STUDIES IN GREEK TRAGEDY

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STUDIES IN GREEK TRAGEDY

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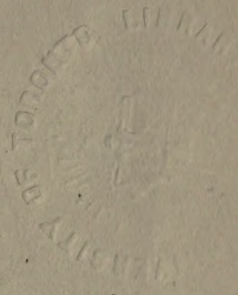
FOUNDED ON LECTURES GIVEN TO SIX STUDENTS
OF NEWNHAM COLLEGE



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TO
MY MOTHER AND MY SISTER MARIE

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PREFACE

THESE essays are not bound together by any single thesis which can be stated in so many words; I have simply taken four plays which interested me and tried to show by analysing them what are the qualities which make the Tragic Spirit. Though the plays analysed have been selected somewhat at haphazard, there are definite general principles which underlie them, and, indeed, every true example of the tragic art.

Every true tragedy turns on a *conflict*, whether it be a merely personal rivalry between one man and another, or a conflict on a grander scale, a struggle between opposing principles. Greek tragedy must always be peculiarly arresting, because the Greek tragedians combined in a curiously subtle way a conflict of persons with a conflict of principles. They present situations in which there is a tremendous conflict of personality and at the same time a much vaster conflict of principle. In each case I have devoted myself to analysing this conflict of principle, and I have mostly left to the reader's own insight the estimation of the rival characters.

These conflicts of principle or of hostile forces are clear, though they are not obvious; I believe them to be there, in each case essentially as I have analysed them, though I do not insist that the authors themselves consciously set out to describe them. They may

perhaps have not been conscious of analysing great generalities at all, being far more intimately concerned with the persons of their plays and with the individual struggle than with a systematic and deliberate philosophy of tragedy. Indeed, in the essay on the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, I have possibly gone too far in describing the issue as almost abstract, and have to some extent lost sight of the magnificent conception of Prometheus as a character, in my zeal for symbolising him and Zeus as philosophic concepts. In the plays of Euripides, I feel more sure that my analysis reflects the spirit of the dramatist; for Euripides' intelligence was mordantly critical, acutely analytic, and apt to look behind and beyond the personal and the present to see in the most curious, and even in the most unpromising, material exactly what great principles were involved[1].

Euripides, indeed, was a much more self-conscious artist than either Aeschylus or Sophocles. His plays give the impression of tearing away a series of veils and of discovering the characters to us and to themselves. The result is often a tragic disaster, a tragic disaster, however, which, inasmuch as it is philosophically necessary, is worth the price in emotion which we must pay for it. Truth is worth a thousand tragic disasters.

This brings me to another point: whatever the issue of the conflict, *tragedy must pursue truth* at

[1] One is reminded of Ibsen and other modern "problem" writers, with this difference apparent, that in Ibsen the conflict of ideas seems to have been the first conception in the dramatist's mind and to have evolved the characters, as puppet-exponents of the conflict, while in the Greek dramas the conflict of ideas only underlies the more personal and obvious aspect of the plot.

whatever price. This is the chief idea in one of the Euripidean plays I have analysed, the *Ion*. In the *Ion* there is a strong contrast between the first half of the play, where the characters live in a world of seeming harmony which is quite unreal, and the second half, where they break through that falsity and seek truth in a terrible struggle. The other plays also show that the end of tragedy is the pursuit of truth, though they do not all do so in an equal degree.

Further, *tragedy is the concern of everyone*. Tragedy is the representation of conflict, and in conflict we are all involved: it has us in its grip. The essentials of these conflicts have not altered since the days of the Greeks, and never will. The ideal tragedy is not less real than life. Life, indeed, is real; now the ideal tragedy represents life in no mechanical way, but analyses it as would a critic; nor is the critic's office exhausted in the mere passing of verdicts; tragedy judges life, but slowly, profoundly and with sympathy, as a *friend* would judge.

In the *Hecuba* the tragic conflict lies between the ordered life of the community, represented by Odysseus, Agamemnon and the Greek host, and the personal claims of an individual, Hecuba. Sacrifice is often demanded from an individual by the community. Such demands are generally held to be not only moral, but noble and inspiring; they may, however, be exorbitant. Euripides has taken such a case, when the Greek host demands the sacrifice of Polyxena's life.

In the *Hippolytus* we have a subtle and powerful analysis of austerity in conflict with the natural desire

for life and the joys of life. I use these words rather than the words "purity" and "passion," though in this play Hippolytos is by many supposed to embody purity, *i.e.* the whole good in the play, while Phaidra stands only for guilty passion. My analysis of the play, especially pp. 99, 100, will make my reasons clear, and will be found to amount to a modification of the usual view.

The essays on the *Prometheus* and the *Ion* should be read consecutively. These plays give, in their most vital and profound aspects, the thought of the two poets on the greatest conflict of all—the conflict of man with what surrounds him, "Circumstance[1]," as I have briefly called it. A summing up of the result in the case of the *Ion* will be found on p. 69. In the case of the *Prometheus*, the loss of the companion plays, *Prometheus the Firebearer* and *Prometheus Delivered*, must make Aeschylus' solution uncertain for us. I have here developed certain suggestions for which I am indebted to a friend, and I acknowledge that the germ of these ideas is to be found in the work of other critics, *e.g.* in Sheppard's *Greek Tragedy*, and in Myers' essay on "Aeschylus" in *Hellenica*. Briefly, the idea is that of a progressive Good. That the present order of things in the world is cruel and terrible is frankly admitted by Aeschylus, as by Euripides in the *Ion*; neither poet attempts to gloss over the cruelty of the existing world. But while Euripides dreams of a future development of good in man and by man, Aeschylus conceives the

[1] *Circumstance* is perhaps rather a limited word. That against which man revolts includes many 'laws of nature,' what the Greeks called ἀνάγκη.

vaster plan of a future development of good in what is above man—in God himself. His theme is the Progress of God.

My last essay is on *Accident*. Perhaps nowhere is the imperfection of the world more obvious to the observer than in the existence of accident; but it is from the imperfect conditions of the world that tragedies arise. The world is unsystematic. Accident intervenes, perhaps to rob the innocent of his due reward, perhaps to save the guilty from his merited punishment. Man receives sometimes more and sometimes less than his deserts, but seldom in proportion to them. Now, tragedy, if it is to be true, must reflect this want of system; it too must be unsystematic (see on the *Hecuba*, p. 144), and this very want of system is part of that conflict with the order around him which the spirit of man has to face. The chapter on Accident, therefore, develops the chapters on the *Prometheus* and the *Ion*. In Part V of this chapter I briefly indicate my idea of the place of accident in life; but my chief object in writing this chapter was more modest, being merely to show how, from an artistic point of view, accident can be used by the writer in the structure of a tragedy. I do not presume to philosophise, but simply as an artist to examine literary structure and literary effects. Since part of the inheritance of tragedy, and perhaps its finest part, has descended not to modern playwrights, but to modern novelists, I have not hesitated here to draw many of my examples from tragic romance rather than from tragic drama. I hope this chapter will interest some who have not studied Greek literature.

Throughout I have arranged this book so that it can be read by those who are not Greek scholars with the help of any good translation of the plays treated.

It remains for me to acknowledge most gratefully help received from Miss F. Melian Stawell; besides much other help I owe to her the translation of *Ion* 859 *sqq.* and 1282 *sqq.*; also from Miss Jane Harrison, of Newnham College, and from my brother, Mr E. R. Matthaei; further I am particularly indebted to Mr W. H. S. Jones of Cambridge for his great kindness in reading the proofs.

L. E. M.

Newnham College,
Cambridge.
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Neither life nor a good tragedy is a mere disconnected string of appearances.

Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1090^{b} 19.

CHAPTER I

THE *PROMETHEUS VINCTUS* OF AESCHYLUS[1]

1. Preliminary—The Homeric Tradition

Aeschylus called his dramas "slices from the rich banquet of Homer." I will begin by indicating, in the briefest way, what Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides inherited from Homer. This will serve to suggest what the material of tragedy is, and what tragedy desires to fashion out of it.

In Homer the first impression is of great human characters. Taking the latest and most developed Homeric work, the *Odyssey*, as our point of departure, we see the central factor of the poetic construction in the unconquerable heart of the man Odysseus, his "own great heart"; this responds indeed, as needs it must, to environment, to the physical environment of the earthly world in which the body moves, to an intellectual and spiritual environment, whether conveyed in advice from Athena, through warnings and omens of the gods, or by the shadows of fate; yet it remains always and throughout in its essential self an independent force, a positive rather than a permitted existence.

[1] Aeschylus quoted by Oxford text. Sidgwick, 1900.

Beyond Odysseus, one can hardly say above him, are not one, but several suprahuman powers. There is Moira, the grandest of all, whom we usually call Fate. Yet Moira is not nearly definite enough to correspond to our idea of Fate. Moira is a vast and shadowy background, all pervading: she is things as they are, the order of the world as it exists, the stuff out of which good and evil arise, rather than good or evil itself. Into Moira recede, or against Moira clash (according to circumstance), two sets of gods. There are the gods of goodwill, like Zeus and Athena, and the gods of illwill, like Poseidon, who persecutes Odysseus (and like Ares in the *Iliad*). The spirit of the gods of goodwill we may see in Athena's ceaseless striving to bring Odysseus home, but not a little also in a great announcement with which Zeus opens the action of the *Odyssey*. In the great council of the gods in Book 1 he declares that the gods *punish guilt in men and respect innocence*. Yet at the very outset too acutely do we feel the weakness of Zeus; if he can quote the guilty Aegisthos and his destruction as a shining example of warning given and justice executed, against Zeus' sublime pretensions Athena can quote the pitiful case of Odysseus, abandoned through twenty years of wandering and exile without fault of his. The poem proceeds to trace this conflicting issue, the innocent never wholly secure, the guilty for too long triumphant. Indeed, the Homeric concepts are not at any point philosophically reconciled; yet they seem to present a very remarkable achievement in early human thought. For they admit two things—and the world has been trying ever since to discover the reconciliation between

these two—they admit a power of circumstance, which is apparently unsystematic, Moira, and they also admit a moral hope; a moral hope, for when Homer does make a god, he prefers to have him a moral god, though he cannot wholly disengage himself from the primitive imitative conceptions of the savage, generally called anthropomorphic; hence the figure of Poseidon. But with the conflict of these two, circumstance and moral hope, is discovered the Tragic Spirit. The Tragic Spirit is born not of the sense of the evil in the world, but of the good mingled with the evil; not of the sense that the world is hopeless; such a belief gives rise only to the Epicurean withdrawing from the world, the *ataraxia*, or the hermit's life; then there can be no conflict, for the world is despised, and we do not conflict with that which we despise and from which we withdraw. The Tragic Spirit does not disengage itself from the world; it believes in the world and lives in it, it believes in Moira—and yet it believes in something else as well, in something greater. It feels the want of adjustment between its own faithful search for good and an order which may finally become good, but which is now demonstrably not so; the Tragic Spirit exists as the sense of waste or disproportion between what should be and what is, the perpetual jar of things. Therefore it is double in its nature. It is realistic to an intense degree; no horror can be too horrible for it, no injustice too incredible; to Homer above all we owe that amazed and stricken sense of the utterly unjustifiable oppression of death, which has dogged us ever since. So it faces circumstance, not indeed in hopelessness, and yet unalterably fixed never to

condone. But it is also the most irrevocably and obstinately idealistic of spirits, calling an unseen world into existence in order to redress the balance of the world it sees. And this its double nature, of hope and experience mixed, is a nature at war with itself, and so the Tragic Spirit is the spirit of conflict, conflict between the world as it is and a great Something Else. Crude indeed is Homer's picture of that Something Else: crude, almost childish, and most incurably weak are his Olympian Zeus and his Olympian Athena; Zeus' powers over against Moira are almost nil. Yet there he is, with his sense of his own weakness, and yet equally with his grand announcement that innocence and guilt shall have their due reward.

The general impression of the poem on these great questions is inconsistent and at bottom confused, for Homer attains the most accurate truth which is in him by indicating these stupendous questions and by never fully answering them. Yet through the confusion shines a great illumination, the first and most vital step taken by moral speculation: the knowledge that the world is ordered neither incurably for evil nor yet systematically for good, the knowlege that *a conflict* has us in its grip.

2. The Argument

Prometheus, of the elder gods, had aided Zeus, the younger god, to come to power; but now Zeus has tied him to a rock and tortures him.

The conflict between the Titans and Zeus had been for the throne of heaven; Zeus had won, aided by Prometheus and by Prometheus' mother, Themis.

Now Zeus, reigning in heaven, had looked at earth and at the race of men, and in his anger at their weakness and foolishness had wished to destroy them and make a new race; but Prometheus had desired that they should live. This was the first cause of anger between Zeus and Prometheus. Then Zeus had learnt that of all creatures Prometheus alone had knowledge of a secret danger which threatened Zeus and Zeus' power in heaven; he asked Prometheus to tell him this secret; but Prometheus would not. Therefore Zeus bound him to a rock and sent an eagle every third day to tear his liver, which was ever miraculously renewed, and so the torture was unending. While Prometheus thus hangs, there comes on to the scene the virgin Io, in the form of a cow. Zeus had loved her; she had resisted, and finally, in obedience to the Delphic oracle, had left her home to wander over the world, changed into a cow by the jealous Hera, Zeus' wife, and ever maddened by the gadfly, which Hera sends to drive her on. She tells her story to Prometheus, and Prometheus, outraged at the sight of such suffering, hurls louder defiance at Zeus. From heaven Zeus hears him and sends Hermes to threaten yet worse punishment if he will not yield and tell his secret. Prometheus will not, and amid thunder and lightning the earth yawns and he sinks out of sight, still bound to his rock.

After many years Herakles, the descendent of Io and Zeus, shoots the eagle and releases Prometheus. Zeus' mighty anger is appeased, and he and his great opponent are reconciled.

3. Introduction

Was Prometheus in the wrong? This is the question which must stir the heart of every reader. If he was not, then Zeus treated him with tyrannical injustice. This is impossible, say the critics; Aeschylus, who made Zeus the symbol of moral right in his other plays, could not have stultified his own views by this crass contradiction, a contradiction not merely verbal, but going deep down into the foundations of his thought; a very cogent argument. And it is not only the question of Aeschylus' philosophy which troubles us. This question of *the unjust god* is an eternal one. Is God just or unjust? and, if unjust, what are we to make of an unjust God?

So critics make well-meaning attempts to prove that Prometheus *deserved* to be nailed to a rock and have his liver eaten away every three days by an eagle. Failing other sins, stress is laid on the mere obstinacy of Prometheus: he was self-willed, a rebel[1]; he ought to have acknowledged the supremacy of Zeus, but he would not, out of pride.

It is true that all ancient races put a very high value on obedience. A Greek author might see in the idea of obedience a moral truth great enough to be the real solution to a drama. But even a Greek, a Roman, or a Jew would require certain conditions before rendering obedience. The idea of submitting one's will to another, if it is to be a moral idea, depends on a tremendous assumption, namely, that he before whom the will submits is morally superior

[1] *αὐθάδης*, l. 964, 1037.

to oneself. On no other assumption is submission justified. How can this be assumed of the Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound*, of the Zeus of the Io episode?

There is indeed another kind of submission, the submission of the less strong to the more strong, the submission to power as power. But does even this cover the case of the *Prometheus*? As will be explained later, Prometheus has a weapon against Zeus, a fatal and a secret knowledge, which will give him the ultimate triumph, if he can but hold out long enough. Even now, Prometheus is the equal of Zeus. He, like Zeus, is a God. He had helped Zeus to the throne; he need not have done so; he was not forced to do so; he might have prevented Zeus from reigning; see l. 201–21, where the struggle is pictured as one between equals, Zeus and the Titans, with Prometheus as the deciding factor. It was of his own free will that Prometheus helped Zeus to power; hence the persistence with which Prometheus harps on the gratitude owed to him by Zeus for his services; see especially the first account given to the audience of those services[1]. Now if the lordship of Zeus was Prometheus' own handiwork, the sanction of mere superior power falls away, for that power was itself the positive creation of Prometheus. In any case, can such a submission to mere power be a moral thing?

It might be argued that having set Zeus on the throne, Prometheus was bound to obedience, morally by his own act. But it was expressly to exclude that suggestion that the topic of the treatment of man is introduced in the way it is; it is spoken of at length

[1] l. 216 *sqq.*

in the play, and it is clear that on this point the moral right is all with Prometheus; none of it is with Zeus. Zeus had selfishly meant to destroy man; Prometheus resisted[1]; and here Prometheus was right to resist, for man was perfectly innocent, and it cannot be in accordance with the law of perfect justice that the innocent shall be destroyed for mere selfish caprice, and not in pursuance of a higher moral end. It was out of pity, not out of pride, nor to assert his own power, that Prometheus acted against Zeus; his action was far more deeply rooted in pity than in mere rebelliousness. Hereby it is expressly, obviously, and trenchantly laid down by Aeschylus that Zeus is *not* the moral superior of Prometheus. Prometheus ought therefore to have disobeyed Zeus on this point; his disobedience was the morally right action, yet the direct result of that morally right action was that Zeus at once treated him in this horrible way. Some critics argue as though Prometheus ought to have managed to rescue man without, however, angering Zeus, which seems an impossible idea, considering Zeus' character as given. The most of which Prometheus can be accused is a certain degree of obstinacy. It is very difficult to make up a system of justice, when the ingredients are some obstinacy and a little pride in the condemned, crass ingratitude and the infliction of an insane punishment in the judge.

Surely it is impossible to equate the Zeus of the *Prometheus* with the Zeus of the other plays, with the lofty conception of *Agamemnon* l. 160? Could the idea survive for a moment after an *honest* reading of the

[1] l. 233–8.

episode of Io[1], or after realising the outrageous tone in which Hermes brings his message from Zeus?[2] Zeus is neither holy nor just nor even decent.

It is indeed an extraordinary crux, this of Zeus. The real difficulty of siding morally with Zeus against Prometheus is that emotionally we all side with Prometheus against Zeus. The logic which puts Prometheus in the wrong, Zeus in the right, outrages the dramatic sympathies created by the play; it is not for nothing that every poet who has been inspired by Aeschylus to take up the subject, Shelley, Goethe, Herder, Byron (in *Manfred*), should have asked all our sympathies for Prometheus, not for Zeus. We all wish to be like Prometheus (not like Zeus), to show such courage, such endurance, such belief in ourselves, such pity for others, to have such a history of beneficent and noble activity behind us, to be able to look forward without shrinking to an eternity of pain[3], even to joke about it[4].

The difficulty of accepting Prometheus as the sinner is increased, if we put ourselves in the position of Aeschylus writing the play. It would have been very easy to make his sin clear, if Aeschylus had wanted to do so. The myth contained the very elements needed, for Greek myth called Prometheus a thief. The obvious treatment would have been to make Prometheus the typical noble "tragic" figure, noble, but faulty, one who, like Oedipus, comes to utter wreck on a single sin.

[1] l. 640 *sqq.* [2] l. 946 to end. [3] l. 1040–53.

[4] As where he tells Io to question him at length; he has more time than he could wish; l. 818.

The problem is further complicated by the loss of the *Prometheus Delivered.* Every play works up to a climax, which is then resolved or untied, wholly or partially. The *Prometheus Bound* works up to a tremendous climax, but the solution is deferred to the *Prometheus Delivered.* Yet in a good play the problem implies its own solution from the very beginning. Besides, we have some scanty knowledge of the *Prometheus Delivered.*

4. The Power of Zeus

Obviously the play before us deals with the problem of justice, not with the lesser problem of justice between man and man, but with the greater problem of the justice between man and god, with world-justice.

The position of Zeus is everywhere given as one of power: nowhere is this power based on moral right.

1. *Zeus' sovereignty is one of material power.* The scene opens with two personifications of force or violence, Kratos and Bia[1], on the stage; they help Hephaistos to fasten Prometheus to the rock. Kratos, who argues with the reluctant Hephaistos, bases his arguments entirely on the power of Zeus, which must induce fear[2] in all others, and accompanies his argu-

[1] Κράτος = physical might as such: βία = might running counter to moral right; *cf.* the common phrase πρὸς βίαν, = in despite of another's will or wish; it occurs not insignificantly in this play, of Zeus' conquest over Typhon, l. 355, and of Zeus imposing his will on the father of Io, l. 672; hence Κράτος + βία = physical might defying moral claims.

[2] l. 40, Kratos to Hephaistos: *Do you not fear, more than all else, to disobey the Father's words?*

ments both by threats to Hephaistos[1] and by taunts to Prometheus[2]. The same idea of Zeus' mere power is brought out in the story of Typhon[3]. It was simply because Zeus had the "sleepless bolt, the down-sped thunder, breathing flame[4]," that he gained the victory; his physical might was greater, and so he won the battle.

2. *His claim to be right rests only on a personal sanction.* For Prometheus says of him: "Brutal is he, and himself is his own justice[5]": a very important line.

It is claimed by some critics that Zeus' power was necessarily tyrannical, because it was new, and therefore uncertain. There are frequent references to the newness[6] of Zeus' sovereignty, and it is also clear that Zeus, for his part, *feared* the threats of Prometheus. Yet if the novelty and also the insecurity of rule brings a greater harshness, a certain crudeness in the ruler, if it is strong wine and goes to the head, yet this is only an excuse, and no good one at that. It is incredible to suppose Aeschylus condoning injustice on such a score. The dealings of Zeus, moreover, are something more than the harsh exercise of a harsh system; it is no system at all, but a personal tyranny, running counter to Themis[7] or Right.

[1] l. 52, Kratos to Hephaistos: *Will you not hasten to chain him round, lest the Father see you slow?*, and l. 77, *Harsh is he who punishes what we do.*

[2] l. 62, Kratos of Prometheus: *Let them know that with all his cleverness he is duller than is Zeus;* and *cf.* l. 82–87.

[3] l. 353–374. [4] l. 360.

[5] l. 188, οἶδ' ὅτι τραχὺς καὶ παρ' ἑαυτῷ
τὸ δίκαιον ἔχων Ζεύς.

[6] l. 96, 391, 439.

[7] *Cf.* l. 150, νεοχμοῖς δὲ νόμοις Ζεὺς ἀθέτως κρατύνει; the laws of Zeus are *no* laws.

3. *Zeus' power is an ungrateful power:* Prometheus, with all his fore-knowledge, never imagined it would be quite so ungrateful[1].

4. *The power of Zeus is ruthless and vindictive, at best indifferent.* This is shown in the scene between Okeanos and Prometheus[2]. Okeanos claims to have the influence of an old friend over Zeus, and offers to intervene between the angry god and his victim, promising much from that intervention[3]. But Prometheus will not listen to it; he knows Zeus, and warns Okeanos against approaching a power who will only reply to pleas for mercy with resentment against the pleader[4]. The judge who is unapproachable, who will even unload his illwill on an old friend coming to plead with him for a suffering prisoner, scarcely deserves the title of judge: he is a vindictive, personal enemy.

Again, Zeus' complete indifference to the sufferings of man is contrasted with the active beneficence of Prometheus[5], and as though to reinforce the picture of Zeus' power as indifferent to those who suffer under it, Aeschylus twice lays stress on the case of Atlas[6]. He too is claimed by his brother Prometheus as yet another victim of Zeus[7], thus completing the trio, Prometheus,

[1] l. 223–227, *This is the help the tyrant of the Gods received from me, and this the evil recompense he gave me in return. For there is a natural plague on tyranny: tyranny cannot trust a friend.* And *cf.* l. 241 *sqq.*, l. 269 *sqq.*, l. 306 *sqq.*, l. 437 *sqq.*

[2] l. 286–399.

[3] l. 340, *I know, I know that Zeus will give me this gift, and release you from your sufferings.*

[4] l. 390, *Beware lest my lament bring you to enmity with him*; and l. 392, *Beware lest his heart be angered.*

[5] l. 233 *sqq.*, and l. 436–506. [6] l. 349–352, 425–435.

[7] The context of lines 349–352 makes it clear that he is *Zeus'* victim.

Typhon, Atlas. The references to the sufferings of Atlas are not otiose or picturesque, but an integral part of the play's essential logic. For Atlas suffers, and yet he cannot be put down as a mere rebel, a symbol of ebullient forces, like Typhon, which must be made to feel law and order. Atlas helps to keep law and order, he is an essential part, the very pivot of the law of the Cosmos, for he holds up the heaven and the earth. The gods themselves, Zeus among them, depend for their security on his unremitting labour. Thus is Zeus' harshness branded as supremely ungrateful.

So far we have had an uninterrupted increase and deepening of emotional effects serving to expose the character of the divine power. At the beginning we knew that there was a stronger and a weaker side, Zeus and Prometheus; we reserved our final verdict, for it might possibly be that the stronger side was also the just side. But as the play proceeds we grow more and more sympathetic to Prometheus, whereas the power of Zeus develops with appalling rapidity in a light continually more evil. By the end of the second act, the interview between Okeanos and Prometheus, we have ceased to think of Zeus as judge at all, and after further speech between Prometheus and the Chorus, in which the story of Zeus' utter indifference to man and to Atlas is developed, we feel that Zeus must be finally condemned.

Something, however, is still lacking, something absolutely essential to the thought of the play. It is supplied by the episode of Io[1]. It is a small matter

[1] l. 561–886.

if the poet uses a rather unreasonable coincidence, bringing on Io—somewhat too neatly—in the course of the wanderings of years, just at the right time and place, provided he can justify his improbability by what we might call the inner logic of the play. It is essential to display Zeus in yet one other way, which gives the final and absolutely stunning climax to this conception of the divine injustice. It is the last phase of the tyrant's power if he oppresses the weak. The oppression of those who might oppress him if they had the chance, of the Titans, Prometheus, Typhon, Atlas, supplies him with the possible pleas of necessity and self-defence. These fall away when he tortures the weak. Io is not only innocent; she is utterly weak, and could not, under any circumstances, have withstood Zeus. She is mortal, and she and her mortal father are in the hollow of Zeus' hand. And how does he treat her? He desires her, but he desires her with brutality and cruelty; his love has an element of lust in it[1]. In deep perplexity and misery she resists. Her father sends to the oracle to find out "what is pleasing to the gods." Unclear answers torture the wretched man and girl[2]; at last comes something definite; Io is to leave home and country, and wander, a miserable exile, until her union with Zeus is accomplished. The thunderbolt is threatened against the whole race if this is not done—again the sanction of mere power, though it is very important to notice that Io and her father obey the oracle rather than Zeus.

By a skilful dramatic turn we have Io's wanderings brought vividly before us in three speeches of

[1] See especially line 654. [2] l. 661, 2.

Prometheus[1]. Io begs Prometheus to tell her where her sufferings will end, as Prometheus has prophetic power; Prometheus not only does so, but offers to prove the truth of his visionary faculty by relating to her some of her wanderings up to this point. Thus the audience is easily put into possession of all Io's sufferings, and the impression of Zeus' cruelty is immeasurably deepened.

Therefore the picture of Zeus which is given is such that all pity and indignation must be with the sufferings of his victims. The episode of Io is the most cruel, the most poignant, because of her very helplessness against Zeus; without it our feelings against Zeus would be much less vivid. Io is *essential* to the play[2].

The episode of the message of Hermes scarcely adds any new phase to the character of Zeus; it intensifies what has already been given. It is not really more than we expect from Zeus by this time that he should propose to hurl Prometheus into the belly of the earth. The episode develops Prometheus' character, rather than Zeus'.

5. The Chorus and the Allied Characters, Hephaistos and Okeanos.

The Chorus is sympathetic to Prometheus. Yet though sympathetic to his sufferings, it presents a point of view not in agreement with his.

It does not represent the poet's own conclusions.

[1] l. 700–741, 786–818, 823–876.

[2] See an ancient summary of the play quoted by Sheppard, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 65.

Of all unimaginative and undramatic ways of writing a drama that would be the most so, which kept on interrupting the play in order that the poet might comment on his own work. It is an inconceivable view of the Aeschylean Chorus. The Chorus is a dramatic character, and in this play a dramatic character of a nature pleasing, though perhaps not very profound. The Chorus is the Pitiful Onlooker. This idea of the Pitiful Onlooker is to hand from the first words of Hephaistos. The Chorus more strikingly continues the part begun by him. In song[1] the personal pity of the Chorus is widened into a great world-pity, and finally in a magnificent and very unusual passage into a great Nature-pity (for Atlas): "The wave of ocean thunders and crashes in time with thy lamentations, the depths groan, from the dark underworld, earth's recesses, breaks stifled moaning, the streams of consecrated rivers sigh forth their piteous grief." It is rare in Greek literature to find Nature described as sharing our sorrow.

This is not one of those plays which begin quietly. From the very first lines we have the opposites in contrast: with Pity is contrasted Power, Kratos with Hephaistos.

Now, if the pitiful onlooker sees great suffering going on, it is a very natural inference that there is a cause; the most usual, the conventional view is that someone is to blame. At first the Chorus infer that one side is in the wrong, and, on the face of it, they hold that it is easier to say Prometheus is than Zeus; for who dare impugn the righteousness of the Supreme?

[1] l. 399–422.

So they tell Prometheus: "Do you not see that you have done wrong[1]?" and Prometheus, pressed by the insistent Chorus, cries, "I have sinned," though he immediately adds what is his justification, "because I helped men[2]." But it is not true that his general attitude is that of the repentant; the whole of the rest of the play tears that theory to shreds. Prometheus is and remains unrepentant and to the end claims that he was ill-treated. Still that cry: "I have sinned," is very important; it shows that Prometheus does admit something; he had claimed that Zeus was unforgivable, but his claim against Zeus is not without a flaw.

To return to the Chorus: when challenged they are entirely unable to say *how* Prometheus is in the wrong. Like many well-meaning admonishers they can only take refuge in vague generalities. "Do you not see that you have sinned? But how—'tis no pleasure for me to say, and it were bitterness to you. But let us leave these things aside." Could anything be weaker? Thus the first attempt of the pitiful onlooker ends in discomfiture. Their attempts at judgment were too superficial to have any real value in the face of problems so stupendous.

Yet it is just at this point, when pity has been made to seem most valueless, that Prometheus, who not once except on this occasion asks for sympathy, most earnestly begs for the continued comfort of the presence of the Chorus: "Make no lament over my sufferings.

[1] l. 261, *οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅτι | ἥμαρτες;*

[2] l. 268, *ἑκὼν ἑκὼν ἥμαρτον, οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι·*
θνητοῖς ἀρήγων αὐτὸς ηὑρόμην πόνους.

But step down to earth (from your chariot) and listen to my prophecy of all that shall come on me. Yield to me, yield, I pray you: share sorrows with him who suffers now; sorrow may flit from one to another, but it settles on all and none escapes[1]." It is the stimulating art of the poet first to expose the deficiencies of our conventional habits, and then to turn right round on us and prove how much true value there is even in our most banal emotions.

The relations between the Chorus and Prometheus are subdued in tone; a real conflict between them would have distracted us from the major conflict between Zeus and Prometheus. A rather sharper contrast is that between Okeanos and Prometheus. Okeanos is in quality not different from the Chorus; he too is the pitiful onlooker. He has the very greatest belief in his own powers, for when has pity failed to obtain a hearing? Moreover he has the rights of an old friendship with Zeus. But in the most uncompromising way the powerlessness of pity in certain situations is exposed. The situation between Zeus and Prometheus is too awful.

Thus the first suggested solution, the *reconciliation* of a sentimental and somewhat shallow kindness, is rejected. Such a reconciliation would leave the causes of the tragedy untouched. It cannot be that Zeus and Prometheus will lay down their arms and come together on the principle of simply forgetting their disagreement. The question between them must be decided: it cannot be buried. And here we get another pendulum swing of the emotions: immediately after

[1] l. 274–8.

Prometheus has craved for sympathy he realises in the most acute way that no *sympathy* can deal with his case. And he warns Okeanos away. Then follows the Chorus already mentioned[1], the Chorus of the pity of the world for Prometheus and Atlas, which, placed here, tears the hearts of the audience by its mixed emotions: Prometheus is wrapped and shrouded in the pity of all living things, and the pity of all living things cannot help him.

The next Chorus gives the second solution—*submission.* Lines 526–52[2] are an extraordinary presentment of submission to a Power which can neither be withstood, understood, nor turned by prayer: "Never may he who rules all, never may Zeus place his power in conflict against my will; and I, never may I be remiss in placating the Divine, never may my tongue offend; I shudder as I behold him who trembled not before Zeus. Feeble is man; the counsels of men shall not outstrip (*or* transgress) the harmonious orderings of Zeus[3]."

It is necessary for the education of the Chorus, as of the audience—so often Chorus and audience melt into each other—that they should realise in its full force the cruel nature of Zeus' power. Hitherto, though puzzled and miserable, they have not been absolutely shaken, and can still speak of "his harmonious orderings." At this point comes the story of Io. A feverish and desperate curiosity urges on

[1] l. 399 *sqq.*; see p. 16.

[2] The second antistrophe, l. 553–60, returns to the former topic of pity.

[3] I give the gist of the first and second strophes and first antistrophe.

the Chorus to know the worst about Zeus; it is they who interpose and implore the details of the horrible tale of injustice[1]. The story is a frightful shock to them[2]: "Away with it, away with it, fie!" (they have been shaken out of their narrow, parochial content)[3] "I thought in my pride that never should foreign words (*or better*, a foreigner's words, *i.e.* the tale of a foreigner's sufferings) come to my hearing and that the double-edged goad of sorrows, griefs and fears, ill to see and ill to bear, should never enter my heart. Fate, ah Fate, I shudder to behold how Io fareth[4]." The sheltered and conventional view of life shatters when facing the real horrors of the situation between God and man.

[1] Dramatically, the interposition of the Chorus is essential, as Io must know her own story and Prometheus with his prophetic knowledge knows it too; there would therefore be no occasion for telling it, unless the Chorus asked for it.

[2] No doubt the reason why Aeschylus chose a Chorus of maidens is that it would be dramatically true if a maiden-chorus were stirred to its depths by the sorrows of a maid. It is more important to group the Chorus with Io than with Prometheus; it is a rather subtle way of suggesting that Io is as important to the theme as Prometheus; he occupies so much the larger share of the play, that this redress is necessary.

[3] The frame of mind that can say: "All is well in my village, therefore all is well with the world."

[4] l. 687 *sqq.*

ἔα ἔα, ἄπεχε, φεῦ·
οὔποθ' <ὧδ'> οὕποτ' ἠΰχουν ξένους
μολεῖσθαι λόγους εἰς ἀκοὰν ἐμάν,
οὐδ' ὧδε δυσθέατα καὶ δύσοιστα
πήματα, λύματα, δείματα, κέν-
(?) τρῳ ψύχειν ψυχὰν ἀμφάκει.
ἰὼ ἰὼ μοῖρα μοῖρα
πέφρικ' εἰσιδοῦσα πρᾶξιν Ἰοῦς.

Note the bitter comment of Prometheus on this: *You cry out too soon; there is worse to come.*

After this, it is true, they still counsel submission, but it is of a very different kind. They cease to talk of "the harmonious orderings of Zeus"; rather they declare that it is "prudent" to avoid "vengeance" by "prostrating oneself" before the Divine[1], *i.e.* they give up the intellectual problem as not capable of any solution; the only thing is *to submit to power, because one must.*

The final salvation of the Chorus—and it is peculiarly satisfying to the just instincts of the audience—is brought about both with skill and truth. They are forced to undergo the very disagreeable experience of hearing their conventional arguments become the stock-in-trade of the other side. Hermes takes the words counselling submission almost out of their mouths[2]. For a moment they are glad to have found an apparent ally[3]; but when the argument is translated into action, when Hermes threatens them too with the power of Zeus, just when they ought to have been glorious examples of their own prudent doctrine, they turn about and roundly declare that they will defy Zeus, go down to the bowels of the earth with Prometheus rather than submit. Conventional doctrine needs to be translated into action before its bearing can be brought home to the ordinary mind; under that test of action all falsity flies into a thousand pieces at the

[1] l. 936, οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὴν Ἀδράστειαν σοφοί (Ἀδράστεια = νέμεσις). For σοφός *cf.* also note 3, *infra.*

[2] l. 999, *Try you vain prater, you vain prater try for once to think rightly in face of the evils which confront you* (addressed to Prometheus).

[3] l. 1036, *To us Hermes seems to speak a word in season; for he bids you lay aside your stiffneckedness, and seek the wisdom of right counsel. Obey! the wise man is ashamed to err too much.*

touch of a right human instinct, which thus justifies itself in a final harmony with the deeper criticisms of the thoughtful man, who long ago had reached just such a conclusion.

Here we may consider what might be called the dilemma of mankind. Hephaistos, whom we defined as the first presentment of pity, helps to bind Prometheus: pity, in its final form, will rather choose to sink into the earth with Prometheus, defying Zeus. All of us are involved in the course of the world; there is no real neutrality allowed to the pitiful onlooker: he must take sides. Be he never so determined to forego judgment, to give up his intellectual birthright and use only the emotional side of his nature, thus thinking to escape the responsibility of choice, he will nevertheless find himself, for all his passivity, involved in choice, because he is a part of things.

6. The Problem of the Play

Who and what is Prometheus and what is the problem of his fate? Prometheus is a great character dramatically conceived; but he is vastly more than that. Prometheus and Io are the Activities and the Endurance of Man, and the conflict between them and Zeus is, broadly speaking, the conflict arising when the mind of man contemplates the order he sees around him—Present Circumstance. Man is both mortal and immortal: mortal, as Io, immortal, as Prometheus: for each man is mortal, and when he dies his sufferings die with him: but the activity of man is immortal, for thought is handed on and on, so that the mind of man can look backward on the past and forward to the

future, can contemplate its own achievements and foresee its own sufferings and its own ultimate redemption. Meanwhile, in contemplating the Present Order of the World, his instinct is partly to rebel, and partly to endure.

Present Circumstance is more powerful than we are: it imposes life and death on us, whether we ask for them or not. Life and death are things of the physical sphere, and we have no jurisdiction over them. The relations of the Present Order to us are first and foremost those of power against powerlessness. Nor do we know on what ultimate sanction rests the Present Order; a "short" view suspects only a personal sanction. Again, may we not call ungrateful whatsoever it is that imposes on us the Present Order? For with all our endeavour to come up to its demands, we suffer. Further, the Present Order of the World is ruthless; the Greek, with his doctrine of the Envy of the Gods, called it positively vindictive; it is unapproachable, indifferent to human welfare, and needlessly oppressive of our helplessness.

This may seem a long catalogue of charges for man to bring, but are they not—in common honesty be it said—perfectly true? An earthquake is the exercise of mere physical power over physical powerlessness; it is ruthless, it is unavoidable, it is indifferent to human happiness, it is cruel, it is above all unreasonable, *i.e.* it serves no obvious moral purpose, for it fails to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. If we start from the axioms that there is a Power and that it is responsible—and it was from these axioms that Aeschylus started—, what is man to predicate of

that Power? The shallow conventional view, which Aeschylus is concerned to tear to pieces, is to try and gloss things over: to presuppose that the earthquake does serve a moral purpose: to invent a punishing and rewarding god, who is using the preponderance of his might to reinforce a moral system: to make a moral loss and profit account, where no such thing exists. Man is helpless in the grip of Circumstance; in his despair he would endow Circumstance with an obvious and a present moral meaning, and reduce the accidents of nature to a system of reward and punishment. Yet human experience, honestly read, disproves any crude intervention in human affairs aiming obviously or systematically at moral ends. Aeschylus is a bolder thinker than the writers of Old Testament history; he does not seek to systematise his facts[1]. Some might have stopped the play before the Io episode, which gives an almost gratuitously insulting picture of Zeus; not so Aeschylus. The play would have lost half its meaning, half its virulence; it would have been tepid logic, not true feeling. Man must face the fact, says Aeschylus, that he is treated in ways not only inexplicable, but, on occasion, absolutely cruel and unreasonable.

It is clear that on such an interpretation the Zeus

[1] A magnificent and most pathetic attempt to reduce stubborn phenomena to a moral system is made by the writer of Psalm lxxiii.; he begins by confessing, "I do see the ungodly in such prosperity, in no peril of death, but lusty and strong": they meet no misfortune, "like other folk," they "are not plagued like other men." It was "too hard for him to understand," he was "so foolish and ignorant," until he went into the sanctuary of God: then he "understood the end of these men," they were but "set in slippery places": they "do consume suddenly" and "come to a fearful end."

of the *Prometheus Bound* cannot possibly be identified with the Zeus of the *Agamemnon*. It is difficult to follow the workings of a Greek mind in the use it made of the names of gods. It is surprising to find a genius like that of Aeschylus, which was not of the versatile, but of the profound order, so inconsistent. Perhaps it may be said that though the Zeus of the *Prometheus* is not the Zeus of the *Agamemnon* (whose place in our play is taken by Moira), yet he will eventually be harmonised with that conception. On this, see the section called the Progress of Zeus.

7. The Solution

(i) *The progress of Prometheus*

We are obviously in part thrown back on guesswork owing to the loss of the *Prometheus Delivered*, the sequel-play to the *Prometheus Bound*[1].

It is to Prometheus himself that we must turn for a prophetic solution of this horror. One thing is certain: Prometheus will never *condone* the injustice of Zeus. Mere explanation or even forgiveness will not be sufficient (*cf.* what I have said above on the Chorus); more is required. If out of sheer suffering, or even out of sheer contempt, Prometheus had yielded, there would have been condonation of an unjust situation, and this is no solution of injustice. It is as well to make this point clear, as it is important.

There is, it is true, a conception of forgiveness

[1] The *Prometheus Delivered* was the last play in the trilogy, but it is not clear whether the other lost play, *Prometheus the Firebearer*, came before or after the *Prometheus Bound*. See Weil, *Études sur le drame attique*, 1897, pp. 86–92.

which implies a certain supreme quality of heart in him who forgives. This is a perfect solution of an unjust situation, indeed, we may say, the only perfect one. It is pre-eminently a Christian conception and it may be doubted whether the ancients had a clear or profound notion of it[1]. But if this kind of forgiveness is perfect, its counterfeit and substitute, condonation through weariness, contempt or weakness, is correspondingly ugly. Aeschylus evidently thinks it important that Prometheus should not be suspected of this base quality. Zeus must outrage him to a point beyond possibility of any condonation. The tone in which Hermes delivers his message from Zeus, his mockeries, taunts and gibes, are calculated by the poet precisely for that end. The play ends in such an outburst of fury on either side that the spectators must despair of any reconciliation. Condonation can neither be offered, nor would it be accepted.

And there is another reason why Prometheus cannot offer condonation. Granted that he might have done so on his own account, his very generosity forbids him to do so on account of another. It is after hearing and seeing Io, especially after seeing her again driven away in torment, that Prometheus lets his indignation have its way, and his outburst of wrath is so furious as to redirect to him the notice of Zeus[2]. A subtle touch, this; for is not the active principle in men stung into defiance by the contemplation of sufferings imposed on others who have no choice but to submit? Rebellion

[1] See, however, below on Polyxena in *Hecuba*, p. 136. We can only speculate how far the conception was realised at the end of the *Prometheus Delivered*.

[2] l. 906–43.

against the Present Order develops into a generous indignation for one's fellows, but it also invites the acme of suffering on one's self.

So far, we seem only to have mentioned solutions in order to reject them, and indeed, at first sight, the *Prometheus Bound* is only a statement of a problem, without any attempt at a solution. Yet every problem, every binding or knot, as the Greeks called it, should of itself suggest its own untying.

The coming reconciliation depends on two factors, closely allied: a change in Prometheus, and a change in Zeus. In the play we hear more about Prometheus and therefore we will consider him first.

The power of Prometheus lies in his knowledge of a secret which may ruin Zeus. Zeus wishes to marry Thetis; but Prometheus knows that the son of Thetis is destined to be more powerful than his father; if Zeus then marries Thetis, his reign must pass away. Zeus only knows that some danger threatens his power and that Prometheus could tell him what it is; otherwise he is helpless.

Prometheus more than once boasts of this secret knowledge. He hugs his secret, gloats over the thought of vengeance. He begins by being secretive to an extraordinary degree in one so strong and generous. But there is a marked development in the course of the play; gradually Prometheus consents to reveal much that he had at first jealously kept secret, and the circumstances under which he does so are most illuminating. In the beginning he refuses to tell the future to the Chorus except in the most baffling terms, jealously guarding his power[1]. It is the sight

[1] l. 520–5.

of Io's misery which unlocks his heart. All shall be told her, and in "no baffling phrases, but in clearest speech, as friend should speak to friend[1]." Then again he withdraws and refuses to go into his own story[2], perhaps because in pity he feels she is not one to be called upon to sympathise with his sufferings, as the Chorus had been asked to do. And thus we already mark a change from a nature which is secretive for the sake of being secretive, which hugs its secret as a source of power, to a nature which will forego part of its cherished secret to help another, and only so far remains secretive as it is acted upon by pity; for when he again tries to keep the knowledge of the future from Io, it is, as he himself expressly says, from the mistaken[3] idea that ignorance will help her more than knowledge: he "grudges not the gift, but fears to torture her mind[4]." This is the second stage, and a very gulf lies between it and the first. But he gives way at last to her desire, and when the Chorus intervene, begging from Io herself the tale of her previous wanderings, it is now Prometheus who urges her to yield, it is he himself—once the secretive—who urges her to disregard that desire for secrecy which urges the sufferer to keep silence before his fellow men, that immense and curious instinct for hiding suffering, which links human nature with the animal crawling behind the bush to die unseen. Prometheus has come to know the inexpressible comfort of telling one's miseries to those who will listen.

[1] l. 609–17. [2] l. 621.

[3] Mistaken, for later he realises it is better to tell her.

[4] l. 626–8; *cf.* l. 776.

The further stages of the partial disclosure of his secret are again important, and again it is for the sake of another—to inspire Io with courage—that he feels impelled to foretell the possible fall of Zeus by the fatal marriage[1].

Now this is exactly what he had refused to tell the Chorus some time ago[2]; so we see how far he has progressed. But he does not forego all his secret. He imagines himself as keeping it for ever, and as himself being freed from the bondage of Zeus "in Zeus' despite." He is determined not to mention the name of Thetis; thus it is he who will triumph: Zeus will fall "by his own empty folly[3]." Then both Io and the Chorus beg him to speak further. At first he hesitates and almost tries to bargain, with a curious marked return to his old secretive character: he will tell one of two things, but not both, either the coming course of Io's sufferings or the manner of his own release. But soon he yields, and tells both these secrets, thus bringing comfort both to Io and the Chorus; for it is Io's own descendant who is to release him, and neither need she be entirely without hope of dealing with her enemy, Zeus, nor need the Chorus dwell on the thought that Prometheus should suffer for evermore[4]. Yet to Zeus nothing of moment is revealed; for him there is no yielding, no pity. The secret about Thetis still remains with Prometheus, and he means never to forego it.

Yet we know that he eventually did so, for Probus

[1] l. 756–79. [2] l. 520–5.

[3] l. 762, *πρὸς αὐτὸς αὑτοῦ κενοφρόνων βουλευμάτων.*

[4] l. 771 *sqq.*

writes: "Hercules indeed killed this eagle, but feared to set Prometheus free lest he should offend his father (Zeus). But later Prometheus frightens Zeus away from marriage with Thetis, telling him that from such a union would be born one stronger than the gods themselves. In return for this kindness Zeus set him free[1]."

This supremely important change must be the culmination of a long process, of which we see the first steps only in the *Prometheus Bound* and the bare result told us by Probus. Prometheus of his own free will tells his secret to Zeus and "benefits" Zeus, does him a "kindness"! Surely this is a very different Prometheus from the secretive, almost vindictive character whom we first knew.

This change can be watched in another way. That Prometheus' defiance intensifies as the play proceeds, and that this intensification is part of the dramatic action of the play, is obvious and has always been noticed. His development in other directions towards Zeus has been overlooked. His relations to Zeus become not only more intense, but different from what they were. Oddly enough, while his defiance intensifies, his anger lessens. It is again from contact with other suffering that he learns to make this essential, if only preliminary, approach to reconciliation. Io has caught at the idea let fall by Prometheus that Zeus shall one day be hurled from his throne, and

[1] Probus, *ad Virg. Ecl.* 6. 43: *Hunc quidem uolturem Hercules interemit, Prometheum...tamen liberare, ne offenderet patrem, timuit. Sed postea Prometheus Iouem a Thetidis concubitu deterruit, pronuntians quod ex his nasceretur qui ipsis dis fortior futurus esset. Ob hoc beneficium Iupiter eum soluit.*

when Prometheus asks her if she would rejoice to see it, she answers with savage resentment: "Yes, for am I not suffering at his hand[1]?" *i.e.* she is past weighing the guilt of Zeus, she only knows she would like to see the power hurt that has hurt her. Up till now that has also been the attitude of Prometheus, and one would have expected to see Prometheus joining her in her resentment and that they would mingle together their curses against Zeus. He does nothing of the kind; he does not even answer her remark, but goes on to something else. I draw inferences from that silence of his; he has heard spoken from the mouth of another the savage feelings of his own heart, and knows them for what they are, revenge, cruelty, anger, forms of evil thought.

It is clear that at the end of our play Prometheus is still under a positive misapprehension as to the course of the future. For he certainly supposes that, if anything definite is to take place, it will be his own triumph, while the reign of Zeus will pass away. Yet even here there is a certain development, almost as though Prometheus' prophetic knowledge too came to him gradually. After a preliminary statement of the irreconcilable differences between himself and Zeus[2], at line 260 he speaks as though Zeus had the solution in his own hands in virtue of his power, at line 756 he knows of the possibility that Zeus may fall, at line 770 he speaks of his own implication in the fate of Zeus, and in a way which shows some of the familiar Greek "irony." He says that the fall of Zeus will only be averted if he himself is first set free; and supposing

[1] l. 759, πῶς δ' οὐκ ἄν, ἥτις ἐκ Διὸς πάσχω κακῶς;

[2] l. 168–79.

that his freedom can only be purchased at the price of disclosing his own secret, he further supposes that that can never be, for he never will give way, and therefore Zeus will surely fall. But what he is really prophesying is that the fall of Zeus *will* be averted, for he has just mentioned the one condition that will be fulfilled, for he *will* choose to disclose his secret. His only actual misstatement is that his freedom will be won "in despite of Zeus[1]"; and this again is carefully corrected by Aeschylus by means of another unconscious prophecy, this time from the side of Zeus, so that *both* sides contribute to the final reconciliation. This prophecy is made through the mouth of Hermes, who tells Prometheus that Zeus will never loose him till "some god shall be recipient and successor for his woes, ready to sink to sunless Hades and the murky depths of Tartarus[2]." This is meant to be an impossible condition, so as to preclude for ever the setting-free of Prometheus, and Hermes adds that "the boast is no forged utterance, but truly spoken: for the mouth of Zeus knows not how to lie, but all it speaks comes to pass[3]." But by a miracle that exact condition will be fulfilled, and through the agency of the reconciler, Heracles. For Heracles unwittingly wounds Cheiron, and Cheiron, in his suffering, desiring to be free of his immortality, descends to Hades; so that Heracles can demand of Zeus consent to the release of Prometheus, now that the impossible condition is fulfilled[4].

Thus, step by step, this wonderful progress of

[1] l. 771, ἄκοντος Διός. [2] l. 1026–9. [3] l. 1030–3.
[4] Apollod. II. 5. 11; 5. 4. See Paley, notes *ad loc.* line 1049 in his edition).

rometheus is made, from a jealous and defiant secrecy
the consummation described by Probus, when
rometheus willingly tells all his knowledge and for
is "benefit" is loosed by Zeus himself.

The most marked and definite step in the progress
f the drama is when Prometheus turns to the miserable
nimal thing at his side—for Io, it must be remembered,
throughout the play in the form of a cow—, turns
this wretched degraded thing and suddenly, in a
lendid phrase, hails her as "the glorious mate of
eus[1]," and bids her rejoice in the future destined for
er[2], for it shall be no secret thing of shame, but a
lory known to all the world[3]; the union which she
ad so much dreaded shall in the end come gently;
eus shall but touch her and she shall bear a child,
om whose great race shall spring that redeemer who
to loose the bonds set by Zeus about us all; from
ne source of all her sufferings—Zeus' desire—shall
me the saving of the world. Thus out of feebleness
nall come strength, from the endurance of men their
alvation. It is the Endurance of Man that shall set
ee Man's Activity, his creative power, and each is
ecessary to our salvation. Out of the clash and
ntact between Man's Struggle (Prometheus) and his
ndurance (Io) against Present Circumstances (Zeus)
nall arise the better order of the world.

Here is what I consider the cardinal point of the
lution—*the Progress of the World*[4].

[1] l. 834, Διὸς κλεινὴ δάμαρ.
[2] l. 835, τῶνδε προσσαίνει σέ τι (omit question mark).
[3] l. 833.
[4] For the idea that the Succession of Orders solves the problem of

Man shall be reconciled to Present Circumstance by the Reconciler, and indeed, Present Circumstance desires the Reconciler, though it does not yet understand its own desire. Hence Present Circumstance is not wholly bad, though often cruel; on the contrary, it is necessary to the production of the Reconciler; it has the capacity of development into something better than itself. And some of its most cruel actions are the perhaps necessary prelude to the birth of the Reconciler; at any rate, necessary or not, they *are* the prelude. Zeus is cruel and brutal to Io, and Present Circumstance is cruel and brutal to us men and women. But Zeus was gentle in the end, and Io was not defiled, but glorified.

Now the Reconciler springs from these two things —man's defiance of Circumstance when it is evil and his union with it through suffering, even through shame[1], when not evil. When the message first comes to Io she is in deep perplexity; she cannot think it right to yield herself to Zeus by Lerne's deep meadow. But the sanction of the oracle, *i.e.* of *moral law* as at present revealed to us or evolved by us, determines her to obedience. We may note that moral law constantly fails to give a clear direction, in spite of the authoritative position which it assumes and which is almost too easily conceded by us. Moral law is itself a progressive thing, working by experiment, though perhaps the Greeks hardly realised this as we

the *Prometheus*, see Myers in *Hellenica*[2], p. 19 and p. 27, where it is briefly suggested. After writing this essay, I find the same solution given in brief outline by Sheppard, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 62.

[1] Reading αἰσχύνομαι in l. 642.

; they knew, however, that its commands seemed
metimes strangely harsh, with a harshness springing
m its incomplete nature, but that it was one's duty
obey such moral direction as is as yet working in
e world. It is not easy to see why Prometheus
ould, and Io should not, defy Zeus; perhaps it is
cause obedience, at whatever cost, must be given to
that has been built up in the way of a moral code,
ile the vast unexplored region outside that, the
aningless injustice of the rest, is still a subject for
uggle and experiment, until bit by bit the moral
der shall encroach on the remaining chaos of confused
ustice and oppression.

But there is a danger in this experiment, in this
iance of the Present Order; nay, it *must* entail
ne measure of wrong. Man ought to be able to live
ompletely sinless life, but he cannot. So often he
faced by the choice between two sins; he seems only
be able to rise through sinning, his best actions in-
tricably involve him in wrongdoing. So Prometheus
ld only save man at a cost: "I sinned, and willed
sin: to bring help to man I willed it; and now I
y the price in suffering[1]." Yet would it not have
en worse selfishly to stand aside from helping man?
e greater sin was avoided at the cost of committing
e lesser, and this is exactly the effect which Circum-
nce has on the lives of men. The strongest will in
e world cannot entirely defy Circumstance; it is not
our own volition that we find ourselves in the grip
intolerable situations, faced with the bitter necessity

[1] See a fine passage by Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*,
ion 9.

of having to choose between two evil things, while the responsibility for what we choose will dog us evermore. The stronger and more active the nature, the more likely it is to come to grips with Circumstance, for the keener will be its desire to better the conditions in which it finds itself, and such betterment is never won except at a ruinous cost. But in absolving the man who chooses the least evil of many evil courses, we are sometimes apt to forget how very evil that least evil may be. The Greek did not make this mistake; his doctrine was extraordinarily severe, even going to the length of identifying an unconscious error as sin.[1] Prometheus' cry, "I have sinned," expresses the *necessary* and *conscious* imperfection of a creature who finds himself in a sinful and mischievous world, and who cannot dissociate his own actions from the chaos of error into which he is born. He seems doomed both to sin and to condemn his own sin, because, born with the knowledge of a higher perfection, he is nevertheless placed where he must *act* in order at all to approach that perfection; but to act means to act through Circumstance, and instantly the perfect moral end has to be approached through an imperfect instrument. man's progress, therefore, through the Present Order cannot but be most imperfect, *sinful.*

(ii) *The progress of Zeus*

But the development is not in Prometheus alone. Zeus also changes. The Present Order is a changing order; it is cruel, brutal, apparently irrational, but it

[1] For this applied as an explanation of the *Prometheus*, see Sheppard, *op. cit.* p. 64.

esires a harmony with man, it desires something etter than itself. And it not only desires the harmony hich shall crown its union with the Obedience of man, ut it recognises in an increasing degree the necessity its own existence of man's Activity. Man it is who olds the secret knowledge which shall save the world. his also I consider a cardinal point in the Aeschylean onception of the Moral Order, as in the Euripidean[1]: at man must cooperate with the divine principle to ring about a better state of things. Thus the Divine oes not swallow up the human, to destroy its identity, r Divine and Human existence are not exclusive, ut complementary.

The idea of a Succession of Orders is familiar to eschylus, as is clear from the famous chorus in the *gamemnon*[2]; in that play, as in his *Supplices*, the nal order is called Zeus; in our play it is rather lled *Moira* or *Anankê*, Necessity[3], to whom Zeus all become subject, Zeus himself being only a limited, resent aspect thereof. It follows that if Zeus is nited, then there are occasions when it is right to sist him, as did Prometheus, the Ultimate Perfection eing sometimes best attainable by man's opposition nd struggle. Contrast the attitude of Hermes with at of Prometheus; Hermes did not help on the oming of a better order by his slavish obedience to eus. But there are other occasions on which it may e right to work with him. This is shown both by , and also by Prometheus' account of the conflict heaven[4]. Apparently there were three courses

[1] See on the *Ion*, pp. 68, 69.
[2] *Agam.* l. 168 *sqq.*
[3] l. 511 *sqq.*
[4] l. 201 *sqq.*

possible: (1) to side with Kronos, (2) to oppose Zeus, but not by force, only by "craft"; this, it would seem, cannot be in a bad sense, otherwise Themis, Right, could not have advised it; it must mean by thought, mind)(physical force, and suggest the Reign of Reason; this would have been the best plan of all, if Prometheus could have persuaded others to work for it. But the Titans were not wise enough, so Prometheus and Themis felt obliged (3) to support Zeus as against Kronos, *i.e.* accepting and helping on the Present Order with all its imperfections because pregnant with change and movement, holding at least the promise of improvement. This is better than associating oneself with the older order, the stagnant past. And on these grounds there is an ultimate justice in the subjection of Atlas to Zeus; the Past is part of the Eternal Order and without it we should all perish, for it holds together heaven and earth. Yet it must not dominate the Present, but be dominated by it[1].

Myers suggests that Aeschylus knew the legend that Kronos also was set free by Herakles (cf. *Eum.* 640–6). The Titans, at any rate, must have been freed and reconciled to Zeus, for they form the Chorus of the *Prometheus Delivered* (see *fr.* 193, *apud* Cic. *Tusc.* II. 10. 23). Legend said that Herakles gave relief even to Atlas for a time, when he went on his journey to the West, and we know the journey to the West was, by prophecy, included in the action of the *Prometheus Delivered* (see *fr.* 199). This idea of the

[1] I call Kronos the Past, because he is of the older generation; there is an identity of sound between the two words Kronos and Chronos, χρόνος, Time, but this is fortuitous.

reeing of the elder race of gods, of the Titans, of Kronos, and perhaps even of Atlas, is a most attractive ne. When the Order of the World is made perfect, elief shall be given in some mysterious way to the Past also. The sins and sufferings of the Past shall e expiated, and wiped off the account of the Eternal. This sounds unintelligible, and so it is, for our in-elligence is not yet made such that it can understand he working of an Absolute Perfection; and so for Aeschylus the journey of Herakles is a *mysterious* one nto the unknown West.

The fragment, No. 199, gives us perhaps the learest indication of the progress of Zeus, which has urvived from the miserably small fragments of the *Prometheus Delivered*. For there Zeus is said to *pity* Herakles and *help* him, which shows a state of mind many stages ahead of that which sent Hermes on his embassy. Further, if we may trust a prophecy of Prometheus, it is by suffering that Zeus is reformed—

Prom. Alas. *Herm.* Alas—that is a word that Zeus knows not.
Prom. But time growing old shall teach all things to learn[1].

One stage is also given in fragment 201, Prometheus' address to Herakles: "This is the son of a father who was my foe[2]." It is true Zeus is still "enemy" to Prometheus, but the fact that his son, Herakles, is "dearest" remains of cardinal and joyous significance.

[1] l. 980, Πρ. ὤμοι. Ερ. τόδε Ζεὺς τοὔπος οὐκ ἐπίσταται.
Πρ. ἀλλ' ἐκδιδάσκει πάνθ' ὁ γηράσκων χρόνος.

[2] ἐχθροῦ πατρός μοι τοῦτο φίλτατον τέκνον.

(iii) *Herakles*[1] *and the Final Order*

Finally, there is no end or limit foreseen to the Succession of Orders. The coming of the Final Order is not put as a point or stopping place, rather it seems to be suggested as itself a progress. There appear three possible conceptions: (1) that Absolute Perfection will never be attained, that whatever change there is is not a progressive change, but moves merely forwards and backwards; (2) that it will be attained, but that it will exclude further progress, because progress implies change, *i.e.* imperfection; therefore the Absolutely Perfect will be content simply to exist because it is perfect, without change; (3) that Absolute Perfection is itself, in ways beyond our comprehension, a movement of an infinite character, eternally prolonged in a progress from better to better. Here we meet the notion of eternity or infinity, which is at present unintelligible to us, for though we have invented the word, it is impossible for our minds to understand the idea. Aeschylus definitely denies the first of the three ideas, that so-called progress is merely a vicissitude of change; he believes in a true progress, though he does not definitely decide whether it will end in a state of static perfection; indeed, the question is not explicitly raised by him; but the whole weight of his drama leans towards supposing that it will not, but will go on and on. Herakles, the reconciler and redeemer, himself had to go on a journey to the West, and he went in search of justice. Was it fortuitous to Aeschylus' mind that he

[1] For Herakles as Nike, or Human Endeavour, see J. A. K. Thomson, *The Greek Tradition*, pp. 121 and 291.

sought it rather among men than in heaven? He sought "the most just race of men" in a land of idyllic and miraculous plenty. Herakles too, then, has a progress to accomplish, and for that progress he, the god, has as much need of man, as man has need of him. He rescues Prometheus: Prometheus sends him forth: what he seeks is justice: justice he finds among men[1]: and at a moment of the greatest peril it is Zeus, or *Circumstance*, who helps him out[2].

[1] *Fr.* 196, ἔπειτα δ' ἥξεις δῆμον ἐνδικώτατον
<βροτῶν> ἁπάντων καὶ φιλοξενώτατον,
Γαβίους ἵν' οὔτ' ἄροτρον οὔτε γατόμος
τέμνει δίκελλ' ἄρουραν, ἀλλ' αὐτόσποροι
γύαι φέρουσι βίοτον ἄφθονον βροτοῖς.
<βροτῶν> *add.* Hermann.

[2] *Fr.* 199 and 199 *a*. When Herakles was being attacked by the Ligures, Zeus "in pity" sent a wonderful shower of stones, with which Herakles drove off his enemies.

CHAPTER II

THE *ION* OF EURIPIDES[1]

(Probably between 420 and 415 B.C.)

The *Ion* is usually described as a criticism of Greek anthropological religion. This is an inadequate description. It contains a broad metaphysical and moral problem of greater importance than its contemptuous analysis of certain mythological figures. There is indeed a bitter criticism of Greek mythology combined with the moral analysis, and just as the play, written after 420 B.C., has political affinities with the *Troades* written in 415 B.C., so it has moral affinities with the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* written in 413 B.C. Indeed, the whole play might be a kind of illustration of the words in the *Iphigeneia*, l. 380 *sqq.*: "We men, making gods in our own image, make them evil, a cloak and shelter for our own wickedness: it is not possible that the gods could be so wicked." "Athens," cries Euripides, in effect, "it is not possible for you to condone your own religion. Let a Homer or a Pindar weave pretty tales about the loves of an Apollo or a Zeus: but what do they mean? They mean a woman outraged, betrayed,

[1] Euripides quoted by Oxford text (Murray).

despised; they mean such wickedness in god as man refuses to accept from man." The passionate anger in the *Ion*—for cool and ironical as the language for the most part is, the play is an outburst of anti-religious, or rather of true religious passion—has been adequately dealt with by many critics and more than adequately by Verrall[1]. But there is more in the play than a criticism of anthropomorphic deity. Behind the theological lies metaphysical analysis, simple and profound, wistful and courageous.

The Prologue. The scene is in front of the great temple at Delphi. At the opening of the play, the god Hermes comes forward to tell a strange tale, how his brother-god, Apollo, had once betrayed an Athenian maid, Kreüsa, the daughter of the king, and how she had borne him a son in fear and secrecy. In her shame she had placed the babe in a cradle to lie in the cave where Apollo had made her his. Hence Hermes himself, at Apollo's request, had fetched the child with its cradle and such ancestral ornaments as the mother had contrived to place with her babe, and had set all down upon the temple steps at Delphi. The chief priestess of the temple finds the babe and rears him, and here he has lived all his life as boy and youth, serving the god Apollo, innocent and happy, but with no knowledge of his birth. Meanwhile Kreüsa, having married Xuthos, is coming with her husband to enquire of Apollo's oracle whether she shall yet have a child; for her union with Xuthos is unfruitful. And Apollo, Hermes

[1] Verrall, *The Ion of Euripides*, 1890, Introduction I, Gods and Machines.

tells us, has planned to give this lad to Xuthos, and means to pretend that he is Xuthos' son, born of a mad forgotten revel; so the boy will inherit the throne of Athens, as he should, and yet Apollo will not need to confess his old betrayal and desertion of the Athenian woman. The boy shall be known as Ion and shall become famous throughout Greece.

Thus the *Ion* opens, with this curiously elaborate situation.

The story continues as follows. After the Prologue, the lad Ion is discovered sweeping the temple-steps at Delphi and gently scaring away the birds that flock round the altars. His has been a quiet, blessed life. To him come the maids, the servants of Kreüsa, now queen of Athens, who form the Chorus; they spend a happy hour in marvelling at the sculptures round the temple. Kreüsa enters; she and her husband, Xuthos, have come, as already explained, to Delphi to enquire of Apollo if they may have hope of a child. But unknown to her husband Kreüsa means to ask about that other child of hers, whether it be still alive or dead. She puts tentative questions to Ion, as though on behalf of a friend. Ion warns her that no such questions must be put to the god; they would disgrace him. Yet within himself he knows that, if true, the real disgrace lies in the past deed of Apollo, not in any question that Kreüsa may put to him now, and he feels horror at the revelation. Here begins the emotion of the drama, with this shattering revelation made to Ion about the character of the god whom he serves. Kreüsa resigns all hope. Xuthos, on the other hand, meets Ion as arranged and welcomes

him as his son. This is the god's design to make all good and restore her son to Kreüsa. Kreüsa does not know this; she believes that what has been denied to her as a right has been given gratuitously to her husband. Thus neither is Ion pleased to find himself apparently the child of a disgraceful revel and a nameless mother, nor does it occur to Kreüsa as other than an intolerable additional injury, that she, who may not even be permitted to ask of her own son, should have the bastard son of her husband thrust upon her as heir to Athens, the kingdom of her fathers. In an outburst of fury, she throws all concealment and shame to the winds and directly challenges Apollo as her seducer; then plans to kill Ion by sending her servant to hand him a poisoned cup at a feast. The servant does her bidding, but Ion is saved; as the cup is offered, someone by chance speaks an ill-omened word, the pious Ion pours out the cup, as contaminated by the word; a flock of the temple doves sip the wine and one of them falling dead, the plot is betrayed. Ion comes with drawn sword to revenge himself on the woman who has sought his life; she seeks refuge at the altar in the courtyard, and there follows a bitter dialogue between the two. But the Delphic priestess comes from the temple and interposes, bringing to Ion the cradle in which he was found long ago; for the time has come, she says, before he leaves for Athens, when he should seek to discover his birth by means of the tokens in the cradle. He hesitates to open them, dreading fresh unwelcome discoveries; but as soon as he does so, Kreüsa recognises the tokens as those she put in her baby's cradle

years before, and she knows therefore that Ion is her son. Mother and son embrace with joy. When, however, Ion asks for his father and Kreüsa tells him his father is Apollo, he cannot believe it. He is about to force his way into the inner shrine, to the presence of the god, when Athena appears and reveals the ancient guilt of Apollo and his ill-arranged plan to keep it secret and yet to send Ion to Athens. She bids Ion now go with his mother; from him shall spring the great Ionian race to rule Athens and the islands, and she prophesies also other children to Kreüsa by Xuthos, whose descendants shall people the rest of Greece.

Satire there is, undoubtedly, in Euripides' picture here of Apollo. Apollo is the mean seducer, the cheat; Apollo is the patcher-up, who wants to gloss over the mischief he has done with a cheap remedy of comfort for his victims; Apollo is the coward, who does not dare to face his victim, but skulks behind his sister's skirts and sends her to make all the explanations; Apollo is even, in one place, the cunning rascal, delighted with his own cleverness and the ingenuity of his little plot[1]. But all this is also capable of a much wider interpretation. Considering Euripides' treatment of Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*[2], we must accept Apollo both as a sharply caricatured presentment of current theological beliefs, in criticism of the old religion, and also as charged with a metaphysical meaning, that is as part of a new and better religion. This gives the Euripidean gods

[1] l. 1565.

[2] See pp. 79, 80 of that essay.

their curious double character, at first sight so very puzzling. Both here and in the *Hippolytus* the critical faculty is sharpest at the beginning and end of the play, in Prologue and Epilogue, while the metaphysical meaning behind the figures of the gods is clearest in the middle; in the *Ion* indeed the satire at the end is so obvious and bitter as almost to destroy the conception preceding it.

Another criticism may be made: the plot of the play is at once too sensational and too *arrangé*. These two qualities inevitably go together, as any typical melodrama will show; unusual adventures require an ingenious apparatus of rescues. We may grant the divine interference before the play opens, the bringing of the babe, for that is outside the proper action of the play and too well accepted in Greek drama generally to merit any special criticism. Nor is the coming of Xuthos and Kreüsa a more remarkable coincidence than a poet may legitimately use. But when Xuthos is told that he may have as his son the first person whom he meets on leaving the shrine, and when that first person is Ion, we at once feel a weakness. The divine interference of Apollo exceeds the proper limits; for it is the aim of dramatic art to picture happenings which are the outcome of human actions, and only occasionally of likely accident, and it is the supreme characteristic of Euripidean drama that, placed in a doubtful sphere, halfway between the human and divine worlds, it consistently moves along the human plane and foregoes miraculous apparatus in the course of the action. It often begins from heaven and is ended from heaven, but during the real stress of things the gods retire,

and the men and women alone are responsible for what occurs. In this play the recognition of Xuthos' fatherhood, of Ion's sonship is not derived from the characters or actions of either of these two, and there is not the slightest feeling that they are responsible for their own momentous situation. It is either fortuitous, or else it is miraculous, but it fails to be dramatic. A good caricaturist would make fun of it, for it does not ring true. This situation, awkwardly brought about, develops with plot and counterplot and becomes so exciting that we think of almost nothing but the story, of what the characters are doing, instead of what they are. This is very unusual in a Greek play; only when the action pauses, in two dialogues of great importance, does the moral import of everything again engage our attention, as it should. Towards the end we have the rather commonplace apparatus of birth-tokens, etc. Again, twice at least, we are on the verge of ending the play in disaster; once, when Ion is all but poisoned (he positively had the poisoned cup in his hands[1]), once, when he all but puts aside the cradle containing his birth-tokens to lie unopened for ever[2]. Now a play ought not to threaten to come ignominiously to an end like this, and then suddenly, as it were, take a fresh lease of life. There should be a kind of overwhelming flow of action, bearing us along, with no thought of ending till the ending comes.

It is also not satisfactory that Xuthos[3] should be

[1] l. 1187. [2] l. 1384.

[3] I cannot agree that he is a "butt"; Murray, *Euripides and his Age*, p. 121.

left deceived at the end about the true circumstances of Ion's birth[1]; the difficulty seems shirked; one almost feels as though the plot had become too much for the poet, as though he could not be troubled to untwist all the complicated strands he has been so industriously entangling. Still, there may be another meaning to this; it is perhaps part of the rather curious and very unusual ending given to the play[2].

The disjointed effects of the plot are due to the difficulties of the situation which Euripides has chosen, the biggest situation with which he attempts to deal in any play. He has chosen to make a direct attack on the conduct of inscrutable Circumstance in dealing maliciously with men, *i.e.* to fling himself into the whole problem of human suffering and the divine justice which imposes it, somewhat the same task as Aeschylus sets for himself in the *Prometheus Bound*. The story of Apollo's treatment of Kreüsa is an excellent choice: it involves the three qualities, first of wanton cruelty, then of indifference, and finally of a complete and baffling silence, which characterise the dealings of what some people are pleased to call "Providence." As I have said, it is a great mistake to confine the scope of Euripides' work merely to a criticism of a single figure in Greek Olympian mythology, or even of the whole of Greek mythological thought; it goes much deeper. Behind Apollo stand not only the serried ranks of Greek gods and of daemons and half-daemons, but Powers which never yet have received a name, and in Kreüsa are gathered together all the wrongs of all humanity.

[1] See *infra*, p. 71. [2] See *infra*, p. 70 *sqq*.

Now the first thing that Euripides makes overwhelmingly clear is the unequal quality of the struggle; man is feeble, Circumstance powerful. Man as the plaything of forces too vast for him is a favourite topic with us; but it was not so with the Greeks, who were obviously less overwhelmed with the vast complexity of the physical world in which they moved. Still, both Greek and modern agree that man cannot really measure his powers against those other powers, and alter the conditions and circumstances wherein he is set. He can neither change nor override the whole of Circumstance, *e.g.* the circumstance of birth, the circumstance of pain, or the circumstance of death. Yet these circumstances impose on him the severest, the most cruel, limitations, and the *Ion* teaches that man must accept and cooperate with Circumstance, but never condone it.

The first half of the play, to line 735, is largely taken up with an exposition of these emotions in Kreüsa. This is an extraordinary play, for during the whole of the first half of it there is no conflict of action; we are entirely without the inevitable, the onrushing element of actual tragic struggle. There has been a conflict, between Apollo and Kreüsa, and some at least of that past tragedy is exposed to us; but it is a conflict already decided, in which the sides have been so unequally matched that we do not expect it to be resumed. This is an impression tellingly given by lines 369–390, the dialogue between Kreüsa and Ion. Kreüsa has asked Ion whether it will be possible for her to question Apollo as to the fate of her child (of course, she calls it her friend's

child), and Ion has replied that such a question to the shrine is inadmissible: Apollo must not be shamed in his own temple; and Kreüsa, though burning with resentment[1], submits: "Let be, if the god forbids the knowledge I desire[2]," and we lay aside our hopes of seeing her face to face with her tormentor at last. Here Euripides actually puts a few lines, a "tag," such as usually ends a play: "Many men suffer ills, and many are these ills, but different for each. It is hard to find one pure happiness in the lives of men[3]." With satirical intent he seems to want to give the impression that all is at an end, that there is nothing more to be said. In many Euripidean plays such a false impression would be prevented by the Prologue, which outlines the plot, so that the audience know what is to come. In this play the Prologue is no help to us; it is a singularly incomplete forecast that Hermes gives; Apollo is going to tell Xuthos that Ion is Xuthos' own son and make Xuthos take him to Athens; so Apollo's misdoings will be hushed up. By line 675 we have already reached the fulfilment of all Hermes had to tell us, and the tragic action is not yet begun, the struggle between Kreüsa and Ion not yet started.

There is, indeed, too little suspense, too little tragic poise between Apollo and Kreüsa in the first half of

[1] l. 384–7, Ὦ Φοῖβε, κἀκεῖ κἀνθάδ' οὐ δίκαιος εἶ
ἐς τὴν ἀποῦσαν, ἧς πάρεισιν οἱ λόγοι,
κ.τ.λ.

[2] l. 390–1, Ἀλλ' ἐᾶν χρὴ τάδ', εἰ πρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ
κωλυόμεσθα μὴ μαθεῖν ἃ βούλομαι.
The reading of the MSS., ἀλλ' ἐᾶν χρὴ τάδε, no doubt gives the correct sense, but has not been satisfactorily emended.

[3] l. 381–3.

the play; what is there to say about so hopeless
situation? All the right seems with Kreüsa, all th
power with Apollo. No wonder Kreüsa is at onc
savage with resentment and utterly hopeless, with
hopelessness into which she relapses even after th
action has been in full swing for some time. I
lines 969–75 she tells her old servitor that sufferin
is the appointed lot of man, that unhappiness i
helpless, men must submit to the gods, and, in fac
she has had "enough of woes," she will not invit
more by resisting. Just because she is so hopeless
struggling againt Apollo's real powers or of gettin
justice for her old wrong, Kreüsa is prepared t
condone it, if only Apollo will give her another chil
The fulfilment of the hope with which she and he
husband have come to Delphi will be enough to bu
off her resentment against the god. But Apollo give
a son to Xuthos, not to her, and seems to mock he
Then, when hope is finally destroyed in Kreüsa, conflic
of action begins, when Apollo has broken his silenc
and broken it, as it seems, again to do her wrong.

But though there is no conflict of action in the firs
half of the play, for the simple reason that when
complete helplessness is opposed to absolute powe
and absolute silence there can be no action, onl
acquiescence, yet there is *a progressive conflict*
emotion, which prepares us for the violent action
the second half of the play. The hopelessness
Kreüsa does prepare us for what one can only call he
savagery when she determines to murder Ion; for th
peculiar mixture of weakness and violence is perfectl
true to nature, both qualities being symptoms of th

same lack of self-control. Kreüsa is ready to burn down Apollo's temple and is only held back by sheer physical cowardice[1]; that one might expect from her bitter attitude to Apollo, a bitterness for which there is full cause. Yet one has the impression, perhaps just through this physical cowardice, that in the ordinary concerns of life she is not of the daemonic type, like Medea, and it is at first sight rather surprising that she should agree to a murder; for, after all, Ion was guiltless towards her, both in fact and in her own knowledge; it was Apollo who had really, and Xuthos who had apparently, wronged her, and there is something difficult and hard about this transferred vengeance. Even the murder of a hundred Ions would be but a thwarted and abortive revenge; for Apollo would be still untouched and untouchable. But it is for this very reason that Kreüsa is savage, because, with all her plans of vengeance, she is still desperate, still hopeless, and her desperation is well shown in her turning from the god, whom she cannot attack, who is now too far away to answer (though once he was not too holy to stoop down and wrong her), to take vengeance on the first victim with whom she *can* deal. This victim, though she does not know it, happens to be her own son[2], but it is against Apollo that she rages; Apollo, not Ion, is the criminal, and in a magnificent outburst, the central speech of the play, she cries out her wrongs against the god.

[1] l. 974–5.

[2] A Greek would admire the poignancy of the situation where a mother unwittingly seeks to destroy her own son; to us it seems merely artificial and repulsive. That is a point in which ancient and modern tastes differ.

O soul, can I keep silence[1]?
Yet how speak? Speak and show
My secret bed of shame?
Who is there now to stop me?
For whom should I be pure?

My husband has betrayed me,
My home is lost, my children,
My hope has gone, the hope I served in vain,
Hiding my lover,
Hiding my hapless motherhood.

Listen, O starry sky of god!
Listen, O goddess beside the rocks of home!
Listen, O sacred shore, O brimming lake!
I will keep it hid no longer,
I will free my breast from this weight.

My tears fall fast, my heart is bleeding,
Outraged by man, betrayed by gods,
Gods I will prove
Ravished me and betrayed me.

Thou! thou with thy lovely song,
Thou with thy seven-stringed hornèd lyre
Chanting hymns to the Muses
Over the listening land,

Thou, thou, the son of Leto,
Hear me now!
Hear, in the open light of day
Answer the charge I bring!

You came to me, gold-hair gleaming,
As I gathered the gold-eyed flowers,
Your hands closed on my wrists.
You drew me into the cave,
"Mother, mother!" I cried, but you drew me,
A god, you clung to my side,
Seized unashamed
Love, and love's joy.

[1] l. 859, translation by Miss F. M. Stawell.

And I bore you a child, alas! alas!
Woe me for the girl and the mother!
I laid it, trembling, on that lone bed
Where we lay side by side,
The hour you mastered me.
Alas! alas! And the child is dead,
Eagles have torn him,
Your child and mine,
But still you sing to your lyre,
Songs of triumph.

Thou! thou, the son of Leto,
Hear my charge!
Answer my charge!
Thine are the oracles,
Here, at thy golden throne,
Here, at the heart of the earth,
I cry it into thy ears!

Listen, O lying lover!
My husband gave thee no joy,
But thou hast sent him a child,
And my son, mine and thine, is lost,
Torn from his cradle,
Torn by the birds and killed.

Delos hates thee, thy laurel loathes thee,
And the slender bright-leaved palm,
Where Leto bare thee to Zeus,
And called thee a holy child!

This great revelation ends the first half of the play. Yet even before we come to it there is something which may be called the tragic quality. It is the suspicion that the world is not a very pleasant or kindly place. There is a clash between what imposes suffering (Circumstance) and what suffers (Man). The gradual opening of Ion's eyes to this is the fine thing in the first half of the play; it can hardly be called a progression of action, but it is a progression of emotion and a development of character. Ion's de-

lightful boyish gaiety while he sings his songs and sweeps in front of the temple[1] is gradually stolen from him by the realities of suffering which are exposed to him in Kreüsa's story, and the scene ends in his great questioning of Apollo, Apollo only an hour ago his protector, his beloved, his god. Ion's childlike sternness, half arraignment, half pleading, is a marvellous anticipation of Kreüsa's uncontrolled outburst; though so much quieter, it is in its own way just as deadly. Ion ends with an extraordinary accusation against deity in general, satirical and annihilating. "Lo, if a man does wrong, the gods chastise him. Yet you who make these laws for men are proved yourselves to disobey them. How can this be right? Nay, let me imagine, madly perhaps, yet I would argue thus—imagine you adjudged to pay damages for your marriages to mortals: then for your sins your temples would be stripped. You do wrong in holding pleasure more than prudence. No longer is it just to call men wicked; we do but imitate the gods; call *those* evil who teach us thus[2]."

The feelings of the Chorus towards Apollo also suffer a revulsion on hearing of Kreüsa's misery[3]. Thus is the impression strengthened that all who are gay, young and happy in the play must have their illusions shattered, not by the mouthing moralities of their elders, but by the unconscious exposure of an older woman's life.

The struggle is now restated, not as between Kreüsa and Apollo, but as between Kreüsa and Ion. Immediately action begins, because the two sides are

[1] l. 82–183. [2] l. 440–451. [3] l. 509–9.

for the first time comparable. Before, Apollo was so tremendous that there could be no struggle against him; his victims could only suffer; action was cut off by his power and by his silence alike.

To Kreüsa Apollo is *divine at all times.* It is only when her anger turns itself away from the god to direct itself against the man, Ion, that she can begin to act. She cannot act against Apollo; she has abandoned even the idea of questioning him; but this Apolline priest is pushed across her path, and with him she can deal. She could not deal with her divine seducer, but she will punish this human wickedness. She thinks she is dealing with human factors only. She does not guess that the anger which she directs against Ion should still be turned against Apollo, that the boy she seeks to murder is the very son of her union with him.

The next part of the play is an emphatic statement both by Kreüsa and by Ion of their claims against each other. Kreüsa puts herself in such a situation that Ion comes to have against her the exact right of reprisals she claimed against him; he claims to put her to death for having attempted, though not yet accomplished, a deadly injury against him. As usual, the tragic conflict involves an overstatement of right on either side, a claim too exclusive. It was an appalling wrong in Kreüsa to want to murder Ion, even if he and Xuthos had plotted to do her a deadly injury; it is an appalling wrong in Ion to want to murder Kreüsa, even if she has attempted to kill him. The central part of the play lies here. Lines 1045–7, spoken by Kreüsa's old slave, are highly significant:

"Only those who are happy may claim the glory of being pious and moderate; when our desire is to injure an enemy, there is no law that can restrain us." This is a profound platitude, but the Greeks were never afraid of profound platitudes, and this makes their literature great. It is a curious and a tragic truth, that we, as human beings, seem unable to realise in practice that all other human beings have a claim on us for perfect conduct towards them, quite independent of their own conduct towards us. Ion and Kreüsa make the fatal mistake of basing their claims on the wrongdoing of their opponent, which, as they hold, absolves them from the obligation to behave rightly themselves. They are enemies to each other, and current Greek morality said it was not only permissible, but a duty, to injure an enemy. Perhaps Euripides wished to criticise this when he invented this curious situation of mother and son seeking to murder each other. In spite of its elaborate argument and something artificial in its poignancy, it contains a great truth. Put into simple language it is nothing more than to say that to stand too exclusively on one's own rights is seldom just. Ion and Kreüsa both persist in their exclusive claims, and suddenly find themselves involved in their relations with Apollo, who still to them (though not to Euripides) is the Divine. Their too confident assertion of their rights has brought on them the danger of sinning against the god to whom they both appeal.

This is worked out in the very important dialogue, lines 1282–1319. Kreüsa, clinging to the altar for refuge, claims that Apollo is now on her side, and

cannot be on Ion's, while Ion claims that Apollo is on his side and cannot be on Kreüsa's.

Kr.[1] You shall not slay me, I forbid it, I!
I, and the God, beside whose throne I stand.

[A tremendous claim: she almost identifies herself with the essential divinity.]

Ion. You—and Apollo? What have ye in common?
Kr. He has my body for a sacred gift.

[That is, as a suppliant; but there is the further thought of her bodily union with Apollo, the foundation of all her claims.]

Ion. And yet you would have poisoned me, his own?
Kr. Not his, not his! You were your father's bastard.

[She means his supposed father, Xuthos.]

Ion. Apollo fathered me, the fatherless.
Kr. To-day you chose your father: I am Apollo's now.

[When Xuthos came and you agreed to go with him, by that very act, which also meant such wrong to me, you ceased to be the holy priest of Apollo. I, by my suppliant posture at this altar, have taken your place.

The strength of Kreüsa's case lies in the fact that Ion cannot claim to belong both to Apollo and to Xuthos, and in her own secret tie with Apollo. Ion now retorts that only those can claim to be Apollo's, who fulfil by their lives and thoughts the righteous purposes of Apollo.]

Ion. Ah, but you sinned! My deed was innocent.
Kr. You were our foe, and so I sought to slay you.

[To defend herself, Kreüsa now makes a charge against Ion himself.]

Ion. I came not armed against you or your land.
Kr. Your heart was armed: you would have burnt our home.
Ion. Where were the torches? Where the flame of fire?
Kr. You wanted what was mine, in my despite.
Ion. Then you planned murder, fearing only thoughts?
Kr. I feared to die, when thoughts grew into acts.
Ion. My father found me, and you envied him,
Childless yourself.

[Ion now sweeps aside these cobwebs of excuse and groundless charges and goes to the root of the matter.]

[1] Translation by Miss F. M. Stawell.

Kr. And must the childless woman be your prey?
Ion. I only take the land my father won.
Kr. His sons,—what share have they in Pallas' land?

[Kreüsa has skilfully shifted the ground to the question: what right Ion, if he is not *her* son, has to the land of Athens, which Xuthos only gained by his marriage with her. Xuthos himself had some independent claim, because he had helped Kreüsa's father, but he has been paid for that. The underlying feeling that gives passion and force to her contention is that Ion, if he is only the son of Xuthos, has in fact no special claim on her and hers.]

Ion. He saved it, not by words, but by his sword.

[Ion appeals to his father's service: the claim of desert.]

Kr. A helper—not a son of our own soil.

[Throughout Kreüsa feels that Xuthos does not belong to Athens in any full sense.]

Ion. Whate'er he gained, I claim it as his son.

[Ion falls back on the mere claims of conquest, possession and inheritance.]

Kr. What spear and shield can win, is all you win.

[Once more an open declaration of war between them.]

Ion. Up! Leave this altar, leave the seats of God!

[Ion now puts himself definitely in the wrong.]

Kr. As well drive out your mother, as force me.

[I am a suppliant, and holy as a mother. There is an "ironic" allusion to the real relationship between herself and Ion.]

Ion. Shall you go safe, untouched—the murderess?
Kr. Unless you would do murder in the shrine.
Ion. Why do you wish to die on holy ground?
Kr. I wish to torture those who torture me.

In her despair, Kreüsa is determined to force the guilt and remorse of sacrilege upon Ion, and get some revenge for her desolation and for the agony of jealousy he has caused her. She nearly succeeds, as the words show, but he shrinks from the actual deed. Instead, he bursts out with the passionate wish that

the gods had set some sign between the righteous suppliant and the unrighteous. He wishes, poor boy, things were not quite so mixed and difficult, and sighs to receive some declaration out of the eternal divine silence, the old cry of the human soul for some revelation of justice when confounded by the vagaries of Circumstance; but Apollo does not answer, and again we seem to be at a deadlock.

This deadlock is solved by the entry of the Pythian priestess, who brings a fresh element. This element is human trust in humanity, men's confidence in each other. It is this which quite simply and naturally, almost accidentally, is going to solve this tragic puzzle. Ion has been brought up by this woman; she is to him as a mother[1]; he listens at once to what she has to say, and obeys her wholeheartedly, whereas all Kreüsa's fierce arguments had failed to convince him. She tells him not to think of hurting Kreüsa, and he yields without a murmur. There is something whimsically attractive in the complete dependence of this young fire-eater on the older woman. She leaves all the vexed question of rights and wrongs aside, and we know that events will prove that Ion, great though his provocation had been, was greatly in the wrong in what he proposed. She remarks that step-mothers never do like their step-sons, what does he expect[2]? that people do indeed seek to injure others, but that he is brutal[3] who simply tries to repay injury, and she gives him, unconsciously, a wonderful lesson in reserve and self-control through the quietness with which she says to him that she loves him like a son, that she has

[1] l. 1324, 1363. [2] l. 1329. [3] l. 1327, ὠμός.

kept the secret of his birth-tokens for years, not prying into them nor speculating about them, but putting them aside till the proper moment, and she tells him, quite simply and naturally, that the moment has come when she must say goodbye to him; he must go with his father (and with Kreüsa!); new duties call him. She does not even stay to see what is in the cradle: let us hope the temple-servants told her later.

This unloosening of the human tangle, the tangle between Kreüsa and Ion, has been obtained through the ordinary everyday quality of human kindness and trust. It had been preceded by a favourable *accident*: the dove had drunk of the poisoned wine handed by Kreüsa's servant and so Ion's life had been spared. How much value are we to set on this accident? Was it "the reward of virtue"? Because Ion was scrupulous to take notice of an ill-omened word, did Apollo guard him? So it might seem to a superstitious Athenian, and so Euripides might be content to let him believe. We must always remember that even to Euripides Apollo does not altogether cease to be a god. Apollo is a double conception, and in so far as he represents Circumstance Euripides will take note that Circumstance may be good and have that in it which may truly be called divine. Circumstance is not always cruel. There is good-luck as well as ill-luck in the lives of men. Even Greek thinkers like Euripides could not entirely free themselves from the idea that good-luck was indeed a divine gift. Therefore we have such episodes as that of the dove drinking the poison. Later, we have the same impression given in another episode; a certain value is attached to the

simple act of obeying a command which comes from a god. For at one point Ion is tempted to put the cradle aside, in fear that he may discover what is not to his liking[1]; but suddenly it occurs to him that this is disobeying the intentions of Apollo[2], who, by preserving the cradle in his shrine, has clearly indicated that it should be opened. He will no longer therefore "fight against the god's desire." The conventional Athenian would exclaim that even the freethinking Euripides had made his Apollo acknowledge in a substantial way the trust and obedience of his worshipper, Ion, and would go home to prate about the reward of virtue. Euripides has certainly given us a beautiful and sympathetic picture of an obedient worshipper rewarded by his god[3].

It would seem, then, that Euripides sometimes wavers in his conception of Apollo, and that under the ambiguity of the word "Apollo" there is real confusion of thought. The modern world would be incapable of using the same word to describe a personal, limited deity and such an impersonal abstract notion as Circumstance[4]. This difficulty was not so acute for the average Greek. He could have said, with great simplicity, that everything that happened to him came from God, and could have identified Circumstance with the will of Apollo or Zeus. It was because Euripides was struggling to free himself from this simple, but unsatisfactory formula, that he evolved so confused a

[1] l. 1380–4. [2] l. 1385.

[3] Note how different this reasoned, suffering obedience to a high sense of what is right seems from the childish, ignorant obedience of the opening scenes of the play.

[4] Neither should we use a name like "Aphrodite" to cover such conceptions as love, union, friendship, passion.

figure as the Apollo of the *Ion*. In the Apollo of the *Ion* Euripides, for the most part, is not giving us his idea of God at all, but is describing with great power and accuracy exactly what effect Circumstance has on human lives. Behind this, we infer, from other plays of Euripides, a different and an infinitely lofty conception of the nature of God, never actually stated here.

Thus with an effort Euripides and others like him struggled to surmount early superstitions. They saw that the hardships which happen to men must not be attributed to the personal vindictiveness of a supreme power. They did not attempt to disprove the hardships; they did not even fall into the more refined error of supposing that they were sent for disciplinary ends, to school men into good behaviour. They simply doubted whether the power which is Circumstance was *supreme*. Aeschylus boldly states that there is something greater (Moira in the *Prometheus*, Zeus in the other plays). Euripides scarcely makes a statement on the subject; he merely hints at an inexplicable mystery.

There is, however, another development of the interaction between humanity and Circumstance in this very play, and one of great importance. In the Prologue Hermes announces that it is the purpose of Apollo to make good the damage he has done, but we see that the reparation contemplated is woefully incomplete. Apollo's union with Kreüsa is for ever to remain hidden from the world; Ion is never to know that he is the god's son, while even Kreüsa is to remain ignorant of this until she reaches Athens.

Apollo once more appears in a most unfavourable light, and it is Euripidean sarcasm to picture the god as satisfied to offer material damages, while the woman is unwilling to accept anything less than full spiritual reparation—another piece of criticism on current Greek theology. Now this rather mean plan[1] is thwarted by the action of the Chorus. All would have gone as Apollo planned, had not these Athenian girls told their mistress of the plot against her[2]; their impulsive action completely defeats the intention of the god. It is unusual for Euripides to give such important action to the Chorus[3], and therefore it is all the more to be noticed in this play. The cause is the girls' sympathetic indignation for Kreüsa, humanity uniting against Apollo, and humanity has such power that it can completely upset his well-arranged plans. Athena herself, whom Apollo sends to speak for him, says quite plainly at the end of the play that the action of the girls had wholly frustrated his original scheme and that he had been forced to intervene in order to save Ion[4]. Thus the mere exercise of human power has altered Apollo's course.

By this time we are well on the way to solve the bigger conflict between humanity and Circumstance. The whole of the play after line 1467 is again con-

[1] I take the promise of Apollo, mentioned by Athena in lines 1566–8, as insincere: *ἔμελλε...ἄναξ Ἐν ταῖς Ἀθήναις γνωριεῖν ταύτην τε σὴν, Σέ θ' ὡς πέφυκας τῆσδε καὶ Φοίβου πατρός.*

[2] l. 747–807.

[3] G. Murray, *Euripides and his Age*, p. 237–8, says: "The Leader (of the Chorus)...must never take really effective or violent action," but this seems going too far, at any rate in regard to the word "effective."

[4] l. 1563.

cerned with this bigger situation. The unloosening of the human tangle, the struggle between Ion and Kreüsa, was completed between lines 1437 and 1467, and here a less philosophical play might have ended. But the great metaphysical question again becomes insistent, with the extraordinarily natural remark of Ion that he wishes his father could be there to share their joy[1]. This reintroduces the old terrible problem of the Apolline secrecy and silence, and the conflict now again concentrates with vigour on the demand of the human being for some answer or explanation from Circumstance. Here the contrast between Ion and Kreüsa is worth studying. Kreüsa is now content; she demands less than before; she is contented to accept the gift of her son and to leave the rest vague. She even recognises that Apollo's will may have been beneficent—a recognition, however crude, by the human person of the good in Circumstance[2]. "Listen now, my son, to the thought that has come to me. It was to bless you that Loxias[3] gave you a seat in a noble house. Had you been called the child of a god, never would you have had rich surroundings or your father's name. How could you? Did not even I conceal my marriage and was ready to slay you in secret? It was to help you that Apollo gave you falsely to another father." To Kreüsa Apollo resumes his full divinity and holiness; he is again to her a god, not a seducer. Kreüsa is one of those who will always accept a "providential" explanation of phenomena. But Ion will have none of it. Here a piece of good character-study reinforces the metaphysical situation. Ion's education has been

[1] l. 1468–9. [2] l. 1539–45. [3] Apollo.

too rapid, too sharp; he is now ready to believe anything of anybody—except his own mother when she tells him her innocence. For with the cynicism of youth, having been altogether too much disciplined by disillusion and lacking the man's balance and experience, he suspects his mother of some nameless intrigue[1] and that she was the victim of some common seduction; against this she protests in vain and swears that his father is Apollo. When she insists, he confesses his complete bewilderment[2], and, unable to agree to her suggestion of a hidden, beneficent purpose on Apollo's part, suddenly makes up his mind to force an answer from the god[3]: "But I will go into Apollo's house and ask him whether I am of a mortal father or of him[4]." He is much younger and wants so much more certainty than the older, wiser woman, whose knowledge is that of experience, and who therefore has learnt to accept things as they are; he must have it all written out in chapter and verse. He is youth personified: youth, when, in front of the cradle, he still hesitates to probe into the doubtful secrets of life; youth, when, with unparalleled boldness, he casts all that fear aside and rushes on to question fate, by sheer audacity carrying humanity a stage further in spite of all the wise despair of elder men. And so it is Ion who forces from Apollo such answer as is given.

Thus it comes at last, the supreme moment, man face to face with that terrible mystery of Circumstance against which he seems to struggle in vain. A goddess

[1] l. 1523–31. [2] l. 1537. [3] l. 1546–8.

[4] Notice the change from the Ion who told Kreüsa that the question must not be put; p. 44.

appears in divine glory[1]; but the revelation is beyond his powers to bear as yet: "Let us flee," cries Ion, "let us not look on the divine vision, for the time has not come for us to look on god[2]." Had not Ion himself come within an ace of hideous crime[3]? Even youth knows itself not so innocent that it can contemplate the vision of a world other than its own.

The result, however, of Ion's courage is none the less a great one. The Chorus by their indignation had entirely ruined the plan arranged by Apollo, whereby Xuthos was to take Ion home with him as his son; now Ion again thwarts Apollo[4] and forces him to an action different from the one he had intended, forces him to give up his cherished secrecy and acknowledge Ion as his son before the world. Thus Euripides must be counted as among those who deny a determinist theory and definitely take their stand by the principle of freewill; for it is clear that he means the operation of the human will to be a final factor in events, and to follow and evolve its own laws, over which no other system can ultimately be dominant, if humanity chooses to exert its full powers.

Yet though Ion has forced himself into the presence of Apollo, and has forced Apollo to disclose something, the justification of Apollo's conduct remains a secret for ever. The "good[5]" of Apollo is never stated: there is a mystery in Circumstance. What Apollo in effect says is not that he has no explanation, but that

[1] l. 1549–50. [2] l. 1551–2. [3] l. 1514–5. [4] l. 1566–8.

[5] For the term "the good," see on the Hegelian theory of tragedy; the essay on the *Hippolytus*, p. 77.

he does not choose to give it; he neither explains nor justifies his union with Kreüsa: he is simply silent about himself. Circumstance is not to be explained. "There is nothing to reply; the reply remains the secret of God[1]."

We do not know the reason why such suffering is imposed on men, but we must proceed on three assumptions: (1) that it is an untrue conception of things to attempt to gloss over the extent of our own sufferings, an untruth that can only lead to false standards of life and to disaster; Ion's happiness, Kreüsa's silence, shattered when they came to be tested; (2) that it is an inadequate conception of the Divine to suppose that it acquiesces in our sufferings, that it proceeds along a lower line of morality than does man; the clearest thing that emerges in this play is that this Apollo is not *God*. Circumstance is not God; the real God is above Apollo or Circumstance; (3) that submission is a radically false conception of the duty of humanity, that there is no valid reason why men should simply acquiesce in the mystery of Circumstance; let the questioning, the human discontent go forward; by this means alone, by its rashness, its boldness, its indignation, nay, its rebellion against the treatment imposed on it, it can and will evolve a better order of the universe; it can and will itself alter and inform the divine action, *reform deity*, and deity will contemplate no progress which man does not ask from it: the hands of deity are bound until man chooses to unbind them. Thus we have the complement of the Christian notion that with God all

[1] Cardinal Mercier's Pastoral, Christmas, 1914.

things are possible, in the doctrine that with man all things are possible.

The last scene of all in this tragedy[1] has a peculiar, and, at first sight, a superficial effect.

Ion and Kreüsa go home in a matter-of-fact way, apparently quite happy and contented. This jars on the emotions which the poet has hitherto demanded of us. If it is meant to be a reconciliation with Apollo, it is of such a kind that we should greatly prefer to do without it. It is decidedly *bouleversant* to hear Kreüsa not only accepting, but praising Apollo, and we can only agree with Athena that she is indeed "changed[2]." Ion, however, is ominously silent[3], and here we have what is sometimes called the "epic" note of Greek tragedy, *i.e.* the play does not come wholly to an end, but looks forward to a renewal of conflict, as an epic looks forward to a renewal of life. Greek drama drew its subjects from Greek epic; now epic looks backwards and forwards and stretches out to include the whole course of life: it is an arc suggesting the whole circle of time. This suggestion of the whole of time is a legacy which epic left to Greek dramatists, and at the end of a Greek play, while one conflict comes to a close, a new one is often suggested. The new one may be of the same or of a different quality, but it arises out of the old. At the end of the *Septem contra Thebas* of Aeschylus the conflict between the two brothers Eteokles and Polyneikes is closed, but the

[1] l. 1606 to end. [2] l. 1614 μεταβαλοῦσα.

[3] Lines 1617, 1618, should be assigned with the MSS. to Kreüsa, not to Ion; so Verrall *ad loc.*

conflict between Antigone and Kreon is begun; indeed, the very Chorus divides into two halves, siding partly with Antigone, and partly with Kreon, and we are well in sight of a new struggle when the last line is said. Here Ion, we may feel sure, will one day have his own struggle with Apollo, a far tenser one than he has had so far. Between him and Apollo almost all is yet to come; experience has stimulated him: he is too young to be resigned. Only for the present is he silent.

Xuthos too is left deceived. He still imagines Ion to be his own son[1]. In Euripides' eyes Xuthos was one of those people who are made to be deceived; he was not strong enough to bear the truth. It is sometimes said that the truth can never do harm; the French proverb is subtler, "toute vérité n'est pas bonne à dire," the capacity for facing the truth is the last reward of a long and painful training; it is not a natural gift except to the strongest natures. The classic material for the study of human nature as it reveals itself when brought face to face with truth is Ibsen's *Wild Duck*, where the topic is handled with every delicate nuance and not without satire. It is possible that among the lost plays of Euripides there may be a forerunner of the *Wild Duck*. That nothing short of the truth is in the end satisfactory was equally the conviction of Ibsen and Euripides; and this is the

[1] This may be mere carelessness on the part of Euripides or it may have been caused by a technical difficulty. He would perhaps have brought Xuthos on the stage at the end when Athena's revelation was made, had it not been that only three actors were allowed to the Greek playwright, and the actor who had played Xuthos was now actually playing Athena. But it is hard to suppose that it was not intentional.

very basis of the *Ion*. But coupled with the extraordinary stress they both lay on the necessity for seeking out truth in its finest essence is the recognition of the terrible nature of that truth as it is revealed to us, and therefore of the strength of mind required to bear it. Here these two dramatists join hands. In Ibsen there are two worlds, the world of seeming and the world of reality. He invariably begins in the world of illusion and bit by bit tears it away; but as he tears it away he shows which of his men and women are able to deal with that other world of reality, and which are unable. Xuthos, we must suppose, is one of those who would not have been able, and therefore Xuthos is left deceived. Ion alone will one day again face Apollo, for though Kreüsa had had moments when she faced the truth, those moments are now over. Perhaps we feel that Euripides might have credited *us* with so much strength, but he makes the Chorus dismiss us with what we can only describe as a platitude, and an untrue one at that: "for in the end the good receive their desert, while the evil will never prosper, even as is their nature[1]." Is it really consonant with the art of a great thinker like Euripides to believe any such nonsense? His whole aim has been to educate us out of it. There is something almost frivolous in the ending of this splendid play, as though all the terror and the pain had no further significance, as though it were all a dream; astonished we watch an almost impious hand lightly draw the veil across the tragic in Kreüsa's life and across the immoral in Apollo's dealings.

[1] l. 1620–1.

At the end of every tragic presentation we return again to ordinary life, and this involves a process inevitably jarring to the emotions. Who has not felt, at the end of a splendid performance, the misery of returning to the littlenesses of life? Strangely enough, this jar is also felt as a relief. Caught, enclosed, imprisoned once again in our own atmosphere of limited particulars, we do not feel ourselves limited or hampered, but only welcomed back into what is strong and safe; an instinct tells us that we none of us dare for long defy the comfort of the known and the familiar. "Life is not so evil, after all; what we saw was poetry, and we do not want to live in the poet's world; he has enticed us to the theatre, and for an hour we were his victims; he has torn away externals and shown us our own hearts; we shudder and rejoice; but we cannot bear it long," and something of the "unreality" of all "art" comes with an indescribable relief to soothe us; for that which is the truth we call "unreal," and the world of illusion, the world of the surface, we again call "reality"; a large part of mankind lives happily by instinct, and not at all by thought, and lightly crosses abysses with the supreme courage of the blind.

Good plays seldom end with a "curtain"; the poet dare not so dismiss us, for he knows us not so strong that we can carry home with us more than a part of the truth which he has mercilessly exposed. Only the poor play dare end sensationally, for it has challenged nothing vital in our minds. Most Greek plays have the "Attic" ending; some modern ones the sentimental one, that is, the author gently leads us away from seeing our own hearts mirrored into being sorry for the hero's

death. But the peculiarity of the *Ion* is the incompleteness of its moral reconciliation: Apollo guards his eternal silence. What is the use of a sentimental ending here? Sentiment cannot help us over the tragedy of living; only the experience of life gives us courage to continue to live. Euripides therefore attempts quite a special ending; he does for the spectator what the spectator mostly counts on doing for himself. He drops back the veil into its place and shrouds those terrible inner sanctuaries he has dared to expose. He releases us again, almost expels us with violence from tragedy's tense air into an atmosphere of ordinary life. Kreüsa and Ion will go home, and the small facts of their life will close over their tragedy; they will live together and all the fine emotions and sentiments which were so real an hour ago will never be repeated. They will become ordinary man and woman, because, quite simply, that is exactly what they are. No one is a tragic hero for more than a few hours of his life. Poets love to kill off their tragic heroes; that is their high privilege; for they have made them into such glorious beings that they cannot bear to see them slip back into the common ruck again. Euripides has more courage. It would have been the ordinary sentimental ending to bring about Kreüsa's death and to finish with the picture of Ion's eternal grief for the mother he had found only to lose. But our unbelievable, unreconciled feeling of the divine sin would have rent to pieces such an ending: while that reconciliation is lacking, all others are futile, all others except one—the continuation of life. Yes, the Divine sins against the human, sending death and despair;

nevertheless the Divine justifies itself, for the life of men goes on and on. Tragedies happen, but life surges up against them and drives away despair, even if not the pain they bring. Euripides takes the audience into his confidence, and dismisses them in his supreme wisdom back into ordinary life, even into conventional morality, bidding them float safely down the stream of everyday things, only remembering sometimes that there is a mystery behind the veil.

CHAPTER III

THE *HIPPOLYTUS* OF EURIPIDES[1] (428 B.C.)

ARGUMENT

Hippolytos, son of Theseus, was loved and ruined by his step-mother, Phaidra.

In Theseus' absence, Phaidra and Hippolytos were left alone at Troezen for a year; Phaidra, unable to overcome her passion for Hippolytos, determines to destroy herself. But her old nurse, in love and grief, works on her to tell her secret, then with unscrupulous cunning whispers it to Hippolytos, hoping from him she knows not what of shameful connivance and fruition of desire. Hippolytos repulses the nurse with violence, and in fear and shame Phaidra hangs herself; but she leaves behind her a writing, in which to save her name she falsely tells Theseus that Hippolytos had desired her and that she had sought refuge in death. Theseus enters, reads, and without listening to his son, invokes a fatal curse on him. The curse is fulfilled; a sea-monster scares the horses of Hippolytos' chariot, so that Hippolytos is dragged along the ground. He is carried in, mortally wounded, to his father's presence,

[1] Euripides quoted by Oxford text (Murray).

when Artemis, the goddess, descends and tells Theseus all the story of his son's greatness and of Phaidra's sin; Hippolytos is reconciled to Theseus and so dies.

Euripides chooses no easy situation—the love of Phaidra for her step-son Hippolytos. The first version of the play which he put on the stage was such that, according to Aristophanes, the Athenian women made away with themselves for very shame, so greatly were their susceptibilities outraged[1], and undoubtedly the play shocked Athens. The first version may have had its faults; it was probably an analysis of passion only. Of the quality of the second version there can be no doubt; it is an intricate study of the struggle between passion and self-control, with more poetic interest on the self-control.

This essay, and that on the *Hecuba*, were originally inspired by Mr A. C. Bradley's masterly exposition of the Hegelian theory of tragedy[2]. Tragedy, according to Hegel, is a conflict not between good and bad, but between two principles, each good. Yet though good, neither of these principles is a complete or perfect good; conflict arises because of their coexistence as imperfects trying to reach the Supreme or Perfect Good (see this essay, p. 99 *sq.*). In the course of the conflict they recognise the good in each other, because it is the nature of the good to recognise and acknowledge the good (see this essay p. 105 and note on pp. 115 *sqq.*). In the end, neither of them attains to

[1] *Frogs*, 1043–50; see also the second ancient *Argument* prefixed to the drama.

[2] In *Oxford Lectures on English Poetry*[2], 1909, p. 69 *sqq.*

the Perfect or Supreme Good (this is tragedy or the Mystery), but both are blotted out and absorbed by it (the Explanation or Reconciliation).

The play opens with a Prologue spoken by the goddess Aphrodite. In this Prologue the Euripidean criticism of current anthropomorphic conceptions of deity is very marked, as many writers have noticed. Aphrodite has the baser human passions, in particular a grudging spite, and shows every intention of securing a personal revenge with the most callous disregard of the sufferings she inflicts; she does not claim to be a judge or appeal to moral judgment: she is a partizan, and on her own side. She begins by stating in general terms that she honours or exalts (*πρεσβεύω*) those who worship her: those who neglect her she "trips up" (*σφάλλω*); and that this is the rule of the gods: "we rejoice to be honoured by men[1]"; the more sinister half of this general rule is left to be supplied by the audience: that when not honoured the gods visit their displeasure on men[2]. In Troezen Hippolytos is the only one who neglects her and worships her rival, Artemis, and she intends to have her revenge "this very day[3]." To this end she has inspired his step-mother, Phaidra, wife of his father, Theseus, with an overmastering passion for him. Now Phaidra is

[1] l. 5–8, *τοὺς μὲν σέβοντας τἀμὰ πρεσβεύω κράτη,*
σφάλλω δ' ὅσοι φρονοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς μέγα.
ἔνεστι γὰρ δὴ, κἂν θεῶν γένει τόδε·
τιμώμενοι χαίρουσιν ἀνθρώπων ὕπο.

[2] As Wilamowitz notes, such an omission could be made most telling by good acting. *Euripides' Hippolytos, Griechisch und Deutsch*, von Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff: Berlin, Weidmann, 1891, note on l. 7.

[3] l. 22.

determined to die in silence[1]; thus would the design of Aphrodite be balked. This must not be; Aphrodite will herself betray this passion to Hippolytos: "it shall be published abroad[2]," and it shall ruin Hippolytos. Phaidra herself shall die, though "in honour" (εὐκλεής); "but I weigh not any ill of hers over against my determination to have the revenge on my enemies that I wish[3]."

Euripides is as cynical as possible in criticising a Greek god in the face of a Greek audience; but in the *Hippolytus* his cynicism is not so purely intellectual as it is in the *Ion*; it has a positive emotional passion about it which communicates itself to the audience, and therefore the *Hippolytus* is a far finer play than the *Ion*. Aphrodite is malignant and degraded, but she is also powerful. Human in her jealousy, yet only too divine in her power to satisfy that jealousy, she at once creates a situation as terrible as can well be imagined. The audience is shocked and terrified into an unnatural tension of feeling.

This conception of Aphrodite as a malignant, utterly worthless personality reappears at the end of the play, where she is condemned out of the mouth of her own fellow-goddess, Artemis[4]; but the central dramatic action clearly presupposes quite a different conception. In the body of the play the personality of Aphrodite

[1] l. 38, *ἐνταῦθα δὴ στένουσα κἀκπεπληγμένη*
κέντροις ἔρωτος ἡ τάλαιν' ἀπόλλυται
σιγῇ· ξύνοιδε δ' οὔτις οἰκετῶν νόσον.

[2] l. 41, *ἀλλ' οὔτι ταύτῃ τόνδ' ἔρωτα χρὴ πεσεῖν·*
δείξω δὲ Θησέως παιδὶ, κἀκφανήσεται.

[3] l. 47, *ἦ δ' εὐκλεὴς μὲν, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἀπόλλυται,*
Φαίδρα· τὸ γὰρ τῆσδ' οὐ προτιμήσω κακὸν
τὸ μὴ οὐ παρασχεῖν τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἐμοὶ
δίκην τοσαύτην ὥστ' ἐμοὶ καλῶς ἔχειν.

[4] l. 1327–8.

sinks entirely into the background and the play is dominated by the idea of an undeniable and unconquerable trend or instinct of Nature, world-wide, the instinct which leads to marriage and the begetting of children, shared by man with the animal world as a basis of his physical life and the *sine qua non* of his continued existence[1]. Phaidra's old nurse well describes the real meaning of Aphrodite when she says[2]: "Kypris, then, it seems, is no goddess, but whate'er there may be greater than a god." There exists too a fine fragment of thirteen lines, in which Aphrodite is described as a universal power over all nature and all human life, unspeakable and immeasurable[3].

Such an instinct is in itself neither moral nor immoral, but it is the material out of which morality is made, for it may be used both for good and for evil ends. It is, indeed, most striking that Phaidra can in one place appeal to Aphrodite as the force which makes for purity in married life[4], while a hundred lines later the old nurse can appeal to her, and in the very same phrase[5], to be aider and abettor in her infamous design of bringing Phaidra and Hippolytos together.

This double conception of Aphrodite as a personality and then as a natural power of incalculable dominion gives a certain disjointedness, which is disturbing, though its effect may well be overstated. It is not so much that the poet is confused in thought, as that he is trying to do two things at the same time, to have a fling at his old enemies, the anthropomorphic gods, and also to write a play on a special subject.

[1] l. 447–50. [2] l. 359. [3] Nauck, *fr.* 890.
[4] l. 415. [5] l. 522, δέσποινα ποντία Κύπρι.

There is the same double emphasis on a personality and an impersonal function in *Paradise Lost*; Milton's conception of Satan as a character and also as the power of evil is exactly parallel[1].

The preliminary dramatic condition of the play is that the passion which visits Phaidra shall be undeniable. Like all natural facts it *is* there; it cannot be annihilated (which is not the same as saying that it cannot be dealt with). And if Aphrodite is a goddess, while Phaidra is only a woman: if Aphrodite is nature, while Phaidra is only a creature subject to natural laws[2]: then the two aspects of Aphrodite reinforce each other in creating the situation, for they have a common factor—power over human lives.

What should this woman do, visited by irresistible pressure of a god? Apparently defeated, she can yet triumph. She is set on two thoughts, to conceal the passion, *i.e.* to limit its operation to the narrowest sphere, and to destroy the medium through which it works evil, namely, her own existence. Thus the human will, conquered, conquers in its turn, and flings back the immoral divine action. Phaidra, as first presented, is unassailable in her inner and spiritual purity.

In contrast with Phaidra is Hippolytos. Hippolytos

[1] Wilamowitz's commentary on the double nature of the Euripidean gods is exceedingly good (*op. cit. Introduction*, p. 52–3); he notes the extraordinary advantage enjoyed by Euripides in having these popular forms into which he can pour his, or rather all men's, moral conceptions; he is not obliged to present these conceptions as dead abstractions. Thus they live, and can enter into a drama as flesh and blood persons, and yet not lose the depth of their metaphysical meaning.

[2] l. 459, the old nurse again: "All things are subject to the natural law of love. Are you only to rebel? Did your father beget you different from other creatures, or with other gods and other laws above you?"

is pure, but not (at first) by mastery over his will and by battling with temptation, but because he is ignorant and makes it the business of his life to remain ignorant. He shelters his own soul like a delicate flower; he will not mix with his kind; he will not soil himself with the dust of battle, but will withdraw to solitary, untrod meadows, there to have communion with the wild and the free. Thus both the central characters make the claim to *Sophrosynê*[1], an idea which may briefly be said to include everything suggested by our words self-control, purity, modesty.

The subject of the play is passion in conflict with austerity. A superficial view, and the inevitable view of a Greek audience when first hearing the story, would call Phaidra with her overmastering passion the intemperate person and Hippolytos with his horror of that passion the temperate. The play challenges this verdict, and exposes the defects and qualities of different kinds of self-control, criticises current and ready-made notions, and shows that real self-control is not a matter of conforming to certain laws and regulations, but an inner attitude of the spirit. Does not Aphrodite herself say at the very outset that Phaidra is to die "in honour"? Yet how can a woman who notoriously was the victim of indecent and guilty passion die "in honour"? The challenge to the audience is very bold.

The Prologue is followed by the entry of Hippolytos with attendants in procession to worship Artemis, the goddess of the wild, of the non-human. The special

[1] For Hippolytos see lines 78–81, for Phaidra her speech, lines 373–430, and note how in the next line (431) the Chorus immediately emphasise τὸ σῶφρον.

claims of Hippolytos are at once made clear. He alone of men has intimate communion with Artemis; he hears her voice and holds converse with her[1], and this because he keeps himself pure from marriage, has cut himself off from human kind; he will not even touch animal food[2]. He brings her a wreath, culled from a lonely and virgin meadow, "where never came sickle or scythe, where no shepherd dares to feed his flock, but only the bee hovers over the solitary untouched[3] meadow of the spring. There Reverence makes a garden for those to cull the flowers thereof, who have not needed to learn aught, but purity (or self-control[4]) rules all their life and all their nature." As yet Hippolytos hardly seems to be arrogant; he claims the undisturbed purity and sweetness of youth, the untouched soul and virgin body, and the visionary life which is born of these. There is less childishness in him than there is in Ion: he is a man, not a boy; but both in the *Ion* and in the *Hippolytus*, after the painful impression of the sinister Prologues, the next scenes open in an atmosphere of youth, of innocent gaiety, almost of *insouciance*, bringing instant relief of emotional tension. This change is strikingly dramatic. In the *Ion* the scene of "relaxed tension" is a long one; after Ion's song[5], we have the entry of the girls, the attendants of Kreüsa, in their more than half-holiday mood, with their delighted little shrieks and exclamations, as they run about and pick out on the face of the temple the sculptured pictures they knew by hearsay

[1] l. 84–6. [2] l. 952.
[3] The word *ἀκήρατον -ον* twice, in lines 73 and 76.
[4] First mention of *τὸ σωφρονεῖν* in the play. [5] *Ion*, l. 82–183.

at home; only gradually, one might say tentatively, as though with regret and a kind of tender hanging-back, is the tragic note introduced to mar this brightness[1]. In the *Hippolytus* the slackened tension brings all the more relief in proportion as the Prologue was more threatening than that of the *Ion*, but this relief is also much more quickly forfeited; the low tension scene lasts for barely thirty lines; in the dialogue[2] between Hippolytos and his old attendant which follows, a situation full of tragic danger is exposed with a kind of abrupt cruelty[3].

The tragic part is that Hippolytos begins so well. He is made to show that true humility of spirit which can bear to receive advice from an inferior[4]; he goes further: he acknowledges a general law, binding on men, "to hate pride and the unusual[5]," surely a tremendous admission for youth to make? He is made to acknowledge at least the usefulness of a courteous amiability[6]. Then the old servant, having drawn him so far, almost triumphantly rounds on him with the question: "And does not the same apply to the gods[7]?" The language is vague; he does not say whether what

[1] *Ion*, l. 241, 264. [2] l. 58–87.

[3] It is not surprising that the economy of this dialogue has earned the admiration of Wilamowitz; *op. cit.* note on line 105: "Nirgends in diesem drama empfinde ich die unzulänglichkeit meiner übersetzung so stark wie in dieser scene, wo jedes wort berechnet u. für das ganze bedeutsam ist: aber ich verstehe sie u. weiss, dass die vielen, die hier vieles ändern, λίαν σοφοί sind."

[4] l. 88–90.

[5] μισεῖν τὸ σεμνὸν καὶ τὸ μὴ πᾶσιν φίλον.

[6] l. 95, Θε. ἐν δ' εὐπροσηγόροισιν ἔστι τις χάρις;
Ιπ. πλείστη γε, καὶ κέρδος γε σὺν μόχθῳ βραχεῖ.
Perhaps some sarcasm in the last words.

[7] l. 97, ἦ κἀν θεοῖσι ταὐτὸν ἐλπίζεις τόδε;

he means is that the gods resemble us, or that we are like the gods. Now if he means that the gods hate everything arrogant and unusual in man, because they are like men, subject to the same laws of pride and jealousy, the implications are terrible; with horrible abruptness we are reminded of the Prologue; we remember that this is just what Aphrodite said, and she was altogether too much subject to human laws; she went further still and in her jealousy threatened revenge on what claimed to be independent of her. Then the answer of Hippolytos swings us back again: "Yes," he says, "if indeed we mortals rule our lives by laws divine[1]," giving an exactly opposite interpretation, the instinctive answer of a noble mind, which does not contemplate a higher (divine) nature acting according to the needs of a lower (human) one, but quite naturally assumes that the lower will or should act according to the proper standard of the higher, men should be like gods, not gods like men—the backwards and forwards of the dialogue being possible because "to hate what is proud" can bear two meanings, a mean envy of what is beyond one and unreachable, and a just indignation at what is foolishly arrogant, which latter might be a truly divine quality. Still more so is this in Greek, where the word *σεμνός* constantly means "set apart" in the sense of "divinely pure"; in fact, very much as our word "awful" means both "horrible" and "holy." The servant sees he must speak more plainly, more crudely, and after Hippolytos' splendid line we fall with painful suddenness to a lower

[1] l. 98, *εἴπερ γε θνητοὶ θεῶν νόμοισι χρώμεθα.*

plane; he puts to Hippolytos a particular question, almost a reproach: "Why then do you not worship a proud goddess?" and the answer of Hippolytos too is no longer humble, but verges on the defiant: "Which goddess? See your mouth doth not offend." In one flash of two lines it is all recalled and exposed: the servant crudely repeating Aphrodite's insupportable claim for mechanical obedience, and the victim displaying towards him, just at the moment when so identified with the goddess, a lightheartedness which is really arrogance. Again there is a slight slackening of the anxiety: Hippolytos will "worship from afar[1]"; but this relief is only to be lost for ever when in answer to the old man's pious hope that he "may know a suitable wisdom," he flames out with the hopelessly angry words: "I hate a goddess worshipped at night[2]," words which give vent to a careless, angry contempt for Aphrodite. The last words of Hippolytos are shocking in their light defiance of an awful power: "I go to drive—and a long goodbye to that Aphrodite of yours[3]." It is useless for the slave to remain behind and offer up a pious little prayer to the outraged deity, and bid her note that "gods should be wiser than men[4]"; for do we not know that Aphrodite does not intend to be "wise," and has he not only just now himself said that gods are as men—hating the independence of others? The last line of the monologue seems to be almost more cynical than anything else in the play; it is a grim joke indeed to have Aphrodite's most acknowledged servitor begging her to be "wiser

[1] l. 102. [2] l. 105–6. [3] l. 113. [4] l. 120.

than men," and that, too, the moment after she had been most outrageously insulted[1].

The situation of the Prologue was not tragic, it was sinister; but by the time this dialogue is over there is fullblooded tragedy astir. There is youth and purity, but it defies awful powers with terrible light-heartedness: there is courage and nobility[2], but it borders on a doubtful arrogance and ignorance; we have been given that knowledge of Hippolytos, whereby he ceases to be in our eyes a victim, and has become a tragic hero.

The next scene introduces Phaidra and her nurse. Phaidra is on the verge of death. She has deliberately starved herself for three days in order to bring this about[3]. In a dying hallucination or vision her spirit longs to visit the pure and solitary, untrod places of nature, where her wretched soul may have peace[4]; she even calls on the goddess of the wild, Artemis[5]. Thus by a designed piece of construction she is making the same claim and expressing the same longing as Hippolytos for communion with the pure and the free. Her nurse and the women are totally ignorant of what ails her; she is determined to die in silence. As already said, Phaidra, when first shown to us, does show an inner self-control. At the end of the play, Artemis absolves her, which is important; Artemis

[1] This is the last time Aphrodite appears as a personality until line 1327.

[2] Hippolytos is contrasted with the servitor's cringing to Aphrodite; the latter says: "We speak as slaves," and this exactly describes his attitude; l. 115, *ἡμεῖς δέ...ὡς πρέπει δούλοις λέγειν, Προσευξόμεσθα τοῖσι σοῖς ἀγάλμασι, Δέσποινα Κύπρι.*

[3] l. 135, 275–7. [4] l. 208, 215. [5] l. 228.

says to Theseus that she would "tell him of his wife's frenzy and of what was in measure the greatness of her; for she was smitten with the goad of the most hateful of all goddesses to love your son, but by strength of mind she sought to conquer love[1]." Moreover the nurse at the moment of her first outburst of horror (though quickly overcome), yet calls Phaidra "self-controlled[2]"; and even Hippolytos at the last speaks of her pitifully as a victim, a fellow-victim with himself[3], and before that had said that "in her impurity she was pure[3]." An inner self-control, then, is there, and markedly so at the first; Phaidra has been visited by this devastating passion; if conflict of spirit there was in resisting it, that conflict seems to be over when the play opens; for she has chosen a refuge whither Aphrodite will not be able to pursue her—a silent death.

But perhaps the very violence of the remedy is meant to be the subtlest sign of some lack of self-control; a desperate escape from guilty desire is not to overcome desire. The splendid courage of Phaidra, as she approaches her end, battling with mental and physical miseries, is strangely mixed with a curious ecstatic, almost visionary element, product half of her physical condition, exhausted as she is by starvation (a good piece of accurate observation, this representation of ecstasy as the result of famine). She herself knows it to be unnatural, and is half ashamed of it,

[1] l. 1300–4; l. 1304, *γνώμῃ δὲ νικᾶν τὴν Κύπριν πειρωμένη.*

[2] l. 358.

[3] l. 1403, *τρεῖς ὄντας ἡμᾶς ὤλεσ', ᾗσθημαι, Κύπρις.* l. 1034, *ἐσωφρόνησεν οὐκ ἔχουσα σωφρονεῖν.*

and yet would half recall it, if she could[1]. Such an ecstatic condition is dangerous. It triply arms against a particular temptation, but an abnormal strength of will in one direction is apt to leave unforeseen weaknesses elsewhere. Still Phaidra, as she first appears, is strong, not weak, though she is strong with this dangerous overstrained strength. She would have died, and in silence, had not her old nurse urged her with every loving persuasion she could think of, to speak. And she does speak, and yield, and fall, but even in her yielding and her fall there is a kind of magnificent power left. In a few wonderful lines of restrained agony she discloses her secret, not by pronouncing the actual name of Hippolytos—that is left for the nurse[2]—but by calling on the names of two other women of her house, Pasiphae and Ariadne, destroyed by disastrous loves: "I am the third to die in misery[3]."

This is the first definite break in self-control, and from it the whole dramatic action of the play has its beginning; it is the crucial moment of departure, motivated, in a most powerful and natural manner, by the intense desire of a dying woman for the sympathy of her beloved and trusted old nurse in her misery. This breach of self-control is to have the most disastrous consequences, and yet, at the moment, it seems so excusable, so natural. As if to reinforce this impression we are immediately shown Phaidra's purity untouched, her resolve to die unaltered; we are shown the calm conviction of the necessity of that death to

[1] l. 239–49.

[2] A fine touch, imitated by Racine.

[3] l. 337–41.

a mind inwardly pure. Phaidra makes a long speech to her women[1], in which she explains her convictions about the moral life. Note here again the change of tension: the Phaidra who speaks in this stately, dignified, controlled way—so controlled that she can even bear to address the deadly Aphrodite and ask her to bear witness to the shamefulness of an illicit love[2]—this Phaidra is as different as possible from the ecstatic creature who longed to flee into the wilds of nature. But we believe in her more, we have far more confidence in her. We were torn with anxiety when she betrayed herself to her nurse, but now our anxiety is relieved and soothed; we believe in her will and her capacity: her honour is safe in her own hands. But this lull is followed by a scene of conflict, in which all our anxieties are reawakened even more acutely than at first. The nurse tempts her to give up the idea of suicide. Phaidra at first resists, yet by breaking her vow of silence she has inevitably exposed herself to a renewal of temptation; this is the first consequence. She still opposes, indeed, the idea of giving way to her passion, but when the nurse tempts her with a charm, *i.e.* a cure, she does not say no. Why is it we feel this second dalliance with temptation to be so much more fatal than the first? It marks a distinct stage in the tragic action, which now threatens to become a chain of inevitable consequences. Is it not because of the utter discrepancy between the moral sickness and the so-called remedy? Is temptation to mean no suffering? Is escape from it to be thus easy and painless? There was a perverse morality about the

[1] l. 373–430. [2] l. 415.

idea of suicide and silence: death at least would have involved her in an incalculable payment; there is something trivial in the idea of a charm. Is the spirit of justice to be so cheated with a medicine? Given that the charm works—one does not clear up immoral situations by drugs. It is like the gross old nurse to think so, but Phaidra sinks immeasurably when she permits herself to trifle with the thought. Suicide, incomplete self-control though it may have seemed, was in more complete harmony with eternal right.

Yet, looked at from another side, this second fall is only the natural reaction from that desperate, if noble, design of self-destruction. It is so natural that Phaidra, in spite of her heroic words, should still want to live. There was something wicked to a Greek, as well as to us, in the suggestion that self-annihilation is the best means of dealing with a moral problem. In her calmest moments Phaidra herself admitted that there had been a better way[1]. There are temptations like that which came to Phaidra, but such is not their solution, at least not their truest and best solution. Therefore Phaidra's second fall is in its way a consequence of her first incompleteness of self-control, and thereby a kind of criticism of it. First she would destroy herself: then she would have a charm to help her live and love; had she not made so violent a resolve, she would not have caught at so doubtful an escape.

Again, exactly what escape has the charm to offer? The words of the nurse are ambiguous. She speaks

[1] l. 398, *τὴν ἄνοιαν εὖ φέρειν Τῷ σωφρονεῖν νικῶσα προὐνοησάμην.* Note *τῷ σωφρονεῖν.*

of "charms to soothe love[1]"; to soothe it away? to destroy it? that is the vital question. She throws out the emphatic words: "you shall be cured of this your sickness, if you will only not rebel[2]," and perhaps the definite promise of relief, linked with the half-threat to keep quiet, especially from an old nurse who would be half a tyrant, half a mother, is enough to satisfy a sick mind, without too minute a probing. Possibly Phaidra does not hear, or if she hears, does not understand, or rather *will* not understand, the dangerous implication in the old woman's muttering, "if innocence be lost, the next best thing is joy[3]" (or gratification), which "must be a single joy brought together from twain[4]." She must hear—the nurse says it too explicitly—that some token has to be obtained from Hippolytos to make the charm work; but she is contented to forbid the nurse "to betray aught to Hippolytos[5]," without daring to ask whether her grief is to be cured by annihilating or by gratifying love, by destroying her own passion for Hippolytos, or by charming passion into him. Yet the one means sin and the other innocence, and the very apathy of Phaidra is a measure of her fall from what she was but a short time since: she has not yet sinned, but she is indifferent to sin[6].

[1] l. 509, *φίλτρα θελκτήρια.*

[2] l. 512, *παύσει νόσου τῆσδ', ἢν σὺ μὴ γένῃ κακή.*

[3] l. 507–8, *εἴ τοι δοκεῖ σοι, χρῆν μὲν οὔ σ' ἁμαρτάνειν·*
εἰ δ' οὖν, πιθοῦ μοι· δευτέρα γὰρ ἡ χάρις.

[4] l. 515, *συνάψαι ἐκ δυοῖν μίαν χάριν.*

[5] l. 520, *μή μοί τι Θησέως τῶνδε μηνύσῃς τόκῳ.*

[6] Wilamowitz on this scene goes too far: Phaidra is not yet more than indifferent to sin; she is not yet sinful.

A chorus to love, and the strength of love, connects this scene and the next. It is abruptly broken off by the alarm of Phaidra, who hears sounds within the house, which, to her horror, seem to show that the nurse has betrayed her secret to Hippolytos, as in fact she has. A scene of the utmost excitement follows. Phaidra flies[1]; Hippolytos bursts out of the house in an anger and horror beyond all words, followed by the nurse, who in vain implores him to respect the sanctity of the oath he gave her, that he would keep as an inviolate secret the thing she was about to tell him. This is the central scene of the play. The two tragic characters now become involved in each other's actions; against Phaidra's self-control, or her want of it, that of Hippolytos is to be tested. Will it stand? Suddenly and sharply we are brought up against the insufficiency of Hippolytos' vaunted purity and control. A secret of a shameful kind, which by a pure soul would have been buried in eternal silence, he, the pure, the virgin, the votary of Artemis, desires to shout from the very housetops and proclaim to all the world. Where every motive of love and pity and respect for those of his own household would have kept a man silent, he bursts forth with his uncontrolled clamour of betrayal. Even his own code of a narrower, conventional morality shakes at this, the first moment of real temptation in his life, and he is prepared to break his oath of silence, a violation which filled the Greek with horror: "my tongue sware, my heart is unbound by any oath[2]." These famous words were

[1] Perhaps not right off the stage; see p. 96–7.

[2] l. 612, *ἡ γλῶσσ' ὀμώμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρὴν ἀνώμοτος.*

afterwards quoted against Euripides[1] to show that he approved a quasi-Jesuitical doctrine of a mental reservation in all oaths; but the real essence of the words here is to point the sharpest contrast between an outward and conventional barrier, and an inner and spiritual attitude of mind. Had the inner or spiritual control been perfect in Hippolytos' nature, the question of the oath would have been almost indifferent. He could not, by nature, have taken part in spreading a moral evil over a wider area than was necessary. But the inner attitude being uncontrolled, no external apparatus of oaths could for a moment hold out against a sudden onset of passion. Commentators, including Wilamowitz, miss the supreme significance of this scene; the scene is the central one of the play, binding it all together.

In the long speech of Hippolytos the same lack of a true control over self is shown to us. His determination is to have nothing to do with marriage; he delivers diatribes of the utmost violence against women in general; he asks why it is necessary to make women at all: that if they have to be, best is she who thinks least and talks least: best to have them mere animal things, used by men for purposes of carrying on the race[2]. The speech of Hippolytos is not meant to be sarcastic or ridiculous, but merely ignorant and proud. In it is shown in an intense degree the folly of that

[1] Very neatly in *Frogs* 1471 by Aristophanes, where Dionysos having sworn to take Euripides back from Hades to the upper world, gets out of the consequences of his promise. For other allusions in Plato, Aristotle, and Aristophanes see Rogers *ad loc.*

[2] Such passages gave rise in the minds of early commentators to the idea that Euripides was a woman-hater.

man who denies what he cannot understand, who is intolerant to anything which cannot be explained offhand to him, who judges everything by a shorthand of ignorance, who turns his back in sheer arrogance on natural truths with which he imagines himself out of sympathy.

Yes, he keeps his famous purity intact: he will wash his polluted ears in streams of running water[1]: he is still unsullied; but he denies all the sacred, undeniable claims of old affection and old relationship; for when the nurse appeals to him "not to destroy those whom he loves[2]," he "spurns" them: "I love none who does wrong[2]": perhaps a noble sentiment, but one which would make living together but a poor farce for men. His last words are the climax of crude pride: "I shall never have my fill of hating women—not if I were to talk to all eternity, for to all eternity are they wicked. Now let someone teach them self-control, or to all eternity let me trample on them[3]."

These lines, and the corresponding lines of Phaidra[4], complete what Aristotle calls the binding up of the play; they mark the summit of the conflict. Of the two opponents, each has made an excessive claim, and each uncompromisingly denies the claim of the other,

[1] l. 653, ...*ἀγὼ ῥυτοῖς νασμοῖσιν ἐξομόρξομαι*
ἐς ὦτα κλύζων.

[2] l. 613, Τρ. *ὦ παῖ, τί δράσεις; σοὺς φίλους διεργάσῃ;*
Ιπ. *ἀπέπτυσ'· οὐδεὶς ἄδικός ἐστί μοι φίλος.*

[3] l. 664, *μισῶν δ' οὔποτ' ἐμπλησθήσομαι*
γυναῖκας, οὐδ' εἴ φησί τίς μ' ἀεὶ λέγειν·
ἀεὶ γὰρ οὖν πώς εἰσι κἀκεῖναι κακαί.
ἢ νύν τις αὐτὰς σωφρονεῖν διδαξάτω,
ἢ κᾆμ' ἐάτω ταῖσδ' ἐπεμβαίνειν ἀεί.

[4] l. 730–1.

Hippolytos, when he says that all women are bad, Phaidra, when she pretends that Hippolytos is at bottom as infamous as she is tempted to be herself[1].

But, as almost invariably in a closely constructed tragedy of the Greek type, the unravelling process begins before the binding process is quite complete. The unravelling is inherent in the ravelling; the tying of the knot suggests how to untie it; the two processes overlap. Even before his final taunt at Phaidra and at women, Hippolytos has recovered his self-control. In spite of his outburst, he now has no intention of betraying Phaidra. His conventional self-control has resumed its full hold over him; he will not betray Phaidra because he has sworn an oath: "Know, woman," he says to the nurse, "that it is my piety that keeps you safe; for never would I have held back from telling all to my father, had I not been unwittingly snared by oaths[2]." Thus it is the oath, and the oath only, which at this point controls him. He goes off the stage, having announced his intention of leaving the city of Troezen[3], and not returning except with Theseus.

It is not clear whether Phaidra is meant to leave the stage before this, when Hippolytos bursts out of the house[4], and return when he goes off[5], in which case we must suppose that her nurse or the women repeated Hippolytos' words to her, or whether she remains on the stage during his long speech, either seen by him,

[1] See *infra*, p. 98.

[2] l. 656, *εὖ δ' ἴσθι, τοὐμόν σ' εὐσεβὲς σῴζει, γύναι·*
εἰ μὴ γὰρ ὅρκοις θεῶν ἄφρακτος ἠρέθην,
οὐκ ἄν ποτ' ἔσχον μὴ οὐ τάδ' ἐξειπεῖν πατρί.

[3] l. 659. [4] l. 600. [5] l. 668.

(so Wilamowitz[1]), or unseen. Whichever it be[2], we have to consider why she does not believe that Hippolytos will keep his word and *not* betray her to Theseus. He expressly says he will not do so, yet she acts as though he certainly would. The explanation that occurs to me is that she and the women simply do not trust Hippolytos, because of his one tremendous lapse. This is the penalty he pays for loss of self-control; he has indeed recovered himself, and nobly, but he can no longer make his little world believe in him. A disproportionate penalty, no doubt; but so was Phaidra's; she listened only half-conscious to evil suggestion, and reaped betrayal, death and shame: such is tragic justice.

The dramatic construction here is a masterpiece. The sin of Hippolytos in all but shouting the shameful secret aloud and the sin of the nurse in betraying it—who admits that *Sophrosynê* was violated when she did so[3]—have reacted on Phaidra herself and reawakened in her reverberations of temptations she had thought long since surmounted. Thus she in turn becomes involved in the consequences of their sins, and these, on the other hand, have been derived from that first lapse of her own in confiding in her old nurse. Thus the moral taint spreads and deepens. The action of each

[1] I gather this from the stage-directions he prints in the translation.

[2] It is an astonishing thing to realise that in this tense play, the two principal characters, who are in the most tremendous opposition to each other and who so inextricably become entangled in each other's fate, should never once meet to address each other. The emotional and moral conflict is so vividly and admirably given, that we hardly notice the absence of physical contact.

[3] l. 704, *οὐκ ἐσωφρόνουν ἐγώ*.

character depends on that of the other characters, and there is the effect of a climax designedly produced. The test of a truly great dramatic work is perfectly fulfilled, *i.e.* all the action seems to be the inevitable result of the characters and all are involved in each other. The climax of sin and horror now reaches an unsurpassable height. Just as a mechanical movement begun slowly and gently will gather momentum during its course, so this moral movement, beginning slowly, gathers increased momentum of evil as it progresses. Phaidra disappears to destroy herself, but leaves behind her tablets addressed to Theseus, in which she accuses Hippolytos of having licentiously indulged a passion for her. Thus indeed are the tables reversed. He who claimed to be so proudly pure that he would not even take part in the natural life of the family or the nation, is now under a peculiarly odious accusation. "He shall share this sickness[1] in common with me, and shall learn self-control[2]," is Phaidra's bitter taunt, before she leaves the stage for ever, an echo of Hippolytos' words[3] undoubtedly designed by Euripides.

It was said that the beginning of the unloosing not only preceded in time the completion of the binding, but was inherent in the binding. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the character of Hippolytos. His sin was rooted in something inherently good, not in something bad. As already stated, all tragedy, according to Hegel, implies conflict, not between good and bad, but between good and good. It is worth while to consider whether the Hegelian theory will fit this play.

[1] *i.e.* the sickness of love. [2] l. 731, *σωφρονεῖν μαθήσεται.*
[3] l. 667, see p. 95.

It is a very good test case, because at first sight the conflict can seem only between good and bad; what could there be wrong in Hippolytos' rejection of such an unlawful love, or what good in Phaidra's giving way to it? But the Hegelian definition of tragedy lays down two conditions: (1) that each side of the conflict contains something which can be called a "good"; (2) that neither of these "goods" can be a perfect or complete good; were it so, it would, by its very nature, instantaneously blot out or absorb the other; it would already be that ultimate perfection, towards which all earthly things tend, but do not yet attain; conflict, of itself, implies imperfection on both sides. We must not, therefore, define the conflict of the *Hippolytus* as that between evil passion and perfect self-control. This is not the play that Euripides wrote, and, if it had been, it would not have been a tragedy, but a morality play, quite a different thing. The conflict is that between two natures. One aims at that inner and perfect self-control, that poise of the whole being, which enables the soul to thread its way in a lasting serenity through the two mixed and troubled worlds of body and of spirit; its distinguishing feature is a double one: it has an intimate knowledge of the evil against which it contends: it is not blind, but seeing: it is too completely aware of evil even to be described as wholly innocent; yet it remains untouched and untouchable, courageously familiar with its enemy and courageously victorious. Something of this sublime quality touches Phaidra in her best moments; but the imperfection on her side is the gap between what she is and what she would be. The other nature, that of Hippolytos, is

the type of what is hard and narrow. Nevertheless this narrower nature has in it something of the highest and noblest. The morality at which it aims may be inadequate and limited, but it is neither negligible nor absurd nor low. Hippolytos' turning away from ordinary human life and nature grew from good sources and implied high aims of self-abnegation and asceticism. His wrath when he first hears of Phaidra's passion for him is magnificent and truly moral, *good*, in a real sense of the word.

Euripides, under his calm, sometimes apparently callous analysis of evil, was one of those intensely sympathetic natures, who, while realising the faults of their fellow-men with no ordinary acuteness, are yet irresistibly drawn to a real and deep sympathy with the soul which has yielded to temptation. The danger of such natures is not that they should become indifferent to sin, but that they should make their fellow-men indifferent by failing to convey to them with sufficient obviousness their own profound condemnation of all evil. They are so sensitive to the shortcomings of the conventional verdicts passed against sinners, that with a kind of noble obstinacy they refuse to join in the howl of condemnation. This is why, though Euripides is in nature elevated, his plays sometimes fail to leave an elevated impression. The *Hippolytus* is one of the best of his plays because it is free from this shortcoming. Nowhere in ancient or in modern literature is a sense of the horror of sin conveyed with greater strength. It was no easy thing to do in this case; the story was already known to the audience, the Prologue mentioned this evil passion in

a cool tone, not to say one of condonation, so that the "edge" was taken off the horror. It was to recreate the moral misery which the thought of evil should arouse that two passages were expressly written. The first is that in which Phaidra refuses to pronounce the name of Hippolytos and the nurse's outburst of appalled horror which is united with it. As the nurse afterwards appears sensual and immoral, this instinctive outburst of hers, so at variance with her whole nature, is extremely forcible; even her gross mind is repelled at the terrible nature of this contemplated sin. Hippolytos' outburst, in the scene we are considering, repeats this with heightened effect. The greatness of this scene, then, is its sheer truth. It so intensely conveys the sense of mixed good and evil which dominates our life. It was right that Hippolytos should flame into anger at what he has heard; his indignation is a glorious indignation. But at the same time there is something utterly repellent about his attitude to Phaidra. He knows how horrible is sin: he has never known what it means to struggle against it.

Or again, the conflict of the play may perhaps be defined from a different point of view. It is that between the two sides of man's nature, the side that is natural, and to that extent "good," and the side that seeks something beyond the "natural good," and in seeking that something beyond too often destroys the natural good. The natural instinct which carries on the physical life of man is good; nor, though it is the instrument for carrying on the physical life, is it exclusively physical itself. It embraces within it the most precious things known to man—companionship,

friendship, love: on the one side it means intercourse, and all that intercourse brings with it, social good; on the other it means passion with all its intensity for good as well as for evil. The Aphrodite, the malignant goddess of the Prologue, is in the body of the play the greatest force which moves the world; she is a force, moreover, which works by law; she is Nature, she is Love, she is the Life of men; how should she therefore not be a "good"? Both are good, life, and that austere spirit which can triumph over life, and if need be, deny it and forego it. Therefore the conflict between Phaidra and Hippolytos is not the conflict between good and evil, but the far more terrible conflict between good and good.

Phaidra is the richer character in many ways and certainly the more attractive. Self-control with her could go much deeper than with Hippolytos. She does not gird at men as he does at women; she is incapable of such crude violence. When the crash comes, she does not waste words; she meets it with courage, with a return of true self-control, for she instantly reverts to her plan of suicide (this while she is still listening at the door, before Hippolytos comes on the stage[1]). Yet, if her character is capable of more good, it is also capable of more evil; undoubtedly she sinks immeasurably lower than he does. She sends Hippolytos to a horrible death and a horrible disgrace. Yet, oddly enough, Phaidra, who writes the lying tablets, shows a power not shown by the Phaidra who dreams, while she lets her servant plot sin. That was giving way to mere desire, animal desire; this is

[1] l. 599.

something better, bad though it is. It has in it the active element of struggle, and therefore a moral element, as against the passive and immoral element of merely giving way to evil. And it still holds the last remnants of real love in that curious, perverted, but by no means uncommon, form, of an overmastering wish to dominate the other person, even when hope of affection is for ever lost, the instinct which makes men want to hurt the things they love, because they must impress themselves on them in some way. Phaidra cannot make Hippolytos love her, but she will make him suffer; so he will realise her: she will impress herself on him for ever. Moreover—and this may be called her good from which her evil thought springs—she has a consciousness of innocence; she feels—and now with the foreboding knowledge of her suicide once more we feel it with her—that she is a pure woman caught in a situation too strong for human nature. We must remember that she is under the impression that Hippolytos will betray her; it has become in her mind a question of her shame or his. A duty of justice towards herself, which is an undeniable duty as well as a right for men, induces her to choose his rather than her own disgrace; for she is altogether overborne by the desire to establish herself in the eyes of Theseus, of her friends, of the world. This passion to *appear*, as well as to *be* moral, this fierce rebellion against a condemnation not wholly deserved, is in itself the test of a moral personality; every good person desires to be thought good, it is only the evil heart which can accept the accusation of evil. At the moment when Phaidra commits her greatest crime, she makes almost

the strongest claim on our forbearance. True, she sees only her own good, she does not stop to weigh the suffering of another; her justice to herself is the most horrible injustice to him; she is blind to his claims, as he was to hers; and that is just the essence of a tragic conflict, that either side is blind to the claim of the other.

The unravelling rapidly continues, but simultaneously involves a new binding, that of Theseus. I mean by the unravelling here the recovery of Hippolytos towards self-control; this becomes more and more pronounced. Confronted by his father with the lying tablets he absolutely refuses to betray Phaidra, because he is bound by his oath. He says so quite expressly; there can be no doubt on the point: "Whether this woman lost her life in fear, I know not; I can say no more[1]." He who had declared "his heart unbound by any oath," later abides by the external obligation of that oath even to the bitter end of death. He does more, he begins to recognise that other kind of self-control of which he had once been so contemptuous. Phaidra's suicide has re-established her where she never dreamt to be re-established, in the eyes of the one person whose verdict she imagined to be against her for ever; he sees her genuineness at last, that she valued honour more than desire. His last words are most striking: "In her impurity she was pure: I, who had purity, ill have used it[2]." They seem to sum up the truth both about himself and her.

[1] l. 1032, *ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐ θέμις πέρα λέγειν.*

[2] l. 1034–5, *ἐσωφρόνησεν οὐκ ἔχουσα σωφρονεῖν,*
ἡμεῖς δ' ἔχοντες οὐ καλῶς ἐχρώμεθα.

The last line has a touch of tragic "irony"; Hippolytos himself does not realise the full meaning of his words; he only feels that he has somehow got no good out of his purity, but the poet knows that he had not used it in quite the right way, not with the sympathy which would have checked his fatal outburst. If tragic justice may be defined as disproportion between sin and penalty, so also it may be defined as disproportion between effort and reward. The suicide of Phaidra, that inadequate attempt at right action, brings to her the overwhelming reward of rehabilitating her in the eyes of Hippolytos, and therefore in our eyes; for we feel through Hippolytos. Moreover, these lines illustrate the care of the Greek tragedians in making each side at some point *recognise* the "good" of the other side, recognitions, which indispensably prepare the way for the final *reconciliation*.

But before reconciliation can come, the theme of the tragedy is once more presented, and with renewed disaster. The final catastrophe of Hippolytos' death is directly induced by the action of a new character, Theseus, and by his lack of self-control. Theseus, in a sense, replaces Phaidra[1] and exhibits the malignant aspect of Aphrodite's power in another form. Theseus sees the tablets in the hand of the dead Phaidra, and, reading them, finds they accuse Hippolytos of having made unlawful love to her, thus driving her to suicide. At once the evil side of Aphrodite—jealousy—seizes

[1] If this were not so, the play would threaten to come to an end with the death of Phaidra; but the new crisis keeps up the interest; at the same time it does not distract the attention, because it deals with the same problem, self-control.

hold of him, and in the most violent passion he instantly accepts the accusation and condemns Hippolytos without even listening to what he has to say. He banishes Hippolytos for ever and prays to his father, Poseidon, to bring about the death of Hippolytos; for Poseidon had once promised to fulfil any three requests made by Theseus. And Poseidon sends a sea-monster, which scares the horses of the chariot; Hippolytos is thrown and dragged along the ground and so bruised to the point of death. There is something terrible in the sight of a man like Hippolytos, who has first suffered and made others suffer by threatening to break his oath, now having both to undergo and to impose worse suffering because he is resolved to keep it; for he seems to suffer and impose suffering equally whether he sin or sin not. Yet somewhere every great tragedy should induce terror[1] as well as pity[1] in the spectator. The poet must somewhere be as crude and brutal to his characters as life is crude and brutal to us men; otherwise he has merely glossed over the horrors of living, and how should he then be able to reconcile us to life? But it is the tragic art to reconcile us to all this apparently meaningless evil by showing us the conflict of good therein. And the reconciliation is induced just because we do see good arising to contend with the evil. The nobility of Hippolytos, his self-control, now springs up to contend against the evil passion of Theseus. There is in his reasoned, deliberate, but never defiant or outrageous, opposition to Theseus a very different quality from that crude violence with which he confronted Phaidra. He has

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, ch. 6, § 2.

caught something of the inner illumination known to her; in fact, we may almost say he has been "educated" by Phaidra. Among the spiritual events which, though not necessarily staged, go to make up a play like the *Hippolytus*, must be counted the shock which the death of Phaidra would be to a man like Hippolytos; it would shake him out of his self-complacency, and, once started on the path of enlightenment, a character like Hippolytos would advance by leaps and bounds, because he has the essential stuff of goodness in him. Hippolytos, then, treats Theseus very differently from the way in which he treated Phaidra; he receives astounding provocation, but even so one feels that he understands his father a great deal better than that father understands him[1]; so that at the last the reconciliation between father and son seems not in the least unnatural, but most understandable.

But the basis of the reconciliation is even more subtle than this. In Theseus, too, we see a feeling working which itself is not wholly evil. His passion, his lack of self-control, arise out of a noble feeling, love for Phaidra and complete trust in her. When Hippolytos first heard of the sin of Phaidra he burst out into violent invective; this was terrible, but would it not have been far more terrible if he had not? if he had not seen something immeasurably hateful in this love? So here it is terrible that Theseus should burst out into violent threats the moment he hears the story of Hippolytos' supposed sin; yet it would have been far more terrible if he had minded less. If there is something indescribably horrible in hearing him say,

[1] *Cf.* lines 1041–4.

all unconsciously, before he opens the fatal tablets, how the seals seem to "smile at him[1]" coming from a dead and beloved hand, there is also something inspiring, something that reconciles us to the horror, in the manifestation of such a deep affection. This is the good out of which the evil springs[2].

So the catastrophe happens, and the news is brought in by a messenger of the monster sent by Poseidon and of how Hippolytos lies without at the point of death. A change takes place in Theseus; anger gives way to feelings less violent, leading up to the reconciliation, one of the finest in Greek tragedy. The servants rather apprehensively ask Theseus whether he will see his son before he dies, whether they *may* bring him into his presence[3]. Theseus, though still unforgiving, will not carry resentment to such a length. Here begins the unravelling as regards Theseus; it proceeds from his own initiative, without divine prompting. He recognises, at least partially, the claims of the other

[1] l. 862.

[2] The Chorus of a Greek tragedy could not be removed from the stage; this was very often highly inconvenient, and is so here. We cannot help feeling that the women might have spoken and so saved Hippolytos. Partly they are kept silent by their oath to Phaidra (l. 713–4)—and no Chorus in Greek tragedy is so individualised that it could do such a striking action as break an oath under emotional stress—partly also by the sheer terror of the situation; largely too, no doubt, they would positively choose to save Phaidra's reputation at the cost of Hippolytos' life; they cannot save Hippolytos without exposing everything, even the infamy of the lying tablets. In any case, Euripides skilfully glides over the crux by making Theseus so hasty in uttering the curse; for after that, though the women make one weak attempt to ask him to recall his words (l. 891–2), the uselessness of speaking is sufficiently obvious. Therefore they do not speak.

[3] l. 1261–4, and 1249 *sqq*.

side. His words are pathetic in their mixture of emotions and their desperate attempt to reconcile the claims of opposites in his mind. In his confusion he attempts the impossible—he, a father, in such a situation—by taking up a neutral attitude. "I hated the man who suffered thus, therefore your story pleased me. But now I reverence the gods and him—for is he not my son? Whence this disaster brings to me neither joy nor grief[1]." But how much progress has not already been made in that confused attempt to abandon his own unjust position! And it is still more significant that he expresses the hope, harshly and unkindly, it is true, but still the hope, that his new feeling will result in bringing about a new feeling in Hippolytos. He hopes to obtain from Hippolytos a confession of guilt[2]. This blind, groping effort, nevertheless, embodies the one essential truth on which, according to Hegel, tragedy is based: that the rights and claims, the "good," of either side are capable of a complete harmony with each other. The nearer the one side approaches to giving up its exclusive claim, the nearer it draws the other side to doing the same, and Theseus, in giving up his excessive claims and his extreme position, has a perfectly right instinct that this very change of attitude will induce a reciprocal change; for, *if* he were guilty, Hippolytos confessing his guilt

[1] l. 1257–60, *μίσει μὲν ἀνδρὸς τοῦ πεπονθότος τάδε*
λόγοισιν ἥσθην τοῖσδε· νῦν δ' αἰδούμενος
θεούς τ' ἐκεῖνόν θ', οὕνεκ' ἐστὶν ἐξ ἐμοῦ,
οὔθ' ἥδομαι τοῖσδ' οὔτ' ἐπάχθομαι κακοῖς.

[2] l. 1265–7, *κομίζετ' αὐτόν, ὡς ἰδὼν ἐν ὄμμασι*
τὸν τἄμ' ἀπαρνηθέντα μὴ χρᾶναι λέχη
λόγοις τ' ἐλέγξω δαιμόνων τε συμφοραῖς.

would be decidedly nearer to eternal justice than Hippolytos the unabashed and unconfessed criminal. But instead of the very partial reconciliation, which is all that Theseus has the courage to look for, is substituted by divine agency one of the most complete and satisfactory reconciliations ever seen on the stage. Artemis herself appears, and in a scene of great beauty and simplicity, undeceives Theseus as to the guilt of Hippolytos, and leaves to father and son the joy of the last few minutes of reconciliation, before Hippolytos, having forgiven his father, dies "in honour[1]." But she does far more than that; she explains to Theseus, and of course to us, how Phaidra herself may be forgiven; she had sought "by her will to conquer Aphrodite, but had perished by the machinations of her nurse, to which she had never consented[2]." And Artemis joins her, quite simply, with Theseus and Hippolytos as a third *victim* of Aphrodite[3]. Finally, with a mixture of reproach and forgiveness, which is almost heartrending in its simplicity and truth, she puts before Theseus his own conduct in its true light. "Evil were you to him, evil to me; you would not wait for pledge nor for the voice of the interpreter[4], you would not seek the truth, nor let length of time bring insight; more swiftly than you ought, you cursed your son and slew him."

[1] l. 1299.

[2] l. 1304–5, *γνώμῃ δὲ νικᾶν τὴν Κύπριν πειρωμένη*
τροφοῦ διώλετ' οὐχ ἑκοῦσα μηχαναῖς.
The order of the words shows that *οὐχ ἑκοῦσα* goes in sense with *μηχαναῖς*, although there is no *grammatical* connection.

[3] l. 1403–4, Hippolytos suggests it:
Ιπ. τρεῖς ὄντας ἡμᾶς ὤλεσ', ᾗσθημαι, Κύπρις.
Αρ. πατέρα γε καὶ σὲ καὶ τρίτην ξυνάορον.

[4] *i.e.* the priest, who would find out guilt and innocence by omens, etc.

Theseus: "Ah, might I perish!" Artemis: "Ill have you done, yet even you may still obtain forgiveness for this ill[1]."

Then follows the famous dialogue[2] between the goddess and Hippolytos. The essence of this scene is easy to feel, difficult to describe. I think it is this, and it is unusual on the Greek stage: for a few minutes the other characters are mentally speaking blotted out; they seem to disappear from the stage: they are altogether forgotten[3]. Hippolytos and the goddess are left alone, and over them hovers an exquisite and calm serenity; an eternal Olympic summer seems to have sunk down from heaven on to earth and to hold the lover of Artemis for a few moments in motionless ease. Hippolytos had once said that his purity had not stood him in good stead; but he too is reconciled at the last to that spirit of

[1] l. 1320 *sqq.*,

Αρ. σὺ δ' ἔν τ' ἐκείνῳ κἀν ἐμοὶ φαίνῃ κακός,
ὃς οὔτε πίστιν οὔτε μάντεων ὅπα
ἔμεινας, οὐκ ἤλεγξας, οὐ χρόνῳ μακρῷ
σκέψιν παρέσχες, ἀλλὰ θᾶσσον ἢ σ' ἐχρῆν
ἀρὰς ἀφῆκας παιδὶ καὶ κατέκτανες.
Θη. δέσποιν', ὀλοίμην. Αρ. δείν' ἔπραξας, ἀλλ' ὅμως
ἔτ' ἔστι καί σοι τῶνδε συγγνώμης τυχεῖν.

[2] l. 1389 *sqq.*

[3] As a rule, the rigid conventions of Greek stage construction force every character which is on the stage, to take vital part in the action, as long as he is there. There is nothing approaching the passive existence of some characters, perhaps even unseen, while others are acting, which so incomparably enriches the episodes of modern drama. Aeschylus was much jeered at for leaving his characters in long silences on the stage, *e.g.* Prometheus, Niobe; but again defended by the argument that these long silences were more "speaking" than the long speeches of other people's characters; and there is not a case where a character of Aeschylus is hidden or neglected.

purity, and as he had lived, in obedience to the will of Artemis, so will he end, a man in harmony with the divine[1]. Yet something there is of the unsolved in the cruel relations between gods and men, and always must be; death intervenes, and Artemis, faithful though she professes herself to Hippolytos, must bid him farewell: "for deity must not look on death[2]." It has been suggested to me—and I entirely agree with the suggestion—that at this point quite a different atmosphere intrudes, the biting, cruel, truly Euripidean atmosphere of sarcasm against the so-called "divine"; Artemis, the spirit of purity, who hovers over her worshipper for a few moments in a windless peace, becomes Artemis, the petty, limited deity of current Athenian religion, who can do no better for her faithful worshipper than to leave him, just when he is at his greatest need; "deity must not look on death." But what is the use of a deity that cannot face death? No power except the power that triumphs over death need present itself to us; all else we can supply for ourselves. The biting sarcasm of the goddess who floats serenely away and leaves her human worshipper to death has perhaps not often been equalled. It is not violently done, in fact, it is so quiet as almost to pass notice; but it hits deep and true, and the Olympian gods deserved it.

Nor is the most irreconcilable aspect of all, the malicious deity of Aphrodite, included in the final harmony, except to a limited extent. Hippolytos had

[1] l. 1443.

[2] l. 1437–9, *καὶ χαῖρ'· ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐ θέμις φθιτοὺς ὁρᾶν*
οὐδ' ἵμμα χραίνειν θανασίμοισιν ἐκπνοαῖς.

burst forth with the wish that men could curse gods as gods curse men[1], but is immediately stopped by Artemis, who promises that in the sphere of deity her power shall eventually revenge itself on that malicious potency[2]; the last words of Theseus, too, are not those of a mind reconciled to Aphrodite[3]. This is striking in the light of the usual Euripidean formal reconciliation between god and man at the end of his plays, but it is the less important, as such was not the main problem of the play. The last words of Artemis sum up the situation, at once a solution and no solution of all that has happened: "If the gods give it so, it is natural for men to sin[4]."

Strange! The words of the pure goddess are the very words of the gross old nurse: "Forgive me, child, 'tis natural for men to sin[5]."

Thus, in accordance with the definition of Hegel, the two "goods," Passion and Austerity, are first shown in conflict with each other, and this is the tragic conflict involved in the play; at the end, even if no ultimate solution is obtained, they are reconciled to the extent of being shown to be both limited sides of an unlimited whole, which whole, with the ending of the play, absorbs into its unity and replaces these two partial aspects.

[1] l. 1415, *φεῦ· εἴθ' ἦν ἀραῖον δαίμοσιν βροτῶν γένος.*
[2] l. 1416–22.
[3] l. 1461, *ὦ τλήμων ἐγώ,*
ὡς πολλά, Κύπρι, σῶν κακῶν μεμνήσομαι.
[4] l. 1433–4, *ἀνθρώποισι δὲ*
θεῶν διδόντων εἰκὸς ἐξαμαρτάνειν.
[5] l. 615, *σύγγνωθ'· ἁμαρτεῖν εἰκὸς ἀνθρώπους, τέκνον.*

NOTE I

There seems to be an undoubted stress on three words in the play—*σώφρων, σωφροσύνη* ; *εὐκλεής* ; *σεμνός*. This is probably natural and unconscious, except *σωφρονεῖν μαθήσεται*, l. 730, which is a reminiscence of *σωφρονεῖν διδαξάτω* of l. 667 : cf. l. 1036.

A. **σώφρων, τὸ σωφρονεῖν, σωφροσύνη.**

Used l. 413 and 731 by Phaidra, l. 431 by the Chorus, l. 358 by the nurse, l. 667 by Hippolytos. In l. 949 Theseus denies it to Hippolytos, but Hippolytos claims it for himself in l. 995, 1007, 1013, 1100, 1365 ; in l. 1034 he allows it to Phaidra ; in l. 1402 Artemis gives it to Hippolytos.

B. **εὐκλεής.**

In l. 47 Aphrodite says Phaidra shall die *εὐκλεής*, exactly balanced by l. 1299 where Artemis says of her protegé, Hippolytos, that he shall die *ὑπ' εὐκλείας*. In l. 423 Phaidra hopes her children may be *εὐκλεεῖς* as regards their mother ; *cf.* l. 717 ; in l. 687 she fears she shall no longer die *εὐκλεής*, *cf.* l. 489.

C. **σεμνός.**

l. 93–4, attendant to Hippolytos : *μισεῖν τὸ σεμνόν* ; *cf.* l. 99, why not worship a goddess who is *σεμνή* ?

l. 713, oath by Artemis *σεμνή* ; *cf.* l. 886 of Zeus.

l. 957, Theseus accuses Hippolytos of simulating *σεμνοὶ λόγοι*—'religious talk'—as a cover to base designs ; *cf.* l. 1064, where he accuses him of *τὸ σεμνόν*, *evil* pride.

l. 1364 Hippolytos of himself (in a good sense).

The above passages well bring out the double meaning of *σεμνός*—good and bad.

D. In l. 489 *sqq.* note *εὐκλεής, σεμνός* (*τί σεμνομυθεῖς ;*), *σώφρων*, used close together.

The insistence on *σώφρων, εὐκλεής*, brings out the similarity of the claims made by the rival sides.

E. Finally, *cf.* the echo of l. 415, *ὦ δέσποινα ποντία Κύπρι*, in l. 522.

NOTE II

The following analysis of the *Hippolytus* on Hegelian lines may serve as an exercise for those who wish to investigate dramatic construction.

Take each character separately and trace his or her δέσις or 'binding,' and λύσις or 'unwinding' of the same; also note accusations of evil brought against them, or reversely, recognitions of good present in their claim.

A. *Phaidra*

δέσις: begins l. 335 with the word δώσω.

Stages are (i) breach of silence.
(ii) the charm accepted.
(iii) the fear that Hippolytos will betray her.
(iv) the lying letter to Theseus: **crisis.**

λύσις: begins l. 596, καλῶς δ' οὐ, which is the recognition by Phaidra of the wrong involved in (ii) *supra*; continued in the determination to die, l. 599–600. This is the λύσις to (i) and (ii). What λύσις there is to (iii) and (iv) is given in Hippolytos' acknowledgment of her purity, l. 1034–5, repeated by Artemis, l. 1300–5, 1404.

Accusations against Phaidra

(i) By Phaidra herself: l. 596 (see *supra*).
(ii) By the nurse: l. 353–7 (her first outburst of horror when she hears the secret); l. 494 (Phaidra is *not* σώφρων).
(iii) By Hippolytos, l. 667 *sqq.* [*All* women are involved; note the over-statement, symptomatic of one rival side against the other.]

Recognitions of the good in Phaidra

(i) By Aphrodite: Phaidra shall die εὐκλεής, l. 47.
(ii) By the nurse; classes her with οἱ σώφρονες; *cf.* (ii) *supra.*
(iii) By Hippolytos, l. 1034, *cf.* l. 1403.
(iv) By Artemis, l. 1300–5, 1404.
(v) Nor can it be accidental that the women swear secrecy to Phaidra by Artemis, the goddess of *chastity*; *cf.* Phaidra's own prayer to Artemis, l. 228–31.

B. *Hippolytos*

δέσις: (i) general defiance of Aphrodite, l. 100–13.
(ii) scene with the nurse, l. 601 *sqq.*
crisis in l. **665–8**, where he curses all women.
(iii) l. 1415, he threatens for a moment to be equally passionate against the gods, but is stopped by Artemis.

λύσις: (i) he will keep the oath, l. **656–7**, *cf.* l. 1060.
(ii) Artemis promises him immortality and foretells a final victory of her power over Aphrodite, l. 1416–30.

Accusations against Hippolytos
(i) By his servant; he is a reckless babbler, l. 117.
(ii) By the nurse; he is cruel to his friends, l. 613.
(iii) By Phaidra; he is overbearing, etc., l. 729–31.
(iv) By Theseus; he is boastful and impure, l. 950, 1064, 1080, etc.
(v) Hippolytos himself admits he has not used τὸ σωφρὸν properly, l. 1035; in l. 94 he had admitted pride was hateful.

Recognitions of the good in Hippolytos
(i) Claimed by Hippolytos himself: l. **994–5**, 1074–5, **1100–1**, **1365–9**, 1383.
(ii) By the messenger, l. 1254.
(iii) Admitted by Theseus, l. 1454.
(iv) By Artemis, l. 1299–1300, and throughout the "reconciliation," esp. l. 1402.

C. *Theseus*

δέσις: very sudden, begins with the **crisis**, the curse, l. 887, his claims reaffirmed throughout the scene; closes with reiteration of the curse, l. 1169–70.

λύσις: begins very gradually, with the recognition that Hippolytos is still his son, l. 1259, and 1265–7;
continues l. 1313, 1325 and end of scene;
completion in l. 1449–51, where Hippolytos frees him from guilt by forgiveness.

Accusations against Theseus
(i) By the Chorus, l. 891–2.
(ii) By Hippolytus, l. 1051–2 and throughout the scene; *cf.* l. 1413.
(iii) By the servants (implied), l. 1249–54, 1263–4.
(iv) By Theseus himself: see λύσις.
(v) By Artemis, l. 1294–5, 1320–4, 1325.

Recognitions of good in Theseus
(i) By Artemis, l. 1325–6, 1431–4.
(ii) By Hippolytos: see λύσις.

D. *The Nurse*

δέσις: begins with her long speech, tempting Phaidra l. 433 *sqq.* (which is in contradiction to l. 353 *sqq.*); stages might be

marked at l. 476, 490, 509; l. 509 (offer of the charm) is a crisis, but the real **crisis** (the disclosure to Hippolytos) takes place off the stage.

A further δέσις (offer to Phaidra to save her from the consequences of the disclosure) threatened at l. 705, but swept away.

λύσις: begins with recognition of her own wrongdoing, l. 615, ἁμαρτεῖν; more plainly in l. 704, οὐκ ἐσωφρόνουν ἐγώ (Racine carries the process still further by making his nurse destroy herself).

Further than this there is no λύσις, unless Artemis' words in l. 1434 are meant to be a conscious echo of l. 615 (it is human to err, an idea used unworthily by the nurse, but caught up and used worthily by Artemis).

Accusations against the nurse

(i) By Phaidra, l. 682 *sqq.*, l. 706–9.

(ii) By Hippolytos, l. 645–50.

Recognitions of the good in the nurse

By Phaidra, l. 597, φίλως, she acted through love, even if wrongly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE *HECUBA* OF EURIPIDES[1]

(425 or 424 B.C.)

Hecuba, wife of Priam, mother of Hector, queen of Troy, frenzied by her wrongs, was changed into a prowling hell-hound, baying on the plains of Troy.

The few hours that pass before this final horror are chosen by Euripides for his play of *Hecuba*, which, discarding charm and pathos except in one passage[2], yet holds us by its power and gloom.

The Greek host is at the Tauric Chersonese (Gallipoli), stayed by contrary winds on its way home[3]. We see Hecuba a slave in Agamemnon's camp; her sons have fallen, her city lies in ashes, her husband is slain, Kassandra, her daughter, is Agamemnon's victim concubine. We feel her tragic presence within the tent, while the ghost of her youngest child, Polydoros, rises on the desolate shore; he had been sent to the house of King Polymestor, king of the Chersonese, away from Troy and danger, but the king has foully murdered him for the treasure he had brought from home, and cast his body on the sands. But those who rule the world of ghosts have

[1] Euripides quoted by Oxford text (Murray).

[2] The episode of Polyxena.

[3] Prologue.

consented to his burial at his mother's hands; Hecuba shall learn the hideous truth, and on the same day she, who believes two children are left to her, Polydoros and the virgin Polyxena, shall see them both lying dead before her; for on Achilles' tomb Polyxena is to be slaughtered like a beast, to give good voyage to the Grecian host. And thus indeed we see it come about, hear Odysseus bring the cruel message, and when the mother would have fought for her child's life, we watch Polyxena rejoicing to go unforced to martyrdom, and strangely through the misery we rejoice with her. We hear the distant noises of the camp preparing for the accomplishment of the sacrifice, we listen to Talthybios telling the story of the end; we see Hecuba set herself slowly to accomplish the last rites for her child; one of her few remaining servants, an old slave-woman, goes shoreward in the gloom to fetch lustral water for the washing of the body, so that all grief, all terror, all misery, may pass away into the sad chanting of dirges, be exorcised by the due fulfilment of rites, and sink into an appointed calm. But the slave-woman comes hurrying back, bearing in her arms no consecrating water, but a thing of terror, and there before our eyes and hers Hecuba unveils her murdered son. Then we listen to pleas and counterpleas between the desolate mother and the conquering Agamemnon who has become her king, fierce despair arguing against policy and hesitant condonation, until she wrings his unwilling consent to a terrible revenge. King Polymestor with his children is summoned by a crafty message, cajoled and flattered and deceived, and as he disappears

within the tent, shudderingly the Chorus whisper something about a penalty which has not yet been paid[1], but which surely still may come. And it comes at once: an agonised cry from Polymestor that he is blinded, that his children are murdered at his very feet, and then he bursts out of the tent, half insane with misery, following the triumphant Hecuba, to grope in helpless fury for her, maddened pursuer of the victim he had maddened. With Agamemnon we listen to fierce denunciations and fiercer answers, as Hecuba and King Polymestor confront each other, urging their intolerable wrongs and miseries; with Agamemnon we reject the cruel greed of Polymestor which could murder a helpless boy, who should have been the sacred fondling[2] of a loyal hospitality, but again with Polymestor we cry out at reprisals that are hellish, and prophesy, what in these scenes of impossible outrage no longer seems unnatural, a coming transformation of the human woman into a sheer animal: already before our very eyes Hecuba seems to turn into a dog. Abruptly the play ends; Hecuba has had her revenge on one at least of her enemies, but for revenge she has given her soul.

The play has been severely criticised. It was Hermann[3] who brought the first considerable accusations against its structure, partly in answer to the eulogy of it, prefixed by a certain Pflugk to his edition of the previous year[4]. Hermann begins by repeating

[1] l. 1024. [2] l. 20, ὥς τις πτόρθος.

[3] His first edition, published in 1801, I have not seen. The vigorous *Praefatio* to the second edition of 1831 (Weidmann) is well worth reading.

[4] Pflugk, *Euripidis Hecuba*, Gotha and Erfurt, 1830.

the usual charges against Euripidean drama, no doubt derived from August Wilhelm Schlegel[1]; the charges of (1) Emotionalism, (2) Sophistry, (3) Verbosity in the choruses, (4) Careless construction with a view to immediate effects. The last fault is especially obvious, it is said, in the *Hecuba*. In this play there are two actions, between which there is no necessary connection; neither is derived from, nor essential to, the other; "they succeed each other, but they do not belong to each other[2]"; in fact the play falls into two distinct parts, the sacrifice of Polyxena and the revenge of Hecuba on King Polymestor for the death of Polydoros; the prologue only glosses over the disconnection of these two halves. The composition of the first part is admirable, though even here Hermann takes exception to the chorus[3], remarking that it is singularly unfeeling of the women to bewail their own fate only, and to have no word to spare for the tragedy of Polyxena and Hecuba just consummated before their eyes[4]. But the second half, the revenge of Hecuba, has nothing tragic except the name of tragedy. There is no room for fear or pity or any generous sentiment. Who could feel fear at the sight of a villain's punishment? and King Polymestor is a villain. On the contrary, we can but rejoice. For Hecuba we feel up to a certain point, but in the end her horrible act destroys our sympathy. This terrible vengeance is a piece of mere sensationalism, degrading the tragic art to the low instincts of

[1] *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst u. Literatur*, Vienna, 1808.
[2] "Argumenta tempore quidem, non re coniuncta," Hermann.
[3] l. 444–83.
[4] See *infra*, p. 142 *sqq*.

the mob which streams to the theatre in order to satiate itself on blood and horrors[1]. There is nothing to mitigate the horror; Polymestor does not repent; he remains deceitful, cowardly, hardened, atrocious, and therefore we cannot be sustained by the moral satisfaction which comes from contemplating repentance. Thus in the two principal characters, Hecuba and King Polymestor, there is nothing to admire, love, respect or pity: "Euripides seems to have thought the merely horrible to be tragic[2]." As for Agamemnon, Hermann's excellent summary of that curious character may well stand: "neque ipse animo commotus neque alios movens."

Hermann then goes on to argue more particularly against the view of Pflugk. Pflugk stood for the unity of the play, and proposed to unite the two apparently separate halves on the theme of the *Sorrows of Hecuba*, common to them both[3]. This idea the acute Hermann proceeds to tear to pieces. Pflugk had made a good point in stressing the truth that a single action is not necessarily a simple action; no doubt this remark flows from the influence of Schlegel, who, quoting Racine's *Andromaque* as an example, establishes the fact that unity of *action* does not exclude a *situation* which is complex, combining different acts in different individuals, so long as they

[1] "Non movent misericordiam nisi infimae plebis, tum maxime solitae et horrore et dolore perfundi cum oculis adspicit atrocia."

[2] "Tragica visa esse Euripidi etiam quae nihil aliud essent quam detestabilia."

[3] An argument revived by Paley in his introduction to the play; *Euripides*, 1874, vol. II, p. 513. See also Patin, *Tragiques grecs*, *Euripide*, 5me ed. 1879, vol. I, ch. II.

tend to one end; unity of dramatic action is like a river, which may receive tributaries in its course or even itself become divided and flow simultaneously through many channels and pour itself into the sea by many mouths, yet it remains one and the same river[1]. Occasionally a play contains two actions, which are positive and negative to each other, and so make up one dramatic unity. This definition is not far from covering the case of the *Hecuba*, where, as I hope to show later, the two actions of the first and second half of the play are complementary to each other. But Pflugk did not, as it seems to me, grasp the real unity of the *Hecuba*, and the unity which he does propose, Hermann will have none of. If the *Sorrows of Hecuba* be the theme, why then only two out of her many sorrows? Why not all her tragic life summed up into one culminating action? No: the play has no unity, maintains Hermann. King Polymestor could have murdered Polydoros even if Polyxena had never been born, or Polyxena could have been sacrificed had Polydoros never existed. Not everything that happens to one person is a single action. Undoubtedly Hermann has in mind the Aristotelian criticism[2], and undoubtedly Hermann, resting on Aristotle, is right as against Pflugk; the idea that the *Sorrows of Hecuba* unites the two actions into one is hopeless.

It is hopeless, because the sorrows of Hecuba are not tragic unless the poet makes them so; they are

[1] *Op. cit.* 9te Vorlesung.

[2] *Poetics*, ch. 8, "Unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero; there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action," etc., to the end of the chapter.

only pathetic, sad, horrifying. But tragedy implies a conflict or struggle. Exactly where does the conflict lie in this play of Hecuba?

Even Hermann himself, powerful critic though he is, misses this essential point. He and his victim Pflugk alike judge the play from far too narrow a platform: they look only for an emotional satisfaction. Undoubtedly the emotional satisfaction of the spectator should be an inherent part of every good play. The *Hecuba* leaves much to be desired, and this prevents it from being a very great play[1]; but it does satisfy the essential condition of tragic conflict.

Hermann almost implies that there is only one possible formula of tragic action, the Aristotelian one, which so exactly fits the supreme type of Greek tragedy, the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that type in which the great man shatters on a single weakness (Arist. *Poet.* 13. 3). But though this definition covers many tragedies, it cannot possibly be made to cover all, and applied to the *Hecuba* it is not sufficient. Hecuba shatters on her motherly passion for revenge, but in saying this we have not yet fully explained the true unity of the play. Again, Hermann is surely too narrow in asking that King Polymestor should have had some redeeming feature, that he should have repented, or been courageous in his sufferings, or at least died desperate, not moaning. He maintains, following Aristotle (*loc. cit.* § 2), that there is no tragic satisfaction in "the downfall of the utter villain"; and so much is true, there is only a very crude satisfaction

[1] Racine was in the habit of annotating in the margin of the Greek plays, but the *Hecuba* is one of the three plays he failed to annotate.

about the downfall of villainy. But there are other than these crude demands to be satisfied, and it may well be asked whether the existence of a villain is not after all the most tragic thing in the world, whether the mere fact of a character like Polymestor should not carry us beyond these crude emotions. In a profound sense it is true that Euripides with his stage villains, his representations of *men not as they ought to be, but as they are*, is "the most tragic of poets," (*Poet.* 13. 6). Aristotle, with his doctrine of the tragic Mean between virtue and vice (*Poet.* 15. 1 and 5), was a little inclined to *débarrasser* himself of the "utter villain[1]," as untypical, outside the average; but were there only one "utter villain" in the history of the world, the philosophy which disregarded even that one would stand condemned as insufficient, and all its house of cards would tumble to the ground. Misguided by the Aristotelian tradition, the literary world as such has been a little inclined to gloss over the vast problem of utter wickedness. From this illusion Euripides stands apart; he is profoundly courageous, and includes, like Walt Whitman, the Devil as fourth person in his "Square Deific."

Equally useless is it to join Hermann in turning the tables on Hecuba, and to argue that in the second half of the play she ceases to be "tragic," because she only repels deceit by worse deceit, violence by worse violence; we want moral values in our plays, but not on the simple basis of demanding that everybody shall be good. Rather, the tragedy in Hecuba's story approaches the type of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as

[1] ὁ σφόδρα πονηρός.

already said, because it is the one passion for revenge as an outraged mother that brings her otherwise noble moral nature to such utter shipwreck. It is true that our demands for moral pleasure, our instinctive wish to believe in our fellows, are not satisfied by Hecuba herself; but that does not prevent her from being tragic.

As a rule, tragedy does satisfy this strong desire of ours for a moral pleasure at the end; tragic poets are certainly prophets of the essential goodness in men. And though in this play neither Hecuba nor King Polymestor give us this moral pleasure, there is one character, Polyxena, who does, and that in such an exalted manner, that some critics have been tempted to see in her the central figure of the play. As Polyxena is slain before half the play is over and has nothing whatever to do with the second half, this involves us in fastening on Euripides the accusation of quite an extraordinary fault of construction. Hermann is willing to do so, and argues that Polyxena, not Hecuba, is the heroine, although Euripides did not know it! But Pflugk maintains that we cannot finish the play after the first part, the sacrifice of Polyxena, for it is not tragic to leave the mind "broken and exasperated"; there would be a complete lack of that reconciliation which Hegel defines as the cardinal end of every tragedy. Here again Hermann answers, and with convincing force, that reconciliation is present at the end of the first half of the *Hecuba*: for the nobility of Polyxena, her steadfastness, her purity, her willing self-sacrifice, reconcile our minds to the horror of her martyrdom; she redeems the play by the magnificence of her surrender, by that passive yielding

to another, which is occasionally the highest form of spiritual activity. In his zeal for proving that the *Hecuba* ought to end after the death of Polyxena—though it does not—Hermann entirely questions the emotional value of the last half of the play. Do we feel more comforted after seeing Hecuba lose a daughter, in seeing her also lose a son, in order that she may get some vengeance somewhere? better keep the son and forego the vengeance. This is to confuse the emotions of the characters with the emotions of the spectators; we do not absolutely identify ourselves with any of the characters. They have their satisfaction; ours is that "tragic pleasure" which desires to see the death of the tragic character, because believing in the eternal life behind individual phenomena[1].

Still it must be admitted, that as against Pflugk, Hermann, the greater critic, who so clearly saw the difficulties and inequalities of the play, has the better of the argument. The summary at the end of Pflugk's introduction expresses an extraordinarily superficial analysis of the ends of the tragic art, and is only worth noting as a typical expression of the "poetic justice" formula. The spectator is to go away comforted by realising that whatever happened to Polydoros, Polyxena and Hecuba, at least King Polymestor got his deserts. It seems inconceivable that with the available plays of the three dramatists in front of him, any critic could

[1] Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie*, 16 *fin.*, "Die metaphysische Freude am Tragischen...: der Held, die höchste Willenserscheinung, wird zu unserer Lust verneint, weil er doch nur Erscheinung ist, und das ewige Leben des Willens durch seine Vernichtung nicht berührt wird. 'Wir glauben an das ewige Leben,' so ruft die Tragödie."

have reduced a play of Euripides to this childish nonsense. Was this really the truth the audience were to take home with them, that even the weakest and most wretched, *quamvis imbecillos et miseros*, would be sure to get their turn, that the desperate villain would be sure to be punished? If the poet had intended to teach such absurdities, they would not have survived the exit from the theatre-gates; for when once the audience got outside, reality would quickly have dispelled the pleasant illusion. Yet in his groping way this critic has hit on a truth denied by the greater Hermann: the play is one, and Hecuba, not Polyxena, is the central figure.

The theme of the play is justice, and it falls into two parts, because it analyses, reveals, contrasts, confronts, two kinds of Justice. The one kind is formal or community or social Justice, partly to be defined as Conventional Justice, the other is instinctive, individual, personal Justice, sometimes to be called Natural Justice. The first was everything that the Greeks knew as *nomos*, the second everything that we sometimes call "nature."

The tragic episode of Polyxena is brought about in this way. The shade of Achilles, clad in his golden armour, appears above his burial mound[1], crying out that he would know why his Danaans have left his tomb unhonoured[2]; proud Troy has fallen, and now at

[1] This mound was on the Asiatic, not on the European, shore, where the Greek host lingered. But Hermann surmises that Euripides was content to leave the locality quite vague.

[2] l. 111 *sqq*.

last the victors dip full hands into the rich heaps of spoil; only he, the best, the darling of them all, has nothing[1]; his ghostly hands can no longer know the fiery joy of slaughter; let them give him to drink of human blood in other ways; the loveliest of the spoil, great Priam's daughters, shall go to the two bravest of the Greeks; let Agamemnon take his fair Kassandra home, there to bask in her living warmth, if only first the insistent cravings of the dead be satisfied, if the blood of Polyxena drenches his own funeral mound; or else his wrathful indignation shall stay their ships by adverse winds; in such deadly ways do spirits still maintain their right to enter into the world of life.

Was this a right? Is the demand just? The answer is complex. Ultimately it is not just, but Euripides makes us see how Odysseus and Agamemnon come to believe that it is. The play is not written simply as a tract for an Anti-Human-Sacrifice society at Athens. In the first place, there was no human sacrifice at Athens, and therefore no need to sermonise against it. There is, indeed, some bitter irony when Euripides makes Odysseus gravely quote the superiority of the Greeks over the barbarians as an argument for holding the sacrifice; the barbarians, says Odysseus[2], do not know how to honour their dead; the Greeks do, and therefore—have the courage to sacrifice Polyxena to Achilles. Surely there is a double note here; there is the vivid picture of the courage that can dare to do a horrible thing, because convinced, even though falsely convinced, that it is right; Euripides pays a tribute of admiration to that

[1] *Cf.* l. 303 *sqq.* [2] l. 328.

courage in its partial rightness, but adds his own finer criticism of it. It was a courage which Greek communities often and tragically exhibited in their dealings with their members, far too eager, as they were, to commit the most awful wrongs, borne on by their strange assumptions of what was politically right. "Look at these barbarians: they are the truly gentle people; look at us Greeks, we are the barbarians at heart: we sacrifice young girls"; it was not too severe a saying in the mouth of one who had just lived through the two Corcyrean seditions. Yet too much stress must not be laid on the distinction between Greek and Asiatic. The main purpose of the play goes far outside this theme. The relations of Hecuba to Agamemnon are not those of Asiatic to Greek, but of slave to conqueror. Now a slave has no nationality; but more than that: a wronged woman is the same all the world over, whether Greek or barbarian, whether slave or free. Helplessness against power, this is the situation of the *Hecuba*.

Nevertheless, it is not helplessness against mere brute violence; it is helplessness against ordered power of a special kind. The Greek host is a community, a society, and has all the duties, all the responsibilities which a society has to its members; in a pre-eminent degree its accredited leaders, Agamemnon, Odysseus, are bound to see that these duties, these responsibilities, are carried out. Achilles was, still is, though in death, the greatest, the best member of this society; time after time he could and did save the Greek host; he was their salvation, their magnificent defence, and now too his grief and anger are their overwhelming danger.

But justice, rather than expediency, requires that the society which he saved should fulfil all due obligations to him, and as first member of that society he has the first and best claim to the reward of victory won at last. It is a just sharing out of the spoil which allots to him Polyxena, even as Kassandra falls to Agamemnon. Let them not forget the terrible quarrel that arose when once before his just claims were flouted[1]; then he claimed in confidence of his powers as the greatest; now his claims have long since been proved; nothing can excuse a society which denies the duty of gratitude to that one of its members who in times past saved it from destruction; such a denial would undermine the very foundations on which the common life of men is built, mutual trust, faith and loyalty: *to honour the good man*[2], as Odysseus says. If the Greeks do not honour Achilles now, who will fight for them in the future[3]? The whole community will perish. Throughout the play the best of the Greek leaders think thus about Achilles' demand, for though the mass is divided[4], the two sons of Theseus, the representatives of Athenian public virtue, and Odysseus, feel no doubt[5]. Honour and gratitude bid them satisfy Achilles' claims. This argument, that the Greek host must not be ungrateful, appears emphatically; first in the chorus-passage, where the Trojan slave-women warn Hecuba that Odysseus' arguments in the Greek assembly will be[6]: "let them not reject (*i.e.* cast out

[1] There is however, no reference to Briseis in the play.
[2] l. 327, *τιμᾶν τὸν ἐσθλόν.*
[3] l. 313–16.
[4] l. 117–19.
[5] l. 123.
[6] l. 134–40.

from among their own society) the best of all the Greeks, because the price is the killing of a slave[1]; let it not be that one among the dead may stand at Persephone's side and tell her how Greeks have gone home from Troy's plain ungrateful to Greeks[2], those who survived forgetful of those who fell[3]." It appears again in the speech of Odysseus, where he answers Hecuba at length and explains the reasons for the sacrifice, especially where he laments that "many cities come to ruin, because they fail to give to their best and greatest their due meed of honour," and in those fine lines where he declares that Achilles was worthy of their regard, he, the man who fell gloriously for his country: "And were it not shameful if he, whom we used as friend when living, should cease to be our friend when dead?" The union between living and dead was strongly felt in ancient society. The community counted one generation of living members, but countless generations of dead; by the loving care of those who successively enjoyed physical life, by their due performance of rites and sacrifices, the dead might enjoy the only kind of life left to them; but it depended on the goodwill of the living, and vague and gloomy threats from the world of ghosts were the only compulsion which could prevent these rites from falling into disuse, if once piety and gratitude failed to inspire them. This terrible and beautiful communion between the living and the dead is nowhere more finely expressed

[1] From Odysseus' point of view a mere nothing: from Euripides', a great deal; and the double emphasis is intended, the poet flinging into the face of his audience his bitter disagreement from them on the value of a "slavish life."

[2] Ἀχαριστοι Δαναοὶ Δαναοῖς. [3] l. 303–12.

than in the feeling of Odysseus that Achilles' claim is binding on the community to which he still belongs.

And there is that other duty of a body of men, its duty to itself. The Greek host before Troy implies so much more than the mere aggregation of the individuals who for the time make it up; it holds in its charge the glories of the past and the hopes of the future; Greece herself is involved in the fates of these men: "that Greece may prosper, therefore will we appease Achilles' wrath," says Odysseus[1]. How could the leaders of the host let "a slavish sacrifice[2]" for a single moment stand in the way of the overwhelming duty of saving those for whom they were responsible, and with these the history of their race? It is in some ways the same problem as confronted Agamemnon at Aulis, and the public claim again triumphs. There is, I think, an implied reference[3] towards the end of the play to the similarity of the two situations; Agamemnon ended, as he had begun, by buying his country's good with the ruin of a woman's life. Expediency, therefore, the higher kind of expediency, which is so near to justice when the salvation of the community must and ought to be the prime postulate of action, is felt by the Greeks to reinforce the argument of gratitude; the Greeks must needs be good to Achilles, but above all they must be good to themselves.

Thus it comes about, as Euripides takes the utmost care to explain (though the critics have overlooked it), that the sacrifice of Polyxena is not a yielding on the

[1] l. 330, *ὡς ἂν ἡ μὲν Ἑλλὰς εὐτυχῇ*. Cf. l. 310, where Achilles is spoken of as falling "for the land of Hellas."

[2] l. 135, *σφαγία δούλων*.

[3] See pp. 155, 6.

part of terrified leaders to a mad outbreak of mob superstition and crazy fear, but an act of the whole community, done deliberately, duly, religiously. But it is a terrible religion, a religion that can persuade to sin.

The decision is for long debated in the assembly of the whole army[1], with voices for and against the sacrifice, until Odysseus carries opinion with him. Odysseus announces it to Hecuba in brief, official language as "a decision of the army and their formal vote[2]" and uses the formula of a decree[3]; he comes as accredited envoy of the host[4], and Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles, fitly becomes the duly appointed agent of the sacrifice[5]. Remarkable is the messenger's account of the sacrifice when consummated[6]. This messenger is no other than Talthybios, the messenger *par excellence* of Greek tradition, *i.e.* the account is put in a setting the most formal, the most regular and typical. The whole army of the Greeks was present, because at a ceremonial occasion[7]; Polyxena is led forward by Neoptolemos and Talthybios themselves; chosen youths of the army follow as guard[8]; Talthybios proclaims the holy silence of sacrifice to all[9]. Neoptolemos then prays to his father Achilles to drink the blood poured out to him by his son and all the army[10], and the army gives the necessary acclamation to the prayer[11].

[1] l. 117–40.
[2] l. 218–9, *γνώμην στρατοῦ Ψῆφόν τε τὴν κρανθεῖσαν.*
[3] l. 220, *ἔδοξ' Ἀχαιοῖς.*
[4] l. 222–3, *ἡμᾶς δὲ πομποὺς καὶ κομιστῆρας κόρης Τάσσουσιν εἶναι.*
[5] l. 223–4. [6] l. 518–82. [7] l. 521.
[8] l. 525. [9] l. 529–33. [10] l. 534–41.
[11] l. 542.

Neoptolemos takes his sword and signs to the guard to seize Polyxena, but she prays to go free to the altar, a willing victim[1]. Here notice that in Greek ritual the perfectly acceptable sacrifice presupposed a willing victim, and the willingness of Polyxena completes and perfects the religious propriety of the occasion; the guards who were "to restrain the struggles of this heifer[2]" are not needed, and the chief of the people himself, Agamemnon, gives the word to let her stand unguarded. Then follows the beautiful account of the fall of the victim, of her modesty, of her exquisite chastity[3], she is a perfect victim without blemish; then of the busy labours of the Greek soldiers, who vie with each other to pile up the funeral-pyre of their victim[4]. Let her be buried with pomp and circumstance: the people have slain her: but it was for the good of all, but she went a willing victim, but her dying releases thousands to life and happiness; let her be honoured: the people have demanded strange things from their servant: but they recognise their debt, they would repay: this is the justice of communities.

Further it is to be noticed that Polyxena is willing to die[5] just because her own community has disappeared into irrevocable ruin; her own life has lost all personal value to her, because it lacks that supreme value which a single life derives from being a part of a larger life of others. Troy is no more, and without Troy she will not live: "the very name of slave drives me to death[6]."

Such is the justice or injustice of a community.

[1] l. 548, *ἑκοῦσα θνήσκω.* [2] l. 526. [3] l. 557–70.
[4] l. 571–80. [5] l. 342–78. [6] l. 357.

The martyrdom of Polyxena, the spirit in which she goes to her death, has been called a reconciliation of this injustice. This is true, but it is a reconciliation for Polyxena only, not for others. When gross injustice is done, the spirit in which the injustice is met determines whether he who bears it is a true victim or not. If the injustice calls out in him evil qualities, whether it be violence or cowardice, resentment, jealousy, or revengeful thoughts, then it has done its work and triumphs over him; his nature is changed and lowered. But if the injustice is powerless to change the inner nature of the soul, then it is the sufferer who really triumphs, for he is untouched in all things' essential. It is therefore a minor and sometimes an indifferent question whether the sufferer positively resists or passively allows the injustice to take place. Sometimes it will be right to resist, sometimes to be passive; but resistance or non-resistance can never be a positive criterion or mechanical rule by which to judge right action. It is not what happens to Polyxena, but what she is, that matters[1]; and she is what she has always been, noble; her nature is not changed. Her mother hears the story of her end and says: "the good are always good: what happens to them does not change their nature; they remain noble to the end[2]." For Polyxena, then, there is a reconciliation between herself and injustice; and the reconciliation is that she

[1] "What happens to such a being (Cordelia) does not matter; all that matters is what she is." Bradley, *Shakespearian Tragedy*[2], *King Lear*, p. 325.

[2] l. 596–8, ὁ μὲν πονηρὸς οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν κακός,
ὁ δ' ἐσθλὸς ἐσθλός, οὐδὲ συμφορᾶς ὕπο
φύσιν διέφθειρ', ἀλλὰ χρηστός ἐστ' ἀεί.

proves herself stronger than injustice, because in her own life she asserts the triumph of the higher over the lower mind; wrong is powerful to destroy her body, but the qualities of her soul are invincible and irremovable, and once that is proved, she has brought her own fate into harmony with absolute laws. But others could only share in this reconciliation through acknowledgment of those absolute laws. Some not ungenerous recognition of Polyxena's greatness we do get from the Greeks, but until it goes the length of bringing them to confession and repentance, they cannot claim any part in her strange and perfect triumph. It is a triumph in another sphere, remote from their thoughts; they remain blind and bound in their sin, the victims and the slaves, while her spirit goes free and virgin to its eternal home.

But in its own lower world the community triumphs absolutely; the greater absorbs the lesser, the whole blots out the part. Now in the Perfect State the ends of whole and part are the same; the state cannot be made perfect unless every individual in it is made perfect, and conversely no human being in it attains to fulness of life except through the larger life shared with others; this is perfect justice both for the whole and for the part, an internal principle of harmony and richness and fulness of life. There are two lines in the play which speak of Perfect Justice as something shared both by community and individual: "that evil should come to the evil, and good to the good, this is a common end for all, for each man separately and for the city too[1]." But community-life

[1] l. 902–4.

is very far from being perfect, and the identity of justice for the whole and for the part is still to seek; because imperfectly realised the community often crushes rather than developes, blots out rather than illuminates, destroys rather than makes to live. Then there follows an irreconcilable opposition between the individual and his community; his justice jars on the justice of his fellows; there is no harmony, but protest, conflict, rebellion. Nor can these problems be dealt with offhand by ready-made solvents, such as the Greatest Good of the Greatest Number. The rights of minorities are sacred rights, and nothing that involves the unhappiness of a single obscure member of a community can be properly defined as a "good" or as perfect justice. The happiness of each individual soul is an end in itself, and cannot under any circumstances whatsoever be finally sacrificed to the happiness of any other individual, not even to the sum of happiness of all who have ever lived or who ever shall live.

Hecuba stands for this. She stands for the individual against the community. What is it to her if the Greek host perish on its homeward way? Out of the ruin of her life she has rescued only her affections, but in these she is impregnable. No necessity of others can rob her of these sacred realities. So when Polyxena herself has willingly given up her rights to the claims of others, Hecuba, unconvinced, still stands alone against the world in a revolt of her whole nature. She submits, because submit she must; she is quiet in her final preparations for the funeral of her child, because the extremes of passion inevitably exhaust themselves, because she was already a woman broken

in spirit when first we met her. And so the play promises to decline to its end in her despite, and to pass from violence and conflict to at least a semblance of peace; but the peace is unreal, the silence is ominous, and the terror and the passion all flame up again in a moment, tenfold more hideous than before. Nothing could be more legitimate, more effective, than this pause in the very centre of the play. The sense of Hecuba's irreparable wrongs is not quieted by any arguments of Odysseus or by any resignation of Polyxena. It haunts us with unanswerable insistence, and it is almost a relief to see Hecuba again rebellious; that false, intolerable peace must be shattered into a thousand fragments or the deepest instincts of our nature will be outraged. Hecuba, and Hecuba alone, carries us over from one part of the play to the other in a great undercurrent of tragic feeling, and therefore the name of the play is *Hecuba*. Tragic episodes may pass before her; Polyxena herself may find a strange reconciliation with the Greeks; but this partial reconciliation, this attempt at an harmonious outlook, sought by others, only throws into still more cruel relief the agony of the one protestant, of the one who still stands outside, a spiritual exile from all reconciliation, a fierce denier of every harmony that is unreal.

The play is carried along by the person of Hecuba, but its unity is not to be summed up in any formula of the *Sorrows of Hecuba*. The name of the play is *Hecuba*, and the theme is her character in its conflict with the inadequate justice and horrible injustice of men. Earthly justice is first analysed in a form often known to us, namely, community-justice, and the

characters on the stage are Hecuba and the Greek nation. The community triumphs, as a community almost always does triumph, utterly, completely, absolutely; there is no doctrine so annihilating, so difficult to repel as that of the Good of the Majority. This is meant to be felt with full force; a kind of hopeless end is reached; there is nothing more to be said. But all the time the poet has designedly kept alive in us a feeling of revolt. How cruel is not this triumph of the many over the one? Somehow it must be swept away. The unity of the play partly consists in this, that the individual (Hecuba) must be goaded past all bearing before he dare challenge the powers of a community so much more powerful than himself. The individual seldom sets himself against society, because he has not the strength. Dramatically the first part of the play is necessary to the second part, because without having been stung past all bearing Hecuba would not have dared to plunge into her fury of revenge; the cumulative effect of finding the body of Polydorus after having seen Polyxena taken away is the deciding factor; otherwise the end of the play would have been simply unbelievable. The second part of the play is necessary to the first part, because without it the first part would leave us with no word of protest, no statement of the other side; the justice of the community alone would be taken as the only justice.

At this point it may be convenient to say something about the three choruses, sung by the Trojan slave-women, Hecuba's companions in captivity[1]. These choruses are beautiful, simple in thought, and not

[1] l. 444–83, 629–56, and 905–52.

over-ornate in language, and all deal with the unbreakable ties between society as society and those who make it up. Their first effect is that of plaintive, heart-broken lament sung by captives on their way to captivity. "Breeze of the ocean, whither will you bear me in my misery over the seas? Shall I reach Doris or Pthias? Shall I be set to sing in honour of the Delian gods, or to weave the robe for Pallas in her city?" Hermann[1] complains that it is selfish of the women to think of their own miseries instead of those of Hecuba; but it has long since been recognised that the Euripidean chorus cannot be treated wholly as a dramatic character; it has other functions as well. When the Trojan women captives bring to Hecuba the news of Polyxena's intended sacrifice[2], formally there is no difference between this "song" and the other three choruses just mentioned; but in l. 100 *sqq.* the chorus are simply *any* women taking a necessary part in the action, *i.e.* they are dramatic characters; in the other three songs they become *all* women who are being carried away into slavery. The fall of Troy, the city, means to each woman, as well as to Hecuba, unutterable woe; here is Hecuba's story repeated an hundredfold, and each repetition has its own essential weight of misery and grief for every particular woman. Only the fact that it *is* repeated, that it *is* common, transforms it into quite other substance; from the sharing of sorrows springs the common experience of men, and from their common experience the mercy they show each other. Therefore Hecuba is savage, the chorus only mournful. They grieve for a perished

[1] See *supra*, p. 121. [2] l. 197–215.

city and perished homes; they do not know to which of many strange places in a strange land they shall be brought. Only at the end is there quite suddenly a note of intense passion, in the three last words, where they cry out that they are "entering the bridal chambers of a land of death."

The passionate note is more prominent in the second chorus[1]. Again the theme is the calamities which men and women may suffer through living together, but with an added thought: that the calamity of all was the work of one. Paris alone ruined Troy, and with Troy each of these women. Note the passionately repeated *I too* of the two first lines: "I too, I too was doomed to misery and anguish long ago, then when Paris cut the first tree on Ida to build his boat to bring his Helen home"; and note too l. 640, "ruin for all was brought to the land of Simois by the folly of one," with its close juxtaposition of *all* and *one*[2]. It is the old cry of the innocent who are being dragged down with the guilty, without volition or choice of theirs. And again it is transmuted in some strange way, characteristic of the Euripidean chorus[3], into an unearthly quality of serene sympathy, when these slaves from Troy end their griefs by pitying those other women, mothers of Greece, who near the broad Eurotas also mourn their dead.

The last chorus[4] is most strikingly made up of

[1] l. 629 *sqq.*

[2] Κοινὸν δ' ἐξ ἰδίας ἀνοίας
κακὸν τᾷ Σιμουντίδι γᾷ
ὀλέθριον ἔμολε, συμφορά τ' ἀπ' ἄλλων.

[3] See Murray, *Euripides and his Age*, p. 232.

[4] l. 905 *sqq.*

this double material—passionate vividness and again a dream-like, pensive melancholy, which takes all bitterness out of the passion. The song opens with a fine invocation of the fallen country, and then goes on to give a picture in each woman's mind of how she remembers that fall, a picture which is almost like that of a disembodied soul, mourning over the griefs of a former existence: so sharp is every detail, and yet so flooded with a kind of unearthly and melancholy radiance; there is in it the immovable calm and the sleeping glory with which the past invests all its untouched possessions. "Thou, oh my Ilian country, shalt no longer be spoken of as a city unravaged: so huge a cloud of Greeks hides thee to violate thee with the sword. Shorn of thy crown of towers and deeply stained with the smoky flames, I shall not again enter thee, oh my unhappy land.

"Ruin came at midnight, then when sweet sleep hovers over our eyes after the feast. The songs and sacred dances were over, and my husband lay in his chamber, his spear hung on the peg; he saw not yet the ship-borne throng who marched on Ilian Troy. And I was braiding my hair in the headband, gazing at the countless rays of the golden mirror, making ready to fling myself at length on the bed: suddenly a call came to the city, and this summons through the town of Troy: 'Up, sons of Greece, finish the spoiling of lofty Troy, and get you home again.' And I left my couch with but a garment on, like any Dorian girl, I sat with holy Artemis, but, alas, she did not save me. Forth with me, looking at my husband dead, forth with me, turning to look again at the city; for the ship was

under weigh and bore me from the land of Ilion, and, alas, I knew no more for grief.

"Helen, sister of the Dioscuri, shepherd, you, of Ida, cursed name, I cursed you, for you took me from my home, yours no marriage, but a blasting curse. May never the sea bear her home again; may never she come to her home and land!" The dream passes; the chorus ends with a curse, that the one who destroyed a city may never see her own city again.

There is in these choruses an emotional force which clothes for us the conflict between community and individual as with flesh and blood. But it is a mistake to suppose that for the dramatic characters either this conflict is presented as a clear-cut, speculative issue. That would be contrary to the spirit of tragedy. Such things appear only as troubled images, obscurely visible through the cross-currents of the surface. Tragedy cannot afford to dissociate them from the medium in which they live; they must appear with all their disturbing train of emotional causes and results. Tragedy must be full-blooded, and also not too systematic; a set conflict of philosophies on the stage would be like a dance of fleshless skeletons.

The pathetic, the horrible, the appealing, in a word the emotional, is the birthright of the tragic spirit. And therefore tragedy feels, and is justified in penetrating into, the superhuman. It cannot be that there is anything in any world which tragedy may not claim. Ancient tragedy, for instance, loves to move in the world of gods and heroes; we moderns have mostly ceased to do that, and yet I think of *Faust*, of

Prometheus Unbound. Certainly tragedy might well concern herself with what we may call the underside of the world, "nature" in the narrower sense; here is rich material. For that part of the world over which the thinking mind of man claims dominion is only as yet a very small part of the whole; on every side it merges into vast spaces, whence stream unconquerable, almost unrecognisable powers, vast influences, penetrating from a kind of formless chaos into the very centre of the human heart. If in anxious fear tragedy builds up a wall between her own and these other worlds, she instantly loses her best right to exist; for it is her privilege to sit on the throne of reason and thence to let her vision range over the chaos of feeling and pierce through it.

The conflict in the *Hecuba* between community and individual loses itself in a wider conflict. While the community rests on the world of thought and reasoned conclusion, Hecuba seeks more powerful allies, and draws her strength from the world of emotion, will and impulse, the subconscious world of instinct. She has affinities with the tigress robbed of her young. And this contrast is the right one in these circumstances. When common life passes beyond the bounds of the family, *i.e.* beyond the bounds of instinctive affection, the binding factor is some form of reason or logical thought; for however much "herd instinct" may reinforce the cohesion of a larger group, it cannot create a lasting community. The Greeks, at any rate, were peculiarly conscious of living in communities by virtue of something essentially reflective and deliberate. Indeed, their communities were almost too much in-

clined to argue about the logical bases of their existence and to trust too little to the mere impulse of living together to carry them forward.

It is therefore an inner necessity which opens these vistas. For when all is said and done, an individual's belief in his right to exist is justified more by instinct than by anything else. This is Rousseau's faith in "the rights of man," which inevitably ends in the cry of "back to nature," because natural instinct is the only justification which that faith has; all believe they have a right to exist: none can prove it. And this belief is one of the strongest powers in us, giving us a stubborn tenacity, which alike carries the explorer through incredible physical situations and the creative genius through amazing intellectual hindrances. For this, like all other true instincts, which draw their strength from the world of the subconscious self, is then strongest when most menaced. It lies quiescent until threatened. A man will have no quarrel with society, until society threatens him. Therefore revolt against society is rare, and partly because it is rare, it appears unnatural, horrible.

It is the sense of isolation which makes it appear most horrible. Hecuba is alone against a world, whereas the community has many champions; Odysseus is the reasoned voice of the people, Achilles speaks for the past with all its claims and burdens, to which a community is peculiarly bound and from which it cannot, without denying its own nature, free itself, as a man can break from family tradition; Agamemnon presents the full force, both good and bad, of convention and the accepted canons of life. Against all these the

individual soul has to range itself, if it would fight society: against the past, against convention, against reason; it appears as unreasonable, selfish, anarchic, incredible, almost as merely animal.

At every point Hecuba depends on the personal, or else on the instinctive, factors of life; not so the others. She first appears to us as a woman pursued by dreams and apparitions; she has dreamt that a dappled fawn[1], as she fondled it, was snatched from her knees by the bloody paw of a wolf[2]; these dreams fill her even then with a prophetic foreboding of Polydoros' death[3]. But Polyxena thinks him still alive[4], for Polyxena has no share in this world of subconscious knowledge. And when the body of Polydoros is unveiled, Hecuba names his murderer without faltering, not by guesswork, but unhesitatingly[5], in virtue of some strange, penetrating intuition. The *audience* know that the murderer has been truly named, for they had heard the ghost of Polydoros speak; but the characters on the stage, *i.e.* Agamemnon and the Chorus, accept Hecuba's denunciation without attempting to find out for themselves; she has announced the name of the murderer with such finality, that it never occurs to them to question her intuition; Agamemnon never once says: "Perhaps Polymestor is innocent after all," and yet Agamemnon is a very level-headed person, rather inclined to see difficulties than to gloss them over, and must have known by sheer experience as leader of the host that men are not to be condemned for murder on the strength of

[1] l. 69–70, etc. [2] l. 85–6. [3] l. 429.
[4] l. 430. [5] l. 710–11.

one unsupported guess from an enraged woman. He is very averse to guessing as a rule, impatient and worried, when Hecuba floods him with her incoherent clamours and outcries[1]. When he does hazard a conjecture as to what she wishes of him, it is a miserable failure[2]: he supposes she is asking for her freedom, unaware, because he is that type of rather stupid man, who simply cannot put himself into another person's place, that freedom is an utterly worthless gift to a woman like Hecuba, broken with age and sorrows, homeless and miserable; its only result would be to separate her from her one remaining child, Kassandra. Kassandra's freedom would have been a gift of worth, but a gift it would have been vain to ask for.

Hecuba on her side shows small talent for true argument. What she urges depends too much on strictly personal values. Her long pleading with Odysseus has been little more than: "What did I not do for you, and will you not now repay it?[3]" It shattered hopelessly against Odysseus' cold decision. Odysseus was ready to be just according to his lights, to listen at length to all she has to say, acknowledge in full all she has done for him in times past[4], admit that he owed her his very life[5], and yet not move one inch from the demand which he brought as representative of the Greek host. Their personal relations are in his eyes beside the mark. This is an attitude which Hecuba simply cannot understand. She passes over

[1] l. 743–8. [2] l. 754–5.

[3] She had saved his life at Troy, when he was about to be discovered as a spy by the Trojans.

[4] l. 238. [5] l. 250.

into bitterness and makes the wildest and most unjust accusations: they are sacrificing Polyxena because they are currying favour with the mob[1], or out of sheer bloodthirstiness[2], or mere low revenge[3]. Why do they not take Helen instead, who began all these troubles? Surely she is beautiful enough to be a victim? quite oblivious of the fact that it is not any victim whom Achilles demands, only Polyxena. But a hopeless, outraged woman loses sight of truth and logic; she may claim to be talking "justice[4]," but from his point of view Odysseus quietly corrects her and calls it "an angry spirit[5]." He has his own conception of justice which he holds and which he enforces; what Hecuba calls "justice," he counts the mere raving of an angry woman, and in the name of his own justice, the justice of the community, he sweeps it aside.

Now once more she is pleading for justice to herself and her children, and once more with one of her conquerors. She pleads passionately, using every instrument at her command: she will be "all voice, all entreaty, all suppliant clinging[6]": she does not even shrink from the purely personal argument[7] that the lover of Kassandra should avenge Kassandra's brother. But this wild outburst does not come till she has exhausted other pleas, more reasonable, pleas based on grounds of right and wrong[8]. It is only because Agamemnon turns aside[9], that she goes on to the arguments of desperation.

[1] l. 254–7. [2] l. 260–1. [3] l. 262–3.
[4] l. 271, *τῷ δικαίῳ*. [5] l. 299, *τῷ θυμουμένῳ*. [6] l. 836–43.
[7] l. 824 *sqq*. An argument condemned by Schlegel as unworthy of tragedy.
[8] l. 799–805, *τὸ δίκαιον* and *νόμος*. [9] l. 812.

But Agamemnon refuses help. And his reason is not, as the reason of Odysseus was, bound up with a conception of justice. The refusal of Odysseus was justified to his own conscience, although it showed the cruel inadequacy of community-justice, as we know the community. The community is too impersonal, takes too little notice of the great personal basis of human life, whose unity is an organic one of feeling and affection, having a power over and above that of any union brought about by an intellectual principle of reason. When the community does violence to this organic unity of affection, it is in contradiction with the best in life. Therefore Odysseus was in the wrong, though he was also in the right. But is Agamemnon in the right at all? What is the reason for his refusal? Only this: he is afraid that the Greek host will say: "King Polymestor was our friend, Hecuba is our foe[1]." Now community-justice, though inadequate, is essentially a stage towards a better order; but it ceases to be even that if it denies its own nature; the very quality which is its defect, is also its virtue. Impersonal impartiality is an ideal as well as an imperfection; in the eyes of public justice there is neither friend nor foe. Thus Agamemnon yields to personal claims in the wrong way, the cowardly way. It is not because King Polymestor is dear to Agamemnon that he hesitates, but because he is afraid of others, his friends in the Greek army. It is the inspiration of fear, not that of mercy, which moves him, and therefore it is this action which brings about an awful catastrophe; for Agamemnon's refusal to vindicate Hecuba is action

[1] l. 855–60.

of the most positive kind and inherently wrong, whereas the action of Odysseus, though leading to terrible consequences and seemingly so much more cruel, yet was in one way so right, that it actually evoked something like a reconciliation from Polyxena. Agamemnon ought never to have turned away from Hecuba at all; it is because he does so, that she is driven to use unworthy arguments, just when she was trying to base her claims on justice, and so to take her place again in some sort of society, even if only as a slave; for the slave belonged to Greek society as well as the free man.

And just as Agamemnon yields to the claims of the individual in an unworthy way, so does a travesty of the claims of the community appear in King Polymestor's mouth, when, towards the end of the play, he defends himself in front of Agamemnon against the accusations of Hecuba. Polymestor has for ever shattered the only hope there was of carrying on the Trojan kingdom by murdering Priam's last surviving son and stealing the treasure which would have helped to found a new Troy; yet he affects to have done this in the name of two communities, pretending that his motive was to prevent a new Troy from threatening, as of old, his own country or that of the Greeks. The motive is not condemned as such, but the assertion of it is understood to be a fabrication. There is a certain facile method of covering up the sins of single men by the so-called good of the community. But the excuse of King Polymestor is swept away by Agamemnon. Polymestor's arguments are turned against himself[1]. The good of the whole cannot be served by a general licence

[1] l. 1243–8.

to murder guests. Agamemnon goes further and says that his own reputation is involved in dissociating himself from this injustice[1]; and here we come back to the idea of l. 902–4, that there can be no fundamental conflict between the good of the individual and the good of his community.

The discovery of her son's murder is a climax in the outraging of Hecuba's instincts, and is instantly followed by a climax of revenge. It is inevitable that these things should follow a law of retribution. Now the revenge of Hecuba, like her wrongs, is an outrageous one; it is unholy, to a Greek far worse than unjust; it passes far beyond what "justice" allows. "Justice" has finally deserted Hecuba; her enemy, King Polymestor, is made to say so in "irony," the moment he greets her[2]. From that time onwards there is something animal in her thoughts and actions, though she pretends to an extraordinary regard for convention just at this moment; she apologises for appearing, in defiance of Greek manners[3], before a man not of her own household; the contrast between her prim words and her raging heart is horrible. She has really slipped out of the community, the human circle, altogether. The chorus expect her to murder King Polymestor[4], but she chooses the much more horrible act of murdering his children in front of him and putting out his eyes,

[1] l. 1249–50.

[2] l. 956–60, "Hecuba, I grieve to see you thus...; there is neither glory nor prosperity so stable that it cannot be reversed; the gods fling all things to and fro, they send confusion, that confounded we may worship them," *i.e.* your case shows there is no reason or logic, no justice, in human affairs.

[3] l. 975.

[4] l. 1024–33.

so that he may live to feel every phase of agony, physical and mental. His suffering shall be made equal to hers. For Hecuba's instinctive justice is a kind of justice, though not what we understand by reasonable justice; it is the cry for equality; it is talionic. Primitive codes tend to be strongly talionic[1], because they are nearest to instinct; only gradually does reason substitute other methods for the talionic principle. It was utterly unreasonable, cruel and inhuman—unjust—that in the French Revolution women should sit and knit as they counted the heads that tumbled from the guillotine; it was an outrage to human nature; but it was the principle of talionic justice asserting itself by instinct and defying reason and conventions, a perverted and violent realisation of the watchword of "equality"; for the wrongs which the aristocratic order suffered were no worse than the wrongs which they had inflicted. On such occasions, when wrongs have been done past all bearing, the revenge exacted is terrible beyond all words, almost as though there were a natural law of necessity, which demands the re-establishment of equality by suffering, before the world can proceed on its way.

Outrageous wrong presupposes outrageous wickedness to inflict it; hence King Polymestor, "the utter villain," who is absolutely necessary to the development of the metaphysical ideas involved in the play. It is just the existence of utter wickedness which creates hopeless situations. But after Hecuba's revenge,

[1] *E.g.* that article in the Hammurabi code which says: "If a man kill a gentleman's daughter, his own daughter shall be put to death; if he kill another man's daughter, he shall pay half a mina."

Polymestor's function changes. He is now the outraged, not the outrager. Euripides, who in this cruel play has shown with such unrelenting mercilessness just how infamous human nature may become, suddenly, in his manner, reverses the whole situation. King Polymestor has, indeed, been incredibly wicked, but at the end of the play it is he who is to be pitied, not Hecuba. To say that the situation of King Polymestor is merely the poet's verdict against wrongdoing, scarcely does justice to Euripides. Rather, the profound lesson that he wishes to teach is that no man, even the most wicked and terrible, can really be put outside the limits of our pity. Though his presentation has not a great deal of sympathy or persuasiveness, nevertheless what he says is true.

But the community is apt to be specially blind to the duty of pitying the sinful; it is one of the chief defects of a system of community-justice. The community as represented by Agamemnon fails once again to attain an adequate justice; it wholly allows the claims of Hecuba, but it cannot penetrate into the subtle contradiction of those claims, which Polymestor's rights, as they stand now, involve. For now Polymestor takes over and discharges the office of Hecuba. He is outraged instinct, and being that, he suddenly and marvellously becomes possessed of her psychic and prophetic powers; he has passed over from the reasonable world of the human community into the vast world of super-emotion and instinct, which borders on the non-human. He has the motions of a four-footed animal[1], as he gropes about the stage on hands

[1] l. 1058, and *cf.* l. 1070–4, 1125–6.

and feet; he actually likens himself to an animal, pursuing the dogs who have hunted him[1].

He prophesies the end of Hecuba, of Agamemnon, of Kassandra[2], whereas Hecuba is now the disbelieving person[3]. They have changed places. Hecuba has satisfied all her obscure sense of justice, and she and Agamemnon conspire to deny the non-reasonable forces, which they now neither of them understand. Agamemnon calls it "bold raving[4]," and calmly expresses a prayer for a happy voyage and a happy ending[5].

But it is within the knowledge of the audience that this prayer and hope are futile. There is not to be realised here on earth by any human action a complete and final synthesis between the two opposing principles: the conflict is irreconcilable except in virtue of some larger force which does not perfectly manifest itself among us. Therefore the talionic law will go on; both Hecuba and Agamemnon will pay the price; the words which the chorus said of King Polymestor apply to them too: "You have not yet paid the penalty, but perchance you yet shall pay[6]." Hecuba will turn into a dog, because she deliberately subordinated the reasonable to the animal part of her nature; therefore the animal will conquer her; for if the rule of reason is severe, the rule of instinct results in something a thousand times worse. And there is a contrast meant between the way in which Polyxena met injustice and the way in which Hecuba meets it. Injustice, we

[1] l. 1173, *θὴρ ὡς διώκω τὰς μιαιφόνους κύνας.*
[2] l. 1259 *sqq.*, 1275, 1277, 1279.
[3] l. 1274–6.
[4] l. 1286, *θρασυστομεῖ.*
[5] l. 1291–2.
[6] l. 1024.

saw, was powerless against Polyxena: "her nature was not changed[1]": against Hecuba it is terribly effective; for it ruins and destroys her, and turns her into something low and fiendish, a pariah-dog, tearing at the vitals of society. Agamemnon will die at the hands of his wife, because he too has set at nought personal claims by the sacrifice of Iphigeneia; a daughter was taken from a mother, and again the outraged personality will answer by a terrible revenge and fling itself against "the necessity of the state."

The noble side in that necessity of the state Euripides fully understood, but in this play he has rather chosen to show us, and, indeed, laid greater stress on, its cruel, narrow and pitiless side. This cruelty and narrowness he makes to work through figures designedly unsympathetic; the harsh justice which they claim to represent makes Odysseus and Agamemnon intolerable to us, and the same harsh justice, falling on a victim, Hecuba, transforms that victim into something intolerable too; judges and victim are all intended to forfeit our sympathies. In the whole play Polyxena is the only sympathetic figure, and we cannot fully rejoice in her surrender; her personal claims dominate us; we are enslaved to her sereneness, her purity, and above all to the devastated glory of her youth.

This insistence on the value of the individual may point to a certain opposition between philosophy and poetry. It is the function of philosophy, in its search for the universal through law and order, to assert the value of the community, because the community is the

[1] See p. 136.

expression of order in human social relations; but it is one of the functions of poetry continually to reassert the absolute value of each individual life and to rescue it from the insistent pressure of the community by a kind of divine rebellion. The two functions cross, and we know poets who philosophise, and philosophers who rhapsodise. Tragedy, more perfectly than any other form of human expression, unites the world of thought to the world of feeling. But tragedians are more poetic than philosophical, and by nature stress the rights of the individual. Once again in the history of literature this was shown, and still more markedly than in the *Hecuba*. In the *Aeneid* Vergil undertook to engage our interest for the claims of a nation, and to hold a fair balance of sympathy between nation and individual. Which was it that won? Aeneas bears with him the destinies of a country, almost of a civilisation, and these destinies conflict with the desires of Dido. The poet sets out conscientiously to prove that Dido's happiness cannot stand against these great issues, but what in the end is the emotional value of the *Aeneid*? Set Aeneas and Dido side by side: confront his multitudinous contentions of duties and patriotisms and religions, his glories, his high illimitable hopes, his eager championings of earth and heaven, with her one terrible claim of her own love, and what is it now if he bear on his shoulders the future of mankind, if his fate be pregnant with the fate of many? Worlds shall sink into a nameless grave, and the fates of men be shattered into a thousand fragments, if herewith one Dido may buy the consummation of her love.

CHAPTER V

ACCIDENT[1]

PART I. THE ATTEMPT TO ELIMINATE THE INEXPLICABLE

The characteristic of accident is that it is inexplicable. It therefore creates *surprise*. Now surprise seems to be neither instructive nor creative of sympathy; we are apt to resent it as unjust or else to seek to escape from it; it would seem likely to evoke the worst sort of fear, or else the worst sort of recklessness.

Such recklessness and foolish defiance are, however, dispelled as soon as there arises even a hope of explanation; it is the business of the tragic poet, not indeed to present an explanation, but at least to suggest the hope that there may be such a thing. Thus we may define tragedy as swaying between a sense of mystery and a hope of illumination. A play which is entirely explained is simply a morality play; a play which is all inexplicable is only a meaningless photograph of the surface chaos of life; such

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, quoted by Butcher's second edition, 1898 London.

a meaningless jumble is a melodrama, where even the most amazing experiences seem to alter nothing, and therefore to explain nothing, in the characters. Every tragic artist has to find his own particular compromise between mystery and illumination—for compromise is all it ever can be.

The Greeks had a strong sense of the mysterious in life, but they connected it less with the accidental than we do. Where we should speak simply of "accident," they might put the action of some supernatural force. Now the action of such a supernatural force *might* be erratic, in which case it would have the same effect of being inexplicable as belongs to accident. But it was more often conceived as logical, or at least reasonable, in the sense that it sprang from some determining cause, *e.g.* the wrath of a god; then it was no longer entirely inexplicable. So the storm in *Odyssey* v springs from the wrath of Poseidon.

Thus the sphere of the inexplicable was narrower to the Greeks, wider to us (a curious result of our vastly greater scientific knowledge). To give an example: there is nothing perhaps quite so inexplicable, so shocking as the death of the young in the flower of life; but Homer, though he has a strong sense of the injustice of such a death, lays less stress on its accidental character; Achilles knows long before his death comes that he must die, and such a foreknowledge, though no explanation of his death, yet prevents it from seeming a true accident. This idea of predestination or of a supernatural force working directly through natural events, eliminates the sense of accident in life, and only in proportion as it disappears

does accident begin to play an important part in tragic philosophy.

It might be possible to trace the development of the sense of accident within the history of Greek literature itself from Homer to Euripides; but it would be hazardous; for neither is Homer a superstitious fool who sees in every accident a divine revelation, nor is Euripides entirely emancipated from the ancient atmosphere of oracle, prophecy and inspired events. The ancient tradition (though without the special ancient religious atmosphere) is carried on by Racine, who avoids giving any large or important part to accident in his tragedy. But it is clear that with Shakespeare we are in a different world; here accident plays a large, sometimes a very disconcerting part. From Shakespeare inherit all modern dramatists and novelists; the part played by accident in Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Brontë, Hardy, Meredith, to speak only of English work, is very great. The exact way in which each of these, or indeed any author whether ancient or modern, works out his compromise between mystery and illumination needs a separate study of each; in Part IV of this chapter I give some suggestions as to particular uses of accident by literary artists; in Part V I suggest that the true principle lies in showing a connection between accident and character: accident is valuable to an artist in creating or affecting or altering the evolution of character. This is merely to say that after all the proper subject of tragedy (as of comedy or novel) is humanity, not nature, only those workings of nature which directly affect humanity being pertinent to these forms of art.

The difference between modern and ancient work then becomes this: that ancient work tends to isolate man from his environment (more noticeably later, in Greek tragedy, than in Homer), while modern work includes a contemplation of such part of nature as can be defined as an environment affecting man, even though it be but remotely[1]. But it is the description, analysis and illumination of human character which remains as the real subject of tragedy, whether ancient or modern.

Now human character is a consequence or chain; it is not a series of disconnected acts or thoughts; on the contrary, a present act has grown out of a past act, and involves also a future act; each stage is the result of a previous one and the cause of one following, and this is true even of what we call an inconsistent character. One would not deny that there may be some element of the incalculable even in human character; still, on the whole, human character is not an inexplicable thing; it is not without rhyme or reason.

But neither is it fixed. It is far from being a mathematical proposition. It is of the nature not of the necessary, but only of the probable. There is therefore even within the narrower sphere of human character, taken alone and isolated from its environment, an element of uncertainty, of mystery. Here those artists who have no wish to deal with the accidental as such, may yet find material for evoking a surprise. And no artist can afford to discard

[1] D. S. Mac Coll, *XIX^th Century Art*, p. 20–1, Ancient drama "was the art of a clear explicit foreground...the eye of modern literature is constantly on the background."

surprise; it is too rich an emotion for him thus to neglect. Only, such a surprise, originating in a development of some human quality, will be different from a surprise arising through pure accident in nature. It will be a surprise which we shall afterwards, on reflection, be able to explain, not one which baffles us to the end.

The surprise which can eventually be led back to a recognisable cause, this cause being some action of a human personality, not some accident in nature, is the typical surprise of Greek tragedy. Although it originates in uncertainty, and the whole play is kept in suspense until that uncertainty has been allayed and the event has fallen out in one way or the other, yet at the end there is found to be almost nothing of the truly inexplicable. Such an action and plot is an attempt to use the emotion of surprise (with which no artist can wholly dispense) while at the same time *eliminating* the element of *the inexplicable*.

Homer was the education of generations of Greeks, and no better example of the typical use of a surprise, found eventually to spring from recognisable causes, could be quoted than *Iliad* XXIV. As the analysis is developed at some length, and is at the same time not complicated by any other action, it is not out of place to consider it here; it will be a type for the analysis of surprise in innumerable Greek tragedies.

Hector is dead; Achilles has triumphed[1], but he is in a desperate mood; he gets no rest night or day; the only happiness he finds is in the shameful joy of desecrating Hector's body. For twelve days he acts

[1] l. 1–18.

thus; even the gods are outraged; even those of them who will not interfere, who hated Hector themselves[1], cannot but "pity" him, when they see him now. Achilles is showing himself "without pity and without understanding[2]," giving way, like a beast, to animal anger; for he is outraging all human sanctions "in outraging the senseless clay." Thus we start with the worst forebodings about Achilles' character, and in reading the *Iliad* it is only Achilles' character that matters to us now (Troy, we know, is doomed). And it is to Achilles' character, and indeed to his better nature, that Zeus himself turns. He will not use force or guile against him; he says it would be useless; "but perhaps if his mother Thetis went to him and spoke wise words—?[3]": with that our hopes rise again; but what an unhopeful hope it is!—"if by any means he will fear me and ransom Hector." Thetis seeks Achilles and gives the message, faithfully and simply: the gods are angry with him, he ought to let Hector's body be ransomed. What does Achilles answer? Taciturn and enigmatic, he speaks a single frozen sentence. Yet there is no sheer refusal, no outburst of anger; something in his mother's words must have stirred his conscience. But he will not commit himself; at the most he will only promise a hearing to the Trojan emissary, if one should come, and perhaps he does not believe that one will come at all: "He who would bring gifts and ransom the dead, may come

[1] l. 23. [2] l. 39–54.

[3] The gifts mentioned in l. 76 are not a bribe, but merely the normal Homeric accompaniment to every transaction, signifying its validity; they do not induce the transaction.

hither, if he be sent by Zeus[1]." That is all; he cannot even bear to mention Priam's name, and once more we are left in suspense; a permission so forced may give way at any moment and Achilles may sink to do the most horrible things.

But if hope and faith are weak, they are there none the less. And they are strengthened by the words of Zeus, when he sends Iris to Priam, Hector's father, bidding him go to the ships of the Achaians and ransom his son himself; "Achilles," Zeus says to Iris[2], "will not slay him nor suffer a man of his men to harm him: he is not without heart or understanding: he will reverence the suppliant." Will he? Is he not altogether mad and wicked and outrageous? It is just this reverence of the suppliant on which we cannot rely, for not so very long ago Apollo spoke of him as "without heart or understanding." We feel of Priam's journey with Priam himself that he may well be going to his death[3], and almost with Hecuba that he is mad to go: Achilles has shown himself "savage and faithless, pitiless and shameless[4]." Hecuba's mother-wit may be right. And so is created suspense, the conflict between our faith in Achilles and our fear of him.

Then Priam resolves on the risk[5]. He will take lavish presents and pray for a safe return[6]. Zeus answers with the favourable omen of an eagle and those standing round rejoice[7]; nevertheless, they think

[1] l. 139, punctuating τῇδ' εἴῃ ὃς ἄποινα κ.τ.λ., not τῇδ' εἴῃ. ὃς....

[2] Omit, with Leaf, the repetition of this assurance from Iris to Priam, l. 181–6, and see the excellent reasons given by Leaf.

[3] l. 224–7, 244–6.

[4] l. 200–16.

[5] l. 228 *sqq.*

[6] l. 314–20.

[7] l. 320–1.

that Priam is doomed[1]; even omens cannot reassure them fully. So the suspense is carried on.

Hermes in the guise of a young man meets Priam as he drives across the plain; Priam's charioteer thinks all is lost through this chance meeting with a stranger: so dangerous is the journey. But the disguised god professes himself friendly and tells them that Hector's body by the miracle of the gods is still unravaged. And though we already know this, yet somehow we share in the relief felt by Priam and the suspense slackens for a moment. Almost as though it had slackened too much, it is instantly stretched tight again. We feel a terrible foreboding of Achilles' fierceness, when Hermes pretends that he is the squire of Achilles and in such terror of him, that he dare accept nothing in the way of a gift from Priam. And though we are aware that all this story of Hermes' is invented, it has almost the same effect on us as if it were true. This is because we know that Achilles has a capacity in him for being savage.

It needs two miracles to bring Priam safely to the courtyard of Achilles' hut (the guards miraculously overcome by sleep: the bolt of the gate moved by the god's power)[2]. Then Hermes reveals himself; it has needed a god to bring him so far. *We* have known all the time that Hermes was a god; but as soon as Priam knows it, he realises to the full how dangerous has been the journey, and because Priam realises it for the first time, we also realise it with fresh force. And if the journey hitherto has been terrible, what will the meeting face to face be like? Suspense is wrought up

[1] l. 328. [2] l. 445, 456.

to the highest pitch. No delay is bearable. Homer takes us instantly into the sight of Achilles: "And the old man went on, straight into the house, where Achilles sat, the friend of the god[1]. His comrades were in the hall: but he sat apart, with only two of them at his side, the hero Automedon, and Alcimos, Ares' child. He had just taken food and drink from their hand and the table was still beside him. Not one of the company saw the king as he came up the hall till he knelt down by Achilles silently, and touched his knees, and kissed his hands, the hands that had slain his sons." Homeric rapidity brings us to the meeting quickly; the two are face to face. On that there is a momentary pause; the astonishment of the meeting is emphasised by a simile, and on a simile action must pause; "as a man stares at a fugitive fled to him for sanctuary," so stared Achilles at Priam. This pause, and the nature of it, bring a relief, essential if we are to give due value to the wonderful lines which follow, where Priam pleads with Achilles. Achilles, we know now, will listen. He has looked on Priam as on a suppliant claiming sanctuary. Our worst fears are over; Zeus said he would reverence the suppliant. Had we been still so afraid, we could not have borne to hear Priam speak at such length, for fear cannot tolerate the delay of speech.

And with Achilles' burst of tears and his yielding comes a magnificent surprise to us, a genuine surprise, though step by step we have been led up to it. The second half of the book completes this surprise, this

[1] At this point to call Achilles "the friend of the god," Διὶ φίλος, is an extraordinary touch, just flashing into our minds our old, better memories of Achilles, the beloved of the gods.

great vindication of Achilles. He does more, far more, than we had ever dared to hope. He himself carries Hector's body, the body he had hated and desecrated, to Priam's chariot. *But the peculiar quality of this surprise is that it is no surprise*; it is what we should and ought to have expected of Achilles had we only had faith to believe in him. It is Achilles as we know he really is; we have known him long since; it was madness to doubt him. He is still the generous impetuous man; the mention of blessings which may fall on him, and of gifts as of something which he may enjoy, only angers him: "Anger me no longer; it is my own desire to give Hector back to you; a message came to me from Zeus, brought to me by my mother, who bare me, the daughter of the sea[1]." So even at the moment of his icy aloofness from Thetis, he was beginning to think nobly, and we might have known it, had we only had the inspiration to go behind his chilling words.

But—and this is the truest touch of all—that anxiety of ours was after all no mere illusion. Even now we stand on the edge of a precipice. We had almost lost faith in Achilles, and he proves to us triumphantly that we need not have done so; now we are almost too much inclined to believe in him, and instantly he reminds us that after all we had reason for our distrust. Achilles himself it is who warns us of the terrible anger that we had almost forgotten and buried out of sight in our desire to make amends. It is there, still threatening to bring his soul to ruin. He is still, if his passion be aroused—and a word may arouse it—

[1] l. 560–1.

capable of "not leaving Priam alive beside the huts[1]," suppliant though he is. Thus our worst fears are recalled, and in the plainest language. Again, when the unhoped for reconciliation between Achilles and Priam has reached its most extraordinary point, when Priam, who could not rest in his own home for the misery of his thoughts, eats and drinks with the man who but now was his deadly foe and asks to sleep in his hut, very suddenly we are reminded that he is after all in the very thick of his enemies: "Place the bed outside," says Achilles, "for at any moment you might be betrayed if you lay within[2]"; we remember again how deadly is the strife between Greek and Trojan, and thereby also it is suggested to us how difficult and almost unnatural are the present feelings of pity in Achilles' heart. And more and more insistently the danger is recalled; Hermes himself intervenes. He stands at the head of the sleeping Priam and tells him it is folly: away, before the dawn break; there is no tarrying in the midst of foes. All the terrors of the journey hither are recalled; it may be even now that Priam will not bear home the body of his son. So suspense is sustained to the end, though it is a lesser and a different suspense, touching no moral deeps.

For moral suspense must be completely and wholly dissolved before we can be satisfied. And indeed, before we leave Achilles, he has done something greater than even we, with our old conception of him and demands on him, could have imagined, something that inspires and surprises us, rather than merely

[1] l. 568–70. [2] l. 650–5.

satisfies our expectations. He asks Priam how many days the Trojans would mourn for Hector: "so many days will I hold back the Greeks from battle[1]." The man who had dragged Hector's body for twelve days at his chariot-wheel, will see to it, in defiance of all his friends, that that body has twelve full days for the burial rites[2]. This is a genuine surprise; but since it contradicts nothing essential, rather confirms all, it is one of those surprises which are true conclusions to an action, because true answers to the problem raised. Achilles was noble, but would his nobility conquer his passions? This "surprise" more than answers this doubt, and therefore the poem ends, because the poet has answered his own doubts.

At the outset there were two contradictory possibilities, both poignant: it may be that Achilles will kill Priam and outrage the suppliant's holy estate: it may be he will give him Hector's body and show himself pitiful and generous. And because we begin with fearing that Achilles is more likely to outrage than to forgive, when at the end we find him generous and pitiful, we are surprised. Yet not so surprised as to be unbelieving; so subtle and gradual are the steps by which we are led from doubt to faith; the long journey, the loving care of the gods watching over Priam, until he is actually in Achilles' hut, touching him, and speaking with him face to face: at this point

[1] l. 656–72.

[2] Twelve days of the rites, l. 667, correspond to twelve days, on each of which the body was dragged round Troy, l. 31; and nine days of the actual wailing, l. 664, *cf.* 610, correspond to nine days during which the gods disputed how to save Hector, l. 107.

we can no longer believe that Achilles will harm him. And what we had known long since of Achilles, but for a time forgotten, again asserts itself: that he is great and generous of heart. Therefore, though we are surprised, we are not astonished or puzzled. We are able to say, "why, that is what was bound to happen, if only we had thought it out."

A surprise, such as Homer gives us in *Iliad* XXIV, depends on nothing except what is contained in human character; it depends on no event in nature. Therefore, though surprising, it has all the nature of a sequence. Such a surprise, while retaining all the rich and varied emotions associated with the unexpected, does not touch the truly inexplicable.

Aristotle defines as an essential feature of many tragic plots the Reversal or Recoil[1]. We might have imagined that such a feature would lead to a large use of accident in Greek tragedies; but, on the contrary, the typical reversal in a Greek tragedy is like that of *Iliad* XXIV; it usually consists in the discovery or rediscovery of something about the principal character, either by himself or by someone else. Accident, of course, is not excluded from a Greek tragedy; but the *principal* catastrophe flows always from some development of character, not from environment; it is inherent, not accidental. That is why a Greek tragedy always seems to rush along; once started, nothing can stop it (and therefore it is hopeless to try and divide it into acts); it has one tremendous uninterrupted motion. In the plot of a typical Greek tragedy, there is something inevitable; *the inexplicable is*, to a large extent, *eliminated.*

[1] *Poet.* ch. 10.

NOTE ON PART I

There is one objection which has been brought against the idea that surprise contributes to the artistic satisfaction of the audience. Surprise, it is said, must lose its whole force when once the secret is out; as soon as a play has been once played, there can no longer be any surprise in a repeated performance for any member of the same audience, for they know already what will happen; and it is quite clear that no one who has once read *Iliad* XXIV could possibly forget whether or no Achilles had given back the body of Hector. Yet it is equally clear that the first reading of *Iliad* XXIV is not necessarily the most enjoyable. This would seem to prove the objection right: surprise contributes nothing to artistic satisfaction. The general history of Greek tragedy would also seem to bear this out, for the myths which made the plots of Greek tragedies were well known to the audience beforehand.

But surprise does not depend on the entirely unknown. Such a theory leaves out of count the faculty of make-believe, and our faculty of following two chains of thought simultaneously. One part of us knows quite well that Homer has made Achilles give back Hector's body; another part of us dissociates itself altogether from that knowledge and is equally powerful to pretend that it knows nothing, a faculty strongly present in children, who can listen to the same story a hundred times. In the theatre it is a mistake to think that only the characters on the stage are playing a part; the audience is playing its own part, and *con amore*. Its part largely consists in forgetting that it has ever seen or read this play before. It is simply a certain exercise of the faculty of imagination, not less important or powerful, because it has only, so to say, a negative result. The same applies to reading; we simply draw a stroke through all our past readings of *Iliad* XXIV and offer ourselves up to Homer uncontaminated by Homeric memories. All this discarded knowledge our brain carries along with it in some secret corner, and it has the faculty of producing it at need. We do not exercise our will in this matter; our instinct does all this adjustment for us without trouble on our part. If ever the suspense produced by the poet grows too agonising, we fall back on our discarded knowledge and suspense is over, for we know the end. There are some plays almost too painful at a first reading. Surely the widespread habit of looking at the end of a novel first is something entirely justifiable. We are well within our rights in wishing to know whether we must prepare ourselves for something joyful or for something tragic. Suspense is inspiring and pleasurable, but only within certain limits.

Part II. The Attempt to eliminate the Inexplicable denied

We have seen the principle of illumination at work, explaining the mystery of living, have seen suspense about the Unknown in life resolve itself into recognition of the Probable in it; surprise has been evoked only in order to be mastered and conquered, and life is now known to be a logical outcome of character or will. Very early in Greek thought this idea was formulated in a famous sentence of three pregnant words by Heracleitus[1]: *man's character is his fate.* Such a formula absolutely denies that the accidental has power in life.

Present these ideas to the plain man, and without much parleying he will scoff at them; he will refuse to believe that men can master accident, will ask what would have happened if in that swift driving over the plain of Troy one of Priam's axles had broken: then he could not have crossed the Greek lines in time: then he could not have made his request: then Achilles could not have had an opportunity for displaying all that magnanimity. The plain man has a most profound sense of the reality of accident in this life and the poet cannot charm him away from it: life *is* "epeisodic," to use the Aristotelian word. Anything might have happened to Priam: some of the other Greeks might have given the alarm, etc. To those who have a sense of life's vagaries, the tragic hero is always on the edge of an abyss, though neither he nor

[1] *Fr.* 121: ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων.

the poet seems aware of the fact and both are wilfully blind to the disasters that lie thick about him by the mere force of circumstances. This sense of the Unaccountable or Uncontrollable in the present order is a most profoundly true thing. It defies the dictum that man's character is his fate by the simple process of analysing particular human fates known to it. We might challenge Heracleitus on a remarkable passage written by the Social Democratic leader, August Bebel, and placed in the second chapter of his autobiography[1]: "The arbiter of a man's destiny is often no other than chance....Most emphatically I do not agree with the proposition that a man is master of his own fate. He is impelled to action by circumstances and his environment. So-called freedom of will is mere moonshine. In most cases a man cannot conceive of the consequences of his actions; only afterwards does he recognise the results to which they lead. A step to the right instead of to the left, or *vice versa*, might have brought him into the grasp of quite a different set of conditions, which might have been better or worse than those he actually experiences. Whether he has taken the right or the wrong turning he can only tell afterwards, by the ensuing consequences. Very often, having no standard of judgment, he is not even aware of the alternative. The self-made man exists only in a very limited degree. Hundreds of others, men of far better quality than the man who comes to the top, live and perish in obscurity because unfavourable circumstances have kept them down—that is, have prevented the best

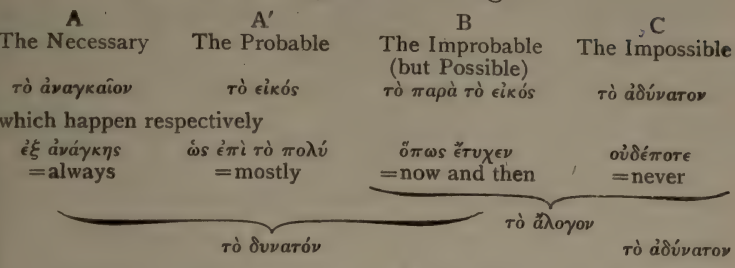
[1] August Bebel, *My Life*, English translation, Unwin, 1912, p. 41–2.

application and exploitation of their personal excellences. It is favouring circumstance that lifts a man to a privileged position in life. For the very many who do not reach such a position there is no seat at the table of life; and, even if circumstances be favourable, a man must show the requisite adaptability to make use of them. But there is no personal merit in that."

It is curious, by the way, that if ever a man made his own career and influenced his own destiny and the destiny of others by sheer force of personal will, such a man was Bebel[1]; yet at the end of a long life he emerges from his strenuous activities with so strong a sense of the masterly power of unaccountable accident. To him man is anything but the architect of his own fortunes: accident intervenes and surprises him. Thus again we have arrived at the factor of surprise. But this is a very different kind of surprise from that other which we felt, *e.g.* in reading *Iliad* XXIV; that seemed to be the completion of a prophetic instinct, which, had we only used it properly, would have warned us of what was likely to come. But this kind of surprise, the kind of surprise to which Bebel refers, we could not have foreseen by any faculty granted to the human brain.

[1] See what he relates on the very next page of the way in which by sheer determination he moulded circumstances to his liking as a young apprentice at Leipzig.

There are four categories of things:



At first sight one would be inclined to draw the distinction between A, A′ and B taken together in contrast to C, since what *can* happen, however rarely, is obviously distinguished from what *cannot*. But if it comes to reflection on the causes of things, there is an equally big distinction between those things which can be accounted for (*τὸ ἀναγκαῖον*) or surmised (*τὸ εἰκός*)[1], *i.e.* reduced to some kind of intelligible scheme or system, and those which resist any reduction to a system (*τὸ παρὰ τὸ εἰκός*). So an equally fundamental distinction may be drawn between A and A′ on the one side = the Expected, and B on the other = the Unexpected; and since C, the Impossible, is also, *ex hypothesi*, what contradicts the system of the universe, we may then proceed to class B and C together as *the surd element in things*: the Inexplicable, in Aristotle's language, *τὸ ἄλογον*, what cannot be ranged under a λόγος, ratio, *reason* or system, the Illogical, Unreasonable, Irrational, in a word *accident*.

But to recognise the Irrational or Inexplicable is to despair of illumination and return to mystery.

This, then is the opposite point of view from that examined in Part I.

[1] A and A′ together in Aristotle, *Poet.* IX. 1. 4, 10, X. 3, XI. 1, XV. 6 (*bis*).

Part III. The Attempt to put a Value on Accident

§ 1. *General*

But as long as the human mind remains what it is, the desire for illumination remains ineradicable. If the prophetic power is largely denied to man, there is at least the reasoning instinct which can act in retrospection, and there are few who can abstain from speculation on the causes of the events which have met them and altered their lives. According as those causes are thought to be traceable, will the events appear as probabilities or necessities; according as they are thought to be untraceable, they will remain an inexplicable residuum, *accidents*.

To the victim who tumbles over the string placed in his path, the tumble will appear as a surprise or *accident*; unless he finds out that it was placed there, he will continue to call it an accident all his life. But to the practical joker who put the string there the tumble will be *an expected probability*.

Now suppose that the string had not intentionally been placed there in order to do harm, but had carelessly been left: then the tumble of *A* appears to *B*, who carelessly left the string (but *not* with the intention of seeing *A* tumble over it), as an *unintended* probability. We may even suppose *A* himself to have left the string carelessly trailing on the ground: then we have the unexpected and unintended result of *A*'s own action.

Now suppose *A* to have tumbled over the root of a tree: then there has been no causating act of any

kind, whether innocent or guilty; the tumble of *A* is, as we say, *pure accident*. The fact that we thus try to distinguish a special kind of accident as "pure" accident shows how complicated is the idea of accident.

But suppose that after *A* has tumbled, his detractors say of him that he always did walk very carelessly, then what appears to his friends as "pure" accident, will appear to his detractors as a "likely" accident; in their minds they will be inclined to shift his tumble from the sphere of the unaccountable, τὸ ἄλογον, into the sphere of the likely, τὸ εἰκός.

Now suppose that *A*, after a lingering illness, somewhat unexpectedly dies from the effects of his tumble: then the general public will say his death is the unforeseen result of a mere accident. But his superstitious servant, who knows *A* to have tumbled over the root of that tree under which, years ago, *A* committed a secret murder, will infer no accident from an accident, but will see a simple case of *divine retribution*, and postulate a strict causation in the chain of events.

Accident, then, is not an event *per se*, but what we think an event to be; the same occurrence may be an accident or not an accident according to the views of the persons conscious of it; it is clear that beasts, for instance, have no sense of accident. *Accident is what in any man's eyes he himself cannot account for.*

Views on the place of accident in human life will vary therefore according to the man. Men certainly do differ enormously in the power they attribute to accident. We have already remarked Heracleitus and

Bebel; the one says that the power of accident is negligible: man can always master it; the other that the power of accident is paramount: it invariably masters man. But it is necessary to be careful not to attribute more to Heracleitus than he really says; he does not deny that accident exists or attempt to eliminate it altogether; he merely asserts that the effects of it can be made negligible by the will of man.

But there is a further view which actually attempts to deny the very existence of the Unaccountable, to argue that there is no residuum of the Inexplicable in the scheme of things: so-called "accidents" are directed or "sent" by a Controlling Power.

To take one of our examples: *A*'s death after his tumble. We need not even suppose that there is any romantic connection between it and *A*'s past life; it suffices that to somebody *A* seems to be a wicked person; then to that somebody *A*'s tumble is the justly purposed result of the Divine Consciousness. To such people accidents are the Divinely purposed results of Divinely initiated actions.

This is the "providential" view of accident.

Those who take the "providential" view of accident have to make the most tremendous assumptions. They have to assume not only a conscious and purposing Mind behind phenomena, they have to assume that this Mind acts directly through accident; for the Inexplicable they substitute a perhaps incomplete, but none the less striking, system of reward and punishment. They claim for their own illumination that it explains the mystery of life. Man, they admit, is not able to control accident; but they postulate something

that is. This reduces accident to a meaningless word, for it denies to it its true character of being accidental by supplying a power of design behind the scenes; indeed, the effective use of this principle, whether for moral or literary ends, depends on the idea that this design is occasionally revealed to us; it is always suspected.

The "providential" view of accident makes the further and again tremendous assumption that the purpose of this Controlling Mind is beneficent towards man. But it is also possible, though perhaps not usual, to assume that the purpose is malignant towards man. Such a theory entirely contradicts the conception of God as good, and is rare; but in ancient times, when love was no necessary attribute of deity, thinkers often dallied with it, though few definitely accepted it. Still it was often suggested that this Controlling Power was unequal and unfair in its action, and such inequality almost amounts to malignancy; many men it left alone, but then it marked out and pursued others, and those sometimes the best, the most famous of mankind, with incredible virulence; sometimes it might pursue a whole family through several generations.

The following passage[1], prefixed by Maeterlinck to his dramas from 1890—1894[2], will illustrate this idea of malignity behind phenomena. "On y a foi à d'énormes puissances, invisibles et fatales, dont nul ne sait les intentions, mais que l'esprit du drame sup-

[1] *Théâtre, Préjace*, p. 3. Lacomblez, Paris, 1901.

[2] In his later dramas Maeterlinck discards this idea; see p. 7 of this preface, and *e.g.* such books as *La Sagesse et la Destinée.*

pose malveillantes, attentives à toutes nos actions, hostiles au sourire, à la vie, à la paix, au bonheur. Des destinées innocentes, mais involontairement ennemies, s'y nouent et s'y denouent pour la ruine de tous, sous les regards attristés des plus sages, qui prévoient l'avenir mais ne peuvent rien changer aux jeux cruels et inflexibles que l'amour et la mort et les autres puissances promènent parmi les vivants. Et l'amour et la mort et les autres puissances y exercent une sorte d'injustice sournoise, dont les peines—car cette injustice ne récompense pas—ne sont peut-être que les caprices du destin. Au fond on y trouve l'idée du Dieu chrétien, mêlée à celle de la fatalité antique, refoulée dans la nuit impénétrable de la nature, et, de là, se plaisant à guetter, à déconcerter, à assombrir les projets, les pensées, les sentiments et l'humble félicité des hommes."

It is not necessary to consider further the chaos of ideas contained in this passage. Some of Maeterlinck's dramas, *e.g. Les Aveugles*, will sufficiently illustrate the idea of a malignant destiny working through circumstance.

The idea of unlucky accident attaching itself to a human being by the volition of some power outside man is bound to end in the personification of a pursuing Fate or Destiny. The idea of a pursuing fate is a contradiction to the very idea of accident. Many tragic poets without really accepting it, like Maeterlinck, have used it to reinforce their dramatic effects. It arouses pity in the spectator, a powerful emotion which it is a pleasure for the artist to evoke. It also arouses fear, but—this is where the principle breaks

down—it fails to 'purgate' or eliminate fear. If a man is pursued by a malignant fate from which he cannot possibly escape, then all his efforts and struggles are *ab initio* doomed, meaningless; resignation would have had a higher value than struggle; in fact, struggle has no value at all in this scheme; it is, on the contrary, an initial mistake, an anomaly, a contradiction, a futile protest against the order of the world; therefore this principle of destiny is a denial of the tragic spirit itself, a command to the artist to cease writing plays at all; he reduces himself to an absurdity. Instead of freeing us from the emotions of pity and fear, it binds us slaves to them for evermore. Tragedy ceases to aim at a freeing of the human will, at an understanding of life which shall make the will master life instead of being mastered by life; rather this conception subjects the human will to the order of the world, and the knowledge which it teaches is not a knowledge which can be translated into power; it is a step towards slavery, not a process towards freedom.

But there is a type of tragedy, and one of the finest types of all, which first emphasises the idea of a pursuing destiny, only in order eventually to deny it. This is the Aeschylean tragedy. Aeschylus has analysed a special form of the doctrine, which is perhaps outside our subject of accident, but which is so important in the history of tragedy that we must briefly notice it. He scarcely conceives the pursuing destiny as working through mere accident, but through the even more terrible medium of sin. At first sight the Aeschylean characters seem doomed to sin; they are under a curse, and the son receives from the father the evil inheritance

which forces them all to do wrong. But on closer examination "each deed stands on its own merits for judgment, and fairly so, because each has its cause in the passions and will of the doer[1]." It is possible to escape the family curse by perfect purity of motive. Thyestes, Atreus, Agamemnon, Klytemnestra, were not perfectly pure in motive; each set his own punishment in motion by his passions; therefore they are not the mere blind puppets of fate. Still we feel unsure of this (*cf.* the passage where Klytemnestra actually calls herself the *fate* of the house, *Agam.* 1497), until we find Orestes, by refusing his adhesion to any but the absolutely pure motive, mastering the inherited tendency to sin; in him therefore the curse comes to an end and loses all its power, though after suffering. To avoid suffering is not within the scope of the human will, but neither is sin the inherited doom of any human being. In the trilogy of Aeschylus the value of the so-called "destiny" in the House of Atreus is to show that even where circumstance is most adverse the human will *may* triumph, and the triumph is the greater because of the strength of circumstance it has overcome. Indeed, the whole force of the Aeschylean plays lies in the re-affirmation of the strength of the human will.

It was a very happy lesson for the first great tragedian to teach and it gave an impulse to tragedy from which the world has shown no desire to break loose. To accept accident as the absolute master of life is indeed to misrepresent life as much as by eliminating accident altogether. I have already referred to the Maeterlinck plays, but perhaps this becomes even

[1] E. Myers in his essay on "Aeschylus" in *Hellenica*, p. 16.

clearer when worked out in the comic spirit. There is that very favourite type of farce where the principal character is continually made a fool of by a series of unlucky accidents which annihilate his best efforts on the point of success, *e.g.* whenever he is on the point of proposing to the lady of his heart, someone bursts into the room. This is the ludicrous exaggeration of the power of accident. It is *untrue*, and this type of farce bears somewhat the same relation to real comedy as the false Maeterlinck plays bear to real tragedy. There is little dramatic quality in either, if we define dramatic quality, whether in tragedy or comedy, as that which shows the human will in struggle against circumstance; the only difference is that in the farce the aim is amusement, in the tragedy serious; in either case the determination of the end is largely taken out of the hands of the human characters; there is little scope allowed for human volition.

Nor is the case different where accident is conceived as uniformly lucky; prosperity marks a man and watches over him and rescues him from the most incredible situations. Here there is just as great untruth. Again farce, not comedy, will supply many illustrations, and this is the favourite mainstay of boys' stories of adventure, all very exciting, but all quite untrue. As supplied for the grown-up appetite the idea may be studied in *Robinson Crusoe* and also in the tales with which de Rougemont so delightfully deceived the world. From the nature of the case the idea is not much used in tragedy, but it appears distinctly in the *deus ex machina*; *e.g.* in the *Orestes* of Euripides, by the intervention of the *deus ex machina* not

only is Hermione luckily saved—she was on the point of being murdered by Orestes and Pylades—but Helen, who was supposed to have been already murdered by them, is declared to have been miraculously rescued. Good-luck could scarcely be pressed further. If we take the Euripidean *deus ex machina* seriously we return, curiously enough in the case of so powerful a thinker, to the suggestion of design behind (lucky) accident; it is the Olympian gods (in the *Orestes* Apollo) who stay the desperate course of events and turn all into a smiling harmony. But it is, of course, another question how far Euripides was serious in the use of the *deus ex machina*: whether the whole thing is not satirical. This is a further question; for our purpose it is sufficient to note the use of the motive of good-luck intervening to reverse a situation.

The opposite is, however, more usual and can produce a very powerful effect; by the opposite I mean ill-luck intervening at the end of a long spell of prosperity. A man is uniformly happy; for long fate gives him all he desires; suddenly there is a complete reversal, his smiling fate turns into a malignant one and a single accident ruins the happiness of years, and so completely blots out his past prosperities that they seem as though they had never been. The classic example is the story of Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, as told by Herodotus. Here the principle of good-luck is over-emphasised in order to be the more effectively swept away by the principle of ill-luck. The effect of a story of the Polycrates type is exceedingly sinister. It must be an early piece of human reflection, for it appears in so many fairy stories and legends, where

the hero is safe in every way except *one* way, or resists every temptation except *one* temptation, but to that one temptation or danger he always succumbs in the end. But this in itself is not tragic; it only becomes tragic if the poet uses it in a tragic way. Indeed, it is somewhat unpromising material. Yet, if tragedy is true to life, it must be able to deal even with this unpromising atmosphere, and great artists have been able to do so. A wonderful use may be made of this peculiar, almost magic, ill-luck; indeed, magic may be largely introduced into a story and yet the story may have the true tragic quality.

Siegfried, for instance, bears a charmed life because he bathed in the Dragon's blood; this is sheer magic; but in the end Hagen's spear pierces him in the only spot where he can be pierced, on the shoulder, where the lime-tree leaf fell on him and which therefore remained untouched by the magic blood. We must analyse as follows: we start from a thesis which tries to eliminate all accident by postulating a Controlling Power which can get rid of it through magic means. This Controlling Power wills that Siegfried shall be immune from dangers; now such a superhuman despotism over circumstance makes the mere human will worthless. But the despotic system is not quite complete: a leaf fell; this was an accident, and this trivial accident interrupts the magic immunity. In fact, having started from a thesis which denied any power to accident, the story contradicts itself and admits the greatest power to accident. Now the tragic quality of the story lies is this: that Hagen's treachery, *i.e* Hagen's will, seizes this isolated opportunity to work

its activity. This argues a tremendous faculty in the human will, and the value of accident in this story is that it has helped the human will to recover its value against an omnipotent destiny. As in the Aeschylean tragedy, the human will seems all the more wonderful when we consider the overwhelming odds against which it has worked.

From this analysis we may draw the condition that to a tragedy a contest of the will is essential, and if accident is introduced it must never be pushed so far as to destroy this. Our net result is to say: neither is man a puppet, nor is he complete master of his environment; there remains a mystery, a something inexplicable in life.

§ 2. *The Aristotelian view*

But it is true that, within this limit, the amount of power assigned to accident varies greatly according to the temperament of individual artists. We will not entirely surrender the attempt to gain some kind of general view, and we will begin with considering what Aristotle says or implies on the place of accident in tragedy.

We may at once rule out from the Aristotelian theory the view of Bebel that accident is an insurmountable, encompassing obstacle with which no man's will can deal, that things "happen" to men which make of them mere playthings and a jest. Aristotle condemns the "epeisodic" plot in tragedy as "the worst of all plots and actions[1]"; by the "epeisodic"

[1] *Poet.* IX. 10: "Of all plots and actions the epeisodic are the worst. I call a plot epeisodic in which episodes or acts succeed one another without necessary or probable sequence."

plot he clearly means just such a conglomeration of entirely fortuitous happenings as Bebel has pictured life to be.

On the other hand, Aristotle is extremely averse to admitting the Providential (or its counterpart, the Malignant) view of accident. He does just allow that it could be the explanation of a tragedy, but only in order to avoid a worse possibility, and it would be no good tragedy which would depend upon it. He instances a Greek play (?), wherein the statue of Mitys at Argos fell upon Mitys' murderer as he gazed at it and killed him; "such events seem to be due not to mere chance[1]," which means, in other words, that they are due to retribution willed by superhuman power. Such a plot he admits is of the "better" kind; but by examining the context, we see that all Aristotle means to state by this is that it is "better" to presuppose some meaning in the falling of the statue than to accept the explanation that it happened without any reason at all, *i.e.* that the Providential view of accident is better than the Bebel view.

But though the Providential view is a possible basis on which to build up a tragedy it is not his own view. His own view of accident is set out in two passages not in the *Poetics*[2].

Nature is not a mechanical or fortuitous system, but is a purposing activity; each natural thing is endowed with a capacity for effort and strives towards its own goal (τέλος). Mostly the purpose of Nature is achieved and we get order in Nature, summer and

[1] *Poet.* IX. 12.

[2] *Phys.* II. 5. 197a; *Metaph.* 1064b–1065b=XI. 8.

winter in due season, etc. But there is a special class of physical events whose anomaly may be put down to a failure of natural purpose: these are marvels or surprises, *τέρατα*, *accidents*[1]. Thus cold in the Dog-Days is such a failure of natural purpose.

And besides Nature there is man, also endowed with a purposing activity, and who, in addition, knows himself to be so endowed. His purpose also by no means always comes to fruition. Thus there are other accidents attributable to the failure of a man's purpose. Aristotle sometimes uses the phrase the "automatic[2]" to indicate accidents which occur in the sphere of Nature, and "Tyche" to indicate those which occur in the sphere of human action; but he also uses both words indifferently to cover the whole range of accident in both spheres.

Thus accident is essentially *a failure of purpose* somewhere. But beyond this explanation Aristotle does not go; he does not attempt to explain *why* purpose should fail. He accepts the Irrational and defines it so far, without attempting to go behind it.

The stress which he lays on the purpose of man has coloured his whole conception of the use of the accidental in tragedy. At one point he actually goes so far as to say that the Irrational must be excluded from the action of tragedy[3], and several times he speaks of "the rule of probability or necessity," which

[1] *Phys. l.c.*

[2] *τὸ αὐτόματον*, meaning something which occurs without a recognisable cause. The English word *automatic* is misleading as a translation, because it has acquired the additional connotation of something which is sure to occur, something on which we can reckon. This is absolutely contradictory to the meaning of the Greek.

[3] *Poet.* XV. 7.

is all-important in his eyes (IX. 1, X. 3, XV. 6 and 7). Yet he knows well the value of the "Startling" (*τὸ ἐκπληκτικόν*), and would like to have it; only it must be combined with the Inevitable; "events will seem the more terrible and pitiful" when they "come on us by surprise," "and the effect will be heightened when, at the same time, they follow from one another; the tragic wonder will be the greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident" (XIV. 8). Then the effect of surprise in tragedy is that of a discovery of something which might have been expected, or even of a rediscovery of something once known and forgotten, *i.e.* exactly that effect which *Iliad* XXIV presents so brilliantly. In fact, to Aristotle the sequence or chain is the thing; event must arise out of event and action out of action according to the rule of probability or necessity (XIV. 6 and 7). Sequence of character is all in all to him and he will not have it sacrificed to anything.

At the same time he was too discerning to ignore the enormous potentialities of the Startling in a play, following the enormous part which the Irrational does have in our lives. He therefore introduces it in the following way:

Every act must be "in character"; but the *result* of any act may be irrational and therefore surprising, in the sense that it produced something which the actor did not expect.

Starting from this general rule, we get two subdivisions, corresponding to our original division of the "Automatic" and "Tyche," accidents in the sphere of Nature and accidents in the sphere of human action, namely:

(*a*) The unexpected (and unintended) result of a necessary or probable *action* of a creature, *man*, who is endowed with choice and consciousness. Thus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the messenger arrives to give news which he hopes will comfort Oedipus, but contrives to tell him just what will make him utterly miserable; his action in coming to speak is extremely probable: its results quite unintended. Here there is something more than the merely Surprising, as we had it in *Iliad* XXIV; there is a real element of the Irrational: why does this curious result come about from a well-intentioned action? We cannot say: it is inexplicable.

(*b*) The unexpected result of *an occurrence or event in Nature*, which occurrence or event is itself either necessary or probable. Such an occurrence would be *e.g.* the existence of birthmarks on a child (according to the Greeks very probable in themselves); such birthmarks might lead to a most unexpected recognition of one person by another.

But Aristotle in the main body of his work definitely rules out from his model tragedy any act or occurrence in itself improbable; the accidental element must not be in the original thing, but only in that which springs from it, the result; especially would he rule out the unintended result of an originally improbable action or event. Thus it is an illegitimate use of accident when the unexpected recognition of Iphigenia is brought about by Orestes being 'made to say' what it is not natural for him to say—contrast the words uttered by Jocasta, whereby she betrays to Oedipus the secret of Laïus' murder; they were natural[1] to her at that

[1] See Part IV, p. 202.

moment, though the result of them was most unexpected.

Thus Aristotle is far more strict in his limitations to the use of accident in tragedy than are the moderns; the effects of his strict theory may be seen in the drama of Racine. We do indeed still accept the view of Aristotle as regards character; we revolt from any action that cannot be seen to flow naturally and inevitably from a given character; but we do not revolt, as Aristotle seems to have done, from the introduction of an occurrence in nature (as distinct from a human action) in itself neither necessary nor probable. We like our characters to be in sequence, but we do not exclude everything except character in making up the tragic action; we contemplate not only man but also his environment. In this way our tragedy undoubtedly becomes truer, more real than the type suggested by Aristotle. Indeed, in attempting to limit the Irrational in this very special way, Aristotle gave his approval to one of the weakest elements in Greek tragedy; for the "recognitions" are apt to become exceedingly artificial and wearisome[1]; but it is difficult to invent many natural plots where an entirely unexpected result shall flow from a probable action or occurrence, and Greek tragedians were therefore forced to use the "recognition" over and over again in order to get any element of surprise at all in their plays. Euripides uses and misuses the "recognition" more than any other Greek tragic poet, and we cannot help suspecting himself became heartily tired of it; but this frequent use was

[1] The "recognition" is a survival of a religious act; see Harrison, *Themis*, p. 343 (Professor Murray's Excursus).

probably due to his having a truer idea of the power of the accidental in life than either Aeschylus or Sophocles. As if to experiment he introduces accident of other kinds in a somewhat bizarre and helpless way, chiefly unexpected entries of new characters on the scene who alter the action[1]. But he is rather a 'prentice hand at this sort of thing, and for effective use of the really unexpected and improbable event we have to wait till Shakespeare[2].

Nevertheless, with that curious genius for self-criticism which characterises Aristotle, we find him making just this admission and addition which we have been discussing. Having exhausted the idea of the sequence of the Probable and Necessary, and confined the Irrational within the strictest limits, towards the end of the *Poetics* he virtually revises his whole position (XXIV; XXV. 5 and *fin.*). What, after all, is really the Improbable? The really improbable thing would be for a man to go through life and never meet with an accident; "it would be very improbable if improbable things did not happen to men"; and again, "it is probable that a thing may happen contrary to probability" (XXV. 17). He would seem thus to suggest that as improbable things do occasionally happen in life, therefore they may occasionally be inserted in a tragedy; the justification would be that a great effect was gained thereby (XXIV. 8)[3]. Such

[1] *E.g.* the too opportune return of Herakles from Hades in *Her. Fur.* 514.

[2] *E.g.* Cordelia's death; on which see Bradley, *Shakespearian Tragedy*[2], 1905, p. 322 *sqq.*

[3] "The element of the wonderful ought to be introduced into tragedy," and he admits that the wonderful "depends for its chief effects on the

a great effect[1] profoundly stirs our emotions (Cordelia's death in *King Lear*).

But Aristotle goes even further than this. We had started with four categories of things: the Necessary, the Probable, the Improbable, the Impossible. Now, though it is convenient to speak of the Irrational as though it only meant the Improbable (3), yet strictly it includes both (3) and (4), the Improbable and the Impossible; for the Impossible also is decidedly irrational. In chapters XXIV, XXV Aristotle suddenly extends it to include not only the Impossible, but even the Absurd (XXIV. 8–10). The Absurd is the furthest degree of the Impossible: it is what cannot even be *conceived of* as happening. In fact, there is a series of gradations in the Irrational; a thing can be very slightly improbable, rather improbable, or so highly improbable as to be virtually impossible; finally it can be so impossible as to be absurd. Now Aristotle, as we might expect, usually prefers as slight a degree of the Irrational as need be; just as he prefers the Probable to the Improbable, so does he prefer the Improbable to the Impossible, and so again the simply Impossible to the Absurd. He would prefer to have a drama where there is merely a question of birthmarks to one which introduces Scylla, because Scylla is a frankly impossible creature; but he would prefer Scylla to a tragedy based on the statement that 2 and 2 do not make 4.

irrational." This could just be made to justify the fall of Mitys' statue, even without any idea of superhuman intention.

[1] *τὸ θαυμαστόν*. In IX. 12 *τὸ θαυμαστόν* is used of tragic "wonder," quite a different sense, corresponding to our fairy-story element in art; there is only a verbal contradiction between IX. 12 and XXIV. 8.

Still he will admit the Impossible and the Absurd. On what conditions? He says he will admit it if it is *πιθανόν*, acceptable, plausible; indeed, he says he would rather have "probable impossibilities" than "improbable possibilities" (XXIV. 10). The word "plausible" is a very vague word; but he would seem to indicate—what is an undoubted fact—that under certain circumstances the human brain recognises an inward, as well as an outward logic, what we might call a logic of the emotions. This logic of the emotions can perfectly well afford to disregard certain material facts of a non-essential nature. This process, says Aristotle, is justifiable for the poet if the end he gains is really worth while. Two examples, one from Aristotle, and one other, will illustrate what he means, and will serve to show how unnecessarily poetry would limit itself, if it excluded the Impossible merely because impossible. In XXIV. 8 he says of the Pursuit of Hector in the *Iliad* that "it would be ludicrous if placed on the stage—the Greeks standing still and not joining in the pursuit, and Achilles waving them back." (He is in process of showing that epic will admit still more of the Impossible than drama, which seems true.) But this "impossibility" is exceedingly probable if we take into account Achilles' character only; Achilles' desire would be to act thus. Now Achilles' character is from the poetic point of view *the* subject in hand. The truth that his desire could not *in fact* come to fruition is totally unimportant. The actions of certain other Greeks might prevent it; but we are not considering the tragedy of those other Greeks, we are considering Achilles. Therefore we are justified in

isolating the action of Achilles; to do this really would be an impossible thing, but we do it imaginatively. Action on earth is so mixed that it is often essential to provide this kind of artificial isolation, just as scientists will only experiment under "pure" conditions. The poet has often to create "impossible" conditions to illustrate a higher "probability."

Again, *Faust* II is impossible (as fact), but acceptable, because the impossible conditions postulated are only the setting for a higher "probability" (the conflict and place of man in the universe).

The same of all the adventures of Odysseus; impossible (thaumaturgic), as fact, they yet illustrate the probabilities in Odysseus' character. This brings us to a final point, which Aristotle makes in the course of his argument; he makes a special reservation for that particular form of the Impossible which we may call the miraculous or thaumaturgic (XXIV. 8 and 10 *fin.*); this is the fairy-story element and it undeniably gives us the most exquisite pleasure. It has a special place in literature and is not only admissible, but welcome. The best instance I know of a story whose pleasure depends on the wildly absurd is Hans Andersen's *The Tinder Box*: which by being rubbed once brought to its owner a dog "with eyes like big teacups"; twice a dog "with eyes as large as the wheels of a watermill"; and thrice, a dog "with eyes each one as large as the Round Tower of Copenhagen: and it keeps turning round its head exactly like a mill-wheel."

Part IV. The Use of Accident in Literature

Accident and will (character) must have relations; they must not be discrete, but have organic connection. In a work of art, where accident intervenes, it must influence the course of the action; it must not run a comet-like path, breaking the action, or, if it intrudes, as does a comet from an outside void, it must draw with it, or at least turn from their course, the bodies which it meets; it is a new factor received into the action, deflecting it. The action itself may be likened to a river, which meets all sorts of obstacles in its path; yet, however altered the nature of its course according to the obstacles which it encounters, it does in the end reach the sea. Accidents happen to us and change our lives, making that flow backwards which flowed forwards, or sending us headlong down precipices in rushing confusion; yet there is an irresistible power in us which shows itself in spite of accident, and seeks its own end through the most tortuous windings or over the most sullen obstacles, and is as powerful to wear away the obstacle as the obstacle was to turn its course. This is the eternal conflict of character and accident, of will and the order of the world against which will has to work.

If the literary artist wishes to include accident in his creations, he must make it an organic part of his work; it may not be inserted mechanically or capriciously, it must be *used*. But if it is used, there is almost no degree of the improbable which cannot be offered to the reader and accepted by him; indeed, we

have seen that even the entirely impossible can be made acceptable, though it is preferable for the artist to obtain his effects without demanding credence for the entirely improbable, unless it is of a marvellous or thaumaturgic nature; this, indeed, has a special fascination for us. It is preferable, because at any moment the critic may reawaken in the reader, and put awkward questions, which are not really to the point, but which distract attention from what the artist is saying.

There are no hard and fast lines to be drawn between accidents probable and accidents improbable, an infinite series of gradations leads from one to the other. Beginning with accidents of the most likely nature, I suggest some headings under which accident could be ranged in literature, though these headings do not by any means exhaust the possible uses of accident for the artist.

(1) *The likely accident that gives opportunity for the action or that hurries the action or that helps or reinforces the action.* These are only three phases of the same thing. A good example of the accident giving opportunity for the action is the finding of the body of Polydoros by the woman who goes to fetch the lustral water in the *Hecuba*[1]; this is simply a piece of mechanism to bring on the second half of the action; it is not truly a part of the action, for no one's *will* is involved. But it falls quite incontestably within the limits of likely accident; for, if we consider the circumstances, it would have been very unlikely if someone had not discovered the body rather soon, given the short distance of the tents from the shore, the number

[1] See the *Hecuba*, p. 119.

of persons in the camp, etc. It is true that Euripides makes just the right person discover the body; but consider how legitimate this is. If some stranger had discovered the body, it would yet have been brought to the Greek camp, and Hecuba would have recognised it, perhaps an hour later, but that is totally unimportant. By making the right person discover it, all these possible details are swept out of sight; they are without significance and would not have altered the ultimate result; therefore they need not exist for the dramatist. This accident might be defined as one possibility out of a number of possibilities (*i.e.* a number of different people might have found the body), all of which, though different in themselves, agree in bringing about one result—the knowledge of Hecuba that her son has been murdered; or, to put the matter on an even wider basis, the murder of Polydoros itself is only one out of many possibilities, which would all have agreed in their result; *e.g.* something might have happened not to Polydoros, but to Hecuba's other child, Kassandra, and the effect would have been the same—Hecuba, outraged beyond endurance, would have taken her revenge.

I note an exactly similar principle in a certain type of detective story. The criminal, of extraordinary astuteness, covers up all his tracks except one; at one point he gives himself away; it would be incredible if he did not; that one accident is no unlikely reversal of all that has happened, but the working of the law of probability; it is one out of an immense number of possible and probable self-betrayals on the part of the criminal, and the author has every right to select that one, if he chooses, rather than another.

So too in the *Odyssey*, in the scene where Odysseus, saved from the great storm, is sleeping by the seashore; Nausicaä and her maidens are playing ball near by, and their ball falls into the water; they cry aloud and this wakens Odysseus[1]. This is a trivial, but very likely accident, used as a piece of mechanism to bring Odysseus into contact with Nausicaä. It is not part of the action of the *Odyssey*, but it gives opportunity for the action.

The likely accident that hurries an action. Again we start from the principle of a number of different possibilities which all agree in their ultimate result; but one may bring it about much *sooner* than another: the artist chooses the one that brings it about quickly. This is partly for purely practical reasons; the author cannot keep his audience in the theatre till dawn of day, going through and rejecting every possible contingency. But even if he had time, nothing would be gained by it; the final occasion would seem not a bit more likely, because all others had been first rejected. F. W. Schlegel has proved with convincing clearness that stage-time (and the same applies to novels, etc.), is "ideal" time, not actual time; that nothing is easier for our minds than to bridge immense real intervals in a moment of thought; that the truly difficult thing for us would be to apply the standard of real time to a play; an interval of twenty years between the acts causes us not the slightest difficulty, an interval of ten minutes while the characters are idle is intolerable because it attempts to give us the real; therefore the characters may go long journeys behind the scenes,

[1] *Od.* VI. 110–18.

marshal armies, prepare conspiracies, with incredible speed, as long as they do not offend against "ideal" time. Without the slightest difficulty our mind selects significant moments of time and joins them to one another, absolutely disregarding all that comes between, though the moments may be really only moments and the forgotten intervals really years. Now it often happens that in a series of years an accident may occur which has far-reaching consequences; it might happen at any moment: it actually does at one. Then the artist may disregard all the time when it does not happen, and proceed straight to the moment when it does; he telescopes the years up. An example will make this clear, and a very good example it is of the use of accident. The end of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is extraordinarily powerful. I refer to the scene where Rawdon discovers his wife Becky decked out in diamonds to gratify Lord Steyne's guilty pleasure, while he himself was supposed to be safely away in prison for debt. It is powerful by reason of its combination of the accidental with the truly probable, and this, as Aristotle says, is "of the most wonderful effect[1]." Becky might have gone on intriguing with Lord Steyne for years, but she was almost bound one day to overreach herself and make the fatal mistake; the accident of her discovery, then, is only one out of a great number of similar possible accidents, and they would all have flowed from one source, her own character. Nay more, the actual accident, when it does come, is still more directly the result of character; it is the kindness of Lady Jane which sets Rawdon free at this moment,

[1] *Poet.* IX. 12, *θαυμασιώτατα δοκεῖ.*

and Lady Jane has always been good and kind. Therefore, though the accident is most truly an accident, it is also most truly probable at some time. The extraordinary effect is simply this: the tortuous career of Becky is successful for so long, and then the artist suddenly leaps over all remaining possibilities and proceeds straight to the one final inevitability, and so her career comes to sudden and ghastly ruin. The accident has hurried the inevitable moment, but the moment was bound to come.

The likely accident that helps or reinforces an action. This is similar to the accident that hurries an action, except that it is not so closely concerned with the time-factor. In the *Ajax* of Sophocles the Chorus just fail to come to Ajax in time to prevent him from falling on his sword[1]. The chances for and against their arriving in time were perhaps exactly equal; and, if they had, the probability of their preventing him from slaying himself was perhaps exactly balanced against the chance of their not being able to do so; so strong was his determination to die that day[2] that he might very likely have achieved his purpose even if they had come up at that moment. Still, this is uncertain; the hope is that they will prevent him, by reaching him in time; the fact that they could not, that this moment was given to him, that he found himself alone in a deserted spot, helped his determination to die; it was *the fatal opportunity*, and because he seized it, we are all the more impressed by the strength of his will to die.

[1] Soph. *Ajax*, 866 *sqq.*

[2] It is only on this day that he is to be possessed by the desire to die; on the morrow the danger will be over; see l. 756.

This can be pushed by the artist to extraordinary lengths and give wonderful effects. The opportunity can be presented as the *only* possible one; the hero instantly seizes it; then we get an overwhelming sense of the irresistible determination of the hero, *i.e.* the accident has helped the meaning of the play or novel. Some of the effects of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles depend on this principle. Jokasta, in telling the story of Laïus' death at the hands of robbers, casually mentions that it happened at a place "where three roads meet[1]." These chance words are instantly caught up by Oedipus, because he himself had once done a dreadful deed at a place "where three roads meet." Then gradually it appears that it was Oedipus who murdered Laïus, and then that Laïus was his own father. But had not Oedipus been so quick and determined to ask about these chance words, the truth need never have appeared. That Jokasta should have said them at that moment was an accident, trivial, but fraught with immense consequences because Oedipus seizes it; there is a kind of perverse fatality about it. But this sense of fatality is slight compared with the sense of the character of Oedipus, the man who ruined himself in the search for truth.

This example exactly illustrates the Aristotelian theories, and in all probability, as the *Oedipus Tyrannus* was even in antiquity the most famous of all plays, Aristotle's theories were actually formed from it. In the first place, the accident is a natural one; there is nothing improbable or unlikely in Jokasta's describing the place of the accident; yet she has no particular

[1] l. 716, ἐν τριπλαῖς ἀμαξιτοῖς.

intention in saying them; they are therefore both natural and truly accidental. But Oedipus seizes on them with intention, because he thinks they are a clue, which will contribute to the truth; in other words, man's will makes use of the accidents it meets. Yet the consequences which flow from this clue are entirely different from what Oedipus intended; in other words, man is not master of accident or circumstance, there is *a failure of purpose*. This is tragic in the highest degree; for that man should wish to do right, and only find he has succeeded in doing wrong, is a tragic truth, and the momentous part which unavoidable accident plays in this result is not the least tragic thing about it.

Because the words of Jokasta are natural, they may be classed as an entirely likely accident, and to a certain extent distinguished from *e.g.* the original accident which brought Oedipus to Thebes, the only city whither he ought not to have come. Such an accident as that is much more improbable in itself and much less easy to justify. In this particular case Aristotle perhaps would have felt no qualms; he would have said that th original irrational element preceded the action of t play and lay outside it. The nature of Greek m made it almost impossible to avoid such improbabili as long as Greek tragedians felt themselves rest to myth for their plots. Modern criticism is som stricter, seeing that the artist is under no such pulsion, and it would condemn such a story as de on a very improbable coincidence. But apart preliminaries—and they are only preliminaries of accident in the play may be called superb

The device of an unintentional disclos

to immense results is repeated in lines 937 *sqq.*; the messenger gives news to Oedipus with the express purpose of helping him, but it turns out that this news is the one thing that ruins Oedipus; the accidental element lies in the fact that the messenger does not know the import of his own words. Indeed, there is more than a failure of purpose, there is sheer mockery of it. One is almost reduced to saying that it is "no use trying," if accident makes such havoc of our good intentions, and undoubtedly the helplessness of the righteous man is the grand theme of the *Oedipus*. Nevertheless, though accident can ruin Oedipus and bring him to shame and despair, it cannot impair his will; his life is altered and broken: his character remains. This is the net result of the conflict between will and circumstance.

(2) *The likely accident which deals with and illuminates a whole character.* Again this begins before the last category ends. The artist puts before us a certain conception, say, of character, and we feel more and more sensible of it as the play proceeds: suddenly an accident happens which puts the conception beyond doubt. Accidents which end plays and end them with the hero's death are often of this nature and absolutely right and legitimate. *The Mill on the Floss* ends with an accident; a huge piece of wreckage, loosened by the flood, bears down on the boat in which Tom has rescued his sister Maggie and they are both drowned. It might seem perverse in George Eliot to invent this gratuitous accident at the end, and many would say it is an instance of the morbid love of writers "to make their plots end unhappily." I think

it is in the nature of a proof. Tom's love for Maggie was the greatest thing in his life, strong enough to defy death, if need were. But there is not in his life an occasion when on the one side stands death and on the other his love, so that he can exercise a deliberate choice between them; there seldom is, as a matter of fact, such an opportunity for deliberately proving the heroic in our lives: yet the heroic exists. To create an opportunity for a considered choice between death and love is apt to be highly artificial[1]; it is less artificial to let death come by accident in such circumstances as only to suggest the proof of love. This does not mean that Tom could in fact have escaped by sacrificing Maggie, yet the accident suggests that he would not have done so, and the suggestion is sufficient. We may therefore say that it is justified as a proof of the action of the book.

(3) We now come to accidents which can no longer be classed as likely; they are improbable. They may be more or less so; likeliness or unlikeliness, as we have seen, is a question of degree. But we may say roughly that there are accidents which cause consternation to the spectator. Such an accident is *unprepared*. It is not necessarily inartistic, for it is not untrue; how many accidents in real life are not overwhelming surprises to us! But it is the most difficult of all to use properly. On the whole, ancient tragedy is inferior to other forms of literature, *e.g.* the modern novel, in its use of unlikely accident;

[1] Such forced choices are characteristic of the fine school of French classical tragedy, Racine, Corneille, Voltaire, V. Hugo, and give a somewhat artificial tone to the works of these artists. Nor are all the plays of Euripides free from such forced situations.

it is hardly discoverable in Sophocles and Racine; but Shakespeare is rather fond of it.

We may perhaps distinguish between the merely unexpected and the really improbable accident. One of the most striking examples of the unexpected accident is in Anthony Trollope's *Last Chronicles of Barchester*. Trollope overhead in his club two men saying that they were sick and tired of Mrs Proudie, the wife of the Bishop of Barchester (she had already figured largely in two previous novels of the Barchester series), and then and there he vowed he would go home and kill her. This he instantly proceeded to do, in what are certainly two of the very best chapters he ever wrote. He makes her die of heart-disease with great suddenness, *i.e.* really by an unexpected accident (heart-disease was invented at that point). But though unexpected, absolutely unprepared, as the circumstances show it must have been, the incident does not seem in the least unnatural, and this is because Trollope proceeds to *use* the accident he wilfully invented. He uses it in this way; in the first place, the description of the emotions which bring on the fatal attack of the disease give us a far more profound and sympathetic insight into the character of a woman like Mrs Proudie than we get in any other place in these books; and not only is the inner soul of Mrs Proudie laid bare to us, but the shock of her death on her husband, the Bishop, is used for exactly the same purpose in his case; the description of his thoughts on hearing it is masterly and most intimately adds to our realisation of his character and the whole of his past career. It may be added that the Bishop

gradually fades out of the book, which is exactly what would have been the effect on such a man of such an accident; it makes him unimportant. But the really striking thing that the accident of Mrs Proudie's death does is to awaken a sympathy and pity for Mrs Proudie. Hitherto she has appeared only in the most unpleasant light, but the surprise of her death brings home to us the suggestion that there might be her side to the question after all.

Again, in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* there are two instances of the good use of unlikely accident. It was a mere chance that made Lucy Snow meet a chatterbox like Ginevra Fanshawe on the boat going to Belgium, and that that chatterbox could give her just the information she so sorely needed about the school in Brussels; but it is only a woman like Lucy Snow who would have had the tremendous determination, which seized that careless chatter and turned it to its own desperate needs, and we get a sense alike of Lucy's utter forlornness (if she had to be so indebted to the stray words of a silly young girl), and of the tremendous will-power which carried her into Madame's drawing-room and forced the place of nursery governess from Madame. Again, Lucy meets in Brussels her old playmate, Dr John; but for long she does not tell him who she is, and in her treatment of Dr John we get an impression of a character reticent, almost secretive, at any rate reserved to an extraordinary degree, and reserved partly because it will not accept anything except the finest sort of love from others, and with an amazing mixture of instinctive pride and deliberate principle draws back from claiming acquaintance with

a facile nature like Dr John. Yet it must be admitted that it was the extreme of improbability that Lucy should find Dr John at Brussels; nevertheless it would be a foolish critic who should find anything to cavil at in this unlikely accident; so true is the use to which it is put.

An excellent example of the right use of most unlikely accident is the *Odyssey*. Extraordinary adventures fall to Odysseus and many of them: he overcomes them all by sheer force of character. But they do not leave him the same as they found him. As he faces each he becomes at once more cautious and more daring, until when he reaches Ithaca there is in him that peculiar combination of amazing caution and reckless fierceness which dominates the situation. He never gives the suitors a loop-hole if he can help it; he had done this with the Cyclops[1], but he never did it again. He takes every needful risk and none that is unnecessary; he is the type for all time of a man who has passed through the tremendousness of life and battled with it, and emerged altered and yet unbroken, changed and not changed.

(4) Finally there remains *the symbolic use of accident*, whether probable or improbable. Here we may choose one example from ancient literature and two brilliant examples from modern.

In the *Aeneid*, in the final combat between the doomed Turnus and Aeneas, Turnus discovers that by accident he has taken Metiscus' sword instead of his own (XII. 735); this "treacherous sword" (*perfidus*

[1] *Od.* IX. 491 *sqq.* When he could have got away with the remnant of his men from the blinded Cyclops, he madly challenges him with his voice from the boat, and nearly gets the boat sunk by a huge rock which the Cyclops throws in the direction of the voice.

ensis, l. 731) breaks in two against the divine armour of Aeneas. Now nothing really depends on Turnus' mistake in taking the wrong sword; his own, though given by a god, must also have been shattered against that armour. But it is prophetic and symbolic in the highest degree; it shows with exceptional poignancy the picture of the man betrayed. All that could save Turnus has left him; his sister, the nymph Juturna, has been chased away by angry gods, Jupiter himself is turned against him, now even inanimate things conspire to ruin him: his own trusted sword is not at hand. "And when he saw an unfamiliar blade and his right hand defenceless, he fled more swiftly than the wind," as well he might and needs he must, for all too plainly death is now upon him.

Again, in Ibsen's *Master Builder* we have the picture of the man who has lost faith in his old ideals through the strain of ambition, grief and business, and yet who retains the capacity and the desire for the ideal. Such desire can be re-awakened, and as the play proceeds we feel pretty certain that the old ideals, the old fire, is once more inspiring the heart of Solness: he defies all sense, all prudence, apparently all right, to climb a ladder and place a wreath on the top of the building he has just completed, as once before he did in the most inspired moment of his youth, falls, and is killed, and instantly we know it was so: the ideal had again become to him the greatest force in life; the accident of death has proved it. Would it not have been equally proved if he had climbed the ladder and come down in safety? No; so much is here at stake that we require the severest possible test; death is in

the nature of a final proof; nothing else could be so certain and anything less would have tampered with our certainty. Moreover, the symbolism goes deep; the ideal is the unattainable, and those who seek it perish; to a successful Solness descending to earth in safety we should have denied the claim to the true ideal and we should have attributed to him only some lesser aim; but his misfortune satisfies us, we can now afford to credit him with everything. And with a mastery of imagination Ibsen has equated the physical and the spiritual conditions; given the age and nature of Solness it was madness in him to climb the ladder, and this perversity and recklessness mirrors the recklessness which marks the soul's pursuit of the unattainable; the sense of waste is integral to both situations, and the sense of waste is chiefly conveyed by an accident which could have been avoided.

My third example is from *Jane Eyre*; but before analysing it I will remark that *Jane Eyre* also gives us a very good instance of a bad use of accident in literature. This is the coincidence through which Mary, Diana and St John turn out to be Jane's first cousins. It is thoroughly bad for two reasons; it is altogether too unlikely, for it is a million to one against Jane having lighted on her own unknown cousins when she seeks refuge, and against those cousins living in the exact spot in all England where her strength finally deserts her and she sinks senseless on the doorstep. But it is also false in a more damaging way; it contributes nothing to the action; it alters nothing in the relations of Jane to any other character; all her real relations to Mary, Diana, St John and Rochester are

quite independent of this cousinship. Her sharing of her fortune with her cousins is perfectly otiose; we knew long ago Jane Eyre would under any circumstances do just such a thing. The whole accident of the blood-relationship and the will might be sacrificed without disturbing a single element of the book; it is merest mechanism.

On the other hand, in chapter XXIII there is a very fine example of the symbolic use of accident. It is immediately after the first great crisis, the great scene in the garden where Jane declares her love for Rochester and knows she is loved.

"But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set and we were all in shadow: I could scarcely see my master's face, near as I was. And what ailed the chestnut tree? it writhed and groaned; while wind roared in the laurel walk, and came sweeping over us.

"'We must go in,' said Mr Rochester: 'the weather changes. I could have sat with thee till morning, Jane.'

"'And so,' thought I, 'could I with you.' I should have said so perhaps, but a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking, and there was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal, and I only thought of hiding my dazzled eyes against Mr Rochester's shoulder.

"The rain rushed down. He hurried me up the walk, through the grounds, and into the house....

"Before I left my bed in the morning, little Adèle came running in to tell me that the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away."

Now the use of this accident is here not only justified, it is a most brilliant piece of construction; it is highly symbolic and prophetic. Jane, whose spirit aches for a refuge and an answering affection seems at last to have found that sure haven: Rochester's love will cherish her. But that haven holds disaster and ruin; the great horse-chestnut, the symbol of strength and sheltering power, is rent from top to bottom. So Rochester's strength, in which her love has trusted, will be neither strength nor refuge to her, but only an agony and a ruinous storm. And there is subtly conveyed to us in the physical danger which Jane and Rochester had run under the chestnut, the very symbol and picture of the spiritual danger which is lowering over them. The pause in the struggle, the long-sought-for moment of peace, is but that treacherous silence which Nature sends before the coming storm.

Part V. Conclusion

Accident not only may, but must, have its place in tragedy or in any other form of literature which claims to be a true reflection of human life. But it must be organically part of the action; it must not disregard the dramatic unity of the play. But what is dramatic unity? This is a most difficult question to answer and many critics have tried their hands at it from the day that it first occurred to Aristotle[1]. Perhaps a good definition is F. W. Schlegel's "the absolute

[1] *Poet.* VIII.

beginning of tragedy is the condition (Bewährung) of freedom, the absolute end the recognition of necessity (Anerkennung der Notwendigkeit)." This amounts to saying that there are recognisable points where the activity of any single human will, or closely interconnected group of human wills, begins and ends; when the play begins the will is "free" to act: it ends when it becomes clear that its activity is exhausted or impossible. One would like to add as a rider that a dramatic unity also ends when the activity of the human will is completed or effective, and this better fits such plays, for instance, as Goethe's *Faust* (though, of course, for Mephistopheles the play ends with "the recognition of necessity"). Such points for departure and conclusion of the activity of the will might lie as far apart as the birth and death of the hero, or even further apart in the case of a mission, a hatred, or a duty passed on from father to son, or from fathers to sons; this permits of the history of a nation being treated as a dramatic unity, and it is obviously necessary to allow this possibility to drama. But in other cases, the two moments, *i.e.* the beginning and end of the will-activity, might be very close together; one hour could suffice to arouse in a man mortal anger, ending, say, in murder, and to let that anger pass into remorse and repentance; such an hour would be stuff for tragic treatment. It simply depends on when the will is roused to act, when it ceases to do so.

Therefore accident must not break, though it may alter or deflect, the working of a human will. When it breaks off the continuity of human determination, a play ends. Tragedy very often ends with death,

because the human will is so immensely strong that very little except death has power to interrupt it.

But though nothing must absolutely break the human will or the play will stop, the human will, in its turn, cannot ride roughshod over circumstance; as a mere matter of fact, it does not. Therefore, to introduce accident which fails to influence the human will is radically false. Here lies the great failure of melodrama; accident after accident happens: at the end the hero is as virtuous, as tender, as brave as ever. Now this is incredible; we may say he would either have to be less or more so; he would, in real life, either emerge from such an ordeal a broken reed, or refined as in a fire; but he could not be the same. It is not the number of incidents that spoils melodrama, but the failure to use them; they are inorganic. Asked to repeat the plot of a melodrama most people would say that they could not remember it: "too much happened"; but this impression is simply because there was no unity interconnecting characters and circumstances.

Therefore not every accident is pertinent to a tragedy; but those accidents which go either to hasten or to reinforce or to alter the action of a human will are not only pertinent, but essential; without accident tragedy is untrue.

But it is equally untrue if it tries to include all and every accident. Every accident that happens in the world belongs by rights to some drama, but by no means to any particular drama. The underlying assumption all the time is that one human will or group of human wills and one activity thereof can be to a

certain extent treated as a thing apart, distinct from the whole will that is immanent in phenomena. The complementary assumption is that there is a Whole somewhere; then it follows that every accident is part of that immense Whole, has had or will have an influence on it at some point; the sum of accident influences the sum of will, and the sum of will must even now be attempting to deal with the sum of accident.

Now in History we have an art which attempts to describe this Whole, at least that portion of it which has actually occurred in the past. History is, as it were, the drama of the Whole; therefore *every* past accident is pertinent to it. As Aristotle curiously says, "History presents...all that happened within a period to one person or to many, little connected together as the events may be[1]." As a matter of fact, so little of the Whole is known that History itself rightly exercises a power of selection, very analogous to that of the dramatic artist, and chooses which incidents it shall treat, which neglect. Nevertheless, the perfect historian, unlike the perfect dramatist, would at least desire to include the sum of all actual accident in his work.

This brings us to a yet wider conception. There is another art, Philosophy; Philosophy attempts to deal with the whole of life and therefore includes the whole sum of accident, not only the past but the future as well; the justification for its speculative character is the deep-seated need of the human soul to attempt a synthesis of everything. Philosophy, if it reached its goal, would be able to explain accident. Meanwhile, until Philo-

[1] *Poet.* XXIII. 1.

hy shall have evolved an explanation, we will reject those false explanations, which postulate our own limited notions of either kindness or malignancy working directly through accident as an instrument with which to tutor the lives of men.

Tragedy, therefore, unlike History, selects and chooses the accidents with which it will deal, and again, unlike Philosophy, asks for no final explanation of them. The truest thing that tragedy does for us is to admit an unexplained element, a sense of mystery which we cannot fathom, and just because it lays more stress on this than does either History or Philosophy it is the most magnificent and supreme of all arts. Even in the most probable accident there is this inexplicable element: why did such an accident happen just at that moment, just when its occurrence is fraught with the most tremendous consequences? Why did Jokasta say those fatal words to Oedipus just at that moment? Why not to someone else or at another time? There is no answer to such a question. There *is* some hidden scheme, but it is a matter of faith, not of speculation. The tragic artist is a religious votary in his faith, a remorseless critic in his observation, optimist and pessimist alike, realist and idealist together. He determines neither to exclude accident nor to enthrone it above will; he goes out to meet accident, fully aware that it will change and deflect the course of things, yet convinced that that course of things will bear accident along with it: the dramatic unity of the Whole lies in the will of the Whole.

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