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OXFORD LECTURES ON POETRY

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Содержание

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PREFACE

This volume consists of lectures delivered during my tenure of the Chair of Poetry at Oxford and not included in *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Most of them have been enlarged, and all have been revised. As they were given at intervals, and the majority before the publication of that book, they contained repetitions which I have not found it possible wholly to remove. Readers of a lecture published by the University of Manchester on *English Poetry and German Philosophy in the Age of Wordsworth* will pardon also the restatement of some ideas expressed in it.

The several lectures are dated, as I have been unable to take account of most of the literature on their subjects published since they were delivered.

They are arranged in the order that seems best to me, but it is of importance only in the case of the four which deal with the poets of Wordsworth's time.

I am indebted to the Delegates of the University Press, and to the proprietors and editors of the *Hibbert Journal* and the *Albany*, *Fortnightly*, and *Quarterly Reviews*, respectively, for permission to republish the first, third, fifth, eighth, and ninth lectures. A

like acknowledgment is due for leave to use some sentences of an article on Keats contributed to *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature* (1903).

In the revision of the proof-sheets I owed much help to a sister who has shared many of my Oxford friendships.

NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This edition is substantially identical with the first; but it and its later impressions contain a few improvements in points of detail, and, thanks to criticisms by my brother, F. H. Bradley, I hope to have made my meaning clearer in some pages of the second lecture.

There was an oversight in the first edition which I regret. In adding the note on p. 247 I forgot that I had not referred to Professor Dowden in the lecture on “Shakespeare the Man.” In everything that I have written on Shakespeare I am indebted to Professor Dowden, and certainly not least in that lecture.

POETRY FOR POETRY'S SAKE [1]

(INAUGURAL LECTURE)

One who, after twenty years, is restored to the University where he was taught and first tried to teach, and who has received at the hands of his Alma Mater an honour of which he never dreamed, is tempted to speak both of himself and of her. But I remember that you have come to listen to my thoughts about a great subject, and not to my feelings about myself; and of Oxford who that holds this Professorship could dare to speak, when he recalls the exquisite verse in which one of his predecessors described her beauty, and the prose in which he gently touched on her illusions and protested that they were as nothing when set against her age-long warfare with the Philistine? How, again, remembering him and others, should I venture to praise my predecessors? It would be pleasant to do so, and even pleasanter to me and you if, instead of lecturing, I quoted to you some of

[1] The lecture, as printed in 1901, was preceded by the following note: "This Lecture is printed almost as it was delivered. I am aware that, especially in the earlier pages, difficult subjects are treated in a manner far too summary, but they require an exposition so full that it would destroy the original form of the Lecture, while a slight expansion would do little to provide against misunderstandings." A few verbal changes have now been made, some notes have been added, and some of the introductory remarks omitted.

their best passages. But I could not do this for five years. Sooner or later, my own words would have to come, and the inevitable contrast. Not to sharpen it now, I will be silent concerning them also; and will only assure you that I do not forget them, or the greatness of the honour of succeeding them, or the responsibility which it entails.

The words 'Poetry for poetry's sake' recall the famous phrase 'Art for Art.' It is far from my purpose to examine the possible meanings of that phrase, or all the questions it involves. I propose to state briefly what I understand by 'Poetry for poetry's sake,' and then, after guarding against one or two misapprehensions of the formula, to consider more fully a single problem connected with it. And I must premise, without attempting to justify them, certain explanations. We are to consider poetry in its essence, and apart from the flaws which in most poems accompany their poetry. We are to include in the idea of poetry the metrical form, and not to regard this as a mere accident or a mere vehicle. And, finally, poetry being poems, we are to think of a poem as it actually exists; and, without aiming here at accuracy, we may say that an actual poem is the succession of experiences – sounds, images, thoughts, emotions – through which we pass when we are reading as poetically as we can.[2] Of course this imaginative experience – if I may use the phrase for brevity – differs with every reader and every time of reading: a poem exists in innumerable degrees. But that insurmountable fact lies in the

[2] Note A.

nature of things and does not concern us now.

What then does the formula 'Poetry for poetry's sake' tell us about this experience? It says, as I understand it, these things. First, this experience is an end in itself, is worth having on its own account, has an intrinsic value. Next, its *poetic* value is this intrinsic worth alone. Poetry may have also an ulterior value as a means to culture or religion; because it conveys instruction, or softens the passions, or furthers a good cause; because it brings the poet fame or money or a quiet conscience. So much the better: let it be valued for these reasons too. But its ulterior worth neither is nor can directly determine its poetic worth as a satisfying imaginative experience; and this is to be judged entirely from within. And to these two positions the formula would add, though not of necessity, a third. The consideration of ulterior ends, whether by the poet in the act of composing or by the reader in the act of experiencing, tends to lower poetic value. It does so because it tends to change the nature of poetry by taking it out of its own atmosphere. For its nature is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase), but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality.

Of the more serious misapprehensions to which these statements may give rise I will glance only at one or two. The

offensive consequences often drawn from the formula 'Art for Art' will be found to attach not to the doctrine that Art is an end in itself, but to the doctrine that Art is the whole or supreme end of human life. And as this latter doctrine, which seems to me absurd, is in any case quite different from the former, its consequences fall outside my subject. The formula 'Poetry is an end in itself' has nothing to say on the various questions of moral judgment which arise from the fact that poetry has its place in a many-sided life. For anything it says, the intrinsic value of poetry might be so small, and its ulterior effects so mischievous, that it had better not exist. The formula only tells us that we must not place in antithesis poetry and human good, for poetry is one kind of human good; and that we must not determine the intrinsic value of this kind of good by direct reference to another. If we do, we shall find ourselves maintaining what we did not expect. If poetic value lies in the stimulation of religious feelings, *Lead, kindly Light* is no better a poem than many a tasteless version of a Psalm: if in the excitement of patriotism, why is *Scots, wha hae* superior to *We don't want to fight?* if in the mitigation of the passions, the Odes of Sappho will win but little praise: if in instruction, Armstrong's *Art of preserving Health* should win much.

Again, our formula may be accused of cutting poetry away from its connection with life. And this accusation raises so huge a problem that I must ask leave to be dogmatic as well as brief. There is plenty of connection between life and poetry,

but it is, so to say, a connection underground. The two may be called different forms of the same thing: one of them having (in the usual sense) reality, but seldom fully satisfying imagination; while the other offers something which satisfies imagination but has not full 'reality.' They are parallel developments which nowhere meet, or, if I may use loosely a word which will be serviceable later, they are analogues. Hence we understand one by help of the other, and even, in a sense, care for one because of the other; but hence also, poetry neither is life, nor, strictly speaking, a copy of it. They differ not only because one has more mass and the other a more perfect shape, but because they have different *kinds* of existence. The one touches us as beings occupying a given position in space and time, and having feelings, desires, and purposes due to that position: it appeals to imagination, but appeals to much besides. What meets us in poetry has not a position in the same series of time and space, or, if it has or had such a position, it is taken apart from much that belonged to it there;[3] and therefore it makes no direct appeal to those feelings, desires, and purposes, but speaks only to contemplative imagination – imagination the reverse of empty or emotionless, imagination saturated with the results of 'real' experience, but still contemplative. Thus, no doubt, one main reason why poetry has poetic value for us is that it presents to us in its own way something which we meet in another form in nature or life; and yet the test of its poetic value for us lies

[3] Note B.

simply in the question whether it satisfies our imagination; the rest of us, our knowledge or conscience, for example, judging it only so far as they appear transmuted in our imagination. So also Shakespeare's knowledge or his moral insight, Milton's greatness of soul, Shelley's 'hate of hate' and 'love of love,' and that desire to help men or make them happier which may have influenced a poet in hours of meditation – all these have, as such, no poetical worth: they have that worth only when, passing through the unity of the poet's being, they reappear as qualities of imagination, and then are indeed mighty powers in the world of poetry.

I come to a third misapprehension, and so to my main subject. This formula, it is said, empties poetry of its meaning: it is really a doctrine of form for form's sake. 'It is of no consequence what a poet says, so long as he says the thing well. The *what* is poetically indifferent: it is the *how* that counts. Matter, subject, content, substance, determines nothing; there is no subject with which poetry may not deal: the form, the treatment, is everything. Nay, more: not only is the matter indifferent, but it is the secret of Art to "eradicate the matter by means of the form,"' – phrases and statements like these meet us everywhere in current criticism of literature and the other arts. They are the stock-in-trade of writers who understand of them little more than the fact that somehow or other they are not 'bourgeois.' But we find them also seriously used by writers whom we must respect, whether they are anonymous or not; something like one or another of them might be quoted, for example, from Professor Saintsbury, the late

R. A. M. Stevenson, Schiller, Goethe himself; and they are the watchwords of a school in the one country where Aesthetics has flourished. They come, as a rule, from men who either practise one of the arts, or, from study of it, are interested in its methods. The general reader – a being so general that I may say what I will of him – is outraged by them. He feels that he is being robbed of almost all that he cares for in a work of art. 'You are asking me,' he says, 'to look at the Dresden Madonna as if it were a Persian rug. You are telling me that the poetic value of *Hamlet* lies solely in its style and versification, and that my interest in the man and his fate is only an intellectual or moral interest. You allege that, if I want to enjoy the poetry of *Crossing the Bar*, I must not mind what Tennyson says there, but must consider solely his way of saying it. But in that case I can care no more for a poem than I do for a set of nonsense verses; and I do not believe that the authors of *Hamlet* and *Crossing the Bar* regarded their poems thus.'

These antitheses of subject, matter, substance on the one side, form, treatment, handling on the other, are the field through which I especially want, in this lecture, to indicate a way. It is a field of battle; and the battle is waged for no trivial cause; but the cries of the combatants are terribly ambiguous. Those phrases of the so-called formalist may each mean five or six different things. Taken in one sense they seem to me chiefly true; taken as the general reader not unnaturally takes them, they seem to me false and mischievous. It would be absurd to pretend that I can end in a few minutes a controversy which concerns the ultimate nature

of Art, and leads perhaps to problems not yet soluble; but we can at least draw some plain distinctions which, in this controversy, are too often confused.

In the first place, then, let us take 'subject' in one particular sense; let us understand by it that which we have in view when, looking at the title of an un-read poem, we say that the poet has chosen this or that for his subject. The subject, in this sense, so far as I can discover, is generally something, real or imaginary, as it exists in the minds of fairly cultivated people. The subject of *Paradise Lost* would be the story of the Fall as that story exists in the general imagination of a Bible-reading people. The subject of Shelley's stanzas *To a Skylark* would be the ideas which arise in the mind of an educated person when, without knowing the poem, he hears the word 'skylark'. If the title of a poem conveys little or nothing to us, the 'subject' appears to be either what we should gather by investigating the title in a dictionary or other book of the kind, or else such a brief suggestion as might be offered by a person who had read the poem, and who said, for example, that the subject of *The Ancient Mariner* was a sailor who killed an albatross and suffered for his deed.

Now the subject, in this sense (and I intend to use the word in no other), is not, as such, inside the poem, but outside it. The contents of the stanzas *To a Skylark* are not the ideas suggested by the work 'skylark' to the average man; they belong to Shelley just as much as the language does. The subject, therefore, is not the matter *of* the poem at all; and its opposite is not the *form*

of the poem, but the whole poem. The subject is one thing; the poem, matter and form alike, another thing. This being so, it is surely obvious that the poetic value cannot lie in the subject, but lies entirely in its opposite, the poem. How can the subject determine the value when on one and the same subject poems may be written of all degrees of merit and demerit; or when a perfect poem may be composed on a subject so slight as a pet sparrow, and, if Macaulay may be trusted, a nearly worthless poem on a subject so stupendous as the omnipresence of the Deity? The 'formalist' is here perfectly right. Nor is he insisting on something unimportant. He is fighting against our tendency to take the work of art as a mere copy or reminder of something already in our heads, or at the best as a suggestion of some idea as little removed as possible from the familiar. The sightseer who promenades a picture-gallery, remarking that this portrait is so like his cousin, or that landscape the very image of his birthplace, or who, after satisfying himself that one picture is about Elijah, passes on rejoicing to discover the subject, and nothing but the subject, of the next – what is he but an extreme example of this tendency? Well, but the very same tendency vitiates much of our criticism, much criticism of Shakespeare, for example, which, with all its cleverness and partial truth, still shows that the critic never passed from his own mind into Shakespeare's; and it may be traced even in so fine a critic as Coleridge, as when he dwarfs the sublime struggle of Hamlet into the image of his own unhappy weakness. Hazlitt by no means escaped its influence.

Only the third of that great trio, Lamb, appears almost always to have rendered the conception of the composer.

Again, it is surely true that we cannot determine beforehand what subjects are fit for Art, or name any subject on which a good poem might not possibly be written. To divide subjects into two groups, the beautiful or elevating, and the ugly or vicious, and to judge poems according as their subjects belong to one of these groups or the other, is to fall into the same pit, to confuse with our pre-conceptions the meaning of the poet. What the thing is in the poem he is to be judged by, not by the thing as it was before he touched it; and how can we venture to say beforehand that he cannot make a true poem out of something which to us was merely alluring or dull or revolting? The question whether, having done so, he ought to publish his poem; whether the thing in the poet's work will not be still confused by the incompetent Puritan or the incompetent sensualist with the thing in *his* mind, does not touch this point: it is a further question, one of ethics, not of art. No doubt the upholders of 'Art for art's sake' will generally be in favour of the courageous course, of refusing to sacrifice the better or stronger part of the public to the weaker or worse; but their maxim in no way binds them to this view. Rossetti suppressed one of the best of his sonnets, a sonnet chosen for admiration by Tennyson, himself extremely sensitive about the moral effect of poetry; suppressed it, I believe, because it was called fleshly. One may regret Rossetti's judgment and at the same time respect his scrupulousness; but in any case he judged

in his capacity of citizen, not in his capacity of artist.

So far then the 'formalist' appears to be right. But he goes too far, I think, if he maintains that the subject is indifferent and that all subjects are the same to poetry. And he does not prove his point by observing that a good poem might be written on a pin's head, and a bad one on the Fall of Man. That truth shows that the subject *settles* nothing, but not that it counts for nothing. The Fall of Man is really a more favourable subject than a pin's head. The Fall of Man, that is to say, offers opportunities of poetic effects wider in range and more penetrating in appeal. And the fact is that such a subject, as it exists in the general imagination, has some aesthetic value before the poet touches it. It is, as you may choose to call it, an inchoate poem or the débris of a poem. It is not an abstract idea or a bare isolated fact, but an assemblage of figures, scenes, actions, and events, which already appeal to emotional imagination; and it is already in some degree organized and formed. In spite of this a bad poet would make a bad poem on it; but then we should say he was unworthy of the subject. And we should not say this if he wrote a bad poem on a pin's head. Conversely, a good poem on a pin's head would almost certainly transform its subject far more than a good poem on the Fall of Man. It might revolutionize its subject so completely that we should say, 'The subject may be a pin's head, but the substance of the poem has very little to do with it.'

This brings us to another and a different antithesis. Those figures, scenes, events, that form part of the subject called the

Fall of Man, are not the substance of *Paradise Lost*; but in *Paradise Lost* there are figures, scenes, and events resembling them in some degree. These, with much more of the same kind, may be described as its substance, and may then be contrasted with the measured language of the poem, which will be called its form. Subject is the opposite not of form but of the whole poem. Substance is within the poem, and its opposite, form, is also within the poem. I am not criticizing this antithesis at present, but evidently it is quite different from the other. It is practically the distinction used in the old-fashioned criticism of epic and drama, and it flows down, not unsullied, from Aristotle. Addison, for example, in examining *Paradise Lost* considers in order the fable, the characters, and the sentiments; these will be the substance: then he considers the language, that is, the style and numbers; this will be the form. In like manner, the substance or meaning of a lyric may be distinguished from the form.

Now I believe it will be found that a large part of the controversy we are dealing with arises from a confusion between these two distinctions of substance and form, and of subject and poem. The extreme formalist lays his whole weight on the form because he thinks its opposite is the mere subject. The general reader is angry, but makes the same mistake, and gives to the subject praises that rightly belong to the substance[4]. I will read an

[4] What is here called 'substance' is what people generally mean when they use the word 'subject' and insist on the value of the subject. I am not arguing against this usage, or in favour of the usage which I have adopted for the sake of clearness. It does not matter which we employ, so long as we and others know what we mean. (I use

example of what I mean. I can only explain the following words of a good critic by supposing that for the moment he has fallen into this confusion: 'The mere matter of all poetry – to wit, the appearances of nature and the thoughts and feelings of men – being unalterable, it follows that the difference between poet and poet will depend upon the manner of each in applying language, metre, rhyme, cadence, and what not, to this invariable material.' What has become here of the substance of *Paradise Lost*– the story, scenery, characters, sentiments, as they are in the poem? They have vanished clean away. Nothing is left but the form on one side, and on the other not even the subject, but a supposed invariable material, the appearances of nature and the thoughts and feelings of men. Is it surprising that the whole value should then be found in the form?

So far we have assumed that this antithesis of substance and form is valid, and that it always has one meaning. In reality it has several, but we will leave it in its present shape, and pass to the question of its validity. And this question we are compelled to raise, because we have to deal with the two contentions that the poetic value lies wholly or mainly in the substance, and that it lies wholly or mainly in the form. Now these contentions, whether false or true, may seem at least to be clear; but we shall find, I think, that they are both of them false, or both of them nonsense: false if they concern anything outside the poem, nonsense if they apply to something in it. For what do they

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'substance' and 'content' indifferently.)

evidently imply? They imply that there are in a poem two parts, factors, or components, a substance and a form; and that you can conceive them distinctly and separately, so that when you are speaking of the one you are not speaking of the other. Otherwise how can you ask the question, In which of them does the value lie? But really in a poem, apart from defects, there are no such factors or components; and therefore it is strictly nonsense to ask in which of them the value lies. And on the other hand, if the substance and the form referred to are not in the poem, then both the contentions are false, for its poetic value lies in itself.

What I mean is neither new nor mysterious; and it will be clear, I believe, to any one who reads poetry poetically and who closely examines his experience. When you are reading a poem, I would ask – not analysing it, and much less criticizing it, but allowing it, as it proceeds, to make its full impression on you through the exertion of your recreating imagination – do you then apprehend and enjoy as one thing a certain meaning or substance, and as another thing certain articulate sounds, and do you somehow compound these two? Surely you do not, any more than you apprehend apart, when you see some one smile, those lines in the face which express a feeling, and the feeling that the lines express. Just as there the lines and their meaning are to you one thing, not two, so in poetry the meaning and the sounds are one: there is, if I may put it so, a resonant meaning, or a meaning resonance. If you read the line, 'The sun is warm, the sky is clear,' you do not experience separately the image of a warm sun and

clear sky, on the one side, and certain unintelligible rhythmical sounds on the other; nor yet do you experience them together, side by side; but you experience the one *in* the other. And in like manner, when you are really reading *Hamlet*, the action and the characters are not something which you conceive apart from the words; you apprehend them from point to point *in* the words, and the words as expressions of them. Afterwards, no doubt, when you are out of the poetic experience but remember it, you may by analysis decompose this unity, and attend to a substance more or less isolated, and a form more or less isolated. But these are things in your analytic head, not in the poem, which is *poetic* experience. And if you want to have the poem again, you cannot find it by adding together these two products of decomposition; you can only find it by passing back into poetic experience. And then what you recover is no aggregate of factors, it is a unity in which you can no more separate a substance and a form than you can separate living blood and the life in the blood. This unity has, if you like, various 'aspects' or 'sides,' but they are not factors or parts; if you try to examine one, you find it is also the other. Call them substance and form if you please, but these are not the reciprocally exclusive substance and form to which the two contentions *must* refer. They do not 'agree,' for they are not apart: they are one thing from different points of view, and in that sense identical. And this identity of content and form, you will say, is no accident; it is of the essence of poetry in so far as it is poetry, and of all art in so far as it is art. Just as there is in music not

sound on one side and a meaning on the other, but expressive sound, and if you ask what is the meaning you can only answer by pointing to the sounds; just as in painting there is not a meaning *plus* paint, but a meaning *in* paint, or significant paint, and no man can really express the meaning in any other way than in paint and in *this* paint; so in a poem the true content and the true form neither exist nor can be imagined apart. When then you are asked whether the value of a poem lies in a substance got by decomposing the poem, and present, as such, only in reflective analysis, or whether the value lies in a form arrived at and existing in the same way, you will answer, 'It lies neither in one, nor in the other, nor in any addition of them, but in the poem, where they are not.'

We have then, first, an antithesis of subject and poem. This is clear and valid; and the question in which of them does the value lie is intelligible; and its answer is, In the poem. We have next a distinction of substance and form. If the substance means ideas, images, and the like taken alone, and the form means the measured language taken by itself, this is a possible distinction, but it is a distinction of things not in the poem, and the value lies in neither of them. If substance and form mean anything *in* the poem, then each is involved in the other, and the question in which of them the value lies has no sense. No doubt you may say, speaking loosely, that in this poet or poem the aspect of substance is the more noticeable, and in that the aspect of form; and you may pursue interesting discussions on this basis, though

no principle or ultimate question of value is touched by them. And apart from that question, of course, I am not denying the usefulness and necessity of the distinction. We cannot dispense with it. To consider separately the action or the characters of a play, and separately its style or versification, is both legitimate and valuable, so long as we remember what we are doing. But the true critic in speaking of these apart does not really think of them apart; the whole, the poetic experience, of which they are but aspects, is always in his mind; and he is always aiming at a richer, truer, more intense repetition of that experience. On the other hand, when the question of principle, of poetic value, is raised, these aspects *must* fall apart into components, separately conceivable; and then there arise two heresies, equally false, that the value lies in one of two things, both of which are outside the poem, and therefore where its value cannot lie.

On the heresy of the separable substance a few additional words will suffice. This heresy is seldom formulated, but perhaps some unconscious holder of it may object: 'Surely the action and the characters of *Hamlet* are in the play; and surely I can retain these, though I have forgotten all the words. I admit that I do not possess the whole poem, but I possess a part, and the most important part.' And I would answer: 'If we are not concerned with any question of principle, I accept all that you say except the last words, which do raise such a question. Speaking loosely, I agree that the action and characters, as you perhaps conceive them, together with a great deal more, are in the poem. Even

then, however, you must not claim to possess all of this kind that is in the poem; for in forgetting the words you must have lost innumerable details of the action and the characters. And, when the question of value is raised, I must insist that the action and characters, as you conceive them, are not in *Hamlet* at all. If they are, point them out. You cannot do it. What you find at any moment of that succession of experiences called *Hamlet* is words. In these words, to speak loosely again, the action and characters (more of them than you can conceive apart) are focussed; but your experience is not a combination of them, as ideas, on the one side, with certain sounds on the other; it is an experience of something in which the two are indissolubly fused. If you deny this, to be sure I can make no answer, or can only answer that I have reason to believe that you cannot read poetically, or else are misinterpreting your experience. But if you do not deny this, then you will admit that the action and characters of the poem, as you separately imagine them, are no part of it, but a product of it in your reflective imagination, a faint analogue of one aspect of it taken in detachment from the whole. Well, I do not dispute, I would even insist, that, in the case of so long a poem as *Hamlet*, it may be necessary from time to time to interrupt the poetic experience, in order to enrich it by forming such a product and dwelling on it. Nor, in a wide sense of "poetic," do I question the poetic value of this product, as you think of it apart from the poem. It resembles our recollections of the heroes of history or legend, who move about in our imaginations, "forms more

real than living man," and are worth much to us though we do not remember anything they said. Our ideas and images of the "substance" of a poem have this poetic value, and more, if they are at all adequate. But they cannot determine the poetic value of the poem, for (not to speak of the competing claims of the "form") nothing that is outside the poem can do that, and they, as such, are outside it.'[5]

Let us turn to the so-called form – style and versification. There is no such thing as mere form in poetry. All form is expression. Style may have indeed a certain aesthetic worth in partial abstraction from the particular matter it conveys, as in a well-built sentence you may take pleasure in the build almost apart from the meaning. Even so, style is expressive – presents to sense, for example, the order, ease, and rapidity with which ideas move in the writer's mind – but it is not expressive of the meaning of that particular sentence. And it is possible, interrupting poetic experience, to decompose it and abstract for comparatively separate consideration this nearly formal element of style. But the aesthetic value of style so taken is not considerable;[6] you could not read with pleasure for an hour a composition which had no other merit. And in poetic experience you never apprehend this value by itself; the style is here expressive also of a particular

[5] These remarks will hold good, *mutatis mutandis*, if by 'substance' is understood the 'moral' or the 'idea' of a poem, although perhaps in one instance out of five thousand this may be found in so many words in the poem.

[6] On the other hand, the absence, or worse than absence, of style, in this sense, is a serious matter.

meaning, or rather is one aspect of that unity whose other aspect is meaning. So that what you apprehend may be called indifferently an expressed meaning or a significant form. Perhaps on this point I may in Oxford appeal to authority, that of Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, the latter at any rate an authority whom the formalist will not despise. What is the gist of Pater's teaching about style, if it is not that in the end the one virtue of style is truth or adequacy; that the word, phrase, sentence, should express perfectly the writer's perception, feeling, image, or thought; so that, as we read a descriptive phrase of Keats's, we exclaim, 'That is the thing itself'; so that, to quote Arnold, the words are 'symbols equivalent with the thing symbolized,' or, in our technical language, a form identical with its content? Hence in true poetry it is, in strictness, impossible to express the meaning in any but its own words, or to change the words without changing the meaning. A translation of such poetry is not really the old meaning in a fresh dress; it is a new product, something like the poem, though, if one chooses to say so, more like it in the aspect of meaning than in the aspect of form.

No one who understands poetry, it seems to me, would dispute this, were it not that, falling away from his experience, or misled by theory, he takes the word 'meaning' in a sense almost ludicrously inapplicable to poetry. People say, for instance, 'steed' and 'horse' have the same meaning; and in bad poetry they have, but not in poetry that *is* poetry.

> ‘Bring forth the horse!’ The horse was brought:
> In truth he was a noble steed!

says Byron in *Mazeppa*. If the two words mean the same here, transpose them:

> ‘Bring forth the steed!’ The steed was brought:
> In truth he was a noble horse!

and ask again if they mean the same. Or let me take a line certainly very free from ‘poetic diction’:

> To be or not to be, that is the question.

You may say that this means the same as ‘What is just now occupying my attention is the comparative disadvantages of continuing to live or putting an end to myself.’ And for practical purposes – the purpose, for example, of a coroner – it does. But as the second version altogether misrepresents the speaker at that moment of his existence, while the first does represent him, how can they for any but a practical or logical purpose be said to have the same sense? Hamlet was well able to ‘unpack his heart with words,’ but he will not unpack it with our paraphrases.

These considerations apply equally to versification. If I take the famous line which describes how the souls of the dead stood waiting by the river, imploring a passage from Charon:

Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore;

and if I translate it, 'and were stretching forth their hands in longing for the further bank,' the charm of the original has fled. Why has it fled? Partly (but we have dealt with that) because I have substituted for five words, and those the words of Virgil, twelve words, and those my own. In some measure because I have turned into rhythmless prose a line of verse which, as mere sound, has unusual beauty. But much more because in doing so I have also changed the *meaning* of Virgil's line. What that meaning is *I* cannot say: Virgil has said it. But I can see this much, that the translation conveys a far less vivid picture of the outstretched hands and of their remaining outstretched, and a far less poignant sense of the distance of the shore and the longing of the souls. And it does so partly because this picture and this sense are conveyed not only by the obvious meaning of the words, but through the long-drawn sound of 'tendebantque,' through the time occupied by the five syllables and therefore by the idea of 'ulterioris,' and through the identity of the long sound 'or' in the penultimate syllables of 'ulterioris amore' – all this, and much more, apprehended not in this analytical fashion, nor as *added* to the beauty of mere sound and to the obvious meaning, but in unity with them and so as expressive of the poetic meaning of the whole.

It is always so in fine poetry. The value of versification, when it is indissolubly fused with meaning, can hardly be exaggerated.

The gift for feeling it, even more perhaps than the gift for feeling the value of style, is the *specific* gift for poetry, as distinguished from other arts. But versification, taken, as far as possible, all by itself, has a very different worth. Some aesthetic worth it has; how much, you may experience by reading poetry in a language of which you do not understand a syllable.[7] The pleasure is quite appreciable, but it is not great; nor in actual poetic experience do you meet with it, as such, at all. For, I repeat, it is not *added* to the pleasure of the meaning when you read poetry that you do understand: by some mystery the music is then the music *of* the meaning, and the two are one. However fond of versification you might be, you would tire very soon of reading verses in Chinese; and before long of reading Virgil and Dante if you were ignorant of their languages. But take the music as it is *in* the poem, and there is a marvellous change. Now

> It gives a very echo to the seat
> Where love is throned;

or 'carries far into your heart,' almost like music itself, the sound

> Of old, unhappy, far-off things
> And battles long ago.

What then is to be said of the following sentence of the critic

[7] Note C.

quoted before: 'But when any one who knows what poetry is reads —

> Our noisy years seem moments in the being
> Of the eternal silence,

he sees that, quite independently of the meaning, … there is one note added to the articulate music of the world – a note that never will leave off resounding till the eternal silence itself gulfs it' must think that the writer is deceiving himself. For I could quite understand his enthusiasm, if it were an enthusiasm for the music of the meaning; but as for the music, 'quite independently of the meaning,' so far as I can hear it thus (and I doubt if any one who knows English can quite do so), I find it gives some pleasure, but only a trifling pleasure. And indeed I venture to doubt whether, considered as mere sound, the words are at all exceptionally beautiful, as Virgil's line certainly is.

When poetry answers to its idea and is purely or almost purely poetic, we find the identity of form and content; and the degree of purity attained may be tested by the degree in which we feel it hopeless to convey the effect of a poem or passage in any form but its own. Where the notion of doing so is simply ludicrous, you have quintessential poetry. But a great part even of good poetry, especially in long works, is of a mixed nature; and so we find in it no more than a partial agreement of a form and substance which remain to some extent distinct. This is so in many passages of

Shakespeare (the greatest of poets when he chose, but not always a conscientious poet); passages where something was wanted for the sake of the plot, but he did not care about it or was hurried. The conception of the passage is then distinct from the execution, and neither is inspired. This is so also, I think, wherever we can truly speak of merely decorative effect. We seem to perceive that the poet had a truth or fact – philosophical, agricultural, social – distinctly before him, and then, as we say, clothed it in metrical and coloured language. Most argumentative, didactic, or satiric poems are partly of this kind; and in imaginative poems anything which is really a mere 'conceit' is mere decoration. We often deceive ourselves in this matter, for what we call decoration has often a new and genuinely poetic content of its own; but wherever there is mere decoration, we judge the poetry to be not wholly poetic. And so when Wordsworth inveighed against poetic diction, though he hurled his darts rather wildly, what he was rightly aiming at was a phraseology, not the living body of a new content, but the mere worn-out body of an old one.[8]

In pure poetry it is otherwise. Pure poetry is not the decoration of a preconceived and clearly defined matter: it springs from the creative impulse of a vague imaginative mass pressing for development and definition. If the poet already knew exactly what he meant to say, why should he write the poem? The poem would in fact already be written. For only its completion can reveal, even to him, exactly what he wanted. When he began and

[8] This paragraph is criticized in Note D.

while he was at work, he did not possess his meaning; it possessed him. It was not a fully formed soul asking for a body: it was an inchoate soul in the inchoate body of perhaps two or three vague ideas and a few scattered phrases. The growing of this body into its full stature and perfect shape was the same thing as the gradual self-definition of the meaning.[9] And this is the reason why such poems strike us as creations, not manufactures, and have the magical effect which mere decoration cannot produce. This is also the reason why, if we insist on asking for the meaning of such a poem, we can only be answered 'It means itself.'

And so at last I may explain why I have troubled myself and you with what may seem an arid controversy about mere words. It is not so. These heresies which would make poetry a compound of two factors – a matter common to it with the merest prose, *plus* a poetic form, as the one heresy says: a poetical substance *plus* a negligible form, as the other says – are not only untrue, they are injurious to the dignity of poetry. In an age already inclined to shrink from those higher realms where poetry touches religion and philosophy, the formalist heresy encourages men to taste poetry as they would a fine wine, which has indeed an aesthetic value, but a small one. And then the natural man, finding an empty form, hurls into it the matter of cheap pathos, rancid sentiment, vulgar humour, bare lust, ravenous vanity – everything which, in Schiller's phrase,[10] the

[9] Note E.

[10] Not that to Schiller 'form' meant mere style and versification.

form should extirpate, but which no mere form can extirpate. And the other heresy – which is indeed rather a practice than a creed – encourages us in the habit so dear to us of putting our own thoughts or fancies into the place of the poet's creation. What he meant by *Hamlet*, or the *Ode to a Nightingale*, or *Abt Vogler*, we say, is this or that which we knew already; and so we lose what he had to tell us. But he meant what he said, and said what he meant.

Poetry in this matter is not, as good critics of painting and music often affirm, different from the other arts; in all of them the content is one thing with the form. What Beethoven meant by his symphony, or Turner by his picture, was not something which you can name, but the picture and the symphony. Meaning they have, but *what* meaning can be said in no language but their own: and we know this, though some strange delusion makes us think the meaning has less worth because we cannot put it into words. Well, it is just the same with poetry. But because poetry is words, we vainly fancy that some other words than its own will express its meaning. And they will do so no more – or, if you like to speak loosely, only a trifle more – than words will express the meaning of the Dresden Madonna.[11] Something a little like it they may indeed express. And we may find analogues of the meaning of poetry outside it, which may help us to appropriate it. The other arts, the best ideas of philosophy or religion, much that nature and life offer us or force upon us, are akin to it. But they are only akin. Nor is it the expression of them. Poetry does not present to

[11] Note F.

imagination our highest knowledge or belief, and much less our dreams and opinions; but it, content and form in unity, embodies in its own irreplaceable way something which embodies itself also in other irreplaceable ways, such as philosophy or religion. And just as each of these gives a satisfaction which the other cannot possibly give, so we find in poetry, which cannot satisfy the needs they meet, that which by their natures they cannot afford us. But we shall not find it fully if we look for something else.

And now, when all is said, the question will still recur, though now in quite another sense, What does poetry mean?[12] This unique expression, which cannot be replaced by any other, still seems to be trying to express something beyond itself. And this, we feel, is also what the other arts, and religion, and philosophy are trying to express: and that is what impels us to seek in vain to translate the one into the other. About the best poetry, and not only the best, there floats an atmosphere of infinite suggestion. The poet speaks to us of one thing, but in this one thing there seems to lurk the secret of all. He said what he meant, but his meaning seems to beckon away beyond itself, or rather to expand into something boundless which is only focussed in it; something also which, we feel, would satisfy not only the imagination, but the whole of us; that something within us, and without, which everywhere

[12] Note G.

makes us seem
To patch up fragments of a dream,
Part of which comes true, and part
Beats and trembles in the heart.

Those who are susceptible to this effect of poetry find it not only, perhaps not most, in the ideals which she has sometimes described, but in a child's song by Christina Rossetti about a mere crown of wind-flowers, and in tragedies like *Lear*, where the sun seems to have set for ever. They hear this spirit murmuring its undertone through the *Aeneid*, and catch its voice in the song of Keats's nightingale, and its light upon the figures on the Urn, and it pierces them no less in Shelley's hopeless lament, *O world, O life, O time*, than in the rapturous ecstasy of his *Life of Life*. This all-embracing perfection cannot be expressed in poetic words or words of any kind, nor yet in music or in colour, but the suggestion of it is in much poetry, if not all, and poetry has in this suggestion, this 'meaning,' a great part of its value. We do it wrong, and we defeat our own purposes, when we try to bend it to them:

We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence;
For it is as the air invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.

It is a spirit. It comes we know not whence. It will not speak

at our bidding, nor answer in our language. It is not our servant; it is our master.

1901

NOTE A

The purpose of this sentence was not, as has been supposed, to give a definition of poetry. To define poetry as something that goes on in us when we read poetically would be absurd indeed. My object was to suggest to my hearers in passing that it is futile to ask questions about the end, or substance, or form of poetry, if we forget that a poem is neither a mere number of black marks on a white page, nor such experience as is evoked in us when we read these marks as we read, let us say, a newspaper article; and I suppose my hearers to know, sufficiently for the purpose of the lecture, how that sort of reading differs from poetical reading.

The truths thus suggested are so obvious, when stated, that I thought a bare reminder of them would be enough. But in fact the mistakes we make about 'subject,' 'substance,' 'form,' and the like, are due not solely to misapprehension of our poetic experience, but to our examining what is not this experience. The whole lecture may be called an expansion of this statement.

The passage to which the present note refers raises difficult questions which any attempt at a 'Poetics' ought to discuss. I will mention three. (1) If the experience called a poem varies 'with every reader and every time of reading' and 'exists in

innumerable degrees,' what is the poem itself, if there is such a thing? (2) How does a series of successive experiences form *one* poem? (3) If the object in the case of poetry and music ('arts of hearing') is a succession somehow and to some extent unified, how does it differ in this respect from the object in 'arts of sight' – a building, a statue, a picture?

NOTE B

A lyric, for example, may arise from 'real' emotions due to transitory conditions peculiar to the poet. But these emotions and conditions, however interesting biographically, are poetically irrelevant. The poem, what the poet *says*, is universal, and is appropriated by people who live centuries after him and perhaps know nothing of him and his life; and if it arose from mere imagination it is none the worse (or the better) for that. So far as it cannot be appropriated without a knowledge of the circumstances in which it arose, it is probably, so far, faulty (probably, because the difficulty *may* come from our distance from the whole mental world of the poet's time and country).

What is said in the text applies equally to all the arts. It applies also to such aesthetic apprehension as does not issue in a work of art. And it applies to this apprehension whether the object belongs to 'Nature' or to 'Man.' A beautiful landscape is not a 'real' landscape. Much that belongs to the 'real' landscape is ignored when it is apprehended aesthetically; and the painter only

carries this unconscious idealisation further when he deliberately alters the 'real' landscape in further ways.

All this does not in the least imply that the 'real' thing, where there is one (personal emotion, landscape, historical event, etc.), is of small importance to the aesthetic apprehension or the work of art. But it is relevant only as it appears *in* that apprehension or work.

If an artist alters a reality (*e. g.* a well-known scene or historical character) so much that his product clashes violently with our familiar ideas, he may be making a mistake: not because his product is untrue to the reality (this by itself is perfectly irrelevant), but because the 'untruth' may make it difficult or impossible for others to appropriate his product, or because this product may be aesthetically inferior to the reality even as it exists in the general imagination.

NOTE C

For the purpose of the experiment you must, of course, know the sounds denoted by the letters, and you must be able to make out the rhythmical scheme. But the experiment will be vitiated if you get some one who understands the language to read or recite to you poems written in it, for he will certainly so read or recite as to convey to you something of the meaning through the sound (I do not refer of course to the logical meaning).

Hence it is clear that, if by 'versification taken by itself' one

means the versification of a *poem*, it is impossible under the requisite conditions to get at this versification by itself. The versification of a poem is always, to speak loosely, influenced by the sense. The bare metrical scheme, to go no further, is practically never followed by the poet. Suppose yourself to know no English, and to perceive merely that in its general scheme

> It gives a very echo to the seat

is an iambic line of five feet; and then read the line as you would have to read it; and then ask if *that* noise is the sound of the line *in the poem*.

In the text, therefore, more is admitted than in strictness should be admitted. For I have assumed for the moment that you can hear the sound of poetry if you read poetry which you do not in the least understand, whereas in fact that sound cannot be produced at all except by a person who knows something of the meaning.

NOTE D

This paragraph has not, to my knowledge, been adversely criticised, but it now appears to me seriously misleading. It refers to certain kinds of poetry, and again to certain passages in poems, which we feel to be less poetical than some other kinds or passages. But this difference of degree in poeticalness (if I may

use the word) is put as a difference between 'mixed' and 'pure' poetry; and that distinction is, I think, unreal and mischievous. Further, it is implied that in less poetical poetry there necessarily is only a partial unity of content and form. This (unless I am now mistaken) is a mistake, and a mistake due to failure to hold fast the main idea of the lecture. Naturally it would be most agreeable to me to re-write the paragraph, but if I reprint it and expose my errors the reader will perhaps be helped to a firmer grasp of that idea.

It is true that where poetry is most poetic we feel most decidedly how impossible it is to separate content and form. But where poetry is less poetic and does not make us feel this unity so decidedly, it does not follow that the unity is imperfect. Failure or partial failure in this unity is always (as in the case of Shakespeare referred to) a failure on the part of the *poet* (though it is not always due to the same causes). It does not lie of necessity in the nature of a particular kind of poetry (*e. g.* satire) or in the nature of a particular passage. All poetry cannot be equally poetic, but *all* poetry ought to maintain the unity of content and form, and, in that sense, to be 'pure.' Only in certain kinds, and in certain passages, it is more difficult for the poet to maintain it than in others.

Let us take first the 'passages' and suppose them to occur in one of the more poetic kinds of poetry. In certain parts of any epic or tragedy matter has to be treated which, though necessary to the whole, is not in itself favourable to poetry, or would not in

itself be a good 'subject.' But it is the business of the poet to do his best to make this matter poetry, and pure poetry. And, if he succeeds, the passage, though it will probably be less poetic than the bulk of the poem, will exhibit the complete unity of content and form. It will not strike us as a mere bridge between other passages; it will be enjoyable for itself; and it will not occur to us to think that the poet was dealing with an un-poetic 'matter' and found his task difficult or irksome. Shakespeare frequently does not trouble himself to face this problem and leaves an imperfect unity. The conscientious artists, like Virgil, Milton, Tennyson, habitually face, it and frequently solve it.[13] And when they wholly or partially fail, the fault is still *theirs*. It is, in one sense, due to the 'matter,' which set a hard problem; but they would be the first to declare that *nothing* in the poem ought to be only mixedly poetic.

In the same way, satire is not in its nature a highly poetic kind of poetry, but it ought, in its own kind, to be poetry throughout, and therefore ought not to show a merely partial unity of content and form. If the satirist makes us exclaim 'This is sheer prose wonderfully well disguised,' that is a fault, and *his* fault (unless it happens to be ours). The idea that a tragedy or lyric could really be reproduced in a form not its own strikes us as ridiculous; the idea that a satire could so be reproduced seems much less ridiculous; but if it were true the satire would not be poetry at all.

[13] In Schiller's phrase, they have extirpated the mere 'matter.' We often say that they do this by dint of style. This is roughly true, but in strictness it means, as we have seen, not that they decorate the mere 'matter' with a mere 'form,' but that they produce a new content-form.

The reader will now see where, in my judgment, the paragraph is wrong. Elsewhere it is, I think, right, though it deals with a subject far too large for a paragraph. This is also true of the next paragraph, which uses the false distinction of 'pure' and 'mixed,' and which will hold in various degrees of poetry in various degrees poetical.

It is of course possible to use a distinction of 'pure' and 'mixed' in another sense. Poetry, whatever its kind, would be pure as far as it preserved the unity of content and form; mixed, so far as it failed to do so – in other words, failed to be poetry and was partly prosaic.

NOTE E

It is possible therefore that the poem, as it existed at certain stages in its growth, may correspond roughly with the poem as it exists in the memories of various readers. A reader who is fond of the poem and often thinks of it, but remembers only half the words and perhaps fills up the gaps with his own words, may possess something like the poem as it was when half-made. There are readers again who retain only what they would call the 'idea' of the poem; and the poem *may* have begun from such an idea. Others will forget all the words, and will not profess to remember even the 'meaning,' but believe that they possess the 'spirit' of the poem. And what they possess may have, I think, an immense value. The poem, of course, it is not; but it may answer

to the state of imaginative feeling or emotional imagination which was the germ of the poem. This is, in one sense, quite definite: it would not be the germ of a decidedly different poem: but in another sense it is indefinite, comparatively structureless, more a 'stimmung' than an idea.

Such correspondences, naturally, must be very rough, if only because the readers have been at one time in contact with the fully grown poem.

NOTE F

I should be sorry if what is said here and elsewhere were taken to imply depreciation of all attempts at the interpretation of works of art. As regards poetry, such attempts, though they cannot possibly express the whole meaning of a poem, may do much to facilitate the poetic apprehension of that meaning. And, although the attempt is still more hazardous in the case of music and painting, I believe it may have a similar value. That its results *may* be absurd or disgusting goes without saying, and whether they are ever of use to musicians or the musically educated I do not know. But I see no reason why an exceedingly competent person should not try to indicate the emotional tone of a composition, movement, or passage, or the changes of feeling within it, or even, very roughly, the 'idea' he may suppose it to embody (though he need not imply that the composer had any of this before his mind). And I believe that such

indications, however inadequate they must be, may greatly help the uneducated lover of music to hear more truly the music itself.

NOTE G

This new question has 'quite another sense' than that of the question, What is the meaning or content expressed by the form of a poem? The new question asks, What is it that the *poem*, the unity of this content and form, is trying to express? This 'beyond' is beyond the content as well as the form.

Of course, I should add, it is not *merely* beyond them or outside of them. If it were, they (the poem) could not 'suggest' it. They are a partial manifestation of it, and point beyond themselves to it, both because they *are* a manifestation and because this is partial.

The same thing is true, not only (as is remarked in the text) of the other arts and of religion and philosophy, but also of what is commonly called reality. This reality is a manifestation of a different order from poetry, and in certain important respects a much more imperfect manifestation. Hence, as was pointed out (pp. 6, 7, note B), poetry is not a copy of it, but in dealing with it idealises it, and in doing so produces in certain respects a fuller manifestation. On the other hand, that imperfect 'reality' has for us a character in which poetry is deficient, – the character in virtue of which we call it 'reality.' It is, we feel, thrust upon us, not made by us or by any other man. And in this respect it

seems more akin than poetry to that 'beyond,' or absolute, or perfection, which we want, which partially expresses itself in both, and which could not be perfection and could not satisfy us if it were not real (though it cannot be real in the same sense as that imperfect 'reality'). This seems the ultimate ground of the requirement that poetry, though no copy of 'reality,' should not be mere 'fancy,' but should refer to, and interpret, that 'reality.' For that reality, however imperfectly it reveals perfection, is at least no mere fancy. (Not that the merest fancy can fail to reveal something of perfection.)

The lines quoted on p. 26 are from a fragment of Shelley's beginning 'Is it that in some brighter sphere.'

THE SUBLIME [14]

Coleridge used to tell a story about his visit to the Falls of Clyde; but he told it with such variations that the details are uncertain, and without regard to truth I shall change it to the shape that suits my purpose best. After gazing at the Falls for some time, he began to consider what adjective would answer most precisely to the impression he had received; and he came to the conclusion that the proper word was 'sublime.' Two other tourists arrived, and, standing by him, looked in silence at the spectacle. Then, to Coleridge's high satisfaction, the gentleman exclaimed, 'It is sublime.' To which the lady responded, 'Yes, it is the prettiest thing I ever saw.'

This poor lady's incapacity (for I assume that Coleridge and her husband were in the right) is ludicrous, but it is also a little painful. Sublimity and prettiness are qualities separated by so great a distance that our sudden attempt to unite them has a comically incongruous effect. At the same time the first of these qualities is so exalted that the exhibition of entire inability to perceive it is distressing. Astonishment, rapture, awe, even self-abasement, are among the emotions evoked by sublimity. Many would be inclined to pronounce it the very highest of all the forms assumed by beauty, whether in nature or in works of imagination.

[14] I have learned something from many discussions of this subject. In its outline the view I have taken is perhaps nearer to Hartmann's than to any other.

I propose to make some remarks on this quality, and even to attempt some sort of answer to the question what sublimity is. I say 'some sort of answer,' because the question is large and difficult, and I can deal with it only in outline and by drawing artificial limits round it and refusing to discuss certain presuppositions on which the answer rests. What I mean by these last words will be evident if I begin by referring to a term which will often recur in this lecture – the term 'beauty.'

When we call sublimity a form of beauty, as I did just now, the word 'beauty' is obviously being used in the widest sense. It is the sense which the word bears when we distinguish beauty from goodness and from truth, or when 'beautiful' is taken to signify anything and everything that gives aesthetic satisfaction, or when 'Aesthetics' and 'Philosophy of the Beautiful' are used as equivalent expressions. Of beauty, thus understood, sublimity is one particular kind among a number of others, for instance prettiness. But 'beauty' and 'beautiful' have also another meaning, narrower and more specific, as when we say that a thing is pretty but not beautiful, or that it is beautiful but not sublime. The beauty we have in view here is evidently not the same as beauty in the wider sense; it is only, like sublimity or prettiness, a particular kind or mode of that beauty. This ambiguity of the words 'beauty' and 'beautiful' is a great inconvenience, and especially so in a lecture, where it forces us to add some qualification to the words whenever they occur: but it cannot be helped. (Now that the lecture is printed I am able to avoid these qualifications

by printing the words in inverted commas where they bear the narrower sense.)[15]

Now, obviously, all the particular kinds or modes of beauty must have, up to a certain point, the same nature. They must all possess that character in virtue of which they are called beautiful rather than good or true. And so a philosopher, investigating one of these kinds, would first have to determine this common nature or character; and then he would go on to ascertain what it is that distinguishes the particular kind from its companions. But here we cannot follow such a method. The nature of beauty in general is so much disputed and so variously defined that to discuss it here by way of preface would be absurd; and on the other hand it would be both presumptuous and useless to assume the truth of any one account of it. Our only plan, therefore, must be to leave it entirely alone, and to consider merely the distinctive character of sublimity. Let beauty in general be what it may, what is it that marks off *this* kind of beauty from others, and what is there peculiar in our state of mind when we are moved to apply to anything the specific epithet 'sublime'? – such is our question. And this plan is not merely the only possible one, but it is, I believe, quite justifiable, since, so far as I can see, the answer to

[15] Popular usage coincides roughly with this sense. Indeed, it can hardly be said to recognise the wider one at all. 'Beauty' and 'beautiful,' in that wider sense, are technical terms of Aesthetics. It is a misfortune that the language of Aesthetics should thus differ from the ordinary language of speech and literature; but the misfortune seems to be unavoidable, for there is no word in the ordinary language which means 'whatever gives aesthetic satisfaction,' and yet that idea *must* have a name in Aesthetics.

our particular question, unless it is pushed further than I propose to go, is unaffected by the differences among theories of repute concerning beauty in general. At the same time, it is essential to realise and always to bear in mind one consequence of this plan; which is that our account of what is peculiar to sublimity will not be an account of sublimity in its full nature. For sublimity is not those peculiar characteristics alone, it is that *beauty* which is distinguished by them, and a large part of its effect is due to that general nature of beauty which it shares with other kinds, and which we leave unexamined.

In considering the question thus defined I propose to start from our common aesthetic experience and to attempt to arrive at an answer by degrees. It will be understood, therefore, that our first results may have to be modified as we proceed. And I will venture to ask my hearers, further, to ignore for the time any doubts they may feel whether I am right in saying, by way of illustration, that this or that thing is sublime. Such differences of opinion scarcely affect our question, which is not whether in a given case the epithet is rightly applied, but what the epithet signifies. And it has to be borne in mind that, while no two kinds of beauty can be quite the same, a *thing* may very well possess beauty of two different kinds.

Let us begin by placing side by side five terms which represent five of the many modes of beauty – sublime, grand, 'beautiful,' graceful, pretty. 'Beautiful' is here placed in the middle. Before it come two terms, sublime and grand; and beyond it lie two

others, graceful and pretty. Now is it not the case that the first two, though not identical, still seem to be allied in some respect; that the last two also seem to be allied in some respect; that in this respect, whatever it may be, these two pairs seem to stand apart from one another, and even to stand in contrast; that 'beauty,' in this respect, seems to hold a neutral position, though perhaps inclining rather to grace than to grandeur; and that the extreme terms, sublime and pretty, seem in this respect to be the most widely removed; so that this series of five constitutes, in a sense, a descending series, – descending not necessarily in value, but in some particular respect not yet assigned? If, for example, in the lady's answer, 'Yes, it is the prettiest thing I ever saw,' you substitute for 'prettiest' first 'most graceful,' and then 'most beautiful,' and then 'grandest,' you will find that your astonishment at her diminishes at each step, and that at the last, when she identifies sublimity and grandeur, she is guilty no longer of an absurdity, but only of a slight anti-climax. If, I may add, she had said 'majestic,' the anti-climax would have been slighter still, and, in fact, in one version of the story Coleridge says that 'majestic' was the word he himself chose.

What then is the 'respect' in question here, – the something or other in regard to which sublimity and grandeur seemed to be allied with one another, and to differ decidedly from grace and prettiness? It appears to be greatness. Thousands of things are 'beautiful,' graceful, or pretty, and yet make no impression of greatness, nay, this impression in many cases appears to

collide with, and even to destroy, that of grace or prettiness, so that if a pretty thing produced it you would cease to call it pretty. But whatever strikes us as sublime produces an impression of greatness, and more – of exceeding or even overwhelming greatness. And this greatness, further, is apparently no mere accompaniment of sublimity, but essential to it: remove the greatness in imagination, and the sublimity vanishes. Grandeur, too, seems always to possess greatness, though not in this superlative degree; while 'beauty' neither invariably possesses it nor tends, like prettiness and grace, to exclude it. I will try, not to defend these statements by argument, but to develop their meaning by help of illustrations, dismissing from view the minor differences between these modes of beauty, and, for the most part, leaving grandeur out of account.

We need not ask here what is the exact meaning of that 'greatness' of which I have spoken: but we must observe at once that the greatness in question is of more than one kind. Let us understand by the term, to begin with, greatness of extent, – of size, number, or duration; and let us ask whether sublime things are, in this sense, exceedingly great. Some certainly are. The vault of heaven, one expanse of blue, or dark and studded with countless and prodigiously distant stars; the sea that stretches to the horizon and beyond it, a surface smooth as glass or breaking into innumerable waves; time, to which we can imagine no beginning and no end, – these furnish favourite examples of sublimity; and to call them great seems almost mockery, for

they are images of immeasurable magnitude. When we turn from them to living beings, of course our standard of greatness changes;[16] but, using the standard appropriate to the sphere, we find again that the sublime things have, for the most part, great magnitude. A graceful tree need not be a large one; a pretty tree is almost always small; but a sublime tree is almost always large. If you were asked to mention sublime animals, you would perhaps suggest, among birds, the eagle; among fishes, if any, the whale; among beasts, the lion or the tiger, the python or the elephant. But you would find it hard to name a sublime insect; and indeed it is not easy, perhaps not possible, to feel sublimity in any animal smaller than oneself, unless one goes beyond the special kind of greatness at present under review. Consider again such facts as these: that a human being of average, or even of less than average, stature and build may be graceful and even 'beautiful,' but can hardly, in respect of stature and build, be grand or sublime; that we most commonly think of flowers as little things, and also most commonly think of them as 'beautiful,' graceful, pretty, but rarely as grand, and still more rarely as sublime, and that in these latter cases we do not think of them as small; that a mighty river may well be sublime, but hardly a stream; a towering or far-stretching mountain, but hardly a low hill; a vast bridge, but hardly one of moderate span; a great cathedral, but hardly a village church;

[16] I do not mean to imply that in aesthetic apprehension itself we always, or generally, make conscious use of a standard or, indeed, think of greatness. But here we are *reflecting* on this apprehension.

that a model of a sublime building is not sublime, unless in imagination you expand it to the dimensions of its original; that a plain, though flat, may be sublime if its extent is immense; that while we constantly say 'a pretty little thing,' or even 'a beautiful little thing,' nobody ever says 'a sublime little thing.' Examples like these seem to show clearly – not that bigness is sublimity, for bigness need have no beauty, while sublimity is a mode of beauty – but that this particular mode of beauty is frequently connected with, and dependent on, exceeding greatness of extent.

Let us now take a further step. Can there be sublimity when such greatness is absent? And, if there can, is greatness of some other sort always present in such cases, and essential to the sublime effect? The answer to the first of these questions is beyond doubt. Children have no great extension, and what Wordsworth calls 'a six-years' darling of a pigmy size' is (if a darling) generally called pretty but not sublime; for it *is* 'of a pigmy size.' Yet it certainly *may* be sublime, and it is so to the poet who addresses it thus:

> Thou whose exterior semblance doth belie
> Thy soul's immensity…
> Mighty prophet! Seer blest!
> On whom those truths do rest
> Which we are toiling all our lives to find.

A baby is still smaller, but a baby too may be sublime. The starry sky is not more sublime than the babe on the arm of the

Madonna di San Sisto. A sparrow is more diminutive still; but that it is possible for a sparrow to be sublime is not difficult to show. This is a translation of a prose poem by Tourgénieff:

> I was on my way home from hunting, and was walking up the garden avenue. My dog was running on in front of me.
>
> Suddenly he slackened his pace, and began to steal forward as though he scented game ahead.
>
> I looked along the avenue; and I saw on the ground a young sparrow, its beak edged with yellow, and its head covered with soft down. It had fallen from the nest (a strong wind was blowing, and shaking the birches of the avenue); and there it sat and never stirred, except to stretch out its little half-grown wings in a helpless flutter.
>
> My dog was slowly approaching it, when suddenly, darting from the tree overhead, an old black-throated sparrow dropt like a stone right before his nose, and, all rumpled and flustered, with a plaintive desperate cry flung itself, once, twice, at his open jaws with their great teeth.
>
> It would save its young one; it screened it with its own body; the tiny frame quivered with terror; the little cries grew wild and hoarse; it sank and died. It had sacrificed itself.
>
> What a huge monster the dog must have seemed to it! And yet it could not stay up there on its safe bough. A power stronger than its own will tore it away.
>
> My dog stood still, and then slunk back disconcerted. Plainly he too had to recognise that power. I called him to me; and a feeling of reverence came over me as I passed on.

> Yes, do not laugh. It was really reverence I felt before that little heroic bird and the passionate outburst of its love.
>
> Love, I thought, is verily stronger than death and the terror of death. By love, only by love, is life sustained and moved.

This sparrow, it will be agreed, is sublime. What, then, makes it so? Not largeness of size, assuredly, but, we answer, its love and courage. Yes; but what do we mean by '*its* love and courage'? We often meet with love and courage, and always admire and approve them; but we do not always find them sublime. Why, then, are they sublime in the sparrow? From their extraordinary greatness. It is not in the quality alone, but in the quantity of the quality, that the sublimity lies. And this may be readily seen if we imagine the quantity to be considerably reduced, – if we imagine the parent bird, after its first brave effort, flinching and flying away, or if we suppose the bird that sacrifices itself to be no sparrow but a turkey. In either case love and courage would remain, but sublimity would recede or vanish, simply because the love and courage would no longer possess the required immensity.[17]

The sublimity of the sparrow, then, no less than that of the sky or sea, depends on exceeding or overwhelming greatness – a greatness, however, not of extension but rather of strength or power, and in this case of spiritual power. 'Love is *stronger* than death,' quotes the poet; 'a power *stronger* than its own tore it

[17] Thus, it may be noticed, the sparrow's size, which is the reverse of sublime, is yet indirectly essential to the sublimity of the sparrow.

away.' So it is with the dog of whom Scott and Wordsworth sang, whose master had perished among the crags of Helvellyn, and who was found three months after by his master's body,

> How nourished here through such long time
> He knows who gave that love sublime,
> And gave that strength of feeling, great
> Above all human estimate.[18]

And if we look further we shall find that these cases of sublimity are, in this respect, far from being exceptions: 'thy soul's *immensity*,' says Wordsworth to the child; '*mighty* prophet' he calls it. We shall find, in fact, that in the sublime, when there is not greatness of extent, there is another greatness, which (without saying that the phrase is invariably the most appropriate) we may call greatness of power and which in these cases is essential.

We must develop this statement a little. Naturally the power, and therefore the sublimity, will differ in its character in different instances, and therefore will affect us variously. It may be – to classify very roughly – physical, or vital, or (in the old wide sense of the word) moral, like that of the sparrow and the dog. And physical force will appeal to the imagination in one way, and vital in another, and moral or spiritual in another. But it is still power of some kind that makes a thing sublime rather than graceful, and immensity of power that makes it sublime rather than merely

[18] The poet's language here has done our analysis for us.

grand. For example, the lines of the water in a thin cascade may be exquisitely graceful, but such a cascade has not power enough to be sublime. Flickering fire in a grate is often 'beautiful,' but it is not sublime; the fire of a big bonfire is on the way to be so; a 'great fire' frequently is so, because it gives the impression of tremendous power. The ocean, in those stanzas of *Childe Harold* which no amount of familiarity or of defect can deprive of their sublimity, is the untameable monster which engulfs men as lightly as rain-drops and shatters fleets like toys. The sublimity of Behemoth and Leviathan in the *Book of Job* lies in the contrast of their enormous might with the puny power of man; that of the horse in the fiery energy of his courage and strength. Think of sublime figures or ideas in the world of fiction or of history, and you find that, whether they are radiant or gloomy, violent or peaceful, terrible or adorable, they all impress the imagination by their immense or even irresistible might. It is so with Achilles, standing alone beyond the wall, with the light of the divine flame soaring from his head, while he sends across the trench that shout at whose far-off sound the hearts of the Trojans die within them; or with Odysseus, when the moment of his vengeance has come, and he casts off his rags, and leaps onto the threshold with his bow, and pours his arrows down at his feet, and looks down the long hall at the doomed faces of his feasting enemies. Milton's Satan is sublime when he refuses to accept defeat from an omnipotent foe; he ceases to be so in tempting Eve, because here he shows not power but cunning, and we feel not the strength

of his cunning but the weakness of his victim. In the bust of Zeus in the Vatican, in some of the figures of the Medici Chapel, in 'The horse and his rider,' we feel again sublimity, because we feel gigantic power, put forth or held in reserve. Fate or Death, imagined as a lurking assassin, is not sublime, but may become so when imagined as inevitable, irresistible, *ineluctabile fatum*. The eternal laws to which Antigone appeals, like that Duty which preserves the strength and freshness of the most ancient heavens, are sublime. Prometheus, the saviour of mankind, opposing a boundless power of enduring pain to a boundless power of inflicting it; Regulus returning unmoved to his doom; Socrates, serene and even joyous in the presence of injury and death and the lamentations of his friends, are sublime. The words 'I have overcome the world' are among the most sublime on record, and they are also the expression of the absolute power of the spirit.[19]

It seems clear, then, that sublimity very often arises from an overwhelming greatness of power. So abundant, indeed, are the instances that one begins to wonder whether it ever arises from any other kind of greatness, and whether we were right in supposing that mere magnitude of extension can produce it.

[19] A word may be added here on a disputed point as to 'spiritual' sublimity. It has been held that intellect cannot be sublime; but surely in the teeth of facts. Not to speak of intellect as it appears in the sphere of practice, how can it be denied that the intellect of Aristotle or Shakespeare or Newton may produce the impression of sublimity? All that is true is, first, that the intellect must be apprehended imaginatively and not thought abstractly (otherwise it can produce *no* aesthetic impression), and, secondly, that it appears sublime in virtue not of its quality alone but of the quantity, or force, of that quality.

Would such magnitude, however prodigious, seem to us sublime unless we insensibly construed it as the sign of power? In the case of living things, at any rate, this doubt seems to be well founded. A tree is sublime not because it occupies a large extent of empty space or time, but from the power in it which raises aloft and spreads abroad a thousand branches and a million leaves, or which has battled for centuries with buffeting storms and has seen summers and winters arise and pass like the hours of our day. It is not the mere bulk of the lion or the eagle that wins them their title as king of beasts or of birds, but the power exhibited in the gigantic head and arm or the stretch of wing and the piercing eye. And even when we pass from the realm of life our doubt remains. Would a mountain, a river, or a building be sublime to us if we did not read their masses and lines as symbols of force? Would even the illimitable extent of sea or sky, the endlessness of time, or the countlessness of stars or sands or waves, bring us anything but fatigue or depression if we did not apprehend them, in some way and however vaguely, as expressions of immeasurable power – power that created them, or lives in them, or *can* count them; so that what impresses us is not the mere absence of limits, but the presence of something that overpowers any imaginable limit? If these doubts are justified (as in my opinion they are), the conclusion will follow that the exceeding greatness required for sublimity is *always* greatness of some kind of power, though in one class of cases the impression of this greatness can only be conveyed through immensity of extent.

However this question may be decided, our result so far seems to be that the peculiarity of the sublime lies in some exceeding and overwhelming greatness. But before this result can be considered safe, two obstacles must be removed. In the first place, are there no negative instances? Is it impossible to find anything sublime which does *not* show this greatness? Naturally I can say no more than that I have conscientiously searched for exceptions to the rule and have searched in vain. I can find only apparent exceptions which in reality confirm the rule; and I will mention only those which look the most formidable. They are cases where at first sight there seems to be not merely an inconsiderable amount of power or other greatness, but actually the negation of it. For example, the silence of night, or the sudden pause in a storm or in stormy music, or again the silence and movelessness of death, may undoubtedly be sublime; and how, it may be asked, can a mere absence of sound and motion be an exhibition of immense greatness? It cannot, I answer; but neither can it be sublime. If you apprehend the silence in these cases as a mere absence, no feeling of sublimity will arise in your mind; and if you do apprehend the silence as sublime, it is to you the sign of immense power, put forth or held in reserve. The 'dead pause abrupt of mighty winds' is the pause *of* mighty winds and not of gentle breezes; and it is not the absence of mighty winds, but their *pause* before they burst into renewed fury; or if their silence is not their will, it is a silence imposed on them by something mightier even than they. In either case there may be sublimity, but then

there is the impression of immense power. In the same way the silence of night, when it seems sublime, is apprehended not as the absence but as the subdual of sound, – the stillness wrought by a power so mighty that at its touch all the restless noises of the day fall dumb, – or the brooding of an omnipotent peace over the world. And such a peace it is, an unassailable peace, that may make the face of death sublime, a stillness which is not moveless but immovable.[20]

At present, then, our result seems to stand firm. But another danger remains. Granted that in the sublime there is always some exceeding and overwhelming greatness, is that *all* there is? Is there not in every case some further characteristic? This question, premising that the phrase 'overwhelming greatness' contains important implications which have yet to be considered, I can only answer like the last. I do not find any other peculiarity that is *always* present. Several have been alleged, and one or two of these will be mentioned later, but none of them appears to show itself indubitably wherever sublimity is found. It is easy to give a much fuller account of the sublime if you include in it everything that impresses you in a sublime baby while you omit to consider Behemoth, or if you build upon Socrates and ignore Satan, or if you confine yourself to the sublime thunderstorm and forget the sublime rainbow or sunrise. But then your account

[20] The same principle applies to other cases. If, for example, the desolation of a landscape is felt to be sublime, it is so not as the mere negation of life, verdure, etc., but as their *active* negation.

will not answer to the instances you have ignored; and when you take them in you will have to pare it down until perhaps you end in a result like ours. At any rate we had better be content with it for the present, and turn to another aspect of the matter.[21]

So far, on the whole, we have been regarding the sublime object as if its sublimity were independent of our state of mind in feeling and apprehending it. Yet the adjective in the phrase 'overwhelming greatness' should at once suggest the truth that this state of mind is essential to sublimity. Let us now therefore look inward, and ask how this state differs from our state in perceiving or imagining what is graceful or 'beautiful.' Since Kant dealt with the subject, most writers who have thought about it have agreed that there is a decided difference, which I will try to describe broadly, and without pledging myself to the entire accuracy of the description.

When, on seeing or hearing something, we exclaim, How graceful! or How lovely! or How 'beautiful'! there is in us an immediate outflow of pleasure, an unchecked expansion, a delightful sense of harmony between the thing and ourselves.

> The air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself

[21] The reader will remember that in one sense of the question, Is there no more in the sublime than overwhelming greatness? this question must of course be answered in the affirmative. Sublimity is a mode of beauty: the sublime is not the overwhelmingly great, it is the beautiful which has overwhelming greatness; and it affects us through its whole nature, not by mere greatness.

Unto our gentle senses… The heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here.

The thing wins us and draws us towards itself without resistance. Something in us hastens to meet it in sympathy or love. Our feeling, we may say, is entirely affirmative. For though it is not always untouched by pain (for the thing may have sadness in it),[22] this touch of pain or sadness does not mean any disharmony between the thing and us, or involve any check in our acceptance of it.

In the case of sublimity, on the other hand, this acceptance does not seem to be so simple or immediate. There seem, in fact, to be two 'aspects' or stages in it.[23] First – if only for a fraction of a second – there is a sense of being checked, or baffled, or even stupefied, or possibly even repelled or menaced, as though something were affecting us which we could not receive, or grasp, or stand up to. In certain cases we appear to shrink away

[22] I am warning the reader against a mistake which may arise from the complexity of aesthetic experience. We may make a broad distinction between 'glad' and 'sad' modes of beauty; but that does not coincide with the distinction of modes with which we are concerned in this lecture. What is lovely or 'beautiful' may be glad or sad, and so may what is grand or sublime.

[23] In what follows I have spoken as if the two were always successive stages, and as if these always came in the same order. It is easier to make the matter quickly clear by taking this view, which also seemed to answer to my own experience. But I do not wish to commit myself to an opinion on the point, which is of minor importance. What is essential is to recognise the presence of the two 'aspects' or 'stages,' and to see that both are requisite to sublimity.

from it, as though it thrust upon us a sense of our own feebleness or insignificance. This we may call by the convenient but too strong name of the negative stage. It is essential to sublimity; and nothing seems to correspond to it in our perception of loveliness or grace except sometimes a sense of surprise or wonder, which is wholly pleasant, and which does not necessarily qualify the lovely or graceful thing.

But this first stage or aspect clearly does not by itself suffice for sublimity. To it there succeeds, it may be instantaneously or more gradually, another: a powerful reaction, a rush of self-expansion, or an uplifting, or a sense of being borne out of the self that was checked, or even of being carried away beyond all checks and limits. These feelings, even when the sublime thing might be called forbidding, menacing, or terrible, are always positive, – feelings of union with it; and, when its nature permits of this, they may amount to rapture or adoration. But the mark of the negation from which they have issued, the 'smell of the fire,' usually remains on them. The union, we may say perhaps, has required a self-surrender, and the rapture or adoration is often strongly tinged with awe.

Now, this peculiar doubleness in our apprehension of sublimity, this presence of two equally necessary stages or phases, a negative and a positive, seems to correspond with the peculiarity which we found in the sublime object when we were provisionally regarding it by itself. It is its overwhelming greatness which for a moment checks, baffles, subdues, even

repels us or makes us feel our littleness, and which then, forcing its way into the imagination and emotions, distends or uplifts them to its own dimensions. We burst our own limits, go out to the sublime thing, identify ourselves ideally with it, and share its immense greatness. But if, and in so far as, we remain conscious of our difference from it, we still feel the insignificance of our actual selves, and our glory is mingled with awe or even with self-abasement.[24]

In writing thus I was endeavouring simply and without any *arrière pensée* to describe a mode of aesthetic experience. But it must have occurred to some of my hearers that the description recalls other kinds of experience. And if they find it accurate in the main, they will appreciate, even if they do not accept, the exalted claim which philosophers, in various forms, have made for the sublime. It awakes in us, they say, through the check or shock which it gives to our finitude, the consciousness of an infinite or absolute; and this is the reason of the kinship we feel between this particular mode of aesthetic experience on the one side, and, on the other, morality or religion. For there, by the denial of our merely finite or individual selves, we rise into union with the law which imposes on us an unconditional demand, or with the infinite source and end of our spiritual life.

These are ideas much too large to be considered now, and even

[24] 'Ich fühlte mich so klein, so gross,' says Faust, remembering the vision of the Erdgeist, whom he addresses as 'Erhabener Geist.' He was at once overwhelmed and uplifted.

later I can but touch on them. But the mere mention of them may carry us to the last enquiries with which we can deal. For it suggests this question: Supposing that high claim to be justified at all, can it really be made for *all* sublimity, or must it not be confined to the very highest forms? A similar question must be raised as to various other statements regarding the sublime; and I go on to speak of some of these.

(1) Burke asserted that the sublime is always founded on fear; indeed he considered this to be its distinguishing characteristic. Setting aside, then, the connection of this statement with Burke's general doctrine (a doctrine impossible to accept), we may ask, Is it true that the 'check' administered by the sublime object is always one of fear? We must answer, first, that if this check is part of an aesthetic experience and not a mere preliminary to it, it can *never* be fear in the common meaning of that word, or what may be called practical or real fear. So far as we are *practically* afraid of a storm or a mountain, afraid, for instance, for ourselves as bodily beings in this particular spatial and temporal position, the storm or mountain is not sublime to us, it is simply terrible. *That* fear must be absent, or must not engage attention, or must be changed in character, if the object is to be for us *sublimely* terrible, something with which we identify ourselves in imaginative sympathy, and which so causes a great self-expansion. But, secondly, even if 'fear' is understood rightly as indicating a feature in an aesthetic and not a practical experience, our question must obviously be answered in

the negative. There is fear in the apprehension of some sublimity, but by no means in that of all. If there is a momentary check, for example, in the case of a rainbow, a glorious sunrise, the starry night, Socrates, or Tourgénieff's sparrow, 'fear,' unless the meaning of the word is unnaturally extended, is surely not the name for this check.

Burke's mistake, however, implies a recognition of the 'negative aspect' in sublimity, and it may remind us of a truth. Instances of the sublime differ greatly in regard to the prominence and tone of this aspect. It is less marked, for example, and less obvious, in the case of a sublime rainbow or sunrise than in that of a sublime and 'terrible' thunderstorm. And in general we may say that the *distinctive* nature of sublimity appears most clearly where this aspect is most prominent, – so prominent, perhaps, that we have a more or less explicit sense of the littleness and powerlessness of ourselves, and indeed of the whole world of our usual experience. It is here that the object is most decidedly more than 'glorious,' or even 'majestic,' and that sublimity appears in antithesis to grace. Only we must not give an account of the sublime which fully applies to these cases *alone*, or suppose that the negative aspect is absent in other cases. If a rainbow or sunrise is really sublime, it is overwhelming as well as uplifting. Nor must we assume that the most distinctively sublime must also be the most sublime. The sunrise witnessed from an immense snowfield in the high Alps may be as sublime as an Alpine thunderstorm, though its sublimity is different.

(2) Grace and 'beauty,' it has been said, though not of course merely sensuous, are yet friendly to sense. It is their essence, in fact, to be a harmonious unity of sense and spirit, and so to reconcile powers which in much of our experience are conflicting and dissonant. But sublimity is harsh and hostile to sense. It makes us feel in ourselves and in the world the presence of something irresistibly superior to sense. And this is the reason why it does not soothe or delight, but uplifts us.

This statement recalls some of the ideas we have been considering, but it may easily mislead. For one thing, it is impossible for any sublimity whatever to be *merely* hostile to 'sense,' since everything aesthetic must appeal to sense or sensuous imagination, so that the sublime must at least express its hostility to sense by means of sense. And if we take the phrase in another meaning, the statement may mislead still, for it attributes to sublimity in general what is a characteristic only of certain forms of the sublime. Scores of examples could easily be quoted which show no hostility to sense: *e. g.* a sublime lion, or bull, or tree. And if we think of our old examples of the rainbow and the sunrise, or, better still, of a thunderstorm, or 'The horse and his rider,' or the 'Sanctus' in Bach's Mass, we find the sublime thing actually making a powerful appeal to sense and depending for its sublimity on the vehemence or volume of this appeal. Diminish at all markedly in these cases the amount of light, colour, or sound, and the sublimity would vanish. Of course the appeal here is not merely to sense, but it *is* to sense.

But undoubtedly there is another kind of sublimity; and it is particularly interesting. Here, it is true, a sort of despite is done to the senses and what speaks to them. As we have seen, the greatness of soul in the sparrow is enhanced by contrast with the smallness and feebleness of its body, and pours contempt on the visible magnitude of the hound; and the stillness of night or death is sublime from its active negation of sound and motion. Again, there is a famous passage which depends for its effect on this, that, first, sublime things are introduced which appeal powerfully to sense, and then something else, which does not so appeal, is made to appear even more sublime and to put them to shame: first a great and strong wind, an earthquake, a fire; and after the fire a still small voice. Sometimes, again, as Burke observed, sublimity depends on, or is increased by, darkness, obscurity, vagueness, – refusal of satisfaction to the sense of sight. Often in these cases the sublime object is terrible, and its terror is increased by inability to see or distinguish it. Examples are the image of 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness,' or Milton's description of Death, or the lines in the *Book of Job*:

> In thoughts from the visions of the night
> When deep sleep falleth on men,
> Fear came upon me and trembling,
> Which made all my bones to shake.
> Then a spirit passed before my face;
> The hair of my flesh stood up.
> It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof.

An image was before mine eyes.
There was silence, and I heard a voice.

It has been observed that attempts to illustrate such passages as these dissipate their sublimity by diminishing the obscurity of the object. Blake's illustrations of the lines in Milton and in *Job*[25] show this, while his design of the morning-stars singing together is worthy even of the words.

We may trace this severity towards sense, again, in examples already mentioned, the ideas of Fate, of the eternal laws to which Antigone appeals, of Duty in Wordsworth's ode. We imagine these powers as removed from sight, and indeed wholly immaterial, and yet as exercising sovereign dominion over the visible and material world. And their sublimity would be endangered if we tried to bring them nearer to sense by picturing the means by which they exercise their control.

I will take a last example. It has probably been mentioned in almost every account of the sublime since Longinus quoted it in his work on Elevation of Style. And it is of special interest here because it illustrates at one and the same time the two kinds of sublimity which we are engaged in distinguishing. 'God said, Let there be light, and there was light.' The idea of the first and instantaneous appearance of light, and that the whole light of the whole world, is already sublime; and its primary appeal

[25] At least if the 'Vision' is sublime its sublimity is not that of the original. We can 'discern the form thereof' distinctly enough.

is to sense. The further idea that this transcendently glorious apparition is due to mere words, to a breath – our symbol of tenuity, evanescence, impotence to influence material bulk – heightens enormously the impression of absolutely immeasurable power.

To sum up, then, on this matter. It is not safe to distinguish the sublime from the 'beautiful' by its hostility to sense. The sublime may impress its overwhelming greatness in either of two ways, by an appeal to sense, or by a kind of despite done to it. Nor can we assert, if we think of the sunrise, the thunderstorm, or of sublime music, that the second of these ways is more distinctive of the sublime than the first. But perhaps we may say this. In 'beauty' that which appears in a sensuous form seems to rest in it, to be perfectly embodied in it, and to have no tendency to pass beyond it. In the sublime, even where no such tendency is felt and sublimity is nearest to 'beauty,' we still feel the presence of a power held in reserve, which could with ease exceed its present expression. In *some* forms of sublimity, again, the sensuous embodiment seems threatening to break in its effort to express what appears in it. And in others we definitely feel that the power which for a moment intimates its presence to sense is infinite and utterly uncontainable by any or all vehicles of its manifestation. Here we are furthest (in a way) from sense, and furthest also from 'beauty.'

(3) I come finally and, as it will at first seem, needlessly to an idea which has already been touched on. The words

'boundless,' 'illimitable,' 'infinite,' constantly recur in discussions of sublimity, and it cannot be denied that our experience constantly provokes them. The sublime has been said to awake in us the consciousness of our own infinity. It has been said, again, to represent in all cases the inadequacy of all finite forms to express the infinite. And so we may be told that, even if we do not adopt some such formula, but continue to speak of 'greatness,' we ought at least to go beyond the adjective 'exceeding' or 'overwhelming,' and to substitute 'immeasurable' or 'incomparable' or 'infinite.'

Now, at the point we have reached, it would seem we might at once answer that a claim is here being made for the sublime in general which really holds good only of one kind of sublimity. Sometimes the sublime object *is* apprehended as the Infinite, or again as an expression of it. This is, for example, a point of view frequent in Hebrew poetry. Sometimes, again, the object (*e. g.* time or the heavens) is apprehended, not indeed as *the* Infinite, but still as infinite or immeasurable. But how are we to say that a sublime lion or mountain, or Satan or Lady Macbeth, is apprehended as the Infinite, or as infinite, or (usually) as even an expression of the Infinite? And how are we to say that the greatness of most sublime objects is apprehended as incomparable or immeasurable? It is only failure to observe these distinctions that leads to errors like one recorded in Coleridge's Table-talk (July 25, 1832): 'Could you ever discover anything sublime, in our sense of the word, in the classic Greek literature?

I never could. Sublimity is Hebrew by birth.'

This reply, however, though sound so far as it goes, does not settle the question raised. It may still be maintained that sublimity in all cases, and even when we have no idea of infinity before us, does represent the inadequacy of all finite forms to express the infinite. And it is unfortunately impossible for us to deal fully with this contention. It would carry us into the region of metaphysics; and, while believing that no theory of the sublime can be complete which stops short of that region, I am aiming in this lecture at no such theory, but only at a result which may hold good without regard to further developments. All that I can do is to add a few words on the question whether, going beyond the adjective 'exceeding' or 'overwhelming,' we can say that the sublime is the beautiful which has immeasurable, incomparable, or infinite greatness. And the answer which I suggest and will go on to explain may be put thus: the greatness is only sometimes immeasurable, but it is *always* unmeasured.

We cannot apprehend an object as sublime while we apprehend it as comparably, measurably, or finitely great. Let the thing be what it may – physical, vital, or spiritual – the moment we say to ourselves, 'It is very great, but I know *how* great,' or 'It is very great, but something else is as great or greater,' at that moment it has ceased to be sublime. Outside the consciousness of its sublimity we may be perfectly well aware that a thing is limited, measurable, equal or inferior to something else. But then we are *not* finding it sublime. And when we *are* so

finding it, we are absorbed in *its* greatness, and have no thought either of the limits of that or of its equality or inferiority to anything else. The lion of whom we are thinking, 'An elephant could kill him,' is no sublime lion. The Falls of Schaffhausen are sublime when you are lost in astonishment at them, but not when you are saying to yourself 'What must Niagara be!' This seems indubitable, and hence we may say that, in one sense, all sublimity has unmeasured greatness, and that no greatness is sublime which we apprehend as finite.

But the absence of a consciousness of measure or finitude is one thing; the presence of a consciousness of immeasurableness or infinity is another. The first belongs to all sublimity, the second only to one kind of it, – to that where we *attempt* to measure, or find limits to, the greatness of the thing. *If* we make this attempt, as when we try in imagination to number the stars or to find an end to time, then it is essential to sublimity that we should fail, and so fail that the idea of immeasurability or endlessness emerges. In like manner, *if* we compare things, nothing will appear sublime whose greatness is surpassed or even equalled by that of something else; and, if this process of comparison is pursued, in the end nothing will be found sublime except the absolute totality (however it may be imagined). And this kind of sublimity, which arises from attempts to measure or compare, is often exceedingly striking. But it is only one kind. For it is an entire delusion – though a very common one in theories of the sublime – to suppose that we *must* attempt

to measure or compare. On the contrary, in the majority of cases our impression of overwhelming greatness is accompanied neither by any idea that this greatness has a measure, nor by the idea that it is immeasurable or infinite.[26]

It will not do, then, to lay it down that the sublime is the beautiful which has immeasurable, incomparable, or infinite greatness. But I suggest that, after the explanations given, we may conveniently use the adjective 'unmeasured,' so long as we remember that this means one thing where we do not measure at all, and another thing where we try to measure and fail. And, this being so, it seems that we may say that *all* sublimity, and not only that in which the idea of infinite greatness or of the Infinite emerges, is an image of infinity; for in all, through a certain check or limitation and the overcoming of it, we reach the perception or the imaginative idea of something which, on the one hand, has a positive nature, and, on the other, is either *not* determined as finite or *is* determined as infinite. But we must not add that this makes the sublime superior to the 'beautiful.' For the 'beautiful' too, though in a different way, is an image of infinity. In 'beauty,' as we said, that which appears in a sensuous

[26] To avoid complication I have passed by the case where we compare the sublime thing with another thing and find it much greater without finding it immeasurably great. Here the greatness, it appears to me, is still unmeasured. That is to say, we do not attempt to determine its amount, and if we did we should lose the impression of sublimity. We may *say*, perhaps, that it is ten, fifty, or a million times, as great; but these words no more represent mathematical calculations than Hamlet's 'forty thousand brothers.'

form seems to rest in that form, to be wholly embodied in it; it shows no tendency to pass beyond it, and intimates no reserve of force that might strain or break it. So that the 'beautiful' thing is a whole complete in itself, and in moments when beauty fills our souls we know what Wordsworth meant when he said 'the least of things seemed infinite,' though each thing, being but one of many, must from another point of view, here suppressed, be finite. 'Beauty,' then, we may perhaps say, is the image of the total presence of the Infinite within any limits it may choose to assume; sublimity the image of its boundlessness, and of its rejection of any pretension to independence or absoluteness on the part of its finite forms; the one the image of its immanence, the other of its transcendence.

Within an hour I could attempt no more than an outline of our subject. That is inevitable; and so is another defect, which I regret more. In analysing any kind of aesthetic experience we have to begin by disentangling the threads that meet in it; and when we can only make a beginning, no time is left for the further task of showing how they are interwoven. We distinguish, for example, one kind of sublimity from another, and we must do so; but in the actual experience, the single instance, these kinds often melt together. I take one case of this. Trying to overlook the field in which sublimity appears, we say that there is a sublimity of inorganic things, and of things vital, and of things spiritual, and that these kinds differ. And this is true; and perhaps it is also true that sometimes we experience one of these kinds, so

to say, quite pure and unmixed with others. But it is not always, perhaps not usually so. More frequently kind mingles with kind, and we mutilate the experience when we name it after one of them. In life the imagination, touched at one point, tingles all over and responds at all points. It is offered an impression of physical or vital greatness, but at once it brings from the other end of its world reminiscences of quite another order, and fuses the impression with them. Or an appeal is made to the sense of spiritual greatness, but there rises before the imagination a vision with the outlines and hues of material Nature. Offer it a sunset – a mere collection of coloured lines and spots – and they become to it regrets and hopes and longings too deep for tears. Tell it of souls made perfect in bliss, and it sees an immeasurable rose, or city-walls that flash with the light of all the gems on earth. The truth that a sparrow and a mountain are different, and that Socrates is not Satan, interests it but little. What it cares for is the truth that, when they are sublime, they are all the same; for each becomes infinite, and it feels in each its own infinity.

1903.

NOTES [27]

I add here a few remarks on some points which it was not convenient to discuss in the lecture.

1. We have seen that in the apprehension of sublimity we do not always employ comparison or attempt to measure. To feel a thing overwhelmingly great it is not necessary to have before the mind either the idea of something less great, or any standard of greatness. To argue that this must be necessary because 'great' means nothing except as opposed to 'small,' is like arguing that I cannot have a perception of pride without thinking of humility.

This point seems to me quite clear. But a question remains. If we go below consciousness, what is it that happens in us? The apprehension of sublimity implies that we have received an exceedingly strong impression. This as a matter of fact must mean an impression very much stronger than something else; and this something else must be, so to say, a standard with which the impression is unconsciously compared. What then is it?

Stated in the most general terms, it must apparently be the usual or average strength of impressions.

But this unconscious standard takes particular concrete forms

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[27] I am far from being satisfied with the ideas imperfectly expressed in the first and third of these Notes, but they require more consideration than I can give to them during the printing of the Second Edition. The reader is requested to take them as mere suggestions.

in various classes of cases. Not seldom it seems to be our sense of our own power or of average human power. This is especially so where the thing felt to be sublime is, in the relevant respect, *in eodem genere* with ourselves. A sublime lion, for example, is immensely superior to us, or to the average man, in muscular force and so in dangerousness, Tourgénieff's sparrow in courage and love, a god in all sorts of ways. And the use of this unconscious standard is probably the reason of the fact, noted in the lecture, that it is difficult to feel sublimity, as regards vital force, in a creature smaller than ourselves.

But this is not the only standard. A sublime lion is not only immensely stronger than we are, but is generally also exceptional among lions; and so with a sublime tree or bridge or thunderstorm. So that we seem also to use as unconscious standard the idea of the average of the kind to which the thing belongs. An average thunderstorm hardly seems sublime, and yet it is overwhelmingly superior to us in power.[28]

What, again, is the psychical machinery employed when we attempt to measure the shoreless sea, or time, and find them immeasurable? Is there any standard of the 'usual' here? I will leave this question to more skilled psychologists than myself.

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[28] Hence a creature much less powerful than ourselves *may*, I suppose, be sublime, even from the mere point of view of vital energy. But I doubt if this is so in my own case. I have seen 'magnificent' or 'glorious' cocks and cats, but if I called them 'sublime' I should say rather more than I feel. I mention cocks, because Ruskin somewhere mentions a sublime cock; but I cannot find the passage, and this cock may have been sublime (if it really was so to Ruskin) from some other than 'vital' greatness.

2. Since the impression produced by sublimity is one of very exceptional strength, we are not able to feel it continuously for long, though we can repeat it after a pause. In this the sublime differs from the 'beautiful,' on which we like to *dwell* after our first surprise is over. A tragedy or symphony that was sublime from beginning to end could not be so experienced. Living among mountains, we feel their beauty more or less constantly, their sublimity only by flashes.

3. If our account of the impression produced by sublimity is true, why should not any sensation whatever produce this impression merely by gaining extraordinary strength? It seems to me it would, supposing at its normal strength it conformed to the general requirements of aesthetic experience, and supposing the requisite accession of strength did not remove this conformity. But this, in one respect at least, it would do. It would make the light, sound, smell, physiologically painful, and we should feel it as painful or even dangerous. We find this in the case of lightning. If it is to be felt as aesthetic it must not pass a certain degree of brightness; or, as we sometimes say, it must not be too 'near.'

HEGEL'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY [29]

Since Aristotle dealt with tragedy, and, as usual, drew the main features of his subject with those sure and simple strokes which no later hand has rivalled, the only philosopher who has treated it in a manner both original and searching is Hegel. I propose here to give a sketch of Hegel's theory, and to add some remarks upon it. But I cannot possibly do justice in a sketch to a theory which fills many pages of the *Aesthetik*; which I must tear from its connections with the author's general view of poetry, and with the rest of his philosophy[30]; and which I must try to exhibit as far as possible in the language of ordinary literature. To estimate this theory, therefore, from my sketch would be neither safe nor just – all the more because, in the interest of immediate

[29] See, primarily, *Aesthetik*, iii. 479-581, and especially 525-581. There is much in *Aesthetik*, i. 219-306, and a good deal in ii. 1-243, that bears on the subject. See also the section on Greek religion in *Religionsphilosophie*, ii. 96-156, especially 131-6, 152-6; and the references to the death of Socrates in *Geschichte der Philosophie*, ii. 81 ff., especially 102-5. The works so far cited all consist of posthumous redactions of lecture-notes. Among works published by Hegel himself, the early essay on 'Naturrecht' (*Werke*, i. 386 ff.), and *Phaenomenologie d. Geistes*, 320-348, 527-542, deal with or bear on *Greek* tragedy. See also *Rechtsphilosophie*, 196, note. There is a note on *Wallenstein* in *Werke*, xvii. 411-4. These references are to the second edition of the works cited, where there are two editions.

[30] His theory of tragedy is connected with his view of the function of negation in the universe. No statement therefore which ignores his metaphysics and his philosophy of religion can be more than a fragmentary account of that theory.

clearness, I have not scrupled to insert without warning various remarks and illustrations for which Hegel is not responsible.

On certain characteristics of tragedy the briefest reminder will suffice. A large part of the nature of this form of drama is common to the drama in all its forms; and of this nothing need be said. It will be agreed, further, that in all tragedy there is some sort of collision or conflict – conflict of feelings, modes of thought, desires, wills, purposes; conflict of persons with one another, or with circumstances, or with themselves; one, several, or all of these kinds of conflict, as the case may be. Again, it may be taken for granted that a tragedy is a story of unhappiness or suffering, and excites such feelings as pity and fear. To this, if we followed the present usage of the term, we should add that the story of unhappiness must have an unhappy end; by which we mean in effect that the conflict must close with the death of one or more of the principal characters. But this usage of the word 'tragedy' is comparatively recent; it leaves us without a name for many plays, in many languages, which deal with unhappiness without ending unhappily; and Hegel takes the word in its older and wider sense.

Passing on from these admitted characteristics of tragedy, we may best approach Hegel's peculiar view by observing that he lays particular stress on one of them. That a tragedy is a story of suffering is probably to many people the most obvious fact about it. Hegel says very little of this; partly, perhaps, because it is obvious, but more because the essential point to him is not

the suffering but its cause, namely, the action or conflict. Mere suffering, he would say, is not tragic, but only the suffering that comes of a special kind of action. Pity for mere misfortune, like fear of it, is not tragic pity or fear. These are due to the spectacle of the conflict and its attendant suffering, which do not appeal simply to our sensibilities or our instinct of self-preservation, but also to our deeper mind or spirit (*Geist*, a word which, with its adjective, I shall translate 'spirit,' 'spiritual,' because our words 'mind' and 'mental' suggest something merely intellectual).

The reason why the tragic conflict thus appeals to the spirit is that it is itself a conflict of the spirit. It is a conflict, that is to say, between powers that rule the world of man's will and action – his 'ethical substance.' The family and the state, the bond of parent and child, of brother and sister, of husband and wife, of citizen and ruler, or citizen and citizen, with the obligations and feelings appropriate to these bonds; and again the powers of personal love and honour, or of devotion to a great cause or an ideal interest like religion or science or some kind of social welfare – such are the forces exhibited in tragic action; not indeed alone, not without others less affirmative and perhaps even evil, but still in preponderating mass. And as they form the substance of man, are common to all civilised men, and are acknowledged as powers rightfully claiming human allegiance, their exhibition in tragedy has that interest, at once deep and universal, which is essential to a great work of art.

In many a work of art, in many a statue, picture, tale, or

song, such powers are shown in solitary peace or harmonious co-operation. Tragedy shows them in collision. Their nature is divine, and in religion they appear as gods; but, as seen in the world of tragic action, they have left the repose of Olympus, have entered into human wills, and now meet as foes. And this spectacle, if sublime, is also terrible. The essentially tragic fact is the self-division and intestinal warfare of the ethical substance, not so much the war of good with evil as the war of good with good. Two of these isolated powers face each other, making incompatible demands. The family claims what the state refuses, love requires what honour forbids. The competing forces are both in themselves rightful, and so far the claim of each is equally justified; but the right of each is pushed into a wrong, because it ignores the right of the other, and demands that absolute sway which belongs to neither alone, but to the whole of which each is but a part.

And one reason why this happens lies in the nature of the characters through whom these claims are made. It is the nature of the tragic hero, at once his greatness and his doom, that he knows no shrinking or half-heartedness, but identifies himself wholly with the power that moves him, and will admit the justification of no other power. However varied and rich his inner life and character may be, in the conflict it is all concentrated in one point. Antigone *is* the determination to do her duty to her dead brother; Romeo is not a son or a citizen as well as a lover, he is lover pure and simple, and his love is the whole of him.

The end of the tragic conflict is the denial of both the exclusive claims. It is not the work of chance or blank fate; it is the act of the ethical substance itself, asserting its absoluteness against the excessive pretensions of its particular powers. In that sense, as proceeding from an absolute right which cancels claims based on right but pushed into wrong, it may be called the act of 'eternal justice.' Sometimes it can end the conflict peacefully, and the tragedy closes with a solution. Appearing as a divine being, the spiritual unity reconciles by some adjustment the claims of the contending powers (*Eumenides*); or at its bidding one of them softens its demand (*Philoctetes*); or again, as in the more beautiful solution of the *Oedipus Coloneus*, the hero by his own self-condemnation and inward purification reconciles himself with the supreme justice, and is accepted by it. But sometimes the quarrel is pressed to extremes; the denial of the one-sided claims involves the death of one or more of the persons concerned; and we have a catastrophe. The ultimate power thus appears as a destructive force. Yet even here, as Hegel insists, the end is not without an aspect of reconciliation. For that which is denied is not the rightful powers with which the combatants have identified themselves. On the contrary, those powers, and with them the only thing for which the combatants cared, are affirmed. What is denied is the exclusive and therefore wrongful assertion of their right.

Such in outline is Hegel's main view. It may be illustrated more fully by two examples, favourites of his, taken

from Aeschylus and Sophocles. Clytemnestra has murdered Agamemnon, her husband and king. Orestes, their son, is impelled by filial piety to avenge his father, and is ordered by Apollo to do so. But to kill a mother is to sin against filial piety. The spiritual substance is divided against itself. The sacred bond of father and son demands what the equally sacred bond of son and mother forbids. When, therefore, Orestes has done the deed, the Furies of his murdered mother claim him for their prey. He appeals to Apollo, who resists their claim. A solution is arrived at without a catastrophe. The cause is referred to Athene, who institutes at Athens a court of sworn judges. The votes of this court being equally divided, Athene gives her casting-vote for Orestes; while the Furies are at last appeased by a promise of everlasting honour at Athens.

In the *Antigone*, on the other hand, to Hegel the 'perfect exemplar of tragedy,' the solution is negative. The brother of Antigone has brought against his native city an army of foreigners bent on destroying it. He has been killed in the battle, and Creon, the ruler of the city, has issued an edict forbidding anyone on pain of death to bury the corpse. In so doing he not only dishonours the dead man, but violates the rights of the gods of the dead. Antigone without hesitation disobeys the edict, and Creon, despite the remonstrance of his son, who is affianced to her, persists in exacting the penalty. Warned by the prophet Teiresias, he gives way, but too late. Antigone, immured in a rocky chamber to starve, has anticipated her death. Her lover

follows her example, and his mother refuses to survive him. Thus Antigone has lost her life through her absolute assertion of the family against the state; Creon has violated the sanctity of the family, and in return sees his own home laid in ruins. But in this catastrophe neither the right of the family nor that of the state is denied; what is denied is the absoluteness of the claim of each.

The danger of illustrations like these is that they divert attention from the principle illustrated to questions about the interpretation of particular works. So it will be here. I cannot stay to discuss these questions, which do not affect Hegel's principle; but it will be well, before going further, to remove a misunderstanding of it which is generally to be found in criticisms of his treatment of the *Eumenides* and the *Antigone*. The main objection may be put thus: 'Hegel talks of equally justified powers or claims. But Aeschylus never meant that Orestes and the Furies were equally justified; for Orestes was acquitted. Nor did Sophocles mean that Antigone and Creon were equally right. And how can it have been equally the duty of Orestes to kill his mother and not to kill her?' But, in the first place, it is most important to observe that Hegel is not discussing at all what we should generally call the moral quality of the acts and persons concerned, or, in the ordinary sense, what it was their duty to do. And, in the second place, when he speaks of 'equally justified' powers, what he means, and, indeed, sometimes says, is that these powers are *in themselves* equally justified. The family and the state, the bond of father and son, the bond of mother

and son, the bond of citizenship, these are each and all, one as much as another, powers rightfully claiming human allegiance. It is tragic that observance of one should involve the violation of another. These are Hegel's propositions, and surely they are true. Their truth is quite unaffected by the fact (assuming it is one) that in the circumstances the act combining this observance of one and violation of another was morally right, or by the fact (if so it is) that one such act (say Antigone's) was morally right, and another (say Creon's) was morally wrong. It is sufficient for Hegel's principle that the violation should take place, and that we should feel its weight. We do feel it. We may approve the act of Antigone or Orestes, but in approving it we still feel that it is no light matter to disobey the law or to murder a mother, that (as we might say) there is much justice in the pleas of the Furies and of Creon, and that the *tragic* effect depends upon these facts. If, again, it is objected that the underlying conflict in the *Antigone* is not between the family and the state, but between divine and human law, that objection, if sound, might touch Hegel's interpretation,[31] but it would not affect his principle, except for those who recognise no obligation in human law; and it will scarcely be contended that Sophocles is to be numbered among them. On the other hand, it is, I think, a matter for regret that Hegel employed such words as 'right,' 'justified,' and 'justice.' They do not mislead readers familiar with his writings,

[31] I say 'might,' because Hegel himself in the *Phaenomenologie* uses those very terms 'divine' and 'human law' in reference to the *Antigone*.

but to others they suggest associations with criminal law, or our everyday moral judgments, or perhaps the theory of 'poetic justice'; and these are all out of place in a discussion on tragedy.

Having determined in outline the idea or principle of tragedy, Hegel proceeds to give an account of some differences between ancient and modern works. In the limited time at our disposal we shall do best to confine ourselves to a selection from his remarks on the latter. For in speaking of ancient tragedy Hegel, who finds something modern in Euripides, makes accordingly but little use of him for purposes of contrast, while his main point of view as to Aeschylus and Sophocles has already appeared in the illustrations we have given of the general principle. I will only add, by way of preface, that the pages about to be summarised leave on one, rightly or wrongly, the impression that to his mind the principle is more adequately realised in the best classical tragedies than in modern works. But the question whether this really was his deliberate opinion would detain us too long from weightier matters.[32]

Hegel considers first the cases where modern tragedy resembles ancient in dealing with conflicts arising from the pursuit of ends which may be called substantial or objective and not merely personal. And he points out that modern tragedy here shows a much greater variety. Subjects are taken, for example, from the quarrels of dynasties, of rivals for the throne, of kings and nobles, of state and church. Calderon shows the conflict

[32] See Note at end of lecture.

of love and honour regarded as powers imposing obligations. Schiller in his early works makes his characters defend the rights of nature against convention, or of freedom of thought against prescription – rights in their essence universal. Wallenstein aims at the unity and peace of Germany; Karl Moor attacks the whole arrangement of society; Faust seeks to attain in thought and action union with the Absolute. In such cases the end is more than personal; it represents a power claiming the allegiance of the individual; but, on the other hand, it does not always or generally represent a great *ethical* institution or bond like the family or the state. We have passed into a wider world.

But, secondly, he observes, in regard to modern tragedy, that in a larger number of instances such public or universal interests either do not appear at all, or, if they appear, are scarcely more than a background for the real subject. The real subject, the impelling end or passion, and the ensuing conflict, is personal, – these particular characters with their struggle and their fate. The importance given to subjectivity – this is the distinctive mark of modern sentiment, and so of modern art; and such tragedies bear its impress. A part at least of Hegel's meaning may be illustrated thus. We are interested in the personality of Orestes or Antigone, but chiefly as it shows itself in one aspect, as identifying itself with a certain ethical relation; and our interest in the personality is inseparable and indistinguishable from our interest in the power it represents. This is not so with Hamlet, whose position so closely resembles that of Orestes. What engrosses our attention

is the whole personality of Hamlet in his conflict, not with an opposing spiritual power, but with circumstances and, still more, with difficulties in his own nature. No one could think of describing Othello as the representative of an ethical family relation. His passion, however much nobility he may show in it, is personal. So is Romeo's love. It is not pursued, like Posa's freedom of thought, as something universal, a right of man. Its right, if it could occur to us to use the term at all, is Romeo's right.

On this main characteristic of modern tragedy others depend. For instance, that variety of subject to which reference has just been made depends on it. For when so much weight is attached to personality, almost any fatal collision in which a sufficiently striking character is involved may yield material for tragedy. Naturally, again, characterisation has become fuller and more subtle, except in dramas which are more or less an imitation of the antique. The characters in Greek tragedy are far from being types or personified abstractions, as those of classical French tragedy tend to be: they are genuine individuals. But still they are comparatively simple and easy to understand, and have not the intricacy of the characters in Shakespeare. These, for the most part, represent simply themselves; and the loss of that interest which attached to the Greek characters from their identification with an ethical power, is compensated by an extraordinary subtlety in their portrayal, and also by their possession of some peculiar charm or some commanding

superiority. Finally, the interest in personality explains the freedom with which characters more or less definitely evil are introduced in modern tragedy. Mephistopheles is as essentially modern as Faust. The passion of Richard or Macbeth is not only personal, like that of Othello; it is egoistic and anarchic, and leads to crimes done with a full knowledge of their wickedness; but to the modern mind the greatness of the personality justifies its appearance in the position of hero. Such beings as Iago and Goneril, almost portents of evil, are not indeed made the heroes of tragedies; but, according to Hegel, they would not have been admitted in Greek tragedy at all. If Clytemnestra had been cited in objection as a parallel to Lady Macbeth, he would have replied that Lady Macbeth had not the faintest ground of complaint against Duncan, while in reading the *Agamemnon* we are frequently reminded that Clytemnestra's husband was the sacrificer of their child. He might have added that Clytemnestra is herself an example of the necessity, where one of the principal characters inspires hatred or horror, of increasing the subtlety of the drawing or adding grandeur to the evil will.

It remains to compare ancient and modern tragedy in regard to the issue of the conflict. We have seen that Hegel attributes this issue in the former to the ethical substance or eternal justice, and so accounts for such reconciliation as we feel to be present even where the end is a catastrophe. Now, in the catastrophe of modern tragedy, he says, a certain justice is sometimes felt to be present; but even then it differs from the antique justice. It

is in some cases more 'abstract': the end pursued by the hero, though it is not egoistic, is still presented rather as his particular end than as something rightful though partial; and hence the catastrophe appears as the reaction, not of an undivided ethical totality, but merely of the universal turning against a too assertive particular.[33] In cases, again, where the hero (Richard or Macbeth) openly attacks an ethical power and plunges into evil, we feel that he meets with justice, and only gets what he deserves; but then this justice is colder and more 'criminalistic' than that of ancient tragedy. Thus even when the modern work seems to resemble the ancient in its issue, the sense of reconciliation is imperfect. And partly for this reason, partly from the concentration of our interest on individuality as such, we desire to see in the individual himself some sort of reconciliation with his fate. What shape this will take depends, of course, on the story and the character of the hero. It may appear in a religious form, as his feeling that he is exchanging his earthly being for an indestructible happiness; or again, in his recognition of the justice of his fall; or at least he may show us that, in face of the forces that crush him to death, he maintains untouched the freedom and strength of his own will.

But there remain, says Hegel, many modern tragedies where we have to attribute the catastrophe not to any kind of justice, but to unhappy circumstances and outward accidents. And then we can only feel that the individual whose merely personal ends are thwarted by mere particular circumstances and chances, pays

[33] This interpretation of Hegel's 'abstract' is more or less conjectural and doubtful.

the penalty that awaits existence in a scene of contingency and finitude. Such a feeling cannot rise above sadness, and, if the hero is a noble soul, it may become the impression of a dreadful external necessity. This impression can be avoided only when circumstance and accident are so depicted that they are felt to coincide with something in the hero himself, so that he is not simply destroyed by an outward force. So it is with Hamlet. 'This bank and shoal of time' is too narrow for his soul, and the death that seems to fall on him by chance is also within him. And so in *Romeo and Juliet* we feel that the rose of a love so beautiful is too tender to bloom in the storm-swept valley of its birth. But such a feeling of reconciliation is still one of pain, an unhappy blessedness.[34] And if the situation displayed in a drama is of such a kind that we feel the issue to depend *simply* on the turn the dramatist may choose to give to the course of events, we are fully justified in our preference for a happy ending.

In this last remark (or rather in the pages misrepresented by it) Hegel, of course, is not criticising Shakespeare. He is objecting to the destiny-dramas of his own time, and to the fashionable indulgence in sentimental melancholy. Strongly as he asserted the essential function of negation throughout the universe, the affirmative power of the spirit, even in its profoundest divisions, was for him the deepest truth and the most inspiring theme. And one may see this even in his references to Shakespeare. He

[34] Hegel's meaning does not fully appear in the sentences here condensed. The 'blessedness' comes from the sense of greatness or beauty in the characters.

appreciated Shakespeare's representation of extreme forms of evil, but, even if he was fully satisfied of its justification, his personal preference lay in another direction, and while I do not doubt that he thought *Hamlet* a greater work than *Iphigenie*, I suspect he loved Goethe's play the best.

Most of those who have thought about this subject will agree that the ideas I have tried to sketch are interesting and valuable; but they suggest scores of questions. Alike in the account of tragedy in general, and in that of the differences between ancient and modern tragedy, everyone will find statements to doubt and omissions to regret; and scarcely one of Hegel's interpretations of particular plays will escape objection. It is impossible for me to touch on more than a few points; and to the main ideas I owe so much that I am more inclined to dwell on their truth than to criticise what seem to be defects. But perhaps after all an attempt to supplement and amend may be the best way of throwing some part of Hegel's meaning more into relief. And I will begin with the attempt to supplement.

He seems to be right in laying emphasis on the action and conflict in tragedy rather than on the suffering and misfortune. No mere suffering or misfortune, no suffering that does not spring in great part from human agency, and in some degree from the agency of the sufferer, is tragic, however pitiful or dreadful it may be. But, sufficient connection with these agencies being present, misfortune, the fall from prosperity to adversity, with the suffering attending it, at once becomes tragic; and in many

tragedies it forms a large ingredient, as does the pity for it in the tragic feeling. Hegel, I think, certainly takes too little notice of it; and by this omission he also withdraws attention from something the importance of which he would have admitted at once; I mean the way in which suffering is borne. Physical pain, to take an extreme instance, is one thing: Philoctetes, bearing it, is another. And the noble endurance of pain that rends the heart is the source of much that is best worth having in tragedy.

Again, there is one particular kind of misfortune *not* obviously due to human agency, which undoubtedly may affect us in a tragic way. I mean that kind which suggests the idea of fate. Tragedies which represent man as the mere plaything of chance or a blank fate or a malicious fate, are never really deep: it is satisfactory to see that Maeterlinck, a man of true genius, has now risen above these ideas. But, where those factors of tragedy are present which Hegel emphasises, the impression of something fateful in what we call accident, the impression that the hero not only invites misfortune by his exceptional stature and exceptional daring, but is also, if I may so put it, strangely and terribly unlucky, is in many plays a genuine ingredient in tragic effect. It is so, for example, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. It is so even in dramas like Shakespeare's, which exemplify the saying that character is destiny. Hegel's own reference to the prominence of accident in the plot of *Hamlet* proves it. Othello would not have become Iago's victim if his own character had been different; but still, as we say, it is an extraordinary fatality which makes him

the companion of the one man in the world who is at once able enough, brave enough, and vile enough to ensnare him. In the *Antigone* itself, and in the very catastrophe of it, accident plays its part: we can hardly say that it depends solely on the characters of Creon and Antigone that the one yields just too late to save the life of the other. Now, it may be said with truth that Hegel's whole account of the ultimate power in tragedy is a rationalisation of the idea of fate, but his remarks on this particular aspect of fate are neither sufficient nor satisfactory.

His insistence on the need for some element of reconciliation in a tragic catastrophe, and his remarks on the various forms it assumes, have the greatest value; but one result of the omissions just noticed is that he sometimes exaggerates it, and at other times rates it too low. When he is speaking of the kind of tragedy he most approves, his language almost suggests that our feeling at the close of the conflict is, or should be, one of complete reconciliation. This it surely neither is nor can be. Not to mention the suffering and death we have witnessed, the very existence of the conflict, even if a supreme ethical power is felt to be asserted in its close, remains a painful fact, and, in large measure, a fact not understood. For, though we may be said to see, in one sense, how the opposition of spiritual powers arises, something in us, and that the best, still cries out against it. And even the perception or belief that it must needs be that offences come would not abolish our feeling that the necessity is terrible, or our pain in the woe of the guilty and the innocent. Nay, one may conjecture, the

feeling and the pain would not vanish if we fully understood that the conflict and catastrophe were by a rational necessity involved in the divine and eternally accomplished purpose of the world. But this exaggeration in Hegel's language, if partly due to his enthusiasm for the affirmative, may be mainly, like some other defects, an accident of lecturing. In the *Philosophy of Religion*, I may add, he plainly states that in the solution even of tragedies like the *Antigone* something remains unresolved (ii. 135).

On the other hand, his treatment of the aspect of reconciliation in modern tragedy is in several respects insufficient. I will mention only one. He does not notice that in the conclusion of not a few tragedies pain is mingled not merely with acquiescence, but with something like exultation. Is there not such a feeling at the close of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*; and that although the end in the last two cases touches the limit of legitimate pathos? This exultation appears to be connected with our sense that the hero has never shown himself so great or noble as in the death which seals his failure. A rush of passionate admiration, and a glory in the greatness of the soul, mingle with our grief; and the coming of death, so far from destroying these feelings, appears to leave them untouched, or even to be entirely in harmony with them. If in such dramas we may be said to feel that the ultimate power is no mere fate, but a spiritual power, then we also feel that the hero was never so near to this power as in the moment when it required his life.

The last omission I would notice in Hegel's theory is that

he underrates the action in tragedy of what may be called by a rough distinction moral evil rather than defect. Certainly the part played by evil differs greatly in different cases, but it is never absent, not even from tragedies of Hegel's favourite type. If it does not appear in the main conflict, it appears in its occasion. You may say that, while Iago and Macbeth have evil purposes, neither the act of Orestes nor the vengeance of the Furies, neither Antigone's breach of the edict nor even Creon's insistence on her punishment, springs from evil in them; but the situation with which Orestes or Antigone has to deal, and so in a sense the whole tragedy, arises from evil, the murder of Agamemnon, and the attempt of Polyneices to bring ruin on his native city. In fact, if we confine the title 'tragedy' to plays ending with a catastrophe, it will be found difficult to name great tragedies, ancient or modern, in which evil has not directly or indirectly a prominent part. And its presence has an important bearing on the effect produced by the catastrophe. On the one hand, it deepens the sense of painful awe. The question why affirmative spiritual forces should collide is hard enough; but the question why, together with them, there should be generated violent evil and extreme depravity is harder and more painful still. But, on the other hand, the element of reconciliation in the catastrophe is strengthened by recognition of the part played by evil in bringing it about; because our sense that the ultimate power cannot endure the presence of such evil is implicitly the sense that this power is at least more closely allied with good. If it rejects the exaggerated

claims of its own isolated powers, that which provokes from it a much more vehement reaction must be still more alien to its nature. This feeling is forcibly evoked by Shakespeare's tragedies, and in many Greek dramas it is directly appealed to by repeated reminders that what is at work in the disasters is the unsleeping Ate which follows an ancestral sin. If Aristotle did not in some lost part of the *Poetics* discuss ideas like this, he failed to give a complete rationale of Greek tragedy.

I come lastly to the matter I have most at heart. What I take to be the central idea in Hegel's theory seems to me to touch the essence of tragedy. And I will not assert that his own statement of it fails to cover the whole field of instances. For he does not teach, as he is often said to do, that tragedy portrays only the conflict of such ethical powers as the family and the state. He adds to these, as we have seen, others, such as love and honour, together with various universal ends; and it may even be maintained that he has provided in his general statement for those numerous cases where, according to himself, no substantial or universal ends collide, but the interest is centred on 'personalities.' Nevertheless, when these cases come to be considered more fully – and, in Hegel's view, they are the most characteristically modern cases – we are not satisfied. They naturally tend to appear as declensions from the more ideal ancient form; for how can a personality which represents only itself claim the interest of one which represents something universal? And further, they are sometimes described in a manner which strikes the

reader, let us say, of Shakespeare, as both insufficient and misleading. Without raising, then, unprofitable questions about the comparative merits of ancient and modern tragedy, I should like to propose a restatement of Hegel's general principle which would make it more obviously apply to both.

If we omit all reference to ethical or substantial powers and interests, what have we left? We have the more general idea – to use again a formula not Hegel's own – that tragedy portrays a self-division and self-waste of spirit, or a division of spirit involving conflict and waste. It is implied in this that on *both* sides in the conflict there is a spiritual value. The same idea may be expressed (again, I think, not in Hegel's own words) by saying that the tragic conflict is one not merely of good with evil, but also, and more essentially, of good with good. Only, in saying this, we must be careful to observe that 'good' here means anything that has spiritual value, not moral goodness alone,[35] and that 'evil' has a similarly wide sense.

Now this idea of a division of spirit involving conflict and waste covers the tragedies of ethical and other universal powers, and it covers much besides. According to it the collision of such powers would be one kind of tragic collision, but only one. *Why* are we tragically moved by the conflict of family and state? Because we set a high value on family and state. Why then should not the conflict of anything else that has sufficient value affect us tragically? It does. The value must be sufficient – a

[35] Hegel himself expressly guards against this misconception.

moderate value will not serve; and other characteristics must be present which need not be considered here. But, granted these conditions, *any* spiritual conflict involving spiritual waste is tragic. And it is just one greatness of modern art that it has shown the tragic fact in situations of so many and such diverse kinds. These situations have not the peculiar effectiveness of the conflicts preferred by Hegel, but they may have an equal effectiveness peculiar to themselves.

Let me attempt to test these ideas by choosing a most unfavourable instance – unfavourable because the play seems at first to represent a conflict simply of good and evil, and so, according both to Hegel's statement and the proposed restatement, to be no tragedy at all: I mean *Macbeth*. What is the conflict here? It will be agreed that it does not lie between two ethical powers or universal ends, and that, as Hegel says, the main interest is in personalities. Let us take it first, then, to lie between Macbeth and the persons opposing him, and let us ask whether there is not spiritual value or good on both sides – not an equal amount of good (that is not necessary), but enough good on each to give the impression of spiritual waste. Is there not such good in Macbeth? It is not a question merely of moral goodness, but of good. It is not a question of the use made of good, but of its presence. And such bravery and skill in war as win the enthusiasm of everyone about him; such an imagination as few but poets possess; a conscience so vivid that his deed is to him beforehand a thing of terror, and, once done, condemns him

to that torture of the mind on which he lies in restless ecstasy; a determination so tremendous and a courage so appalling that, for all this torment, he never dreams of turning back, but, even when he has found that life is a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, will tell it out to the end though earth and heaven and hell are leagued against him; are not these things, in themselves, good, and gloriously good? Do they not make you, for all your horror, admire Macbeth, sympathise with his agony, pity him, and see in him the waste of forces on which you place a spiritual value? It is simply on this account that he is for you, not the abstraction called a criminal who merely 'gets what he deserves' (art, like religion, knows no such thing), but a tragic hero, and that his war with other forces of indubitable spiritual worth is a tragic war.[36]

It is required by the restatement of Hegel's principle to show that in the external conflict of persons there is good on both sides. It is not required that this should be true, secondly, of both sides in the conflict within the hero's soul; for the hero is only a part of the tragedy. Nevertheless in almost all cases, if not in all, it is true. It is obviously so where, as in the hero and also the heroine of the *Cid*, the contending powers in this internal

[36] The same point may be put thus, in view of that dangerous word 'personality.' Our interest in Macbeth may be called interest in a personality; but it is not an interest in some bare form of self-consciousness, nor yet in a person in the legal sense, but in a personality full of matter. This matter is not an ethical or universal end, but it must in a sense be universal – human nature in a particular form – or it would not excite the horror, sympathy, and admiration it does excite. Nor, again, could it excite these feelings if it were not composed largely of qualities on which we set a high value.

struggle are love and honour. Even when love is of a quality less pure and has a destructive force, as in Shakespeare's Antony, it is clearly true. And it remains true even where, as in Hamlet and Macbeth, the contest seems to lie, and for most purposes might conveniently be said to lie, between forces simply good and simply the reverse. This is not really so, and the tragic effect depends upon the fact. It depends on our feeling that the elements in the man's nature are so inextricably blended that the good in him, that which we admire, instead of simply opposing the evil, reinforces it. Macbeth's imagination deters him from murder, but it also makes the vision of a crown irresistibly bright. If he had been less determined, nay, if his conscience had been less maddening in its insistence that he had thrown the precious jewel of his soul irretrievably away, he might have paused after his first deed, might even have repented. Yet his imagination, his determination, and his conscience were things good. Hamlet's desire to do his duty is a good thing, but what opposes this desire is by no means simply evil. It is something to which a substantial contribution is made by the qualities we most admire in him. Thus the nature of tragedy, as seen in the external conflict, repeats itself on each side of this conflict, and everywhere there is a spiritual value in both the contending forces.

In showing that *Macbeth*, a tragedy as far removed as possible from the *Antigone* as understood by Hegel, is still of one nature with it, and equally answers to the account of tragedy proposed, it has been necessary to ignore the great difference between the

two plays. But when once the common essence of all tragedies has been determined, their differences become the interesting subject. They could be distinguished according to the character of the collisions on which they are built, or of the main forces which move the principal agents. And it may well be that, other things being equal (as they never are), the tragedy in which the hero is, as we say, a good man, is more tragic than that in which he is, as we say, a bad one. The more spiritual value, the more tragedy in conflict and waste. The death of Hamlet or Othello is, so far, more tragic than that of Macbeth, that of Macbeth than that of Richard. Below Richard stands Iago, a figure still tragic, but unfit for the hero's part; below him persons like Regan or, in the very depth, Oswald, characters no longer (at least in the dramatic sense) tragic at all. Moral evil, that is to say, so greatly diminishes the spiritual value we ascribe to the personality that a very large amount of good of some kind is required to bring this personality up to the tragic level, the destruction of evil as such being in no degree tragic. And again, it may well be that, other things being equal, the more nearly the contending forces approach each other in goodness, the more tragic is the conflict; that the collision is, so far, more tragic in the *Antigone* than in *Macbeth*, and Hamlet's internal conflict than his struggle with outward enemies and obstacles. But it is dangerous to describe tragedy in terms that even appear to exclude *Macbeth*, or to describe *Macbeth*, even casually or by implication, in terms which imply that it portrays a conflict of mere evil with mere

good.

The restatement of Hegel's main principle as to the conflict would involve a similar restatement as to the catastrophe (for we need not consider here those 'tragedies' which end with a solution). As before, we must avoid any reference to ethical or universal ends, or to the work of 'justice' in the catastrophe. We might then simply say that, as the tragic action portrays a self-division or intestinal conflict of spirit, so the catastrophe displays the violent annulling of this division or conflict. But this statement, which might be pretty generally accepted, would represent only half of Hegel's idea, and perhaps nothing of what is most characteristic and valuable in it. For the catastrophe (if I may put his idea in my own way) has two aspects, a negative and an affirmative, and we have ignored the latter. On the one hand it is the act of a power immeasurably superior to that of the conflicting agents, a power which is irresistible and unescapable, and which overbears and negates whatever is incompatible with it. So far, it may be called, in relation to the conflicting agents,[37] necessity or fate; and unless a catastrophe affects us in ways corresponding with this aspect it is not truly tragic. But then if this were all and this necessity were merely infinite, characterless, external force, the catastrophe would not only terrify (as it should), it would also horrify,

[37] In relation to *both* sides in the conflict (though it may not need to negate life in both). For the ultimate agent in the catastrophe is emphatically not the finite power of one side. It is beyond both, and, at any rate in relation to them, boundless.

depress, or at best provoke indignation or rebellion; and these are not tragic feelings. The catastrophe, then, must have a second and affirmative aspect, which is the source of our feelings of reconciliation, whatever form they may assume. And this will be taken into account if we describe the catastrophe as the violent self-restitution of the divided spiritual unity. The necessity which acts and negates in it, that is to say, is yet of one substance with both the agents. *It* is divided against itself in them; they are *its* conflicting forces; and in restoring its unity through negation it affirms them, so far as they are compatible with that unity. The qualification is essential, since the hero, for all his affinity with that power, is, as the living man we see before us, not so compatible. He must die, and his union with 'eternal justice' (which is more than 'justice') must itself be 'eternal' or ideal. But the qualification does not abolish what it qualifies. This is no occasion to ask how in particular, and in what various ways in various works, we feel the effect of this affirmative aspect in the catastrophe. But it corresponds at least with that strange double impression which is produced by the hero's death. He dies, and our hearts die with him; and yet his death matters nothing to us, or we even exult. He is dead; and he has no more to do with death than the power which killed him and with which he is one.

I leave it to students of Hegel to ask whether he would have accepted the criticisms and modifications I have suggested. Naturally I think he would, as I believe they rest on truth, and

am sure he had a habit of arriving at truth. But in any case their importance is trifling, compared with that of the theory which they attempt to strengthen and to which they owe their existence.

1901.

NOTE

Why did Hegel, in his lectures on Aesthetics, so treat of tragedy as to suggest the idea that the kind of tragedy which he personally preferred (let us for the sake of brevity call it 'ancient') is also the most adequate embodiment of the idea of tragedy? This question can be answered, I think, only conjecturally, but some remarks on it may have an interest for readers of Hegel (they are too brief to be of use to others).

One answer might be this. Hegel did not really hold that idea. But he was lecturing, not writing a book. He thought the principle of tragedy was more clearly and readily visible in ancient works than in modern; and so, for purposes of exposition, he emphasised the ancient form. And this fact, with his personal enthusiasm for certain Greek plays, leads the reader of the *Aesthetik* to misconstrue him.

Again, we must remember the facts of Hegel's life. He seems first to have reflected on tragedy at a time when his enthusiasm for the Greeks and their 'substantial' ethics was combined, not only with a contemptuous dislike for much modern 'subjectivity' (this he never ceased to feel), but with

a certain hostility to the individualism and the un-political character of Christian morality. His first view of tragedy was thus, in effect, a theory of Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy; and it appears in the early essay on *Naturrecht* and more fully in the *Phaenomenologie*. Perhaps, then, when he came to deal with the subject more generally, he insensibly regarded the ancient form as the typical form, and tended to treat the modern rather as a modification of this type than as an alternative embodiment of the general idea of tragedy. The note in the *Rechtsphilosophie* (p. 196) perhaps favours this idea.

But, whether it is correct or no, I believe that the impression produced by the *Aesthetik* is a true one, and that Hegel did deliberately consider the ancient form the more satisfactory. It would not follow, of course, from that opinion that he thought the advantage was all on one side, or considered this or that ancient poet greater than this or that modern, or wished that modern poets had tried to write tragedies of the Greek type. Tragedy would, in his view, be in somewhat the same position as Sculpture. Renaissance sculpture, he might say, has qualities in which it is superior to Greek, and Michael Angelo may have been as great an artist as Pheidias; but all the same for certain reasons Greek sculpture is, and probably will remain, sculpture *par excellence*. So, though not to the same extent, with tragedy.

And such a view would cohere with his general view of Art. For he taught that, in a sense, Classical Art is Art *par excellence*, and that in Greece beauty held a position such as it never held

before and will not hold again. To explain in a brief note how this position bears upon his treatment of modern tragedy would be impossible: but if the student of Hegel will remember in what sense and on what grounds he held it; that he describes Beauty as the '*sinnliches* Scheinen der Idee'; that for him the new idea that distinguished Christianity and Romantic Art from Greek religion and Classical Art is that '*unendliche* Subjektivität' which implies a negative, though not merely negative, relation to sense; and that in Romantic Art this idea is not only exhibited in the religious sphere, but appears in the position given to personal honour, love, and loyalty, and indirectly in what Hegel calls 'die formelle Selbstständigkeit der individuellen Besonderheiten,' and in the fuller admission of common and un-beautiful reality into the realm of Beauty, – he will see how all this is connected with those characteristics of modern tragedy which Hegel regards as necessary and yet as, in part, drawbacks. This connection, which Hegel has no occasion to work out, will be apparent even from consideration of the introductory chapter on 'die romantische Kunstform,' *Aesthetik*, ii. 120-135.

There is one marked difference, I may add, between ancient and modern tragedy, which should be considered with reference to this subject, and which Hegel, I think, does not explicitly point out. Speaking roughly, we may say that the former includes, while the latter tends to ignore, the accepted religious ideas of the time. The ultimate reason of this difference, on Hegel's view, would be that the Olympian gods are themselves the '*sinnliches*

Scheinen der Idee,' and so are in the same element as Art, while this is, on the whole, not so with modern religious ideas. One result would be that Greek tragedy represents the total Greek mind more fully than modern tragedy can the total modern mind.

WORDSWORTH [38]

'Never forget what, I believe, was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen… My ears are stone-dead to this idle buzz, and my flesh as insensible as iron to these petty stings.' These sentences, from a letter written by Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont in 1807, may remind us of the common attitude of his reviewers in the dozen years when most of his best poetry was produced. A century has gone by, and there is now no English poet, either of that period or of any other, who has been the subject of criticism more just, more appreciative, we may even say more reverential. Some of this later criticism might have satisfied even that sense of wonder, awe, and solemn responsibility with which the poet himself regarded the operation of the spirit of poetry within him; and if we desire an interpretation of that spirit, we shall find a really astonishing number of excellent guides. Coleridge, Hazlitt,

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[38] The following pages reproduce the two concluding lectures of a short course on the Age of Wordsworth, given at Oxford in April, 1903, and intended specially for undergraduates in the School of English Language and Literature. A few passages from the other lectures appear elsewhere in this volume. On the subject of the course may I advise any reader who may need the advice to consult Professor Herford's *The Age of Wordsworth*, a little book which is familiar to students of the history of English Literature, and the more admired the more they use it?

Arnold, Swinburne, Brooke, Myers, Pater, Lowell, Legouis, – how easy to add to this list of them! Only the other day there came another, Mr. Walter Raleigh. And that the best book on an English poet that has appeared for some years should be a study of Wordsworth is just what might have been expected. The whirligig of time has brought him a full revenge.

I have no idea of attempting in these two lectures another study, or even an estimate, of Wordsworth. My purpose is much more limited. I think that in a good deal of current criticism, and also in the notions of his poetry prevalent among general readers, a disproportionate emphasis is often laid on certain aspects of his mind and writings. And I should like to offer some words of warning as to this tendency, and also some advice as to the spirit in which he should be approached. I will begin with the advice, though I am tempted at the last moment to omit it, and simply to refer you to Mr. Raleigh, who throughout his book has practised what I am about to preach.

1

There have been greater poets than Wordsworth, but none more original. He saw new things, or he saw things in a new way. Naturally, this would have availed us little if his new things had been private fancies, or if his new perception had been superficial. But that was not so. If it had been, Wordsworth might have won acceptance more quickly, but he would not have gained

his lasting hold on poetic minds. As it is, those in whom he creates the taste by which he is relished, those who learn to love him (and in each generation they are not a few), never let him go. Their love for him is of the kind that he himself celebrated, a settled passion, perhaps 'slow to begin,' but 'never ending,' and twined around the roots of their being. And the reason is that they find his way of seeing the world, his poetic experience, what Arnold meant by his 'criticism of life,' to be something deep, and therefore something that will hold. It continues to bring them joy, peace, strength, exaltation. It does not thin out or break beneath them as they grow older and wiser; nor does it fail them, much less repel them, in sadness or even in their sorest need. And yet – to return to our starting-point – it continues to strike them as original, and something more. It is not like Shakespeare's myriad-mindedness; it is, for good or evil or both, peculiar. They can remember, perhaps, the day when first they saw a cloud somewhat as Wordsworth saw it, or first really understood what made him write this poem or that; his unique way of seeing and feeling, though now familiar and beloved, still brings them not only peace, strength, exaltation, but a 'shock of mild surprise'; and his paradoxes, long known by heart and found full of truth, still remain paradoxes.

If this is so, the road into Wordsworth's mind must be through his strangeness and his paradoxes, and not round them. I do not mean that they are everywhere in his poetry. Much of it, not to speak of occasional platitudes, is beautiful without being

peculiar or difficult; and some of this may be as valuable as that which is audacious or strange. But unless we get hold of that, we remain outside Wordsworth's centre; and, if we have not a most unusual affinity to him, we cannot get hold of that unless we realise its strangeness, and refuse to blunt the sharpness of its edge. Consider, for example, two or three of his statements; the statements of a poet, no doubt, and not of a philosopher, but still evidently statements expressing, intimating, or symbolising, what for him was the most vital truth. He said that the meanest flower that blows could give him thoughts that often lie too deep for tears. He said, in a poem not less solemn, that Nature was the soul of all his moral being; and also that she can so influence us that nothing will be able to disturb our faith that all that we behold is full of blessings. After making his Wanderer tell the heart-rending tale of Margaret, he makes him say that the beauty and tranquillity of her ruined cottage had once so affected him

> That what we feel of sorrow and despair
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
> The passing shows of Being leave behind,
> Appeared an idle dream, that could not live
> Where meditation was.

He said that this same Wanderer could read in the silent faces of the clouds unutterable love, and that among the mountains all things for him breathed immortality. He said to 'Almighty God,'

But thy most dreaded instrument
For working out a pure intent
Is Man arrayed for mutual slaughter;
Yea, Carnage is thy daughter.

This last, it will be agreed, is a startling statement; but is it a whit more extraordinary than the others? It is so only if we assume that we are familiar with thoughts that lie too deep for tears, or if we translate 'the soul of all my moral being' into 'somehow concordant with my moral feelings,' or convert 'all that we behold' into 'a good deal that we behold,' or transform the Wanderer's reading of the silent faces of the clouds into an argument from 'design.' But this is the road round Wordsworth's mind, not into it.[39]

Again, with all Wordsworth's best poems, it is essential not to miss the unique tone of his experience. This doubtless holds good of any true poet, but not in the same way. With many poems there is little risk of our failing either to feel what is distinctive of the writer, or to appropriate what he says. What

[39] These statements, with the exception of the last, were chosen partly because they all say, with the most manifest seriousness, much the same thing that is said, with a touch of playful exaggeration, in *The Tables Turned*, where occurs that outrageous stanza about 'one impulse from a vernal wood' which Mr. Raleigh has well defended. When all fitting allowance has been made for the fact that these statements, and many like them, are 'poetic,' they ought to remain startling. Two of them – that from the story of Margaret (*Excursion*, I.), and that from the *Ode*, 1815 – were made less so, to the injury of the passages, by the Wordsworth of later days, who had forgotten what he felt, or yielded to the objections of others.

is characteristic, for example, in Byron's lines, *On this day I complete my thirty-sixth year*, or in Shelley's *Stanzas written in dejection near Naples*, cannot escape discovery, nor is there any difficulty in understanding the mood expressed. But with Wordsworth, for most readers, this risk is constantly present in some degree. Take, for instance, one of the most popular of his lyrics, the poem about the daffodils by the lake. It is popular partly because it remains a pretty thing even to those who convert it into something quite undistinctive of Wordsworth. And it is comparatively easy, too, to perceive and to reproduce in imagination a good deal that *is* distinctive; for instance, the feeling of the sympathy of the waves and the flowers and the breeze in their glee, and the Wordsworthian 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' expressed in the lines (written by his wife),

> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude.

But there remains something still more intimately Wordsworthian:

> I wandered lonely as a Cloud
> That floats on high o'er vales and hills.

It is thrust into the reader's face, for these are the opening lines. But with many readers it passes unheeded, because it is strange and outside their own experience. And yet it is absolutely

essential to the effect of the poem.

This poem, however, even when thoroughly conventionalised, would remain, as I said, a pretty thing; and it could scarcely excite derision. Our point is best illustrated from the pieces by which Wordsworth most earned ridicule, the ballad poems. They arose almost always from some incident which, for him, had a novel and arresting character and came on his mind with a certain shock; and if we do not get back to this through the poem, we remain outside it. We may, of course, get back to this and yet consider the poem to be more or less a failure. There is here therefore room for legitimate differences of opinion. Mr. Swinburne sees, no doubt, as clearly as Coleridge did, the intention of *The Idiot Boy* and *The Thorn*, yet he calls them 'doleful examples of eccentricity in dullness,' while Coleridge's judgment, though he criticised both poems, was very different. I believe (if I may venture into the company of such critics) that I see why Wordsworth wrote *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* and the *Anecdote for Fathers*, and yet I doubt if he has succeeded in either; but a great man, Charles James Fox, selected the former for special praise, and Matthew Arnold included the latter in a selection from which he excluded *The Sailor's Mother*.[40] Indeed,

[40] *Goody Blake*, to my mind, tries vainly to make the kind of impression overwhelmingly made by Coleridge's *Three Graves*. The question as to the *Anecdote for Fathers* is not precisely whether it makes you laugh, but whether it makes you laugh at the poet, and in such a way that the end fails to restore your sobriety. The danger is in the lines,And five times to the child I said,Why, Edward, tell me why?The reiteration, with the struggle between the poet and his victim, is thoroughly Wordsworthian, and

of all the poems at first most ridiculed there is probably not one that has not been praised by some excellent judge. But they were ridiculed by men who judged them without attempting first to get inside them. And this is fatal.

I may bring out the point by referring more fully to one of them. *Alice Fell* was beloved by the best critic of the nineteenth century, Charles Lamb; but the general distaste for it was such that it was excluded 'in policy' from edition after edition of Wordsworth's Poems; many still who admire *Lucy Gray* see nothing to admire in *Alice Fell*; and you may still hear the question asked, What could be made of a child crying for the loss of her cloak? And what, I answer, could be made of a man poking his stick into a pond to find leeches? What sense is there in asking questions about the subject of a poem, if you first deprive this subject of all the individuality it possesses in the poem? Let me illustrate this individuality methodically. A child crying for the loss of her cloak is one thing, quite another is a child who has an imagination, and who sees the tattered remnants of her cloak whirling in the wheel-spokes of a post-chaise fiercely driven by strangers on lonesome roads through a night of storm in which the moon is drowned. She was alone, and, having to reach the town she belonged to, she got up behind the chaise, and her cloak was caught in the wheel. And she is fatherless and motherless,

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there are cases where it is managed with perfect success, as we shall see; but to me it has here the effect so delightfully reproduced in *Through the Looking-glass* ('I'll tell thee everything I can').

and her poverty (the poem is called *Alice Fell, or Poverty*) is so extreme that for the loss of her weather-beaten rag she does not 'cry'; she weeps loud and bitterly; weeps as if her innocent heart would break; sits by the stranger who has placed her by his side and is trying to console her, insensible to all relief; sends forth sob after sob as if her grief could never, never have an end; checks herself for a moment to answer a question, and then weeps on as if she had lost her only friend, and the thought would choke her very heart. It was *this*

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