The Tragic and Education by Virtue of Cathartic Action

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Snapshot 1: Sichuan, China, 1974 [(1)]

A thirteen-year-old girl was besieged on the school playgrounds in the midst of the morning recess, by a huge flock, girls and boys, teachers and passers-by. The late comers were jumping up and bouncing around to see who was encircled. Someone from the inner circle shouted out: "Small Trousers Legs! Cut them open!" Just in a sudden instant, the voice was chorused by derisive sneers as if there was no stop note in the rhythm and melody: "Cut open small trousers legs!" The shouts engulfed the entirety of Neijiang No. 2 Middle School, echoing from building to building, classroom to classroom. The alleged small-trousers-legged girl audaciously broke through the crowd, half running to her classroom; the first floor of the Teaching Building. The curious crowd followed her closely. She couldn't lift up her head, and did not dare to look at the packed room or the head-filled classroom windows. She finally broke down, crying, and sinking her tearful eyes and bare face into her forearms so that she could seem to cover her legs and body as if they were, too, nude. She was exposed in the yet-so-besieged openness that it was as if not a drop of water could trickle through.

The following day, she didn't go to school. But the day after, she went back, as usual, as if nothing had happened two days ago, the truth of which was, and is still, unknown to her parents.

Snapshot 2: A Soldier in the battle trench (from Wilfred Owen's poem, "Exposure," 2008):

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...
Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.
…
Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deathly than the air that shudders black with snow,
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew;
We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces -
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses,
Is it that we are dying?

1. The author's own autobiographical account of her early life during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

When forced to confront such tragic or traumatic scenes as if they were here and now, we are, instinctively, taken aback by the impact of our activated emotions—such as, to be extreme, the fear, the pain, the suffering, the pity, and other unspeakably mixed sensations. This is all that patently overwhelmed the young girl in the milieu of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and Wilfred Owen, a poet and soldier in the battlefield of the World War I. For the moment, we may feel our soul stunned by the tragic experience, and, at one and the same time, we may also feel our freedom of action impeded as if it were felt by the young Chinese girl and the English poet-soldier. When caught both physically and emotionally, as if paralyzed from any action, we vicariously experience, like the poet-soldier in the death-threatening trench, his "snow-dazed" stare, the "cringe in the holes," and we fall "back on forgotten dreams." Or we choose no other but we "broke down, crying," like the young Chinese girl, and, instinctively hide our yet-as-if, nude legs and bodies from the "besieged exposure" of a terrifying alienation.

The tearful lament of the girl and the drowsing stupor of sun-doziness that the poet-soldier stumbled in, upon which they both were to fall back in their unsurpassed fear and pity caused by the tragic or traumatic moments, are a momentary breaking-through for their deprived freedom: freedom from shame, fear, or death. Such, seemingly, is the unintentional reaction; to wit, the one when human beings are facing up to the extremity of human conditions — ones such as conscious danger or the exhaustion of their biological existence, and the ultimate condition — death. It is, however, imperative to note that it is not just an instinct of survival that causes one to react to such abject conditions encompassed by shame, terror, or death—conditions described in the aforementioned scenes. But what then undergirds individuals in the face of the tragic and the ultimate end — death?

Calling for the Rationale of the "Tragic Necessity"

To proceed with my present thesis of the tragic and catharsis in their relation to education, I need first of all to define tragedy and catharsis. The origin of the word tragedy is Greek *tragoidia*, "meaning song for the goat." However, in understanding tragedy and the sense of the tragic, I must retrace Aristotle, who seems the first to define properly what tragedy is, as well as what it does. He offers, in the *Poetics*, his famous definition of tragedy:

> A tragedy, then 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 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 emotions.
>
> (*Aristotle*, 1965, p. 348)

In this view, descriptive rather than prescriptive, the experience of tragedy was limited to dramas (e.g., the tragedy of King Oedipus). And the proper function, (or *ergon*, the Greek word literarily meaning "the work") of tragic drama is to arouse "pity and fear" and simultaneously to effect the catharsis or purgation of these emotions.

Plays or dramas are written about the "tragic" people, in which "pity and fear" are inspired by the misfortune of personages superior to ourselves, such great kings as Agamemnon or Oedipus, or princely figures such as Orestes. In understanding the cause of tragedy, we read Aristotle: "Their downfall is brought about not by vice but by some great error or family of character" (Woodfin & Groves, 2002, p. 159). If this is exclusively true, Othello's jealousy and Macbeth's ambition — not "great errors" or "family of character" yet rather personal vices, errors, or flaws, shall we say —clearly show that Shakespearean tragedy deviates from

Aristotelian norms. Nor do modern playwrights like Arthur Miller in his modern tragedy, *Death of a Salesman* (1974); the tragedy of the protagonist Willie Loman is simply due to his innocent belief in the American Dream. Still yet, nor does the notion of the tragic I am intending to unravel here fall into the category of Aristotle's tragic hero and the plot of action.

Detailed discussion of tragedy and the connection between catharsis, pity and fear begins with Aristotle's classic analysis in the *Poetics*; our discussion, however, should not, and cannot, end with it. As regards tragedy, Aristotle based his theory on induction from the only examples available to him: the tragedies of Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. In the subsequent two thousand years or more, many new and artistically effective types of serious plots ending in a catastrophe have been developed — types that Aristotle had no way of foreseeing. Aristotle defines tragedy as such —"the imitation of an action… as having magnitude, complete in itself," in the medium of poetic language, and in the manner of dramatic rather than narrative presentation, incorporating "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions." How we are to interpret Aristotle's catharsis has given rise to much dispute (which I do not intend here to discuss in any detail). In its connection to tragedy, catharsis has shown different shades of analysis since Aristotle: interpretations are attempted in diverse spheres of the religious, the medical, the therapeutic, the moral/ethical, the psychological/psychiatric, and the aesthetic.

The word "catharsis," derived from Greek word *Katharein* (meaning to "cleanse"), has allowed a number of more or less probable interpretations. It is variously translated as "purification"/ "cleansing" or, only, "purgation," (Lucas, 1928) or sometimes as both. In relating catharsis to the tragic, "pity and fear," Aristotle, remembering his medical training, asserted that "tragedy is a form of homeopathic treatment — curing emotion by means of an

emotion like in kind but not identical" (Woodfin & Groves, 2006, p. 157). Catharsis is generally thought to refer to the audience and their perspective: Aristotle set out to account for the undeniable fact that many tragic representations of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed, but relieved, or even exalted. But some theorists have argued that it refers to the purgation of the tragic hero's guilt. According to Gerald Else's (1967) interpretation, Aristotle's catharsis applies not to an effect on the audience, but to an element within the play itself. Catharsis signifies, as Else claims, the purgation of the guilt attached to the hero's tragic act, through the demonstration in the course of the drama that the hero performed this act without knowledge of its nature. As such, it would seem undeniable to understand catharsis as referred to the sensation or literary effect, in that catharsis represents and embodies a process, a transformative process in the hero that would aesthetically transcend and ideally overcome an audience during and upon finishing watching a tragedy.

In order, to focus my thesis on human tragic experience and how it is relevant to education, let me pause here and think about this question: How does tragedy — however defined by Aristotle, or created by Shakespeare or Miller — have anything to do with ordinary people in their ordinary lives? In other words, how can ordinary people translate the experience of the tragedy in the play and cathartic action thereof into their own lives and experiences? And more specifically, how is the tragic necessarily called for in their education? I shall thus explore the notion of catharsis in discussing the function of such emotionally transformative purgation in persons' tragic experiences in relation to a primal willingness to suffer and to sublimate their suffering. Thus, I shall go beyond the sense of catharsis described in Aristotle's *Poetics*, but come to terms to perpetuate sublimation through the tragic experience.

That I bring tragic experience and catharsis into the terrain of education, or into an evocation of educational relevance, is not because I intend to magnify such experience and hold this educational evocation under the spotlight for the sake of this magnification. Rather, I call the tragic necessary because it serves as an aesthetic process of transformation —an aesthetic purgation. I seek to explore how one's tragic or traumatic experience impacts one's confrontation with, acceptance of, and reconciliation with the tragic situation.

This process, which I call "sublimation of self-overcoming," derived from humans' primal or ontological willingness to suffer, occurs through the emotional purification of the self, just as the members of the audience in watching a tragedy are themselves going through a release of repressed emotion or energy in encountering the aroused "fear and pity."

Nietzsche (2003), in *The Birth of Tragedy*, views Greek tragedy as if it had, to quote Hill, "an ethical significance that could give meaning to a life" (p. 6). For Nietzsche, tragedy needs not only "to make genuine culture possible, but to render human life meaningful and satisfying" (Hill, 2007, p. 17). As such, Nietzsche looks for a way to use tragedy, and art in general, to make life worth living. And this is what I seek in examining how individuals' tragic and traumatic experiences give meaning to their lives and make their lives worth living.

Before I further proceed, I shall say that it is not my intention here to discuss any political or ethical issues, such as those related to wars as in the case of the poet-soldier in the World War I, or the Chinese Cultural Revolution as in the case of the young girl. My intention is oriented toward the immanency of the individuals in their interaction with the conditions that confront their primal ontological force.

Accepting the Tragic and Suffering

We do not recognize that there is as much freedom and latitude in our acceptance of the tragic as that of joy and pleasure. For it is within humans' capability to find accepting pain and suffering no less spacious than in merely encountering and rejecting them. According to Michel de Montaigne, pain and grief should be confined, not cultivated, but at the same time recognized as necessary foils to pleasure and happiness. Much in the way, and even emphasizing more the profundity of the "foils," is the assertion made by Chinese ancient thinker Mengzi, one of the leading figures of Confucianism, who wrote, "天将降大任于斯也, 必苦其筋骨, 饿其体肤." We humans must accept suffering and pain as necessary in making experience of the greatest capacity available and possible for the most challenging human conditions. Further, to confront and accept pain and suffering is to cultivate the individual's capacity for creative transformation itself. Acceptance transforms and perpetuates sublimation of self-overcoming through the tragic experience, much in the same way as Aristotle's notion of catharsis of emotion accomplished it through the aroused "pity and fear" in experiencing the destruction of the tragic heroes in tragedy.

As I have stated earlier, it is not just an instinct of survival alone for humans to react to abject conditions encompassed by shame, terror, or death, as described in the aforementioned incidents of the young Chinese girl and the English poet-soldier respectively in their tragic and traumatic situations. Nor is it, as in tragic dramas of ancient Greeks, the hero's courageous deed: "a willingness to act and speak"; which, as Hannah Arendt (1998) emphasizes, is what "we now feel to be an indispensable quality of the hero" (p. 186). Rather, it is an action that is "necessarily and primarily related to human willingness to suffer the consequences" (p. 186).

It is this “willingness” humans immanently possess that compels them to face any extreme abjectness — suffering, pain, terror, humiliation, or even death. I have called this willingness inherent in humans the primal or ontological human force. For not only am I referring to heroic courage that takes various forms of demonstration and reification in tragic dramas as well as in other art works but I am also applauding the ordinary people in ordinary lives for their “non-glorified” deed or accomplishment, such as depicted with regard to the poet-solider and his comrades in the bullet-streaked trench:

> Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
> Less deathly than the air that shudders black with snow,
> With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew;
>
> (Owen, in *Exposure*)

In their willingness to suffer the consequences, they watched the flying bullets and flowing flakes that were “wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance.” They waited; however, said the poet-soldier, “But nothing happens.”

But nothing happens! What was to happen? What was expected to happen that did not happen? Willingly, they were facing and expecting any, even ultimate, consequences.

> Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
> Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses,
> Is it that we are dying? …
>
> （Owen, in *Exposure*）

Facing the direst situation of death, the poet-soldier asked “Is it that we are dying?” — a heroic deed, if I may suggest, is put so well, like the exclamation of the tragic hero par excellence, Hamlet, who questions in his famous monologue “To be or not be!” Or less heroically, the

young Chinese girl who skipped one-day from school after her humiliating exposure and alienation on school playgrounds, but more courageously, “went back, as usual, as if nothing had happened.”

The willingness or their ontological force to think, speak, or act in a certain way does not have to be portrayed as the heroic as in ancient Greek tragedies. It is a force that compels humans to respond to a dire encounter. Here I would like to quote Arendt (1998), who writes:

> The extent of this original courage, without which action and speech and therefore, according to the Greeks, freedom, would not be possible at all, is not less great and may even be greater if the “hero” to be a coward. (pp. 186-187)

Certainly, the extent of human willingness to suffer, for the poet, as for the young girl, is no less great, and “may even be greater” (to refer to Arendt’s words), whether or not they were seen as heroes or just ordinary people. It is this ordinariness of people that I aim to focus on in revealing what Arendt refers to as human “willingness” or “original courage” in the face of the tragic. Nonetheless, we humans skip, or try to avoid, consciously or unconsciously, any such tragic or traumatic experiences in life. That is for sure!

However, for Nietzsche, accepting tragedy is symptomatic of human strength, whereas denying it symptomatic of weakness. (I shall not estimate whether this is Nietzsche’s prejudice: a praise of strength and a disdain for weakness.) Here I shall just follow Nietzsche in his view that the tragic effect in tragedy is pleasurable “when tragedy portrays the destruction of characters with whom we identify” (Hill, 2007, p. 20). The crux of Nietzsche’s answer is, as Hill (2007) writes:

> [T]hat something in tragedy inspires the audience to adopt the perspective of the world will itself, for whom every agony is also ecstatic pleasure. If we can come to perceive in our own sufferings not individual failure but the ecstasy of the world will, we will experience an energizing rapture. (p. 20)
>
> …

Here I bring back Wilfred Owen's poem "Exposure" as an example. The poet described the battlefront: he was in the trench, exposed to all the bullets, his familiar background, or his cultural landscape, was taken away—exposed here and now in the bare landscape without cultural shields, as if stripped of everything; what was left was only the core of the species — the bare humanity, as Arendt frames it. Left was the bare being of humanity. What then was there for him, as well as for the thirteen-year-old Chinese girl, to hold onto? Under what conditions could a person only a specified as "species" — but still the bearer of humans — find something to hang on?

This requires us to fully recognize the possibilities of the human capacity to encounter pain and suffering and demonstrate our realizable aspirations. This human ontological possibility coincides with the Aristotelian idea of moving from potential to actual existence. Thus, the ontological vocation of humans is to actualize their potential aspirations. And this is all (!) that is rooted in their ontological potency of a willingness to bear the consequences of suffering. To humans, even if the tragic or suffering were imminent or unavoidable — such as death — recognition of their bare humanity and its primal forces would still be necessary. It is this sensitivity of their willingness to endure suffering and the integration of primal consciousness that bring humans sustainability in the face of death.

Reaching the State of "Discovery"- A Cathartic Moment

In tragedy, catastrophe, or the outcome decided by the death of the hero, where the action or intrigue ends in failure for the protagonist, the mystery is solved or the misunderstanding cleared away. The common term for this precipitating final scene is the dénouement (French for "unknotting") which involves in many plots a reversal, or else we have Aristotle's term, *peripety*, alluding to the hero's fortunes, failure, or destruction. The reversal frequently depends on a discovery (for Aristotle, *anagnorisis*). This is the moment of recognition by the protagonist of something hitherto unknown to him: e.g., the fact of Iago's lying treachery dawns upon Othello. The notion of discovery I am herein referring to is a recognition upon which a self-overcoming is reached, thus reaching a state of wonder or discovery: a cathartic moment that touches on the sublime.

In an endeavor to discuss this state of discovery or the moment of catharsis, I shall now turn to Hegel in referring to his Dialectic Method (in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 1964). The reason is that Hegel was, as Abdulla (1985) claims, "the first thinker to make catharsis a universal phenomenon, not one which is merely aesthetic" (p. 4). To put it briefly, Hegel's dialectic method begins with a *thesis* that moves to its opposite, the *antithesis*, by principle of negativity. It is *via negativa* that a new state, called *synthesis* (Mueller, 1958; Abdulla, 1985), (though Hegel himself never named as such), is arrived at through the clash of the two opposite forces. This new state of synthesis, while sharing traits of both thesis and antithesis, produces a discovery of the two opposite forces, or "a reconciliation of the two," in Abdulla's expression. In the Hegelian view, all things are related and nothing stands in isolation. In other words, everything, in one way or another influences and is being influenced by the forces around it.

This Hegelian dialectical procedure reveals conflict ideas or beliefs not as disjunctions but as conjoined, hence an idea of truth will emerge in radical opposition to the prevailing one. Such is the *synthesis*, a category of *becoming*, thus in essence, is catharsis. Echoing Abdulla's assertion that Hegel's Dialectic Method provides us with "a fruitful method of understanding catharsis" (p. 4), I hold that this method guides us to understand catharsis in a view extending from a purely literary phenomenon through to experiencing the artistic or aesthetic aspects of catharsis that function ultimately in affinity with human history, with ordinary life and reality.

In parallel with Hegelian synthesis as a cathartic moment out of the two opposite forces, Nietzsche's notion of catharsis stems from the dialectic of the *Dionysian* and *Apollonian* as an explanation of the tragic effect, thus reversing Aristotle's catharsis theory. Nietzsche names these two important terms (in his *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, 2003) after the two Greek gods, Dionysus and Apollo. Dionysus was the god of wild flute music, of wine and intoxication, of orgies and festivals, representing the wild, disordered, and unrestrained spirit of man, and Apollo —the god of restraint, harmony, and balance, representing in man the spirit of order as it appears in "classical" Greek sculpture and architecture. For Nietzsche, tragedy is the product of a tension between these two human impulses: it comes about as a synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus, the impulses or forces existing in human mind. But it is only after the *recognition* of the Dionysian that the Apollonian can triumph. This "recognition," in a Hegelian *via negativa*, demonstrates that eventually one must give way to the other, offering it the recognition it seeks (Hill, 2007, p. 184).

This recognition, synthesis, discovery, or reconciliation is a cathartic process wherein during a contemplation of the tragic representation — identifying with the tragic hero as only an individual human being but an individualized Apollonian form, or a force of *antithesis* (e.g.,

fear, evil, repulsion) — each audience or individual in life comes to feel that despite his or her own suffering and failure, the hero too is an appearance of Dionysus (just as Nietzsche regarded himself), or a force of *thesis* (e.g., pity, good, attraction). In this cathartic moment, reasoning or rationality is possible after we exercise the power to harness irrationality, chaos, wildness. That is: both Hegel and Nietzsche, in their treatment of catharsis, emphasize the dialectic of interrelatedness between the two opposite forces or impulses that externalize and yet internalize to create a state of revelation, discovery through negation, or self-overcoming.

It is through this dialectic interrelatedness that one can understand the reality embedded in the social context that is not given explicitly. Nor is that reality static; rather, it is shifting and negotiable in a transformative process. And this interrelatedness, whether temporal or spatial, is in fact the present moment that contains all that there is. It is a ground in between the past and future. The sense of interrelatedness, regardless of whether that sense was developed out of a Western or Eastern heritage, is rooted in these ancient cultures whose philosophies were grounded in relatedness. As such, the sense of individuality discovered or reconciled in the cathartic process through "pity and fear," good and evil, compassion and repulsion, is real only in the context of being associated with other members of society.

Catharsis is therefore an important transformative discovery, which is one of the processual parts of tragedy Aristotle discussed. The spectator went through tragic, dramatic experience and passed catharsis, realizing that catharsis was not the final state in itself but was rather a reaching to the state of synthesis, recognition, understanding, or discovery. This is the moment of wonder that we find beautiful — a glimpse of the moment of sublimation — and that affirms the beauty of life, despite the fear encompassing us. After he killed his wife, Desdemona, Othello felt that he was taken from everything, and realized that he erred. It was the speech he made after the

revelation of truth that manifested the moment in which the audience finds magnitude and beauty! Such a moment is invariably one reaching the state of "wonder" in literary form.

As audience, we view the acting of tragedy and take that same form, relating that transformative process to our own lives. By transformation we mean the new birth of self: that we are something here, and then a set of things moves us, and then we are different, out of it! That is model for us, and yet a transformation. This is related to what Nietzsche calls "self-overcoming." It is vitally important for any art — tragedy, in particular — to see the relationship between the actor on the stage and the audience. And whenever a discovery or reconciliation occurs, cathartic moments take place, here and there. In those instants we become self-conscious; that is, we see the limits of the tragic, and, simultaneously, what limits it, viewing the two tensions or forces that bind the situation, including those which bind us. In this way we have first and foremost been deprived of our subjectivity and have become an object in someone else's world. This process alternates between the Dionysian aspect of humans (representing impulses or forces that are the primitive and primordial) and the Apollonian aspect (representing rational and harmonious forces). In this process, a sort of response or reaction stems from the change of state — cathartic transformation. Herein lies probably some level of fear in all of us, of which we are seldom if ever conscious: that the other person has the power to destroy us, not physically, but in the sense of depriving us of the power that goes with being a self-willed centre of existence.

In further understanding a Nietzschean view that existence is a struggle and life is simply a will to power, I further emphasize that the will to power lies in self-overcoming. The idea of self is centralized somehow in the process of overcoming in the encounter with the world. So it is in a process of subject-realization that one becomes very conscious in confronting crises and pain,

ranging from cruel torture to daily boredom. When encountering crises, one is utterly awakened, as the poet-soldier confronting death in the battlefront, and as the young Chinese girl besieged by the personal and political crisis during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Terror and suffering taught them how to live.

Educating So That One May Endure Suffering and Pain

It is essential to reiterate that catharsis is transformation, primarily through art: a purgation of such emotions as "pity and fear," and, possibly, of extended connotations: pain, suffering, or terror of death. The cathartic moment is not something teachable. Rather, it is the *process* of catharsis—a synthesis or becoming—that is transformational, and thus educational (transformation in its own right is educational). The cathartic moment leaves "spectators" or ones who are involved in the cathartic context (art in general and tragedy in particular) changed, and "being changed" or transformed is an uplifted form of self-overcoming. It is a process of sublimation of self-overcoming, to refer to my earlier phrase. Hence, it brings about a spiritual renewal or satisfying release from the tension one experiences in the tragic setting. It is in this sublimation of self-overcoming that lies the educational implications.

I propose that what we can teach is to embrace conditions wherein cathartic experiences occur. The reason is that when situated in cathartic action, we allow ourselves to be elevated from going through the tragic moments (as in watching tragedy). It is these cathartic experiences that relieve us of our burden of terrible memories, at the same time releasing hidden creative forces and invoking compassion, goodness, sacrifice and other sublimated qualities through our self-overcoming — in our facing up to pain, suffering, or death. For this sublime quality elevates or exalts humans, especially in dignity and honor, thus rendering finer qualities of

purity or excellence. It is at this moment, when the two tensions—Hegelian “forces” or Nietzschean “impulses”—are communicated through a cathartic or sublime self-overcoming, that education takes place. In other words, education takes place in the transformative process by virtue of cathartic action and the sublimation of self-overcoming.

Let me just pause to go back to the tale of the young Chinese girl. In 1967, in the year after the start of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a shocking calamity befell her family; being only six year old, she became a target as member of a “blacklisted” family. Her “exposure” and “humiliation” on school playgrounds that day was yet one of the many subsequent traumatic incidents she underwent. However, at that moment — the tragic moment — what she experienced served for her as a self-consciousness of the abject situation and as a change of her position in the eyes of the members of society. She suddenly and necessarily came to activate an inner force to face up to such an ordeal. Her will to power and to live, once perhaps dormant deep in her original resources, now was actuated upon an urgent call in facing up to the now-confronted, yet unavoidable abjectness of life.

Such a deep-rooted self-consciousness (as described in Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Nietzsche) became salient in her self-movement, self-identity, and “self-overcoming.” She, as a young person, endured pain and suffering, through activating the fear, pain, and trauma of herself *via negativa*. This negativity is a form of self-overcoming, one that allowed her to endure and master the pain and suffering when confronted by shame and terror. What lies deeper within this self-overcoming and self-mastering is that the will to care, to give, to protect, and to sacrifice is perpetuated together with the will to live. That is why only the day after the open humiliation and alienation on the school playgrounds, “she went back, as usual, as if nothing had happened …” even without telling her parents what she had encountered. Having learned to

endure the suffering by herself, she did not, nor did she wish to, vex her parents with what she thought might bring pain and suffering to them. She simply accepted and reconciled herself with the confronted situation on her own and in willingness. She therefore converted her inferiority in the inevitable encounter into something of higher esteem or worth: not only to live but also to live in the beauty of caring about others.

She thus had obtained the transformative quality through cathartic action that allowed her to survive, to move, and to go from one moment to another: to continue to move on. Similar to one watching a tragedy, this is the real tragic experience of the young girl. These tragic and traumatic experiences of her life allowed her at the moment and continued to allow her to become conscious of her confronted, reconciled, and self-overcome identity she always had had, and to be able see the beauty of life. Necessarily and inevitably she went through her own sublimation of self-overcoming. This is a moment of educational transformation for her as for anyone who goes through such a process when cathartic action takes place.

It is my intention here simply to draw our attention to the educational relevance resting upon the cathartic moments, found either in Owen's poem, or in the anecdote of the Chinese girl, or simply in other similar situations. When we talk about tragic transformation in an educational context, we first realize that tragic and traumatic experience can take many forms. Awareness of the relationship, however, between tragedy and trauma in history defines the experience of modernity for individuals. The most dramatic forms are wars (e.g., the world wars and civil wars), revolution (e.g., French Revolution and Chinese Cultural Revolution), authoritarianism, oppression, such that in the domain of culture and multiculturalism in our modern and post-modern eras, political and economic changes (e.g., the current global economical crises) that fragment and decentre individuals from their lives thus define their traumatic experience.

In this sense, tragedy links the individual consciousness and the historical process. The tragic gives meaning and form to the confusions, perplexities, and pain of the traumatized individuals. Tragedy thus can be articulated as a human experience seen through art. What is perhaps not so well recognized is the potential for a more open and inclusive understanding that through the circumstances of history as trauma, teachers can also give shape and meaning to that experience in the forms of tragedy. Therein underlie the implications that tragedy has for conceptualizing learning and teaching. Education understood in this way ennobles the individual, in the same way that Euripides ennobled Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Taulis* or Shakespeare ennobled King Lear.

Education is never intended to teach people in order for them to endure pain. But we can still not escape the "ultimate concern" — death. Therefore, education has (or should have) an agenda of preparing the young to confront crises, pain and suffering. We humans need to have some resources to draw from in presencing our ontological forces that have been confronted and simultaneously activated by repression in any discursive way, by any form of the tragic, of trauma, or of crisis. Thus, education in a broader sense permeates every aspect of human life, exemplified by discussion of tragedy and catharsis.

This is what real education is for: to prepare the young, in a different light, to form their lives by actuating their ontological resources so as to adjust to what they will inevitably face in any situation and at any state of their lives. That way, they are able to accept any inevitability rather than to resist it or try to hide from it. For them, it is to accept the responsibility and to act accordingly. When we understand our own conditions and our use of them, we humans seek no other conditions. What we need to know and find lies in what is inside, and not at all outside, ourselves. To educate is to activate and empower such understanding and recognition.

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