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KNOCK, OR THE TRIUMPH OF RHETORIC

Synopsis

This paper is divided into four parts.

Part I is a rhetorical anecdote.

Part II is theory:

1) I consider possible definitions of rhetoric and derive the existential propositions "rhetoric is the theory and practice of verbal strategies for achieving ends in the extra-rhetorical world.

2) I stipulate the axiological proposition "rhetoric = (+), sophistic = (-)".

3) I consider the three modes of persuasion in terms of their relationship to the object of analysis and specify as follows: for ethos, auctoritas will be foregrounded; for Pathos, Phobos and the collection of objects in Book I, chapters 5 and 7 of the Rhetoric deemed happiness or "good things" will be foregrounded; logos, as traditional, will consist of enthymemes and inartificial proofs.

Part III is the analysis of a particular case. Act I, Act II, scene 6 and Act III, scene 6 will be foregrounded. I discuss plot as a series of transformations (major and minor reversals) due to the powers of rhetoric. I consider the propositio of the play as a sententia/paradox with paradox to be understood in the original etymological sense. I examine the figures of irony, metaphor and metonymy and their role in establishing intelligibility.

Part IV, an extension of the analysis, is placed under the aegis of reader-response criticism. I establish a continuum of negotiable possibilities, their upper and lower bounds, and present an example of negotiation.

Dispositio

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I Paradiegesis

I have been teaching courses in twentieth-century French literature for quite some time now and these tend to list heavily toward Existentialist and quasi-Existentialist fictional and dramatic worlds: Sartre's Les Mouches, Camus's La Peste, Malraux's La Condition humaine etc. Two or three years ago, as the Winter semester was nearing its end, a student came to me and said: "why must it all be so grim? Doesn't modern French literature have any happy texts?"

I thought about this for a while and, although not as yet a born-again rhetorician, I was nevertheless perfectly aware that I needed to please my audience - we live, after all, in parlous academic times -, so I decided to try and find at least one happy text for the year ahead.

I scouted around and eventually exhumed from the depths of my school-girl recollections, Jules Romains's 1923 play, Knock ou le triomphe de la médecine. I hadn't thought about Knock in donkey's years; it was one of those texts they tended to use in language acquisition courses along with St-Exupéry's Le Petit Prince, the short stories of Marcel Aymé, the novels of Simenon. Still, with the book-store breathing down my neck, I didn't have much time to play with so I shoved Knock onto my order form and, like Scarlett O'Hara, told myself I'd think about it tomorrow -- or rather in September and as we all know in April, September never comes.

In the fullness of time, September came and with it the problem of inventio. A happy, uncomplicated text and there was nothing in my academic background to equip me for dealing with happy, uncomplicated texts. What on earth was I going to say?

What I found to say is the subject of this paper.

II. The "Wishful Ought" vs the "Factual Is" or, One Man's Rhetor is Another Man's Sophist

The problem of ends and means which informs moral philosophy is not entirely without representation in the history of rhetoric. The following propositions are abstracted from historical sources but have been idealized for purposes of demonstration.

(1) All Rhetoric is Good (simple affirmative)[1].

This position is abstracted from Cato's vir bonus dicendi peritus ('a good (sic) man, skilled in speaking'): "The classical champions of rhetoric were unshaken in their adherence to this definition, in their conviction that goodness is a prerequisite of the true orator" (quoted and glossed Dixon 4).

(2) No Rhetoric is Good (simple negative).

This position is abstracted from that ascribed to Socrates in the Gorgias (459); rhetoric is not an "art" but a "knack": "The orator need have no knowledge of the truth about things; it is enough for him to have discovered a knack of convincing the ignorant that he knows more than the experts."

(3) Rhetoric is both Good and Its Contrary (complex term). This position derives from Aristotle in the Rhetoric (1355b): "In rhetoric... the term 'rhetorician' may describe either the speaker's knowledge of his art, or his moral purpose." The translator explains: ""'rhetorician' in fact, can mean either a trained speaker or a tricky speaker (sic) [24].

(4) Rhetoric is neither Good nor its contrary (neutral term).

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[1]. These categories are derived from the square of oppositions as extended by Greimas (29-32).

(Encyclopedia 3 and 4, 514), then by the rules of analogy, it is reasonable to claim that rhetoric is also an organon, one in the service of praxis, of actions and undertakings in everyday life. Consequently, my definition of rhetoric is: the theory and practice of verbal strategies for achieving ends in the extra-rhetorical world.

I seem, therefore, to be throwing in my lot with the Sophists, although ever since Plato it has not been the done thing for historians of rhetoric to give the Sophists a particularly good press. Still, I must admit to a sneaking fondness for those peripatetic pedagogues who, lacking slaves, estates or tenure, lived from student to student and taught as they could to survive. Nonetheless, in the interests of practicality -which the Sophists should be the first to appreciate - and to ensure economy of presentation, I will abide by the established norms. Let, therefore, "rhetoric, rhetorical, rhetorician" be "god" terms in the "plus" slot with "sophist, sophistry, sophistic" remaining as "devil" terms in the "minus" slot (Woodson 16, 27) for when there is need to refer to fallacious argument for illegitimate ends.

Any speaker, whether rhetorician or sophist, at some time or another, will be called upon to practise one or more of the three modes of persuasion, the appeals to ethos, pathos, logos, the three Aristotelian "proofs." I know of no better description of the relationship governing these three modes than that supplied by Sister Miriam Joseph in her monumental work, Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language:

> That mode of persuasion which Aristotle calls ethos is, in a sense, included in pathos, for the attitude of the audience toward the personal character of the speaker, their confidence in him and in his good will toward them, constitutes part of their feelings or frame of mind as they listen. And logos, the sum of the ideas in the speech, helps not only to inspire in the audience confidence and good will toward the speaker but also to affect their feelings favorably or unfavorably toward the person or matters being discussed. Consequently, although each of these three modes of persuasion ethos, logos and Pathos, has special reference either to the speaker, to the speech or to those spoken to, they are, nevertheless, closely interrelated; all three are intrinsic to the speech, all three are under the control of the speaker, and the measure of success of all three is the effect on the hearers... (393-94).

If, as is inferable from some of the statements by the Group Mu (8-27), and from "L'ancienne rhétorique" of Roland Barthes, rhetoric was the Ancients' version of communication theory, then this summation is particularly suggestive for a modern

audience, since it represents the rhetorical transaction as something very close to the communication model formulated by Roman Jakobson in his seminal address on the six functions of language (350-77). Transcoded into Jakobsonian terminology, ethos would correspond to the expressive function, pathos to the conative function and logos, in deliberative or forensic rhetoric to the referential or cognitive function and perhaps even, in the case of epideictic rhetoric - if we extrapolate from Perelman's discussion of the traditional views of the genre (47-55) -, to the poetic function itself. What about the two remaining functions? Surely the metalinguistic function is amply taken care of by Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian etc., the canon and its commentators and possibly the phatic function, the need to ensure a contact, might perhaps be given over to the fourth and fifth of the traditional parts of rhetoric, memoria and pronunciatio.

However, although the legitimacy of using the ancient proofs in modern rhetorical criticism seems to me reasonably well established, the particular properties ascribed to these proofs may well vary with the object to which they are applied. For Knock, the object of my own discourse, I propose the following ground rules:

Ethos. Together with the ethical properties of the speaker cited by Sister Miriam Joseph, "personal character... sincerity... truth... ability... good will (272), I would most particularly draw the attention of my own hearers to that property referred to by Quintilian as auctoritas (quoted in Corbett, p. 93). In order to gain his ends, it is essential that Dr. Knock convince his hearers that he legitimately speaks to them as one having authority.

Pathos. Of the nine Pathe, defined either in terms of pleasure or pain and discussed in Book II of the Rhetoric, phobos or fear, "a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or powerful evil in the future (1382a)[3] is the most relevant. For other aspects of Pathos useful in the context of Knock, we are better off with chapters 5 and 7 of Book I where Aristotle discusses what constitutes happiness and what constitutes "good things": "every individual man and all men in common aim

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[3]. I am indebted to Alan Brinton for a copy of his paper "Pathos and the 'Appeal to Emotion': An Aristotelian Analysis" (Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric, Hamilton, 27 May 1987.)

at a certain end which determines what they choose and what they avoid. This end, to sum it up briefly, is happiness and its constituents" (1360b). It will be one of Dr. Knock's main tasks to discover what his hearers define as a source of happiness for themselves and persuade them that he can either increase or limit their access to it.

Logos. A short, all-inclusive definition will suffice: the use, whether for rhetorical or sophistic purposes, of enthymemes and testimony, artificial and inartificial proofs.

III Persuasion in the Text. Arguments and Exegesis[4].

Proem

In Act III, Scene 6 of Knock ou le triomphe de la médecine, Dr. Parpalaid, returning to the town of St. Maurice after an absence of three months, is amazed to find that in so short a time his successor, Dr. Knock, has managed to attract such an impressive and fanatically loyal clientele. "Do you really mean to tell me," he says, "that one hundred and fifty people a week line up for the privilege of seeing a doctor - and pay for it? No one forced them? No pressure was used?" Whereupon Knock replies: "I didn't need the army and I didn't need the police."

Now although it is a commonplace, both in Aristotle's Poetics and in modern literary theory, that plot may be described as a series of transformations, it is not quite that common to find these transformations ascribed so dramatically to the powers of rhetoric. For with the argumentum ad bacculum so clearly excluded, what else remains but the use of persuasion? Exactly what sort of persuasion and what can be inferred from it is what I should now like to consider.

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[4]. A Note on Procedure: 1) the analysis that follows, although reasonably detailed, is representative rather than exhaustive; 2) quotations in the original French are from the Folio edition, whereas quotations in English are from the Gidney translation; 3) the analysis is based on the written or dramatic text rather than the theatrical or performance text (Elam 3). Consequently, proofs will be adduced from purely verbal sources, both the transcribed dialogue and the didascalia (stage directions) which provide transpositions and, at times, interpretations of the non-verbal material in terms of verbal signs. Quoted stage directions will be italicized (underlined) as they are in the printed texts.

Act I

Argument. Having purchased the medical practice of Dr. Parpalaid, Dr. Knock learns belatedly 1) that his potential clients rarely, if ever, have serious, protracted illnesses; 2) that they are not in the habit of seeking medical advice for the infirmities they do have and 3) that they are, however, in the habit of paying for any medical expenses they might incur only once a year, at the end of September. (As the play begins, it is early October.)

Deciding to make the best of a bad bargain, Knock gradually reveals to Parpalaid (and, of course, to the audience) how he came to embark on a career in medecine.

1. His vocation was revealed to him by that persuasive medium par excellence, advertising, in the form of promotional material accompanying medical and pharmaceutical products.

2. Twenty years ago, although unlicensed, he obtained a position as ship's doctor: population of ship, 35; number of patients, 35.

3. Afterward, to finance proper medical studies, he built up a successful peanut business which, however, like most commercial undertakings, turned out to be boring. Indeed, the only professions he hasn't yet tried are medicine, politics, high finance and the priesthood.

4. He is now forty years old and has just received his degree after successfully completing his thesis.

As the act ends, the two medical men reach an understanding: in three months time, Parpalaid will return to assess what Knock, working under such difficult conditions, has managed to achieve.

This is a classic comic situation classically unfolded through a plot having a beginning (Act I), a middle (Act II) and an end (Act III).

Act I. A protagonist (Knock) tricked by an antagonist (Parpalaid) proposes to reverse the situation.

Act II. The various steps leading to the reversal are shown.

Act III. The reversal is accomplished and explicated. This reversal takes two forms: 1) a major reversal involving the population of St. Maurice whereby a

collectivity defining itself as healthy is transformed into a collectivity defining itself as ill and 2) a minor reversal involving two individuals: according to the formula of "the biter bit" (poetic justice, Parpalaid the trickster becomes Parpalaid the tricked. That these reversals are effected through various forms of rhetorical manipulation is already made clear to us in this first act.

1. Dr. Knock's dissertation, "Sur les prétendus états de santé" (31) / "On So-Called Good Health" (13), not only has a blatantly tendentious title, it comes with the epigraph "les gens bien-portants sont des malades qui s'ignorent" (31) / "Healthy people are sick people who don't know it" (13). This epigraph takes the form of a sententia which unlike "proverbs or adages [that] represent the testimony of many men [represents] the wisdom of one" (Joseph 98). Furthermore, this sententia also conforms to the figure of paradox and articulates the initial version of the propositio, the central thesis of the play. Finally, the attribution of this sententia/paradox to the historical figure of Dr. Claude Bernard, a possessor of certified ethos as the implied audience is expected to know, reveals a sophistic use of apomnemonysis, "a form of inartificial argument which quotes for authority the testimony of approved authors" (Joseph 102). By projecting onto Claude Bernard an apothegm of his own composition, by the ruse of metonymy - association - Knock fallaciously acquires a simulacrum of ethos for himself.

2. Knock's appointment as ship's doctor was also achieved through rhetorical stratagems:

> Comme j'ai horreur des situations fausses j'ai déclaré en entrant: "Messieurs, je pourrais vous dire que je suis docteur mais je ne suis pas docteur. Et je vous avouerai même quelque chose de plus grave: je ne sais pas encore quel sera le sujet de ma thèse." Ils me répondent qu'ils ne tiennent pas au titre de docteur et qu'ils se fichent complètement du sujet de ma thèse. Je réplique aussitôt: "Bien que n'étant pas docteur, je désire pour des raisons de prestige et de discipline, qu'on m'appelle docteur à bord." Ils me disent que c'est naturel. Mais je n'en continue pas moins à leur expliquer pendant un quart d'heure les raisons qui me font vaincre mes scrupules et réclamer cette appellation de docteur à laquelle, en conscience, je n'ai pas droit. (33)

(I hate being in a false position, so I told them right away: "Gentlemen, I could tell you that I'm a doctor but I'm not. What's worse, I haven't even chosen a subject for my thesis." They replied that they didn't insist on my being a doctor and they didn't give a good God damn about my thesis. Then I said: "Although I'm not a doctor, I'd like,

for the sake of prestige and discipline, to be called 'Doctor' on board." They said: "Naturally." Nevertheless I put in twenty minutes explaining why I have wrestled with my conscience and ended up by asking for a title to which I really had no right. 12-13)

We have here another variant of the appeal to authority, another sophistic version of the ethical proof. In the case of Claude Bernard, the source for the authority was legitimate; it was the attribution that was false. In this case, since Knock was not a doctor, the authority sought was illegitimate, but the attribution was true: Knock was himself the source, he revealed himself as such and thereby acquired the ethos of sincerity ("good character). However, through (post-Hegelian) dialecticalor-rhetorical-sleight-of-hand, to reveal is to conceal; Knock has made use of dissimulatio and of misdirection through a figure of ambiguity, equivocation.

According to the rules governing this possible world, since Knock's material success varies directly with his rhetorical success, it is not surprising that a sophistic appeal to ethos is one of the stratagems most persistently displayed.

3. Finally, once more by the rules of metonymy-contiguitythe association of medicine, high finance, politics and the priesthood invites - or at least renders plausible the inference - that given an appropriate context these professions can be seen as "standing for each other." Thus, right from the beginning, a precondition for allegorization is built into the structure of the dramatic world.

Act II

Scene 1

Argument. Two transformations through persuasion are accomplished. Transformation I: Knock persuades the town crier to be his accomplice; Transformation II: Knock persuades the town crier he is ill.

Transformation I is accomplished through various forms of the ethical proof:

1. Knock requires systematic use of his title to establish authority: " ... quand vous avez l'occasion de parler de moi au dehors, ne manquez jamais de vous exprimer

ainsi: 'le docteur a dit,' 'le docteur a fait' ... (sic), j'y attache de l'importance" (53) / " ... when you talk about me outside, be sure to say 'the doctor said,' 'the doctor did' ... it's important" (21).

2. Knock displays his "good character" by showing benevolence and liberality; he offers the crier top dollar for his services and offers the population at large free medical advice: "Le docteur Knock ... présente ses compliments à la population de la ville et du canton de Saint-Maurice, et a l'honneur de lui faire connaître que, dans un esprit philanthropique ... il donnera tous les lundis matin ... une consultation entièrement gratuite ... "(58) / "Dr. Knock ... presents his compliments to the people of the city and township of St. Maurice and is pleased to announce that in the interests of the welfare of the community ... his services will be available ... without charge ... every Monday" (24).

In the fulsome phrases of this address, might we not recognize versions of figures of ethos such as comprobatio ("a man commends the good he sees in the judges whose confidence he wishes to win"), parrhesia ("one is humbly respectful"), and philophronesis ("gentle speech and humble submission") (Joseph 273, 397)?

For Transformation II, in order to move the crier from his role as accomplice into his role as potential client, Knock has recourse to all three proofs as he gradually creates the presence of illness.

Logos 1) the illness is generated by means similar to those used to establish a "precising definition" (Copi 134-40): "K: 'De quoi souffrez-vous?' T: '[...] il y a des fois que je me sens une espèce de démangeaison. ... Ça me chatouille, ou plutôt, ça me gratouille.' K: 'Attention. Ne confondons pas. Est-ce que ça vous chatouille ou est-ce que ça vous gratouille?'" / "K: 'What's the matter with you?' TC: 'Sometimes after I've eaten I feel a kind of itch ... it tickles ... or scratches.' [...] K: 'Let's be clear about it. Does it tickle or does it scratch?'" (26).

2) The illness is diagnosed through the fallacy of the complex question (Copi 92-93): "Est-ce que ça ne vous gratouille pas davantage quand vous avez mangé de la tête de veau à la vinaigrette?" (63) / "Doesn't it scratch worse when you've eaten calf's head vinaigrette?" (27).

Ethos. Benevolent authority is exercised by the speaker over the hearer through the use of the imperative and of nonverbal signs: "K: (lui mettant la main sur l'épaule) 'Mon ami, faites votre travail aujourd'hui comme d'habitude. Ce soir, couchez-vous de bonne heure. Demain matin, gardez le lit'" (64) / "K: (Putting hands on crier's shoulders) 'Go about your work today as you always do. But get to bed early tonight and stay in bed tomorrow'" (27).

That fear has successfully been induced is clear from the non-verbal signs: "[Le tambour] se trouble peu à peu ... "avec anxiété " ...s'essuie le front" (64-65) / "getting gradually worried" ... anxiously ... "taking out his handkerchief" (27).

Scene 2

Argument. Transformation I: Knock persuades Bernard, the schoolmaster, to be his accomplice; Transformation II: Knock persuades Bernard that he is ill.

Scene 2 is clearly a variant of scene 1; like its predecessor, it sets in motion one or another of the three proofs.

Logos: intrinsic proof. Once again, Knock makes use of dissimulatio: as exemplified here, the assertion as fact of what one knows to be contrary to fact: "K: 'Ce n'est pas moi qui laisserai s'interrompre la collaboration si précieuse que vous accordiez à mon prédécesseur.' [...] B: 'C'est la première fois qu'il est question d'une chose pareille à Saint-Maurice.' K: (avec tous les signes d'une surprise navrée) [...] 'si je ne l'entendais pas de votre bouche, je vous assure que je n'en croirais rien" (67-69) / "K: 'I wouldn't want to break up the valuable collaboration that existed between you and my predecessor.' B: 'This is the first time I've heard of such a thing in Saint-Maurice.' K: (flabbergasted and in deep distress) 'If I weren't hearing it from your own lips, I wouldn't believe it'" (28-30).

Logos: extrinsic Proof. Knock offers as testimony plans for a set of lectures complete with scientific paraphernalia: "J'ai ici la matière de plusieurs causeries de vulgarisation, des notes très complètes, de bons clichés, et une lanterne" (71) / "I have some material for several popular lectures: complete notes, some good slides and a lantern" (31).

Testimony generates pathos (fear) as Bernard, showing all the signs of the classic hypocondriac ("le coeur chaviré ... tout frissonnant" (72) / "highly upset ... trembling" (31-32), follows the crier into the world of the invalid.

There is, however, a significant difference between the apparently identical outcomes of scenes 1 and 2. In the case of the crier, transformation - good health into ill health - was followed by acknowledgement. In the case of Bernard, acknowledgement is withheld: "B: 'vous pensez que moi, docteur, je suis porteur de germes?' K: 'pas vous spécialement.'" (73-4) / "B: 'Do you think I'm a germ-carrier, Doctor?' K: 'Not you necessarily'" (32). This particular strategy whereby the consequences of persuasion are followed not by the expected recognition but, paradoxically, by repudiation, has strong rhetorical force. It will reappear as ethos in Act III, scene 1 when Mme Rémy, the innkeeper turned nurse, offers the example of Bernard to Parpalaid as proof of Knock's disinterested nature and all-embracing concern (cf. 122-23/54).

Scene 3

Argument. Knock persuades the pharmacist Mousquet to be his accomplice.

In the world of fools and knaves we are examining, it is predicated of Mousquet that he is a knave. Consequently, for the transformation to occur, all that is required is the appeal to "good things" (Rhet. 1360b) - in this case, money and social status (scene 2, passim).

A more significant aspect of this scene, in terms of the general economy of the play is that it offers us the first example of the military metaphor: "Pour moi, le docteur qui ne peut pas s'appuyer sur un pharmacien de premier ordre est un général qui va à la bataille sans artillerie" (75) / "So far as I'm concerned a doctor who hasn't the support of a first-class pharmacist is like a general going into battle with no artillery" (33).

Here, too, constructed from the topics of invention according to arguments of comparison from the greater, the equal or the less (Joseph 147), surfaces the second version of the play's propositio as the sententia/paradox attributed to Claude Bernard

in Act I develops into: "La santé n'est qu'un mot, qu'il n'y aurait aucun inconvénient à rayer de notre vocabulaire. Pour ma part, je ne connais que des gens plus ou moins atteints de maladies plus ou moins nombreuses à évolution plus ou moins rapide" (80) / " 'Health' is a word which we could just as well erase from our vocabularies. For me there are only people more or less sick of more or less numerous diseases progressing at a more or less rapid rate" (35).

Scenes 4 and 5

Argument. Knock persuades the Lady in Black (scene 4) and the Lady in Purple (scene 5) that they are ill.

Just as the crier and the schoolmaster were variants of each other, so, too, are the Lady in Purple and the Lady in Black. These two "characters" are constructed out of a very small set of properties: sex, age, class, garment and, lastly, "good thing." These "good things" are the same that went into the construction of Mousquet. Here, however, they are parcelled out. The Lady in Black gets, essentially, "money"; this is communicated by stage directions in the form of a zeugma: "elle respire l'avarice paysanne et la constipation" (82) / "she exudes an atmosphere of peasant greed and constipation" (36). The Lady in Purple gets, essentially, "social status"; this, too, although a bit less directly, is communicated by the stage directions: "elle s'appuie assez royalement sur une sorte d'alpenstock" (92) / "She leans rather majestically on a sort of alpenstock" (40). In both cases, however, the appeal is to "appetency" which, as this paraphrase of Aristotle reveals, "accompanies sensation, since sensation is accompanied by pleasure and pain, and with them comes the appetite for that which is pleasant" (Ferguson 98).

Scene 6

Argument. Knock persuades the two young men that they are ill.

Scene 6 is the shortest scene in Act II but it is the climactic one and therefore the most powerful. Once it is over and the curtain rises on Act III, the town will have become a town of invalids, the major reversal will have taken place.

Scenes 1-5 dealt with the transformation of specific individuals; scene 6 deals with the transformation of the collectivity as a whole. As revealed first by the didascalia (1)

and then by the dialogue (2), the two young men are synecdoches for the population at large.

(1) Deux gars s'avancent. Ils se retiennent de rire, se poussent le coude, clignent de l'oeil. Pouffant soudain. Derrière eux, la foule s'amuse de leur manège et devient assez bruyante. (103)

(Two young fellows come forward. They are holding back their laughter, nudging and winking at each other, suddenly exploding. Behind them the crowd is enjoying their horse-play and becoming noisy. 46)

(2) "K: '[...] il me semble que je ne vous ai pas vus tantôt. Il y a des gens avant vous.'
P: 'Ils nous ont cédé leur place Hi! Hi! Demandez-leur.' (rires et gloussements.) (104)

("K: '[...] I don't think I've seen you before. There are others ahead of you.'
F: 'They're letting us go first. Ask them.' (laughs under his breath)" (46).

This is the basic confrontation. If Knock loses, he loses everything, if he wins, he wins everything.

His weapons are familiar: testimony, a sophistic use of inartificial proof and phobos, the production of an all-pervasive fear. Signs of phobos appear in the didascalia, and are arranged in ascending order of intensity according to the figure of auxesis or incrementum. "a figure which advances from less to greater" (Joseph 149): 1) "ils s'échangent des signes et gloussent, mais en se forçant un peu. 2) "les deux gars n'ont pas la moindre envie de rire" (104, 106) / 1) "they continue to make signs to each other and snigger a bit but with a bit of an effort". 2) "the two young fellows have lost all desire to laugh" (47).

The introduction of testimony accelerates the progression: "Knock [...] rapporte de grands cartons illustrés qui représentent les principaux organes chez l'acoolique avancé..." (106) / "Knock ... brings out some large posters showing the main body organs in an advanced state of alcoholism ... " (47). Whereupon: 3) "très timidement," 4) "très

piteux," 5) "il recule en tremblant" (106, 107) / (with great timidity "staggering back fearfully." "[he] continues to tremble" (48).

As the scene ends, the closing didascalia, pure commentary on the part of the implied author, reveals the outcome of the confrontation:

> Silence. Knock ouvre la porte. On entend le brouhaha des gens qui rient d'avance. Knock laisse passer les deux gars qui sortent avec des mines diversement hagardes et terrifiées et traversent la foule soudain silencieuse comme un enterrement (108).

(Silence. Knock opens the door. Noise of crowd beginning to laugh. Knock watches the young fellows go out. They look haggard and terrified as they pass through the crowd which becomes as silent as a funeral [sic] (48).

Who has won and who has lost cannot seriously be in doubt.

IV Persuasion by the Text. An adventure in Allegorization

Once again, Sister Miriam Joseph: "In considering... drama it must be remembered that there are two groups of hearers: the other characters in the play, who are the persons immediately addressed, and the audience attending the play, who are the ones ultimately addressed" (243). This concluding section will concern itself with the second group. What is it persuaded by? What is it persuaded toward?

Let us consider, first of all, a "traditional" analysis, based on Lansonian principles. In his introduction to the Gidney translation, Jack Godin, after reviewing the changes in St. Maurice, draws the following conclusion: "the will to action of the collective soul is irresistible and in the village has been brought about the creation of a unanimistic mind though the miracle of science... (VI).

Fair enough and no doubt reasonably true, but Unanimism, although perhaps still with us in other guises, has been relegated to the footnotes of intellectual history. Let us see, therefore, if having been liberated by reader-response criticism from too slavish a dependence on historical context, we might not do something else.

In The Theory of Comedy, Elder Olson, a neo-Aristotelian and member of the Chicago School, established the opposition "plots of cleverness" vs "plots of folly." In

plots of cleverness, there is either a well-intentioned wit or an ill-intentioned wit; in plots of folly, there is either a well-intentioned fool or an ill-intentioned fool: "for the ill-intentioned fool, there must be failure, for the well-intentioned fool, success; for the illintentioned clever man, failure and success for the wellintentioned one" (52-53).

Now I assume we all agree that Parpalaid was an illintentioned fool and he certainly failed, whereas Knock was an ill-intentioned clever man and he most certainly did not. What sort of comedy is this? What do we have here after all?

Perhaps what we have here could be approached through two of Northrop Frye's allegorizations of genre theory: comedy, the mythos of Spring and irony and satire, the mythos of Winter. I would argue that a "weak" interpretation of Knock would align the play with the "first or most ironic phase of comedy... in which a humorous society triumphs or remains undefeated" (177). On the other hand, a "strong" interpretation would opt for the "sixth phase of satire ... the chief form [of which] in our day is the nightmare of social tyranny. ... We often find, on this boundary of the visio malefica, the use of parody-religious symbols suggesting some form of Satan or Antichrist worship" (238).

Let us therefore postulate a continuum with the "weak" interpretation as its lower bound and the "strong" interpretation as its upper. We, the audience, will allegorize or "negotiate" along this continuum according to our ideological proclivities, foregrounding what suits our purpose.

How might a reader like myself, a lapsed Existentialist, choose to negotiate?

First of all, I would make much - as I did - of the evidence provided me by two of the major rhetorical figures: on the one hand, metonymy, which legitimizes the interchangeability of medicine and politics, on the other hand, metaphor which created the image of a Holy War. These, after all, are clearly in the text and cannot reasonably be denied.

With metaphor and metonymy as my basic proofs, I would return to the paradox containing the thesis of the play "ill health is good, good health is ill" and reformulate it - a legitimate rhetorical topic (Lanham 107-08) - as "the absence of physical illness entails the absence of moral wellness": let us, after all, not forget the obdurate M. Raffalens. Thus restated, the paradox easily generates its corresponding endoxa,

reputable universal opinion as Arnhart showed us; to wit, "the presence of physical illness entails the presence of moral illness." It is this endoxa - although the authors in question would scarcely thank me for applying to their work such an appellation - that, in varying degrees, governs two other allegorical texts, two coded texts with a reasonably clear referent in the extratextual world: Jean-Paul Sartre's Les Mouches and Albert Camus's La Peste.

So perhaps Knock ou le triomphe de la médecine wasn't quite so uncomplicated after all and perhaps, like the characters in Sartre's Huis clos, I am condemned for eternity - or at least until retirement, whichever comes first - to teach courses in twentieth-century French literature which list heavily toward Existentialist and quasi-Existentialist fictional and dramatic worlds.

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