that for the sake of which " the movement transpires. In Aristotle's words, " If a thing undergoes a continuous change, there is a stage which is last, and this stage is the end." (As a cautionary adjunct he points out that not every stage which is last claims to be the end, but only that which is best).[4] The end is the final cause, the *causa causarum*, of natural things, and here as well, because " the end is everywhere the chief thing," it shall retain super-eminent importance. " Nature belongs to that class of things which acts for the

1. *Ibid.*
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, ch.3.

sake of something,"[1] says the Philosopher. In a word, it does not act in *vain*.

In this regard, let us look at another text from the *Physics* :

> That teeth and all natural things either invariably or normally come about in a given way ; but with none of the things resulting from chance or spontaneity is this true. We do not ascribe the frequency of rain in winter to mere chance or coincidence, but we do to frequent rain in the summer. Now if things come about either for an end or by coincidence, the behavior of nature must be said to happpen for an end, since mere spontaneity and coincidence cannot account for it.[2]

This passage indicates that more than mere material causality accounts for the form of the natural subject, but that rather the form is realized through a process of generation determined by a final cause. Without the instrumentality of final causality there would be no other explanation of the natural subject than that it came to be by chance.

At the term of the generative process, when the last or best stage is attained, the form of the natural subject is identical with the end, in that it is the *finis generationis*. That is to say the form of the mature tooth is the last stage in its development. But it is not, of course, the *finis intentionis*, which is mastication or the operation necessitating the *finis generationis* or mature tooth.

By dint of the intelligent principle of final causality governing nature, nature is said to be determined *ad unum*. Pointing up this aspect as well as gathering all that has been said, in summary fashion Aristotle says :

> For those things are natural which, by a continuous movement originated from an internal principle, arrive at some completion : the same completion is not reached from every principle ; nor any chance completion, but always the tendancy is toward the same end, if there is no impediment.[3]

Along the sames lines, St. Thomas in his Commentary says :

> Natura agat propter finem, et quod in quibus necessarium non sit ex causis prioribus in esse, quæ sunt movens et materia, sed ex causis posterioribus, quæ sunt forma et finis.[4]

That which determines nature *ad unum* is a certain necessity. That necessity is in turn determined by the *finis intentionis*. If the intelligent principle in nature poses a certain end, say, mastication, or the operation of chewing, it is in turn necessary that the end be satisfied by something such as the mature tooth. Likewise the mature

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1. *Ibid.*, ch.8.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *In II Phys.*, lect.12, n.250 (1).

tooth will necessitate a certain matter that shall be appropriate to its form. This necessity is referred to as hypothetical necessity in the sense that *if* a certain purpose is to be served then such and such means must be taken. It is, therefore, this kind of means that will typify nature since nature always acts for an end. This necessity as hypothetical is of a posterior sort (ex causis posterioribus, quae sunt forma et finis), and not in the order of simple or absolute apriori necessity (non sit ex causis prioribus in esse, quae sunt movens et materia) for in that case coincidence and chance and chaos would reign. Thus we can see more distinctly the sense of Aristotle's remark in *De Partibus Animalium* that, " the formal cause is of greater importance than the material."

The common view is often that the necessity of the process of a natural production is determined solely by antecedent necessity. For example, one might say by such reasoning that the cause of stones being at the base of the foundation of the house and the wood being above is merely because heavier objects tend downward and hence the earth and stones are below and the lighter wood is above. Whereas, though the wall does not come to be without these factors, it is not due to these, except as material causes. Rather, it comes to be, or is due, for the sake of sheltering. Similarly in all things that come to be for an end, the product cannot come to be without these things which have a necessary nature, but it is not due to these save materially. Therefore in nature we find an hypothetical necessity, a result not essentially or formally determined by antecedent or material necessity.

St. Thomas capsulates what has just been said in these words :

. . . quod autem habet necessitatem ex conditione, vel suppositione ; ut puta si dicatur, *necesse est hoc esse si hoc debeat fieri* ; et hujusmodi necessitas est ex fine, ex forma inquantum est finis generationis.[1]

He adds at the end, you will notice, the sense in which the form of the natural subject is identical with the end ; namely, as *finis generationis.*

Thus, we have touched upon those things which are said to be " nature " and that which is said to be " according to nature " ; the prior being *matter* and *form* and the latter the posterior and hypothetical type of necessity characterizing nature's generation or *fieri* in the attainment of its term of perfection.

B. *Artificial beings* — Although it is art that imitates nature and therein nature enjoys the priority, it is the case that in order to gain some understanding of nature it is helpful first to take examples from art. Man himself is the author of artistic production and therein has an intimate knowledge of the elements and processes involved. As

1. *Ibid.*, lect.15, n.273.

maker he can reflect upon his own making operations and from such present knowledge can acquire an insight into the unknown of nature.

That art is so adaptable and may be so readily employed for this purpose is indicated in this passage from the Prooemium to St. Thomas' Commentary on the *Politics* :

> Et inde est quod Philosophus dicit quod si ars faceret ea quae sunt naturae similiter operaretur sicut et natura : et *converso*, si natura faceret ea quae sunt artis similiter faceret sicut ars facit.

We see in this observation a certain convertibility in the operations of art and nature, and on the strength of this convertibility the one may be used to illuminate the other. This point is of the utmost significance to my analysis. I mention it now not to develope its meaning at this point but to explain the usage of examples from art already made in the preceding section on Nature. Indeed, we shall come back to it before long.

Clearly, I have not treated nature in all of its facets and its various concomitant implications, but rather, for the sake of pertinence and economy I have restricted by consideration of nature to those aspects that arise in relation to art and, in fact, only to those matters which Aristotle and St. Thomas themselves chose to illustrate by means of a parallel rapport between art and nature. I shall essay to treat art conversely in a fashion parallel to that already accorded to nature. I mean by this, to review the causes already applied to nature as they pertain to art and as they illustrate the similitudes and oppositions between art and nature.

All *sensibilia* involve matter and hence material causality. Art, a species of *sensibilia*, therefore involves matter. Herein lies a similitude between art and nature, but in the comparison there is evinced an opposition. Nature, as we have seen, involves a principle of change and all that is natural has an innate impulse to change. Let us note this observation :

> So far as whatever product of art, e. g., a bed or a coat in so far as it has such a designation it has no innate principle of change. But in so far as they happen to be composed of stone or earth or a mixture of the two they do have such an impulse.[1]

By way of an example, Aristotle adds that it would be the material principle in a bed for instance that would cause it to grow if it were planted and happened to grow, and not the artistic form, for it would not shoot up into a bed but into wood. We are brought swiftly to a difference in art and nature, actually the basic difference, namely that the principle in nature is intrinsic to the natural thing while in art

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1. *Physics*, Bk. II, ch.1.

the principle remains extrinsic. To the extent that something is a product of art it is altogether lacking in an intrinsic principle of movement or change. This as we have seen is best evidenced in the consideration of the relationship between art and its material cause.

Although the principles in art and in its matter are different they are not indifferent. Just as matter must be appropriate to the form in nature the same holds true and prevails in art. The artist must seek and choose and even treat his materials specially, that they may contribute efficaciously to his artistic ends. Aristotle explains this relationship thusly :

> The arts make their matter. (Some simply make it and others make it serviceable). The arts which govern the matter and have knowledge are two, namely the art which uses the matter and the art which directs the production of it. The using art is directive too, but it differs in that it knows the form, whereas the directive art concerned with the production knows the matter, e.g., the helmsman knows and prescribes the kind or form of helm desired, the other the sort of wood it should be made from and by means of what operations. In products of art however we make the matter with a view to the function, whereas in nature the matter is there all along.[1]

When it is said that art " makes " its matter it does not mean that it makes it, as it were, *ex nihilo* ; rather, the strinking word " mades " serves to heighten the significance of the extrinsic principle of art which lacks the intimacy of the principle uniting matter and form in natural things. Nature need not go searching for its matter, as art must, for its matter is, so to speak, " there all along."

Nature, as we have seen, must also be accounted for in terms of shape or form. The same again applies to art. Form, as we remember, has the relation to matter as act to potency, and once more, form is especially deserving of the name Art. We do not say that something is artistic if it is only potentially a bed, or the wood with which one might construct a bed, but only when the bed has been realized in its formal causality. Thus, as the shape of man is said to be his nature so also is " figure " said to be art.

Nature and all intelligent actions are always for the sake of an end. Art proceeding from a rational agent is such an action and thus it is defined as *recta ratio factibilium.* Art will involve a rational process, a movement through stages towards an end in the same way as nature. In this regard there is a near perfect similitude between the two. The convertibility that we referred to earlier bears immediately on the likeness of processes towards a final effect. Aristotle unfolds this sense of convertibility :

> Thus if a house had been a thing made by nature, it would have been made in the same way as it is now made by art ; and if things made by

1. *Ibid.*, ch.2.

nature were made by art also, they would come to be in the same way as by nature. Each step in the series is for the sake of the next ; and generally art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish and partly imitates her. If, therefore, artificial things are for the sake of an end, so clearly are natural products. The relation of the latter to the earlier terms of a series is the same in both.[1]

It is a condition common to both art and nature to operate for an end, and in turn it is common to both to be impeded in their processes towards that end by chance, or incidental causes, whose intercession frustrates the attainment of the due result. For example, the grammarian may make a mistake in writing, or a doctor may pour out the wrong dosage. The existence of such failings does not contradict the presence of final causablity, but rather it points up the reality of the final cause lest the impediment and imperfect result never be known as an impediment and an imperfect result. If nature or art did not operate for an end, we would have to consider all results to be freaks of chance and fortune, and, moreover, they would be utterly unintelligible and indistinguishable. I intend to say a few more words on this matter in the succeeding section.

In line with the matter of final causality in art we are able to refine the similitude between art and nature even more precisely by considering the species of necessity characteristic of art's *processus*. Art, like nature, in acting for a purpose selects and arranges its elements and causes to most perfectly attain the desired end. Because of the paramount importance of the final result the material elements, their activities and allocations, are all subservient to the final cause. As in nature therefore, if a certain end is to be achieved certain means must be used and certain steps taken. Again we encounter the posterior and hypothetical necessity we met in nature, this time in art. This is nicely illustrated by Aristotle :

> A saw's end cannot be unless it is made of iron if it is to perform the operation of sawing. What is necessary then is necessary on hypothesis ; it is not a result necessarily determinated by antecedents.[2]

C. *Chance results* — A last species of *sensibilia* remains, and that is things resulting from chance and fortune. It is worthwhile examining the characteristics of such events not merely to exhaust the genus *sensibilia*, that we might distinguish them especially from art and nature as we work out the meaning of imitation, but also for the sake of clarifying yet further the operations of art and nature.

As we have noted, art and nature alike will sometimes fail to attain their prescribed ends. Just as the grammarian and doctor may

1. *Ibid.*, ch.8.
2. *Ibid.*, ch.9.

be thwarted in the course of their arts, nature herself occasionally miscarries producing freaks and monsters. These are due to chance.

What does chance imply? If art and nature act designedly for an end that end will be achieved then through proper or *per se* causes. It will be specifically because the several causes involved are calculatedly present that the intended effect comes to pass. Speaking negatively, the results of art and nature are not due to randomness or *per accidens* causality. Nevertheless as we know these prescribed ends are from time to time disturbed by *per accidens* causes and the results are called " chance " happenings. If Socrates goes to the market place to shop and happens onto his debtor on the way and collects the debt we say that this happened by chance or per *accidens*, because the causes leading to the collection were not organized for the sake of collecting the debt but rather for the sake of shopping and it was incidental to the *per se* causes that he met his debtor and settled the debt. The causes in chance are of this sort.

The fundamental point is that art consists in the conception of the result to be produced before its realization in matter.[1] Nature proceeds by her prescriptions similarly. Characteristics of both is an intelligent evolution such as is described in this passage :

> For elsewhere, for instance in housebuilding, this is the sequence. The plan of the house, or house, has this or that form ; and because it has this or that form, therefore its construction is carried out in this or that manner. For the process of the evolution is for the sake of the thing finally evolved, and not for the sake of the process. Empedocles then was in error when he said that many of the characteristics present in animals were merely the results of incidental occurrences during their development ; for instance, that the backbone was divided as it is into vertebrae, because it happened to be broken owing to the position of the fœtus in the womb.[2]

To attribute to randomness or incidentality the results of this evolutionary process would be to do away with nature and what exists by nature. Not only would nature and the natural vanish, but with it the intelligibility of everything that evolves.

Per se causality is determined causality. In art and nature the causal evolution has a determined reference to the end or final form evolved. Being determined, the causes are limited in number and kind, and the natural thing evolved is highly comprehensible in view of them. Chance, on the other hand, is independent of and posterior to intelligence and nature, as all incidental causes are posterior to *per se* causes. It is only in relation to *per se* causality that incidental causality has its existence. Since in chance there is no prescribed or determined end, the number of possible *per accidens* causes is infinite

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1. ARISTOTLE, *De Partibus Animalium*, Bk II, ch.1.
2. *Ibid.*

and incalculable. Because of the inderminateness and infinity of chance it has often been considered to belong to that class of things inscrutable to man, says Aristotle.[1]

Nature is determined *ad unum*. Its continuous movement originates from an internal principle and arrives at some completion, " but always the tendency is towards the same end, if there is no impediment."[2] The odd impediment intervenes from time to time, but only so often as to allow nature to be defined as, " that which happens always or, *for the most part* " ; conversely, chance is defined in this way : " Causa per accidens in his quae fiunt secundum propositum propter finem in minori parte."[3] The *per accidens* causality of chance and its subsequent frequency characterizes a further similitude between nature and art, in that both are counter-distinguished from chance.

D. *The imitation* — Having reviewed the three species of *sensibilia* we are in a position to recognize certain similitudes and with these to set down the basis for a likeness that will be of the nature of an imitation.

In the case of each of the three we discover the presence of matter and a kind of form. That is, they each possess a form that is last, or a resultant form. In art and nature however, this final form represents the realization of the final cause. (*Forma est finis generationis*). In the cause of chance the last stage is not as such the result of final causality, for as chance it is utterly without final causality, and the reason for this is that chance, not proceeding *per se*, is not a principle. But art and nature are principles and herein lies a mutual likeness. By force of being principles their products have finality and organization.

The presence of final causality in the two reveals a further similitude, which concerns the " process " involved. Their process or *fieri* comes about through stages guided and organized in the light of the final cause. Chance too involves a certain process, but one empty of an intelligent and *per se* arrangement of the steps that lead on to the chance result. In so far as chance produces the result, the stages are little more than an unrelated sequence of events happening incidentally in such and such a way and absent of a true beginning, middle and end. Thus no real and entire process can be predicated of chance.

The combined presence of final causality and process in art and nature points up a third similitude. As we have seen already, the process in each is related to the *finis intentionis* by way of a characteristic necessity called *hypothetical*. It is in terms of this necessity on

1. *Physics*, Bk II, ch.5.

2. *Ibid.*, ch.8.

3. St. Thomas, *In II Phys.*, lect.8, n.216 (10).

hypothesis that the simple and antecedent necessity in *movens et materia* is determined in the natural and artificial subjects. But chance arises contrary to the posterior causes *forma et finis*, and must be resolved to the antecedents.

It seems then that a certain similitude obtains between nature and art that may serve as a basis for imitation. The distinctness of this similitude is brought out as art and nature are contrasted against the third class of *ens sensibile*, chance, which is strikingly without these qualities which characterise the operations of natural and artificial becoming.

On the other hand, the similitude does not amount to an *aequalitas*. There is rather in this similitude the priority and posteriority of a thing reflected and its reflection. This is guaranteed on the grounds that the very beginnings of natural becoming differ substantially. On this count St. Thomas says, " In nullo enim alio natura ab arte videtur differe, nisi quia natura est principium intrinsecum, et ars est principium extrinsecum." [1] In nature the principle or source of its movement or change is intrinsic (though issuing from divine intelligence [2]), and the artist imitates the generation in nature in his own making operations, though in the latter the source or cause of movement or change proceeds from a principle extrinsic to the artificial subject, namely, the artist's intellect.

The three characteristics typifying the imitation are therefore these : firstly, both art and nature are principles, secondly, the products of each involve a certain process in their becoming, and, thirdly, the two partake of a necessity based on hypothesis. The notes of similitude are surely quite comprehensive concerning the becoming of nature and art for as St. Thomas has just said, the two only differ in that the principle of the one is intrinsic and that of the other is extrinsic. In as much as the imitation then pertains to the producing of nature and not to its particular products the imitation can be said to be most perfect, for everything that is susceptible to being imitated is present in the imitation. This therefore is the broadest sense in which *ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione* and it is on the strength of its excellence that Aristotle and St. Thomas speak of a certain convertibility of nature and art, observing that if one were to do the other's work the results would be the same.

The word " art " as it has been used thus far in this chapter does not refer merely to its species " poetry ", but is obviously taken in a sense broad enough to include all things produced by the human *recta ratio factibilium*. The relation of *ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione* to poetry as a *recta ratio factibilium* is to follow.

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1. St. Thomas, *In II Phys.*, lect.XIV, n.268 (8).
2. St. Thomas, *In Polit.*, prooemium.

E. *Imitation and poetry* — As for the poetry which merely narrates, or imitates by means of versified language (without action), it is evident that it has several points in common with Tragedy.

I. The construction of its stories should clearly be like that of a drama ; they should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end, so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature.[1]

At the close of the preceding chapter I proposed to relate the idea of *Plot* to the basic sense in which *ars imitatur naturam.* We have seen this basic sense of imitation worked out over the several foregoing sections. The relation that poetry, in and through the *Plot*, has to this most fundamental and universal sense is presented clearly in the passage just cited above. The Epic like the Tragedy, and all poetry for that matter, ought to have the organic unity of a living creature we are told. But one might merely say that each poem ought to have the unity of a natural thing, for to specifically mention a living creature is to speak of nature in its most perfect form. The organic unity of living creatures is at once the most evident and the most complex in all of nature, though the idea of unity is common to all natural things. In likening poetry to a living creature in its organic unity, Aristotle presents us with the most vivid illustration of the requisite process that must be present in poetry for it to effectively attain its proper end.

In the three characteristics typifying a natural organic unity we see in poetry's likeness thereto the manner in which poetry, as a species of art, imitates nature in its operation. The " construction of its stories " refers to the principle of poetry, proceeding from the mind of the poet ; the " beginning, middle and end " pertains to the *per se* process ; and, the *finis intentionis*, " to produce its own proper pleasure," indicates the necessity in the process based upon hypothesis. The " organic unity " to be found in the poem will be there by the instrumentality of the *Plot* or form, which, as we have seen, is reducible to the intrinsic term of the poem as *forma inquantum est finis operationis.*

Plot in one sense, as the " imitation of an action," has a material reference. As the other elements exist for the " action," the " action " will encompass them. Here the *Plot* is at the essence of the material imitation of objects. Imitation in this ratio has a narrow sense, and a material sense, which some distinguish as an imitation of nature *in esse.*[2] It pertains also to the most manifest sense of imitation as being much like the reflection of something in a mirror. Moreover, the material imitation of objects is a kind of imitation unique to poetry. Yet we have seen that " the wood of which a couch is made constitutes the couch, though it does so because it is capable of receiving such

1. ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, ch.23, 1459 *a* 17-21.

2. James TORRENS, S.J., *Poetry, An Imitation of Nature, The Thomist*, July, 1955.

and such a form." The poem in its turn is constituted of the imitation of objects only because they are capable of receiving such and such a form or *Plot*. *Plot* in this latter ratio relates to the proper pleasure to be produced. The " process " of poetic generation will be necessitated by this *finis intentionis*, catharsis, and will be attained through the evolution of a story adequate to producing this effect. Herein involved is the universal notion of imitation in art (*ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*), and in poetry in particular the intrinsic end of this imitation of nature *in fieri* shall be the *Plot*. Poetry as a principle, in the sense of one of its three typifying features, is in the poet (for the principle in art is *extrinsic*) ; and the " that for the sake of which," the catharsis, as the determinant of its hypothetical necessity, is in the reader ; but the " process," linking the two, is in the poem, and it is there determined essentially in and through the *Plot* as form. *Plot* as form will therefore be of " greater importance " than *Plot* as matter, and, " it is the form in art that we call art."

Applying hypothetical necessity to the poem, we say that *if* the catharsis is to be attained certain antecedent causes (*movens et materia*) must be employed. The employment is consequently determined by the *finis intentionis* remotely, and by the *forma et finis operationis* proximately. Plutarch's " system of amendments," however, intervenes as arising from the matter, in the same way as the incidentality of chance, and more than likely, if the intervention touches on a " real part " of the whole, it would impede the realization of the *finis intentionis* and tend to result in a sort of poetic monster. Thus, the imitation in poetry in the formal sense would be less of an imitation of nature and more of an imitation of chance. But not only is the tampering with the objects of imitation, Thought and Character, harmful to the organic unity of poetry, but even those liberties taken with the manner and means of imitation can be disruptive. The words used, the verse and metre and style employed as means of imitation, equally exist for the end and are necessary on hypothesis in the light of the end. If Coleridge, when he says, " The infallible test of a blameless style : namely, its untranslatableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning," [1] is right, then Plutarch's license to tamper with words for the sake of the matter is quite wrong.

Nature in its organic unity does not act in vain. Nor should art if it is to imitate nature. Nonetheless, inherent in the poetic imitation of human action is a natural disposition towards an emotional response. The force of the emotional in poetic representation is of greater *per se* efficacy than is the speculative disposition of the poetic mode. In the order of speculation the poetic mode is grossly inferior, whereas in the order of catharsis it is the very best. Plutarch, however, within the confines of the poetic mode, would have poetry neglect its essential

1. S. T. COLERIDGE, *Biographia Literaria*, ch.20.

emotional disposition in the name of speculative ends, and in so far as its cathartic tendency still persists, poetry, for him, would be acting in vain.

IV. POETRY AND TRUTH

Since the specific effect of poetry is catharsis in one form or another, then its proper purpose is purgative. This, as has been stated, will be the basis of its hypothetical necessity. Before passing on to the consequences of the poetic hypothesis a few words on catharsis are relevant.

The word catharsis or purgation as used by Aristotle " is a medical metaphor and denotes a pathological effect on the soul analogous to the effect of medicine on the body," according to Butcher.[1] He adds that " the idea of catharsis implies . . . the expulsion of a painful and disquieting element, — *ta lupounta.*" Specifically, the reference is to those emotions fear and pity catharsized in the tragedy. I am, however, not interested in the tragedy as such but in that which is common to poetry as a whole, and that is a sort of purgation related to whatever emotion is involved. The idea then is to inquire into the purgative purpose generally. The pathological effect addresses the emotions and hence directly pertains to the subject of the moral virtues. Yet poetry is an *infima doctrina* and in this regard is in some way in the intellectual order. Surely this is clear in as much as poetry induces *admiratio*, and excites rational investigation, but, moreover, it is true as well in the cathartic order.

St. Thomas tells us that a thing may belong to the contemplative life in two ways, essentially or dispositively. The moral virtues though they pertain to active happiness as opposed to contemplative happiness nonetheless pertain to contemplation *dispositively.* Acts of contemplation are hindered by both the impetuosity of the passions which withdraw the soul's intention from intelligible to sensible things, and by outward disturbances. Now the moral virtues curb the impetuosity of the passions, and quell the disturbance of outward occupations. Hence moral virtues belong *dispositively* to the contemplative life.[2]

How is the dispositive role of poetry played? In his definition of tragedy, Aristotle poses as the final cause the catharsis of the emotions fear and pity. A general notion of the function of purgation may be approached through a passage in the *Politics* wherein Aristotle is discussing music and its value :

But we maintain further that music should be studied, not for the sake of one, but of many benefits, that is to say with a view to (1) education,

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1. S.H. Butcher, *Poetics*, a translation and commentary by S.H. Butcher (New-York, Dover Publications, 1951), p.245.

2. *IIa IIae*, q.180, a.2.

(2) purgation (the word purgation we use at present without explanation, but when hereafter we speak of poetry, we will treat the subject with more precision) ; music may also serve (3) for intellectual enjoyment, for relaxation and recreation after exertion. It is clear, therefore, that all the modes must be exployed by us, but not all of them in the same manner. In education the most ethical modes are to be preferred, but in listening to the performances of others we may admit the modes of action and passion also. (And here we are in poetry proper). For feelings such as pity and fear, or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious enthusiasm, whom we see as a result of the sacred melodies — when they have used the melodies that excite the soul to mystic enthusiasm — restored as though they had found healing and *purgation*. Those who are influenced by fear and pity, and every emotional nature, must have a like experience, and others in so far as each is susceptible to such emotions, and all are in a manner purged and their souls lightened and delighted.[1]

There are two points I should like to make first off concerning this text. The first is, with the introduction of the use of music for education Aristotle appears to fall in line with Plutarch's purposes of poetry. Not wishing to launch a detailed analysis, I believe that it is adequate to say that the usage of music as educative and the modes that suit such ends are yet within the scope of those elements that retain a material character akin to the material elements in poetry in relation to the *Plot*, whose introduction recasts them in a form proper to achieving purgation. The ethical modes then, as Character, will exist for the sake of the musical equivalent of the *Plot*.

The second point, in line with purgation, is that Aristotle continues to develope the analogy of catharsis as medical or *healing*. Healing the emotional part of the soul can be distinguished in the moral order from the perfecting acquisition of the moral virtues, as inducing a condition of the soul that is in proximate potency to the exercise of the moral virtues, just as health in the body is a prerequisite to the perfecting exercise of the healthy body. Nevertheless, a dispositive function is performed in the purgation of the passions, though it be perhaps proximate to the moral virtues and remote regarding the intellectual virtues or contemplation.

Taking up the theme of purgation and emotional health, Butcher has this to say :

Aristotle held that it is not desirable to kill or to starve the emotional parts of the soul, and that the regulated indulgence of the feelings serves to maintain the balance of our nature. Tragedy, he would say, is a vent for the particular emotions of pity and fear. In the first instance, it is true, its effect is not to tranquillise but to excite. It excites emotion, however, only to allay it. Pity and fear, artificially stirred, expel the latent pity

1. *Politics*, ch.7, 1341 *b* 35 — 1342 *a* 16.

and fear which we bring with us from real life, or at least, such elements in them as are disquieting. In the pleasurable calm which follows when the passion is spent, an emotional cure has been wrought.[1]

Also sustaining the idea of poetry as therapy and making more precise the work of " artificial stirring," Gilbert and Kuhn have this to add :

Aristotle thought of the evils in soul as like diseases in the body. But the body was sick when one of the elements composing it increased to extreme proportions ; and the soul was ill when one of its native propensities was indulged to excess . . . We understand that for Aristotle if stage plays and music were to be therapeutic agencies they were to restore a balanced functioning to a soul-body afflicted with deficiency or excess. They were to insinuate into the organism the principle of the norm, and draw back the disarranged habit to the middle path . . . There had to be such affinity between disease and cure that the diseased part could receive to the maximum the action of the medicine . . . But it is not the same pity that cures and that is the thing to be cured. In Aristotle's constantly reiterated terminology, the medicine is pity's form, and the disease is pity's matter . . . The peculiar pleasures that accompany attendance at dramatic performances are colored then by the return of the reign of an emotion that is proportioned and ordered, after fear and pity had introduced disarray into the mental economy.[2]

The passions of man have a distinct appetite for a re-ordering as is worked through poetry. Its appeal addresses the passions as such and supplies them with a principle that as passions they lack, namely, an ordering proceeding from intelligence, and this is infused into the poetic matter from the poet's mind. (Delectationes corporales sunt secundum partem sensitivam, quae regulatur ratione : et ideo indigent temperari et refraenari per rationem.[3]) Owing to their contrariety the sensible passions hunger for that which delights them, in a way that is unknown to the spiritual regions of the soul.

Sed quoad nos, delectationes corporales sunt magis vehementes, quia delectationes corporales appetuntur ut medicinae quaedam contra corporales defectus vel molestias, ex quibus tristitiae quaedam consequuntur. Unde delectationes corporales, tristitiis hujusmodi supervientes, magis sentiuntur, et per consequens magis acceptantur, quam delectationes spirituales quae non habent tristitias contrarias.[4]

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1. S. H. Butcher, *opus cit.*, p.246. Cf. " videtur autem esse purificatio corruptio alicujus passionis nocivae inexistentis. Et quia corruptio unius est per generationem alterius ; ideo est corruptio unius passionis vel per generationem contrariae, sicut irae corruptio per generationem mansuetudinis." Peter of Auvergne, *In VIII Polit.*, lect.3, n.1331 (Marietti).

2. K. E. Gilbert and H. Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (Bloomington, Indiana, University Press, 1953), pp. 76-79.

3. St. Thomas, *Ia IIae*, q.31, a.5, ad 3.

4. *Ibid.*, c.

In this way one may account for the cathartic moral purpose of poetry. Admitedly the accounting is only sketchy, but it is not my purpose in this thesis to deal with such matters profoundly. Having established the specific orientation of poetry, I propose to direct my consideration to the means needed to attain catharsis and the order of truth apropos of the poetic argument.

Let us return to the consequences that follow from poetry's hypothesis based on catharsis. Catharsis may involve any emotion and the work of art is not required to cause every kind of pleasure, " but only its own proper pleasure." Therefore, as the work of art pertains to this passion or that so will the means and materials vary to suit the particular end, and more precisely they should be actualized as causes of the cathartic effect in and through the poem's formal principle, the *Plot*. As Aristotle says, " The tragic pleasure is that of fear and pity, and the poet has to produce it by an imitation ; it is clear, therefore, that the causes should be included in the incidents of the story."[1]

Given the end, the tragic pleasure of fear and pity, there will be an appropriate means, and, of course, as the end becomes more and more definite the rules of art (*recta ratio factibilium*) become more and more precise. Aristotle goes as far as to state that for a cathartic effect certainly " the poet has to produce it by an imitation." What other means but those involving human thought, character, and action, represented in concrete terms could serve as the matter requisite to achieving such an end ? The idea of the need for appropriate matter is not difficult, and is readily seen in reference to artifacts. If one desires to cut wood he will construct an axe. Upon the hypothesis, *if* it is to cut wood, it must be made of something harder than wood and castable into a wedge shape, etc. As the end becomes more and more precise so do the specifications, but in any case there is a due proportion between the end and the adequate means. Poetry in like manner has its extrinsic end and this in turn is served by an instrument with a certain adequate form or *Plot*, composed of appropriate matter, (*forma est finis materiae*). This is exemplified in the *Poetics* where Aristotle describes for us the best type of story and tragic hero. As the best axe needs a certain shape and should be made of a certain metal,

> We assume that, for the finest form of tragedy, the plot must be not simple but complex : and further, that is must imitate actions arousing fear and pity, since this is the distinct function of this kind of imitation. It follows, therefore, that there are three forms of Plot to be avoided. (1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic

1. *Poetics*, ch.14, 1453 *b* 12-14.

that can be ; it has no one of the requisites of Tragedy ; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness to misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear ; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves ; so that there will be noting either piteous or fear-inspiring in the situation. There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error in judgment.[1]

This, then, in a general way, is the certain shape and the certain metal (matter) adequate to achieving the tragic pleasure.

If in artifacts and in poetry one finds commonly a necessity based on an hypothesis, bearing on the formal and final causes, one will find also a common presence of antecedent absolute necessity in their matter. But, the matter employed in the making of artifacts is inanimate, such as iron, wood, and the like, and in its properties and behavior it is quite strictly determined *ad unum*. In the case of poetry, however, the remote matter is human action and this brings to the poem its own character of determination. The action imitated if it is to remain convincing must retain a certain semblance of truth, and in preserving the appearance, the imitation preserves some of the qualities of the objects of imitation. The science proper to human action is the science of Ethics. St. Thomas tells us that, " materia autem moralis talis est, quod non est ei conveniens perfecta certitudo."[2] Explaining why that in the science of morals we cannot expect perfect certitude he says that at all times and all places men do not always share the same understanding of vice and virtue, that " *voluntatis autem motivum est, non solum bonum, sed apparens bonum*, and that *ad materiam moralem pertinent bona exteriora, quibus homo utitur ad finem. Et circa etiam ista bona contingit invenire predictum errorem, quia non semper eodem modo se habent in omnibus.*" Then concluding he says, " *Et sic manifestum est, quod materia moralis est varia et diffor-mis, non habens omnimodam certitudinem.*" This very same quality of certitude that pertains to the objects of imitation will pertain as well to the imitation and hence Aristotle will not say, " what such and such a kind of man *must* say or do," but rather, " what such and such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do."[3] Therefore, in terms of the absolute necessity in the matter of poetry, because human action does not have the rigidity of behavior as say water, which at a certain altitude always boils at a certain temperature, the poet enjoys a certain flexibility in his matter and a certain lee-way in the use thereof.

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1. *Ibid.*, ch.13.
2. *In I Ethic.*, lect.3, nn.32-36 (Marietti).
3. *Poetics*, 1451 *b* 8-9.

Plot, which is the series or combination of incidents in a poem, has a special relation to the *probable* in this sense, if it is to possess the organic unity of a living creature, whose every stage of development is related to that which has gone before. Yet the relation of the incidents in the *Plot* follow one another in a fashion not determinable by any greater certitude than would characterize moral science ; though on the other hand, not as hap-hazard or purely contingent either, as is shown here :

> These (Peripety or Discovery) should each of them arise out of the structure of the Plot itself, so as to be the consequence, necessary or *probable*, of the antecedents. There is a real difference between a thing happening *propter hoc* and *post hoc*.[1]

In considering antecedent necessity thus far we have only been applying it to the remote matter of poetry, the objects of imitation. Analogously it pertains as well to the manner and means of imitation. In some cases it will have a determination as certain as that of inanimate matter, e. g., the sculptor's marble, and in others it will be as malleable as the poet's words which are capable of a new meaning with every metaphor. However, these are only the manner and means of imitation and in so far as the notion of truth bears a reference to objects by way of an *adequatio*, our concern should confine itself to the objects of imitation only. It might be added nonetheless, that with the given end of catharsis, the manner and means employed are choosen and used in a fashion adequate to such an end, and naturally, as the manner and means of imitation they determine the condition of the objects of imitation as imitated.

There is yet another aspect of the *probable* in poetry. In the *Prior Analytics* Aristotle says, " a *probability* is a *generally approved proposition* : what men know to happen or not to happen, to be or not to be, for the most part thus and thus, is a probability, e. g., ' the envious hate," ' the beloved show affection.' "[2] A " generally approved proposition " of this sort is not a necessarily true proposition but rather an opinion, or what one approves as true. Now the poet desires a " willing suspension of disbelief " so that the spectator will seriously follow the action ; otherwise, if he considers the poem so much nonsense he can easily disengage himself from it emotionally, and having done that, fail to respond cathartically. Therefore, poetry, in its own way, must be convincing, and with this in mind Aristotle would prefer to see a convincing or probable impossible than an unconvincing possible.[3]

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1. *Ibid.*, ch.10.
2. *Prior Anal.*, Bk. II, ch.27, 70 *a* 3-6.
3. *Poetics*, 1460 *a* 27-28.

Once poetry addresses itself to opinion in its argumentation a commitment to objective truth, as it were, falls by the wayside. In answer to an objection to poetic indifference to speculative truth, Aristotle does not seem to be particularly apologetic in saying :

> If the poet's description be criticized as not true to fact, one may urge perhaps that the object ought to be as described — an answer like that of Sophocles, who said that he drew men as they ought to be, and Euripides as they were. If the description, however, be neither true nor of the thing as it ought to be, *the answer must be then, that it is an accordance with opinion.* The tales of the Gods, for instance, may be as wrong as Xenophanes thinks, neither true nor the better thing to say ; *but they are certainly in accordance with opinion.*[1]

Opinion, of course, may conform to the truth as where we opine that what has happened in history is surely possible because it actually did happen. Aristotle remarks that the poet may well use historical events in his work because the task of convincing has already been accomplished. Yet he observes further, that the poet may, and ought to, take leave of historical truth where it shall enhance his poem.

In the name of the poetic commitment, Aristotle will go on to say :

> It is to be remembered, too, that there is not the same kind of correctness in poetry as in politics, or indeed any other art. There is, however, within the limits of poetry itself the possibility of two kinds of error, the one directly, the other only accidentally connected with the art. If the poet meant to describe the thing correctly, and failed through lack of expression, his art itself is at fault. But if it was through his having meant to describe the thing in some incorrect way (e. g., to make the horse in movement have both right legs thrown forward) that the technical error (one in a matter of, say, medicine or some other special science), or impossibilities of whatever kind they may be, have got into his description, his error in that case is not in the essentials of the poetic art.[2]

Along these lines Aristotle praises Homer for showing us the best way to frame lies, the paralogism, and for his ability to render a *Plot* fraught with absurdities and impossibilities acceptable, whereas an inferior poet could not conceal and veil such absurdities and his treatment would be intolerable.[3] Impossibilities as such clearly are not desirable, but they may be in certain cases :

> Any impossibilities there may be in his descriptions of things are faults. But from another point of view they are justifiable, if they serve the end of

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1. *Ibid.*, 1460 *b* 35-1461 *a* 1.
2. *Ibid.*, 1460 *a* 13-23.
3. *Ibid.*, ch.24.

poetry itself — if they make the effect of either that portion of the work or some other portion more astounding.[1]

The fact that the poetic argument appeals to opinion and that opinion as such is neither necessarily true nor false indicates that the sort of truth characterizing the poetic argument is far removed from the intelligence as such. This fact is even made clearer when we see that the paralogism which is logically false is poetically true, for it may very well be the ideal way of achieving a situation or a *Plot* that will succeed best in producing the poetic effect. The distance of poetic truth from speculative truth or that truth to which the intelligence naturally inclines, is clearest when we see that within the context of poetry one might find a " probable or likely impossible." To the extent that it is " likely " or convincing it will be good poetry, and to the extent that it is " impossible " it will make the worst science. To aggravate the situation even more, the presence of an " impossibility," such as the Pursuit of Hector,[2] may be the very cause of a heightened poetic effect.

The reason for poetry's indifference to the demands of reason or intelligence as such is that it speaks not to the intellect properly but to the emotions, and only to reason in as much as it must be convinced sufficiently so as to enlighten the passions. Poetic discourse anticipates or comes before the judgment of reason concerning the objects imitated as St. Albert reveals in this statement :

> Poetae enim non sunt Philosophi nisi secundum quid : finis enim poetae est persuadere vel dissuadere aliquid ex iis *quae praeveniunt judicium rationis*, inducendo terrorem vel etiam abominationem aliquorum, ex aliquibus fabulosis.[3]

The word Truth is generally understood to mean a certain *adequatio* or conformity between the knowing intellect and the thing known.[4] It is the end and the good of the speculative intellect to attain such a conformity with the real. Hence, when one speaks of speculative truth the understanding is in terms of such an adequation or conformity, and in the measure that the conformity is exact so would one judge its excellence. The true course of speculative reasoning expects to arrive at this kind of truth.

But it is otherwise with the practical intellect, and art is a virtue of the practical intellect. Scientific knowledge is about things that are universal and necessary, but practical reason concerns variables and its " good state is truth in agreement (or conformity) with right

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1. *Ibid.*, 1460 *b* 23-27.
2. *Ibid.*, 1460 *b* 27.
3. *In Epistolas B. Dionysii Areopagitae*, Epist. VII, s.2.
4. St. Thomas, *Ia*, q.16, a.1.

desire." Truth and falsity belong to contemplation, but the measure of art's (or poetry's excellence) is a certain adequation that it has to the end or good desired. If the art attains the end it is good, and, in an analogous sense, it is true, (for its means conform to its end). Thus, one speaks of *practical truth.* It is *practical truth* to represent a hind recognizably whether it be with or without horns (since the desired end is a recognizable representation), but it is not *speculative truth* unless the natural horns are there. The same may be said of the Tragedy, or poetry in any form. If its representations achieve the cathartic purpose it has practical truth whether its imitations are of things as they are, or as they ought to be, or in accordance merely with opinion ; and in any event, whether they conform to things as they really are, or ought to be, these must still be in accordance with opinion as a lowest common denominator, for an " unconvincing possibility " has no practical truth, though it may have a certain speculative truth. In the case of a *convincing* possibility or reality, the word to be underlined poetically is " convincing " as a *per se* quality ; and the word " reality " comes with it only as a *per accidens* companion.

Regarding the species of poetry's proper truth and its distance from and frequent opposition to the real let us listen to Master Shakespeare describe his craft :

Hip. 'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.
The. More strange than true ; I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys. Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold ;
That is, the madman, The lover, all as frantic, sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolloing,
Doth glance from heaven to earth,
From earth to heaven ;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poets pen turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothingness a local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night imagining some fear
How easy is a bush supposed a bear ! [1]

The curious words that make this statement apropos of poetry's practical truth are that the poetic imagination " bodies forth " its

1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Act.V, Scene I.

poetic forms from " airy nothingness " and by its " tricks " gives them " a local habitation and a name." And its " tricks " include such manipulatings as wherein fear is induced by a " bush supposed a bear." Speculatively this is " more strange than true," but, practically, the " night " and the " bush " are as true as the " bear," for they equally influence fear.

But, many a poet of genius and wisdom less than Shakespeare's has conceived his task to be that of making the " bush " a " bear," that is, pressing his poetic mode towards the speculative as much as it will allow. Today the objective is often psychological truth instead of Plutarch's moral philosophy, but the motive is the same in kind. In a recent review of a movie adaptation of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, a famous horror story, the critic had this to say :

> The film is seriously flawed by a fundamental misconception that arises from a fundamental disagreement among students of the novel. Some say the ghosts are irreally real ; others say they are hysterical fantasies developed by the governess, who has repressed a passion for her employer. Both explanations are probably true, and so are several others. James was almost certainly writing on several levels of meaning at once ; moreover, he was shrewd enough to see that *the tale gained fresh horror from every possible explanation.* But the men who wrote this picture, Truman Capote and Playwright Archibald, unhappily press hard, much harder than James did, for the psychiatric interpretation. *They obviously failed to perceive that in suggesting a normal, everyday basis for ghastly phenomena, they must inevitably relieve the spectator of his nameless horror of what happens.* But isn't horror, when all's said and done, the one important experience this tale is intended to communicate ? [1]

The movie adapters set out to judge the action or objects of imitation and to arrive at a rational explanation of the cause of such terrifying events, but, in truth, *finis poetae est persuadere vel dissuadere aliquid ex iis quae praeveniunt judicium rationis, inducendo terrorem,*" as St. Albert has told us already.

The critic here speaks of several explanations being all true regarding the causes of certain events in the tale, and yet these explanations contradict one another. If he were talking about speculative truth his position would be untenable, for truth is one in this sense. Clearly, his meaning must be practical, for several differing imaginary and subjective causes that serve to work a desired effect are, as measured by the attainment of that effect, true. With each new plausible explanation the effect was to give the tale " fresh horror," and the tale is by intention a horror story.

The poetic mode, the metaphor and the like, is not characteristic of poetry because it is a means of reaching a popular audience, as

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1. *Time Magazine*, January 5, 1962 (Cinema section).

Plutarch may have thought, but its essential *raison d'être* is that it is the best means of achieving poetry's proper pleasure. By the same token, the speculative mode is best suited for the attainment of science ; and because the ends are so distant from one another the poetic and speculative modes are accordingly distant. Certainly, a substitution of one for the other would thwart the ends of both poetry and science. Science must use words properly to arrive at its definitions, whereas poetry is enhanced with metaphorical speech, which uses words improperly, attaching to them new senses. Science addresses the intellect and the rational, whereas poetry behooves itself to appeal to opinion, which may be quite irrational. Our critic mentioned above gives us a case in which a somewhat speculative mode supersedes the poetic mode in poetry pointing out that a rational explanation of the causes of " ghastly phenomena," reducing it to a " normal, everyday basis " (a scientific explanation dispelling all mystery), " inevitably relieves the spectator of his nameless horror of what happens." Then he indicates the folly of such a substitution saying that, " when all is said and done, isn't horror the one important experience this tale is intended to communicate."

The rational judgment or the rational explanation of the objects of imitation might have another effect if substituted for the poetic mode, equally devastating to poetry. The intelligible *in se* is much beyond the common awareness of men, yet scientific reason pursues the intelligible *in se*. If the argument of reason were imposed in the poetic context in an essential way it would not generally be understood or would appear improbable, since it is not according to the common opinion of the laity, and in either event, appearing unconvincing, the poem would lose its hold on the spectator. Plutarch had something like this in mind when he spoke of the bright sunshine of philosophy dazzling and blinding the youth who attemps to step into its presence directly. Yet, even if the rational argument were understood and accepted by the spectator, say, a scientist or philosopher, its abstract and universal character would not have the same moving effect as a concrete and sensible action.

In a fashion not totally unlike that applied by those seeking to reduce poetry to psychiatry, Plutarch would insinuate the speculative mode of moral philosophy into the poetic content. Though harmless enough at first blush, the end product of using poetry as the illustrative aspect of moral philosophy is to incorporate it into moral philosophy and to determine its own mode finally by the speculative mode of science. Then, all the evils that accrue from a substitution of the scientific mode for the poetic mode will follow, and will mean the end of poetry as poetry.

With Plutarch we have seen how he fixes his system of amendments upon those elements Thought, Character and Action (in so far as it relates to the objects of imitation), and it is these elements that he

" prunes and pinches back " so that they may be helpful in the education of character. Now these elements have the relation of matter to the formal, essential, and unifying principle which is *Plot*. As parts or material elements they exist for the sake of the *Plot*, as the parts exist for the whole. Yet in his resolution to these several elements, Plutarch treats his plot, or, if you will, his " clever interweaving of fabulous narrative," as an occasion for their presentation, from which analysis one can conclude that he is as much as saying that the whole exists for the parts ; and such a conclusion cannot be consonant with the idea of a poem imitating the organic unity of a living creature.

In his treatise *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*, Plutarch does a double disservice. First, he directs youth to seek the impossible in poetry, that is to seek an essential conformity with speculative truth. This goes against the nature and natural tendential in poetry, and not only does it deprive the youth of gaining that which is properly valuable in poetry, but it condemns him to a task in which he, like Sisyphus, must always be frustrated in completing. The natural end of poetry and the natural, keenly imaginative disposition of the poet shall substantially be at odds with the youth's prescribed enterprise, for as Plutarch himself lamentably attests, " we know of sacrifices where there is no flute playing or dancing, but we know of no poetry without fable and falsehood."

The second disservice is to poetry itself. In a word, he *destroys* poetry as such : he ignores its vital *formal* force and empties it of its emotional purpose ; he breaks down its unity, proportion, integrity and clarity, in short, its beauty, through his random system of material amendments ; and, because of these hap-hazardly taken corrections and modifications made for the sake of the matter and not for the sake of the poem, he will have poetry imitate chance in its becoming, rather than the natural organic unity of a living creature. I use the word " becoming " regarding poetry to include whatever other tampering it undergoes before the spectator experiences it ; and if substantial material changes amount to an impediment of its cathartic purpose, the poem then becomes something of a monster.

Briefly, Plutarch would that the natural materials used by art should essentially be using art. There is no better answer than to respond :

> Dicendum quod artificialia non reducuntur in naturalia ita quod natura sit eorum primum et principale principium, sed inquantum ars utitur naturalibus organis ad complementum artificii.[1]

The purpose of this thesis is not only to compare and contrast the thinking of Plutarch and Aristotle on poetry, but also to probe the

1. St. Thomas, *In III Sent.*, dist.37, a.3, ad 2 (Parisiis).

purpose of poetry and some of the intrinsic qualities of the well-wrought poem, and to point up the essential disengagement of poetry from the order of speculative truth. Quite naturally, the ever-present question of art and morality is suggested, but it is not within the modest confines of my effort to treat it.

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