

Let us now, continuing to think in terms of Nietzsche's historical speculation regarding theatrical history, suppose that by the time of Euripides, who was the villain in Nietzsche's account, charged with having destroyed tragedy through reason, the conventions of the theater were sufficiently internalized by the Athenian audiences that he could embark on a program of purgation, eliminating from his dramas anything whose counterpart was not to be found in life. "Nothing was beautiful which was not rational" Nietzsche supposes him to have believed, executing in his dramatic works a program of rationality Nietzsche associates with Socrates. Thus, if he does not quite eliminate the chorus, he renders it pretty vestigial, inasmuch as choruses would be mimetically unconvincing, none of us in actual life enacting our destinies in the presence of a nosy anonymous set of kibbitzers. Of course the chorus has a cognitive function in the tragedies: it was part of its function to know what the hero was thinking, for example, and through the chorus this information was transmitted to the audience, who then could better understand what was going on. This informative function was crucial, the question only being how to perform it through more "natural" avenues, and it would be this that is the role of the confidant—the lieutenant or the personal maid—to whom the hero and heroine can in a wholly credible way reveal their innermost fears and ambitions. For similar reasons, the heroes and heroines had to be cut down to size, made more like you and me, so that we could without special effort assimilate their conduct to the beliefs and practices through which we rationalize one another's behavior, and assign them motives we could similarly internalize and recognize as counterparted in our own lives. The old heroes were too cosmic, their motives too exalted, too remote from any that might enter into the practical syllogisms ordinary persons can internalize. So they were replaced with types we can understand: housewives, jealous husbands, difficult adolescents, and the like, and the *dramatis personae* of intelligible tragedies are accordingly banalized. This is what Nietzsche speaks of as Aesthetic Socratism. Of course, these ordinary persons are thrust by Euripides into the most unordinary situations, which almost test the limits of moral reason. But there is little doubt that a certain mysteriousness is sacrificed and, with this, something essential to art, in Nietzsche's view, is expunged in the interests of rationality—a mysteriousness he supposed in his own time to be reintroduced into art through the mythic content of Wagnerian opera; it is not art unless it defies rational explanation, and unless its meaning somehow escapes us.

So in the end Euripides achieved an artistic surface comprehensible in terms of the categories of ordinary life. Then indeed art is imitation

in the sense that it resembles what is possible, but though this may indeed be Socratism in a sense, it immediately encounters the problem posed by Socrates in Book Ten of the *Republic*: what is the point of having in art something which so resembles life that no difference between art and life can be marked in terms of internal content? What is the need or good of a duplication of what we already have? Who requires a world just like this world, Nelson Goodman asks centuries later, adding in his characteristically snappy way that "one of the damned things is enough." A map, it may be said, is a kind of duplicate by means of which we can find our way about a certain reality but, as Lewis Carroll made plain, a map cannot be a duplicate of the country, or to the degree that we are lost in the one we are lost in the other. Moreover, the idea here is that life itself is supposed to be something like a map for art, since it is by reference to life that we find our way through what is set up as an imitation of life. So the cognitive defense the analogy to maps might offer is gone forfeit in the case of such art. And immediately a counterprogram suggests itself: if art is to have any function at all, it must be exercised through what it does *not* have in common with life, and this function can hardly be discharged by the Euripidean program. Only to the degree that it is discontinuous is it art at all, this countertheory holds. So under pressure of Socrates' question, mimetic art fails when it succeeds, when it gets to be like life. But then, to the degree that it is to succeed in whatever function it is to discharge, it cannot be through mimesis. This we may speak of as the Euripidean dilemma. *This is a 4-gram*

We are familiar enough with attempts to slip the dilemma, which suppose art to consist in the discrepancies between reality and its imitative replications. Euripides, it is argued, went in exactly the wrong direction and paid the price by producing something otiose and parasitic, like an echo or a shadow. Let us instead make objects which are insistently art by virtue of the fact that, lacking counterparts in reality, no one can make the sort of mistake that is possible so long as imitation prevails as an artistic program. The pleasure we take in imitations is, as noted, dependent upon the knowledge that it is an imitation and not the real thing. We take a (minor) pleasure in the crowcalls made by a man imitating crows which we do not ordinarily take in crowcalls themselves, not even when one crow repeats the same calls made by another. It is essential that the man not be inept: he must make crowcalls close enough to the original that they can be mistaken for such by, say, an overhearing crow, for otherwise his ineptitude blocks by distorting the (minor) artistic signals intended for our delectation. And it is essential that we know enough about crowcalls to know what these are

imitations *of*; otherwise, as Aristotle suggests, the pleasure is due not to the imitation but to something else—in this instance perhaps to sheer raucousness—in which case the pleasure in question could be indifferently had whether the noises were made by crows or by men imitating them or even by men so stricken in the pharynx that their only vocal utterances are tragically indiscernible from what crows make in the common course of nature.

So there are varieties of mistakes possible in the case of imitation which are not possible if the object in question is a product of the counter-Euripidean program just sketched. We may suppose, if it is successful, that there is nothing in reality to mistake the artwork for, or for which the artwork itself can be mistaken; and it may *be* this order of artwork that Plato himself would have endorsed, being rather more a mystic in any case than his hero. Thus the disfigurements banished in the name of Aesthetic Socratism are one by one reintroduced, this time by an artistic decision: one *cultivates* a self-conscious woodenness, a deliberate archaism, an operatic falseness and falsetto so marked and underscored that it cannot be taken as our intention to subject our audience to the danger of illusion (unless they should happen to live in worlds so different from our own that in being discontinuous with our own we have created something continuous with theirs). But to an audience from the artist's own world it must be clear that the artist is not a failed imitator, like the inept crow simulator, and that his aims lie elsewhere. Think for a moment of an inept magician, who inadvertently reveals the false bottom in his boxes and the cards up his sleeve, and who fails in consequence to bring off the benevolent deceits which are what magic shows are made for. But contrast this with a man who deliberately shows what is up his sleeve and makes plain the phoniness of his boxes. Then he raises his art to a new level, which now may be puzzling because it is discrepant with the banal conventions of prestidigitation: wherever (if anywhere) illusion is to be located here, it will not be at the customary place between hand and eye. And so it is with this counter-Euripidean art, of which, if Nietzsche is right, Wagner is an example, with an already initial advantage in the fact that he used opera, the least probable of the arts save for such communities as those in which members communicate normally by singing and perhaps resort to talking for entertainment, so that our plays, even such ruthlessly realistic ones as Euripides', would be as abstract to them as operas are to us. In any case, the essence of art, on this new theory, lies in precisely what cannot be understood through simple extensions of the same principles that serve us in daily life. Inevitably, then, art is going to be mysterious: and, as before, it is in the expurgation of mystery in the name of

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