

KIERKEGAARD'S
CONCEPT OF THE
INTERESTING

THE AESTHETIC GULF IN
EITHER/OR I

Anthony Eagan

Kierkegaard's Concept of the Interesting

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Kierkegaard's Concept of the Interesting

The Aesthetic Gulf
in *Either/Or I*

Anthony Eagan

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List of Abbreviations

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

References to Kierkegaard's writings in English use the following standard sigla adapted from Mercer University Press's *International Kierkegaard Commentary* series:

- CA** *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- CI** *The Concept of Irony*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- CUP** *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- EO I** *Either/Or, I*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- FT** *Fear and Trembling*, in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- JC** *Johannes Climacus*, in *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- PF** *Philosophical Fragments*, in *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- POV** *The Point of View*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- R** *Repetition*, in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- SLW** *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- SUD** *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

TDIO *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

DANISH TEXTS

The corresponding volume and page number in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag) is provided wherever available.

SKS 1 *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer; Om Begrebet Ironi*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup og Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads, 1997).

SKS 2 *Enten - Eller. Første del*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads, 1997).

SKS 3 *Enten - Eller. Anden del*, Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads, 1997).

SKS 4 *Gjentagelsen; Frygt og Bæven; Philosophiske Smuler; Begrebet Angest; Forord*, Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads, 1997).

SKS 5 *Opbyggelige taler, 1843-44; Tre Taler ved tænkte Leiligheder*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads, 1998).

SKS 6 *Stadier paa Livets Vei*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads, 1999).

SKS 7 *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup (Copenhagen: Gads, 2002).

SKS 9 *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, and Johnny Kondrup (Copenhagen: Gads, 2004).

SKS 11 *Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen; Tvende ethisk-religieuse Smaa-Afhandlinger; Sygdommen til Døden; "Ypperstepræsten" - "Tolderen" - "Synderinden,"* ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Anne Mette Hansen, and Johnny Kondrup (Copenhagen: Gads, 2006).

Overture

How is one to understand the term *the crisis of modernity*? For most of us, it probably conveys a vague sense that we are adrift and without purpose, alienated from both nature and the society we inhabit, lacking in any worldly representatives but also unable to represent the world with any certainty, so acclimated to the secular that nihilism is more routine than faith, and under the impression that scientific reasoning explains most of the universe but not our own place within it. Assuming this generalisation is accurate, the word modernity itself may suggest the confluence of a specific historical time-period and the broad cultural attitudes and values (or lack thereof) of the population within that epoch. This would mean that modernity is the crisis, or that the crisis is modernity.

But when does modernity begin as a historical period? With Martin Luther and the printing press or with Rousseau and the French Revolution? With Bacon and Galileo or with Planck and Einstein? With Descartes or with Nietzsche? With *Hamlet* or with *Madame Bovary*? Is Don Quixote the first modern figure or the last remnant of the Middle Ages, when after all his whole life is lived in a refusal to see that he is in fact lost, a stranger to everyone he meets, a man so intensely driven by an obsolete idea that all who engage with him think his explicit agenda is a form of derangement having no connection to reality, and that as a result his overall purpose is a delusion designed to conceal that he has none?

The fact that historians, philosophers, anthropologists, art critics, and sociologists disagree on both the ‘when’ and the ‘what’ of modernity only reveals the lack of any definitive event or idea that can be seen as the proper turning point from the so-called Middle Ages to so-called modern times. Yet we know that Hamlet is a modern figure in the sense that he is unmoored, unable to reveal himself, suffering from an exacerbated intellect, indecisive, paranoid, possibly mad, and dreadfully aware of the fact that reason may go far in explaining the world but not his own situation, let alone the actions he is supposed to take. The same may be said of Faust, the underground man

of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, all of Kafka's characters, and the figures populating the novels of Flaubert as well as the plays and stories of Samuel Beckett.

For the moment, let me suggest an understanding of the term the crisis of modernity that goes one level deeper than the general sense outlined above—even while remaining vague enough to clarify very little (leaving that clarification to Kierkegaard in the chapters that follow). This slightly deeper level sees the crisis as a contradiction concerning authority. Slowly, over the course of time—as human intellectual endeavours, technologically advanced warfare, global trade, the rise of money, improvements in engineering and information-dissemination, and the development of universities and metropolises, all in combination, began to decentralise our picture of the universe, and to strip away the widespread notion of an anthropomorphic God as Lawgiver, Judge, and Prime Mover—artists and other deep thinkers began feel that no absolute authority existed. While there may have been earthly authorities such as parents, mayors, governors, kings, and popes, these were merely powers that were, rather than omnipotent beings to whom we willingly submitted in order to ground our own thinking and acting.

While this lack of authority may give one a sense of liberation, even free moral play with minimal stakes no matter the outcome, it generates a sort of cognitive dissonance. And here is the contradiction from which that dissonance arises: that, despite our relativism, we cannot shake the deep feeling that there is an absolute truth lurking somewhere, a cosmic judge or jury, even though our vision has been obscured and we know not where to look. We cannot shake the sense that there is something called *right thinking* and *right action*, even *right being*, and that we will be prosecuted either by eternity or the ledger of nature, which some call karma, or by an Intelligence we cannot fathom, or by the court of public opinion, or some other strange engine. And so we wait. And deliberate. And pontificate with false and fanatical assurance to convince ourselves of our own certainty.

Our sense of freedom becomes a burden, and our relativity and moral possibility generate anxiety. We amplify thinking and diminish passionate action, we grope to find a definitive commitment rather than relying on our intuitions, we reason with ourselves and then talk ourselves out of our own conclusions with equally logical counterpoints, we defer responsibility and outsource accountability, and all the while we keep seeking something undeniable that can adequately unify the jumble of our experiences and reveal some sort of significance behind their apparent randomness. We hope that this unifying factor would show us a direction, a way forward, a platform for action. And yet until we see that unifying purpose we cannot promote its outcome, so we think harder and continue to defer action.

Understood in this way, the crisis of modernity can be grasped as a feed-back loop in which the loss of our forms of faith due to excessive reasoning leads us to reason and reflect further, to probe more deeply, to doubt ourselves and the world to an even greater degree, to become more faithless and tentative, in a never-ending spiral into nothingness. As astronomer-physicist Sir Arthur Eddington wrote in his book *The Nature of the Physical World*, 'I am standing on a threshold about to enter a room. It is a complicated business. . . . Verily, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a scientific man to pass through a door. And whether the door be barn door or church door it might be wiser that he should consent to be an ordinary man and walk in rather than wait till all the difficulties involved in a really scientific ingress are resolved.' Walter Benjamin would later point out that with this passage Eddington sounds alarmingly like a character out of Kafka.

A glance at the most archetypal figures of the modern western imagination reveals a strange pattern connecting all of them: none are able to begin, none are able to marshal the material at hand and enter into their own lives. They are all archetypes of an inability to become archetypal and therefore to generate any authoritative worldview to leverage real decisions. All inhabit a threshold between thought and action. Hamlet, Faust, Tristram Shandy, the underground man, Kafka's Josef K and K and Gregor Samsa: all these men fall into a class that does not belong to itself. All are seeking rational access to something beyond the reach of reason. All make delays while looking for the red thread that will lead them out of their own self-inflicted predicaments, and yet, paradoxically, all have inherited this same predicament of self-infliction. And this is why each of these figures is so dizzying. Even Don Quixote falls into this classless class, in a way, since the archetype he takes as authoritative for his worldview and as the foundation of his judgments and decisions—the chivalrous knight—is outdated in his own time and puts him at odds with consensus reality. His beginning is a false start (aptly, his first sally in the novel is a false start: he returns home, recruits Sancho Panza, and then starts again), yet he proceeds along that errant path.

Having studied each of these figures in depth—most of whom will return in the main chapters of this book—and having pored over the first volume of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, it is now my belief that A, the main figure in that text, is as revelatory of the crisis as any character I have mentioned. The reading public simply does not classify him among this litany of representatives of the problem of representation because *Either/Or* is such a difficult book to digest. It is more dizzying than *Hamlet* or *The Castle*, and it is far more taxing on our intellect from page to page. If one were to place all of the characters listed so far on the same spectrum, with their distance from one another determined by the degree of their awareness of the crisis they are experiencing, then of course Don Quixote would be placed at the extreme

left of unawareness, with many of Kafka's characters in the middle, while Hamlet and Faust would be close together at the extreme right, somewhere near Dostoevsky's underground man. But place A on the spectrum and he is even more extremely to the right than anyone. Strangely enough, one could say that the goal of his life's work is to get back to the left—to a blissful forgetfulness of his own ontological-epistemic-moral crisis. The chapters that follow will reveal what I mean.

Kierkegaard certainly understood his own age as a crisis of authority emerging in the aftermath of European secularisation. For him, it was an ontological, epistemic, and ultimately moral crisis wherein self-consciousness is marked by an absence of integration with the milieu it is supposed to inhabit. The consequent prioritisation of aesthetic detachment, which he believed he witnessed as a dominant trend in contemporary philosophy and even public life, was for him a counter-productive response to and expansion of the crisis. His first real character and full-blown pseudonym, A, sometimes called the aesthete, is the uncanny representative Kierkegaard created to reveal to his readers how deep these problems lie—and how they concern all of us at the most profound existential levels. For Kierkegaard, A demonstrates “not existence, but existence-possibility oriented towards existence.” He is “brought so close that one almost feels how every moment is wasted in which a decision has not yet been reached. But the existence-possibility in the existing A does not want to be conscious of this and holds existence at bay by the most subtle of all deceptions, by thinking” (CUP 1:253; SKS 5:230).

Either/Or was Kierkegaard's first pseudonymous work, and he considered it the beginning of his authorship. Therefore, a thorough knowledge of its workings will not only illuminate the subtlest contours of the crisis as Kierkegaard saw it, but will also provide a background for all of the many writings that follow. The first volume, the main contents of which are written from the perspective of the aesthete we have already identified as the identity-less A, consists of seven expositions on different artistic media and character types. As each exposition reveals progressively deeper forms of individual alienation and groundlessness, the aesthete grows increasingly obsessed with ‘*the interesting*’—Kierkegaard's name for the discrepancy between human concealment and disclosure. From an initial attempt to regain sensual integration through music, to the culminating quest for selfish pleasure through a perverted diary of seduction, these expositions highlight the aesthete's growing belief that ‘justice is done to aesthetics’ only when individuals attempt to make life *interesting*.

My book begins by detailing the complex of issues signified by this claim, first by showing how the *interesting* came to be the quintessential modern criterion, and next by detailing the moral and psychological dangers involved in pursuing the *interesting* over other human considerations. In a

close explication of Kierkegaard's text, I show the insufficiency of aesthetics to make sense of the fundamental inner-outer uncertainty governing modern consciousness. As the aesthete moves through the alienated conditions of doubt, guilt, pain, isolation, and boredom, his own subjective crisis becomes ever more apparent, triggering a spiral in which his original uncertainty widens *ad infinitum* and everything potentially authoritative is lost in a schizoid moral confusion of possibilities.

But before turning our attention to the text itself, it will be necessary to generate a context both for the more general idea of aesthetics as an intellectual enterprise and for the more specific concept of the *interesting* as a philosophically legitimate and well-established criterion within that enterprise. In the introductory chapter, then, I begin by laying out the basic impetus for the development of aesthetics within modern philosophy. Next, I show how the concept of the *beautiful*, which was the original aesthetic category, came to be countered in early German Romanticism by the concept of the *interesting*. Finally, I will develop a sense of Kierkegaard's own complicated grasp of what the concept of the *interesting* entails.

Including the seven main expositions penned by A, the first volume of *Either/Or* is in fact divided into nine total sections. Section one is a preface by a pseudonymous editor named Victor Eremita, who claims to have found a bundle of papers in his own beloved second-hand desk. According to his story, these papers were authored by two different individuals, the first being an aesthete and the second being an ethicist. The papers of the aesthete comprise the first volume, whereas those of the ethicist comprise the second. Victor adds that the ethicist's papers were easy to organise, since they consisted of three letters to the aesthete, the second of which presupposes the first, and the third of which presupposes the second. Victor claims that the aesthete's writings, on the other hand, were difficult to organise, given that they consisted of seven long expositions and hundreds of scraps of paper found scattered throughout the larger bundle. The scraps contained little aphorisms, bursts of thought, inspired declarations, and random adages, and they seemed to be written at different points in time and consequently under different moods and circumstances. Numerous scraps of thought even stand in direct contradiction to others. Victor's ultimate decision was to compile these *Diapsalmata*, as he calls them, and to place them foremost as a sort of prelude to the aesthete's more sustained pieces. These pithy, ironic, humorous, and rather despairing scraps of thought now constitute the second section of the book, or the first section of writings by the aesthete.

They are followed by seven sustained expositions (sections three through nine) in which the aesthete provides his insights on various forms of desire and pain, the expression-capacities of the different artistic media, a multiplicity personality type including Don Juan, Faust, and a modern Antigone, and

novel strategies for overcoming boredom and unhappiness through the maintenance of an intellectually stimulating and *interesting* lifestyle. The editor, Victor, claims that he has not rearranged the order of these seven sustained expositions. What appeared first in the bundle in his desk appears first in the volume, what appeared third appears third, and so forth. In reporting this detail, he notes his rationale: After scrutinising their contents, he could not discern whether the order in which he discovered the expositions had ‘chronological value or ideal significance’ (EO 1:7; SKS 2:15). In other words, not knowing whether the aesthete wrote the pieces in the extant sequence, or whether he or someone else arranged the pieces into this sequence according to some hidden purpose, and only after all seven were completed, Victor has let fate determine their arrangement for future readers.

Based upon the first of these two editorial revelations, I have decided to pass over the *Diapsalmata* section without examination or analysis. The haphazard placement of the scraps among the original bundle of papers, along with their arbitrary and at times inconsistent nature, could easily render a prolonged discussion of their contents somewhat convenient and biased to my larger purposes—as, being unable to discuss each scrap of thought, I could very easily select one sort of aphorism without providing a commentary on a contradictory one. I propose, instead, that my individual attention to each of the seven sustained expositions will retroactively illuminate the *Diapsalmata*, and will prepare the reader to understand better just how the aphorisms can be so contrary to one another, so capricious and so miscellaneous, so despairing and yet so comical, without betraying an inconsistency of character on the part of the aesthete: for his consistency as a character lies in his many contradictions and vacillations. Just as an overture is better appreciated when the arc of the opera is understood, so the *Diapsalmata* will be better appreciated when we have completed the exegesis and experienced the breadth and trajectory of the aesthete’s thought. The reader who, having read what follows here, has absorbed my line of argument and agreed or disagreed, should be able to turn to that little lyrical overture and enjoy the declarations as they should be enjoyed: like individual notes in a stormy but beautiful passage of prefatory music.

Based upon the second of Victor’s editorial revelations, I will operate under the premise that, as is the case with most individuals, and especially with most intellectuals, chronology contributes to and even determines the ideas and subject matter the aesthete investigates. We tend to derive our current perspective from our former failures and successes, from the shape our life and thought has taken, and our line of thinking is often renewed or rejected in the process. If those failures and successes have arisen from dependence upon a certain demonstrable attitude, such shape-changing effects usually only intensify. What is more, I believe that in bringing the issue of sequence

to our attention, Victor is not highlighting a doubt or expressing a reluctance so much as he is gently and indirectly prodding his readers to contemplate the relation of each exposition to the others, the better to judge for ourselves the interplay of cause and effect even within a sphere as personally arbitrary as aesthetics will prove to be.

For this reason, after my own introduction to aesthetics and the concept of the *interesting*, I will turn directly to the third section of *Either/Or*, which is A's first aesthetic exposition: a study of and encomium to Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*. Each subsequent chapter will then correlate to a subsequent exposition in the aesthete's collection of papers. Upon completing a case-by-case analysis of these expositions, I believe the reader will agree with me that the papers, as Victor Eremita discovered them, are indeed arranged in the same sequence in which they were written by the aesthete. The aesthete's trajectory will, by then, have been rendered obvious to us; and, as we will see, this trajectory is absolutely crucial to an understanding of what Kierkegaard understands to be the aesthetic worldview or 'sphere of existence.'

It is my opinion that no thorough exegesis of the first volume of *Either/Or* exists. Strangely enough, the only published monograph on *Either/Or* is *Between Nihilism and Faith*, by Karsten Harries, which leaves much of the important and worthwhile territory of the text unexplored. Helpful books on Kierkegaard's view of aesthetics include *The First Sphere*, by A.G. George, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, by George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, by Louis Mackey, and *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics*, by Sylvia Walsh. However, none of these provides an in-depth reading of *Either/Or* in light of all its richness and philosophical detail. Frankly, within the abundance of secondary literature devoted to Kierkegaard, we still do not have a complete and accurate depiction of the subtlety and dynamics of the aesthetic worldview: its origins and motivations, its ambitions, its seductions, its progress and dialectic, its moral dangers, and its psychological and emotional effects upon the aesthetically-oriented subject. Only by grasping the trajectory of the aesthetic enterprise—historically, anthropologically, psychologically—will readers fully appreciate why aesthetics is not at all a proper solution to the modern human predicament which Kierkegaard believes is constituted by doubt, relativity, anxiety, disenchantment, and ultimately despair.

This is not to say that *Either/Or* has not received wonderful scholarly attention in journals and anthologies and monographs about his larger authorship. Yet the aforementioned abundance of secondary literature exists because there is much to discuss about Kierkegaard on so many levels: as an individual, as flawed but morally oriented human being, as a leading Danish intellectual in dispute with his contemporaries, as a world-historical philosopher and theologian in conversation with the greatest philosophers and theologians in the

West, and as an author struggling to stress and address, perhaps more deeply than any preceding thinker, the fundamental questions and contradictions of human existence, desire, love, and ethical striving.

One of the most remarkable features of Kierkegaard's writings concerns the manifold layers of intent embedded in each of his works. In virtually all his published books, he was able to satisfy numerous objectives simultaneously—or to kill many birds with one stone. To take the famous instance of *Fear and Trembling*, one can read the text as a painful, beautiful, cryptic love-letter to the woman he both worshipped and spurned, Regine Olsen; but one can also read it as a Socratic response to the sophistical trends Kierkegaard felt he was witnessing in Denmark and abroad. One can read it as a refutation of either Kantian or Hegelian ethics (or both). One can read it as a reaction against philosophical system-building, as a polemical attack on crowd-thinking and the bourgeois quest for an easy life lived with minimum emotional risk and deferred responsibility (i.e. as an exposure of our tendency to hedge all existential bets). One can read it as an encomium to individuality, self-trust, and passionate intuition, or as a book about the question concerning the truest form of heroism. One can read it as an indirect communication in which the archetypes of Judaism are shown to be Christian prototypes, or as a terrific account of the paradox entailed in having a consciousness in the world, or as a potential eulogy on the lost transcendence within modernity. One can read *Fear and Trembling* as a work of theology or Biblical exegesis, as a manifestation of neurosis, as a commentary on the ordeal of silence, or as an intentionally failed attempt to understand the inner life of a terrifying figure such as Abraham. And the list of interpretive angles goes on.

A similar litany of interpretive angles is possible with respect to the central content of *Either/Or*. One such approach would be to place it within the framework of what is called Golden Age Denmark and thereby to read the book as an impassioned conversation with Danish Hegelians, theologians, and aestheticians such as Heiberg, Martensen, Sibbern, and Mynster. No doubt such historical investigations are relevant and helpful, but the present inquiry does not aim to explore such territory. First of all, it has been done thoroughly already. Jon Stewart, in his massively learned *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, devotes two comprehensive chapters to the relevance of contemporary Danish thinkers for the construction of *Either/Or*. In the first of these chapters, Stewart establishes the different and multifaceted Hegelian strands of thinking in Denmark between 1807 and 1850, showing not only how Hegel was received, and how his thoughts were disseminated by different Danish authors, but also how Kierkegaard was related to and influenced by these authors. In the second of these, Stewart discusses *Either/Or* specifically, showing especially Hegel's influence on the work. Bruce Kirmmse devotes an entire lengthy study, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, to

drawing the personal and intellectual relations between Kierkegaard and his Danish predecessors and contemporaries. On top of these, many of the biographies written about Kierkegaard show the importance of Danish thinkers for Kierkegaard's intellectual development. This includes Alastair Hannay's *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, Joakim Garff's *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, and Clare Carlisle's *Philosopher of the Heart: The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard*. Finally, George Pattison's *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* reveals the influence of Danish aestheticians and poets such as Heiberg and Oehlenschläger upon *Either/Or* specifically.

As I say, our concern here does not pertain to the history of ideas in Denmark. Nor is it a genealogy of Danish Hegeliansim. Not only would that be revisiting charted territory, but also such concerns tend to be limited in their penetration into Kierkegaard's specific brand of profundity. What I present here seeks to achieve such penetration into the text. This study is an attempt to investigate Kierkegaard's masterful approach to the deeply intertwined problems of consciousness, aesthetics, and morality. *Either/Or* definitively transcends Golden Age Denmark, and to investigate the work within its provincial context is to do an injustice to its vastness, astuteness, brilliance, and complexity. Invaluable as the studies I have mentioned tend to be, there is a sense in which they cannot address this single masterpiece for its full psychological and philosophical trenchancy, nor for its full expression of the problems of the modern age.

Kierkegaard's ability to remark upon the human psyche, and to show how it functions in its attempt to seek a ground or foundation for personal decision-making, is unsurpassed in the history of thought. This means it has no precedent, and so to focus on Danish influences on *Either/Or* would diminish our ability to investigate the work with full diligence. It is upon the novelistic subtlety, the psychological realism, and the concept of the *interesting* which my investigation focuses. And these are focuses that must necessarily sacrifice certain other worthwhile areas of inquiry. In attending to the labyrinthine form and content of *Either/Or I*—the work which Kierkegaard insisted marked the beginning of his authorship—this study seeks to remedy our scholarly omission to prepare readers for subsequent Kierkegaardian texts, pseudonymous or otherwise.

Either/Or is a most acute diagnosis of the modern predicament. In what follows I explore how the aesthetic attitude—only one of a series of possible responses to the crisis I believe we still have not got beyond, even if we call our own age by different names such as 'postmodern' or 'digital' or 'posthuman'—can lead to an ever-more voracious tendency to interpret and represent the world in a private, self-defeating, and unscrupulous fashion. All the while, it is an attitude that only exacerbates the issues it intends to overcome.

Chapter 1

From the Beautiful to the Interesting

THE GREAT GULF

The opposition between the outer realm of phenomena and the inner realm of spirit has beguiled humankind and stimulated individuals to misguided activity since that original moment in the Garden of Eden when God's prohibition to Adam and Eve effectively implied that a secret knowledge lay behind the veil of nature. Whether one is religious and holds God's prohibition to be the first historical provocation contributing to mankind's actual Fall from innocence and immediacy, or whether one sees the story merely as an allegory of the incomprehensibly simultaneous genesis of doubt, freedom, and self-consciousness, and thus of our subjective limitations with respect to objective knowledge, it is a useful account to bear in mind if we wish to consider the wide domain of inquiry modern philosophers call *aesthetics*.

As most scholars and historians of modernity agree, the perceived opposition between the outer and the inner—or the phenomenon and the essence, the materially necessary and the psychically free, the physical and the spiritual—took a great leap forward in Europe with the Reformation and, subsequently, with the developments of Newtonian science. While the opposition has been present with us from the dawn of the consciousness, as the book of *Genesis* so acutely indicates, it seems to have reached a point of maximum crisis early in modernity. Accurate or apocryphal, scriptural or mythical, the story of our expulsion from Eden, while of course perennially relevant, regains figurative potency in Europe's emergence from the Middle Ages, and the discipline of aesthetics, developing almost in parallel with this emergence (as we are about to see), may be understood as a cooperative attempt on the part of modern philosophers to restore our place as irrefutably free agents integrated within,

rather than alienated from, the *beautiful* harmonies of nature's ostensibly mechanistic causality.

In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel points to this idea. He asserts that aesthetics, starting officially with the work of Alexander Baumgarten and then advancing immensely with Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, owes its incipience as a 'science' [*wissenschaft*] to the urge to reconcile the cleavage 'between inner freedom and the necessity of external nature' (Hegel 1975, 54).¹ In the same passage, Hegel includes the conviction that his own aesthetic theory will further the cause of dissolving and reducing to unity 'the above-mentioned opposition and contradiction between the abstractly self-concentrated spirit and nature—both the nature of external phenomena and that of inner subjective feeling and emotion' (Hegel 1975, 56). Given the lucidity with which he attends to these matters of inner-outer opposition and our human craving for the reunion of what has been divided, it is worth quoting Hegel's point at length.

These are oppositions which have not been invented at all by the subtlety of reflection or the pedantry of philosophy; in numerous forms they have always preoccupied and troubled the human consciousness, even if it is modern culture that has first worked them out most sharply and driven them up to the peak of harshest contradiction. Spiritual culture, the modern intellect, produces this opposition in man which makes him an *amphibious* animal, because he now has to live in two worlds which contradict one another. The result is that now consciousness wanders about in this contradiction, and, driven from one side to the other, cannot find satisfaction for itself in either the one or the other . . . But for modern culture and its intellect this discordance in life and consciousness involves the demand that such a contradiction be resolved. (Hegel 1975, 53–54, my emphasis)

With these words Hegel is echoing a sentiment nestled within a more difficult passage from Kant. In his 'Introduction' to the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant writes of the possibility that aesthetics can bridge the gap between what he calls the 'sensible' (substance, the universal law of causation, natural phenomena) and the supersensible (human freedom):

Albeit, then, between the realm of the natural concept, as the sensible, and the realm of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, there is a great gulf fixed, so that it is not possible to pass from the former to the latter (by means of the theoretical employment of reason), just as if they were so many separate worlds, the first of which is powerless to exercise influence on the second: still the latter is *meant* to influence the former—that is to say, the concept of freedom is meant to actualize in the sensible world the end proposed by its laws; and nature must consequently also be capable of being regarded in such a way that

in the conformity to law of its form it at least harmonizes with the possibility of the ends to be effectuated in it according to the laws of freedom. There must, therefore, be a ground of the *unity* of the supersensible that lies at the basis of nature, with what the concept of freedom contains in a practical way . . . (Kant 1952, 195–196)

There have been countless attempts to express the sources and features of this modern gulf between subjective freedom and natural determinacy. J.M Bernstein's account, in his 'Introduction' to an anthology entitled *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, is both germane to our investigation and highly illuminating, and his articulation of the intellectual origins of the crisis is neither too vague to be of use nor too descriptive to include here as a précis. 'On the one hand,' he writes, '[the crisis] concerns the dematerialization of nature, the reduction of circumambient nature to a mechanical system whose lineaments are provided by the immaterial forms of mathematical physics' (Bernstein 2003, ix). He continues:

This dematerialization denies that there might be a unique, irreducible language of nature, and this is equivalent to the delegitimation of the authority of nature in favour of the authority of abstract, scientific reason. Thus the disenchantment of nature, which includes the human body, its pains and pleasures, leaves it dispossessed of voice or meaning, since all meaning is given *to* nature by (mathematical) reason. (*ibid*)

On the other hand, Bernstein later explains, this dematerialization is connected with the deepening problem of subjectivity. 'The flipside of the disenchantment of nature relates to a crisis of the subject. This crisis also involves dematerialization, the self losing its substantiality, its worldliness. Once nature is figured as a mechanical system, the self is divorced from the natural world as such' (Bernstein 2003, x). Hence we see that the so-called disenchantment of the world and the subjective crisis, or self-alienation, are two sides of the same coin.

Whether this sense of divorce between the individual and the universal remained subterranean or was patent in the mind of the average eighteenth century European, it is certain that the leading intellectuals and artists of the time felt the issue keenly and increasingly. As I have suggested, it was in their attempts to bridge the widening gulf between intelligible freedom and sensible nature that—according to Kant, Schiller, Schelling, Hegel, and the other formidable aestheticians of the time, along with Bernstein and a host of contemporary philosophers—aesthetics came to be an integral and even prioritized discipline within the larger philosophical enterprise.² Ultimately, for the German Romantics, and most especially for Friedrich Schlegel among them, this striving for a proper aesthetic theory seemed to become the most

urgent of all intellectual quests. If philosophers and critics could establish how properly to perceive and judge artworks and the attractiveness of natural phenomena, and consequently if they came to regulate the intellectual focuses and aims of contemporary artists, then the true artwork, produced under the interaction of human reflective freedom and physical nature, would have the potential to constitute an instance of harmony between the subject and the phenomenal realm from which he has been *prima facie* divorced. As Bernstein puts it, 'the most plausible account of the privilege [of aesthetics] turns upon a conception of artworks as fusing the disparate and metaphysically incommensurable domains of autonomous subjectivity and material nature' (Bernstein 2003, viii).

Michael Inwood expresses this even more succinctly. '[T]he artist's creativity,' he writes, 'combines the necessity of nature and the freedom of spirit' (Inwood 1993, xii).³ This is to say that if the sculptor's material, such as marble or clay, is natural in origin, and if his content derives from the efforts of reflective freedom to manifest itself in substance, then the finished artwork should constitute a reintegration of those previously divided domains. More specifically, the sculpture in this example will be a unity of freedom and necessity that reveals the imprint of human inward representation upon the outward and natural world, both for the artist and for the spectator. In the final product, the inner depths of human freedom and subjectivity are materialized and made sensuous, and the sensuous is made to expose the subjective and unique moral value of a sovereign individual. The successful artwork becomes a perceptible product of autonomy within the heteronomous natural world, a revelation of an individual human truth as the union of the two previously opposed realms of freedom and necessity.

Bernstein's thesis may or may not comprehensively answer the question of why aesthetics suddenly flourished in Germany and Europe before the turn of the nineteenth century; for our concerns, however, his explanation is paramount, as it is this very urge to reconnect subjective reflection and objective experience which Hegel himself highlights as the historical role of art when he explains that 'art's vocation is to unveil the *truth* in the form of sensuous artistic configuration, to set forth the reconciled opposition just mentioned, and so to have its end and aim in itself, in this very setting forth and unveiling' (Hegel 1975, 55). It is the role of aesthetics as a discipline to make the truths and unities which art is capable of generating more apparent and explicit, and to establish criteria for judgements regarding the perceptible world that show an intimate connection between free human intention and strict causality. Aesthetics, these modern philosophers seem to have thought, is the mode of philosophy that calls attention to and further expresses the unification of objectivity and subjectivity brought to fruition by the perception of beautiful works of nature and the creation and observation of ingenious works of art.

For our purposes, then, an aesthete is a thinker who seeks to reconcile the opposition between inner and outer by investigating human perception and judgement with respect to the causally-understood universe.

THE BEAUTIFUL AS DISINTERESTED PLEASURE

As we have seen already, Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement*, expressly sought to bridge the ‘great gulf’ between sensible nature and the spiritually free subject. Unlike Schelling, Schlegel, and the Romantics, however, he did not attempt to reunite the sensible and the supersensible by looking to artistic creation as the point of unity between freedom and necessity. His approach was at once shrewder, subtler, more epistemologically-oriented, and more implausible. On his view, the unity between the two sides of the gulf was to be found in the human power of judgement itself—in the *relation*, that is, between the thinking subject and the object of perception. By showing that the beautiful is neither a quality inherent in the object of perception nor something purely subjective (i.e. *in the eye of the beholder*), he felt he could reveal an extant but discreet harmony between the structure of the human intellect and the structure of the empirical object, one which is exposed in moments when the beholder experiences a sense of beauty without employing the capacity for rational, conceptual cognition. ‘For Kant, the pleasure in beauty is merely the general pleasure of grasping the harmony between self and world, a harmony that is a precondition for both empirical categorization and moral achievement’ (Wicks 1993, 361–362). Because beauty is not a predicate of the object as is its hardness or density, for instance, the aesthetic judgement is not rationally grounded or determinate, meaning that the pleasure ‘does not rest on any concept,’ and ‘no conclusion can be drawn to the logical’ (Kant 215–216). And because beauty is not merely in the eye of the beholder, the pleasure is not grounded on the basis of individual interest, meaning that in our relation to the object, the sense of beauty does not ‘involve a reference to the faculty of desire’ (Kant 1952, 204–205). With these considerations, he wished to establish that the judgement is at once universal and subjective (i.e. free from necessity).

In the first main section of the *Critique of Judgement*, called the ‘Analytic of the Beautiful,’ Kant established four main criteria, which he called *moments*, in support of this idea of a harmonious, concept-free relation between subject and object. As I have just suggested, one of his crucial strategies for establishing the bridge was to maintain that the judgement of taste, in its effortless work of identifying an object as beautiful, must be deficient of any interest in the actual object’s material existence or instrumental purpose. In Kant’s definition, this *disinterest* is the first moment for any experience of the beautiful.

He puts the issue as follows. ‘If the question is whether something is beautiful, one does not want to know whether there is anything that is or that could be at stake, for us or for someone else, in the existence of the thing, but rather how we judge it in mere contemplation’ (Kant 1952, 204–205). If interest in an object arises when we find the thing agreeable (i.e. pleasing in sensation) or good (i.e. instrumental as a means towards some end), then taste in the beautiful must involve no private motivation, no arousal of these delights, and therefore no desire, personal preference, or appetitive tendency with respect to the object’s presence, utility towards some unfulfilled end, or capacity to provide sensual gratification. This *disinterested* appreciation is, in fact, an indication of the freedom from external determinations in the judgement of the perceiving subject:

Of all these three kinds of delight [the agreeable, the beautiful, and the good], that of taste in the beautiful may be said to be the one and only disinterested and *free* delight; for, with it, no interest, whether of sense or reason, extorts approval. And so we may say that delight, in the three cases mentioned, is related to *inclination*, to *favour*, or to *respect*. For FAVOUR is the only free liking. An object of inclination, and one which a law of reason imposes upon our desire, leaves us no freedom to turn anything into an object of pleasure. All interest presupposes a want, or calls one forth; and, being a ground determining approval, deprives the judgement on the object of its freedom. (Kant 1952, 210–211)

Furthermore, it is this very absence of interest or private incentives which, in the judgement of taste, prompts the subject’s estimation of the object as a thing which is *universally* beautiful. Kant asserts that it would be nonsensical for a person who prided himself on good taste to say that an object of his perception, such as a fine building or a pretty dress or an enjoyable piano concerto, is beautiful *for him*, i.e., beautiful *for him alone*. In other words, the judgement of beauty presupposes that the object would inspire a parallel judgement in all other individuals able to perceive it. When a person calls an object beautiful, he essentially demands the same pleased, albeit *disinterested*, response from others. Although the aesthetic judgment is not conceptual or demonstrable through reasoning, and is therefore not derived *necessarily* from the object or its content—again, the judgment of taste is *free*—still it is a judgment that is hypothetically imputed to anyone who might perceive the object in question, just as if the judgment were absolutely grounded as a rational deduction. ‘For where any one is conscious that his delight in an object is with him independent of interest, it is inevitable that he should look on the object as one containing a ground of delight in all men’ (Kant 1952, 211–212). Because the pleasure taken in contemplating the beautiful object is revealed to be absent of any relevant desire on the part of the beholder—because the

experience is devoid of interest—this individual experiencing beauty must regard his judgement as universally valid despite lacking a concept, category, or any syllogistic redoubt to render its justification abstractly as such. The quality unique to this particular experience or moment is not consigned to mere causality, yet somehow it speaks a universal language.

In this paradox of freedom and universality we find the richness of Kant's theory of the beautiful. Both the inner freedom of the subject and the universal validity of his particular aesthetic judgment are maintained, apparently, and the beautiful object is the locus that highlights subjective experience while also rendering a pleasurable point of potential interaction with other individuals on account of the assumed universal validity of the free judgement. Kant calls this potential for shared effect the *sensus communis*, or the common sense. This *sensus communis* 'is accomplished by weighing the judgement, not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible, judgements of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else, as the result of a mere abstraction from the limitations which contingently affect our own estimate' (Kant 1952, 293–294). It is as a consequence of this that a sort of secondary, objective public interest develops after the judgment of the beautiful occurs, as it were, and 'it is inevitable that we should also look upon taste in the light of a faculty for estimating whatever enables us to communicate even our *feeling* to every one else' (Kant 1952, 294–295).

When we consider the earlier claim that art and the materials of art have the potential to function as intermediaries between an individual and the natural world, or the idea that aesthetics seeks to re-enchant the world as the proper domain of the subject, then it seems that Kant's aesthetics struggles to accomplish this agenda. His putative observing subject fails really to integrate sensuously-subjectively with the object, and his bridge between the sensible and the supersensible does not involve the interpenetration of these realms so much as the detached contemplation of the latter by the former. Rather than a tangible interpenetration, an interaction between freedom and materiality, we have here a passive observation which only isolates the subject even further by, in effect, intensifying his sense of freedom from interest in the very causality and substance of the object of his attention. It may be the case that, for Kant, the pleasure in beauty arises from the perception of free universality, or at least from the perception of an object that in its purposive yet pre-conceptual form seems to kindle the subject's satisfaction with his own harmonious relation to the world, a relation which is subsequently intuited to be universal (attributable to other subjects) precisely because of the indeterminate nature of such an experience; but, in the end, this pleasure remains self-enclosed, silent, and fleeting. Kant does not bridge the great gulf between thinking and being so much as suggest a smoke signal from the phenomenal realm to the subjective realm, asking his reader to delight in this ephemeral

relation as a suggestion that we are not alienated from the artworks of the universe. In a brief summation of Kant's theory, Hegel expresses this problem perfectly when he writes that, 'this apparently perfect reconciliation is still supposed by Kant at the last to be only subjective in respect of the judgement and the production [of nature and art], and not itself to be absolutely true and actual' (Hegel 1975, 59).

As I understand Kant's argument, it is the case that if *disinterest* is the first determination of the beautiful, then the beautiful object does not negate our disenchantment in such a way that the subject indeed touches the object with any Arcadian sense of cosmological interdependency or first-order influence. Freedom is not reconciled with and through matter; rather, freedom is emphasized at the expense of an interested and *technical* engagement with the phenomenal realm—a consequence that may tend to lead towards further disenchantment, even if the subject's sense of freedom and his trust in the *sensus communis* is stimulated and thereby opens up the possibility of rational intersubjective communication on the topic of the object in question. The spectator remains isolated and merely roused towards the view that anyone who might perceive the object disinterestedly will experience the same sense of beauty as indicative of an acausal connection between mind and nature—and this in *parallel isolation*, severed from any necessary relation to or actualization from or within the material world with which we are so concerned to have lost our connection. The *sensus communis* remains a strong suspicion, and the subject recedes further into his own detached mentality.

Therefore, if Kant's picture is at all accurate, or (what amounts to the same thing for our concerns) if his theory of beauty is so remarkable and formidable as strongly to pre-empt ensuing philosophers and critics from generating wholly opposed views of beauty⁴—if, that is, the *Critique of Judgement* creates at the very least a provisional consensus among contemporary intellectuals that the problems Kant articulates must be explored further and examined in greater detail—then perhaps the aesthetic criterion of the beautiful is not the solution to the crisis of disenchantment after all. This is to say that Kant's analytic of the beautiful was indeed impressive and utterly influential, and yet, as Hegel puts it, 'only by overcoming Kant's deficiencies could [the] true comprehension [of the beauty of art] assert itself as the higher grasp of the true unity of necessity and freedom, particular and universal, sense and reason' (Hegel 1975, 60–61).

Given the fact that the pitch of beauty cannot be sustained, and that the moment we have recognised our spiritual unity with the material object is the moment it ceases to be experienced as a unity since we begin to enjoy ourselves enjoying it, or it is a state that is nullified the moment it is named, the judgement of beauty may only remind us, now and then, of what we have lost through the dematerialisation of our natural milieu and the bloom

of subjectivity. If the modern experience of beauty does indeed resemble Kant's elaborations on the matter, then perhaps thinkers still seeking genuine subjective re-enchantment, a true synthesis between freedom and causality, will have to turn to an entirely different aesthetic category and a new standard of judgement in an effort to fulfil the function of more deeply involving the subject within his own particular, unique, inarticulate mental experience, or, conversely, of more deeply involving the phenomenal world within subjectivity in such a way that artistic material might have the power to disclose to that individual his awareness of a specific individuality and a particular freedom and transcendence with respect to nature.

The work of Friedrich Schlegel, although dependent upon and initially supportive of Kant's theory of the beautiful, reveals first the presentiments and later the full contours of such a break with the beautiful as the supreme achievement of the aesthetic experience. In many ways, the general endeavour of the Romantic movement within Germany results in part from a collapse of the grip of the beautiful and an attempt to go beyond the reach of Kant's effort to bridge the gulf between the inner world of the transcendent, infinitely developing subject and the outer world of empirical experience. This ensuing attempt is one in which the new aesthetic category of the *interesting* will be put in contention with that of the *beautiful*.

THE INTERESTING IN OPPOSITION TO THE BEAUTIFUL

In an early treatise entitled *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Friedrich Schlegel juxtaposes these two aesthetic categories, the *beautiful* and the *interesting*. He identifies the former as the orienting aesthetic of Greek poetry and the latter as the orienting aesthetic of modern poetry. For fashioning this distinction, Schlegel is generally credited with inaugurating the philosophical-theoretical focus upon the *interesting* as an aesthetic category within its own rights.⁵ Whereas for Kant *disinterest* was the first moment in the judgement of beauty, or the ground and condition of the judgement's validity, now for Schlegel the issue of subjective interest is elevated to an independent and alternative ground and indication of taste—the potential for a judgement virtually opposed in its conditions to the judgment of the beautiful. It is important to note, however, that by establishing this new category, the *interesting*, Schlegel initially intended to convey what he considered to be a corrupt propensity intrinsic to modern poetry and its practitioners and adherents. Although he would later shift his outlook in favour of the *interesting* (a concept which came to be virtually synonymous with and replaced by the concepts of the ironic and the *Romantic*),⁶ in his original formulation as

represented by *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, he did not intend to propose the superiority of the modern and *interesting* over the ancient and beautiful. To the contrary, the *interesting* was to be suspected for its failure both to activate and to follow any unified moral, social, or universal aim for the culture in which individual examples of it were produced. As he puts it near the beginning of his treatise, ‘The predominance of the interesting is simply a mere passing crisis of taste, ‘for it finally must annihilate itself’ (Schlegel 2001, 36).

The thrust of Schlegel’s argument suggests that he views Kant’s conception of the beautiful to be accurate and superlative. In his estimation, though, the sensibility of modern poetry and poetic appreciation appears to be driven precisely towards productions and artistic preferences that are not beautiful in the Kantian sense: not arranged by the disinterested but ‘pure’ laws of beauty,⁷ not universally valid, not modelled upon the pre-conceptual coherences of the physical world, not complementary between whole and part, not formally purposive and harmonious while conceptually elusive of extrinsic ends, and not directed towards the objective representation of nature. The problem with modern poetry, according to Schlegel, pertains to its heavy reliance upon the expression of subjectivity. His line of thinking involves three implicit theses. First, that Kant is correct about the role *disinterest* plays in the experience of beauty. Second, that the Greek poets were guided by something akin to this principle of beauty.⁸ Third, that modern poetry fails to produce beautiful works because it lacks any guiding principle from the beauty of nature and its ideal forms. Schlegel’s definition of the beautiful, as it stands during the period of his writing *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, is therefore relatively familiar to those who have read Kant. A. O. Lovejoy recapitulates this view as follows:

The doctrine which Schlegel at this time held was, in essence, a sort of esthetic rationalism. It regarded beauty as an “objective” attribute, which works of art do or do not possess, irrespective of their relation to the feelings and the experience of the artist, if not wholly irrespective of their relation to the feelings of the reader, hearer, or beholder. An esthetic value, to be genuine, must be ‘of universal validity,’ neither expressive of, not dependent for its effect upon, the subjective ‘interest’ of this or that individual. (Lovejoy 1917, 66)

Schlegel’s doctrine of the *interesting* is not so clear cut as his understandably derivative doctrine of the beautiful. Schlegel himself admits of the difficulty he has in locating the conditions for this criterion when he writes, in a belated preface to *On the Study of Greek Poetry* which he composed after the coincidental publication and influence of Schiller’s *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, that ‘[in] the entire realm of the science of aesthetics, the deduction

of the *interesting* is perhaps the most difficult and complicated task' (Schlegel 2001, 99). Although we may say broadly that for Schlegel the *interesting* is an aesthetic category contrary to that of the beautiful, it remains difficult to assess just what the opposition entails—after all, *interesting* is not necessarily synonymous with *ugly*; nor is it that feature of judgement which distinctly excludes beautiful elements. Schlegel insists, for instance, that Shakespeare wrote *interesting* dramas, yet he maintains that those works use beauty as a means to a specific, philosophical purpose (Schlegel 2001, 31).

We may differentiate these more familiar categories of *beauty* and *ugliness* by acknowledging that the judgments of each are judgments of the immediate aesthetic outcome or total effect of a given object or work. The beautiful is pleasant and the ugly is unpleasant, and the experience of each is instantaneous and immediate, transmitted, as it were, between the object and the subject in a pre-conceptual flash of recognition, in the same way that the sense of smell allows us to make immediate, unintellectual, and instantaneous judgements regarding the merits or demerits of a perishable food. The object affects the spectator and inspires his sense of gratification or displeasure in the moment he observes its form and the relation of its parts to its whole. The *interesting*, on the other hand, may have no cohesive aesthetic outcome and appears to be beyond the reach of a single moment of observation. The *interesting* has the feature of duration, development, and 'ongoingness,' and it instigates the spectator's curiosity and sense of incompleteness, and thus inspires further investigation.⁹ The judgment is neither instantaneous nor immediate, since there is no 'harmonious accord between [the] object's organized structure and a person's capacity to understand that object through a projective set of organized, and organizing, concepts.'¹⁰

Unmistakably, even without any foreknowledge of Schlegel's characterization of the term, one must accept by the word's connotations that, like the beautiful, the *interesting* in some way or another will be pleasing for the spectator, perhaps in a way that is more subjectively instrumental than the judgement of the beautiful. If the perception of an object entailed the 'perception of rational structures external to [the apprehending subject],' the delight of which involved the corroboration of 'another rational presence in the world besides one's own,' then, as we know, that perception would not be *interesting* because it would not present novelty and particularity so much as external verification of the forms of subjectivity already present in the spectator. The beautiful experience carries with it a sense of likeness between the perceptive capacity of the spectator and the formal coherence of the object. However, unlike the beautiful experience, the *interesting* experience is not a confirmation of free subjectivity as an ostensible universal, but a deepening of individual distinction and divergence from the universal. That which is

universal, being regular, recognizable, and conceptually routine, is seldom *interesting*. We never remark on how *interesting* it is when billiard balls collide to produce the expected trajectories or when an egg is shaped like an egg. On the other hand, the most *interesting* lemon will be the lemon that stretches our preconceived concept of what a lemon is—the lemon that, for instance, most resembles a kumquat. We feel our sense of genus or species being stretched to its limit.

Here are three of Schlegel's clearest passages on the matter, selected from various points throughout his text:

Utterly indifferent at bottom to all form, and full only of an unquenchable thirst for *content*, the more refined public demands of artists only *interesting individuality*. As long as there is an *effect*, as long as the effect is *strong and new*, the public is as indifferent to the manner in which—as well as the content within which—it occurs as to its agreement of the individual effects to form a complete whole. (Schlegel 2001, 20)

Furthermore, the *total predominance of the characteristic, individual, and the interesting* is evident throughout modern poetry, especially in more recent ages. Finally, there is the *restless, insatiable striving after something new, piquant, and striking* despite which, however, longing persists unappeased. (*ibid*, 24)

The general orientation of poetry—indeed, the whole aesthetic development of modernity—toward the interesting can be explained by this lack of universality, this rule of the mannered, characteristic, and individual. Every original individual [poetic being] that contains a greater quantity of intellectual content or aesthetic energy is *interesting*. I said deliberately: *greater*. Greater, namely, than the receptive individual already possesses: for the interesting demands an individual receptiveness, indeed, often a momentary individual mood. (*ibid*, 35)

From these three passages, we can gather that Schlegel first conceives of the *interesting* artwork as inspiring our fascination by virtue of its novelty, not for the sake of novelty alone but for the promise novelty seems to hold of enriching our store of particular, private, unique knowledge and ground-breaking experience, as a confirmation of the validity of experience that is indeed subjective and is not predicted by universal laws. Perhaps this explains, in part, Schlegel's use of the word *interesting* as a sort counterpoint to the Kantian *beautiful*—since there is an obviously self-interested element involved if the object promises to break new ground in the domain of concrete subjective experience. There is, however, a more etymologically derived meaning behind the concept of the *interesting* to which Schlegel was probably not ignorant.

From the Latin *inter-esse*, the word suggests a *being between*, or an ‘amphibious’ location within the gap that occurs in self-reflection, in which the thinker is divided into both subject and object, and in which he thus falls ‘between the real and the ideal, where both self-development and self-deception can find free play’ (Macdonald 2013, 101). Hence the Greek poetry of antiquity, for which the objective *cosmos* amounted to the totality of significance and human exigency, remained attentive to and representative of the objective state of affairs, whereas modern poetry, in which an undercurrent of subjectivity and incompleteness reign, deals more prominently with the division we feel as subjects capable of alienation from the substantial milieu through which we come to understand ourselves. To quote William Macdonald: ‘Between the immediacy of the real and the possibility of the ideal lies *interest* . . . Reflection opens the space between the “inner” and the “outer,” where intimation of a discrepancy creates ‘the interesting’ (Macdonald, 2013, 101).

Schlegel is anxious throughout *On the Study of Greek Poetry* to discern and articulate a guiding principle for the artistic and cultural development of his contemporary Germans and Europeans, to guide his readers towards a community that has restored its foundation in beautiful, universal art. ‘It is obvious that *modern poetry*,’ the book begins, ‘either *has not yet attained the goal towards which it is striving*, or that its striving has no established goal, its development no specific direction, the sum of its history no regular continuity, the whole no unity’ (Schlegel 2001, 17); and yet, as he stipulates a few pages later, ‘[there] is indeed a common element in that thorough anarchy evident throughout the entirety of modern poetry, a characteristic trait that could not exist if there were no common inner foundation’ (Schlegel 2001, 22). The overall ambition of his text, then, is to unearth that inner foundation, to identify the task lurking behind the age’s apparent aesthetic chaos, to question whether such a task is attainable, and, if it is found to be so, to inquire as to the means of satisfying this task.

On Schlegel’s view, the key difference between the art of the ancient Greeks and that of the modern Europeans, as I mentioned above, can be elucidated by reference to his simple belief that the Greeks were not disenchanted with respect to nature: Their more primitive experience was not as divided between the incongruous realms of phenomenal necessity and subjective possibility. The enlargement and direction of Greek culture, as depicted most vividly in their poetry, was extrapolated from their perspective of nature as that specific and absolute domain of the human animal in which the ideal coincided with and informed the real. In the Kantian sense, therefore, their art was a representation of what they perceived as beautiful and exemplary in nature, which, while indeed bursting with particulars, nevertheless fed their sense of the ideal and universal through the obvious

similitude of those particulars and through the anonymity of natural objects with respect to their genus.¹¹ Schlegel writes that, ‘Greek beauty was the common property of public taste, the *spirit of the whole*’ (Schlegel 2001, 52). As a result, Greek poetry exalted what was harmonious, uniform, self-enclosed, and formally contiguous in the unmediated environment they perceived to be the pleromatic condition and limit of their existence. The pinnacle of this achievement can be found in the work of Sophocles, according to Schlegel. In both form and content, Sophoclean tragic drama creates and references the milieu that is the condition for the actions which transpire therein. ‘The mature and full-grown organization of each of [his works] is carried out to a *completeness* that is disrupted neither by the slightest deficiency, nor by a superfluous touch. Everything evolves *necessarily* out of a unity and even the smallest part belongs unconditionally to the *great law of the whole*’ (Schlegel 2001, 61). Furthermore, unlike modern poetry, which represents concrete and *amphibious* individuals, ‘ancient poetry represents ideal forms . . . and therefore is universal and objective’ (Macdonald 2013, 101).

Modern poetry has as its prevailing impetus not the premonition of a natural fate and substantial determinism, but the conviction of a supra-natural freedom, human transcendence, and the awareness of individual autonomy. Consequently, modern poetry wants to depict *character development* and the notion of individual incompleteness and striving. Schlegel calls this impetus *artificiality*. He claims that artificial cultural development is self-directed from a place beyond the observable world. It is not a development gleaned from the example of nature and the ‘vague longing’ of our experience as beings entirely subservient to a multitude of physical and inherited forces and external influences. Unlike in the past, experience now is comprised, paradoxically, of that which is beyond experience as well as that which is revealed in spatiotemporal phenomena. Freedom cannot be manifested in the phenomenal realm but only uncovered by the discerning mind as that which is both absent from what is sensible and yet miraculously influential upon it and within it. As Bernstein puts it, ‘In the modern world, in light of the emergence of subjectivity and the experience of freedom as belonging to the individual, as its essence, the ideal is removed from the domain of empirical actuality . . . individuality emerges when self-realization no longer occurs through identification with established social roles. Individuality is expressed through originality and the *interesting*; they are what individualize an individual’ (Bernstein 2003, xxvii, my emphasis).

The potential for aesthetic appreciation therefore has expanded to include not only the beautiful, which is universal and sharable, but also the *interesting*, which is particular, unique, and suggestive of both the hiddenness of autonomy and the isolated particular consciousness conducting the judgement. For Schlegel, the delights of beauty enhance our sense of community

(via the Kantian *sensus communis*) and direct us towards the ethical sphere of mutual natural development. In contrast, the delights of the *interesting* enhance our sense of subjectivity and alienation, and do not necessarily direct us towards ethical community or any consideration of the good of the whole. The *interesting* highlights and seems to affirm subjective discrepancies and trends which move away from the universal and which therefore demonstrate and acclaim individual autonomy or subjectivity.

Schlegel does not dwell upon the epistemic or psychological origin of our delight in the *interesting* in the way Kant does with our delight in the beautiful, nor does he indicate just where in the poetic object the interest of the subject finds its stimulus (it is probable, of course, that these are one in the same source—and that this source and our self-interested reaction is the justification for Schlegel's initial complaints in regard to the *interesting* poetry of the moderns). We may surmise, however, that just as in Kant's articulation, if we have self-interest in those material objects which contribute to our survival and procreation, and thus the continuance and growth of our sensible selves—or to those which have the ability to bring about agreeable ends for us—then also we might have interest in any objects which convey individual immateriality and which seem to perpetuate and magnify our intuition of supersensible, transcendent, autonomous selves. With every increase and appropriation of that which is particular, previously unseen, and foreign to the given concepts governing our understanding, our own particularity and knowledge of the range of possibility grows, and the intellectual material that constitutes our individual difference from the world and others intensifies our sense of subjectivity and therefore our *appetite* for its further intensification.

I believe that this is what Schlegel means in the passage I have already cited above, namely when he says that '[every] original individual [poetic being] that contains a greater quantity of intellectual content or aesthetic energy is *interesting*. I said deliberately: *greater*. Greater, namely, than the receptive individual already possesses: for the interesting demands an individual receptiveness, indeed, often a momentary individual mood' (Schlegel 2001, 35). My hypothesis, therefore, is that for Schlegel *interesting* poetry invigorates our 'uniquely characteristic inwardness,'¹² our pride as free subjects, and our arrogance as beings different from and ostensibly more capacious than a physical world that operates through pure causal necessity, and also to a society that both shapes us and emphasizes the universal over the individual, the mediated over the immediate. To render this in Kantian terms, the *interesting* poem or artwork activates an individual hypothetical imperative, even if it remains silent and opaque within us, which might be articulated loosely as follows: *if I engage with this artwork or novelty, then I will experience an increase in freedom, exceptionality, and subjectivity.*

Perhaps the *interesting* is a more reflective expression for the primitive motivation Eve and Adam each experienced in the moments leading up to their respective decisions to consume fruit from the tree of knowledge, when they first discerned that the outer was potentially discrepant from the inner. As we saw above (and as any reader of Schlegel or the other German Romantics will recognise), despite Schlegel's initial concerns, this motivation ultimately captivated him and interfered with his attention to the beautiful and objective appearances of nature. His eventual quest to elevate the inner surplus of subjectivity came to be the defining feature of his Romanticism. In effect, the *interesting* was a temptation which, once enunciated, he could not resist.

LESSING'S IMPLICIT AND PRESCIENT GRASP OF THE INTERESTING

Although Friedrich Schlegel is generally credited as the first modern aesthete to advance an explicit theory of the concept of the *interesting* and its relation to modern art, or the first to rely heavily and repeatedly upon the category as an alternative to the concept of the *beautiful*, we should not overlook the likelihood that G. E. Lessing's work *Laocoön* was a precursor and inspiration for Schlegel's examination of the sense of the *interesting* as an aesthetic value. Certainly Lessing did not treat the *interesting* as a proper aesthetic criterion. He is worth mentioning here, however, because of the probability that his implicit use of the concept was a major influence on Kierkegaard's utilization of the concept of the *interesting* in *Either/Or*.¹³ One significant difference in the respective focuses of the two authors, Schlegel and Lessing—insofar as such differences concern the present inquiry—is that Lessing's *Laocoön* is a classicist examination on the so-called limits of painting and poetry. With *Laocoön*, Lessing endeavors to praise ancient works to the disparagement of modern works, emphasizing that in the Greek and Roman plastic arts and poetry, the artists were aware of what these respective forms should and should not express. Schlegel's text, on the other hand, deals with both ancient and modern works, and, as we have seen, his objective is to tap the hidden resources behind the apparent arbitrariness of Romantic poetry and, in so doing, to redirect the task of contemporary artists towards future cohesion and increased beauty or wholeness.¹⁴

In Lessing's text, some of the more striking passages pertain to the sacrifice or concealment of full expression in certain ancient works, and while he seldom uses the term *interesting*, he does on occasion use variations of the

lexeme, such as ‘to interest’ and ‘uninteresting,’ in a provocative and pre-scient way. Take the following example:

Now that alone is significant and fruitful which gives free play to the imagination. The more we see, the more must we be able to add by thinking. The more we add thereto by thinking, so much the more can we believe ourselves to see. In the whole gamut of an emotion, however, there is no moment less advantageous than its topmost note. Beyond it there is nothing further, and to show us the uttermost is to tie the wings of fancy and oblige her, as she cannot rise above the sensuous impression, to busy herself with weaker pictures below it, the visible fullness of expression acting as a frontier which she dares not transgress. When, therefore, Laocoön sighs, the imagination can hear him shriek, but if he shrieks, then she cannot mount a step higher from this representation, nor, again, descend a step lower without seeing him in a more tolerable and consequently more *uninteresting* condition. She hears him only groan, or she sees him already dead. (Lessing 2003, 37, my emphasis)

Leading up to this passage, Lessing has been arguing a point about the artistic sacrifice of faithful expression in accordance with the requirements of beauty. Using a painting of Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigenia as his example, he stresses his belief that the painter, Timanthes, brilliantly manages the emotional impact of the image by veiling the face of Agamemnon. Rather than depict the extreme horror and pain in the countenance of a father about to sacrifice his daughter, Timanthes chooses to conceal the emotion. The concealment is not due to some technical deficiency in the painter—an inability to render accurately the sadness and remorse we would discern upon the face of a father about to sanction such a deed—but rather to artistic tact, illustrative restraint, and an intuitive understanding that the most extreme negative emotion would be both unpleasant for the spectator and destructive to her imaginative faculty. ‘What [Timanthes] dared not paint he left to be guessed. In a word, this veiling was a sacrifice which the artist offered to beauty. It is an example not how one should force expression beyond the bounds of art, but rather how one must subject it to the first law of art, the law of beauty’ (Lessing 2003, 34–35).

Furthermore, pointing to the anonymous sculpture portraying the Trojan priest Laocoön as he and his sons are devoured by giant serpents, Lessing argues that we observe the same sort of artistic restraint here as we observed with the painting by Timanthes. Not merely for the sake of withholding the ugly does the anonymous artist refrain from depicting Laocoön’s face in absolute agony, for he knows also that the dynamic of meaning in the sculpture develops under the free play of the spectator’s fancy. In the longer quote above, then, we are to understand that that which gives no freedom to the reflective capabilities of the spectator is *uninteresting*. Lessing seems

to suggest that while beauty is the first law of art, imaginative reproduction is the first law of art appreciation. If this interplay exists in potentiality, the artwork will be *interesting* for the spectator, even if its beauty is maintained for the same reason.

Artists must depict the breadth of human experience and emotion—not simply beautiful objects and forms. When that is the case, when the sad, sorrowful, painful, ugly, unpleasant, or heinous become the subject matter of the work of art, then beauty—the first law of art—must be forfeited but never betrayed. When the veiling occurs in obligation to beauty, the *interesting* arises in its place. It provides the spectator with the freedom to imagine just what is concealed, to apply from the resources of her own subjectivity just what lurks beneath the veil. The *interesting* artwork suggests a discrepancy between what is concealed behind appearances and what is objective and apparent.

THE EXAMPLE OF HAMLET

Throughout the preceding sections, we were concerned with two major questions. In the first place, we inquired as to how modern aesthetics developed as a reaction to the crises of disenchantment and subjectivity. In the second place, we inquired as to how the aesthetic criterion philosophers came to call the *interesting* developed as a counterpoint to Kantian considerations of the beautiful and the so-called *sensus communis* (which we identified as the universalizing aesthetic experience). In reviewing the historical trajectory of eighteenth-century German aesthetics, from its original emphasis on the *beautiful* to its subsequent emphasis on the *interesting*, we discovered two interrelated descriptions of this term, the *interesting*, which in sincere quotidian language rather vaguely suggests a phenomenon that captures the attention, intrigues the imagination, expands a concept, or stimulates the intellect, but which as a more technical philosophical term suggests particularity, subjective development, and hiddenness. By pursuing these lines of thought, we have been constructing a framework for the implicit question of just *why* the *interesting* is interesting, and, more explicitly, we have been developing the historical background for Kierkegaard's use of the term.

We discovered that in Friedrich Schlegel's *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, the *interesting* appears to be the quality of eccentricity, discrepancy, particularity, or peculiarity as exhibited by a poetic work or a character in a drama. In this sense the *interesting* is placed in opposition to the *beautiful*. It is that element in art which captivates the spectator for its distinctiveness or variance from the universal and the objective, and, as such, the *interesting* quality of a poetic creation arises from an authorial emphasis on human individuality

and subjectivity. When Schlegel writes that in the character of Hamlet we witness ‘a limitless disparity between the thinking and the active force’ (Schlegel 2001, 33), we may surmise that by the so-called ‘thinking force’ Schlegel means the subjective and individual element of Hamlet’s experience, the potency of a unique mentality straining towards practical actualization, whereas by the ‘active force’ he means the objective and universal element of Hamlet’s experience, the linguistic and behavioural manifestation of a too-copious mind in conflict with its given parameters of expression and externally prescribed obligations and customs, along with the external factors shaping Hamlet’s life. Audiences observe in the character of Hamlet an individual who as a practical agent is unable to find purchase within the ethical, social, and political patterns and precedents he has inherited. He is a deep and overly contemplative subject who confessedly has ‘within that which passeth show,’ and who therefore discovers that speech and public conduct can neither communicate nor integrate the complexities, nuances, tensions, and depths of his inner abundance and multi-dimensionality—especially not in this momentous hour of collision, calamity, and adjudication.¹⁵

Assuming this is an accurate interpretation of Schlegel’s too-brief appraisal of *Hamlet*, which in *On the Study of Greek Poetry* amounts to no more than a few sentences, we might assume that Schlegel’s insight is perhaps more fertile than it at first appears to be. The inability to ‘universalize’ his will and interiority through language and received normativity is a problem not specific to Hamlet. It is the very double crisis of disenchantment and subjectivity recapitulated in the societal rather than the natural sphere. If Hamlet is deemed selfish, eccentric, peculiar, amoral, irresolute, and so forth, then certainly he also fails to be a witness to general human dignity (in the Kantian sense, Prince Hamlet does not act in such a way as to promote a kingdom of ends). In his attempt to find an action appropriate to his manifold and apparently contradictory duties, desires, memories, affections, aversions, observations, hallucinations, pleasures, and patrimonies, Hamlet exploits virtually every person with whom he interacts, including his ostensibly beloved Ophelia, demonstrating the obvious fact that he is pursuing his private and ineffable interests rather than mediating those interests by virtue of some categorical imperative, some attempt to realize the universal, or some striving towards a communal good or general ethical transparency. He can take revenge or refrain from perpetuating the cycle of violence—these are his practical options in response to his father’s presumed murder—but neither course will satisfy his intricately woven subjective universe. In fact, the limitations of practical reason intensify his internal discrepancy from the world as the drama progresses, twisting his mental forces into an irresolvable knot as he grows more and more alienated from the capabilities of retributive justice and public self-construal.

For the audience, the hero Hamlet is *interesting* because he provides us with a reinforced sense that an emphasis on subjectivity—the private self, the inexpressible dynamics of inwardness, the hidden complexity of an individual mind which, in its representational and imaginative capacities, and in its reflective attention to the past and present and future, is incongruent with the dimensions of objectivity, interpersonal conduct, and social construal—constitutes a somewhat loftier and more heroic existence than the universalized one which can only occur through a compression and consolidation of the abundance of possibilities inherent to individual mentality and the presupposition of autonomy. True, Hamlet is a tragic figure and an object lesson in melancholic indecision and relinquished possibilities, an adverse example of the catastrophe that might befall an individual who draws a line of concealment and who lives in despair of actualization; but as such he is also a martyr for the painful significance of the modern, unknowable human interior and the ineffable wealth of moods within each individual. Despite his flaws and failures, and even despite his self-seeking machinations, Hamlet is modernity's deeply attractive hero of subjectivity and the inner affluence that is incommensurable with exteriorization. At minimum, his dilemma suggests that subjectivity is among the primary conditions of modern experience.

It is worthwhile noting that, in a short essay originally entitled 'Hamlet and His Problems,' T. S. Eliot echoes Schlegel by highlighting how this issue is a central problematic not only within Hamlet (i.e. for Prince Hamlet), but also with respect to the play's artistic merit (i.e. for the spectator). Whether or not he is aware of the accuracy of his terminology and the manner in which his argument follows Schlegel's, Eliot writes the following: 'And probably more people have thought Hamlet a work of art because they found it interesting, than have found it interesting because it is a work of art. It is the "Mona Lisa" of literature' (Eliot 1919, 124). According to Eliot, Hamlet's character is interesting precisely because he is 'dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear' (Eliot 1919, 125). Eliot famously argued that the play is an artistic failure for this very reason—that it is 'full of some stuff that the author could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art' (*ibid*).

According to Eliot, the play is unable to get beyond the problem which possesses its own central character, and it fails in achieving a singular, cohesive, intended effect. Like Hamlet confronting a world that precludes any visible conditions for inner-outer equivalence, Shakespeare confronts an art form that precludes the expression of a boundless and inexplicably baffled interiority. Herein lies T.S. Eliot's central complaint, for, as he puts it, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events

which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately invoked” (Eliot 1919, 125). *Hamlet*, as drama, lacks an objective correlative because it dwells intractably upon a man who is poisoned by his inability to understand why his own emotions are too excessive with respect to the relative significance of the occasions or events upon which they are dependent. In this way, Eliot seems to be echoing the complaint initially aired by Schlegel: The *interesting* artwork or character is problematic because it lacks harmony and completion and the power to satisfy expectations. Everything remains open-ended under the rubric of the *interesting*, and consequently modern artworks ‘leave a thorn in the soul and take more than they give’ (Schlegel 2001, 17).¹⁶

In fact, it is this very idea of a discrepancy between the manifest and expressible on the one hand, and the hidden and inexpressible on the other, which reveals the deep conceptual relation between Schlegel’s (and Eliot’s) view of the *interesting* and Lessing’s earlier view. In Lessing’s brief representation of the matter in *Laocoön*, as we have seen, the aesthetic quality of the *interesting* appears in the distance between what is depicted in a work of art and what is veiled or given limited expression therein, a distance which sparks the imaginative propensity of the individual spectator, thus drawing her into active mental participation with the artwork and entreating her subjective contribution. What is hidden, in the case of Hamlet’s public speech and deeds, and also in the case of the painting of Agamemnon by Timanthes, in the anonymous sculpture of Laocoön, and in the facial expression of Mona Lisa, is in fact the very element which generates personal affinity for the energetic spectator. Lessing’s implicit point is that the painting depicting a father’s veiled grief and the sculpture depicting a priest’s agonizing death would be aesthetically deficient had the respective artists shown the full expression of the sufferers’ respective moments of absolute individual grief. It is not simply that expressions of extreme anguish are visually unappealing or even ugly, although that is certainly the case according to Lessing, but more deeply that hiddenness is attractive to the spectator, even imaginatively catalysing, for in an object that reveals that it is concealing something, we sense a kinship of inner-outer division. The force of the successful artwork therefore resides in the signal of an unseen essence lurking beyond or behind the sensuous material that the artist presents.

The vital link between Lessing’s and Schlegel’s superficially differing conceptions of the *interesting*, therefore, lies in their mutual emphases on subjectivity as the measure of modern aesthetic judgment. When a theatre-goer attempts to understand or empathize with Hamlet, he is left to imagine and ponder just what depths of emotion, experience, and contemplation the

prince is concealing behind a veil of language, attitude, action, and aberration. Even Hamlet's soliloquies open great mysteries and ambiguities for the inquisitive spectator. Likewise, when a museumgoer attempts to understand or empathize with Agamemnon or Laocoön, he is in fact providing the emotional and imaginative heights from within his own individual perspective and experience. For both Lessing and Schlegel, the *interesting* qualities of an artwork emerge when the spectator must *interpret* or *project upon* the constitutive psychological phenomena of that artwork (for instance: a character's behaviour within a larger play, a facial expression within a larger sculpture) which paradoxically conceal what is most essential to the tableau: the emotional reality of individual human experience. To put all of this as succinctly as possible, we may say that, in both authors, the *interesting* artwork presents an incongruity between what is revealed and what is hidden, in part because perception cannot capture the dynamic, supersensible, inward constitution of subjectivity, which is ongoing precisely because it is a free self-relation. Just like Prince Hamlet, the *interesting* artwork itself contains one or many elements which *have within that which passeth show*.

KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF THE INTERESTING

As Brian Söderquist and other recent Kierkegaard scholars have argued, and as we will see in greater detail as we progress through this inquiry, the category of the *interesting* as it appears within Kierkegaard's writings tacitly depends upon this very discrepancy between what is hidden and what is disclosed. In Kierkegaard's hands, however, the category is ultimately treated as an interpersonal, experiential consideration rather than one limited to the field of art-appreciation and aesthetic judgment. This is to say that the concept of what is aesthetically *interesting* is not confined to the pursuit of artistic creation and criticism, but rather is loosed upon the practical and interpersonal domains and becomes a crucial consideration for all future conduct. For this reason, it is important to note that while the writings in which the aesthetic category of the *interesting* appears most frequently and with the most explicit ramifications (*Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, and *Stages on Life's Way*) are technically fictional works—namely lyrical treatises or narratives authored and edited by imaginary personae and entailing novelistic and dramatic elements—and that, consequently, while we might suppose that an analysis of the *interesting* qualities in Kierkegaard's works will be no different from an analysis of the *interesting* qualities of Shakespeare's plays, there remains a fundamental distinction. These four pseudonymous works by Kierkegaard are, at least in part, *about* aesthetes who ultimately struggle with or misuse the concept of the *interesting* in approaching their own aesthetically

oriented situations, along with their intrapersonal and interpersonal relations. The modern aesthetic category is elevated to a heightening existential dilemma in Kierkegaard, and these works express how deeply embedded within the modern experience is the evidently aesthetic issue which the concept of the *interesting* ultimately illuminates. They show how severely problematic the issue truly has become for the reflective, alienated individual.

As Brian Söderquist writes,

Regardless of where Kierkegaard or the pseudonyms use it, ‘the interesting’ has to do with a reflective self-awareness that gives rise to a tension between the inner life and outward appearances. His most interesting characters are acutely aware of the potential incongruity between their own thoughts and motives—hidden from the world—and their outward actions—apparent to any observer. (Söderquist 2015, 26).

In addition to what we have just seen, it is evident from this concise passage that Söderquist considers the *interesting* to be a feature that emerges more distinctly the more a Kierkegaardian agent is aware of any potential distance between the outward significance of an action and its hidden impetus. Although Hamlet is troubled by virtue of his inability to navigate the practical realm in light of his unfortunate circumstances, and by his notion that the phenomenal world does not present him with ample resources to integrate his interior configuration and thus bring about some desired end or even a secure and mutual understanding with himself or others, it is Schlegel after all who first calls Hamlet *interesting*. Hamlet pays no heed to the degree to which one might classify his situation as *interesting*. This is to say that, with regard to a character like Hamlet, the reader or theatregoer plays the role of interested party (although certainly, by virtue of his hiddenness, Hamlet holds emotional-intellectual power over the entire court of Denmark, and all the other personalities remain in his thrall). On the other hand, Kierkegaard’s aesthetically-oriented characters generally become aware of this further point of reflection. They suffer the incongruity of individuals unable or unwilling to disclose themselves fully with the resources of the actual and phenomenal world, and they come to learn that their consequent hiddenness renders their personalities and situations *interesting* to other individuals within their sphere of influence. For the sake of self-interest, then, they tend to render their social consorts into easily-manipulated spectators rather than mutual ethical participants; being agents within the aesthetic stage, however, they are indifferent to the problematic issue of morality, since, after all, they, too, see themselves as spectators of a theatrical world with no objective correlative. They know about or come to develop knowledge of this aesthetic category throughout the process of their highly reflective undertakings within the aesthetical

enterprise, and this knowledge and any subsequent inclinations carry the potential for all manner of dangerous and unhealthy thought-processes and behaviours.

Thus, one of the questions we will need to pursue in the ensuing chapters, as we explore Kierkegaard's response to aesthetics in general and the *interesting* in particular, in the form of *Either/Or* part I, is not exactly a question of how Kierkegaard's use of the *interesting* differs from the category as it appears in Schlegel and Lessing, for in *Either/Or* and the early pseudonymous works Kierkegaard does not formulate a new definition of the term so much as he appropriates and combines the ideas generated from his predecessors, cultivating and enriching this combination through the sheer potency of his insight, rigor of thought, and anthropological clarity. Rather, the question will relate more precisely to our attempts to identify the larger implications and wider applications Kierkegaard was able to discover in this relatively new aesthetic concept, and to the manner with which he demonstrates how an aesthetically-oriented individual might transition from initially appreciating or even worshipping a *beautiful* artwork as a means toward re-enchantment and reintegration with the sensual world, to wanting more out of phenomena and subsequently valuing an *interesting* artwork in place of a beautiful one, and finally to constructing an *interesting* experience, or even an *interesting* existence, based on the tenets derived from the understanding of what is *interesting* in painting, poetry, and the other art forms. In the very subjective-objective incongruity which modern artists such as Shakespeare had begun to depict so acutely in recreated situations of concealment, cunning, disguise, and extreme particularity, and which modern philosophers and critics had begun to categorize in contradistinction to the ostensibly universal touchstone of *beautiful* artworks, Kierkegaard detects the key problematic of individual psychic experience in an abstractly understood and thus disenchanting world.

One needs to look no further than to the opening sentences of *Either/Or*, which Kierkegaard considered to be the first work of his authorial career, in order to discern his early attraction to the issue at hand.¹⁷ Victor Eremita, the fictitious editor of the aggregated, pseudonymously authored manuscripts which comprise the two volumes of *Either/Or*, begins his textual preface as follows:

It may at times have occurred to you, dear reader, to doubt somewhat the accuracy of the familiar philosophical thesis that the outer is the inner and the inner is the outer. Perhaps you yourself have concealed a secret that in its joy or in its pain you felt was too intimate to share with others. Perhaps your life has put you in touch with people about whom you suspected that something of this nature was the case, although neither by force nor by inveiglement were you able to

bring out into the open that which was hidden . . . I myself have always been rather heretically minded on this philosophical point and therefore early in my life developed the habit of making observations and investigations as well as possible. (EO 1:3; SKS 2:11)

Following this paragraph, Victor goes on to say that his so-called ‘heretically-minded observations and investigations’ have brought him varying results over the course of his life. At times, he explains, he has had luck in discerning the discrepancy between what is apparent and what is hidden within a phenomenon or human action, and at other times he has failed to ‘obtain any returns.’ However, the thought-provoking material he now presents to us in his role as editor—material which he claims to have discovered hidden in the secret compartment of a cherished second-hand writing desk—proves to be confirmation of his lifelong suspicion that the inner is not equivalent to the outer and that the two cannot be reconciled. It is not that the beautiful desk concealed such an abundance of dialectical thought within its previously unrevealed recesses, although indeed that concealment is a lovely aesthetical coincidence which illustrates materially the more philosophical notion which so captivates Victor.¹⁸ Rather, it is that the lives of the two different men who authored the papers he has discovered within the desk quite obviously represent two different approaches to the inner/outer discrepancy. The first of these men, whom Victor identifies as an aesthete, and whom he decides to call ‘A’ for the absence of any more specific identification discernible from his writings, has an exterior which forms ‘a complete contradiction of his interior.’ The second, whom Victor identifies as an ethically-oriented municipal judge named William, and whom he decides to call ‘B’ for the sake of providing a designation corresponding to that of the anonymous aesthete, has hidden ‘a more significant interior under a rather insignificant exterior’ (EO 1: 4; SKS 2:12).

While it is true that Victor uses the word *interesting* on but one occasion in his twelve-page preface to *Either/Or*, the context of his usage makes it obvious that, rather than attributing some vague or quotidian meaning to the word, such as ‘novel’ or ‘intriguing’ or ‘curious,’ and rather than using the word inadvertently or by reflex, he has in mind a specific, nuanced, and consciously chosen criterion. In the passage where the word appears, Victor has been discussing A’s ideas on eroticism and seduction, these interrelated topics being integral to the aesthetic expositions which comprise volume one (A’s collected papers), when he writes, “The idea of the seducer is suggested in the piece on the immediate erotic as well as in ‘Silhouettes’—namely, that the counterpart to Don Giovanni must be a reflective seducer in the category of the *interesting*, where the issue therefore is not how many he seduces but how” (EO 1: 9; SKS 2:17 my emphasis).

As with so many passages in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, this sentence simultaneously provides certain clues to the significance of the terminology it contains while also raising more questions than the author cares to answer directly. Readers, especially those unfamiliar with the history and context of the aesthetical use of the word *interesting* as I have been delineating it, are left wondering just what Victor Eremita means to suggest by this 'category of the interesting,' just how it has to do with seduction, and just why it involves a focus on method rather than outcome.¹⁹ It is no coincidence that in the fictitious aesthete's writings, as in Victor's preface, we see a similar concentration upon this category without much explicit clarification as to what it entails. This is to say that however the various voices and persons and writings which comprise *Either/Or* diverge in opinion, attitude, or outlook, all share a common and assumed lexicon.

For example, the first long essay attributed to A is a panegyric on Mozart and an examination of the supreme artistic perfection of his opera, *Don Giovanni*. The essay is entitled 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' and it spans nearly one-hundred laudatory pages. In the centre of the piece, the aesthete devotes roughly a dozen of those pages to identifying the failures native to any non-musical artistic representations of the Don Juan myth, such as the dramatic renditions by Molière and Heiberg and the epic poem by Lord Byron. In diagnosing the issues specific to Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (issues native to any poetic interpretation of the myth), A writes the following:

If Don Juan is interpreted as an *individual*, then he is *eo ipso* in conflict with the world about him. As an *individual*, he feels the constraint and the fetters of these surroundings; as a great *individual* he may triumph over them, but one immediately feels that the difficulties of the obstructions play a different role here. The interest is preoccupied essentially with them. But Don Juan is thereby drawn under the rubric of the *interesting*. (EO 1:107; SKS 2:109, emphasis added)

Again, we are left with clues but no definitive answers as to what this word denotes for the pseudonymous author. We can surmise that, in A's view, the rubric of the *interesting* develops when the achievement of a single character's desires is cast into doubt by virtue of his conflict with elements arising in the external or phenomenal world. But is the *interesting* so vague as that? Is the *interesting* merely temporal suspense over the question of whether individual desire will be achieved, or an uncertainty over what the 'future' hides by virtue of the visible conditions of present circumstances? A definitive answer appears later on, in an essay entitled 'Silhouettes,' which is the third exposition in the sequence of these aesthetic writings, and in which A discusses painting's inability to portray individuals whose sorrow and melancholy are so dynamic that their interior does not rest transparently in

their ‘corresponding exterior.’ Towards the middle of the piece, he constructs the following two metaphors to explain an issue far subtler than mere dramatic suspense:

The exterior, then, is indeed the object of our scrutiny but not of our interest. In the same way, the fisherman sits and looks fixedly at the float; the float, however, does not interest him at all, but rather the movements down at the bottom. Therefore the exterior does indeed have significance for us, but not as a manifestation of the interior, but rather as a telegraphic report that there is something hidden deep within. (EO 1:174; SKS 2:172).

As I have already shown, the Kierkegaardian focus on the *interesting* is not limited to *Either/Or*. A shared concern for the ‘interiority that is incommensurable with exteriority’ permeates *Fear and Trembling*, most conspicuously in the opening pages of the so-called ‘Third Problema,’ a sub-inquiry which comprises nearly one third of the entire book. In this, the largest and most elaborate section of the nine total sections of *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio, the mysterious and nominally taciturn pseudonym, proposes to address the question, ‘Was it Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?’ Exploring the question of whether Abraham should have announced and justified to his family his plan to sacrifice Isaac, and at least opened some lines of dialogue regarding the legitimacy of his intended filicide, Johannes begins with this formulation:

The ethical as such is the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed. The single individual, qualified as immediate, sensate, and psychical, is the hidden. Thus his ethical task is to work himself out of his hiddenness and to become disclosed in the universal. Every time he desires to remain in the hidden, he trespasses and is immersed in spiritual trial from which he can emerge only by disclosing himself. (FT 82; SKS 4:172)

He goes on to say that, in light of these claims regarding hiddenness (individuality) and disclosure (universality), ‘the category I shall consider in more detail is the *interesting*, a category that especially now—since the age lives in *discrimine rerum*—has become very important, for it is actually the category of the turning point.’ Just a few sentences deeper into the discussion, he adds this comment: ‘Furthermore, the *interesting* is a border category, a *confinium* between esthetics and ethics.’²⁰ From these two vague suggestions, the reader is left to assume that the concept of the *interesting*, somehow, is a category under which we might view any conduct which stands between the universal-disclosed and the individual-hidden. Johannes de Silentio will spend the ensuing forty pages providing specific literary and biblical

examples of the challenges of ethical disclosure, but within those pages he will use the word *interesting* just once more. For Johannes de Silentio, the concept of the *interesting*, as the turning point between aesthetics and ethics, becomes our silent key to any proper comprehension of the dilemma confronting Abraham. In other words, the question of how the individual handles the problem regarding whether to remain in secrecy or to disclose the truth of his intentions has major ramifications for whether we view him as an ethically-oriented individual or as someone geared towards his own subjectively-angled, private considerations (Abraham, as it turns out, is neither of these, which is why his case is a potential exception for Johannes de Silentio and therefore why he is the focus of the larger investigation. Ostensibly, on de Silentio's view, only a religious person can 'understand' Abraham).²¹

Unfortunately, while several of these scattered excerpts I have shared may take the superficial form of definitions, propositions, or at least descriptions of the *interesting*—the *interesting* is the category of the turning point, the *interesting* is the border region between aesthetics and ethics, the *interesting* is the how of seduction, etc.—still, no explicit proposition comes close to establishing for readers a clear and precise delineation of the word's meaning. Passages analogous to these excerpts regarding the *interesting* abound in Kierkegaard's works: We encounter time and again sentences or whole paragraphs in which the particular pseudonym either presumes the reader's foreknowledge of the category or else provides mystifying explanations that only increase the intellectual work to be done if an understanding of both the category and the text as a whole is to be reached. All the while these declarations remain too abstract to be definitive, and as readers we must assume that the category of the *interesting* is so capacious or variable that it resists easy formulation. Indeed, it may be so. One is reminded of Schlegel's opaque attempt to deal with the concept.

This is not to say that Kierkegaard would have had such a hard time had he wanted simply to define the *interesting* in any explicit manner. As I have been stressing, and as I intend to demonstrate in the chapters to follow, it seems evident that Kierkegaard knew distinctly what Schlegel only intuited, or that in this case Kierkegaard saw clearly where Schlegel only groped. My claim is that Kierkegaard very easily could have defined the *interesting* in a manner similar to Brian Söderquist's recent recapitulation of the concept. Or he simply could have explained to readers that the *interesting* is the category of aesthetics which arises when the observer detects a discrepancy between what is hidden and what is revealed in a character's conduct; and, from the point of view of ethics, it is greatest at the turning point when the question of whether the individual will prioritize the universal or the particular comes into play. Of course, as is appropriate to this category (which in the end is the category of pressurized individuality in a world understood by the assimilation of

categories, concepts, ideals, and universals), it is the particular cases with which Kierkegaard was concerned, not the nonrepresentational generalizations and slogans. The pseudonymous use of the concept of the *interesting* thus seems to serve as a sort of orientation to this issue of inner and outer, or hiddenness and disclosure, depth and surface, essence and phenomenon. In a sense, Kierkegaard maintains the reader's interest in each case by showing only the fisherman's float, thereafter allowing him to detect what is occurring beneath the surface. Just as Shakespeare indicates Hamlet's general subjectivity but cannot actualise the specific content of that subjectivity—thereby creating a character who is perpetually *interesting* to generations of spectators—so too does Kierkegaard indicate the inward depths of his characters through their frustrations in navigating the tensions between subjectivity and objectivity, the part and the whole, the individual and the universal.

At this point, having glimpsed the historical trajectory that led to an aesthetic emphasis upon the *interesting*, having discussed a contemporary scholar's general impression of Kierkegaard's employment of this category, and having seen how this impression is validated by various passages from the early pseudonymous works, we are finally ready to turn to the first case of the *interesting* in Kierkegaard's authorship: the case of A, the aesthetically-oriented personality who stands as author of the expositions comprising the first volume of *Either/Or*. As I intend to establish through a detailed reading of A's intellectual output and psychological development, the layered complexity of *Either/Or* can be read as direct consequence of Kierkegaard's hyper-sensitivity to, even his obsession with, this simple concept of the discrepancy between what may be hidden behind phenomena and what is perceptible and describable—that is, with the *interesting* incompatibility between inner and outer. It happens to be an opposition which, unlike Kant, Hegel, and a host of other modern philosophers, Kierkegaard does not believe aesthetics can resolve.

NOTES

1. While philosophers since the time of Socrates have integrated discussions of beauty and the uses and misuses of art into their larger philosophical inquiries, the demarcation of 'aesthetics' as a unique and isolated field of discourse became more or less official with the 1750 publication of *Aesthetica*, by Alexander Baumgarten. See Milton C. Nahm, 'Introduction' to *Readings in Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics*, pp. 3–10; J. M. Bernstein, 'Introduction' to *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*; E. F. Carritt, *Philosophies of Beauty*, pp. 81–85; and Israel Knox's *Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer*, pp. 3–5. See also the opening remarks in Hegel's 'Introduction' to *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. In the first paragraph, Hegel

writes: '[Aesthetics] had its origin as a new science, or rather as something which for the first time was to become a philosophical discipline, in the school of Wolff [i.e. Baumgarten] at the period in Germany when works of art were treated with regard to the feelings they were supposed to produce, as, for instance, the feeling of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, and so on' (Hegel 1975, 1). It is often said that Baumgarten's contribution to philosophy and aesthetics was slight, despite his coinage of the term. As Carritt puts it, '[His contribution] consisted chiefly in having, so far as is known, first used that word to designate the philosophy of beauty' (Carritt 1931, 80).

2. For other excellent accounts, see Jacques Taminiaux, *Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment*, pp. 1–93, Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, pp 1–63.

3. In the paragraph from which this sentence is taken, Inwood is summarising Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. However, the point stands as an apt description of the wider belief within the discipline of aesthetics within which Schelling was working.

4. Most prominent philosophers writing on beauty in the ensuing decades were influenced incalculably by Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. See, for example, Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* and *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Lectures on Fine Art*, Schlegel's *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, plus the works of Hölderlin, Novalis, and the other German Romantics.

5. Cf. Stokes 2010, pp.22–26; Macdonald 2013, pp. 100–103; Perkins 1993, pp. 168–170; and Söderquist 2014, 29–32.

6. A. O. Lovejoy writes that "'the *romantische poesie*' of which we hear so much [from Schlegel] after 1798 was simply the 'interessante poesie' of the earlier period. What altered was only Schlegel's evaluation of this type of poetry" (Lovejoy 1977, 67).

7. Cf. A. O Lovejoy, 'On the Meaning of 'Romantic' in Early German Romanticism,' p. 67.

8. "Schlegel utilizes the notion of 'disinterestedness' in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* and historicizes it precisely by rendering it the guiding aesthetic principle of antiquity; he also uses it as a critical provocation for the production of a new literary public, a new sense of community and communicativity" (Leventhal 1994, 263).

9. Cf. For the 'ongoingness' of the *interesting*, see Szianne Ngai, 'Merely Interesting,' p. 782. The author does not mention Kierkegaard.

10. This quote and the succeeding quotes within this paragraph are taken from "Hegel's Aesthetics: An Overview," by Robert Wicks. In that article, Wicks presents an excellent, ultra-condensed précis of Kant's theory of the beautiful.

11. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant had written, 'Nature proved beautiful when it wore the appearance of art; and art can only be termed beautiful, where we are conscious of its being art, while yet it has the appearance of nature' (Kant 306–307).

12. This phrase, 'uniquely characteristic inwardness,' is borrowed from Nietzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (Nietzsche 1997, 78). Despite the anachronistic source, I include the phrase here because it seems to be a development

of Schlegel's notion of the *interesting* and thus a clarification of what is nascent—or present but possibly insufficiently articulated—in Schlegel. In the larger passage, Nietzsche is discussing what he calls modern man's 'indigestible stones of knowledge' and 'the remarkable antithesis between an interior which fails to correspond to any exterior and an exterior which fails to correspond to any interior—an antithesis not known to the peoples of earlier times' (ibid). Furthermore, although it is generally believed that Nietzsche never read any Kierkegaard despite an awareness of his work and talents, this quote and the passage from which it is taken echo Kierkegaard's concept of the *interesting* as described in *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling* (as we shall see in great detail). That Nietzsche was influenced by Schlegel's *On the Study of Greek Poetry* is well known (see, for instance, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, p. 67 and note 97); it is also evident from even the most cursory reading of Schlegel's texts and Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. It is Schlegel, for instance, who introduces the very topic that Nietzsche takes up in *The Birth of Tragedy*: 'Equally blended together in the mind of Sophocles was the divine intoxication of Dionysus, the profound inventiveness of Athena, and the quiet levelheadedness of Apollo' (Schlegel 2001, 61). For further Nietzschean thoughts regarding the category of the *interesting*, see *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche 1996, 11–18, 48–51).

13. For evidence of Kierkegaard's familiarity with *Laocoön* and its influence on him, see, for example, *Either/Or*, p 169ff. See also *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 59–126.

14. Naturally, Lessing was deeply concerned with modern art and poetry, and his apparent classicism may have been superficial, indirect, or even ironical. For a thorough and insightful account of Lessing's more implicit motivations, see J.M. Bernstein's 'Introduction' to *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, pp viii–xviii.

15. Hamlet's complaint appears in *Hamlet*, I.2.5

16. Later in this study (Chapter 4) we will return to this thought. As I see it, this is the very reason for *Hamlet's* success as a work of art. Prince Hamlet is the *subjective* correlative *instar omnium*. His character and situation indirectly express the modern crisis with the most distillate and poetic perfection: the subjective spirit of the modern individual overflows the objects and materials and conditions which are supposed to contain, adorn, and express it; and not only is he unable to find any objective correlative for his unaccountable, inexplicable interiority, but also he fails to understand that this is the problem essentially speaking. The *interesting* character mirrors the modern spectator in the most beguiling way because his 'bafflement at the absence of [an] objective equivalent to our feelings' is itself the emotion that has no objective equivalent. Such is the paradox beyond which modern consciousness cannot reach.

17. Regarding Kierkegaard's stipulation that *Either/Or* marks the beginning of his authorship, see, for instance, *The Point of View*, p 29.

18. Brian Söderquist refers to this clever analogy in a similar fashion (Söderquist 2015, 27).

19. We will return to these mysteries in Chapter 8, when we are in a position to discuss 'The Seducer's Diary.'

20. Cf. Söderquist 2015, 27–28.

21. The idea that the *interesting* is the border territory between aesthetics and ethics may yet remain rather opaque to us. However, the entirety of our investigations into *Either/Or* will help us understand exactly what Johannes de Silentio means. Therefore, we will be able return to this point in the 'Coda,' where we will read the passage with much greater illumination.

Chapter 2

Don Giovanni as Proto-Aesthete

THE MUSIC OF ENCHANTMENT

I hope our discussion of Hamlet's *interesting* drama has been sufficiently clear to serve as a preemptive counterpoint to the character of Don Giovanni (and to Mozart's opera of the same name), for it should by now be apparent that an aesthetically oriented philosopher seeking re-enchantment would be misguided to look to Prince Hamlet, or to any *interesting* type, as appropriate subject matter. Although watching a skilled production of *Hamlet* promises to be an engaging experience, the spectator's genuine appreciation must rely upon some degree of attention to the problems produced by Hamlet's overflowing consciousness and to the consequent discrepancy in his conduct between surface and depth. The most rudimentary idea of *Hamlet*, or what we might call the point of orientation from which the dramatic, tragic, and poetic particularities of the play can be seen to emerge, is the idea of an individual self-consciousness divided against the world and so hidden from the direct view of others that even his consorts find him mystifying. In his melancholy and crisis, he is unable or unwilling to communicate earnestly with others.

In light of its thematic abundance and the endless variety of actual and possible interpretations the work engenders, I here reduce *Hamlet* to one rudimentary idea with extreme reservation. Yet the apparent strength of Hamlet's individuality is the very reason he will forever be *interesting* or hidden or partially incomprehensible, both to the characters within his sphere of action and to readers and theatregoers. Such was the nature of T. S. Eliot's complaint (and my praise). Hamlet is the extreme depiction of modern individuality—only paradoxically so, of course, since the idea of a representative individual is logically confused (and yet this paradox is the strength of our connection to Hamlet, since we take imaginative ownership of his incomprehensibility in the same way that, according to Lessing, any spectator before a veiled

Agamemnon takes imaginative ownership of the king's paternal grief). The tragic problems arising from Hamlet's unique consciousness as it stands in conflict with the body and the world suggest a baseline issue that will be present, more or less, to the mind of any self-conscious individual. All questions of revenge, friendship, piety, eroticism, incest, patrimony, justice, duty, sincerity, deceit, guilt, death, suicide, violence, strategy, politics, misdirection, jest, theatrics, philosophy, science, insanity, power, control, and imagination, can be referred back to the incipient question of whether this individual can or will actualize his internal subtlety upon or within the inherited constellation of circumstances and events. *Hamlet* is many things to many people, in other words, but firstly the play is the sensitive expression of a hero quintessentially and spiritually at odds both with his own identity and with the milieu he inhabits.

Assuming this is valid, we might ask ourselves: How could an aesthetically oriented philosopher expect a theatrical presentation of the most reflective character in Western poetry to be suitable content for the provisional diminishment of her own spiritual-sensual division? Who would turn to *Hamlet* for the momentary denial of her own reflective separation from the domain of sensible experience? Anyhow, regardless of our earlier concentration on the *interesting* as an aesthetic category, we also know rather intuitively that no theatregoer approaches *Hamlet* with the aim of falling into an irresistible and easy mood of enchantment. We sympathize with Hamlet, we learn from his predicament, we savour his sublime language and ponderous flirtation with death, but we do not turn to his example for relief from the twin pressures of the world upon the intellect and the intellect upon the world. The characteristic image of Hamlet in the churchyard, holding and beholding Yorick's detached skull, contemplating aloud the interrelated questions of personal identity, time, and mortality, is wonderfully apt as the emblem of an existence in which the material world seems simultaneously alien and inescapable. However, we would be mistaken to call this a *beautiful* tableau, since conceptions of the *beautiful* cannot and do not want to subscribe to the artistic preservation of such a painful contradiction: to be alienated from that which you cannot escape—possibly not even by suicide. Above all else, beauty should be harmonious and spiritually integrating, and in our experience of the *beautiful* object, if only for a moment, matter should align with the mind.

If the initial wish of aesthetic enjoyment is so-called immediacy, or the momentary forfeiture of self-consciousness (experience without reflection, without conceptualisation, and without fragmentation), then the innermost of an artwork's nesting dolls, the substance around which everything else takes shape, should be the fulfilment of that wish rather than its refutation. The rudimentary idea of any *beautiful* artwork should be the very idea of enchantment. In other words, beautiful artworks are most beautiful when

enchantment lies compressed at the nucleus of the phenomenal particularities of form and content, just as *interesting* artworks are most *interesting* when disenchantment is compressed at the nucleus. The subject matter of the beautiful artwork should somehow represent or depict or enact a plunge into the domain of sensual life at the expense of the reflective-linguistic-intellectual domain.

In direct contrast to Prince Hamlet, Don Giovanni, Mozart's specific interpretation of the Don Juan legend, seems to be the beautiful wish personified. His method of practice is to plunge repeatedly and endlessly into the most sensuous undertaking available to the human in society: sexual congress. As we will see, his activities throughout the opera he inhabits and shapes are transparent expressions of the deepest urge towards immersion in sensuality and the physical experience, and we may say that he is insatiable for the material world at the expense or constant regress of his own self-reflection. He plunges into sensuality as a modern aesthete wishes to plunge into the beautiful artwork. If Hamlet is melancholy and reflective, Don Giovanni is exuberant and unreflective; if Hamlet is the dramatic epitome of the condition of subjective crisis, Don Giovanni is the operative epitome of enchantment. One may argue with reason that no character in Western culture is less enchanted with the sensual world than Hamlet, whereas the opposite may be said of Don Giovanni. For this reason, I intend in what follows to support the claim that Don Giovanni is the proto-aesthete. He is the proto-aesthete not simply as a pleasure-seeker, which seems to be a typical scholarly take on Kierkegaard's use of the word 'aesthete,' but more deeply as a character driven towards sense-experience as a reprieve from the burdens of developing, differentiated self-consciousness.¹

In order to take a closer look at what this claim entails, it will be helpful to examine the manner with which Kierkegaard's fictitious aesthete introduces and explicates his unabashed love for the opera *Don Giovanni*. Unsurprisingly, A begins his enterprise in a manner wholly similar to the manner with which the eighteenth-century German aestheticians began theirs: namely with the humble impulse to return conceptually to the fold of universal sensible experience in order to undo the reflective increase which, through the historical developments of science, religion, the arts, and philosophy since the time of Ancient Greece, has led to this disagreeable critical division between the spiritual and sensible realms of reality. A quick glance at the very first sentence of 'The Immediate Erotic Stages'—the very first sentence of A's very first aesthetic exposition—clearly shows that impulse at work.

From the moment my soul was first astounded by Mozart's music and humbly bowed in admiration, it has often been a favorite and refreshing occupation for me to deliberate on the way that happy Greek view of the world that calls the

world a cosmos because it manifests itself as a well-organized whole, as an elegant, transparent adornment for the spirit that acts upon and operates throughout it, the way that happy view lets itself be repeated in a higher order of things, in the world of ideals, the way there is here again a ruling wisdom especially wonderful at uniting what belongs together, Axel with Valborg, Homer with the Trojan war, Raphael with Catholicism, Mozart with Don Juan. (EO 1: 47; SKS 2: 55).

The picture Kierkegaard's aesthete paints here should feel familiar. He begins by explaining that from his earliest exposure to Mozart's music, his soul *humbly bowed in admiration*. Presumably he performed this spiritual gesture towards the specific work in question (which, at the conclusion of the sentence, we learn was the opera *Don Giovanni*), but quite possibly he directed it towards Mozart as artist. Following upon this *astounding* moment of humility and admiration, A tells us, he developed the new and cherished pastime of pondering the long-vanished 'happy Greek' consciousness that experienced cohesion—or, at minimum, a lack of differentiation—between material and spiritual life. According to A's assessment, the Ancient Greeks were sensitive to the unseen and spiritual element as a smoothly interpenetrating and indistinguishable aspect of the physical milieu.² Such a mentality apparently identified the natural realm of experience as a *cosmos* rather than as a world (the Ancient Greek word implying, simultaneous with the physical phenomena which comprise the material extension of nature, the very idea of beauty in the wholeness and harmony of all things).³

Midway through the sentence, A goes on to explain why this deliberative pastime has been refreshing for him. The palliative quality inherent in the Greek perception of spiritual-physical harmony is accessible even into the modern day, thanks to the enduring presence of certain artistic masterpieces. When a unity between the ideal content of those artworks and the formal execution of the artist in question replicates the Greek unity of natural world and spiritual essence, the *cosmological* outlook is momentarily restored, and the individual spectator experiences *heiterkeit* or serenity.⁴ Of course, in this comparison between artistic masterpiece and Greek *cosmos*, the rudimentary idea integrating the artwork is parallel to the 'spirit that acts upon and operates throughout the world,' and the material or perceivable elements of the artwork are parallel to the physical phenomena constituting sense experience. Thus an artistic masterpiece is to a spectator what the *cosmos* was to an Ancient Greek, and we might say that the artwork becomes its own small *cosmos*—a *microcosm* in the most genuine way—and, consequently, the very example of a wholeness and harmony between ideal content and artistic execution.

The familiarity we may sense in reading A's opening sentence is therefore rather simple to express: Classic art is beloved to us because, for the duration of our engagement with the work in question, we experience beauty and enchantment, a reconciliation of concept and artistic execution. The historical developments which have led to the division between consciousness and material extension fade from our purview, as does intuition of the division itself, and the great gulf is bridged. As spectators or auditors we are drawn into the harmonic relation of medium and subject matter as if consciousness were yet another element of the fully reciprocating spiritual-sensual whole; and our contact with the artwork is unmediated by any conceptualisation of, or differentiation between, the various elements at play in the work.

As with the humble origins of modern European aesthetics more generally, A's humble beginning advances from a desire to undo the division of reality into its disparate components of subject and object. It is a wish mentally to return to the comforting fold of the universally-experienced and purely sensible realm, a place or time where the individual is not isolated from, and insulated within, a physically extended dimension with which his self-consciousness may or may not be able to interpenetrate.⁵ As with the original aestheticians in Germany, A believes this place of solace is the classical work of art. This is what Schlegel called the 'beautiful' and Schiller the 'naïve' work of art.

In the pages that follow this extremely telling opening sentence, A insists with repeated exuberance that, among all classic masterpieces, *Don Giovanni* ranks highest. Here is how he puts it midway through his introduction to the topic: 'I am infatuated, like a young girl, with Mozart, and I must have him rank in first place, whatever it costs.' Just a few pages later, he highlights and expands this thought by adding the conviction that, 'With his *Don Giovanni*, Mozart enters the rank of those immortals, of those visibly transfigured ones, whom no cloud takes away from the eyes of men; with *Don Giovanni* he stands supreme among them' (EO 1:51; SKS 2:59).

At this early stage of our investigation of 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' of course, we cannot know exactly why A insists that *Don Giovanni* stands supreme. Yet, in a very general way, given our discussion, we can forecast the basics of the argument that will follow. If *Don Giovanni* is the masterpiece among masterpieces, the superlative classic, the best particular instance of the 'ruling wisdom especially wonderful at uniting what belongs together,' it must be the single most successfully enchanting artistic creation known to the aesthete. Among artworks, *Don Giovanni* must be the one to fabricate unmediated experience most abundantly. The subject matter of the opera must perfectly inhabit the musical medium; the musical medium must transparently encompass the content; together they must create a well-organized whole by virtue of which *no metaphysical gap exists* between spectator and

performance. In *Don Giovanni*, the ideal (subject matter) and the actual (material form) must be indivisible. A confirms this when he writes, ‘Only where the idea is brought to rest and transparency in a definite form can there be any question of a classic work’ (EO 1:57; SKS 2:61). And so here we see emphasized once more the distinction that A will belabour throughout his introduction to ‘The Immediate Erotic Stages,’ the notion that while all classic works of art achieve a perfect unity between medium and subject matter—that a classic artwork is precisely the unity of these two aspects—*Don Giovanni* is superior in its perfection to all others (despite the obviously illogical concept of a greater perfection). Given that this is the case, we know something must be exceptional about the unity as it is achieved in *Don Giovanni*, since simply to achieve a unity of subject matter and medium is not enough to elevate the opera above the works of Homer and Raphael and all the other great classical artists at work throughout history.

What is it, then, that makes Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* special? Why does A insist that Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is the supreme artwork? Again, the answer will prove to be simple—and perhaps it is partially apparent from our vision of Hamlet as the counterpoint to *Don Giovanni*—if we consider what A admittedly seeks through the mutual permeation of artistic form and content. For we know that if the greatness of a classical artwork resides in its ability to fabricate a cosmological sense of integration, then the piece that best achieves this will be the highest artwork; and we know that the artwork that best activates a return to immediacy will be a successfully harmonious artwork that has at its idealistic nucleus the pull of the sensual, the physical, the unreflective, the immediate: an artwork *about* the rudimentary idea of immediacy and the enchantments of a purely sensual existence. Contrariwise, the formal medium in which this immediacy is expressed must manifest the sensuous more than the other media.

However, this is not the extent of it, for this suggests but does not yet explain the single most important point for the claim that *Don Giovanni* is highest, or what we might call, for lack of a better term, the thesis statement of ‘The Immediate Erotic Stages.’ This is the notion that both the *idea* of Don Juan and the *idea* of music stand at the limits of abstraction. As soon as the idea of Don Juan has been expressed in music, the harmony between this specific subject matter and its appropriate form has been achieved, and such harmony cannot be repeated in another artwork without reconstructing the opera as it already stands. Here it is in A’s words: ‘The more abstract and thus the more impoverished the idea is, the more abstract and thus the more impoverished the medium is; hence the greater is the probability that no repetition can be imagined, and the greater is the probability that when the idea has acquired its expression it has acquired it once and for all’ (EO 1:54; SKS

2:61–62). As we are not yet in a position to grasp exactly what this means or why it is the case, our ensuing discussion will be an attempt to return to A's thesis with a clarified picture of the various elements it contains. As a proactive measure, or as a clue to what follows, it will be useful to cite the most clear-cut scholarly paraphrase of what A intends to express here. In the aforementioned article about Kierkegaard's early fixation upon the legend of Faust, Leonardo Lisi devotes several paragraphs to a discussion of Don Giovanni in order to contrast the idea of his character with the idea of Faust's character. In so doing, he writes that

The idea of "the sensuous in its elemental originality" that the figure of Don Juan embodies, in contrast [to Faust], is abstract in the sense that it organizes only a few defining attributes, which means that it is less likely to be repeated since it is only possible to generate a small number of variations of this idea before instantiating the same set of attributes again. (Lisi 2015, 214)

As we turn our attention more closely to the arguments of 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' let us take the two elements of the opera in their turn, considering first the Don Juan legend as an abstract *idea*, and second music as the most abstract artistic *medium*. In so doing, we will be able to grasp the main point A wishes to express, and, ultimately, to see the flaw in A's argument as a whole.

THE DON JUAN IDEA

In the introduction, during my effort to compile textual evidence for the claim that Kierkegaard's pseudonyms were using the word 'interesting' as a category rather than arbitrarily, I mentioned the detail that A devotes a dozen or so pages of 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' to examining the aesthetic mistake of artistically representing the Don Juan legend in linguistic form. The passage I cited characterises A's specific judgment against Lord Byron's poetic interpretation, the satirical verse epic *Don Juan*. Now that we are concerned more specifically with the *idea* of Don Juan, it will be useful to look at that passage once again:

If Don Juan is interpreted as an individual, then he is *eo ipso* in conflict with the world about him. As an individual, he feels the constraint and the fetters of these surroundings; as a great individual he may triumph over them, but one immediately feels that the difficulties of the obstructions play a different role here. The interest is preoccupied essentially with them. But Don Juan is thereby drawn under the rubric of the interesting. (EO 1:107; SKS 2:109)

The suggestion that Don Juan should never be interpreted in such a way that his character presentation assumes the concrete dimensions of individuality may seem abnormal or even mistaken to readers, for how is it possible to represent such a forceful personality as anything but an individual? However, this is not the only instance of such an aesthetic injunction from A, and a closer look at similar claims will reveal that this is no mistake or momentary exaggeration, but rather a crucial point for the entire argument. Just a few pages earlier, in his discussion of the historical emergence of the Don Juan legend, we read that ‘Don Juan continually hovers between being idea—that is, power, life—and being an individual’ (EO 1:92; SKS 2:97). Moreover, in the paragraphs between these mutually definitive rejections of the so-called individuality of Don Juan, we come across the virtually identical claim that ‘Don Giovanni lies within this universality, in this hovering between being an individual and a force of nature; as soon as he becomes an individual, the esthetic acquires completely different categories’ (EO 1:96; SKS 2:100–101). Why such claims? Why is it the case that to alter the legend by distorting its expression into the category of the *interesting* is to betray the essence of the legend? Why must an artist represent Don Juan as hovering between idea and individuality? Can an individual never be *beautiful*?

In our consideration of this issue, it will be helpful to examine a different point A makes as he opens the passage in which these excerpts occur. At the start of the sub-chapter entitled, ‘The Elementary Originality of the Sensuous Qualified as Seduction,’ he reminds readers that the Don Juan legend developed during the ‘world-historical period in human consciousness’ we call the Middle Ages, and he stresses the importance of the fact that Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is merely one creative interpretation of a prevalent European folktale originating somewhere and sometime during the long span of years between the spread of Christianity and the beginning of modernity (EO 1:87; SKS 2:93).⁶ As a pervasive piece of folklore, the Don Juan story can be understood to convey the nascent but general feeling of the time during which the idea was generated, told, retold, and propagated. As A puts it, ‘[Don Juan] is one of those powerful, primitive ideas that emerge from the folk consciousness with autochthonic originality’ (EO 1:88; SKS 2:93). Don Juan is, along with Faust, a ‘titan and giant’ of the Middle Ages, and the predominant folkloric creation. The idea of a seductive libertine can therefore be said to be representative of the collective wishes and concerns, or at least the prominent aesthetic response to experience, from this historical stretch of time. To understand the idea of Don Juan, then, is to glimpse a major indication of the mood from which modernity materializes.

I think we have paid heed enough to the distinction between Ancient and Modern consciousness as it was understood by the aestheticians and philosophers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to make at least one

general assumption about their outlook regarding the Middle Ages: it was the period of transition from the *cosmological* perspective, in which the individual is at home within phenomena, to the *fragmented* perspective, in which the individual is alienated from phenomena. A takes this view for granted. On his assessment, the Middle Ages is the epoch during which individual incongruence with the universal, or inner alienation from outer, slowly develops by virtue of the fact that Christianity has introduced the idea of spirit as the divine element in humans, and thus as differentiated from and superior to the sensual element previously held to be informative of experience. A emphasizes this point as follows:

To make the claim that Christianity brought sensuality into the world seems boldly venturesome. But as they say: Boldly ventured is half won. So it also holds here; it will become evident upon reflection that in the positing of something, the other that is excluded is indirectly posited. Since sensuality generally is that which is to be negated, it really comes to light, is really posited, first by the act that excludes it through a positing of the opposite positive. Sensuality is posited as a principle, as a power, as an independent system first by Christianity, and to that extent Christianity brought sensuality into the world. But if the thesis that Christianity has brought sensuality into the world is to be understood properly, it must be comprehended as identical to its opposite, that it is Christianity that drove sensuality out of the world, has excluded sensuality from the world . . . This is quite natural, for Christianity is spirit, and spirit is the positive principle it has brought into the world. (EO 1:60; SKS 2:68)

One general consequence of Christian doctrine, according to this thinking, is that for Christendom the material world appears to realise its processes at a distance from the subject's spiritual centre. In fact, the notions of *internal* and *external* have subjective import for the first time as a consequence of Christianity, for although the Ancient Greeks held matter to contain physical and psychical elements, physical extension was for the subject the psychical made manifest. Furthermore, the intuitive domain of sense experience, the world we should know and recognize as our natural milieu, has become the 'kingdom of sin' under Christianity's influence (EO 1:90; SKS 2:95). In this regard, A does not consider modern historical developments such as the scientific discoveries of Kepler, Galileo, and Newton, or philosophical endeavours such as those of Descartes, to be the catalysts for disenchantment properly understood, but rather to be mere responses to the way in which Christianity has excluded sensuality in favour of spirit. He sees the modern crisis as the culmination of a truly millennial development in which the collective human intellect slowly comes to terms not only with what this division entails, but also with what it implies. Therefore, to approach the creations and imaginative representations of the Middle Ages is to witness the human

psyche in transition from the ancient ‘beautiful individuality’ to the modern ‘interesting individuality,’ where *beautiful* here suggests, exactly as we would expect, the concept of spiritual-sensual interpenetration, and *interesting* suggests the concept of spiritual-sensual incongruity.

In the first case, that of the beautiful individuality, we witness the inexorable interpenetration of physical and psychical reality, of fate and character, of phenomenon and essence—with the former component in each relation appearing as the transparent adornment of the latter, or, to put it the other way around, with the latter component in each relation giving actual shape to the ideality of the former. Although the genealogy of this qualifying use of ‘beautiful’ was tacit already in eighteenth-century aesthetics, Hegel, in his lectures on *The Philosophy of History*, was the first to employ the more specific notation of the ‘beautiful individuality’ to express the Greek character’s relation between somatic and psychical components. As Hegel explains it, the Ancient Greek character is ‘*Individuality conditioned by Beauty*, which is produced by Spirit, transforming the merely Natural into an expression of its own being. The idea of Spirit does not yet possess in itself the material and organ of expression, but needs the excitement of Nature and the matter which Nature supplies’ (Hegel 1991, 238–239). He elaborates on this idea, specifying its implications for the Greek consciousness of fate, in his subsequently published *Lectures on Fine Art*, when he claims that “the heart of the [Greek] hero recoils into simple unity with itself when it says: ‘It is so.’” (Hegel 1975, 158). If we look at the example of Achilles, we notice that his psychical features are easily apprehended by observing his athletic prowess and his unmatched martial skill, his swiftness on the field, his discernible ferocity and likewise intelligible wrath, and, in consideration of his prophesied death in Troy, the concordance between his fate and what we moderns might call his inner character. Death in war will be the culmination, the final expression, of who he has always been both psychically and physically.

A fully subscribes to Hegel’s point:

In Greek Culture, the sensuous was controlled by the *beautiful individuality*, or, to put it more accurately, it was not controlled, for it was not an enemy to be subdued, not a dangerous insurgent to be held in check; it was liberated to life and joy in the *beautiful individuality*. (EO 1:62; SKS 2:70)

In the second case, that of the *interesting* individuality, we suspect the disharmony between the outer and the inner, and we can never fully ascertain whether the character’s conduct, speech, and physiognomy align with or contradict some hidden essence. We must ask ourselves: Is Hamlet going mad or just unfolding a strategic deception? To what extent are all his words and actions expressive of concealment? Is his punishing speech to Ophelia

an indication of true repugnance, emotional indifference, psychological manipulation, or simply childish heartbreak? And so on. The full divisive effect of the positing of spirit by Christianity, in other words, is finally expressed only with the arrival of the poetry and art of modernity. We know the extent to which Hamlet embodies this division (and the extent to which such *embodiment* is indeterminate), and now perhaps we see more fully why earlier, when I mentioned my reservation about reducing Hamlet to one idea, I meant to suggest that two features of his dramatic richness—first, his complexity of character (his palpable individuality as the intricately-woven source of novel deeds and more novel speeches), and second his irreducible incomprehensibility (his impalpable individuality as prohibitive of abstraction)—prevented us from pointing to his appearance onstage as representative of any single idea. Hamlet may be said to indicate in abstract *form* the mood of disorientation arising from the incongruence of indeterminate subjectivity within a world of determinate objects. But Hamlet's concrete inward *content* is uniquely his own. Precisely because of the inaccessible circumstances of subjectivity, his example cannot be universalized so as to signify any one idea. Really, Hamlet is at most a suggestion of the universal problem of subjectivity, and this is why I said earlier that Hamlet is the extreme depiction of modern individuality, but only paradoxically so, since the concept of a representative individual is logically confused.

Between the ancient and modern epochs, then, we have the Middle Ages, the mentality of which can be understood as coming to terms with the division between the physical and the spiritual aspects of personality, and thus as transitioning aesthetically from the *beautiful* individuality to the *interesting* individuality. However, because the folk psyche of the Middle Ages has yet to fathom how the subjective-objective identity can persist within one individuality as a contradiction rather than as a congruence, it waives the complexities and puzzling incompatibilities of what we might call subjective distance from or irreducibility to objective phenomena (or 'irony'),⁷ and thus entertains abstract character *representations* of one polarity or the other, placing two such representations in external opposition rather than embodying the opposition in one more concrete and multi-dimensional personality. As I understand A's view, he believes that the changing concept of individuality *in light of spirit* involves problems for which the Middle Ages were not epistemologically equipped, and, as such, rather than succumbing to cognitive dissonance in their poetry, artworks, and folklore, they simplified matters with a limited grasp of what was at stake.

On the whole, the Middle Ages is the idea, partly conscious, partly unconscious, of representation; the totality is represented in a particular individual, yet in such a way that it is only a particular aspect that is defined as the totality and

that is now manifest in a particular individual, who is therefore both more than and less than an individual . . . thus the Middle Ages itself actualized the idea of representation *unconsciously*, whereas a later reflection first perceives the idea in it. (EO 1: 87–88; SKS 2:93, my emphasis)

Rather than the *beautiful individuality* (such as an Achilles), or the *interesting individuality* (such as a Hamlet), we have the *representative personality* (such as the knight, the scholar, the monk, the princess, the fool, the nun, the publican, the poet, etc.). Of the three epochal approaches to the expression of human character, then, only the representative personality can be said to lack individuality *qua* relation between the psychical and the physical aspects of personhood. Yet this is because the consciousness of the Middle Ages is concussed from the blow to sensuousness that accompanies the Christian doctrine of spirit. The prior wholeness of sensible-psychical experience has become incalculably unwieldy or even fragmentary, and so now the part stands in as the semblance of a whole. Here again, A has a concise yet specific description of this historical process of coming to terms with such a paradigm shift: ‘The Middle Ages had to make the discord between the flesh and the spirit that Christianity brought into the world the subject of its reflection and to that end personified each of the conflicting forces. Don Juan, then, if I dare say so, is the incarnation of the flesh, or the inspiration of the flesh by the spirit of the flesh itself’ (EO 1:88; SKS 2:94).⁸

Let us take a closer look at what A means to say here, since it seems that two important and interrelated points are embedded within this remark. The first and more basic point is indistinguishable from the above-mentioned point that the Middle Ages turned to the abstract, representative personality in an effort to simplify the challenge of inhabiting the increasing complexities of concrete individual reality in light of Christianity’s positing of spirit. Human individuality is no longer merely the unique instantiation of the beautiful harmony apparent everywhere in the comfortably ordered *cosmos*. This is because the human individual, in part by virtue of its historically accumulating attributes and its prodigious memory (its self-referential, self-regulating dialectic along the temporal axis), is a concretion too complex for generic conceptualisation, and so self-consciousness is felt to be an unwanted contradiction to the more limited magnitudes of static identity and inherited role, and thus is unpleasant and burdensome. Yet in the folklore of the Middle Ages, this burden remains subterranean or latent, which is to say that primitive intuitions of the burden merely illuminate the dark territories of artistic consciousness as flashes illuminate a stormy horizon.⁹

The second and more important point is, in fact, this very idea of yearning for the abstract (simplification) taken to a higher power: namely it is the idea that Don Juan is *the abstract representation of the longing for abstraction*.

To say that Don Juan is the ‘inspiration of the flesh by the spirit of the flesh itself’ is another way of saying that what the flesh represents in this picture is the idea that the apparent, the tangible, the sensuous and sensible, is really just appearance taken as the full range of reality. As such, Don Giovanni qualitatively transcends the simple character representation—the knight, the scholar, the nun (those types which represent, respectively, interior qualities like valour, intellect, piety)—and becomes more profoundly the ur-representative, the figurehead of the impulse to avoid altogether the complexities of spirit’s division from the flesh and the self-awareness entailed in personal concretion over time. His personal identity can be reduced no further without his disintegration into a purely unconscious force of nature. Don Juan negates the individual concretion over time and experience which threatens always to outpace and to exceed easy self-conceptualisation. He is always beginning anew, or his erotic motion is a standing in place. If spirit, from a certain angle, is that which cannot be reduced to sensible impressions or determinate predicates, then the most abstracted personality-type will be equivalent to the most sensually entrenched and the least multi-dimensional consciousness. This is why Don Juan is a ‘titan and giant’ of the Middle Ages, and this is why A asserts that Don Juan should never be interpreted as a concrete individual. Don Juan’s endless sensual undertakings signify a stubborn resistance to the realisation of incomprehensible individuality. As a nascent individual, he must be seen as retarding the development of any noticeable incompatibility between the subjective and the objective (i.e. as directing his experience away from spirit). Don Juan, then, is best represented as hovering between idea and individual, since now we may say that he is the idea of hovering between idea and individual, or, as I put it above, he is the abstract representation of abstraction. A writes: ‘The most abstract idea conceivable is the sensuous in its elemental originality’ (EO 1:56; SKS 2:64).

So then, according to A, Don Juan is a sort of wish-fulfilment for the Middle Ages. This is not because he signifies or vicariously purges some suppressed pleasure principle, but—more deeply—because, from the perspective of the folk storyteller and audience, he is a naïve obscuration of the emerging temperament which accompanies subjective incommensurability with the objective domain. Thereby the parallel with the origin of modern aesthetics is now fully explicit: for Don Juan’s immersion in sensuality is prototypical of the manoeuvre of modern aesthetics. Just as A turns to classic works of art in order to linger in the universal fold of unreflective experience, to inhabit a place absent the pains and disorientation of a subjectivity in tension with the objective world—to escape ‘the boundless chaos,’ as A calls it—so does Don Juan, in this picture, turn to the universal fold of the sensuous at the price of his own self-consciousness. He does not enjoy himself enjoying, as we moderns apparently do—he merely enjoys. With the claim that Don Juan

is the proto-aesthetician, then, I intend to suggest that Don Juan prefigures the explicit impulse of the eighteenth-century founders of aesthetics. He remains at the level of *prototype* because he is reflectively unaware that this impulse originates in the emotional-intellectual crisis facing Christianized self-consciousness.

Viewed in this light, it is easy to see why Don Juan is drawn towards pure sensuality (if we suspend our disbelief and attribute to him an interior world). But we must also ask how he is so seductive to others. What makes him irresistible to the women he encounters? Why is his victory so assured? While the condition for his success may be apparent so long as we assume that his victims share the emerging temperament that accompanies subjective incommensurability—since certainly immediacy will be their psychological reprieve as much as it is the reprieve of Don Juan (the victims, after all, are likewise products of the Middle Ages)—nonetheless, what remains to be seen is how aptly Don Juan achieves this immediacy for those victims even in advance of sexual consummation. How is his mere attendance upon a woman the proactive guarantee of conquest, and in that regard how is his desire so much more powerful than mere temptation, which after all can generally be resisted by reasoning and willpower?

For an appropriate description of whatever mechanism lies behind his inevitable success, it will be useful to transition from our discussion of the *Don Juan legend as idea* to Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as the crowning iteration of that idea (or as that idea finally brought into proper aesthetic existence). For only by the artistry of Mozart is the myth finally realized, according to A, and only by witnessing Don Giovanni's activity in the opera can we come to understand A's claim that 'He desires, and this desire acts seductively.'

MUSIC AND ANXIETY

Let us now envision Don Giovanni and Hamlet as occupying opposite extremes along a spectrum of disenchantment. In the picture we are drawing, it is fair to say that they are equally afflicted by the division between the subjective, internal experience, and the objective, external experience. Kant's great gulf is their shared psychological underpinning. As we already know, Hamlet's struggle illustrates this division through his melancholy crescendo of solitude and his incommensurate and ultimately failed striving towards an appropriate outcome to his multi-directional motivations; but Don Giovanni illustrates this division through his total neglect of subjective consciousness in favour of his single-minded pursuit of the particular woman as the objective instantiation of the feminine. Although patently dissimilar in symptoms (conduct, tendency, level of reflection, articulacy, complexity, degree of

concealment), Don Giovanni and Hamlet can still be understood as exhibiting a diverse form of the same disease: an affective tension between inner and outer which we shall now, following A's example, begin to call *anxiety*.

Don Giovanni is not self-conscious enough to experience the sort of *interesting* collisions Hamlet faces, but this is precisely because all of his energy is devoted to avoiding the as-yet unrefined crisis of subjectivity. Whereas Hamlet is hyper-aware of his state of division and is virtually paralyzed through his reflection upon the particularized challenges it presents in his own case, Don Giovanni is aware only implicitly or unconsciously and is consequently energized against the full recognition of his own contradiction.¹⁰ In other words, Don Giovanni derives his inexhaustible sensuous desire *against* any cognizance of the division between phenomenon and noumenon, object and subject, matter and spirit, external and internal. As I take it, this is what A means when he makes the following proclamation about Don Giovanni:

There is an anxiety in him, but this anxiety is his energy. In him, it is not a subjectively reflected anxiety; it is a *substantial* anxiety . . . Don Giovanni's life is not despair; it is, however, the full force of the sensuous, which is born in anxiety; and Don Giovanni himself is this anxiety, but this anxiety is precisely the demonic zest for life. (EO 1:129; SKS 2:131, my emphasis)

Although the passage from which this quote is taken contains A's first expository use of the word 'anxiety' [*angest*], it is apparent that the mood he describes here is equivalent to the disquieting sense of incongruity we have identified all along as the origin of the aesthetic impulse. This mood is what I have called previously 'the emerging temperament which accompanies subjective incommensurability.' The assertion that the full force of the sensuous is born in anxiety should be understood in such a way that anxiety here is equated with the unpleasant tension a person feels between the sensuous and the spiritual aspects of individuated experience.¹¹ To cultivate spirit in tension with material life—to become an individual in full recognition of the principle of an inner reality, and thus to become incomprehensible under the limited forms of expression available through sensible nature and universally recognisable concepts—is an unwanted challenge for Don Giovanni. He wills to remain comprehensible to himself and others as substance, not subject¹² (it is for this reason, A argues, that only a ghost or spirit such as the Commendatore can bring about Don Giovanni's downfall, since reflection or the experience of disembodied subjectivity will be and is the end of him).

In fact, it is Don Giovanni's very comprehensibility, his presence in the world as abstraction (irreducibility), and his mutual abstraction (reduction) of the world appearing at his fingertips, which consolidates his power over the other characters in the opera, and which eliminates whatever 'constraints and

fetters' a more reflective individual would face in comparable circumstances. For, as I said above, if the other characters are understood as inhabiting the same mood of embryonic anxiety (the latent subjective crisis of the Middle Ages), then, similarly, they will seek to escape the tension between hoping to integrate into the universal and wishing to remain an individual. If all the persons with whom Don Giovanni interacts experience identically preliminary flashes of anxiety, then to be at once objectified—recognized as an object and rendered (ostensibly) comprehensible through one's particularly manifested universal attributes—and simultaneously proffered the reprieve of pure sensuality, will be an undeniable double-temptation in which both aspects are turned against the subjective discrepancy.

By the sheer focus of his desire, Don Giovanni objectifies each victim absolutely. He sees a woman and pursues her insofar as she is a particular instantiation of the universally feminine, and strictly for that reason. In so doing he exhibits a total lack of concern towards the features and permutations that make her unique as an individual. A conveys this thought when he explains that 'it is not the extraordinary that Don Giovanni desires, but the ordinary that she shares with every woman' (EO 1:97; SKS 2:101). A few pages later, he adds: '[Don Giovanni] desires total femininity in every woman, and therein lies the sensuous, *idealizing* force with which he simultaneously enhances and overcomes his prey' (EO 1:100; SKS 2:104, my emphasis).¹³ All of this to say that Don Giovanni idealizes each victim so thoroughly that she capitulates the looming threat of individuality and succumbs to the harmonious immediacy in which, at the exclusion of spirit, consciousness aligns momentarily with experience. (Idealization, here, should be taken as connoting both the reduction to a single idea and the elevation of that idea to the echelon of highest value.) Don Giovanni is able to seduce, therefore, because his unfaltering desire, although born in the flashes of anxiety, has the power reciprocally to negate anxiety in the victim by preventing any self-defining spiritual development upon which the burden of self-consciousness would otherwise be placed. Unlike, say, spiritually-oriented love, which individualizes the beloved and simultaneously venerates and enhances her subjective difference from others, Don Giovanni's purely sensuous desire universalizes the victim and negates any hints of developing individuation. As a result, she experiences herself under Don Giovanni's gaze—seemingly objectively—as an ideal and as integrated with and identified by the universal femininity he desires.

Now, in order for a work of art to be classic, on A's account, the artistic medium must transparently adorn the subject matter. If the subject matter of *Don Giovanni* is the idea of immediate experience within the abstract and universal domain of sensuousness, then the medium of music must communicate this idea in its own right—namely, the medium must reproduce the

abstract or universal domain of sensuousness. We have already made it clear that 'the Don Juan idea' is the answer to the first of two sequential questions that A poses early in his examination: 'But then, which idea is the most abstract?' Having done so, and, more importantly, having observed just why the Don Juan idea (sensuous abstraction) is the most appropriate answer, we must now look to music in order to grasp why it is the answer to the second question in the sequence: 'Which medium is the most abstract?'

As an artistic form of expression, music, according to A, is the most 'impoverished.' He calls this impoverishment music's defect, by which he means to suggest that although music is undeniably expressive and representational, still, *as a form of expression*, it lacks 'definite contours' and therefore represents completely sensuously, without any accumulation of meaning over time (EO 1:56; SKS 2:64). This is due in part to the fact that the sense of hearing is temporally rather than spatially oriented. The ear cannot hold onto sound the way the eye can hold onto matter, for sound has no sensual duration over time but passes in and out of the sensible world. As A says, 'Music does not exist except in the moment it is performed' (EO 1:68; SKS 2:75). One note must disappear before the next note can appear, just as one word in a sentence must disappear before the next word can appear, and just as one millisecond must pass before the next one comes along. In other words, 'Music has an element of time in itself but nevertheless does not take place in time except metaphorically' (EO 1:57; SKS 2:62).

Of course, the same can be said of language. Neither music nor language have durable temporal or material presence. Unlike language, however, '[music] cannot express the historical within time' (EO 1:57; SKS 2:62). Assuming that with this claim A wants to suggest that music cannot indicate temporal development in which the past plays a role in what is presently unfolding, he seems to be subscribing to Hegel's belief that history 'is a conscious, self-mediating process' (Hegel 1977, 492). If so, we can see why music falls short of language as a concrete medium. Language 'negates the sensuous as a mere instrument' without negating the idea that is conveyed through the employment of this sensuous medium (EO 1:57; SKS 2:62). As such, language is concrete and historical because over time more and more meaning can accumulate despite the dispersion of the vibrations which brought it into being (or the visual absence of the ink). Here again, we can observe the analogy between two ordered pairs: in the first place, individual consciousness and Don Giovanni consciousness, and, in the second place, language and music. Music is the proper medium for depicting a character for whom, in the words of Mark C. Taylor, 'self-consciousness and self-determination never find expression' (Taylor 146). 'As quickly as one erotic adventure has culminated, Don Juan [sic] abandons the seduced and

seeks another outlet for his sensuous energy. His life manifests no continuity, but constantly seeks the new, or the different' (Taylor 143).

Similar to language, but unfolded in space and having material extension and temporal duration, rather than succeeding itself in time and lacking these forms of presence, sculpture and painting also have an element of historical concretion. A sculpture can suggest not only the past but also the past's relation the future, and thus it expresses specific individual's dialectical advance through experience, reflection, self-determination, and further experience. For instance, when we look at Michelangelo's *David*, we see the concrete depiction of a critical moment which bears relation to what has come before and what is to follow. Even a spectator unaware of the biblical story of David and Goliath can discern in the statue situation, relation, and self-conscious purpose, and, from these, definite historical contours. A sculpture of Don Juan would similarly grant unwanted historically individuating contours, whether the character was depicted in voluptuous embrace, in pursuit of a victim, or gazing at an unseen object with erotic longing (and a poem would do the same, to a greater degree—hence the judgement against Lord Byron and other poets attempting the Don Juan legend). As spectators, we would have material witness to Don Juan's status as an individual who has overcome—or, in the latter two examples, who must overcome—this or that obstacle to his desire, even if the obstacle is as mundane as physical distance. In looking at the sculpture, we would therefore posit both the constraints and fetters of existence and the temporal context in which they coalesce, endowing the eternally frozen moment with an imagined 'historical' narrative which Don Giovanni lacks in his lack of self-consciousness.

Of course, sculpture and painting are less 'perfected' forms of expression than language because, with the plastic arts, the disappearance of the medium means the loss of the integrated content. The presence of the marble from which David was sculpted is entirely integral to a spectator's reception of Michelangelo's interpretation of David, whereas the words used to tell the story of the Trojan War must be negated one after another in order for any significance to be accrued for the listener or reader. To repeat what was indicated above, the idea conveyed in language reduces the medium to mere instrument (EO 1:67; SKS 2:74). Language, on this view, is the most spiritual medium for two reasons: it involves temporal increase of significance and definite contours, or historical concretion, and it is disengaged from the sensuous material through which it comes into being (EO 1:68–69; SKS 2:76).¹⁴ Music, like language, is without duration in any physical sense. Unlike language, though, it involves no increase in the significance and delineation of the subject matter it expresses. It entails no temporal development or conceptual mediation, and it cannot express 'action undertaken with a consciousness of the goal' (EO 1:120; SKS 2:123). It is immediate in exactly the same way

that Don Giovanni is immediate. For these reasons, the operagoer experiences Don Giovanni's sensuousness sensually, his immediacy immediately, his abstraction abstractly. For all of these reasons we can see why, on A's view, only by musical expression is the Don Juan idea externalized in the truth of its abstraction.

THE DON GIOVANNI OPERA AS UNREPEATABLE

We are now in a position to return to the clarifying explanation Leonardo Lisi has provided for how it is that, according to A, *Don Giovanni* is the most unique of any artistic masterpiece. Here again is the Lisi excerpt I mentioned earlier:

The idea of "the sensuous in its elemental originality" that the figure of Don Juan embodies . . . is abstract in the sense that it organizes only a few defining attributes, which means that it is less likely to be repeated since it is only possible to generate a small number of variations of this idea before instantiating the same set of attributes again. (Lisi 2015, 214)

Owing to the conceptual impoverishment, or abstractness, of both the Don Juan idea and the musical idea, Mozart's application of the latter to the former denies the possibility that any subsequent interpretation of the Don Juan legend can provide new variations without accumulating historicized individual dimensions around the rudimentary subject matter. Only a better composer composing *Don Giovanni* all over again could succeed in creating a higher masterpiece. Such an outcome is highly implausible, and probably even undesirable. 'Mozart's good fortune,' A writes, 'is that he has found a subject matter that is intrinsically altogether musical, and if any other composer were to compete with Mozart, there would be nothing for him to do except to compose *Don Giovanni* all over again' (EO 1:57; SKS 2:65). Mozart has created the ideal artistic expression of the sensuous and immediate domain of experience, which in itself is the idea of the ideal experience—that is, of a consciousness so abridged that all experience unfolds as the distribution of an ideal into the particularities of sensible experience at the expense of individuation. Of course, Don Giovanni's desire is so generic and impoverished that his experience bears no variegated repetitions. He is like a composer composing *Don Giovanni* over and over and over in an unconscious sort-of Sisyphean perdition to do just one thing in eternal, restless stasis.

Here we come to one final consequence of A's discussion that will be important for our later consideration of the types of artistic expression which may venture beyond the impasses of secular aesthetics. This is the question

of what I will call repetition-capacity. Once again, Leonardo Lisi's very brief discussion of *Don Giovanni* will be appropriately informative of what I mean. In the same paragraph cited above, Lisi says that more "historical" ideas bear further artistic repetitions. He writes that when contrasted with Don Juan, "the idea of Faust is more historical. The amount of distinguishing properties, 'differences,' that the idea of Faust totalizes is greater, so that diverse representations of Faust can choose to emphasize or draw on different sets of attributes (the way that the Trojan War has enough distinguishing marks to afford more than just one narrative about it)." The multi-dimensionality of less abstract, more individuated concepts, such as the Trojan war or the legend of Faust, contain a certain concrete richness that opens up the possibility for multiple themes to be present, instantiated in a variety of particular details, and assembled in a novel configuration which in itself can create a newness out of the essence of what is repeated. This, I believe, is A's point when he writes,

Goethe's *Faust* is really a classic work, but it is a historical idea, and therefore every extraordinary time in history will have its *Faust*. *Faust* has language as its medium, and since this is a much more concrete medium, for that reason, too, many works of the same kind are conceivable. (EO 1:57; SKS 2:64)

Likewise, although *The Iliad* is a masterpiece, an utterly classic work of art, its success does not rule out the possibility that some poet equal in genius to Homer might create a second masterpiece from the materials of the Trojan War, a poem totally different in features from *The Iliad*—and one that, perhaps, focuses on Patroclus or Hector, Helen or Athena, Priam or Paris, or else one that depicts the night of the Trojan horse gambit and the sacking of the walled city. Paradoxically, this thematic profusion makes *The Iliad* less unique as a classic, less perfect in the annals of perfect art, because the possibility of successful repetitions remains strong.

UNEXPECTED IRONY: THE FLAW IN THE AESTHETIC APPROACH TO CLASSIC ARTWORKS

In Mozart's musical interpretation of Don Juan, as we have seen, the character of Don Giovanni is entirely comprehensible. His deferred individuality and his 'disproportionate magnitude' as *the* representative of the sensuous, universal, abstract pole of experience, seem to reveal an alignment between his innermost consciousness and his outward conduct. Unable and unconcerned to conceal his motivations, lacking individual reflective distance from his perceptible form, denying himself any personal development over time,

motivationally transparent, and always immediately present in the situation, Don Giovanni manifests a seeming concordance between his inner and outer states. One might even go so far as to say that his unidirectional desire pervades his outward action so comprehensively that his behaviour is not simply an indication of his essence, but rather that it *is* his essence. Unfortunately, that would be incorrect, for we have seen also that Don Giovanni's essence is anxiety.

To elaborate upon this problem, let us assume that A has been correct in everything he discusses with regard both to the opera's superlative status as the most classic work of art and to Don Giovanni's anxiety. If we do so, we must admit that in this picture the Don Giovanni character is even more comprehensible to the modern aesthete than he is to himself or to the victims of his seduction. But how is this possible? The experience of Don Giovanni's sensuousness—from his own perspective and from the perspective of his next victim—is unmediated self-consciousness. For each character, the threatening conceptualisation of the self as distinct from the world is deferred through the consuming force of Don Giovanni's desire. Looking backwards along with A, we know that Kant's metaphysical gulf is the point of orientation for the modern individual, and in attending to the Middle Ages we see the partially conscious, partially unconscious recognition of this impending condition as the threat from which Don Giovanni figuratively retreats. As Don Giovanni moves across his successive liaisons, jumping from moment to moment without concrete self-development, 'tarrying,' escaping the challenge of an increasing subjective incommensurability with a world conceivable only through universal concepts—albeit always on the verge of irreconcilable individuation—he is interpreted by the more reflective aesthete, A, as the naïve obscuration of anxiety: even if, or especially if, 'this anxiety is his energy.'

It is therefore apparent that what had been, according to A's initial aesthetic reaction, a beautiful and classic opera (an artwork in which the form transparently adorned the subject matter and together with it expressed most uniquely a perfect integrating harmony between these two constitutive elements), has been transformed, under his scrutiny, into an *interesting* opera in which the innermost idea is inconsistent with the surface attributes. The most rudimentary element now appears as anxiety. Yet not only is anxiety discordant or incongruous with the outer expressions of sensuousness and the triumphs of desire, but also, more profoundly, it is interchangeable with the idea of discrepancy from sensuousness. As such, in addition to the fact that A has showed the opera to be concealing an essence opposed to the expressive attributes of the opera—containing as it does this hidden inner idea—he has further showed that Don Giovanni's efforts are entirely fathomable as an urge to conceal from everyone, himself included, the truth of his own primary condition of experience: blossoming subjectivity.

So, Don Giovanni confusedly represents his own anxiety by inverting it into sensuality. If we subscribe to A's argument, then to examine the apparently ideal harmony of the opera is to negate that very harmony for a more primitive disharmony between appearance and essence. To look at it under aesthetic concepts is to grasp the prevalent irony in every sensuous note, and to understand that a spectator who fails to maintain a view of this hidden element will be indulging in deceptive immediacy and thereby succumbing blindly to anxiety in the same way that Don Giovanni and his victims do. The piece of art that is for the aesthete mankind's highest creative achievement, the most classical production in the annals of Western culture, the most beautiful work in the *cosmological* sense of the word, cannot therefore be understood as a reprieve from the crisis of subjectivity, but rather must be understood as a concealment of the symptoms of this crisis, or, somewhat extraordinarily, as an ironized revelation of the issue of the inner-outer incongruity in itself.

When A makes the claim that Elvira and Zerlina become dangerous to Don Giovanni as individuals only after the Don has spurned them, he adds the following comment about the increase in reflection the victim of seduction experiences: 'As soon as she has been seduced, she is raised to a higher sphere; she has a consciousness that Don Giovanni lacks. That is why she is dangerous to him' (EO 1:98; SKS 2:102). Presumably, these victims look back at the sensuous immediacy of their erotic encounter in an attempt to discern what hidden motivational elements were present behind the sensuous surface (in other words, they look past the superficial layer of the former engagement with a view to achieving some understanding of the deeper scenario which has brought about their sudden grief).¹⁵ Now, we can infer that the same process holds for the reflective operagoer, and perhaps most especially for an aesthetically oriented individual such as A, the type of person who seeks not an evening's enjoyment but a lasting solution to the disenchantment of the world and the isolation of his own self-consciousness. After the seductive immediacy of Mozart's music gives way to silence or to the absence of the sensuous instrumentation, the individual spectator, desiring a return to the vanished emotional comforts of spiritlessness, conceptualizes what has occurred in an attempt to comprehend and perpetuate the soul-astounding admiration and joy of the original aesthetic moment. Lacking the sensual medium, however, the reflective aesthete seeks to unearth the hidden elements of the delightful experience. But the experience was precisely the negation of reflective distance. The process, then, is as dangerous to the apparent enchantments of the opera as the reflective victim is to Don Giovanni.

This irony, this *interesting* hiddenness, seems to have escaped the notice of most specialists writing about 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' or *Either/Or*. However, on my reading, it is the crucial feature of the text. The essential

takeaway from ‘The Immediate Erotic Stages’ is that it exemplifies the virtual breakdown of aesthetics according to its incipient purpose, which, as we know, has been the attempt to account for the rational or psychological depths fuelling our pleasurable experience of the *beautiful* object. After a failure to bring the *beautiful* experience under the principles of reason without destroying the emotionally favourable effects of that experience, a devoted aesthete must dialectically alter the concept of aesthetics in order to suit his newer, more reasoned judgment of the artwork or object. This is to say that whereas the term *aesthetic* should, and originally did, signify the unreasoned and instantaneous subjective judgment of an object as beautiful, and whereas *aesthetic* signified a category of emotional pleasure ‘inspired by the immediate image of something’ (Schiller 1993, 29), now, following detailed and rigorous reflections on the matter of beauty, the term *aesthetic* must indicate a new criterion having little to do with the immediate pleasures aroused by beauty and harmonious form. Given the fact that reflection has torn the subject matter from the formative activity of the opera, when after all the opera’s achievement was to make these elements cohere in a fully reciprocating whole, the enterprise of aesthetics is shown through ‘The Immediate Erotic Stages’ to be a misguided approach to beautiful and classic works of art. Together with A, then, we must look now to artworks which do greater justice to subjective incommensurability. If harmony fails for its lack of durability under the reflective eye, then perhaps there will be some redeeming alignment between artwork and aesthetically-oriented spectator in works which convey the *interesting individuality*.

NOTES

1. For example: ‘Don Juan, as presented in Mozart’s opera of the same name, is Kierkegaard’s ideal type of person whose life is governed by the effort to satisfy pleasure.’ (Taylor 1975, 142). Don Giovanni may be the ultimate libertine, but he stands here, for Kierkegaard, as a representation not of libertinage in itself but of the crisis-driven impulse towards libertinage: it is merely a less reflectively sophisticated version of the intellectual pursuit of salvific beauty. This is not to disparage physical pleasures, sensualized-orientation, or even aesthetics proper, but merely to invalidate these pursuits as remedies for disenchantment and the crisis of subjectivity. These pursuits may treat the symptoms quite well and for a certain duration, but soon they exacerbate the disease, as our continued examination will slowly reveal.

2. As J. M. Bernstein would put this, ‘In the Greek world, the ideal and the actual are joined’ (Bernstein 2003, xxvii). Or, as Sianne Ngai would put this, ‘No meta-physical gap exists between man and nature’ (Ngai 2008, 782). Whether or not these Romantically oriented suppositions are correct is another matter.

3. The Ancient Greek word κόσμος [*kosmos*] originally denoted ideas of both ‘order’ and ‘adornment.’ It is the source of the English ‘cosmos’ and ‘cosmetic.’ Again, it matters little whether or not the average individual in Ancient Greece truly experienced the physical world as a transparent adornment of the spirit. What is important is A’s palpable desire to experience this supposed cohesion, to ‘return’ to it. Cf. chapter five of *Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment* on the topic of the German Romantics’ *nostalgia* for Ancient Greece (Taminiaux 1993, 73–92).

4. Cf. *Concept of Anxiety*, p. 79.

5. A’s specific name for this type of enchantment is ‘immediacy.’ Let me point out now, however, that immediacy is, simply put, a direct experience of the alignment between sensual phenomena and consciousness, or a direct experience of life under the spell of which the mind is totally absent the distancing and estranging effects of conceptual reflection and self-awareness. To borrow a phrase from Mark C. Taylor’s reading of Kierkegaard, in experiencing immediacy, consciousness does not involve ‘the distinction of the self from its surroundings’ or ‘the distinction of the self from itself’ (Taylor 1975, 158). Andrew Cross also puts it well: In Kierkegaard’s usage, ‘a person is always in an immediate relation to some *x* if that person lacks the detachment from *x* that comes from reflecting critically on it and on his relation to it’ (Cross 1998, 136).

6. The Don Juan legend—the idea of a nobleman who devotes his life to seducing women—first appears in writing in Spain in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, in a play by Tirso de Molina entitled *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*. However, it is believed by most scholars to have been present in pre-existing folklore. See, for instance, ‘The Don Juan Legend in Literature,’ by Samuel M. Waxman. ‘The Don Juan legend, in some form or other, may be traced in the folk-lore of all peoples of Europe, but it was in Spain that it was first given concrete literary expression . . .’ (Waxman 1908, 184–204).

7. See, for instance, Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Irony*, p. 124, *passim*. Kierkegaard likens the first step of existential irony to ‘the consciously absorbed negation of the validity of experience.’ Later he writes that ‘irony is the very incitement of subjectivity’ (CI 211; SKS 1: 258).

8. Faust is the personification of the opposed force, ‘spirit qualified solely as spirit’ (EO 1:89; SKS 2:94).

9. See A’s extended metaphor of the horizon on p. 129.

10. Stephen Dunning defines Don Giovanni’s inner/outer contradiction as an inwardness that is totally indifferent to anything that remains foreign to it [*qua* desire] (Dunning 1985, 38).

11. This is a very generalized version of the anxiety that Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis will develop in *The Concept of Anxiety*. The technical delineations of anxiety in that text are incredibly more thorough and complex. The concept of anxiety represents a range of different modes of self-relation, of which the Don Giovanni type is a basic example. Haufniensis calls this Don Giovanni anxiety ‘the anxiety of spiritlessness’ (CA 93–96; SKS 4:394–395).

12. This distinction between substantiality and subjectivity, which A employs across several expositions, and which will be important for our considerations in the ensuing

chapter, is derived from Hegel's usage of these terms throughout his authorship and lectures. In substantial individuals we observe no freely reflective determinants of an individuated self-consciousness, and as such they appear to conform to external forces beyond their control. An individual who is considered substantial assumes his shape under the sheer influence of natural and inherited determinants. Subjective individuals, on the other hand, are aware that the inner consciousness is free and capable of influencing, affecting, overcoming, or even negating certain external factors *qua* determinants of character, individuality, and circumstance. See also, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp 4–10; *Aesthetics* v. 2:1223. According to A's later usage, the substantial categories which shape an individual are *family, state, kindred, and fate*.

13. Leporello famously sings the following lines during his catalogue aria: 'if she just wears a skirt, you know well enough what he does.' Cf Bleiler, translation of *Don Giovanni*, I, 3 p. 104. The aesthete addresses these lines on p. 97.

14. Whether this is wholly accurate is another question. For an argument that would contest that linguistic meaning, especially in poetry, suffers when divorced from the sense of its sound, see Francis Berry, *Poetry and the Physical Voice*, 1961. Berry would say that we do an injustice to the art when 'the meaning is weighed by the intellect in disengagement from the act of hearing' (110).

15. Although he does not write of this process Kierkegaardian victims of seduction undergo with reference to 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' Stephen Dunning nevertheless touches upon the notion of reflection arising from grief in his discussion of A's next aesthetic exposition, 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama' (Dunning 1985, 39–45).

Chapter 3

Antigone

The Substantially Interesting

BURIED LIVES

In the previous chapter, we saw how A's initial encounter with *Don Giovanni* 'prevented everything from collapsing into a boundless chaos' for him. Presumably, the absence of any happy relation between inner life and the empirical world resulted in his preceding vulnerability to intellectual disorder, and he was lacking any unifying organizational principle to ground his subjectivity within the manifold features of experience. It was for this reason that his first aesthetic exposition, 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' appeared to originate from the hope that an inquiry into the 'astounding' appeal and magnetism of Mozart's opera could somehow provide a larger solution to the reciprocal issues of alienated subjectivity and the disenchantment of the world. In observing this impulse, we discovered just how acutely A shared the concerns of many of the major aestheticians and philosophers of the late eighteenth-century, particularly Kant, Schiller, Schelling, the Romantics, and Hegel.

Despite whatever initial hopes he entertained, however, A's exposition failed to preserve much complementarity between surface and depth, or outer and inner, even with regard to the features of the opera itself. He seized upon the transparent adornments of the opera and betrayed their artistic coherence by detaching the *idea* of music from the *idea* of Don Juan (that is, he negated the mutual permeation of form and content), the better that readers might see why these two abstractions belong together and why they can be concretely synthesized so successfully. In the end, seemingly inadvertently, A also demonstrated that the concealed, innermost life of Don Giovanni was opposed to his outer indications of sensuality, bravado, and conquest, and thus the apparently immediate harmony of the opera was slowly transformed into irony. The whole process of A's exposition began to reveal that the most

rudimentary feature of Mozart's opera was Don Giovanni's latent anxiety as an insufficiently developed individual. This anxiety, we saw in turn, was the initial mood of the subject's self-conscious divergence from the objective domain (which divergence originates in and intensifies desire). Accordingly, A's exposition transformed the character from a so-called *beautiful* personality to a proto-*interesting* one; and, as such, Don Giovanni became figurative of the emerging individual discrepancy between inner representation and outer expression.

It is appropriate to assume, therefore—given A's sensitivity, subtlety, and propensity for reflection—that the act of writing about *Don Giovanni* has provided him with a new, more deeply-seated insight into the so-called modern issue from which he has already been suffering. This insight, I want to suggest, entails the realisation that *aesthetic experience* (by which I mean the spontaneous feeling arising from immediate personal engagement with an artwork or empirical object), if examined under the enterprise we call *aesthetics* (by which I mean the philosophical articulation into concepts of what the *aesthetic experience* has entailed), will tend to exaggerate rather than diminish our feeling of division between subjectivity and the phenomenal world. Not only does the 'chaos' of inner-outer incommensurability remain as a potential threat to the cognitive stability of the reflecting aesthete, but also the process of aesthetics seeks to interrogate, autopsy, and conceptualise those beautiful phenomena which seem, at first encounter, to bring experiential order and alignment to the individual perspective. The enchantment of the original aesthetic moment perishes in the process.

If chaos is the miscarriage of harmony and order, then what aesthetics has done to the previously harmonious and ordered elements of *Don Giovanni* may reveal the nature of aesthetics more generally, which is to say that aesthetics may move the thinker from chaotic state to chaotic state with intervening failed attempts toward restored order and unification. For, at a very basic level, it is now clear that aesthetics has at least the potential to instigate a vortex of de-prioritization and thus an infinite regress of stability in the individual's relation to the object under scrutiny. On the one hand, aesthetics implies that the experience of an artwork has intrinsic value for and impact upon the active disposition of the spectator. On the other hand, over and above the artwork, aesthetics seeks to prioritize the tools of subjective reflection, suggesting that the immediate aesthetic experience can be granted pre-eminence only when it has been broken into its constituent parts, stripped of its concreteness and particularity, re-rendered in abstract and ideal terms, and 'conceptualised' or 'understood' or 'conveyed' by the spectator. In short, aesthetics seeks to objectify the subjective experience in an unwitting distortion of the original.

In its very nature, aesthetics posits one type of value—the immediately real experience of art, beauty, and figurative representation—and then instantly seeks to replace this value with another type: the epistemic security of rational cogency and concepts. In advance of its surgical processes, aesthetics mistakenly supposes that the latter can cultivate the former, that reflection can preserve the aesthetic experience by means of articulation.¹ The consequence of this error, however, simply restores the division between subjectivity and objectivity, transforming the subjective experience into an objective ‘judgement’ which can no longer be *felt* or *lived* but merely *enunciated* and *recollected*, leaving the practitioner in doubt as to which is the more valid, the fullness and sensual certainty of the experience or the rigidity and conceptual certainty of the articulation, since neither satisfactorily falls under the heading of *reality*. The deep-seated and perhaps still inarticulate intuition I am attributing to A, then—namely the effect of this process upon his mood—can only be that of a further psychic withdrawal from the phenomenal domain, for now there are two objects from which he is alienated: the harmonic artwork and the insufficient and abstract articulation of its features and effects. As such, we begin to witness the proximity between aesthetic doubt and alienation. As strange as it may sound, the intervention of reflection has triangulated the aesthete at a certain remove from each point, and likewise each point from the other.

It may seem bold to make such a claim after witnessing the *aporia* of merely one aesthetic exposition. It is, however, a circumstantial aim of this chapter to bear out this very claim.² For the purposes of these prefatory remarks, a quick glance at the title page introducing A’s ensuing exposition will provide our first indication that A is at least *experiencing* the mood of increased disenchantment, for the full title of the piece announces a new and more ironical tone in A’s writing. The new exposition is called, rather elaborately, ‘The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama: A Venture in Fragmentary Endeavor: Delivered Before the Συμπαρανεκρωμενοι.’ This final word—transliterated as *Symparenekromenoi*—is a portmanteau of A’s own invention, cobbled together from Ancient Greek roots. It has been translated variously as ‘the Fellowship of the Dead’ or ‘the Society of Buried Lives’ (taking hermeneutic liberties, Julian Young has interpreted it to mean ‘society of those who are living lives which are mentally entombed and isolated’) (Young 2013, 139). Of course, as Young and other commentators are quick to point out, given the logical contradictions of a so-called society of isolated or buried individuals, the term is clearly intended to be mordant and ironic (*ibid*).³ An understanding of the role this literary device plays here is important to any strong reading of the exposition, especially since A devotes several pages, directly in the middle of the exposition, to an elaborate mock oratory addressed to this very special society of buried lives. We will come to

a more detailed discussion of the *Symparenekromenoi* and A's mock oratory shortly. I merely mention it now as an early sign of his deepening tone of isolation, alienation, and irony.

The reader may have surmised, then, that our present task seems suddenly to have become more complex. In addition to understanding what A has to say—a challenge in its own right—are we now also responsible for charting his changing mood, perhaps even his state of mental health? In one sense, the answer is yes. In another sense, however, this has been our task all along, for not only are we examining what the *interesting* entails and how it engulfs the *beautiful* in an aesthetic endeavour, but also we are charting the effects of the *interesting* upon an individual who, in its thrall and pursuit, is under the governance of an epistemic ambiguity regarding what has more value, the inner or the outer. What has changed and grown more complex, and what will continue to gain in complexity, is the discrepancy between A's literary appearance and the depths of his mood. After all, it is not so intricate a task to chart the mood of an individual who is 'astounded' by a beautiful piece of music, who is 'infatuated' with an opera, who has a 'childish wish' to praise Mozart and designate him the greatest of all artists. On the other hand, it is a much more complicated task to chart the mood of the same individual when, later, he greets readers by saying, more or less, 'Welcome to the fellowship of the dead.' If nothing else, this greeting indicates that there is now a greater difference between surface and depth, even when it comes to understanding A. His disenchantment has intensified. He is now buried alive. Slowly he has grown more aesthetically *interesting*.

It comes as no surprise to note, therefore, that for his next attempt at the aesthetic enterprise, A turns to an examination of tragedy. As a genre, tragedy asks spectators to witness a *pathos*-rich illustration of the irreconcilable tension between an individual protagonist's autonomous inner will and the comprehensive and determining forces (or 'substantial determinants,') of her inherited milieu. This is the understanding of the basic concepts of tragedy Hegel presents in the *Lectures on Fine Art* when he writes, 'of the particular kinds of the art of speech dramatic poetry is the one which unites the objectivity of epic with the subjective character of lyric' (Hegel 1975, 1158).⁴ Tragedy is a depiction of the conflicts and collisions between the subjective and objective domains. It is a depiction of the individual's quest for a freely desired external outcome that is at least partially created or derived in *counterpoint* to what is received from the universalizing environment. Hence, in terms we are by now familiar with, it entails a clash between the inner and the outer.

To frame all of this in a slightly different manner, let me say that a basic problem has arisen from the implied inadequacy of 'The Immediate Erotic Stages.' A has essentially recognized that artworks can seek either to assuage

or to mirror our condition as isolated subjects in a disenchanted world. To assuage our condition, as *Don Giovanni* initially seemed capable of doing, is to treat the symptoms rather than the disease, and yet to treat them in such a casual and temporary manner the disease at first seems to recede, only to return more intensely after the tonic effects have worn off. In this case, as we know, the actual disease entails the recession of immediate experience as the paramount and final reality for the indwelling mind of the modern individual. This is not to deny the power, richness, and importance of *Don Giovanni* or any similar work which has beautiful and immediate effects, but rather to say that for a sensitive and intelligent thinker facing a potentially totalizing alienation from the world as it sensibly appears, the assuagements of beauty, harmony, and sensuous immediacy are not going to be durable much beyond the timeframe of their iteration. Thus the consequence even of beautiful art entails a mood that J. M. Bernstein calls, in reference to Kant's picture of beauty, 'a remembering that is also a mourning' (Bernstein 1992, 17).⁵ With the beautiful experience, unpleasant emotions flood into the increasing temporal or spatial distance between the perceived object and the experiencing subject. Since the experience of beauty is immediate and indeterminate, beauty is only recognised after the beautiful experience has passed, once the individual's powers of reflection and sense of subjective detachment from the object to which he was relating immediately have returned. The 'pleasure we take in the beautiful recalls a knowing, a cognition of things that was itself pleasurable; and a pleasure, interest, desire and need for things and persons that was neither privative nor in need of constraint nor produced out of an abstract demand for respect. In short, what is mourned in the experience of beauty as such is the separation of beauty from truth and goodness' (Bernstein 1992, 17).

Of course, had the aesthetic approach to Mozart been successful in accordance with the *telos* of re-enchantment—and not merely 'memorial'—A could have concluded his whole enterprise with the completion of that single exposition. He could have luxuriated in the comforts of a harmony re-established both within and beyond the walls of the opera house. Instead, he begins writing again, trying to mediate anew some touch point with an external object, some incontrovertible *association with the world*, turning this time to the dramatic genre that asks us to reflect directly upon the disasters and collisions between subjectivity and the law-governed and ethically-oriented milieu. He inverts his aesthetic curiosity by discussing tragedy, which falls into the latter category of *mirroring* artworks because it simulates or even exaggerates our received condition of unassimilable discrepancy from the empirical domain. Tragedy confronts us, that is, by asking us to embrace knowledge of what cannot be evaded or *reconciled*, inspiring questions about the inevitable suffering and pain that arise when the individual's personal

interests stand and fall in contradistinction to the determining factors of the imposing and relentless world.

It will therefore be our endeavour now to discover, along with A (but at an observatory distance from his mood), whether art of this type can achieve what the art of *assuagement* failed to achieve: a reorienting, re-ordering, re-enchanting worldview. Does A reveal what we might call a redemptive experience in tragedy, one that can help the spectator to overcome the crisis of doubt and alienation, not through the *beautiful* experience *per se*, but possibly through moral regeneration in response to isolated selfhood? Does the *pathos* of the protagonist activate a new connection to reality? Or does tragedy merely flaunt the irresolvable tensions between individual and universal, pushing the aesthetically-minded thinker towards further hopelessness and division? What follows in this chapter is not an attempt to add any new insight to the wealth of literature on Kierkegaard's view of tragedy—nor, as I have indicated in the long footnote above, is it an attempt to discuss the influence of Hegel on the aesthete's picture of tragedy—rather, it is a new element in the process of charting the importance of the *interesting* for our understanding of modernity and the capabilities and hazards of aesthetics.

At this point, before having discussed A's conception of tragedy, it may be difficult to fathom how deeply the *interesting* is related to (a) what I have just described as an intuitive or unconscious recognition of aesthetic futility—or what we might call the *aesthetic experience of the failure of aesthetics*—or to (b) the basic elements of tragedy. As we shall see, however, the *interesting* is inextricably related both to the features of tragedy as A describes them and to A's own delicate position as a thinker in crisis. As he is Kierkegaard's representative figure of the larger predicament of modernity, A's investment in the *interesting* remains extremely important and revelatory, and the final objective of this chapter will be to chart the further development and potency of this aesthetic category as it captivates A and begins to take greater hold on his thinking and intellectual activity. For now, it should be sufficient if I remind the reader of just how deeply the aesthetic criterion of the *interesting* is integrated with the issue of disenchantment and doubt, and if I repeat the fact that, historically, the category arose because Schlegel and his contemporaries recognized the capacity of artworks to express the potential 'ironical' distance between an individual character's actions and his or her motivations. As Leonardo Lisi put it so well in his paraphrase of Heiberg's review of Adam Oehlenschläger's play 'Dina,' the actions of an *interesting* character 'simultaneously reveal that they are not subject to their immediate meaning and fail to provide an adequate determination of the one that they are governed by instead' (Lisi 2015, 225). Of course, the reader will recall that the *interesting* only came into being as an aesthetic category when Kant's definition of beauty proved insufficient to account for the unbeautiful

artworks that seemed so appealing to modern audiences. Now we will begin to see more clearly how modern tragedy, according to A, must depict *interesting* characters in crisis (a detail we have already noticed in our observations on Prince Hamlet). And we will also begin to see how A's own immediate meaning is governed, perhaps, by an increasingly uncertain relation between inner and outer.

SURFACE: OEDIPUS

'The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama' is at once what it appears to be and something far more extraordinary. On the surface, it seems to set forth the aesthete's conceptions of both ancient and modern tragedy. In doing so, it exposes the 'unchangeable requirements' that must be present in a drama for it to be considered tragic independently of the age in which it is created. At a deeper level, however, the exposition stands as a critique of the modern age—not of disenchantment itself, but of the pathology of those who operate in a disenchanted world without heeding the extent and the effects of their own doubt and alienation. It reveals an author who is dismayed by his sense that the society he inhabits is comprised of individuals who seem incapable of recognizing the critical status of the modern condition, who in fact appear to parade this condition in sheer ignorance of the chaotic void above which they hover. Finally, at its deepest level, the piece shows, rather tragically and thus appropriately, that A's approach to the perilous condition he identifies is yet not capable of moving him beyond what so disturbs him.

We will treat of each of these levels in turn. In our effort to do so, let us begin by considering the exposition as if it were merely a simple and straightforward attempt to define tragedy, or 'to show how the characteristic feature of the tragic in ancient drama is incorporated in the tragic in modern drama in such a way that what is truly tragic will become apparent' (EO 1:140; SKS 2:140). To accomplish this first level of understanding, it will be helpful to examine the story of Oedipus—who, along with his daughter Antigone, is perhaps the most recognizable figure from Greek tragedy—applying A's concepts regarding ancient tragedy to the particulars of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* to ensure we have a concrete understanding. Although A does not focus on Oedipus in his own consideration of ancient tragedy, this specific application will be helpful for two reasons. First, it will show the richness and effectiveness of A's description of tragedy; second, it will refresh our memory of the Oedipus story in preparation for an important discussion of his daughter Antigone; for, following upon this application of the ancient tragic concept,

we will do the same with A's concept of modern tragedy, giving particular attention to his own modification and modernization of the Antigone story.

The reader may recall that when the tragedy *Oedipus the King* begins, Oedipus has already killed his father, Laius, and married his mother, Jocasta, and that, furthermore, through this incestuous communion, Jocasta has borne four children to her own son. Prior to the birth of Oedipus, Laius and Jocasta had heard the prophecy that their son would grow up to kill Laius and marry Jocasta. The boy was fated to inherit the curse of the family of Labdakos without his ever having transgressed any moral, interpersonal, ethical, or religious prohibitions—that is, through no fault of his own. As a result of this bad inheritance, it was foretold, he would inevitably commit two of the most heinous and forbidden social encroachments. Unable to entertain the possibility of such an outcome, Laius and Jocasta took measures to prevail over their son's fate, which, if it came to fruition, also and most decisively would become their own fate. The couple ordered a shepherd to leave the infant to die of exposure upon a mountainside. Unbeknownst to them, however, the shepherd took sympathy on the child and did not follow the instructions; instead, he gave Oedipus to an altogether different shepherd, Merope, who brought him far away to a place called Corinth. Later in his life, upon learning of the same terrible prophecy, Oedipus took counter-measures against his fate. Of course, ignorant of these earlier machinations by the two shepherds, and thus of the fact of his true provenance, he fled Corinth and the proximity of his supposed parents and went unwittingly to the place of his birth. Despite this magnitude of effort, then, he managed to return to his true origin, where he fulfilled what had been foretold. Nature, geography, ignorance, precocity, the complexities of the past, the arbitrariness of unseen forces, the pull of blood, and compounded human error—all in some incalculable combination—conspired against Oedipus. Even with his deepest attempts to avoid the crimes he was so loath to commit, no amount of wilful opposition or resilient deeds or honourable efforts could dismantle his connection to what he was by virtue of his inheritance, nor to what actions he had been predestined to enact.

In the work of Sophocles, Oedipus consequently embodies a strange sort of guilt. When A writes that in ancient tragedy 'the action does not proceed only from character, that the action is not subjectively reflected enough, but that the action itself has a relative admixture of suffering,' he is identifying the nature of ancient tragic guilt. In the most exact sense of the word *suffering* as a passive rather than an active affliction, and as contrary to the concept of *deed* or *action*, one suffers or passively bears the 'hereditary guilt' of a wrongful action without assuming the 'ethical guilt' of independent, free responsibility for that wrongful action (EO 1:143; SKS 2:143–144).⁶ This is to say that, while Oedipus is indeed the man who with his own hands and body enacted the terrible crimes of patricide and incest, there is too much

in his history to suggest that he could have done otherwise. It is precisely the nature of fate, so understood, to be inescapable, and thus he is not morally blameworthy in the sense that a free agent would be: to the contrary, he devoted his life to the avoidance of these actions, and his guilt is mitigated in part by the knowledge that he did all he could, that ethically speaking he is unpolluted by wrongful intent. This is what A means when he writes that 'hereditary guilt involves the contradiction of being guilt and not being guilt' (EO 1:150; SKS 2:149).⁷

The actual guilt is only too apparent, for Oedipus did in fact murder his father and come to know his mother sexually. Having performed these appalling crimes, he cannot claim innocence of the acts themselves. Yet it must be repeated that his guilt is the result of unintentional, inadvertent, uninformed behaviour. These events seem to have been as substantially predetermined as the features of his face, as seemingly beyond his control as the very hour of his birth. Considered in this way, the paradox of his tragic understanding is that suffering is really an absolution of true culpability. In light of human helplessness within a *cosmos* where time is simply the domain in which larger forces are made apparent to mortal eyes and through mortal movements, inner agency is futile against the substantial determinants of an inherited life. This is perhaps one explanation for why Oedipus blinds himself with Jocasta's brooches. Aesthetically speaking, he may be capitulating to the idea that the burden of sorrow belongs to the *cosmos*, the past, the chain of cause and effect, and human helplessness. He may be acknowledging that human vision is inadequate against those unmanageable factors we wish to transcend as individuals, and that what we see, therefore, begets false illusions. He has been relieved of the *vigilance* required of an agent attempting to navigate the appalling terrain of life and the appalling legacy of limitation and finitude.⁸ In the sense that Oedipus here is relinquishing his subjectivity, he is no longer aesthetically *interesting*.

The moment Oedipus acknowledges his crimes and capitulates to the fate that he has already ignorantly enacted, the audience experiences an enigmatic emotional deliverance—for that moment, in its confirmation of the original prophecy of patricide and incest, seems to demonstrate the inevitability inherent in human events. It is the consummation and closure of a human in unchangeable suffering. *Sorrow*, the tragic emotion in the 'corresponding consciousness' shared by the audience of Ancient Greeks, is sumptuous and exquisite, soothing, and almost free of what A calls *pain*. The soothing nature of this *sorrow*, of course, does not reduce the anguish of the knowledge Oedipus suddenly acquires regarding his own heinous circumstance—that much is apparent—yet it reveals something modern aestheticians tend to 'mourn' as lost or inaccessible: the interplay and connectivity between the individual and the objective elements of experience. In this picture, in other

words, Oedipus is anything but alienated from the *cosmos*, from society, from his family ancestry, from his Theban milieu. The internal, psychic life of Oedipus has coalesced with the external, objective life of his community. There is no hidden remainder within him that cannot be assimilated into the world of appearances. The anxiety of the question of agency has been punctured and the notion of individual freedom has been foreclosed.

This consideration is extremely important. Both spatially and temporally, Oedipus has no doubt as to his immeasurable objective connection to the causation of this world. The unfolding of his knowledge has revealed an integral relation between the causes and the effects of his character. The *cosmos* has determined not only who he is, but also what he does. In turn, who he is and what he does have reciprocal effects upon the *cosmos*. This much is beyond doubt. His ignorant yet criminal presence in Thebes had been the origin of the plague upon the city's people, and now, as King and figurehead, his self-discovery and self-scapegoating will have the effect of healing for his people. His own sorrow—and his ultimate acceptance not only of this sorrow but also of his personal limitations—are really the emotional proofs of the interrelation between the substantial world and his identity. In fact, one may say that he is not *individuated* from phenomena. He cannot establish the reality of his will in contraposition to the *cosmos*. Here we see why A calls ancient tragedy 'soothing,' why he believes it expresses a 'sadness and a healing,' and why he claims that 'the individual is not happy until he has the tragic' (EO 1:145; SKS 2:145). The hero is not so grievously responsible for suffering and atrocity when the liability is distributed to circumstances well beyond his control. For A, the consolation in this mitigating emotional experience is similar to 'motherly love'—for it entails the comforts of dependence and unaccountability. The *cosmos* is one's womb, as it were, and the insecure emotional by-products of free agency are non-existent in the presence of a definite and pre-ordained role.

A fundamental ambiguity remains, however, and it is through this ambiguity that the true aesthetic appeal of ancient tragedy is generated. For the famous question Oedipus must ask himself concerns the degree to which his striving against fate became the very apparatus of that fate. If the *cosmos* has indeed shaped who he is and what he does, it has perhaps failed to shape *how he feels* in relation to necessity. As such, the latent and paradoxical question regards the extent to which his attempt to outmanoeuvre the prophecy lead to its actualization. If Oedipus were merely like some feather blown this way and that by forces absolutely beyond human action and resistance, his suffering would not engross spectators for very long. It is because his rational opposition to fate paradoxically contributes to his downfall (or, at the very least, because his opposition *occasions* the mode by which his general fate becomes

specifically iterated) that the *interesting* ambiguity develops in counterpoint to his blamelessness. Put another way, Oedipus can still blame himself, even if minimally, for what has come to pass. His sorrow is not absolute, and for that reason it cannot be considered absolutely soothing. This second element of his guilt—this seasoning of his hereditary guilt with something more subjective and ethically flavoured—entails what A calls *pain*. In contrast to sorrow, emotional pain is always self-inflicted because it falls under the category of reflection and ethical guilt. Pain entails the subject's *anxiety* about the past.

The subject in pain asks, 'Why is this happening to me; can it not be otherwise?' (EO 1:151; SKS 2:150). In the case of Oedipus, we can detect a measure of pain for the very reason that his efforts to deny his fate created precisely the circumstances which led to its fulfilment. The effort towards freedom exhibited by his departure from Corinth was the occasion first for patricide and later for incest. While the fact that the outcome of his striving coincided with what was predicted suggests on one level that he could not have avoided this double-fate, still the ambiguity remains as to whether these acts were consummated in part through his hubristic obliviousness in supposing he could outwit his substantial determinants. After all, are not patricide and maternal incest, in the abstract sense, archetypal manifestations of the instinctive impulse to become the origin of oneself, to determine oneself, to create oneself from one's own deepest urges, and to do so independently of the powers that preceded, grounded, and shaped one? Yet therein lies the vexing thought, since one's own deepest urges are *already* primal. Insofar as this narcissistic craving for autonomy and self-generation is a psychic potential within all rational individuals for whom, emotionally speaking, dignity and autonomy are correlated, the prophecy can be interpreted not as a strict prediction of future events so much as a strong intuition of human nature, as a parable or riddle of sorts in which patricide and incest are merely accurate although extreme representations of the dangerous wish to render ourselves freely and independently of our substantial determinants.⁹ The Sphinx, when presenting the riddle, has already spoken in similarly coded language about universal mankind.

These painful questions must be embedded in the Oedipal consciousness: *Could I not have done otherwise? Could I not have accepted my limitations and remained at home in Corinth? Was the prophecy merely forecasting my freely chosen folly? To what degree did I contribute as an individual agent?* He may say that if only he had left fate alone—if only he had accepted fate—he might have escaped the actualisation of the prophecy. If only he had understood the prophecy differently, as more figurative than literal, he might have overcome the destructive action that arose in his attempt to avoid it. This is the paradox that makes tragedy so aesthetically rich for A. In fact, A

believes that this admixture of pain and sorrow is what kindles the spectator's compassion in any tragedy. Even if these question are not articulated in Oedipus, they are constructed into the 'corresponding consciousness' that pays witness to the events of the drama. Otherwise, Oedipus would have no *pathos*. 'The sorrow is more profound,' A says, 'because the guilt has esthetic ambiguity' (148). By this he means that the mood of compassion naturally corresponds more to the intermingling of sorrow (received suffering) and pain (guilt/self-inflicted grief) than to absolute cases of one or the other. A hint of pain in a character's sorrow deepens our empathy.¹⁰ When we witness an individual assuming responsibility for the burdens of a received sorrow, infusing the already overwhelming emotional load with circular and thus inescapable remorse, our hearts reach out with true compassion. We have the deepest compassion for the tragic individual when we fathom that in his mind he cannot forego responsibility for all the wrong that happened simply because in his mind he does not know how thoroughly he is to blame or how thoroughly blameless he is. The sorrow cannot become *final*, for the past cannot be laid to rest. Hence my claim above that pain entails the subject's *anxiety* about the past. The incongruity between two modes of understanding—that (a) the world is purely causal and necessary, and that (b) the individual has practical freedom and possibility within a contingent universe—are irreconcilable; yet, empirically speaking, the one cannot be demonstrably extricated from the other.

According to A, then, the cathartic moment in ancient tragedy will always blend with unknown proportions the hero's sense of moral exoneration as sufferer with at least a minimal sense of culpability as agent. On the one hand, substantial determinants and hereditary guilt appear to be the overpowering elements of a tragic downfall. On the other hand, subjective action and ethical guilt give the hero and his spectators pause to question just how overpowering the external sources have been in relation to the internal sources, and whether or not there is a crossover somewhere that human consciousness is unable to pinpoint. Did the hero freely and of his own authority manifest this outcome? How is this crossover possible? Where and when does it come about? In a well-balanced tragedy, no amount of reflection can discern just how severely the *cosmos* has contributed to the hero's downfall and just how severely the outcome was self-inflicted. The audience relates when, intuitively, we recognise our parallel condition of *amphibiousness*. The question is inexorably present—it lingers and continues and renews in the absence of any quantifiable attribution of causes and effects between the inner and the outer. By witnessing this indeterminate combination of the two opposed and incongruent categories of external affliction and internal accountability, by imagining the endlessness of uncertainty with regard to the source of one's consummated bad outcome, the audience's compassion and empathy are engaged. The

tragedy merely depicts and dialectically enhances the *question* that is a condition of our own consciousness. This question is not yet conceptual. It remains aesthetic, which is to say that the effect upon the spectators is not linguistic but emotional: we experience compassion in the exacerbated manifestation of our own foundational condition of internal-external incongruity.

As A very subtly hints, this thought bears some relation to Aristotle's description of the tragic hero as splitting the difference between righteousness and wickedness (EO 1:147; SKS 2:146).¹¹ Spectators would have no compassion for a purely evil protagonist, a character entirely responsible for the terrible circumstances that have come to pass. For instance, no audience would care to witness a drama in which Oedipus consciously sought out and killed his father in order to deceive his mother into years of sexual intercourse and incestuous childbearing. And in an opposing way, spectators would find it hard to empathize with the absolutely helpless protagonist. For instance, as I have suggested, no audience would care to witness a drama in which Oedipus, in total innocence and absent any expressions of attempted agency or freedom of the will, is crushed like an ant by the massive impersonality of nature. The supposition entails an implicit claim that every spectator has experienced the painful contradiction between being the guilty party and being drawn helplessly into that guilt by the impassive forces of time.

In ancient tragedy, aesthetic interest always entails a blurring between the machinations of individual free will and the irrational forces of nature. No matter how minutely the inner life of the hero seems to contribute to his downfall, the question of action throws everything into confusion and thereby generates the *pathos* of the drama. A expresses this point very succinctly and impeccably when he writes, 'Tragic Action always contains an element of suffering, and tragic suffering an element of action; the esthetic lies in their relativity' (EO 1:150; SKS 2: 149).¹² This relativity between suffering and action is, according to A's definition, the *unchangeable requirement* of all tragedy. As Shoni Rancher describes it so well, 'tragedy leaves its audience with the unresolved question of whether the tragic ending was *either* reached by a free act, *or* whether it was a consequence of the epically substantive context into which the heroine was born' (Rancher 2008, 73). Leonardo Lisi is even more explicit. As he writes, '[for Kierkegaard], the essence of tragedy in all its historical manifestations consists in the representation of an irreducible contradiction between two qualitatively distinct principles: substantial determinants and individual agency' (Lisi 2015 b 102).¹³

In other words, if tragedy is to be performed properly in the modern age, it must similarly contain an incalculable ratio of substantial determinants and subjective agency. This incalculable ratio is the very *essence* of tragedy as the index of our mystified human condition. 'Between these two extremes lies

the tragic,' A writes. 'If the individual has no guilt whatever, the tragic interest is annulled, for in that case the tragic collision is enervated. On the other hand, if he has absolute guilt, he no longer interests us tragically' (EO 1:144; SKS 2:144). Thus, no matter the epoch in which a drama appears, the hero's downfall must manifest an indeterminate composite of subjective (inner) and objective (outer) forces in order for the work to be considered tragic.¹⁴ If we understand this consideration, then the difference between ancient tragedy and proper modern tragedy becomes easy to identify: it pertains *merely* to an inversion of the ratio between subjectivity and substantial determinants (and thus of the ratio between the pain and the sorrow of the protagonist).

Whereas ancient tragedy emphasizes hereditary guilt and fate, and includes a dash of subjective agency and pain to flavour the sorrow, proper modern tragedy emphasizes ethical guilt and subjectivity, and includes a dash of substantial determinants and sorrow to flavour the pain. 'In ancient tragedy, the sorrow is more profound, the pain less; in modern tragedy, the pain is greater, the sorrow less' (EO 1:148; SKS 2:147). This claim becomes concrete if we consider Hamlet's predicament once again, for we can acknowledge how much more responsible than Oedipus Hamlet appears to be for his own downfall and for the disastrous outcome of events. Although Hamlet inherits deeply problematic circumstances, and although he is quite obviously shaped by the substantial determinants of birth, body, family, kindred, state, and history, his mismanagement of the ongoing situation is intensified increasingly by his brooding, his suspicions, his secrecy, his misgiving, his manipulation, his isolation, his doubt, and his anxiety.

It is not sheer accident but some sort of manifestation of Shakespeare's immense and uncontrollable genius that Hamlet learns of his obligation to avenge his father's death from a spirit rather than a materially substantial figure. For the material disconnection (or immaterial connection) is the very quintessence of the modern ratio of tragic relativity properly understood. As we will see momentarily when we look at A's version of *Antigone*, tragic inheritance is nowadays expressed more spiritually or internally. The causal matrix is more ethereal, which does not mean—and this is precisely the point—that it has a lesser hold in the consciousness of the protagonist. This is to say that, unlike the curse of ties and obligations constricting Oedipus, the curse of ties and obligations constricting Hamlet can be ignored *practically* by Hamlet. He is not *compelled* to action (which is one way of describing his whole issue, since compulsion would be welcome). And yet, undeniably, something is rotten in his permutation of substantial determinants. In other words, the archetypal modern tragic protagonist has a life that is 'turned inward, not outward' (EO 1:157; SKS 2:155). Here we see, at least nominally, why modern tragedy is the most *interesting* art form.

Before we turn to A's modern representation of Antigone, and thus to the heart of the *interesting*, one final note is in order regarding comprehension, for there is an issue that has caused some confusion for readers of A's second essay and for many of its commentators. Upon close inspection of 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama,' it seems evident that when A speaks of 'modern tragedy,' the term can refer to either of two separate ideas.¹⁵ These correspond roughly to *modern tragedy as it should be* and *modern tragedy as it generally is*. In the previous paragraph, of course, we saw that A uses the term 'modern tragedy' to discuss what I have been calling *proper* modern tragedy. In this sense, 'modern tragedy' refers to a dramatic form that follows the *unchangeable requirements* of the truly tragic: it is what we have been defining as ancient tragedy, except with an inverted quotient of pain. Modern tragedy here has a similarly inescapable ambiguity between inherited suffering and individual agency, with greater emphasis on the role of the subjective contribution.

Unfortunately, although Shakespeare's tragedies adhere to the *unchangeable requirements* of tragedy and thus properly represent modern tragedy, the majority of more recent artists and audiences exhibit a lack of understanding as to what features must be present in a drama *qua* tragedy in order to interest spectators aesthetically. Instead of proper modern *tragedy*—or *modern tragedy as it should be*—we see an abundance of misguided dramas passing themselves off as tragedies. These dramas, along with the misguided outlook of the age, comprise the second sense of the term 'modern tragedy.' Most 'modern tragedy' fails because of a simple misunderstanding. Namely, modern philosophers, artists, and audiences do not pay any heed to the importance of substantial determinants, or to the basic idea of introducing an incompatible necessity. They presume that the individual stands and falls entirely through his or her own agency. Here is how A expresses his objection to the manifest mistake:

It is, therefore, *surely a misunderstanding of the tragic* when our age endeavors to have everything fateful transubstantiate itself into individuality and subjectivity. We want to know nothing about the hero's past; we load his whole life upon his shoulders as his own deed, make him accountable for everything, but in so doing we also transform his esthetic guilt into ethical guilt. In this way, the tragic hero becomes bad, evil actually becomes the tragic subject, but evil also has no esthetic interest, and sin is not an esthetic element (EO 1:144; SKS 2:144, my emphasis).

Modern tragedy should be hyper-Shakespearean. It should contain all of the features of ancient tragedy, yet with the important distinction that these features are intermingled to emphasize the problematized consciousness of

the individual rather than the problematized circumstances the individual has inherited. This is because the question concerning the role of practical freedom within causal actuality has been *intensified* inwardly as our scientific investigation into matter and our critical philosophies have yielded a deeper sense of the disparity between the physical structure of things and our ineradicable sense of the human autonomy of will.¹⁶ It is with this theory of tragedy in mind that A reconstructs the story of Antigone for his readers. His new Antigone, in the situation she confronts, demonstrates what is needed in our theatres in the present age if tragedy is to remain relevant for modern consciousness. As Clyde Holler proposes, the task of A's exposition is 'to show how the peculiar qualities of ancient tragedy can be appropriate for modern tragedy. The vehicle for this is the Aesthete's creation of a modern Antigone . . . ' (Holler 1995, 129).

DEPTH: ANTIGONE

We are now in a position to grasp how 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama' becomes, at least in part, a critique of the mentality of what A calls 'our age.' It is not that tragedy no longer has validity as an edifying and aesthetically rich art form, but rather that the subjective alienation of the modern individual, generally speaking, has contributed to our ignorance of the categories that make tragedy possible. After Hegel, we conceive of tragedy as the artefact of a more spiritually primitive historical period and also presume to have moved beyond its reaches. We no longer relate to the tragic contradictions between fate and agency as we should because we presume to have freed ourselves from the dominion of fate. Furthermore, because we are unable to integrate our inward and outward realities, and because we cannot overcome the division, we withdraw increasingly from the inherited world and disregard the urge towards any substantial-subjective assimilation. We elevate our individuality out of the context of our familial and social inheritance and disregard the obvious empirical facts of our necessity.

If our sciences demonstrate that the tangible universe cannot support, tolerate, or convey our spiritual agency, then the tangible universe lacks the fundamental reality of human consciousness, and as we emphasize our individuality over our determinants, we neglect our ethical substance as well. As A puts it, 'To a degree, existence is undermined by the subjects' doubt; isolation continually gains the upper hand . . . ' (EO 1:141; SKS 2:141). Under the impressions of this modern dissonance, we have the urge to 'assert our subjectivity in pure form' over and above the objective reality we have inherited (EO 1:142; SKS 2:142). Yet to do so is to be comically misguided.

'Every individual, however original he is, is still a child of God, of his age, of his nation, of his family, of his friends, and only in them does he have his truth. If he wants to be the absolute in all this, his relativity, then he becomes ludicrous' (EO 1:145; SKS 2:144). It is our inability to grasp the tragic potential within our lives—the indefinite relation between subjectivity and substance—that leads to even further psychic withdrawal from the external contributions of physical, familial, social, and ethical determinants.

This is what A means when he asserts that we have misunderstood the tragic, and this is why he goes on to say that an age cannot be happy unless it is in possession of the tragic attitude. Granted, we have lost our understanding of the Ancient Greek perspective of the *cosmos* as a beautifully coherent whole. To be a *beautiful* character, one whose limits are fully articulated within the substantial determinants of body, milieu, family, kindred, and state—which determinants are able to coalesce in a *definitive moment* wherein the whole of one's life finds its outward expression as the manifestation of its origin—is to be foreign to modern understanding.¹⁷ What modern person has ever witnessed a *definitive moment* in the world the likes of which Oedipus experiences in his moment of recognition, when all relevant secrets have been unearthed and all inner will, external force, and individual action have mutually permeated in the consummation of his discovery? We cannot in our age of disenchantment inhabit this ancient *cosmological* consciousness (the consciousness 'corresponding' to ancient tragedy). Oedipus and characters such as Sophocles' Antigone are simply too lacking in discernible hiddenness and subjectivity to satisfy our needs as self-reflective spectators. Just as a scientist cannot relate to the mentality of a butterfly as she emerges from the chrysalis, so a modern thinker cannot relate to mentality of Oedipus as, in his *beautiful* catharsis, he undergoes the eradication of his inward discrepancy and achieves the healing comforts of sorrow.

'Therefore,' says A, 'when so many admire Greek tragedy, it no doubt is often just parroting, for it is obvious that our age at least has no great sympathy for what is the truly Greek sorrow' (EO 1:148; SKS 2:147). Assuming that this view is accurate, a modern spectator may declare (or 'parrot') a wonderful fondness for Ancient Greek tragedy, but when she attends a production of *Oedipus the King*, she will find that the material does not speak to her on an emotionally engaging level. She has no great sympathy for Oedipus because she has never considered her life to be ensnared by fate and heredity in the Oedipal manner. In any case, even if she cannot articulate why, she is left with the obscure presentiment that *Oedipus the King* portrays an unrealistic view of existence. After all, in her quotidian, post-Cartesian life she has been habituated to the belief that subjectivity is the true determining force and object of human activity, and she does not know enough to cast off this modern prejudice. Nor does she know that this view is a form of despair.

A tragic protagonist for the present age would have to appeal to this modern type of spectator while also adhering to what is truly tragic. When A first announces to the Συμπαραινκρωμένοι [*Symparenekromenoi*] his proposed revision of the Antigone character, we get a sense of this double ambition. 'I give the daughter of sorrow a dowry of pain as her outfit,' he writes. 'She is my work, but still her outline is so indistinct, her form so nebulous, that each and every one of you can fall in love with her and be able to love her in your own way' (EO 1:153; SKS 2:152). A seems to believe he will be able to sketch a heroine who has *pathos* specifically for modern spectators and who thus reawakens our aesthetic sense for the amphiboly between substantial determinants and subjective agency. The accomplishment of such a feat would have the potential to restore the soothing effects of a recognized dependence upon substantial determinants and thereby to re-enchante the spectator to some degree, even if the re-enchante is conditioned by pain. Strictly speaking, to say that a character has *pathos* is to acknowledge a feeling for something beyond ourselves. This means that in order for the *pathos* to exist, the aesthetic material must provide an external sense of reality for the subjectively estranged spectator, an engagement across the boundaries enclosing subjectivity. Problematically, since we cannot relate to the inner life of the *beautiful* character (since the *beautiful* character has a psyche that is congruent with the observable situation), *pathos* can be achieved in the modern age only if the character is *interesting*.¹⁸ And so the aesthete's revised Antigone must blossom in her concealment. She must be individualized to such an extent that we cannot understand the range of her inward deviation from the substance of her visible life. She must be pained by the uncertainty between subjectivity and substance. And in all of this she must be unable or unwilling to overcome the discrepancy between these inner and outer significances.

Here is how A introduces the issue:

Oedipus has killed the sphinx, liberated Thebes; Oedipus has murdered his father, married his mother; and Antigone is the fruit of this marriage. So it goes in the Greek tragedy. Here I deviate. With me, everything is the same, and yet everything is different. Everyone knows that he has killed the sphinx and liberated Thebes, and Oedipus is hailed and admired and happy in his marriage with Jocasta. The rest is hidden from people's eyes, and no suspicion has ever brought this horrible dream into the world of actuality. Only Antigone knows it. How she found out is extraneous to the tragic interest, and in that respect everyone is left to his own explanation. At an early age, before she had reached maturity, dark hints of this horrible secret had momentarily gripped her soul, until certainty hurled her with one blow into the arms of anxiety. Here at once I have a definition of the tragic in modern times, for an anxiety is a reflection and in that respect is essentially different from sorrow.

Additionally,

She loves her father with all her soul, and this love draws her out of herself into her father's guilt. As the fruit of such love, she feels alien to humankind. She feels her guilt the more she loves her father; only with him can she find rest; as equally guilty, they would sorrow with each other. But while the father was living, she could not confide her sorrow to him, for she indeed did not know whether he knew it, and consequently here was the possibility of immersing him in similar pain.

In this scenario, Antigone's father is still her brother, but only *secretly*. Before her birth, that is, Antigone's mother's son killed his own father and then impregnated his mother to conceive Antigone. From her earliest memory she has loved this man with the deepest filial and fraternal affections, with the double-bond of sisterhood and daughterhood. At some moment in her young life, she discovered his secret shame as well as her own secret monstrosity—and she became almost certain that she was the only individual who possessed any knowledge of the circumstances (with the exception, *perhaps*, of Oedipus himself). Time passed. Her father-brother died. During his life, she had never been able to ascertain whether he, too, knew the reality of his tangled family ties. As deeply as she wished to unburden herself to him, to ease her anxiety in that regard, she could not unveil her secret and risk throwing Oedipus from a happy ignorance into the deepest grief. That is, she did not know if he, too, was concealing a secret knowledge. In A's special revision, then, it is not merely the fact of the secret that Antigone hides, but more profoundly her sorrow. Her deepest and truest emotions are unknown to the world. When the 'grateful nation acclaims Oedipus with praise and thanksgiving,' she feels pride for her father and herself, and yet her sorrow and anxiety strengthen in tandem with that pride, for these are inseparable from any consideration of his sad and otherwise unknown outcome. She must be careful never to reveal even the suggestion of her sorrow: It is strongest most specifically when she should appear to be most joyful. This is her private contradiction.

As readers, we must remember that Antigone's beginning is implicit in the very first prophecies about Oedipus. She is concealed within the original prophecy, waiting to emerge from its fulfilment—and she knows herself to be the *actual embodiment* of the Oedipal crimes. Her body is the ultimate taboo. In the most literal sense imaginable, she carries his guilt in every inch of her skin and every drop of her incestuous blood. She *is* the actualisation of paternal guilt, the fruit of his very essence as the definitive trespasser against what is natural and right. And yet in another sense she is free of any guilt, for the fact of her guilt-embodiment is really a metaphysical matter insofar as it is a secret. This is the paradox. It can be relegated to a more figurative

guilt in the sense that 'blood' has become a figurative concept in modernity. She bears no visible or physical impairments as a consequence of a redundant gene pool, and in her thoughts alone does the truth hold any significance (so long as she keeps the secret). Being the only living evidence of the crimes, she is able to treat the proof as she wishes. Yet when she most wishes to assuage herself and distinguish between the bodily and the spiritual (citing the paradoxical ethereality of her bodily guilt), she simultaneously must distance herself from her blood relation to her father-brother—whom she loved deeply and in whose memory alone she finds the connection of a shared and inextricable fate, the stasis of sorrow—for if the guilt is released through her appeals to the figurative nature of physical reality, then so too their bond becomes figurative rather than factual, subjective rather than substantial, and she risks drifting away into a deeper isolation from the one connection she has in the world. Her one *cosmological* net would vanish like smoke into the ether of absolute subjectivity.

So far in her young life, the maintenance of this secret has not threatened Antigone's livelihood, aside from preserving her validity as an individual 'sufficient unto herself' (EO 1:157; SKS 2:155). Really, her hidden truth has intensified her spiritual character and enriched her inwardness. 'She is proud of her secret, proud that she has been selected in a singular way to save the honor and the glory of the lineage of Oedipus . . . she carries her secret under her heart, concealed and hidden. Precisely because she is secretive, she is silence, but this turning back into oneself implicit in silence gives her a preternatural bearing' (EO 1:157–58; SKS 2:156). In other words, her substantial determinants, and especially her knowledge of her ancestral link, have heightened her subjective elasticity, and every moment that passes emphasizes the volume of her silence. As guardian of the secret, she does justice to the sorrow and thus the psychological exoneration that Oedipus deserves. She is conclusive in her acknowledgment that Oedipus, as sufferer, was helpless to the forces that thrust him into disgrace (of course, this is the more 'ancient' element of her situation). As guardian of the secret, she feels elevated spiritually above the world, and she senses the validity of her individual life in contradistinction to the universal (of course, this is the more 'modern' element of her situation). Within her character, then, the ambiguities of love and identity are raised to the level of paradox, and this is why she cannot communicate. More than any character we have discussed, Hamlet included, A's version of Antigone has no proper bridge to the world.

'Our heroine is on the point of wanting to leap over an element in her life; she is beginning to want to live altogether spiritually, something that nature does not tolerate' (EO 1:162; SKS 2:160). This *intolerance of nature* leads to her deepest misfortune. She has left herself most susceptible to the feelings of erotic love, for she is spiritually overflowing in her energized solitude.

Consequently, she falls in madly in love with Haimon. When her inmost self, heretofore resting in the spiritual dynamism of her paradoxical sorrow, is set into outward motion by the possibility of an earnest relation to someone external and living—someone who loves her actively in return—the real tragic collision appears. She cannot be true to her beloved if she continues to conceal the most basic facts of her origin and inward reality, but she trespasses against her father and against her accumulated subjective life as a devoted secret-bearer if she reveals the truth. Now she is in the situation where if her erotic desire wins, the secret and her father lose, but if the secret and her love for her father win, then she and her beloved lose. Antigone was unaware that her secret-keeping and isolation were painful until she learned what erotic love promised. It took Haimon to teach her what she did not know she did not know: that joy is possible. However, she learns also that it is possible only in intersubjective exchange, in becoming unburied from her enclosed relation to herself and the memory of her father. The marriage of souls demands disclosure.

In a succinct précis of her tragic dilemma, Shoni Rancher has written the following: ‘in order to consummate her love to Haimon, she must reveal herself completely to him. In doing so, however, she must give away her secret and defile the memory of her father; and this she cannot do. But because her love for Haimon is clear he is thrown into utter confusion when she refuses to marry him. And yet, her reasons must be kept secret. Only Antigone can know’ (Rancher 2015, 61). Her love for Haimon is both sincere and sympathetic. If she does not volunteer the information he seeks, namely an explanation of why she is reluctant to marry him despite her obvious affections, then his heart breaks all the more, since now he is left in his own state of uncertainty and pain. In her love, she has encountered an outward reality to which she wishes to relate in fullness—yet she cannot achieve this relation without sacrificing her inner reality. Then again, if she sacrifices her inner reality, she will have shattered the subjective content of her entire foregoing life and the paradigm from which she has continuously related to the external world: the ground from which her self-knowledge has proceeded in lifelong continuity will vanish. In such a manner, through the circumstances she has acquired involuntarily and guiltlessly, Antigone has been plunged into a choice between two different iterations of guilt against someone she loves.

Antigone’s knowledge makes her guilty (against Oedipus)—for only she knows the shame of her father, and in both her knowledge and her embodiment she keeps it alive. She maintains the shame. Yet she is the victim of it, both physically and mentally, and so her question is whether her guilt is subjectively achieved or substantially determined. This issue, however, is *latent* until the silence becomes an act rather than a passivity. That is, once circumstances draw her into erotic possibility with Haimon, she is drawn into the

decision. Now she *must choose*, and in either case, because she has agency, she must violate either Haimon or her father: either expose her father's shame or subject Haimon to unhappy love. The clash entails uncertainty as to the source of her guilt. If she chooses fate, so to speak, then she remains silent—she is choosing unfreedom (a paradox); if she chooses freedom, so to speak, then she is violating substance (an opposing paradox).

In either direction, she will suffer the pain of knowing that the damage she inflicts is infused with the fact of her own subjective contribution, her choice between inward and outward action, and this is why it will be so *painful*. She will bear the responsibility and the regret in any conceivable outcome.¹⁹ On the other hand, her chosen situation will be fully *sorrowful* as well, since, insofar as she did not place herself in this situation, everything is coloured by her passivity and suffering.

Antigone's entire existence has been imprinted by the fact that she is the human yield of a reproductive incest. This fact is not in question. Her doubt pertains, then, to an inability to ascertain whether this imprint is subjective or objective. Since she is occasioned to act upon this fact—with the circumstance of her monstrosity as the grounding factor of her agency—by virtue of an erotic development, she is thrust into a situation where this agency will bring about her own guilt in either direction.²⁰ Her sudden interest in a reality beyond herself has had an effect that is altogether contrary to what is expected: It has intensified her isolation.

In Sophocles' version of the tragedy, after Antigone is condemned by Creon to a living entombment, she responds by lamenting as follows: 'Alive to the place of corpses, an alien still, never at home with the living nor with the dead.'²¹ A is eager to point out that these words still stand in the updated tragic situation. In his modern version, Antigone's lamentation is less factually accurate than the original but more figuratively true. 'If our Antigone were to say the same thing, it would be figurative, but the figurativeness is the factual pain . . . it is only figuratively that she is alone, but for this very reason, only then is her pain truly literal' (EO 1:159; SKS 2:157). She is buried alive within her own mind and heart. A's modern tragic protagonist, then, is the clear and perfect heroine for every member of the *Symparenekromenoi*, the society of buried lives.

CONCLUSION

If we think seriously about the foregoing considerations, we inevitably note the longstanding and inescapable contradiction in the human experience that A wishes to highlight. It is a contradiction that stretches back into the

earliest moments of recorded history, and its expression is most excellently accomplished in the tragedies of the Ancient Greeks. Crucially, A asserts, we deceive ourselves if we presume to have moved beyond this contradiction into a new and more reasoned phase of human life—and this defeat itself is the very explanation for why we lack a modern tragic expression as proficient as that of the Greeks. In a comic but equally depressing situational irony, this has become our own self-fulfilling prophecy or vicious circle. The more we pressurize subjectivity with the vice of material science and the dream of rationalized fulfilment, the more potent subjectivity becomes in its diminished ‘space.’ Doubt, pain, guilt, and isolation thereby intensify. Or, as A writes, ‘To a degree, existence is undermined by the subject’s doubt; isolation continually gains the upper hand more and more, something that can best be ascertained by paying attention to the multifarious social endeavours’ (EO 1:141; SKS 2:141). The supposed facts of the objective domain of matter, and of the universal domain of linguistically mediated rationality, do not help us as individuals to renounce our subjective validity and inner sense of agency, nor do they help us at all to occupy spiritually a more public and external (ethical) region of experience; rather, these supposedly exclusionary facts only increase that which they ostensibly deny: our doubt, our feeling of self-determination and inwardness, and our alienation.

A’s Antigone has inherited this extreme subjectivity. On a theoretical level, she has even more aesthetically *interesting* potential than Hamlet.²² Her character is impractical for dramatic treatment, however, which may explain what is perhaps the most curious feature of A’s revision of *Antigone*: namely that it does not assume the form of a tragedy (i.e. as a story conveyed through the dramatic elements of dialogue, stage direction, situation, plot, etc.), but instead appears as prose commentary about the tensions between her inner life and her limited outward possibilities. Here the reader may recall my suggestion in Chapter 3 that the most rudimentary idea of *Hamlet*, the point of orientation from which the dramatic tension of the play emerges, is the idea of an individual self-consciousness divided against the world and hidden from the direct view of others. Upon acknowledging this, we were able to classify Hamlet as the *interesting* character *par excellence*. Indeed, he remains so. But whereas Hamlet’s dilemma is unquestionably composed of an inability to manifest his overwhelming intellectual-emotional complexity within the universals of language and the substantial dimensions of his situation, still his general conflict would pertain even if he had the interiority of a mere child. As is readily seen, the *prince and thus the potential regent* in him must decide whether or not to redress the apparent murder of his father the king. The new Antigone’s dilemma, more exceedingly, goes to the very turning point of subjective incongruity, and any affairs of state are really beyond her concern. The richness of her conflict lies in the fact that she is constituted in her fully

physical and spiritual essence by some profound and dark secret. Hamlet must decide whether to kill Claudius or to end the cycle of violence, but Antigone must decide whether to continue to conceal her secret (sacrificing the outward relation to her beloved), or to disclose her secret (sacrificing the inward relation to herself and her legacy). In either case, she will be unable to sustain her inner truth in relation to something external. This is the source of her *tragically interesting* fate.

An *interesting* character cannot be known inwardly. To return to Lisi's terminology, there can be no adequate determination of the meaning governing her actions. This is another way of saying that, given the extremity of her concealment, such a character cannot be *both* dramatically *interesting* and fully understood. Since the inner contradictions that constitute her subjectivity cannot be manifested as such in the empirical world, the audience would be unable bear witness to Antigone's hidden truth except in the form of a monologue explaining her predicament.²³ But monologue is precisely self-disclosure, an unveiling of the secret to the audience, a diminishment of the hiddenness that would be her main source of *pathetic* appeal to that modern spectator who only parrots a love for ancient tragedy. Monologue contains a transparency that in all ways would deflate our compassion for Antigone by virtue of the fact that it would appear to overcome the dilemma she laments by means of that very monologue.²⁴ The audience would be left wondering why she cannot disclose herself similarly to Haimon. Simultaneously, we would wonder why Antigone is *uninteresting* and rather lacking in dramatic tension for us. Viewed from this angle, we have to admit that in order for the new Antigone to reach us aesthetically, we cannot come to know what is tearing at her in the deepest chambers of her heart. We must see only the fragments of her outer life, the clues of her anguish, and in this way we must only observe suggestions of some painful and sorrowful interiority. Then we would love her as we love ourselves, for she, like us, would be trapped by the incongruity of individual and universal experience, and her subjectivity would assume the features of our own imaginative impulses. Because we feel ourselves to be unknown in full, we only intuit the reality of others when they remain unknown in full to us—but then, if we come to love that reality, what are we truly loving but a question mark, or, worse, our own reflections, which is to say an unreality?

This, says A, is why we are so quick to form associations and to construct pseudo-identities out of arbitrary objects and appearances and fashionable predicates. Individuals, he writes, 'In order to feel their significance over against a superior power, count themselves. But all these associations bear the stamp of arbitrariness and most often are formed for some accidental purpose, whose lord and master, of course, is the association' (EO 1:140; SKS 2:141). In our isolation, we long for some justification to believe that we are

not spiritually alone, and simultaneously we seek some external validation of the inner freedom we feel. But, of course, freedom and subjectivity cannot be actualized in the material and causal world—even if they are not mere illusions, still they invert themselves when they cross the boundary between the metaphysical and the physical.²⁵ That we do not recognize this inversion is comic indeed: it leaves us with nothing but self-deception. It is the asinine despair of modernity and the blind hubris of all ages that mistake reason and understanding.

Of course, despite all his satirical talk against ‘associations,’ A proves that he is not beyond the scope of his own critique. If we return to the title page, or if we consider once again his little oration in the middle of the exposition, we recall that he has already formed his own association, specifically one that, numerically speaking, may be the largest the modern world has ever known. He calls it the society of buried lives. As both Clyde Holler and Julian Young have pointed out, A’s address to the *Symparenekromenoi* is directed at us, his readers. A fully intends to implicate each one of us as members of this unintentional association. He takes comfort in knowing that we have all inherited the crisis of a buried life, or the paradox of a substantially determined subjectivity. The best we can do is form a society predicated on the universally hidden individuality, a society wherein every member can wink ironically and say, ‘We know we don’t know each other and never will, and that is our mutual knowledge—and so let me welcome you to the fellowship of the dead.’ This must be why A believes that we, the *Symparenekromenoi*, as we heed his address on the eternally tragic features of human experience, will have compassion and love for his new creation. But as he has already suggested, this is also why our compassion and love can never be secured within, nor in support of, the sensible world we so long to touch and embrace. *Pathos* and epistemic reach seem to be mutually exclusive in a dematerialized and doubtful world.

Where, then, is an aesthete to turn?

NOTES

1. At the very start of his exposition, A acknowledged the mistake of this supposition (EO 1:58; SKS 2:61). Nevertheless, he proceeded.

2. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis writes, ‘it always betrays a greater discretion to abstain from definitions, seeing that one is hardly inclined to grasp in the form of definition the essential of what must be understood in another way, what *one has oneself understood in another way*, and which easily becomes in the form of a definition something alien, something else’ (CA 177; SKS 4:447, my emphasis).

3. See also, for example, Clyde Holler, 'Tragedy in the Context of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, 136.

4. For a longer contextualized discussion of what Hegel means to suggest by 'epic' and 'lyric,' see Rancher 2008, 68–73. We do not have room here to discuss Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel on the topic of tragedy. I will say merely that, regarding this debate, I am of the opinion that A's take on tragedy, while obviously conceptually indebted to the ideas Hegel presents in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Aesthetics*, is finally directly opposed to Hegel's. A, that is, would be eager to point out that tragedy is not tragic if it no longer pertains as a valid human category. So long as there are persons in the world, there will be tragedy. In this sense, I am in agreement with Lisi, Rancher, and Holler. For arguments suggesting that A is simply applying Hegel's thoughts on modern tragedy, see Stewart 2007, 218–224 and Steiner 1984, 52–65. One additional point is in order on this topic of similitude or difference. When Hegel mentions the 'subjective character of lyric,' his take on subjectivity is perhaps to be taken as less *subjective* than A's. He writes the following, for instance: 'As for the subject matter of lyric poetry, it is at almost all stages in the development of national and individual existence that peoples and centuries, now disclosing an ever greater wealth in the matter of religious and secular life, come to express this life in the mirror of their inner consciousness as subjective states and situations' (Hegel 1975, 1153). In other words, insofar as subjectivity is a mere individual reflection of its specific and unique accumulation historical substance, it can be comprehended as immanent because its predicates are grounded in the finite. This point is crucial, since A is attempting to highlight a conception of freedom that is irreconcilable with our simultaneous conception of causal nature.

5. *The Fate of Art*, p. 17. Bernstein calls this 'memorial aesthetics.' Also, A later critiques this himself in his discussion of the hopelessness of recollection (EO I, 223–225).

6. As Lisi points out, the Danish word for event (which A contrasts with 'action') is *begivenhed*. In the sentence which the Hong translation renders as 'In ancient tragedy, the action itself has an epic element; it is just as much event as action,' the word event (*begivenhed*) must be understood as being *given*.

7. As Oedipus himself puts it in *Oedipus at Colonus*, when he is reflecting upon his misfortune, 'Indeed, what I have done is suffering rather than doing . . . How can my nature be evil when all I did was matching others' actions?' (Lines 267–270).

8. No doubt much has and can be said in an effort to explain the significance of Oedipus' self-blinding. It is not my purpose here to provide an exhaustive or final view of the blindness/vision motif and its role in the tragedy. Still, it is worth noting that Oedipus blinds himself upon achieving a new level of self-knowledge. Tragic knowledge, it seems to me, is knowledge gained at the expense of its own utility. This is why even ancient tragedy carries the seed of what will become, in modern tragedy, a more manifest evocation of doubt. Oedipus does not doubt what he sees. He rejects the relevance of seeing and aligns with fate by externalizing analogically the helplessness of human vision.

9. It is only moderately strange that Freud did not account for this simple thought when elaborating upon the Oedipus complex: after all, it would have diluted his entire psychosexual theory and everything that follows from it. Cf. Freud 1994, 162–164.

10. We will begin to see why with increasing detail throughout this and the ensuing chapter.

11. Cf. *Poetics* 1453a. See also Clyde Holler's brief reference to this connection in 'Tragedy in the Context of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*' (Holler 1995, 132). Furthermore, in *Laocoon*, Lessing hints at his own similar consideration of what elements must be combined in order to produce the 'sweet feeling of compassion': 'beauty and pain together' (Lessing 2003, 35). We will pick up on Lessing's comments in the ensuing chapter.

12. This detail reveals that ancient tragedy is, at the very least, minimally *interesting*. This, of course, supports a latent idea from A's first exposition, which is that modern scientific discovery and modern developments in church and state are not what is truly responsible for the discrepancy between inner life and outer life. History, in other words, is the progression of inwardness in contraposition to the necessity of nature. Pursuing this thought with the depth required, however, would be the subject of an entirely different study. Anyhow, I believe this is part of Leonardo Lisi's point in his article entitled 'Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in *Either/Or*' (Lisi 2015 b). It is curious that he does not mention, in support of his argument, the overwhelming detail from 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' that A blames Christianity, not modernity, for creating the discrepancies of spirit that are plaguing individuals within modernity.

13. Lisi posits a second claim which, if accurate, would complicate the matter of the difference between ancient and modern tragedy. This is the claim that in ancient tragedy, the hero (and the audience) sees the contradiction between substantial determinants and subjective agency as an objective fact of life, whereas in modern tragedy, the hero (and the audience) relates to the contradiction as a 'reflexive possibility.' While Lisi may be right, I think he may be overstating the case. Doubt is built into the Oedipus tragedy; and, after all, Sophocles wrote *Philoctetes*—which manifestly reveals a character in doubt—a mere 20 years after he wrote *Oedipus Rex*. My suggestion is that, as with A's dialectical discovery, so with Sophocles'. A himself acknowledges the change: 'The first doubt with which pain really begins is this: Why is this happening to me? Can it not be otherwise?' (EO 1:152; SKS 2:152).

14. It is fascinating to observe that Nietzsche mentions a virtually identical conception of tragedy forty-four years later, although his thoughts on the matter are both less specific and more cynical than A's. In his late book, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche speculates as follows: "In any case, it is certain that even the Greeks knew no more pleasant seasoning for the happiness of the gods than the joys of cruelty. With what eyes, then, do you think Homer let his gods gaze down upon the fates of men? What ultimate meaning did Trojan Wars and similar fearful tragedies have? There is absolutely no doubt about it: They were intended as *festive theatre* for the gods: and insofar as the poet is more 'divinely' constituted than the rest of men, probably as festive theatre for the poets too. And in the very same way the late moral philosophers of Greece thought the eyes of god still gazed down on the moral turmoil, the

heroism and *self-torture* of the virtuous man: The ‘Hercules of duty’ was on stage, and he knew it; unwitnessed virtue was for this people of actors something completely unthinkable. That so daring, so disastrous invention of the philosophers, first devised for Europe at that time—the invention of ‘free will,’ the absolute spontaneity of man in good and evil—should it not have been devised primarily in order to assure people that the *interest* of the gods in men, in human virtue, could never be exhausted? On this stage-world, real novelty, really unprecedented suspense, plot-complications and catastrophes ought never be in short supply: An absolutely deterministic world might be anticipated in advance and so quickly become tiresome for the gods—reason enough for these *friends of the gods*, the philosophers, not to expect the gods to put up with such a deterministic world! In the whole of the ancient world—an essentially public, essentially visible world, which could not conceive of happiness without theatre and festivals—mankind is full of delicate consideration for the ‘spectators’” (Nietzsche 2009, 50). Here we see Nietzsche describing the hero’s question of freedom as the very *seasoning of interest* for the gods/spectators.

15. Whether or not this point is actually missed or simply assumed or overlooked in the existing commentary remains unclear to me. However, I have been unable to find any scholarship that openly addresses this issue. Commentators tend to discuss ‘modern tragedy’ in one but never both of its uses.

16. And yet it must be noted that A believes this issue is present in all tragic understanding, even ancient tragedy. It is, as I have suggested, present at least latently in all forms of human consciousness, as the condition for consciousness (cf. *Johannes Climacus* 166–170; Pap. IV B 145–148). The question is only possible for Oedipus after the clash between two forms of knowledge becomes apparent to him. This is to say that in order for Oedipus to entertain the possibility that the prophecy is figurative, he would have to make the cognitive leap from the particularized understanding to a more generalized understanding of the prophecy proper, from, that is, a richer understanding of the incongruence between the real (particular) and the ideal (universal). This would require a qualitative change in mentality that can come about only through the further development of epistemic doubt, which in his case he only acquires in his moment of recognition. This is another viewpoint, then, of the vicious circle of tragedy. It is the inversion of the self-fulfilling prophecy, or it explains how the modality of doubt must develop in order to condition its own development. However, once it is deployed in modernity, the paradox shifts, and it becomes too late to return to the soothing standpoint of sorrow, since now doubt is the condition of consciousness.

17. As Schlegel writes in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, ‘Greek beauty was the common property of a public taste, the *spirit of the whole*’ (Schlegel 2001, 52). More specifically, he writes of the tragedies of Sophocles that ‘Everything evolves *necessarily* out of a unity and even the smallest part belongs unconditionally to the great law of the whole’ (*ibid* 61).

18. Iris Murdoch underscored this simple point one hundred years later in an essay entitled ‘The Sublime and the Good.’ ‘Love,’ she wrote, ‘is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real . . . That is incidentally why tragedy is the highest art, because it is most intensely concerned with the most individual thing’ (Murdoch 1959, 52).

19. David Kangas highlights this problematic of decision-making in A's schema. Although Kangas is writing of a different passage from *Either/Or*, his commentary is very appropriate to Antigone. He cites the famous maxim from the *Diapsalmata* which begins, 'Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way.' In his reading, this passage is among the most important in the entire collection of A's papers, since it 'articulates the problematic of existence' insofar as it shows that a 'grounding principle . . . can be formulated only in the most aporetic terms' (Kangas 2008, 43). According to Kangas, "A traces the double-bind of regret back to a fracture in the very idea of beginning: there is an essential difference between beginning as something posited, a 'departure point' for a deciding subject, and beginning as something that befalls one, something non-posited. These two cannot be synchronized, which will mean that to begin at an absolute origin, in full consciousness, is impossible" (Kangas 2008, 44). In light of these observations, we may begin to understand why A's Antigone is not such a far-fetched character as at first she may seem.

20. One can see traces of what would amount to original sin in more religious rather than aesthetic categories. Lisi points to this when he directly compares 'the substantial determinants of ancient tragedy and the religious notion of original sin.' (Lisi 2015, 106)

21. Lines 850–851.

22. See my earlier use of the term hyper-Shakespearean.

23. True, ironized language and behaviour suggestive of a personal awareness that transcends the moment can reveal hiddenness, but it cannot reveal the content of the hidden.

24. As A had already written in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' 'A monologue is always more or less a break with the dramatic, and when the poet tries to produce an effect by the wittiness of the monologue rather than by its character, he has broken the rod on himself and has relinquished the dramatic interest' (EO 1:130; SKS 2:132).

25. For example, Antigone's pride of self is constructed from a sorrow that, once it crosses the threshold of expression, would invert into shame and pain.

Chapter 4

Shadows of Variation

THE PARADOX OF REFLECTIVE SORROW

The question ‘Where is the aesthete to turn?’ has two obvious levels of meaning. First, at the literal level, the question impels us to investigate what sort of art form and what sort of character type the aesthete might look towards in his effort to construct a bridge over the great gulf between the inner and outer. How will he attempt to reconcile the incompatibility which has been established as both his original impetus and his intensifying thematic priority? Second, at the rhetorical level, the question suggests A’s proximity to despair and impels us to investigate whether any deeper expanses exist within the limits of the inner-outer incompatibility. Can he descend any lower into the abyss of human pain and disenchantment? Since we wish to secure a flexible understanding of the ongoing dialectic between the changing objects of A’s scrutiny and the shifting contours of his mood, the task we face at present will be to attend to each of these two levels in turn.

We know by now that the *interesting* is the definitive category of modern aesthetics. What is becoming clearer is that, unlike the *beautiful*, it lacks stability and the claim to any *sensus communis*. Judgements of *beauty* do not follow from conceptual necessity, as Kant says, but they do fall under the rubrics of completion, formal purposiveness, disclosure, subjective (‘alleged’) necessity, and universality. Judgments of the *interesting* fall under the rubrics of incompleteness, concealment, possibility, and particularity. As such the governing concept of an *interesting* object recedes into the hidden centre and only invites further pursuit, like a temptress or seducer or some elusive quarry. The preceding chapters have shown that if we want to gain a sense of the path towards the *interesting* and the psychological effects that develop in an aesthete along the way, we must consider A’s papers not only from the point of view of their contents, but also with respect to what their

tone, style, and general literary form reveals about their author's changing mentality as he pursues the elusive quarry into darker regions.

Let us begin with the literal level by addressing the fact that, for his next exposition, the aesthete turns to the emotional effects experienced by victims of erotic deception. His aim in discussing such effects is to teach the *Symparenekromenoi* not only what sorts of anguish and distress affect a deceived lover's heart, but also why these emotional afflictions remain hidden—indeed virtually impossible to detect from any attention to the character's exterior and self-presentation. In order to do so, he begins by providing his readers with a phenomenology of romantic love, the better that they may understand the complexity of possible interpretations when love goes awry. From there, he goes on to describe what he calls *reflective sorrow*—the restlessness an individual consciousness suffers in the breakdown of erotic happiness. A quick summary of these evaluations is in order here.

As A represents the experience, romantic or erotic love entails a blend of two factors, the *egotistical* (love for oneself) and the *sympathetic* (love for the other). In love, as a reciprocal relation between two conscious individuals, elements of the individual's self-regard are intermingled with elements of regard for the other, her beloved. The egotistical element in love, taken in the absolute sense, is pride, or pure concern towards oneself as an individual. The sympathetic element in love, taken in the absolute sense, is altruism, or pure concern for another as an individual. Since absolute egotistical and absolute sympathetic love are therefore mutually exclusive (one cannot love an externality if the entirety of one's love is devoted to oneself, and vice versa), the erotic relation becomes impossible if either form, the *egotistical* or the *sympathetic*, is present absolutely. In this situation, love for another presupposes love for oneself, but love for oneself only reaches fruition through love for another. The lover, being drawn out of her self-enclosure, inhabits the immaterial space *between* two beings, herself and the beloved, and the welfare of the one becomes dependent upon the welfare of the other.

It is important to observe that in love according to A's description, the welfare of the lover as an individual becomes contingent upon the relation between herself and the beloved: her egotistical love now entails both sympathetic and egotistical love, and her sympathetic love now entails both egotistical and sympathetic love. This implies that sympathetic love is the tensing element in egotistical love, since one's welfare would be diminished either by the diminishment of the beloved's welfare *or* by the diminishment of the beloved's reciprocal love. Equally, egotistical love is the tensing element in sympathetic love, since engagement with the beloved reality beyond oneself, which intensifies one's *interest* or invested *between-ness*, enhances the regard one has for oneself. The more one loves the reciprocating erotic partner, the more one necessarily loves oneself. Furthermore, sympathetic love obviously

will be annulled if one disregards oneself totally, for in that case there would be no relation, which is to say that the lover, being insufficiently *reflective*, would not have any foundational point from which to reciprocate that love (EO I, 179).¹

The aesthete is intent on showing his readers that an insight into this duality of factors in the experience of love is necessary for an understanding of the devastation involved when the lover is on the receiving end of an erotic deception. The deception becomes 'a paradox it [love] cannot think' (EO I, 179). This is to say that the duality of sympathetic and egotistical love in an individual, taken as a totality we simply identify as her *love*, must be presupposed in any consideration of why the emotional devastation following from an erotic deception is of a higher level of complexity and pain than the emotional devastation of, say, an unhappy love caused by the death of a beloved (EO I, 172, 189).² Death of the beloved and unrequited love leave the imprint of sorrow, but, as we are about to see, deception leaves no imprint. The sorrow from deception remains uncertain and therefore incomplete. The aesthete alludes to this in the specific case of a character named Marie Beuamarchais, from Goethe's short play *Clavigo*, when he writes, 'She lost childhood's illusion when she acquired that of erotic love; she lost erotic love's illusion when Clavigo deceived her; if it were possible for her to acquire *sorrow's illusion*, she would be helped' (EO I, 189, emphasis added). In fact, deception distorts the initial imprint of love's joy: It rearranges the lover's past by overturning the once-certain object of her memory and injuring her ability to recollect her prior happiness. The devastation from a deception lies in the fact that the *pain* is never complete, because what is devastated (in the literal sense of the word, i.e. *thoroughly laid to waste*) is not the lover's joy, as would be the case with the death of the beloved, but rather her epistemic ground, her memories, and her possibility for proper cognition with respect to her own situation, and furthermore she has to inquire to what degree she is at fault for the deception.

Her past is suddenly rearranged, for what she presumed was reciprocal love now appears to have been mere seduction, self-interest, and dishonesty on the part of her beloved. In death, the absence of the beloved allows the lover to sorrow completely under the illusory but soothing embrace of fate. Hence she feels a consolation and closure similar to that of ancient tragedy's mood of sorrow, which allows her to crystallize her prior joy and relate to it through recollection. In this regard, her sorrow serves as an indication of the reality and certainty of her prior joy. Sorrow becomes like the museum of bygone good fortune. It is an analgesic form of certainty under which the past is shown to have significance and finality of significance, a crushing blow that also vindicates the value of the erstwhile interpersonal union. In erotic deception, however, the absence of the beloved throws the lover into confusion

because, given the structure of erotic love just delineated, she encounters a mesmerising paradox.

Here is how A first introduces the paradox: 'The different factors in love may be amalgamated in the individual in different ways, and thus love in one person may not be the same as in another; the egotistical may be dominant, or the sympathetic. But whatever the love is in its separate elements and also in its totality, a deception is a paradox that it cannot think, and yet that it eventually wants to think' (EO I, 179). This person who introduced her to joy—joy in the given actuality, joy in the innumerable circumstances life has provided, joy in herself as the object of her lover's love, a sense of inner value equivalent to, dependent upon, and symbiotic with her sense of external value—has now introduced her to the incompatible passions of hatred, inferiority, remorse, sorrow, and pride. She cannot sorrow if she hates, but she cannot hate if she sorrows. Proud, she can feel no remorse or inferiority, but remorseful and inferior, she can feel no indignant pride. Any single passion would be healing in the sense that it would provide her with a certitude from which to begin anew in the process of engaging with the world as a sufferer, but taken together these passions annul one another and defer any certitude. She cannot heal because, problematically, these disparate passions are, each of them, anchored to the original joy.

If she begins to hate the deceiver for his cunning manipulation, then she introduces the belief that the former joy of their love was illusory, since a hate-worthy individual cannot remain the object of one's love, and since she cannot trust that her specific recollections are accurate (she hates him for his false pretence of love). While he seemed to love her, it turns out that he was using her and merely serving his own temporary interests, whatever they may have been. If she is to entertain hate in order to abolish her pain, she must reorganise her past and reject the prior 'reality' of her joy in loving him. She must doubt the most significant features of her former happiness, the normative foundation upon which her new and heightened engagement with externality had come into being. However, once it occurs to her in this way that the joy was rooted in an illusion, then the counter-cycle begins instantaneously. After all, if the joy was illusory, substantiated upon a mistaken perception of the beloved, then the betrayal is a non-issue and she has no reason to hate the deceiver, for she has lost nothing in the process—nothing except for her childish illusions about his lovability. The distress of his betrayal should therefore dissolve into sorrow that her hopes of love have been frustrated. Unfortunately, this thought only teaches her that the joy was indeed real, for she is nothing if not distressed, and in her egotistical love she is unwilling to relinquish her former happiness, and so, in ceasing to hate him, the original cycle begins anew. As she indulges her rekindled hate, then, she begins to feel her own cognitive framework begin to dissolve. Her love was the pinnacle

of her development as a conscious individual engaged with reality (subject and object mutually permeating in harmony), and thus, if her prior centre is retroactively dismissed as having been substantiated on nothing, on a deception, then all of her self-understanding takes a blow and she is left whirling in confusion. Slowly her sense of that prior joy restores itself, a movement which, in turn, exacerbates the hate she feels for the deceiver, restarting the cycle with no advance in understanding of what is happening or how to move forward. The intensification of hate diminishes the reality of her original joy, which in turn negates her ability to sorrow. As this negation is understood to be illusory, she clings to her happy memories and begins to sorrow, but, similarly, the intensification of sorrow diminishes the tenability of her newly acquired hate, which diminishment in turn restores her dependence upon the illusion (EO I, 179–215).

Additionally, the lover's circumstance as the victim of deceit throws her into an overwhelming doubt regarding the degree to which she influenced the terrible outcome and the degree to which the outcome has been governed by circumstances beyond her control. She experiences an irresolvable clash between her sense of responsibility for the betrayal (she assumes blameworthiness, thus pain and remorse) and her sense of victimhood (she suffers sorrow, thus anger and hatred). Has she been the quarry of a calculating seducer, a skilled deceiver, someone who had wicked intentions all along? Or was her own inadequacy as an erotic companion a causal factor behind his diminished affections and his subsequent decision to abandon her? Is it that her beloved has always been immoral and manipulative, or that she has grown undesirable to him through the process of extended exposure? As her mood fluctuates and polarises according to what stage of this dialectic she occupies, she runs through the possibilities. Her sympathetic love, her estimation of *him*, prevents her from believing that the beloved could have dealt falsely in romance. Instead, she must believe that his original feelings of attraction have faded away. Of course, in the next moment, in her egotistical love and self-estimation, she refuses to accept that she was not the object of his love, since that love was the catalyst for her intensified sense of self-worth. She reasons that the scoundrel must have been duplicitous from the start.

She cannot entertain both of these thoughts simultaneously, for taken together they would constitute a paradox, since either he deceived her from the start or he lost interest over time, and yet if she truly loves him with the 'totality' described above, then the betrayal cannot be reduced to the one or the other cause. Neither counterpoint can stand alone, and, as a result, his action cannot be given conceptual determinations. In order to accept even the simple fact that she has been deceived, given the two opposing elements in her love for him, she must believe either that (a) he is a deceiver or (b) she has driven him away. But because of the multi-directional elements contained

within the totality of her love for him, she is unable to convince herself in either direction. Either would demand a violation of one element in her bidirectional (sympathetic-egotistical) love.

Pia Søltoft describes the victim of deception in this picture as being gnawed by a ‘bidirectional doubt, one which [she] can never be rid of: was it ever love at all on the beloved’s part? Perhaps he still loves me?’ (Søltoft 2013, 686). This seems correct to me. However, Søltoft neglects to mention the complementary tension, namely that this bidirectional doubt should also be understood—simultaneously—as bidirectional belief. In such a case, the lover’s thoughts would run as follows. ‘He could never be guilty of deception: he is too good,’ and, simultaneously, ‘I am not to blame.’ Unless the individual is absolutely egotistical or absolutely sympathetic—in which case there is no paradox, and the love never would have come into being—reflection, in its belief, alternates between protecting the identity of the beloved and maintaining the pride of the lover. Consequently reflection, under this dialectic of doubt and belief, alternates between hate for the beloved and self-disgust. With each flow of doubt comes a flow of belief; with each flow of belief comes a flow of doubt. Because love is in itself bidirectional, the lover loses her point of reference in the relation. In either case, either the lover or the object of her thoughts recedes from her conceptual grasp, and she loses her prior relation to the highest reality of her consciousness. Her overall position is indeed one of extreme overall doubt: doubt about the past, about the present, and about the future.

Her aesthetic *pathos* in A’s eyes—her incalculable emotional multi-dimensionality—is becoming more evident, since in the case of the erotic situation, premeditated manipulation assumes the role of external determinants, whereas personal accountability assumes the role of inner agency. There an irresolvable clash between her inward life and her outward reality. The paradox reveals an incompatibility between her thoughts and her experiences. *Who is to blame?* she asks. *Have I been I puppet under his influence, or have my actions influenced his feelings? Am I guilty of driving him away or am I the victim of a fraud?* These irresolvable amphibolies, however, which are really all different expressions of the same sort of ambiguity under which Antigone encountered her tragic collision, do not even reveal the full extent of the problem. As I have already suggested, the core amphiboly is merely the *condition* of the lover’s uncertainty concerning the actual facts of the deception. Under the influence of the paradox, being unable rationally to resolve her understanding of the situation, she doubts whether news of deception is indeed accurate: ‘But whether it is a deception is the restlessness in sorrow’s *perpetuum mobile*. To establish certainty for the external fact that a deception is a deception is always very difficult . . .’ (EO I, 178–9). She continually inspects the evidence for some misunderstanding in the chain of

fact-gathering. The paradox that results from the bidirectional totality of an individual's erotic love provides the functional starting point for her doubt about the most basic empirical facts of the matter. Accordingly, she will fluctuate between the extremes of egotism and sympathy, self-consciousness and self-negation.

This is the basic dynamic of the mood which A calls *reflective sorrow*.

THE VICTIMS OF DECEPTION

According to the aesthete, the situation I have just described is Marie Beaumarchais's situation in Goethe's play *Clavigo*. A is quick to emphasize what we might call the straightforward facts of her dramatic situation: 'Her story is brief: Clavigo became engaged to her; Clavigo left her. This information is enough for the person who is in the habit of observing the phenomena of life as one observes rarities in a curio cabinet; the shorter the better, the more one manages to see' (EO I, 177). His concern is with the indiscernible secret workings which lie buried under the influence of these basic facts. After describing the dynamics of Marie's *reflective sorrow*—which, again, amount more or less to the dynamics as I have described them above—A attempts to recapture, through an interior monologue written hypothetically from Marie's shattered perspective, the sophisticated and endless dialectic of her reaction to Clavigo's conduct. A new explanation is always at hand to contradict the prior explanation. She interrogates the key facts over and over again precisely because she cannot think the paradox which those facts inaugurate. In the total blend of her sympathetic and egotistical love, not only does she refuse to accept the truth of Clavigo's betrayal, but also she provides a range of excuses for him that can explain his behaviour in a favourable light. 'Here an interrogation is taking place that with perfect right and special emphasis may be called the third degree; everything is brought out and scrupulously examined—his figure, his facial expression, his voice, his words . . . The court draws the conclusion from all this that it must be a very complicated case. So it goes with her—not just once, but again and again' (EO I, 185).

The first conclusion she draws in his favour is the notion that Clavigo has not betrayed her after all. In fact, he plans to return with a full accounting of how the ridiculous misunderstanding came about. The second conclusion she draws in his favour is the notion that he did indeed cease to love her over the course of their engagement, and that the true deception would have been to remain in the relationship out of pity for her, with a sort of compassionate remainder of his old affections. 'If he had stayed with me without loving me, then he would have been a deceiver' (EO I, 186). The third conclusion she draws in his favour involves a convolutedly sympathetic version of the

second conclusion. She entertains the novel idea that Clavigo is only playing the scoundrel to protect her from too much suffering. 'He was no deceiver. What snatched him away, I do not know; I do not know that dark power, but it pained him personally, pained him deeply. He did not want to initiate me into his pain; therefore he pretended to be a deceiver' (EO I, 187). In this third movement, she tries to convince herself that Clavigo believed that by acting the deceiver he would 'arm her against him' and make the inevitable break less emotionally severe.³

Each of these increasingly sympathetic conclusions, of course, follows after a dialectical swing towards an opposing egotistical explanation—namely that Clavigo truly is a scoundrel, someone not worth loving. In other words, she draws a conclusion in his favour, then she turns and hates him for his betrayal. Next she draws a more unlikely conclusion in his favour, then hates him again to a greater extent. And so on *ad infinitum*. We should note that under the fluctuations of her mood, each advance in this hypothetical monologue (which is really a *dialogue* between the two factors of her love, the egotistical and the sympathetic) represents a more generous and intricate effort of interpretation in Clavigo's favour, or, in the other direction, a more desperate sense of loss and confusion. The excuses grow more distant from the simple reality of his misconduct, and the grief over accepting that misconduct as actual grows more distressing. The vicious cycle of her *reflective sorrow* is unending and utterly destructive, and, rather than decreasing in scale, it only increases:

This interrogation she will never finish, nor the judgment, either—the interrogation, because there are always interruptions; the judgment, because it is only a feeling. Once this movement begins, it can go on as long as it pleases, and there is no end in sight. Only by a break can it be brought to a halt—that is, by her cutting short this whole movement of thought; but this cannot happen, for the *will is continually in the service of reflection*, which energizes the momentary passion. (EO I, 188, emphasis added)

As is clear from the final remark here, A believes that the deception has ruined Marie's capacity even to will in one direction or the other. In this sense, Clavigo is emphatically *interesting* in his own right, since Marie has learned from her uncertainty with respect to his behaviour that his compulsions are conspicuously different from the apparent significance of his conduct, and that therefore his action and speech can never be brought under conceptual determinations (he is so *interesting* to Marie that she can think of nothing else and can make no decisions until she discovers the secret of his motives). That Clavigo has the potential to conceal himself behind the façade of false conduct and demeanour suggests, of course, that even if he

returns to Marie and insists on his integrity, he cannot necessarily be trusted anymore. Her thoughts, as she is unable to escape the cycling mental groundlessness caused by this deception, have become inadequate to the simple act of decision-making. She becomes more and more removed from the domain of action. She would be able to break free from the cycle if only she had the capacity to decide to do so, but she cannot make any decision prior to discovering a foothold on this most important matter. In whose favour should she arbitrate the confusion? Should she mourn his loss or rejoice in her good fortune of having been extricated from relations with a seducer? Should she hope for his return or move on? In her complete indecision and uncertainty, she recedes from her own surface.

The second silhouette is an image of Elvira from A's favourite opera, *Don Giovanni*. We have been privy already to the character of Don Giovanni and his pre-emptive refutation of the inward life through repetitive acts of sensuousness. It was for this very reason, for this immediacy of experience or this lack of self-consciousness, according to A, that we would be unjustified in calling Don G a seducer in the definitive sense. Given his lack of self-consciousness, he does not strategize his erotic manipulations with anticipatory cunning.⁴ What we have not been privy to until this third exposition, however, is the emotional effect his abandonment has upon his victims. A compensates for this in 'Silhouettes' by providing his own poetic description of Elvira's *reflective sorrow*. Two features raise the complexity of her *reflective sorrow* above that which pertained in the case of Marie Beuamarchais. First, Elvira was a nun. She had chosen the monastic life because of her religious faith, and thus she entertained and consciously devoted herself to a single totalising idea by which the manifold features of the world could be understood as unified and coherent. Consequently, in violating her vow of celibacy in favour of an encounter with Don Giovanni, in succumbing to a moment of doubt, she was knowingly elevating sensuality above the stronghold of her theocentric vision. Second—and equally important—there is no question as to whether Don Giovanni deceived her or not. I say that this latter point is equally important because it illuminates the fact that, unlike Marie Beaumarchais, Elvira cannot use her inner sophist to probe the evidence in search of an alternative interpretation of the event. There is no ambiguity in the betrayal, and Don Giovanni is not *interesting* to her. 'Don Giovanni has forsaken Elvira,' writes A. 'Everything is clear to her at once' (EO I, 192). Prior to the seduction, there had been no courtship, no engagement, no promises. Don Giovanni won over Elvira through the sheer force of his desire. He achieved his purpose and then fled the scene the moment the birds began to herald the ensuing dawn.

Elvira's 'break from heaven,' according to A, 'implies a justification' in relation to Don Giovanni (EO I, 210). I believe he means to suggest here

that, however persuasive Don Giovanni is, Elvira's action is indicative of a consciously understood knowledge of the absolute difference between two relations: the relation between herself and God, and the relation between herself and Don Giovanni. Her submission to Don Giovanni's erotic entreaties is a considered if passionately influenced decision in favour of Don Giovanni. Perhaps this is because his seductive attention promises all the qualities lacking in her relation to God: presence, immediacy, physicality, evidence of reciprocation, temporality. In her encounter with Don Giovanni, she reveals that she has doubted sufficiently to succumb to the temptations of the flesh, and she has chosen the flesh in her moment of weakness. But when she sees that it has been but a momentary passion for her beloved, she is suddenly exposed to the paradox: Elvira's love for Don Giovanni has become indistinguishable from her hatred towards him. She seeks his destruction, but this she can never accomplish, for she would have to hold back at the moment of murderous decision. After all, she yearns for his preservation in equal measure. She cannot come to rest because the paradox disorganizes her emotional relation to the primary object of her consciousness. She is simultaneously repulsed from and attracted to the same entity. This loathing-desire therefore throws her into the dynamics of *reflective sorrow*, under the influence of which she cannot come to rest. She hates Don Giovanni because her love for him cannot be accomplished, but she loves him even in full knowledge of his deceptive tendencies: now that she has rejected God, he is all there is.

As Karsten Harries writes, 'Elvira is torn not between interpretations (the facts are too clear for that), but between moods, not knowing whether to love or to hate' (Harries 2010, 70). In short, Elvira must either yearn for the obliteration of what she loves, or, alternatively, she must yearn for the preservation of what she hates. Because this unthinkable simultaneity cannot find rational synchronic expression, it follows a course of vacillation in which one term of the paradox is given license to pursue its own extremity, until, this extremity being reached, the swing towards the other term receives significant momentum. The paradox is present across the duration of her pursuit of Don Giovanni, but its effects require the domain of time for their unfolding. Her life is devoted to following the ebb and flow of these opposing moods, and each one always conceals the other.

The third and final victim of deception is Margarete, the humble young girl from Goethe's *Faust*. The overwhelming nature of Margarete's personal brand of *reflective sorrow* emerges out of the peculiar relationship she has with Faust. It should be stated outright that, in the most basic sense, she is a young girl of faith, whereas Faust is what A calls a doubter.⁵ Faust is the opposite of both Don Giovanni and Elvira the nun (that is, Elvira prior to her seduction), since, having pursued all forms of knowledge, from mathematics

to music to theology, he is unable to discover any unifying conditions behind the objects of his perception.

All that philosophy can teach,
The craft of lawyer and of leech,
I've mastered, ah! and sweated through
Theology's dreary deserts, too;
Yet here, poor fool! For all my lore,
I stand no wiser than before. (*Faust I*, 1–6)

Each step Faust has taken in his unsurpassed acquisition of knowledge has only complicated his despair, since the more and more particular information he digests into his encyclopaedic mind, the harder it is to assimilate everything under a single principle or abstraction (with each new datum the binding principle must become more abstract and featureless, and Faust is left with a *vortex* as his unifying principle). I believe this is what A means when he writes, “[Faust] is a doubter, but as such he has all the elements of the positive within himself, for otherwise he would be a sorry doubter. He lacks the point of conclusion, and thereby all the elements become negative’ (EO I, 209).

Incidentally, a footnote about Socrates from the first pages of *Philosophical Fragments* may be helpful in revealing just what this means and why it is such an overwhelming issue for Faust (if the detrimental psychological effects of the Faustian doubt are not clear already). According to the passage in question, Socrates held to his one idea, that he had no positive ideas, as his only absolute point of reference. That is, he treated the idea like a god or *daimon*, and it regulated his every action towards a single objective of ignorance. Johannes Climacus likens those who ridicule Socrates for this ‘position’ to polytheists who ridicule monotheists as ‘negative’ because they, the monotheists, have quantitatively fewer gods. In other words, in this analogy, the polytheists, having never experienced monotheistic belief, do not understand that the monotheistic belief actually organizes a higher positivity than the polytheistic belief, since all phenomena become, if not attributes of this single positivity, at least manifestations of it, or else objects which are predicated upon it and conceptualized as relative to it. For the polytheist, on the other hand, the world remains relativized according to the relativity of the multiple gods. Of course, this relativity may seem unproblematic until one pushes the idea to its logical, quantitatively ‘positive’ conclusion, which is to imagine a polytheist with as many gods as there are known objects. To which object does one devote oneself as a decisive point of departure or normative foundation? Which god does one please first? One can thus articulate Faust’s problem rather clearly by suggesting that he is like the hyper-polytheist in this

picture. The nature of his doubt is such that every object is a potential god because no object is a god; there is no unifying idea, and thus the world is a chaos and a catastrophe. Unlike Socrates, who has ‘infinite absolute negativity,’ meaning that his only absolute idea is that he has no fixed ideas and thus is *ignorant*, Faust is overwhelmed with ideas, none of which are absolute or capable of serving as a principle of ontological organisation. His *striving* is to discover that one positive datum and to overcome human ignorance, whereas Socrates’ striving is to negate any datum that appears to warrant certitude and to emphasise human ignorance.

According to A, Faust’s ‘doubting soul finds nothing in which it can rest, and now he grasps at erotic love, not because he believes in it but because it has an element of presentness in which there is a momentary rest and a striving that diverts and that draws attention away from the nothingness of doubt’ (EO I, 206). Nothing Faust has learned has the capacity to unify everything else he has learned, and nothing is not subject to conditions. In one sense, he is consequently free from *moral* doubt or scruples, and any conduct is permitted, as we are about to see him admit (and as his famous deal with the devil exemplifies). In another sense, a deeper and more burdensome doubt has emerged regarding what significance the so-called world conveys. We can assume that this is A’s point when he writes of Faust, ‘His life is pure relativity’ (EO I, 207). Or, as Leonardo Lisi has written, ‘The problem of knowledge that Faust faces, then, is not primarily one of content, an uncertainty due to lack of information, but rather one of form, the failure to adequately unify the material at hand’ (Lisi 2015 a, 215). Here are Faust’s own words:

From [moral] doubts and scruples my soul is free;
Nor hell nor devil has terrors for me:
But just for this I am dispossessed
Of all that gives pleasure to life and zest.
I can’t even juggle myself to own
There’s any one thing truly to be known. (*Faust I*, 16–20)

A is very clear in pointing out to his readers that Faust turns his attention to Margarete because she is not subject to this same relativity. He is not naïve enough to assume that her integrated vision can save him from his own epistemic chaos. Most likely, he perceives her lack of reflection to be indicative of a wild misconception regarding the formlessness of reality. He entertains no illusions that he can be transformed through her continual erotic presence and influence, as though her perspective has something like the power of spectacles to alter his own vision. The fact is that, from his point of view, she does not really have a perspective. Young Margarete simply has not been exposed to the sort of knowledge that could potentially unsettle her natural

faith in a world that is totally significant under the God she has been raised to worship. Her integrated vision, her certitude as she confronts the domain of objects, is really just a youthful lack of exposure to the developments of uncertainty, doubt, scepticism, and reflection. She is just an innocent young girl who experiences life at the immediate level, and this immediacy is both the form of her faith and its content. Her spiritual vision is like the vision of of a child who, having yet to develop into individual self-consciousness, sees only the dependability of objects in the comfort of his uninterrupted subsistence within a sequence of need and fulfilment. As A puts it, 'An innocent young girl, however, is within another relativity and thus, in a certain sense, is nothing compared with Faust and yet, in another sense, is enormously much, since she is immediacy. Only in this immediacy is she a goal for his desire, and therefore I said that he desires immediacy not spiritually, but sensually' (EO I, 209). A page later, A adds that Faust 'condescends to her childlikeness and has his joy in seeing how she appropriates everything' (EO I, 210).

To observe one brief example of Margarete's innocence and good faith, the reader needs only to look at the first garden scene between Faust and Margarete. After Margarete muses aloud that Faust must have many friends much more refined and sensible than she, Faust replies: 'Dear girl, believe me! What people call good sense is often vain stupidity.' To this comment, Margarete asks, 'How can that be?' Finally, in response to her earnest question, Faust signals how enamoured he is with this type of 'artless innocence' that takes everything at face value (*Faust I*, 3102–3). It is just this unquestioning and *artless* appropriation of content which inspires Faust's interest in the young girl, according to A. In her presence, he is capable of watching as she assimilates all the objects of world, and all the knowledge that he feeds her, into her own immediate trust and faith. His aim is not to destroy this faith, but to encounter it in its sensual form by becoming its principal object.⁶

It is for this reason that A decides to modify Goethe's work for the sake of his third *silhouette*. The scene in question is the second garden scene, where Margarete asks Faust about his religious beliefs. A believes that Goethe's rendition is psychologically incorrect. Rather than admitting to his agnosticism and then trying to divert her attention by proclaiming the unseen immensity of his love for Margarete, as Faust does in Goethe's drama, in A's corrected version Faust would attempt to enhance her faith with new doctrinal content. Given his wealth of religious knowledge, he would be very capable of 'enriching her with the opulent content of a way of looking at things' (EO I, 209). That is, A's version would supplement her natural faith with theologically informed details and dimensions. A is suggesting that Faust's attentions do not arise from a childish wish to puncture her innocence out of envy of what he is incapable of achieving. Rather, he wants to witness as proximately as possible (as sensuously) the beauty and harmony of her spiritual

innocence. 'Faust readily perceives that Margarete's entire significance hinges on her innocent simplicity . . . If this is taken from her, she is nothing to herself, nothing to him. This, then, must be preserved' (EO I, 209).

Her faithful vision, like a skilled weaver before his eyes, takes in the various strands of Faust's relativity and unites them into its own beautiful tapestry—a tapestry which he knows is illusory but which nevertheless pleases him in his moral detachment. 'That it is ephemeral, no one knows better than Faust; he does not believe in it any more than in anything else, but that it exists, of that he assures himself in the embrace of erotic love' (EO I, 207). Hence Faust seems to desire Margarete from an inclination similar to Don Giovanni's desire for Elvira, albeit on a more self-conscious and sophisticated level, since proactive forgetfulness is the key element behind Don Giovanni's exploits, whereas retroactive forgetfulness is the key element behind Faust's. From the standpoint of doubt, Faust feeds Margarete his knowledge, including all the theological ideas he has studied, and as he does so she becomes 'indebted to him for the content of her faith . . . ' (210). Her mental development begins and continues as an extension of Faust's deceit. In the consummation of his physical desire, he will be able to achieve, by witnessing her love for him as the twisted reflection of his own chaos, something like a moment of unity, a perceptible closure of his own spiritual void, even if he knows it to be a mere illusion perpetuated by his own demonic hunger for the integration he lacks. As Leonardi Lisi puts it so lucidly, 'Faust's pleasure in Gretchen [Margarete], accordingly, is described as teaching her the content of intuitions that to him are only available in negative terms (simply as different from each other) and seeing her incorporate them into the positive form of her world-view . . . Gretchen in this way provides Faust with a substitute for precisely the kind of unity he seeks in the realm of knowledge' (Lisi 2015 a, 226).

Given this new understanding of Faust's intentions as a seducer, the terrible consequence of his betrayal should become clear. Through Faust, Margaret comes into an enriched if as-yet unreflective consciousness, and so through her eventual discovery of his total deception her world is entirely shattered.

But now she is indebted to him for the content of her faith, and yet when he has forsaken her she perceives that he himself has not believed in it. As long as he was with her, she did not discover the doubt; now when he is gone, everything is changed for her, and she sees doubt in everything. A doubt she cannot control since she always includes in her thinking the fact that *Faust himself was unable to master it* (EO I, 210, my emphasis).

Once Faust has betrayed her, Margarete feels her knowledge dissipate as she tries to recollect his essence. As we already know, however, his essence is

formlessness, lack of essence, and although she developed all of her unified intellectual content under his influence, that influence cannot be understood as different from the newly enriched content of her faith. Everything she understands as a conscious individual in relation to the world, that is, is predicated on Faust's guidance and influence. But Faust is a nothing, a deceiver, a liar, and a demonic force of destruction. 'He was not merely a deceiver, but he was, in fact, a hypocrite; she has not sacrificed anything for him, but she owes him everything, except that now it proves to be a deception. But is what he said less true because he himself did not believe it? By no means, and yet for her it is, because she believed it through him' (EO I, 211). Karsten Harries summarises this point simply when he writes, 'Faust made her in a sense, and yet by leaving he unmade what he had made. Her love was absolute, unconditional, and yet he was a deceiver. All she is left with is her grief' (Harries 2010, 71). Yet she cannot activate her grief in one direction or another in order to begin healing since this grief cannot identify its object. 'As a result, her soul certainly does not become less agitated in mood than Elvira's, but her particular moods are less agitated.' Her basic mood of *reflective sorrow* 'does not find expression in any specific outburst; it is unutterable, and the attempt the particular mood makes to lift it, to raise it, is futile . . . The particular mood expresses itself, but it does not mitigate, does not relieve . . . She lacks what could be called the situation of grief, for she is incapable of sorrowing alone' (EO I, 212–213).

In each of the three cases A describes, the victim of deception is thrust into a position of inescapable uncertainty. Given the bidirectional structure of love, with its egotistical and sympathetic elements, the erotic deception originates a regress of understanding. When the object of her love proves to be the opposite of what it had appeared to be, then the lover's epistemic groundwork crumbles. Love stood as the highest iteration of subject-object consciousness, which is to say as the lover's highest sense of and relation to an external reality. As a result, everything must be cognitively reorganized. Unfortunately, the organization cannot begin because, having lost her relation to reality, the individual does not know from which position to engage her will. She is like someone tossed about in a vortex, unable to grasp anything that is not cycling around with equal velocity and turbulence.

The question remains: What art form can house such dynamic and wildly fluctuating interiority as experienced by these victims? Once again, to an even greater degree than in 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama,' A has detached these women from their original dramatic housing precisely because, in seeking to penetrate to their interior states, he believes that they are depicted in artworks unable to express their incompatible inwardness. His only option, if he wishes to follow through with his proposal to the *Symparenekromenoi*

to search the minds and hidden thoughts of grieving individuals, will be to create a new and rather fantastical artistic genre: the *silhouette*.

THE SILHOUETTE AS A POETIC IMAGE

As we saw earlier, Don Giovanni was only prototypically *interesting*. He experienced no reflective divergence between the inner and the outer, even if his life demonstrated exactly the idea that the rupture between consciousness and its object was emerging and that, as if from a dream, his spirit was awakening in contraposition to the sleep-like ease of pure immediacy. As a character who resisted individuation and reflection, he was shown to behave pre-emptively against attaining any subjective difference from the world and thus against the acquisition of any *reflective anxiety*. This allowed him to remain in a place of psychological security, for, along with increasing the capacity to differentiate oneself from immediate phenomena, reflection introduces more burdensome apprehensions regarding the manifold contradictions between thinking and being. Insofar as there was a discrepancy concerning Don Giovanni's conduct and the underlying current of *substantial anxiety* that with each successful erotic encounter he was able to deflect or conceal (especially from himself), he was unconsciously, primitively *interesting*. His inner impetus was hidden primarily from himself, and so he was not manifestly *interesting*. In his endlessly reiterated sensual indulgence, he continually deferred any possibility of developing a perspective. Nevertheless, in investigating Don Giovanni's psychic impoverishment, A established his own deepening aesthetic preoccupation with the category of the *interesting*, for it was his belief that in Don Giovanni's under-developed psychic stance toward the outer world, we witnessed an individual controlled by the secret forces of his own nascent spirit.

In counterpoint to Don Giovanni, Antigone was definitively *interesting*. In her own life, the question of secrecy and concealment was relatively inconsequential so long as it required no volition on her part. Although her secret was sorrowful, she was happy to be its keeper, since, as A stressed, it became an element of her pride and the origin of her sense of individuality. In secrecy she developed an appreciation of her difference from the immediate world. Unfortunately for her—and ultimately tragically—her secret eventually produced a collision in which she was compelled to make a free choice between violating her father's good name (and simultaneously betraying her own prideful continuity as secret-bearer), or sacrificing her beloved Haimon's happiness and erotic understanding. In choosing Haimon, she would have revealed her allegiance to the ideals of marriage and disclosure, whereas in

choosing her father she would have revealed her allegiance to the ideals of piety and concealment. In either direction she would have become guilty *both* against *and* by her own volition. Knowledge of this ambiguity constituted her painful contradiction and gave her representational status as the modern figure *instar omnium*—an individual pressed up against the incompatible but mutual presence of causal determination and subjective freedom. In choosing to die, or in dying of grief from the absolute existential impasse, she refuted either consideration and represented A's belief that 'The colliding forces are matched to such a degree that action becomes impossible for the tragic individual' (EO I, 164).⁷

We see how, in her *interesting* predicament, Antigone proves very similar to Prince Hamlet, who, unable or unwilling to mediate between the different personal, familial, and social obligations at hand, remains *interesting* and ethically aloof, secretively detached from the immediate significance of his body, his conduct, his language, and his entire substantial domain: a man for whom action has become nearly impossible. Antigone, in death, remains eternally at the turning point between aesthetics and ethics, secrecy and disclosure, the inward and the outward. Along these lines, her *pain* and sense of guilt are intricately linked to her inability to discern the effects of substance from those of subjectivity, or what is inherited from circumstances she has brought upon herself. Thus her *interesting* ambiguity emerges from her position of uncertainty with respect to questions of autonomy and accountability.

Marie Beaumarchais, Elvira, and Margarete, as A describes them, are even more *interesting* than Antigone. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is because these women are subject to an even greater uncertainty than Antigone and Hamlet. Their uncertainty has paralyzed them externally and volitionally, although inwardly they are unspeakably restless. Through A's quasi-artistic reproduction of the inner disquiet of each individual, we witness three variations of the type of concealed consciousness that is unable to engage outwardly because it is unable to determine the proper conditions of engagement. Being herself suddenly unsure of her former lover's motivations, desires, and loyalties, each woman is unwilling or unable to stake a decision in order to move forward, since doing so would necessarily entail the sacrifice of either her egotistical or her sympathetic love. If she happens to decide in the wrong direction then she loses both. As a doubting subject, each woman becomes completely detached from her given environment, specifically because she is uncertain as to what is actually given and what is merely her subjective projection onto the given actuality. Not *knowing*, she attempts to keep everything of decisive importance within the domain of possibility, where despair alternates with hope in an endless loop.

Essentially, this amounts to having no conditions by which to reason, act, or live. So long as her *reflective sorrow* persists, the victim of deceit is not

grounded in empirical reality. The suspension of her consciousness between two absolutely opposed ideas is therefore not the consequence of her deviant and secret machinations, as in the case of Richard III or Hamlet, or some ethical impasse, as in the case of our modern Antigone, but of an inability to find the ‘situation of grief,’ since she can neither sorrow nor validate her hope without a definitive object of understanding serving as her epistemic guarantor (EO I, 214). As long as the answer to the most important question of whether or not she has been deceived by the highest object of her reality remains debatable, ‘the sorrow will find no repose but must continue to ramble back and forth in reflection’ (EO I, 171). And because she is unwilling to commit in either direction without appropriate evidence, her mood of *reflective sorrow* does not ‘involve any change in the exterior’ but instead causes her to withdraw and see to it ‘that the exterior is as inconspicuous as possible’ (EO I, 170).

By withdrawing inward in this way, [*reflective sorrow*] finally finds an inclosure, an innermost retreat, where it thinks it can remain, and now it begins its uniform movement. Like the pendulum in a clock, it swings back and forth and cannot find rest . . . In the course of time, the uniformity [of this pendulum-like movement] has something anesthetizing about it. Just as the uniform dripping of rain from the roof, the uniform whirring of a spinning wheel, and the monotonous sound of a man pacing back and forth with measured steps on the floor above have an anesthetizing effect, so reflective grief eventually finds solace in this motion, which as an illusory motion becomes a necessity for it. At last there is a kind of balance; the need to give vent to the grief, insofar as it may ever have asserted itself at all, ceases; the exterior is calm and quiet; and deep within, in its little nook, grief lives like a well-guarded prisoner in an underground prison, who lives on year after year in his uniform movement, walking to and fro in his cubbyhole, never weary of traveling the long or short road of sorrow. (EO I, 170–71)

By withdrawing and concealing her own inner unrest from those around her, the victim tries to overcome her uncertainty with respect to the deception. Since it cannot be verified beyond doubt that her lover is immoral and dishonest, she is able to keep alive the possibilities intrinsic to the totality of her sympathetic-egotistical love. She can move from false recollection (‘he loved me once’) to false hope (‘he loves me still’), and from unverifiable anger (‘he was despicably dishonest from the start’) to unverifiable remorse (‘time revealed my inferiority to such a superior individual’). She finds comfort in each contradictory possibility for different specific reasons, but the point is that every explanation she conjures bears a sort of fantastical certainty or momentary sense of decisiveness from which one element of her love—either the sympathetic or the egotistical—can take root and restore her sense of

understanding and reality. While her overall mood is one of extreme discomfort and anxiety, or permanent *restlessness*, still each specific and contrary response to the *merely apparent* betrayal is ‘anesthetizing’ against that overall unrest. Convincing herself that mutual love existed once but has been lost will have a healing quality with reference to the past: she can finally live in sorrow with her recollection that once upon a time this lovable man made her happy. In the opposite fashion, entertaining hope will have a healing effect with reference to the future: she does not have to sorrow because her beloved will return and repent or ‘completely justify himself or explain everything’ (EO I, 182–83). Likewise, anger has the false certainty of egotism, and contrition the false conviction of altruism. Because none of the possibilities can be sustained through a definitive appeal to the evidence at hand, however, the victim slowly works herself into a pattern of movement between the limits of either false certitude or delusional hope, and in this bipolar fashion she grows more and more independent of any externality which might threaten the mitigating quality that each subsidiary, momentary mood has in relation to the overall mood of uncertainty. Time itself becomes the revelation of her underlying stasis. Like a pendulum she marks time without moving from the spot, and without accumulating or expressing any content.

This is perhaps the most technically *interesting* element of A’s analysis, for it contains an insight as to why, as he imagines things, the victim consciously withdraws from any exposure to or trust of the external domain. One is reminded of his image concerning the fishing bob, where our vision is trained on the surface, but only in order to detect the nature of the movements beneath. The key here is that because each momentary mood mitigates the unrest of the larger inescapable mood of *reflective sorrow*, providing a potential point of departure from which to support a determination of the will in one direction or the other, the victim, in her reflection, is consistently reluctant to reveal to those around her where she is in the so-called pendulum swing between sympathetic and egotistical love. If Marie Beaumarchais, for instance, reveals that her hope is gaining momentum, someone in her circle might attempt to convince her of the foolishness of such hope, thus threatening the mood that is, for the moment, a mitigation of uncertainty and a stronghold against confusion. If, on the other hand, she reveals to others that she is sorrowing over her loss, their tendency might be to strip her of this mood by suggesting that a good-for-nothing deceiver is not worth the price of her tears. If she recovers her pride and enjoys a momentary outpouring of wrath towards Clavigo, the others in her circle may take the same position and curse him as vehemently, an action to which they would have no right in her view, since they do not experience the love she once felt (thus their agreement would deplete the pride and individuating strength of her outrage). And if she diminishes her self-love in his favour, accusing herself of being less

appealing to Clavigo than she was originally, the others will try to convince her that *he* was to blame, that she is the superior one and he the reprobate. In each case, the momentary mitigation would be stolen away from her and she would have to face the uncertainty again in its pure, paradoxical form. Consequently, she goes into hiding behind a fixed façade and secretly enacts this incessant emotional fluctuation, imaginatively soothing herself in multiple directions but always under the basic dominance of her *reflective sorrow*.

For this reason, the victim of deception cannot be depicted pictorially. Not only has her true consciousness receded beneath her own behavioural self-presentation, but also her general mood of *reflective sorrow* is comprised of a series of extreme and incompatible particular moods. Thus even if her momentary, specific mood were somehow to become apparent to onlookers, the single expression entailed would not be representative of her deeper, ongoing state of unrest, vacillation, and duplexity. At no moment is her emotional situation indicative of the entire range that the mood of *reflective sorrow* entails. Just as an individual never before exposed to colour cannot comprehend the omnipresent spectrum of light simply by glimpsing a ray of violet, so the unsympathetic onlooker is incapable of observing the omnipresent spectrum of her emotional colours simply by glimpsing her momentary particular mood (anger, for instance). The momentary mood is only one sequential burst from a logically inexpressible simultaneity, or a misleading step in a never-ending fluctuation of misleading steps, the imponderable whole of which is the truth of her inner being *at every moment*.⁸ And even if at every such moment 'the exterior were a perfect expression of the interior, then there would have to be a whole series of pictures in order to portray reflective sorrow . . . ' (EO I, 178).

Here we see A confronting and trying to overcome a problem of artistic expression similar to but even greater than the problem we saw developing in his discussion of modern Antigone. Since no art form exists that is capable of revealing the character's *pathos* in an appropriately aesthetic manner, the aesthete once again finds himself removing characters from their original artistic setting and attempting to develop an expression of their inward struggle by the use of his own imaginative resources. The victim cannot be shown pictorially, since a painting reveals a single, ideal, representative moment, whereas she has no such moments. For her, there is no ideality breaking forth in a single meaningful moment because every moment of her life is controlled by an unthinkable contradiction. Furthermore, as we have seen, the paradox of *reflective sorrow* is such that while the victim may experience this or that specific emotional fluctuation at any given time, her general inner state remains subject to the undercurrent of the passing, particular mood's diametrical opposition. The *reflective sorrow* is constantly present underneath as a form of *pain* and illogicality incompatible with what is visible or describable. The

tear in her psyche is *always present for her*, but, being the result of a paradox, it cannot be represented pictorially.

It also happens to be the case that, because the victim of deception hides beneath the surface of her self-presentation, and because she is involved in a paradox beyond the capacities of mere thought, she cannot be depicted dramatically. Once again, as with Antigone, the character in question would have to be alone on a stage, with no other individuals in hearing, delivering an erratic monologue of indecision and uncertainty which the audience would have to understand as an *interior* monologue, the audible, time-sensitive expression of the silent and chaotic disarray of her obsessive, concurrently contradictory patterns of thought. More so than Antigone, though, she does not grasp the complexity of her own emotional state, which is yet another part of the problem. The poetical technique of monologue would thereby both destroy the very feature of her existence qua *discrepancy* from outward understanding and cancel any dramatic appeal through the pure mediation of self-expressive, self-subsistent language. Anyhow, the contrasts which dramatic language and poetry can express 'merely supersede each other,' and therefore a poetry illustrating emotional vacillation would diminish the intensity of the simultaneity of contrasts intrinsic to *reflective sorrow*.⁹ Poetry would be wrong in every expressive moment.

Since '[pictorial] art is in the category of space, poetry in the category of time,' neither is sufficient to express the confusion of the instant in which she experiences simultaneously that which has expression only sequentially (EO I, 169). She can be represented accurately neither in drama nor in poetry, nor, as we have seen, in painting nor sculpture. And music, being the harmonious and immediate art form of a splendour inseparable from the senses, is obviously out of the question.

A's solution is to create a new artistic genre called the Silhouette.¹⁰ 'I call them silhouettes,' he writes, 'partly to suggest at once by the name that I draw them from the dark side of life and partly because, like silhouettes, they are not immediately visible' (EO I, 173). Although painting or sculpture would be insufficient for an artistic portrayal of, say, the inner life of Marie Beaumarchais, since the paradox that constitutes her *reflective sorrow* cannot be made visible through the depiction of a single external moment, still, A insists, the visual work of art would be the only medium capable of expressing that her problem is significant precisely because it is subjectively present in *every single passing moment of her existence*, that the entire conflict is present in the single moment beyond which she cannot move. A wants to ensure that we, as readers and members of his *Symparenekromenoi*, are brought to a point where we can see with the mind's eye her inward unfaithfulness to her outward presentation; he wants to inscribe images so that we become

aware of the victim's constant inward agitation, and her ever-renewing mental efforts to mitigate the pain by finding now in the deceiver's favour and next in her own. As he sees it, the spectator can only sympathise with the pain of the victim's *reflective sorrow* if the omnipresent contradictions become intelligible as the inescapable deadlock conditioning her consciousness at every single temporal instant. This type of picture can be painted with words alone (another paradox), since the spectator needs access to the sequence of unfolding explanations, all of which are omnipresent continuously. Yet these words can be written in an image alone (the opposing paradox), since only an image has the capacity to represent the single moment.

Her phenomenal life may consist of changing moods, but her noumenal life is of a single indispensable mood out of which those changing specific moods burst forth: and this more hidden, more indispensable mood is comprised of an incompatibility which she tries to moderate through the pursuit of those aforementioned subordinate moods which are psychologically designed to overcome it. Time, for her, becomes the attempt to escape the paralysis of her inability to find a foothold in enduring conviction. Like a pendulum, then, she is in a continuous pattern of motion and countermotion. Like a pendulum, she cannot move from the spot of her bidirectional inclinations. Like a pendulum, she marks time by a fluctuation between extremes, and the mechanical force pulling her in one direction is always controlled and limited by an equivalent force pulling her in the other direction. Like a pendulum, her existence is purely quantitative and temporal and otherwise lacks any qualitative content by which to witness time as the transcendental domain of her personal, individual development.

Perhaps there is nothing striking about the exterior, but when I look through it, only then do I discover the *interior picture*, which is what I want to show, an *interior picture* that is too delicate to be externally perceptible, since it is woven from the soul's faintest moods. If I look at a sheet of paper, it perhaps has nothing remarkable about it for immediate inspection, but as soon as I hold it up to the light of day and look through it, I discover the subtle interior picture, too psychical, as it were, to be seen immediately.

So fasten your gaze, dear *Symparenekromenoi*, on this interior picture: do not let yourselves be distracted by the exterior, or, more correctly, do not produce it yourselves, for I shall continually draw it aside in order to penetrate better into the interior. (EO I, 173)

This interior is at once static and dynamic, always fluctuating but never developing enough momentum to unhinge itself from the state of tension. Visual art is insufficient to express such interiority because, being oriented in a supposedly revelatory moment, visual art has no capacity to reveal the paradox lurking beneath the surface. On the other hand, only visual art would

suffice, because, as the members of the *Symparenekromenoi* are asked to recall, *reflective sorrow* is defined by the moment in which contradictory tendencies are present simultaneously. The victim's consciousness cannot get beyond the intermediary state of grief between egotistical and sympathetic love, between inner and outer, subjectivity and objectivity. The effort to follow one direction rather than the other is consistently, at all times, hindered by its opposing force.

As we know, of course, A is involving himself in his own little parallel paradox, since an image cannot be created from words except metaphorically or by stirring the literal imagination of others. He has detached Marie Beaumarchais, Elvira, and Margarete from their respective dramatic housings, and in so doing he has developed for his readers a vision of their inner existences. But in none of the cases does this vision have any *aesthetic* stronghold or objective correlative. Once again, he mediates their imponderable paradoxes through reason and poetic accumulation. Like the victim of *reflective sorrow* herself, A seems stuck between the objective domain and his own imaginative interference and projection. Neither the object nor his imagination is satisfactory without the relation of the other, and thus he can have no objective certainty of the subjective element that has become his only concern. The victim of *reflective sorrow* experiences an inability to see herself as independent from the object of her desire, and, simultaneously, an inability to establish what her relation of dependence is in fact relating to: an externally corresponding truth or an entirely deceptive surface.

It appears that the same may be said of A's aesthetic experience.

THE MOOD OF UNREST: A SILHOUETTE IN A MIRROR

The rhetorical side of the opening question for this chapter (*Where is the aesthete to turn?*) brings us back to a point we considered most explicitly in our first discussion of Prince Hamlet, when I explained his standing as the quintessentially *interesting* character of pre-Kierkegaardian literature. As I mentioned then, T. S. Eliot, in his criticism of Shakespeare's tragedy, cited Hamlet's overabundance of hidden emotion as the insurmountable artistic difficulty confronting the author. Because Hamlet experiences thoughts and feelings both incommunicable and out of proportion to their occasion, Eliot says, his presence is marked by ineffability that not even Shakespeare can handle poetically. Hamlet neither understands the disproportion of his moods to their cause nor has any communicative recourse to satisfying the inarticulate claims his consequent melancholy has upon him. As Eliot puts it, with

special reference to Hamlet's apparently excessive responsiveness to the guilt of his mother:

Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him. (Eliot 1918, 125)

Even if we disagree that Gertrude is not an adequate equivalent to Hamlet's emotion, the problem Eliot clarifies here is not limited to the parallels between Hamlet as an individual and Shakespeare as an artist straining to portray the prince's unhealthy emotional overload. In fact, one may say that the greatness and durability of *Hamlet* lies precisely in the fact that, as a work of art, it manages to illuminate the very contradiction Eliot neglects to mention: for if Eliot claims to understand Hamlet's problem (the problem that his problem cannot be understood), then Shakespeare has expressed the affliction of which Hamlet is merely a representative: the *pain* we experience as individuals infected by the secular limits of modernity (*viz.* we are all members of the *Symparenekromenoi*). Shakespeare has expressed the central contradiction of an aesthetic age, namely that the perceptible world, the world to which aesthetics must restrict its investigations, cannot explain, manifest, or account for the surplus interior elements of the human self, the spiritual remainder which is not subject to the immediate reality of sensual and material conditions and yet which arises in apparent dependence upon those very conditions. The *interesting* character, at this point, experiences the world as endless series of spatiotemporal and interpersonal occasions for an isolating inward overgrowth.¹¹

And so in his critical appraisal of what he sees as Shakespeare's most artistically flawed play, T. S. Eliot (perhaps intentionally and indirectly, perhaps unintentionally) is demarcating the problem as it exists for modernity more generally and showing how *Hamlet* manages to capture it. The issue is not limited to Hamlet and to Shakespeare as his poet and creator. Rather it seems to exist for any person inhabiting the modern secular framework, including a transitional character such as Don Giovanni (who is stuck between the medieval and the modern), and thus it is the central obstacle and theme for the modern artist and critic. This is to say that if we understand why *Hamlet* fails, then we understand why *Hamlet* succeeds. And we must acknowledge that the modern individual really has the same problem of supra-phenomenal, supra-rational excess as Prince Hamlet does. It follows that the modern artist has the same problem as Shakespeare (in Eliot's picture).

This problem is what we have been calling, from the start of this examination, the crisis of the subject and the disenchantment of the world, and it manifests in the category of the *interesting*. The effect of the double-crisis upon art and literature, we saw, is what Schlegel bemoaned somewhat inarticulately when, in explicating the so-called ‘crisis of the interesting’ in modern poetry, he lamented that ‘if the context is missing, then the whole is false’ (Schlegel 2001, 39). In the secular-scientific perspective of modernity, of course, the specific context is always missing, hidden, fragmented, or unidentified—because the overall, rationally inexplicable context is the transcendence of the inner self beyond the dimensions of the outer realm of substance and cause which is purported to be its medium and constraint.¹² As we will see in the next chapter, Hegel calls this the Unhappy Consciousness.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is the issue the victims of *reflective sorrow* concretise for A. These women live through a particular type of *pain* that develops because, despite their uncertainty regarding the unhappy love that has thrown their once-blissful lives into chaos, each nevertheless remains aware, at every moment, that her negative emotion is out of proportion to the reprehensible man who has occasioned it. Thus her emotion is not fully subject to the context which begets it and within which it vacillates between antipodal extremes, and furthermore her primitive self-awareness of this *dis-integrated* mentality, even if it remains below the level of reasoned reflection, only confuses everything to a greater degree. The emotional agitation of *reflective sorrow* becomes endless as a result, since the only thing more horrid than the mournful despair one feels after one’s happiness has been destroyed is the mournful despair one feels at having lost any occasion worthy of the mood one wishes to indulge.¹³ As A stressed in ‘The Tragic in Ancient Drama,’ it is much more soothing to have an object of sorrow and thus an explanation than to be in anguish without occasion, sorrow being an emotion that corresponds seamlessly to its context and situation.

This may explain why A is so engrossed by the inward struggles he portrays in his attention to Marie Beaumarchais, Elvira, and Margarete. This may also explain why he so keenly emphasises the *obscurity* and interior incalculability shared by these women—these endlessly reflective individuals who cannot be seen in the light and colour of artistic images but who, nonetheless, cannot be expressed in the time-dependency of poetry or the syllogistic sequence of reason. Perhaps even more discernibly than Hamlet (albeit less *aesthetically*), A’s three silhouettes reveal subtly different versions of the crisis which prompted both the historical, eighteenth-century crystallisation of aesthetics, as delineated in our first chapter, and A’s own personal aesthetic enterprise. Like Hamlet, each victim’s subjective life overflows the objects and conditions which are supposed to occasion, contain, adorn, and express

it. Even more so than Hamlet, these three characters cannot be represented ideally in visual art or in poetry.

As modern subjects we are conditioned by this issue, at least according to the line of thought generated by our ongoing consideration of the *interesting*. Not only are we unable to find any objective correlative for the unaccountable and inexplicable interiority we feel—for our emotional development within the problematic that we are both dependent upon and independent of the occasions, large and small, marking our outer history—but also we fail to see that this ultimate incapacity for integration is the problem which, fundamentally speaking, aesthetics seeks to overcome and yet unfortunately exacerbates. We do not recognise ourselves in the *beautiful* artwork. Even if beauty momentarily sweeps us away now and then (as Don Giovanni sweeps away Elvira, as *Don Giovanni* sweeps away the aesthete), the return to conscious reflection only exacerbates our disenchantment issues. We do recognise ourselves in the *interesting*. We recognise in the *interesting* character's concealed inward struggle a 'bafflement at the absence of an objective equivalent to his feeling'—a bafflement, that is, which mirrors our own bafflement. As an aesthete, A may not wish to dwell on the likeness between himself and the characters he analyses, but it is precisely my point that he cannot avoid being drawn to figures who mirror his problems back to him, for only they have *pathos*, an emotional reality equivalent in complexity to his own. He presumes to stand contemplatively above such characters, yet he cannot help but transform each one into vehicles of his own inward condition. Therefore he exists actively within them. Even if the bond created with such artistic *objects* is ultimately a connection to nothing, it is all he has left. It is a society of buried lives.

The vicious cycle of aesthetics, as a distinctly modern undertaking—as an undertaking which developed specifically out of, and which constitutes, the crisis of modernity—becomes apparent when we finally acknowledge that the 'feeling with no objective equivalent' is that self-same bafflement towards which aesthetic *interest* is most sharply drawn. It is a paradox equivalent to the paradox of *reflective sorrow*. The aesthete is drawn to *interesting* characters such as Hamlet and Marie Beaumarchais because, like such characters, he experiences bafflement at the absence of an objective equivalent to his feeling of bafflement at the absence of an objective equivalent to his feeling of bafflement. Under the influence of such a vicious circle, the aesthete is like a child who, having lost a false coin, has an emotional breakdown in part because he lost the false coin and in part because he fathoms vaguely that his reaction is unwarranted by the external circumstance of having lost a false coin. As we are about to see in the ensuing *Interlude*, this issue begets in the aesthete a sense of the vortex—but only because it arises from the vortex of his inward misrelation.

Unfortunately, recognising the problem in others (witnessing that the problem of the modern character can be neither entirely understood nor represented), does not diminish the intensity of the bafflement but only enhances it. Hamlet cannot be integrated into his milieu, thus Hamlet cannot be integrated with himself, thus Hamlet cannot be integrated into a work of art. The victim of *reflective sorrow* cannot be integrated into her milieu, thus she cannot be integrated with herself, thus she cannot be integrated into a work of art. How *interesting* for a person who feels that life itself is chaos, disintegration, disproportion, and incompatibility. As T. S. Eliot suggests of critics who approach *Hamlet* with an interpretive agenda (i.e. in such a way that for Coleridge, Hamlet is a Coleridge, and for Goethe, Hamlet is a Werther), the aesthete's interpretation of Marie Beaumarchais, Elvira, and Margarete becomes much more an account of his own doubts and crises than a strict critical adherence to the facts and details of the dramas in which the characters originally appear. The question of whether or not A has invented the contours of *reflective sorrow* or learned them from the artworks he admires presents a new turn of the reflective screw that is aesthetics. After all, *reflective sorrow* is really a doubt as to which has the greater reality, the inner or the outer, the subject or the object, memory or reason, the phenomenon or our unverifiable insight into what lies behind the phenomenon.

It seems that the aesthete's turn to the victim of erotic deceit has once again sharpened the predicament. As we conclude our discussion of 'Silhouettes,' a final glimpse at two rather contradictory passages will reveal the deepening complexity and turbulence of A's mood and give us a sense of the mental unrest to which he seems to be succumbing as he probes deeper into the infinitely regressive realm of the human interior. Here we are about to see proof that, just like a victim of deceit, A's volatile mood is both correlated to and dissociated from the objects of his scrutiny, fluctuating between opposed interpretations, and that he truly cannot discern what is the product of his imagination and what is the case objectively speaking. He experiences *sorrow* because his predicament is largely the consequence of forces beyond his control—millennially developing social and spiritual forces which he inherits as a historical individual born into a bourgeois European society lacking any sense for absolute values—but this sorrow is *reflective* because, as an individual possessed of a rational mind, he freely abstracts from the beloved cultural phenomena of his time, transforming art-objects and art-figures into his own subjective possessions, and he remains aware of the fact that his interpretations are not subject to conceptual necessity in the manner with which logic and mathematics claim to be. A's grasp of art and the reach of his psychological penetration thus contain no hermeneutical closure or *beautiful* form: his conclusions are precisely subject to inversion, just like those of a betrothed lover who can never ascertain whether the intentions of her beloved

are what they appear to be, since love itself has no objective correlative outside of marriage.

Here are the two passages in juxtaposition.

Yes, would that the vortex, which is the world's core principle, even if people are not aware of it but eat and drink, marry and propagate themselves with carefree industriousness, would that it might erupt with deep-seated resentment and shake off the mountains and the nations and the cultural works and man's clever inventions; would that it might erupt with the last terrible shriek that more surely than the trumpet of doom announces the downfall of everything; would that it might stir and spin this bare cliff on which we stand as light as thistledown before the breath in its nostrils. (EO I, 168)

Yes, lovable Margarete! Goethe betrayed how you plucked the petals and recited the words: He loves me, he loves me not. Poor Margarete! You can indeed continue this activity and merely change the words: He deceived me, he deceived me not. In fact, you can cultivate a little piece of ground with this kind of flower and you will have manual labor for your whole life. (EO I, 205)

Gauging by the tone of the first passage, the content under focus—the hollow and meaningless universe—seems to inform A's mood of extreme *disregard* for human consciousness and its objects. Gauging by the altogether different tone of the second passage, the content under focus—a single young individual in pain—seems to inform A's mood of extreme *concern* for human consciousness.¹⁴ An even closer look will reveal that, in the first passage, A is expressing an ultra-genocidal wish that all of humankind and all of our historical creations might be swallowed up into the vortex of oblivion, and, furthermore, that the force of this vortex might take with it the very mountains and terrestrial regions upon which we stand, along with the rest of the universe and every object of consciousness that has ever existed. As A seems to believe, this vortex is already present as the inner principle of all that is. The world does not exist under any conceptual or ideal unity, and so all phenomenal objects and events are composed of sheer material accident and mechanical vicissitude. The aesthete merely wishes for the full activation of this hidden vortex, in the hopes that it might swell from its current latency and overwhelm the matter it so tenuously and arbitrarily holds in place, that it might reveal itself absolutely and thus end all the exasperations that arise from the illusions created by our contradictory relation to substance and causality, and from the false certainty of reason. Of course, this vortex would assume the unity the world lacks, albeit with no attendant consciousness remaining to appreciate or relish in the fact that, finally, in our own obliteration, we would have concluding *certainty* with respect the vanity of all things.

In the second passage, A expresses a delicate and tender sympathy towards a single young woman, Margarete, the modest and innocent victim of Faust's erotic deception. Here his tone amounts to an almost indulgent (if slightly parasitic or condescending) sorrow for Margarete's troubled emotional state, and his very first sentence appears to affirm, if not the verifiable presence of his capacity for loving tenderness, then at least the possibility of sympathy's unifying potential: 'Yes,' he writes, 'lovable Margarete . . . Poor Margarete!' To highlight the obvious, Margarete is entirely fictitious, and so she happens to be one of *man's clever inventions*. As it is, the aesthete still thinks of her as though she is real (after all, she is just as much his creation as Goethe's). He speaks to her as though she can hear and take relief from his compassion, and he feels sympathy for her as though she has a visceral, beating heart. Alas she too, fictitious or not, would be obliterated by the consummation of the yearning he expresses in the preceding passage.

From the combined perspective these two quotes provide, then, it seems the aesthete is yearning for the obliteration of what he loves sympathetically. This is reminiscent of the affliction the victim of deception experiences towards her beloved charlatan. The fact is that while the respective moods conveyed in these two passages I have just cited seem, at first, to be mutually exclusive, and while it may feel incorrect to suppose that A could wish for the unconditional triumph of the so-called vortex when his doting apprehension is fixed on a young girl inconsolably plucking the flowers of grief, we should recall A's point that, when it comes to *reflective sorrow*, if the first mood manifests itself, then fluctuation to the other is not only possible but actually likely. Both moods are partial and therefore inadequate sublimations of the contradiction at the centre of consciousness. Under the paradox of the moment, which contains both moods latently but fundamentally, the phenomenal turbulence of oppositional moods is more probable than the stable duration of one extreme mood or the other. We have seen that Margarete, Elvira, and Marie Beaumarchais all suffer from a mental unrest distinguished by its wild inner fluctuations between love and hate, sympathy and anger, pride and humiliation, hope and despair. Now we see why the same may be said of A. As he writes in the concluding sentence of this exposition, 'only the person who has been bitten by snakes knows what one who has been bitten by snakes must suffer' (EO I, 215).

NOTES

1. If A's picture is accurate, then the question of how love begins from the prior state of self-interest is therefore just as mystifying as the timeless question of how consciousness can emerge from unconsciousness (historically, generationally, in

the individual human life, and in the moment of flux between inward attention and outward focus). In other words, this exposition begins to highlight the contradictions which Hegel claims to have resolved. Both love and consciousness require the simultaneous presupposition of both subject and object, since the one cannot emerge in relation to the other without the pre-existence of the other, but also one must come about first in order for the other to emerge as an extant object of thought. This consideration will be important later in this chapter, when we consider (rather safely, I think) the idea that love is the highest manifestation of the structure of subject-object consciousness—or, to put this another way, that love is the extremity of the subject-object relation, which *is* consciousness strictly speaking (but Cf. *Johannes Climacus*, 168). Hence we have aesthetics, since love comes about, as Judge William says, *immediately*, and it begins, like the beautiful, as an indeterminate certainty entirely independent of logical requirements (see Kant's *Critique of Judgement* §42 on *merely aesthetic* judgments as indeterminate). Both love and consciousness presuppose the originating catalyst of a leap into the circle of indeterminate certainty. Furthermore, we can now begin see why erotic situations are inevitably the focus of A's dialectical scrutiny, since the movements that occur on the highest level tend to be ramifications and also figurations of the less apparent action roiling beneath.

2. The duality as it is for the lover alone, setting aside for now any consideration of the permutations of uncertainty that arise when the duality is complicated by the multiplication of *interest* between two conscious individuals reciprocally generating an erotic relationship. A loving relationship itself is the grand multiplicity between two totalities. Each individual experiences a personal totality of the duality between egotistical and sympathetic love. If love were absolutely certain, then an individual could experience the grand multiplicity of love—that is, love without doubt, love from the omniscient point of view. However, since love is seen only from the limited perspective of the lover, this certainty is not achieved, leaving memories subject to change, with doubt always acting as the tensing element.

3. For those familiar with Kierkegaard's biography, this explanation rings familiar, for this is what Kierkegaard claims to have wanted Regina to believe after their break. Kierkegaard wanted to 'arm Regina against him' in order to protect her from pain after he broke off their engagement. See, for example, *pap. III* 159–171. However, interpretations of Kierkegaard's early pseudonymous works which limit themselves to reading Kierkegaard's texts as indirect communications to Regina are misguided. A problematic erotic relationship reveals issues more general to human self-consciousness properly understood, since the erotic is essentially the highest form of consciousness *qua* subject-object relation. If one wants to take the biographical route, it should be performed with a view to understanding how the issues of ethical guilt and reflective sorrow developed (in part) out of Kierkegaard's anxiety regarding his entire relationship with Regina, and how these issues led to his further excavation of the problem of consciousness as both conditioned by and necessary for doubt.

4. 'To be a seducer always takes a certain reflection and consciousness, and as soon as this is present, it can be appropriate to speak of craftiness and machinations and subtle wiles. Don Giovanni lacks this consciousness' (EO I, 98).

5. Here are two helpful quotes which, taken together, indicate the integral relation through the nexus of Faust. 'The thought is that the entire work is sustained by a forward-moving drive epitomized in that key word introduced in the "Prologue in Heaven": striving (Streben). Faust's character consists of just this: that he incessantly reaches beyond the satisfactions of the present moment, that he shakes off inherited structures of thought and morality, that his every accomplishment is merely the platform for the next undertaking. Whereas dramatic characters are typically defined by the substantive goals they pursue, for Faust, pursuit itself, regardless of goal, is primary' (Atkins 1984, xvii). And Lisi writes this: 'Kierkegaard's engagement with Faust is governed by the overarching assertion that he is the paradigmatic representative of doubt. That doubt, moreover, must be understood not in quantitative but in qualitative terms: not as an uncertainty due to a lack of information, but as the failure to organize particular representations under a general idea because a principle for their unification is absent' (Lisi 2015 a, 227).

6. This point will be crucial in the final chapter.

7. In A's description, the exact cause of Antigone's death is unclear. However, since the original Antigone kills herself, it is safe to assume that suicide is his implication: the ultimate refusal to engage with the world. The universal domain in which ethics unfolds is unavailable to her, and she preserves her aesthetic appeal by remaining trapped between the bi-directional impasse of secrecy and disclosure. That is, she remains locked within her inexpressible self-understanding.

8. This is analogous to the self-consciousness itself, which, in its *amphibiousness*, is unable to find stasis and self-identity. As David Kangas has put it, referring to the picture given us by German Idealism, "Conscisouness is for itself contradictory: on the one hand, it grasps the truth of its being in 'the Unchangeable,' while at the same time it knows itself precisely as the 'protean Changeable.' The essence of self-consciousness is to be identical to itself amidst the flux of existence . . . Nevertheless such identity cannot be grasped in any determinate way and so is pushed into a 'beyond.' Moreover, self-consciousness knows itself equally as a flux of sensations, the protean changeable" (Kangas 49).

9. The expression 'the contrasts of poetry merely supersede each other' is taken from *Stages on Life's Way*, 418.

10. In Danish, the word is *skyggerid*. Other English translators sometimes favor 'shadowgraph' over 'silhouette.' The Danish literally means 'shadow-outline,' as the Hongs point out in a note regarding to their decision to use the term 'silhouette' rather than a literal translation (EO 1:631).

11. One of the central contradictions of aesthetics as a philosophical pursuit lies in the fact that it recognises this surplus and yet presses on in the effort to find its immanent expression. Beauty, for instance, comes to us in instantaneous, pre-conceptual moments in which we witness something beyond words and beyond logical necessity. Finding in this something of extreme importance, aesthetics proceeds to autopsy the moment with a view to converting it into something comprehensible, sacrificing the very qualities it wishes to preserve.

12. Of course, this is not inexplicable from the religious perspective, which accepts on faith that a transmundane and immaterial reality exists, and which therefore

acknowledges a spiritual unboundedness necessarily excluded from the individual psychic life by the strongholds of science and reason. As Father Zosima puts it in *The Brothers Karamazov*: ‘Much on earth is concealed from us, but in place of it we have been granted a secret, mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds. That is why philosophers say it is impossible on earth to conceive the essence of things’ (Dostoevsky 2002, 320).

13. I think this is what W. H. Auden wishes to suggest about Prince Hamlet (no doubt borrowing from his favourite thinker, Kierkegaard) when he writes: “Hamlet lacks faith in God and in himself. Consequently, he must define his existence in terms of others, e.g., I am the man whose mother married his uncle who murdered his father. He would like to become what the Greek tragic hero is, a creature of situation. Hence his inability to act, for he can only ‘act,’ i.e., play at possibilities” (Auden 2000, 164). See also *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, by Harold Bloom, pp. 408–411.

14. Equally, of course, one might say that in each case A’s mood of regard or disregard seems to determine the content of his focus—but it is just this inextricable relation here which has proven to be crucial for our grasp of what is going on with aesthetics.

Chapter 5

‘The Unhappiest One’ as an Interlude

UNHAPPINESS IS AN EMPTY GRAVE

In the introduction to this study, when I described the overall structure of the first volume of *Either/Or*, I specified that A’s papers were comprised of two major movements—with an overture called ‘*Diapsalmata*’ preceding movement one, and an interlude called ‘The Unhappiest One’ interrupting the action between movements one and two. We now have reached the interlude: a humorous if bewildering reflection on the problem of aesthetic self-consciousness. Here we witness a turmoil of inversions wherein, as A writes, ‘language breaks down, and thought is confused . . .’ (EO 1:230; SKS 2:223). This turmoil of inversions, this vortex, this inability to secure a grounding for thought, is the very essence of unhappiness; and unhappiness is, of course, the subject matter of the piece. The fourth and briefest of A’s seven expositions, ‘The Unhappiest One’ also marks a suspension between one sort of aesthetical exertion and another, which means that, structurally speaking, the piece replicates or exemplifies its own theme of restless suspension, pointing as it does in two directions at once and yet having its home neither in the one nor in the other.

On the positive side, as we have observed, lies the failure of A’s attempts to discover an objectively correlated *pathos* for the alienated but *interesting* modern individuality. On the negative side, as we are about to observe, lies a series of more ironized and detached attempts to recover from the newly recognised futility of the original movement. Although we have yet to examine the specifics of the three expositions comprising movement two, we are going to see that this transitional exposition expresses the frustrations of movement one while also preparing the way for the new and more cynical approach of

movement two. As the centrepiece of A's papers, 'The Unhappiest One' delineates the unhappiness and hopelessness entailed when self-consciousness, which always involves an awareness of its own temporality, has lost its temporal frame of reference. The specific failures of the past inspire a general sense of the futility of seeking fulfilment in relation to anything immanent in the future: hence neither time frame has the capacity to yield a proper relation between the subject and the objects of his perception, and yet the present lacks any definitive content. Consciously, the individual is unable to come to rest in any form of cohesion, completeness, or finality. In unhappiness, the self-conscious individual remains a stranger both within himself and within the world.

In an essay entitled "'The Unhappiest One' and the Structure of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*," John E. Hare argues that the compilation of A's seven expositions is 'symmetrically arranged to emphasize the middle movement' (Hare 1995, 93). He suggests that because A's fully-fleshed aesthetic writings are seven in total, and because each specific exposition in the first half is proportionate in length to the symmetrically corresponding exposition in the second half, the work assumes an arch-like structure. Exposition number one, 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' corresponds in length to exposition number seven, 'The Seducer's Diary,' and number two corresponds in length to number six, etc. He focuses these claims by arguing that '*The Unhappiest One* is central in importance and not merely in place' (Hare 1995, 93). The question we must consider is whether his point about the structural/thematic prominence of 'The Unhappiest One' is accurate—for while Hare is right in one sense, in another sense he is missing something important. The proper claim would be to say that A's fourth exposition is at once invaluable *and* unnecessary (which is why I call it an interlude). In this regard, contrary to what Hare asserts, the piece is not *central in importance* except insofar as it signals a self-reflective moment in which the interior condition that has remained a latent but governing psychical force in A's endeavour is finally recognised for as an inescapable condition governing his intellectually detached approach to the world. For this reason, in fact, 'The Unhappiest One' is the *least important* of the expositions. It presents very little material that we as attentive readers have not already discerned and construed, and it merely shows that A has finally become aware of the limits of aesthetics as a constructive bridge between the inner and the outer. Once he completes the imaginative reckoning entailed in this fourth piece, a fully droll and ironized exposition about the structure of his own unhappiness, he will be able to move on without the illusion of hope (such is his paradoxical hope).

In the same way that the so-called *moral* of a fable—the concluding axiom—can be understood as the least important element of any specific fable, so too is 'The Unhappiest One,' in its mere articulation of the basic

contradiction that has been progressively apparent with each exposition, the least important of A's papers. After hearing the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare, for instance, an astute child grasps the exemplary symbolic particulars of the lesson involved, even if she cannot summarise and articulate the lesson as pithily as does the concluding axiom (i.e., 'slow and steady wins the race'). The *moral* of the fable provides an ideal and rational explication of what the child is assumed to understand intuitively from the exemplary story proper. Of course, in the sense that the *moral* of a fable is also the most important part—being the final cause of the tale, its ultimate precept and primary instructive aim, the originating basis of the tale's archetypal precision—one can likewise argue the opposite case and propose the secondary status of the anthropomorphic example in relation to its concluding axiom. The *moral* underlies and generates the entire narrative. The simple point I am making is that the concluding axiom of a fable is merely the abstract essence of the aesthetically impactful particularity of the fable proper. The former is direct while the latter is indirect, and, depending on one's preferred way of knowing, the one or the other can be given priority from the pedagogical point of view. From the point of view of aesthetics, however, the tale is infinitely more important, since the epistemic priority of aesthetics is the visual, the artistic, the intuitive, and the imaginative, rather than the discursive and the rational. Hence, if we draw the comparison, my original claim that 'The Unhappiest One' is simultaneously invaluable *and* unnecessary should hold. Yet this is the sort of puzzle that the venture of aesthetics begets once it seeks to secure a rational foundation for its indeterminate judgements, or once it becomes a philosophical endeavour.

As I see it, John E. Hare's failure to acknowledge the contradictory irrelevance of 'The Unhappiest One' can be attributed very simply to the following misjudgement he makes with respect to A's project: '[A's collection of writings] is a set of static moments, like beads on a necklace, and there is no overall development of thought that advances the reader from the initial section to the close' (Hare 1995, 94). This is incorrect. We know already from the work we have conducted in following the sequence of A's aesthetic investigations—as well as from our continual effort to chart the intellectual and ostensibly temperamental changes he undergoes as he moves from *Don Giovanni* to modern tragedy to the women of *reflective sorrow*, in quest of the progressively deeper vision of some irreducible human *pathos*—that the aesthete has a clearly recognisable trajectory and an overall dialectical 'development.' I use scare quotes around the word development here because, while it would be incorrect to call his trajectory a *development* proper, since it is more like a *regress* or *degeneration*, or a *dialectically expanding disjunction between inner and outer when their conjunction is the aim*, still it is the case that an understanding of the interplay between his vacillating moods and the

shifting objects of his attention depends very heavily on the succession of his intellectual discoveries. He is like a monster following a trail of breadcrumbs into a ditch—and each morsel is simultaneously more enticing and more poisonous than the last.

As such, while it would be both inaccurate and misguided to call the first volume of *Either/Or* a *bildungsroman*, when in fact it depicts an individual in the process of progressive deterioration, deformation, and disintegration, nevertheless, A's papers *are* sequential and chronologically sensitive, with one failed investigation begetting another in the causally verifiable disclosure of his advancing alienation and despair (and this claim will bear further confirmation as we transition into the second movement of A's writings). During the writing of 'The Unhappiest One,' he merely happens to have reached a new level of self-awareness regarding what this disclosure brings forth: an unhappy apprehension of the notion that self-consciousness, in a vicious spiral, is *grounded in the objects of experience for which it recognizes itself as ground*. This vicious spiral is equivalent to a sort of *reflective sorrow* in relation not to a single beloved individual but to the entire domain of experience. A conception of the incongruity of subject and object is contained in every act of comprehension, including self-comprehension, where self-consciousness fills both functions, subject and object, and thus is divided against itself in self-understanding, or in self-understanding perceives itself as divided.¹ This may be why A suggests at the conclusion of 'Silhouettes' that he recognises the pains of *reflective sorrow*, by implying that he, too, has been bitten by the snakes of deception. The whole sensible world has deceived him, but he cannot be sure his own form of consciousness is not to blame.

One of Hare's points is that the discussion taking place in 'The Unhappiest One' reaches forward thematically to Johannes the Seducer, the major character depicted in 'The Seducer's Diary,' and also backwards to Don Giovanni, the major character depicted in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages.' According to Hare's reading, this is why the exposition is central in importance.

[The unhappiest one] is looking in two directions, towards Don Giovanni on the one side of him and towards Johannes the Seducer on the other. Perhaps we can think of him as a figure with two masks, one on each face, one tragic mask and one comic. The tragedy and comedy arise from discrepancies between his life and the aesthetic task, which is to make one's life interesting and to avoid boredom . . . [The unhappiest one] *is thus the prototype of the aesthetic life, brought to its greatest pitch of self-awareness*. (Hare 95–96, emphasis added)

While it is true that each exposition to this point can be likened to a vicarious psychological portrait of different cultural figures onto whom A has superimposed his own problematized interiority—insofar, that is, as the inward

life of each successive character under discussion has been a reflection of A's evolving state in the disclosure of his original (latent) unhappiness and self-division—this specific exposition is the only piece of the four in which he does not offer any culturally given character for our psychological investigation. Rather, he focuses his writing precisely on the inability to find a character appropriate enough to mediate and manifest the deepest levels of individual *pain*. Hence the predominant image of the exposition is that of a famous empty grave in England “that is distinguished not by a magnificent monument or a mournful setting but by a short inscription—‘The Unhappiest One [Latin: *miserrismus*]’” (EO 1:219; SKS 2:13). As it turns out, A's entire exposition here will amount to an imaginary contest to discover what type of individual deserves to be buried in that superlatively melancholy hole in the ground. As he points out in his first paragraph, the fact that the famous grave has been exhumed and discovered empty highlights most appropriately the lack of any single identity capable of rendering particular presence to the hidden motions of the fractured, innermost *restlessness* of self-consciousness. To have discovered an individual body in the grave and thus an answer to the question concerning the identity of the unhappiest one would have amounted to a positive step forward—a point of connection and universal communion for the truly unhappy individuals comprising the population of the modern world (the *Symparenekromenoi*). Any conclusively archetypal unhappiest one could be our criterion and as such our means towards a universal realization. But, as we are seeing, unhappiness is equivalent to the complete lack of any secure, objective, common criterion upon which to base our judgements.

Furthermore, unhappiness is marked by endless mental unrest comparable in its empty oscillations to the pendulum swings of *reflective sorrow*, and therefore the type of individual who merits the *miserrismus* epithet and thus the final resting place is exactly the type whose specific merit is his ceaseless *unrest* and thus his present ineffability. The person who most belongs there can never achieve the culmination of internment, closure, and eternal repose, not even in the soothing experience of suffering and sorrow. For A, the grave must always remain empty—and the truly unhappy individuals must fight an endless contest in the effort to claim the title and thus come to a final recognition and repose. This astonishing contradiction can be put as follows: The unhappiest one will be the individual who most longs to be buried in the ‘Miserrismus’ grave, thus the grave must remain empty. To restate the problem highlighted in the previous paragraph, it is the emptiness of the grave that is both the premise and the result of true unhappiness. Unable to relate with certainty to anything *other* than itself, the mind of the unhappiest one cannot stop roaming in search of its true *ground*.

HEGEL'S UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS

In earlier chapters, I stressed that a discussion of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel is beyond the scope of this investigation. Generally speaking, this is still the case. It is of considerable interest to note, however, that in this fourth exposition (as in others, but to a much greater degree), A is both deeply indebted to and deeply satirical of Hegel. Here he makes specific allusions to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which Hegel says that the Unhappy Consciousness (self-division) that is purportedly present underneath all the developments of self-consciousness discussed up to this point in the text is brought to its highest pitch of reflective comprehension in Christianity, most specifically in the doctrine that the incarnation of God constitutes the fulfilment and redemption of humankind. As a system of images, metaphors, and parables, Christianity acknowledges the divisions and contradictions of human consciousness as having both transcendental unity and empirical changeability simultaneously (and thus as being paradoxically divided in its essence, meaning that its essence is to lack an essence); and its central doctrine of the incarnation purports to reconcile this division by claiming the sudden transformation into immanence of what is absolute and transcendental. For Hegel, however, the life and death of Christ have come and gone, and yet the individuals populating history ever since have not received their fulfilment. This explains what he sees as the peculiar and self-defeating historical behaviour of pre-Reformation Christianity in its variously expressed pursuits of the body of Christ: in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist; in the Crusades; and in the search for the burial place of Christ.

When sought as a particular individual, it is not a *universal* individuality in the form of thought, not a *Notion*, but an individual in the form of an object, or an *actual* individual; an object of immediate sense-certainty, and for that very reason only something that has already vanished. Consciousness, therefore, can only find as a present reality the *grave* of its life. But because this grave is itself an *actual existence* and it is contrary to the nature of what actually exists to afford a lasting possession, the presence of that grave, too, is merely the struggle of an enterprise doomed to failure. (Hegel 1977, 131–132)

Hegel's objection to Christianity also happens to coincide with what he sees as its brilliance *qua* final religious approximation to the truth which only philosophy can reveal. On his view, Christianity offers, to use our own terminology, an image of the *interesting* inner-outer problem of self-consciousness brought to its highest symbolic level. For this, the Christian religion must be understood as ingenious, since, like the figure of Christ—who is proclaimed to blend in equal proportion the particular and the universal, the 'changeable'

and the 'unchangeable,' the slave and the master, the empirical and the essential, the relative and the absolute—self-consciousness increasingly understands itself as deriving its essence from such contradictions, and this is a necessary step in the evolution of spirit. The idea of the incarnation of God is a final stage in the *representation* of an Unhappy Consciousness that has been present less apparently since the emergence of self-consciousness proper under the master-slave dialectic. Thus to embrace Christianity and its rituals is, in effect, to devote oneself to Unhappy Consciousness as one's final and highest truth, not recognizing it as an impasse to truth, and therefore mistakenly believing salvation or eternal fulfilment is located somewhere in that impasse. It is to be devoted to that which is beyond immanence and therefore permanently inaccessible while believing the opposite.

Here is how David Kangas summarizes this point:

Christian consciousness knows that the Unchangeable divests itself of its beyondness and manifests in the reality of finitude; however, insofar as the Unchangeable appears under the form of its opposite, it is nowhere more hidden and nowhere more *beyond* that when it becomes near in this way. Thus Christian consciousness undergoes an exacerbation of estrangement. [. . .] The empty tomb of Christ becomes the very emblem of this relation between consciousness and its essential truth: it stands over against emptiness; the very objectivity of its object has vanished, leaving it with absolutely 'nothing' to hold to. The empty tomb of Christ is thus "the grave of its [self-consciousness's] truth"; the grave holds its truth, and its truth is nonbeing and alienation. (Kangas 50)

As Hegel sees it, the doctrine of the incarnation is a final phenomenizing step in the master-slave dialectic that is the work of self-consciousness coming to know itself for what it is as a synthesis of apparent opposites. In rendering the problem in its fullest contradiction, it amounts to the final preparation for what A calls *the next paragraph* in the Hegelian system. In the history of the development of our idea of ourselves, Christianity is the least inadequate projection of who we are in our divided self-consciousness—but for that reason, it must be overcome and fulfilled by philosophy. Christianity prepares us potentially for an advance in the human spirit beyond the level of Unhappy Consciousness that it identifies. Thus when A suggests that Hegel is a happy individual because he is able to write the next paragraph, 'the implication is that the next paragraph in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the transition to the concept, to self-consciousness certain of itself—cannot be written if the unhappy consciousness is attended to with rigor' (Kangas 2008, 48).²

Now, in 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama,' A has already conceded that aesthetics cannot deal with Christianity because its central paradox neutralizes the sort of ambiguity that is the

interest of aesthetics (in which the ratio between passive suffering and active culpability cannot be definitively resolved). The figure of Christ is simultaneously absolutely free and absolutely obedient—absolutely master and absolutely slave—and thus lacking the *interesting* relativity inherent to human (tragic) suffering, sorrow, guilt, and pain: ‘The identity of an absolute action and an absolute suffering is beyond the powers of the esthetic and belongs to the metaphysical. In the life of Christ there is this identity, for his suffering is absolute, since it is absolutely free action, and his action is absolute suffering, since it is absolute obedience’ (EO I, 150). Thus Christianity is beyond his capacity, since, as is obvious, he lacks the grace to accept its paradoxes on faith. However, he cannot accept Hegel’s *next paragraph*, either. He finds it laughable that Hegel presumes to accomplish with his philosophy what Christ could not accomplish with his life and death (be he true saviour or mere itinerant preacher who gained historical renown). Thus Hegel, according to A, is among the happy individuals. He does not understand the depths of the Unhappy Consciousness he ‘circumscribes’ in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Anyone who claims to have escaped the grips of self-divided consciousness must be considered happy, even in self-deception, whereas the truly unhappiest ones cannot come to rest or hope to do so—not even if they have read the remainder of Hegel’s paragraphs.

Such is the unhappiest predicament, the restlessness conditioning and governing all thought, *endlessly*. In other words, A is indebted to Hegel for the latter’s fascination with pursuing, identifying, and overcoming conceptual contradictions and ambiguities. This is the *interest* of aesthetics. However, the Christian contradiction—what another Kierkegaardian pseudonym will call *the absolute paradox* (PF 37–55)—cannot be overcome, and this is because it cannot be grasped by thought but must be accepted in faith. Hegel views Christianity aesthetically, as an event to be grasped, consolidated, and purified intellectually, whereas A knows that the contradictions of Christianity cannot be mediated through mere cognition. A knows that *understanding* Christianity is an existential event and not an intellectual manoeuvre. His negative grasp of the religious for what it is therefore happens to be an element in his own unhappiness, because he knows that it is inaccessible to him as an object of faith, since, lacking the condition of grace, he cannot escape the purely logical assessments aesthetics applies to ambiguous cases. But so too is the Hegelian response of *reason* overcoming Unhappy Consciousness inaccessible to him. It marks an inability to grasp the difference between the aesthetic and intellectual interpretation and the religious and existential acceptance. Christ is not *interesting*—since he is revelation rather than concealment. If A could live comfortably with an absolute paradox, he could overcome his unhappiness. For him, however, as we saw in the chapter on *reflective sorrow*, true unhappiness is the pendulum-like movement between

the gravitational poles of an inescapable and rather unpleasant network of contradictions.

A'S PAINFUL CONTRIBUTION

Really, 'The Unhappiest One' is A's subtle illumination of how the aesthetic process itself has made him superlatively unhappy—even more discernibly and definitively unhappy than when he began to look to aesthetics for assuagement and reprieve from the anxieties of modern reflection and individuation. The chaos, the infinite regress, the endless position and negation, the restlessness of going ever deeper into spiralling disunity with oneself and the encompassing world—these forms of unhappiness which he merely intuited prior to his initial obsession with *Don Giovanni*—are now to be coalesced and exposed at the phenomenal level of a single object, the empty *miserrismus* grave, the paradoxical essence of which is vacancy. Consistently, the previously unformulated ineffability and isolation the aesthete has inherited as a modern individual have been reinforced through his own active inquiry into the interiority of other *interesting* and pained individuals. Hence his self-evaluative stance is latently tragic: it is unclear to what degree he is accountable for the descent and to what degree the substantial determinants of his milieu and historical situation are to blame. Therefore, we should note the obvious echoes of Oedipus' own tragic trajectory in A's aesthetic process, since, as a subject, A is penetrating deeper into the discovery of his own very terrible situation, finding, as a result of his ceaseless curiosity, that he is simultaneously exonerated and blameworthy. His guilt is failing to understand himself: not knowing whether what he knows as a subject is attributable to his own subjectivity or to his inheritance of the modern crisis. The reflective permutation which takes him beyond the Oedipal framework occurs because the discovery of his own definitive situation is the discovery that he has no definitive situation—and so (continuing the inventory of efflorescing contradictions) the paradox that thought cannot think works its vicious cycles against him and through him. One is reminded of the W. H. Auden passage on Hamlet we cited in the previous chapter: "he must define his existence in terms of others . . . He would like to become what the Greek tragic hero is, a creature of situation. Hence his inability to act, for he can only 'act,' i.e., play at possibilities."

For this reason, it seems right for Hare to suggest that the so-called *unhappiest one* who belongs in the grave is the exemplar of the aesthetic life and that, as such, A's investigation into the interior modern condition brings his own unhappy self-awareness to a pitch. This entire exposition, being more or less a poetic self-portrait on the part of A and thus a slightly self-distanced

reconfiguration of his own fundamental inward schism, generates its value because of what A has learned so far in his enterprise: namely that aesthetics, if it is a spectator's quest for some unassailable and essential engagement with an external reality harmonious with his own internal reality, is an exercise in futility. It is too late: One cannot just re-enchant the world by going beyond the measure of outward appearances. Reflection cannot put the genie back into the bottle of immediacy. In writing the piece, A is indeed looking backwards and forwards simultaneously, surveying his point of origin in the desire to prolong the immediacy he experienced in his first encounter with Mozart, recognizing it cannot be recovered, and anticipating his point of conclusion, feeling superlatively unhappy and hopeless in what he now sees as the unlikelihood of achieving any significant conscious harmony with or within spatiotemporal existence.

A is in *pain* because his own freely enacted inquiry has magnified his own seemingly inescapable inheritance: his veritable lack of substantial inheritance. He is accountable for the work he has conducted, and the consequent condition is his own, yet the more he grasps at this existence in terms of problematic others, the more he sees that he has no conditions—that the lack of any individuated essential conditions is the universal and isolating condition. Every *interesting* externality is mere occasion for the attribution of his own self-consciousness, reflection, and possibility. But, as John Jones suggests in his Kierkegaardian analysis of tragedy, only necessity can vindicate the world as having sense (Jones 1962, 170). As I mentioned above, A feels *reflective sorrow* in relation not to a beloved deceiver, as do his poor and *pathos-filled* silhouettes, but to the entire deception intrinsic to his aesthetic relation to temporal existence. The ultimate confusion called *unhappiness* is present as the endless pendulum swing precipitated by reflections over the question of whether the world or his own self-conscious activity is to blame for his own representations of reality. If A is to blame, then he has an essence which carries over chronologically from one moment to the next, in a certain continuity (and the temporal world is the deceiver, since within it everything is transitory and changeable, whereas self-consciousness endures in isolation from temporality). If that is not the case, then his essence is fractured and is therefore specifically not an essence, not a oneness, but the opposite, a discontinuity. As Hegel would put it, this enduring sense of self-consciousness is 'driven out in turn in the very moment when it imagines it has successfully attained to a peaceful unity . . . ' since what it identifies as itself is that which receives duration through negation (Hegel 1977, 126).

I want to emphasise that the active contradictions we have just registered are consolidated in 'The Unhappiest One' and given full attribution in a sort of definitive excavation of this previously buried problem. From the start of his enterprise, the aesthete has been without access to any significant and

necessary connection to the outer world. As he has moved through the stages of his expanding solitude and relativity, he has slowly lost any hope that a connection might be constructed from the limitations of subjectivity—and, in another contradiction, this hopeless alienation seems to him to be the universal modern problem. When any such hope is virtually extinguished at the frustrating conclusion of 'Silhouettes,' wherein A indicates that the characters most capable of arousing his sympathy are those who feel themselves recede when they attempt to establish selfhood in contradistinction to the beloved objects previously constitutive of their enchanted engagement, he is ready to admit that the perceptible world of actuality cannot offer fulfilment for a consciousness defined by reflection, doubt, isolation, and open-ended hermeneutic possibility. My rejection of Hare's un-contradictory reading (in my effort to acknowledge A's *trajectory* as a process that gradually discloses, both to him and to his readers, his unconditional original unhappiness) reveals two important ideas. First, it reveals how an overvaluation of the aesthetic position leads to the blossoming of the original seed of inner-outer incommensurability. Second, it reveals just what *unhappiness* truly is: the very fruition of disillusionment.

In this fourth exposition, A demarcates the boundaries of extreme unhappiness and openly declares himself a native to the territory within. From there, it takes only one small step to conclude that to be superlatively unhappy is merely to be unable to stop the movement of self-consciousness as it tries to secure a foothold for itself and within itself, against the temporal and impending world, yet without any firm governance or determinate ground. Such a consciousness vacillates between attributing significance to the outer and 'changeable' while believing significance emerges only from the inner, and attributing significance to the inner and 'unchangeable' while believing significance only emerges from the outer. This ambiguity and uncertainty produces (and is produced by) the descent into the widening vacancy of subject-object consciousness *at the very moment when it discovers that it has been evolving in response to the shapes it has produced through its own activity*. It recognises that its activity has been static in the manner of a pendulum swing or the motion of the hands of a clock, and so now its stasis becomes, to a greater degree, a restless self-encircling. Before we conclude this brief interlude, then, it will be appropriate to examine how the vacancy of self-consciousness—widening as it narrows, much like a downward spiral—becomes, on A's view, a predominantly temporal problem: a deadlock that is not merely the result of his misrelation to the objects of the temporal world, but that is most palpable as an individual inability to experience time itself as the domain of possible fulfilment.

THE TEMPORALITY OF UNHAPPINESS

Earlier, I mentioned my belief that what Schlegel called ‘the crisis of the *interesting*’ in modern poetry was really indicative of a deeper problem inherent to modern consciousness itself: the problem that Hegel one decade later identified as ‘Unhappy Consciousness.’ This a state of mind in which the division in self-consciousness between what is contingent and what is essential, or what is individual and what is universal, cannot be resolved. As a result, beauty is a hopeless criterion. We saw that from the perspective of modernity, the specific context, beginning, or ground for individual self-consciousness is always missing, hidden, fragmented, elusive, or unidentified. Once individual consciousness has broken free from the once-undesirable constraints of substance, situation, necessity, and fate, it is *already* loosed from its own mooring in actuality—the present. The outcome is an unwelcome transcendence of the inner self beyond the dimensions of the empirical realm which is purported to be its vessel and thus its constraint. Modern, unhappy self-consciousness exceeds the boundaries of its own medium, and yet it cannot identify with itself in this excess, in large part because, as spiritual excess, it is featureless and absent of any secure predicates.

For A, two different relations to time may result from this excess of nothing, both of which we have mentioned at various moments throughout the course of this investigation, and both of which A finds problematic. The first is a nostalgia for the past, that time of supposedly greater immediacy and determinateness when, either for the individual or the larger culture, the world was an enchanted *cosmos*, a beautiful ‘transparent adornment for the spirit that acted upon and operated throughout it’ (EO I, 47). For the individual, this nostalgia may be for the time of childhood and innocence, the carefree immersion in what was apparent to the senses and present in sense-certainty. For the larger culture, this nostalgia may be for the tragic age of the Greeks, the sense of spatiotemporal continuity and happy suffering—a nostalgia that is best expressed in the work of Novalis and Hölderlin.³ Yet since the developments of spirit and reflection are felt to be cumulative and irreversible, and since they drive us ever forward into greater contradistinction from our natural setting, it is obvious that even last year (for the individual) or last century (for the larger culture), appears to be a time of greater happiness and security, greater integration, and greater feeling of presence and universal connection. In this picture, that which grounds us recedes further and further into the past—and all we have is recollection. ‘If, for example, an individual became absorbed in antiquity or in the Middle Ages or in any other time, but in such a way that it had decisive significance for him, or he became absorbed in his own childhood or youth in the way that this had decisive reality for him, then,

strictly speaking, he would not be an unhappy individuality' (EO I, 224). Such a person, in other words, is resigned to the present, but there remains a life-sustaining view of the past according to which the present is purified in the significance of recollection.

This brings us to the second relation to time that has become impossible within the aesthetic purview: hope. The hoping relation is exemplified by the sort of religious perspective discussed so pithily by Dostoevsky's character, Father Zosima, when he argues that our mysterious sense of a living bond with the transcendent world is consolation for the lack of any discernible essence in the immanent world. For the religious individual, the future-perspective here appears as an optimistic outlook regarding the acquisition of eternal life in the desired hereafter, a 'time' beyond this one in which a meritorious and God-fearing individual finds himself re-enfolded within the absolute and universal spirit that is concealed behind or absent from this world. That which *will* ground him, in this perspective, moves further and further into the future, and yet the hope remains present (even if misguidedly, from the perspective of Hegel and A). 'A person who hopes for eternal life is certainly in a sense an unhappy individuality, insofar as he renounces the present; but strictly speaking he is nevertheless not unhappy, because he is present to himself in this hope and does not come into conflict with the particular elements of finiteness' (EO I, 223). Such a person, in other words, is resigned to the present, and yet this resignation is self-unifying and thus happier than the truly unhappiest ones.

A begins his definition of unhappiness by emphasising how, in Hegel's explanation, it takes one or the other of these basic forms. In either case, the individual cannot find fulfilment in the present. The former lives in memory and recollection, and the latter lives in hope. Neither is fulfilled in the present—and yet the present is not a chaos, since it has a grounding in another timeframe. Thanking Hegel for 'adequately circumscribing' the issue, he writes the following: '[On Hegel's view] the unhappy one is the person who in one way or another has his ideal, the substance of his life, the plenitude of his consciousness, his essential nature, outside himself. The unhappy one is the person who is always absent from himself, never present to himself. But in being absent, one obviously can be in either past or future time.' A remains unsatisfied with this description, however, and he follows it up by saying 'For this firm limitation, we thank Hegel, and now, since we are not only philosophers who view this kingdom at a distance, we shall as natives consider more closely the various stages contained therein' (EO I: 222; SKS 2:216). But beyond the jab at Hegel for his happy ability to think himself beyond the impasse, A deepens Hegel's definition and thereby shows it to be insufficiently exploratory of the true affliction of being a self-conscious

individual within time. He tries to highlight the insufficiency by discussing two different individuality types exemplary of the Unhappy Consciousness.

For someone like A, a certain type of awareness interferes with the mechanisms of hope and recollection. This amounts to believing that in the past he has overestimated the significance of the object within reach. Such is the sort of mistake perpetuated by the Don Giovanni type, or the sort perpetuated by a less wizened aesthete enthralled by the sensual harmonies of a successful opera—the mistake of living, that is, under the illusions of immersion and satisfaction, but thereby remaining unaware of a deeper susceptibility to the *substantial anxiety* governing his quest for the duration or repetition of the immediate life. Once a deeper rupture is secured through the process of reflection, the individual must acknowledge that his hope for the future is merely a hope for the return of that prior misrelation. And, of course, lacking religious faith, the Zosima-view is out of reach. This is why A stresses that the individual who deserves the right to be called the unhappiest one is someone who experiences a ‘recollection that prevents him from becoming present in his hope,’ and a ‘hope that prevents him from becoming present in his recollection.’ He adds that this is due ‘on the one hand, to his continually hoping for that which should be recollected [. . . while on] the other hand, he is continually recollecting that for which he should hope.’ In the forward-looking sense, ‘his hope is continually being disappointed, but he discovers that this disappointment occurs not because his objective is pushed ahead, but because he is past his goal, because it has already been experienced or should have been experienced and thus has passed over into recollection.’ In the backward-looking sense, ‘he has already encompassed the future in thought, has already experienced it in thought, and he recollects what he has experienced instead of hoping for it. And in the truly unhappy individual, these two contradictory viewpoints are both present simultaneously: ‘Thus, what he is hoping for lies behind him; what he recollects lies ahead of him’ (EO 1: 225; SKS 2:219).

As a concrete example, we can consider the sort of person who, in her youth, burdened by a sense of melancholy dependency, had hoped for a time of greater maturity and self-reflection. Now that the years have passed and she lives at an age of greater maturity and independence, she is able to see clearly the carefree innocence and immediate joys of childhood that she missed, and she hopes to return to that inaccessible time in order to experience its cheerfulness and lack of anxiety. She can only look back to her own youth with false yearning, since it is a time she never experienced properly but only wasted in hoping for what she now regrets she has acquired. Both timeframes, the past and the future, are therefore iterations of the present one—understood as interludes in which the true existence is perpetually receding in both directions—while all one can see is the current self, unhappy in its position within the objective world, unable to get beyond itself, unable

to grasp how the alternative of fulfilment is any different. Here is how A wistfully expresses this specific example:

But if I were to imagine a person who had no childhood himself, since this age had passed him by without real meaning, but who now, for example, by becoming a teacher of children, discovered all the beauty in childhood and now wanted to recollect his own childhood, always stared back at it, he would certainly be a very appropriate example. He would discover backwards the meaning of that which was past for him and which he nevertheless wanted to recollect in all its meaning. (EO 1:224; SKS 2:218)

Is this not A's case as he writes? What he is hoping for lies behind him, represented in an artwork *which cannot be repeated*, an almost flawless opera, the immediacy of which he has destroyed through reflection, and the ultimate significance of which has been shown to be rooted in dreamlike anxiety and individual self-delusion—an immediacy that never really existed except as a deception. What he recollects lies ahead of him: a tendency towards the negation of presence through the incessant reflections of his unstoppable, ever-oscillating self-consciousness.

As Gregor Malantschuck has put it, 'The intensification of unhappiness in A is due not merely to being obliged to live in memory, having just like the others lost everything, but to the hope of a repetition of the first immediacy, which still tempts him' (Malantschuk 1971, 224). The obligation negates the temptation, while the temptation negates the obligation. Hence we return to Hegel's brilliant remark: 'Here, then, we have a struggle against an enemy, to vanquish whom is really to suffer defeat, where victory in one consciousness is really lost in its opposite' (Hegel 1977, 127). Even if A feels that Hegel does not grasp the impossible depths of self-consciousness, still his relation to time is defined by an outlook of defeat in any direction. Self-consciousness—the present—is nothing but an interlude between two perpetually elusive timeframes, the future and the past, an interlude in which memory is of a false hope and hope is for a memory never acquired.

THE WINNER

One final question remains: Who is the winner of the title of unhappiest one, when after all the winner is the most defeated? As we have seen, A structures his interlude as a mock-competition, hosted by the *Symparenekromenoi*, to restore the rightful unhappiest one to his or her place in the *Miserrismus* grave. Towards the very end of the exposition, in the penultimate paragraph, A writes of the grave that it is 'prouder than all the palaces of the world' (EO

1:230; SKS 2: 223). Earlier, in the second paragraph, he had stipulated that ‘just as the longing of the believers yearns for the sacred sepulchre [of Christ], so the unhappy ones are drawn toward the West to that empty grave, and each one is absorbed in the thought that it is destined for him’ (EO 1:220; SKS 2:213). The question is why. Why should anyone want such a questionable end? Who should wish to accept such a destiny? Who should want to claim the title of unhappiest one—the most wretched and ill-begotten possessor of self-consciousness ever to have wandered the Earth? The answer, to A at least, is rather obvious. The winner is the most restless one—and winning would finally provide that individual a place of rest. ‘But the reward—yes, it is more magnificent than any other in the world, and more certain, for the person who is sure that he is the unhappiest one does not need to fear fortune; he will not taste the humiliation of having to shout in his final hour: Solon, Solon, Solon!’ (EO 1:221; SKS 2:215).⁴

On every page, from every angle, this interlude on unhappiness must be seen as self-contradictory, as is fit. A is at the height of earnestness, yet all lies in jest. He wishes to describe the essence of a troubled self-consciousness, which is precisely to lack essence. He has an aesthetic object in mind, but it happens to be vacant of any content. He is dependent on Hegel for occasioning his understanding of unhappiness, but he calls Hegel happy. He claims that we all wish to be considered the unhappiest, when in so doing is to feel protected against the whims of fortune. He shows that, in the truest cases of restless misery, recollection is of a hope, and hope is for a recollection, and the mind is an empty circle without the possibility of content. His insights go deeper into the human than those of almost any other thinker, and yet he comes up with nothing—and this is both his hard-earned discovery as well as his intellectual point of origin. His stasis is comprised of restlessness. This exposition is his low-point and, simultaneously, his apex. And so on. In all of these ways, A’s exposition is exemplary of its true topic: the tendency of consciousness to negate everything it tries to posit.

In a most fitting conclusion to the piece, A writes the remark with which we began our own interlude. “But what am I saying—‘the unhappiest’? I ought to say ‘the happiest.’ For this is indeed precisely a gift of fortune that no one can give himself. See, language breaks down, and thought is confused, for who indeed is the happiest but the unhappiest and who the unhappiest but the happiest, and what is life but madness, and faith but foolishness, and hope but a staving off of the evil day, and love but vinegar in the wound” (EO 1:230; SKS 2:223). A reader may reasonably hazard that the inversions to which his *interesting* pursuit are subject are, at once, his inheritance and his contribution. Such is the fate of the free individual. And as we are about to see, the ensuing movement in his intellectual exertion—act two—which is comprised of three expositions equal in length to their symmetrical counterpoints from

part one, will reveal A to be making three sequential attempts to distance himself from disenchantment by standing aloof from any attempts to achieve a sense of integration, continuity, duration, or self-presence within the passage of time. Rather than seeking out the *interesting* individual, he is slowly going to exploit his recently acquired understanding of what it truly means to be *interesting*. He is going to become more *interesting* himself. 'For there he stands, the envoy from the kingdom of sighs, the chosen favourite of suffering, the apostle of grief, the silent friend of pain . . . his lips smile at the world, which *does not understand him*' (EO 1:229; SKS 2:222, my emphasis).

NOTES

1. Hegel: 'Here we have a fight against an enemy to vanquish whom really means to suffer defeat' (Hegel 1977, 127). More on this below.

2. In *Philosophical Fragments*, as in other, later texts, Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, offers an interpretation of Christianity that refutes Hegel's claims regarding the lack of fulfilment in Christianity. In the picture he provides, the fulfilment is not to be found in the actual individual presence of Christ, but in embracing the idea that the human being is always in the wrong, in accepting Christ's life and death as an atonement for that very universal human wrongfulness (guilt/sin). In identifying with this atonement through the personal acceptance of suffering and ignorance, the individual comes into a paradoxical identity with Christ in which the love of God for his creation is understood not intellectually but existentially, as a process of faith.

3. Cf. Taminiaux, 73–92.

4. In the first book of *Histories*, Herodotus relates an anecdote in which Solon, an Athenian statesman, advises Croesus, a Lydian king of immense wealth, to deem no man happy until his death—citing the 'instability of human things' (Herodotus 2003, 40). Later, when Cyrus is preparing to burn Croesus alive, Croesus calls out Solon's name three times in an anguished affirmation of Solon's wisdom.

Chapter 6

The Painless Misrelation

A GLIMPSE AT SUBJECTIVITY IN PURE FORM

In 'The Unhappiest One,' the aesthete finally discovered an object able to signify the objectless and restless nature of self-consciousness. Now he has *objectified* the central problem as far as is possible—even though the central problem is that the problem cannot be objectified—by attending to the question of who belongs in that empty grave marked *miserrimus* ('the unhappiest one'). Alas, the object has no content. Unlike Hegel, A has been unable to move beyond the endless inversions of self-consciousness as it tries to establish a stable relation to anything, itself included. The aesthete's pursuit of the *interesting* has taken him to the very origin and conclusion of the inner-outer division, namely to the contradiction of self-consciousness itself, which struggles to find presence and unity but in so doing creates only absence and disunity, or which, in seeking to posit only negates, thereby instantiating in itself an enemy 'to vanquish whom is really to suffer defeat' (Hegel 1977, 127).

All along A had been drawing closer to the idea that at the root of all subjectivity lurks a void, a fissure between two incommensurable domains, neither of which is comprehensible without the other. External history may provide a person with a concrete sense of identity or even a narrative by which to orient her subjectivity, thereby to assume singularity, self-consolidation, a sense of temporally developing significance, and, out of all this, a specific hope for the future; but the unhappiest one is she who has seen through this illusion and believes 'in nothing but unhappiness.' It is she who anticipates the endless deferment of any fulfilling subject-object relation. Individual self-consciousness, for those unhappy enough to have glimpsed its foundational rupture, is marked by the inability to cultivate enduring self-presence within the flow of time. Unhappiness, true unhappiness, signifies

the breakdown, within the ever-progressing present, of any possible unified relation to the actual past or to the possible future (EO 1:220; SKS 2:213). Hence David Kangas writes that 'A thinks fulfilled self-consciousness to the end, where it shows itself as a contentless, vacuous hell' (Kangas 2008, 56).

Now that A has come to terms with his discovery of *unhappiness* as the baseline condition of self-consciousness, he is going to attempt to make himself aloof from the illusions and misconceptions under which others foolishly attempt to achieve a significant spatiotemporal relation. Rather than seeking proximity, communion, and fellowship through sympathy with the plight of those *pathos*-laden characters who struggle to merge happily with the world or themselves, he is going to seek elevation and superiority through mockery of the sort of *comic* character who overinvests objects and events with a sense of ideal significance, who believes all her possibilities will come to fruition, or who presumes to have some sort of necessary objective fulfilment within reach. I am speaking of the sort of person who believes happiness is possible in time. Paradoxically, it is only in distancing himself from the foolish effort to achieve a fulfilling external relation that A will be able distance himself from continued knowledge of hell. He will have a glimpse of the misguided subjectivity of another—and laugh.

The first step in his process, which is brought to life in an exposition entitled 'The First Love,' will be to focus on comedy as the artistic domain capable of separating the spectator from the *happy* or *painless* misrelation between subject and object. The *happy* misrelation is, of course, a contradiction in terms representing the bliss of ignorance. In 'The First Love,' once again, we find A dealing with the discrepancy between inner and outer, albeit in an entirely different fashion from the preceding expositions. In this piece, rather than dwelling on concealed and either intentionally secretive or unintentionally inexpressible subjectivity, he will train his focus on the human tendency to mistake accident for essence, and the urge to perceive a convenient contingency as necessary while remaining unaware of the fanciful illusions this misattribution begets. Here it will become the case that the object of desire itself is *interesting* for what it reveals about the individual's subjectivity, i.e., her fetishistic misrelation to an insignificant externality. The sort of comic individual A examines in this piece is the person who cooks up a fantasy life by attributing hyper-significance to what is purely insignificant. As such, the phenomenal world becomes the playground of her injudicious, self-defeating, overblown egotism. A new contradiction emerges in which her inspired miscalculations reveal the degree to which she attempts to assert her overflowing subjectivity onto the recalcitrant and indifferent empirical world.

When A spoke of the overwhelming propensities of the modern age in 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama,' he made the acute but rather perplexing remark that 'the comic consists in

subjectivity's wanting to assert itself in pure form' (EO 1:142; SKS 2:142). This claim fell within his larger position that the comforts of tragedy elude us more as we drift further into doubt and despair, isolation and detachment—as we drift away from the sense that our substantial determinants are the governing force of our lives and move towards the sense of 'subjectivity reflected in itself' (EO 1:142; SKS 2:142). As A put it then, 'the whole age is working more toward the comic,' for we have lost our sense of inheritance, determinateness, suffering, and substance, without conceding any awareness of the spiritual counter-effects involved in this loss (EO 1:141; SKS 2:141). The primary oversight results in a failure to acknowledge the trade-off that must occur when so-called subjective freedom comes to be the predominant feature of our self-perception as practically rational beings in an otherwise causally networked universe. In a sort of wishful thinking, we lose the thread of the contradiction we are struggling to reconcile as we seek universal immersion and re-enchantment *as* free individuals.

The Kantian gulf only widens if we emphasize this one element over the other. The predominant side-effect of subjectivity reflected in itself is a greater sense of anxiety and potential personal liability. 'Therefore, although everyone wants to rule, no one wants to have responsibility' (EO 1:142; SKS 2:143). This can be stated in a multitude of ways. Everyone wants autonomy, but no one wants accountability. Everyone wants Pelagian self-determination, but no one wants to lose the firm guidance of a higher authority. Everyone wants interpretative sovereignty, but no one wants to forego the hermeneutic certainty of an empirical science based on intractable, knowable laws which have the capacity to ground our judgements. So it goes that when an age praises itself for mastering the subjective side of things—while conveniently neglecting the objective—we have the basic condition for the comic contradiction, wherein the individual presumes she has conquered the situation by seeing within it that which simultaneously exonerates her from a sense of practical moral decision-making (given the situation's ostensible *necessity*) and yet individuates her (given the situation's specificity with respect to her own particular happiness, as if she were fate's glorious and novel invention). The laughter occurs when the onlooker sees that, in fact, unbeknownst to the individual, the situation is working against the satisfaction of her desires, and that what she holds as substantial and necessary is in fact entirely insubstantial and accidental.

But let us look a little more deeply into this contradiction. A's modern Antigone was not comic. As he described her, she had all of the features of a proper modern tragic heroine, most notably a dreadful feeling of ambiguity regarding her own capacity for free agency in light of her substantial patrimony and inherited guilt. Her comprehension of the world was shattered when this ambiguity heightened to a point beyond which she could not bring herself

wilfully to act. However, despite the inescapable amphiboly governing her self-understanding, which we have been calling *pain*, she never developed grandiose illusions about her own subjective capabilities. The *painful* awareness of amphiboly was in fact inseparable from her scarcity of self-deceit. She knew she was caught in an insurmountable uncertainty. This is to say that her *pain* was, broadly speaking, an acknowledgment of the personal inability to take an epistemic step beyond the simple acknowledgment that her irrefutable sense of moral autonomy was incommensurable with her irrefutable perception of causal substance and the intractable influence of external, pre-existing factors. Antigone recognised that, somehow, in a process well beyond her own limited comprehension, substance and subjectivity entangled with one another and even became indistinguishable. The centrifuge of reflection was powerless to separate its originating components, and so she merely went in mental circles, and in the intermingling of substance and subjectivity, she experienced the frictions between guilt and helplessness, immediacy and mediation, necessity and possibility, accountability and exemption. Her life was marked by the insuperable misrelation between inner and outer. Her heroism entailed the idea that she never lost touch with this misrelation, even if she unfailingly buckled under its influence in wanting to do good, and to love and be loved. This became her tragic affliction in the eminent sense: the problem that, maddeningly, both governed and arose from the tragic situation which she both inherited and caused. Her *pain* was her intuitive grasp of these vicious circles—and her *pathos* was her private emotional resistance to the ultimate impotence produced by their confluence.

When *subjectivity wants to assert itself in pure form*, however, the inner-outer misrelation develops and becomes obvious to the onlooker while remaining hidden from the individual subject whom it afflicts. This basic set of conditions, it should be noted, comprises a reversal of A's general conditions for modern tragedy, wherein the inner-outer misrelation is obvious to the individual subject but concealed from the onlooker, a state of affairs that traps the subject in *interesting* silence. In comic situations, the individual mistakenly believes she can overwhelm the contradiction by the sheer force of her subjectivity, or on the mere basis of her desire, so overgrown and ungovernable is her interior sense of merit in comparison with her subterranean sense of the insufficiency of the world to satisfy her yearning for communion and integration. In a comic play such as Eugene Scribe's *The First Love*—which is the aesthetic focal point of A's new exposition—a chain-reaction of inner-outer contradictions begins to take place as a result of the original confusion, and for as long as these contradictions continue without inflicting any *pain* on the subject, an ever-widening correlation grows between the immensity and impotence (or counter-productive potency) of the heroine's subjectivity.¹ This is the altogether different vicious circle of the comic. The correlated growth

of the immensity and impotence of her subjectivity reveals to the audience, but not to the heroine, the gap that actually exists between them.

The individual character presumes to be the controlling factor in the developing situation, and yet, the spectator perceives how the situation is mocking the individual. Further, the situation assumes the shape of her own misunderstanding—and thus, in a ludicrous duplication of confusions, she *is* controlling the situation by causing the mockery to proliferate (which is to say that, unlike the tragic figure, recognition would allow her to extract herself from the contradiction). As A. G. George puts this, ‘The comic, while manifesting the contradiction inherent in life, points also to a way out of the contradiction. Hence it is painless’ (George 1965, 48). The comic character persists under the illusion of inner-outer consonance while in fact revealing the specific inner-outer dissonance and incommensurability. The comic is *painless* for her, never dealing an impact robust enough to expose to her the folly of her fixed idea, while continuously revealing to the onlooker, through a series of accidents and coincidences and aesthetically convenient situations, her fascinating lack of foundation in substantial reality—thus her central *nothingness* as a subject.²

As we will see when we turn to the play, comedy derives its energy from the fact that the individual *is* free to extricate herself from the misrelation, if only she comes to realise that her own overwhelming subjectivity is the source of the misrelation: she can change her circumstances by changing her outlook. But because she is too narcissistic or egotistical, too smitten with herself, and because her subjectivity is indeed overwhelming, so to speak, she remains insensible to the realisation that reality is contradicting her desires at every turn. The problem fuels itself. It is generated not from substantial determinants but from the other side, in the inward reflection of experience, and so long as the contradiction does remain *painless*, it is not sharp enough to puncture the swell of her vanity as an individual. The aesthetic of comedy is not an aesthetic which attempts to convey true *pathos*, in other words. It is rather one which attempts to hold up to the light individuals who live antithetically to a *pathos*-rich, obstacle-heavy reality, or who have no access to the actual circumstances to which they involuntary succumb. As A writes, speaking of the central character of *The First Love*, ‘She has pathos, but since its content is nonsense, her pathos is essentially chatter; she has passion, but since its content is a phantom, her passion is essentially a madness; she has enthusiasm, but since its content is nothing, her enthusiasm is essentially frivolity; she wants to sacrifice everything for her passion—that is, she wants to sacrifice everything for nothing.’

Comedy is not soothing for the spectator because it promotes an aesthetic sense of union in sympathy, or certainty in sorrow, but because it promotes an aesthetic sense of another individual’s subterranean uncertainty and

misapprehension, above which the artist, the artwork, and the spectator hover, content in the benign and amusing knowledge that, in the case in question at least, they are not deceived in the same manner as the character. The laughter amounts to the comparable non-uncertainty acquired through distance from and knowledge of the folly of another's particular illusions. In hovering above the misrelation, one feels one gains a momentary liberation from the painful incongruities and ambiguities of incommensurable subjectivity. Laughter is like a fleeting (and often communal) sense of certainty that, in this moment, existence is not mocking those who are in the know. As such, A's new exposition shows him inverting the aspiration central to his three initial expositions, when he sought to find in different characters a mirror image of his own internal struggle and sense of ineffectual *pathos*.³

Before moving on to the particular elements of A's new exposition, I wish to suggest here that the soothing effects of comedy, unlike those of tragedy, are distributed across the timespan of the artwork rather than condensed into a single moment of recognition. Often one says that the effect of tragedy is tears, while the effect of comedy is laughter. But in a tragic drama, the audience does not cry repeatedly throughout the performance, whereas the audience does laugh frequently during a comic drama. It is absurd even to imagine a spectator who, in attending a performance of *Oedipus Rex*, would begin to shed tears at the first appearance of the hero and then continue to do so with every third line of dialogue. Tragic grief is released in the moment of recognition and finality, when the hero experiences the loss of what is absolutely valuable to him, possibly even his life. But if the comic force were to reveal itself in one single moment, the effect would be not sorrow or pain, nor laughter, but overwhelming anxiety or panic, because comedy entails a succession of moments in which the character on stage relates to nothing, mistaking, as I said, the nothing for something.

If this effect were accumulated over the course of the play, in such a fashion that its dormancy grew without release, and if, suddenly, as with the moment of recognition in a tragedy, the comic character found herself exposed to the horrible nothing interlacing all of her striving, then the audience would be unable to handle the impact, and each individual would have something like a mental breakdown in the confrontation with the black vortex that has suddenly opened up behind the light of merely apparent experience. The repeated laughter in comedy, though, coming as it does in small doses, is soothing, because with the first moment of laughter the audience is distanced from the position of the character—we do not commiserate but snicker—and when the individual reveals her *painless* misunderstanding time and again, in a series of ultimately harmless moments, we laugh in the security that, in this case, we are safe from the particular misunderstanding that flaunts and reveals her overpowering, almost invincible subjectivity. Each instance of

laughter is like a double-negative. Or, to put this another way, each comic moment is a little dose of poison which, administered slowly and repeatedly, produces an intoxicating effect that yields a heightened tolerance over time. The heroine remains unscathed emotionally, unable to conceal her illusions from the onlookers, yet refusing herself to see any indications of her consequent misrelation to experience. And that is *why* it is so humorous and pleasing rather than painful and devastating.

It will be my goal in what follows to clarify what all of this means and to demonstrate why it is that, at this stage in his aesthetic endeavour, A is so enthralled by the insignificance produced by the comic misrelation particular to Eugene Scribe's little play. The question with which I wish to begin, however, concerns just how this misrelation becomes apparent to the onlooker. How is it that in comedy the 'pure' subjectivity of the individual finds an objective correlative in action and event if what we have been stipulating all along is true, namely that this correlation has become nearly impossible to achieve in modern art? It seems to me that a proper response to this question will go a long way in securing our grasp of what I have called, in previous sections, A's turn to negative aesthetics. Fortunately for us, the form of A's fifth exposition re-enacts the comic issue he so enthusiastically describes, and a quick description of the broad strokes of the piece will prepare us in advance for a more nuanced discussion of how the misrelation between subject and object can potentially reveal subjectivity in its pure form. Of course, the mechanism may be mildly apparent already, since we have learned from 'The Unhappiest One' that self-consciousness, on A's view, is rooted in misrelation. If this is the case, then revealing a misrelation will go a long way towards revealing subjectivity in pure form, at least insofar as A understands it.

FETISHIZING THE OCCASION AS A NECESSARY CORRELATIVE

In a one-sentence description of A's 'The First Love,' David Swenson calls it 'a review and interpretation of Scribe's comedy, *The First Love*, sparkling with wit and buoyed up by an aesthetic enthusiasm which puffs its subject up into a masterpiece' (Swenson 1962, xix-xx).⁴ This terminology is both appropriate and helpful. Eugene Scribe's one-act play consists of a series of very short scenes taking up, in their entirety, roughly fifteen published pages. The dialogue is unspectacular, the plot is far-fetched, and the drama as a whole is not very compelling. One can read the whole thing in twelve or fifteen minutes, and a proper performance would consume no more than twenty minutes from start to finish. Despite the fact that certain moments are rather amusing,

nothing about the play stands out as definitive of authorial genius, and in the history of stage-comedy it stands as a mere blip on the radar, entirely insignificant in comparison with many of the more commonly known masterpieces by Aristophanes, Terence, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, Molière, etc. Scribe's work is simply a light-hearted entertainment which centres on the completely standard comic trope of mistaken identity.

On the other hand, A's considered aesthetic response to it fills up more than forty-five pages of dense, witty, crystalline, and ingenious writing. The time required to read his exposition carefully is five or ten times greater than the time required to read the play it purports to discuss as a masterpiece. And his writing happens to be filled with flashes of human insight which only the most remarkable of aesthetically-oriented philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, or art-critics could sustain. But A's own misrelation here is crucially the point: The aesthete puffs up the insignificant play, *The First Love*, into a masterwork with respect to aesthetic considerations, when in fact it is his own inspiration that is doing the heavy-lifting. As it happens, *The First Love* is about a young woman who puffs up an insignificant object from her childhood into a masterpiece of total significance with respect to her happiness, when in fact her unchecked imagination contributes everything to it. Hence A's piece satirically re-enacts the tendency it evaluates.

Whether or not A intentionally develops this disproportion as a sort of tongue-in-cheek replication of the central points he explicitly discusses remains for the individual reader to decide. Perhaps he means to exemplify what he understands artistically the better to communicate his point; or perhaps he is succumbing to the comic misrelation himself, in yet another example of his unhappy inability to get beyond pure subjectivity. Perhaps through sheer repetition this inability is becoming painless—which would announce the entrance to a different chamber of hell. Wherever one comes down on the question, however, there exists an undeniable imbalance in the exposition between the lavish inspiration of its author, A, and the diminutive substance of his aesthetic occasion, Scribe's paltry and genuinely middling entertainment. As I have just tried to indicate, this is crucial because the same sort of disproportionate relation persists between the ebullient fantasies of the young girl at the centre of *The First Love*, a die-hard romantic named Emmeline, and the complete triviality of the objects she fetishizes. Emmeline's misrelation to objects and other individuals comprises the central subject matter of A's piece and thus also regulates its duplication in the form of his own misrelation. In every way, then, A's new exposition resounds with his attention to the human tendency—Emmeline's, the other characters', our own, and his—to puff up entirely inconsequential objects, circumstances, and situations into occasions of immense-seeming consequence.⁵

A opens the exposition by discussing what he calls the occasion [*anledning*] in poetic creation.⁶ So far as he is concerned, an occasion is an arbitrary worldly object, event, or circumstance which serves as the point of departure for human imagination and creativity. Inasmuch as a poet is absorbed by inspiration and ideals and abstract thematic content, or even just the vague premonition of some abstract novelty heretofore unexplored in poetry, he remains poised in unworldly possibility and the imperfect 'wealth of thought.' What is lacking, says A, is the happenstance that allows this poetic possibility to come flowing onto the page in all of its concrete and particular richness. The occasion is an enabling factor for the productive spirit, the 'extra element for an inner decision to become an outer decision' (EO 1:233; SKS 2:227). As he says in the very first sentence of the exposition, 'Anyone who has ever had leanings toward productivity has certainly also noticed that it is a little *accidental* external circumstance that becomes the occasion for the actual producing' (EO 1:233; SKS 2:227 my emphasis).

Now in the field of logic, the term 'accidental' signifies any property an object possesses without necessity, or a property that the object could just as easily lose or lack without undergoing a transformation to its essential nature. A wishes to suggest that when it comes to acts of creation, logic falls short in its capacity to show how something comes into being—it can only express what *is* or what is *necessarily*. Logic falls short of formulating the paradox that occurs when something comes into existence (logic cannot express becoming, the transition from possibility to actuality, since 'a possibility cannot be actualized by necessity,' otherwise it would not be a possibility; and the redoubt of logic is dependent on necessary sequences of either analytic or synthetic syllogisms).⁷ For the accidental, as A expresses it with respect to the *occasion*, is that which is inessential to the *nature* of the poetic product but yet essential, in an entirely different way, as a catalyst for its very existence. The occasion, while related in accidental fashion to the creative production it allows to flourish, is therefore simultaneously necessary in another sense, and this is an element of what logic cannot capture.

The occasion is always the accidental, and the prodigious paradox is that the accidental is absolutely just as necessary as the necessary. In the ideal sense, the occasion is not the accidental as, for example, when I think the accidental in the logical sense, but the occasion is the accidental in the sense of fetishism, and yet in this accidentality it is the necessary. (EO 1:234; SKS 2:228)

When it comes to the *occasion*, then, there is an instrumental necessity that conjoins with the accidental qualities of what is provided by contingency, in that the *occasion* is determined by its accidental relation to the inner decision, yet the inner decision cannot come into being without it, and therefore

it determines the creation. To cite an example from Kierkegaard's book *Repetition*, a character called the young man is a budding poet who meets an attractive young girl. At first he believes he has fallen in love, but it later turns out that '[T]he young girl was not his beloved: she was the occasion that awakened the poetic in him and made him a poet' (R 138). The occasion is necessary in a completely different sense than logical necessity (which by its features obliges something to be what it is), namely *despite* its lack of essential features in relation to what emerges. Its necessity is not connected with reference to the shape of what comes into existence. 'We see this because that which comes out of the occasion is something quite different from the occasion itself, which is an absurdity to any immanent thinking' (EO 1:238; SKS 2:232). In the case of the young man in *Repetition*, what comes out of the occasion is not a desire to consummate the affair nor the wish to build a concrete relationship with the young girl, but a fascination with his own powers of expression and ideation, and the desire to capitalize on his newfound talent as a man of poetry. The occasion should not be confused with ground and cause (EO 1:235; SKS 2:230).

When the aesthete says that the occasion is the accidental in the sense of fetishism, it is easy to consider human eroticism as the quintessential example, which would lack its manifold pleasures should the capacity to fetishize disappear completely. Without the fetishized object, in fact, eroticism itself would vanish, and we would be left only with sexual intercourse, the pure *necessity* of procreation. As an object, the particular fetish forms a focal point for the immaterial reservoir of human desire, allowing an individual to fixate on something *actual* under the illusion that it is an individualised, particularised, essential corollary for the otherwise inexpressible feelings of his adoration, desire, love, and indefinable longing. A fetishized object, like an occasion, is the 'tenuous, almost invisible web' in which the fruits of eroticism are 'suspended' (EO 1:235; SKS 2:229). Consequently, the fetish is the transfer station which allows for the creative expression of supra-procreative desire, which has no true objective correlative; and between two lovers its actuality brings amorous inspiration into being. The fetish annuls our lurking sense that the immanent world is insufficient for the magnitude and profundity of our desires, and it allows us to overinvest a spatiotemporal particularity with a sense of essential import.

Of course, a fetish need not be erotic. Any object capable of accommodating the concrete attribution of overgrown abstract values can assume the role of fetish, as, for example, an engagement ring, a secret phrase between friends, an old baby bottle to a nostalgic grandmother, the scent of lilacs to a retired painter, a favourite book-cover to a bibliophile, and so forth.

Similarly, the *occasion* can be a circumstance or situation, a person with red hair, the sound of effervescing water, the feel of a silk pillowcase, a

spilled bottle of ink, a fleck of debris caught in the eye, the sight of an old building, the taste of a *petite madeleine* dipped in lime-blossom tea. The crucial element is that the *occasion* has objective rather than subjective reality, and that furthermore this reality is entirely contingent, accidental, and fortuitous in its relation to the imagination which, prior to the act of creation, is strictly working within the domain of *possibility*. Here is how Karsten Harries summarises the idea:

Objectively speaking the occasion is the accidental, something contingent. But around this the inspired individual constructs his visions, his fictions, his dreams . . . The work of art derives its significance from the creativity of its author. And yet the author cannot emancipate himself from this situation altogether. He is tied to it. And what ties him, the link, is precisely the occasion. And yet the artist succeeds only to the extent that he successfully integrates the occasion into his work in such a way that it no longer seems accidental and external to it. (Harries 80)

A provides his own judgment with respect to the aesthetic quality of a well-proportioned occasion as follows: ‘the occasion is the most amusing, the most *interesting*, the wittiest of all categories’ (EO 1:238, SKS 2:232, my emphasis). It is *interesting* because it opens onto an essence entirely unrelated to its patent content. ‘The occasion, therefore, is of the greatest significance for every literary work—yes, that is what really determines is true esthetic value. Literary works without any occasion always lack something—not outside themselves, for although the occasion belongs to it, yet in another sense it does not—but they lack something *within* themselves’ (EO 1:237; SKS 2:231, my emphasis). This disclaimer is important because, as A puts it, the *occasion* (having the same qualities of a fetish, or being the umbrella category under which the fetish appears) is ‘the final category, the essential category of transition from the sphere of the idea to actuality’ (EO 1:236; SKS 2:232). By this he means that the imaginative ideality of the possible, for poet and human alike, needs a mysterious channel by which to infuse objective reality with our subjectively-oriented imagination. The *occasion* is the outer which allows the inner to reveal itself in a manner that logic cannot fathom. This is why A thinks it is *interesting*.

A poem by Yeats, entitled ‘Brown Penny,’ will provide a simple illustration of what A means when he emphasises the importance in poetry for a balance between inspiration and the occasion:⁸

I whispered, ‘I am too young,’
And then, ‘I am old enough’;
Wherefore I threw a penny
To find out if I might love.

'Go and love, go and love, young man,
 If the lady be young and fair.'
 Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
 I am looped in the loops of her hair.

O love is the crooked thing,
 There is nobody wise enough
 To find out all that is in it,
 For he would be thinking of love
 Till the stars had run away
 And the shadows eaten the moon.
 Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
 One cannot begin it too soon.

The poem and the love-reflections in the poem are dependent upon the *occasion* in which the narrator wishfully tosses a penny into a fountain. This act leads him first to imagine with bittersweet yearning the curls of his beloved's hair, already a sort of fetish; and from there, he ruminates on the enormity and unintelligible spiritual vastness of human love. The brown penny, of course, bears no essential relation to the ideal subject matter of the poem—for instance, any other individual experiencing the same occasion would be unable to embellish this object with the force and beauty and sense of desire and ineffability that Yeats's narrator conveys—and yet the brown penny is absolutely essential to the creation and execution of the poem as it stands. This poem is successful in part because it expresses the insufficiency of subjective individuals to encompass in thought or in words the full scope of the ideal of love, and yet the brown penny, the object tossed from the narrator's hands, carries the burden and allows the poet to give creative presence to the abstract sense of possibility inherent to wishing for erotic yearning to find its completion. The aesthetic near-perfection of the poem, in fact, is attributable in part to the acknowledgment that no *occasion* can truly serve as an objective correlative for love. Thus the narrator, fully aware of the limitations of actual objects, and fully cognizant of the relation between desiring and wishing, between fortune and accident, is able to capitalize on the full potential of the object, meaning that Yeats finds a suitable balance between inspiration and the occasion.

What A wants to point out to readers, however, is the tendency of mediocre or bad poets to overinflate or underinflate the occasion. As he writes, 'there is much confusion with respect to what in use and wont is called the occasion. Both too much and too little are seen in it' (EO 1: 234; SKS 2:228). A moment later he adds that bad poets can be divided into two classes: 'those who still suggest that an occasion is necessary and those who do not even pay attention to it' (EO 1:235; SKS 2:229). Neither class of bad poet is aware

of the paradox that the occasion is *both* accidental *and* necessary. Taking the latter case first, bad poetry which overlooks the occasion occurs because the poet conceitedly feels his inspiration is sufficiently brilliant that he can merely pontificate abstractly without any refractory object or *actual* point of salience. This sort of poet is likely to write works which are nothing but wild and uncalled-for chatter, stinking of pure, unstructured possibility and thus having no value with respect to existence. The paradox of creation is beyond the reach of this sort of poet. A puts it this way: 'Without looking to the right or the left, they spin out indefatigably the thin thread of their babbling' (EO 1:235; SKS 2:229). Because the occasion is not necessary in the logical sense, the poet egotistically presumes it not necessary *at all*. This class of poet is rooted in an 'exorbitant overrating of their own worth' (EO 1:235; SKS 2:229). Of course, such a type of mistake occurs not merely in the creative work of poetry but also in the creative work of human existence.

But bad poetry also occurs when a poet falls in love too hard with the *occasion*. This latter type of poet is our present concern because she is exemplary of the romantic temperament exhibited more existentially by Emmeline. In Scribe's play, the mistake will occur because Emmeline, like this sort of poet, overestimates the necessity of an object, or attributes to the occasion the idea of necessity in the purely logical sense. The paradox is beyond her reach. In terms of the poet who exemplifies this attitude, the bad poetry occurs because she attributes to every trifling contingency an egotistical sense of personally-oriented necessity, as though she were singled out, as it were, by fate and good fortune, and therefore uses 'the same verse, the same formulas, and yet hope[s] that for those concerned the occasion will be a sufficient occasion for an appropriate honorarium' (EO 1:234; SKS 2:228). In this way, 'the occasion often plays the absolute master; it determines the outcome; it makes the product and the producer into something or nothing, whatever it wishes' (EO 1:234; SKS 2:228). Lacking true inspiration, this sort of poet expects too much of the occasion and brings *nothing* into being. The essential and necessary factor of the imaginary—possibility—is lost in the transfer. Her wish to allocate all of the hard work to chance and all of the productivity to what is beyond her control therefore comes true, she does nothing, and her possibility and imaginative gifts are not exercised process (hence they atrophy further).⁹ Yet precisely because the wish comes true, it mocks the poet by revealing the emptiness of her subjectivity and the deterioration of her possibility. This is *interesting* in a new way. In seeing how the occasion has become the totality, we are able glimpse the inward vacancy of the poet as she discloses herself without understanding herself.¹⁰

EMMELINE'S OVERINFLATED OCCASION IN THE FIRST LOVE

The action of *The First Love* revolves around a young girl named Emmeline and her unrestrained feelings of love for her cousin Charles, with whom she was raised and educated in relative seclusion until the age of eight, at which time Charles was sent abroad. Aunt Judith, their caretaker and teacher, relied solely upon Romantic novels as educational texts for the children, and, as a result, both Charles and Emmeline have skewed, romanticised visions of the world. Emmeline is a starry-eyed idealist 'undisturbed by the actuality of life' and 'caught in a web of sentimentality,' according to A, whereas Charles has 'experienced the pinch of actuality' during his time as a young person abroad. Emmeline has been cushioned and softened by her father's wealth. Charles has become hardened from profligacy and debt. He is a sort of prodigal son: a failure and a squanderer of his uncle's generous allowance. A compares these two personalities with respect to the influence of their Romantic education as follows. 'The yield of being educated on novels can be twofold. The individual either becomes more and more immersed in illusion or comes out of it and loses faith in illusion but acquires faith in mystification. In illusion, the individual is hidden from himself; in mystification, he is hidden from others—but both conditions are the consequences of being brought up on romantic novels' (EO 1:250; SKS 2:244–245). Under this schema, Emmeline is immersed in illusion, whereas Charles has acquired false assurance in his own ability to mystify.

Emmeline's primary illusion pertains to the question of *first love*. Unlike the sort of people who use the term *first love* sophistically, convincing themselves of its quantitative interpretation when that is convenient, and its qualitative interpretation when that is convenient—therefore always confirming that *this love* is the *first love*, even if it is the third or fourth—Emmeline understands only the quantitative interpretation. This in itself is comic, as in her failure to understand the casuistic flexibility of such a concept, she devotes her entire life to the belief that the numerically primary love is the only love one can experience (EO 1:254; SKS 2:246–247). Love for another is impossible. This idea is her inspiration and sole point of significance, and consequently she loves her cousin Charles, whom she has not seen since the age of eight, but with whom, at that time, she had exchanged rings in a childish and histrionic vow to marry someday. All of her folly arises from her inability to see convenient equivocality in the expression "the first."¹¹ She *loves* her cousin Charles so much, it seems, that despite the fact that she has no information about his ripened personality and physical appearance, nor about his conduct and external circumstances in the extended period of his

travels abroad, the simple idea of marrying any other man provokes in her a violent disgust. This so-called *love* for Charles—which would be better classified as Emmeline's *love for her love* for Charles, or her love for the idea of Charles as her betrothed—constitutes the ease with which identities in the play are misgiven and mistaken, and it yields the void around which all of the action and misunderstanding orbits.

In part because of her isolation and insular lifestyle, in part because of the formative influence of so many Romantic novels, Emmeline has 'transferred everything to [Charles] since he left at an early age.' The reader can imagine that as her childhood has grown more distant and her memories of the past more faded, Emmeline has had to rely for a picture of Charles more and more upon the very few external accidents of his identity she still has the power to recall. She wears on her finger the ring he gave her at the age of eight, and in her mind Charles still cherishes his own matching ring. She has the memory of a stolen kiss. She recalls sharing a taste of strawberries and cream with him one afternoon. And while she and Charles have not corresponded since the day of his departure, every night she looks towards the moon and thinks of his youthful promise to do the same. These handful of recollected circumstances amount to the whole apparent substance of her life. Consequently, possessing in her mind no other facts or details with regard to Charles's personality, his appearance, or his activity, Emmeline has come to fetishize the ring as the representation not only of Charles's identity, but also of the full supremacy of the *first* and therefore the *only* love of her life.¹²

Emmeline is unaware of the fact that, in the intervening years, Charles has matured into a scoundrel. While abroad, he has acted unscrupulously and behaved wastefully with his uncle Derviere's generous financial allowance, even going so far as to use the family name and good credit to secure loans he never intended to remunerate. He has also broken his old juvenile vow to Emmeline by marrying an impoverished seamstress, presumably out of some romantic notion of his own powers of mystification over the fairer sex—a form of foolishness and self-delusion that, in its sheer egotism, parallels Emmeline's own sympathetic illusions about him. Or, as A puts it, 'Charles's faith in mystification is just as romantic as Emmeline's visionary infatuation' (EO 1:250; SKS 2:44). Placed together, then, these characters can have no hope of constructive communication or connection, or even of any contact with reality, because each cherishes a phantom Charles, and each is, in a sense, autoerotic (since each loves his or her own false idea regarding this individual named Charles).

As the action unfolds over the course of one afternoon, Charles is preparing to return to Emmeline's household to extort money for his debts. However, knowing of his uncle Derviere's more recent distaste for his wastefulness, he fears revealing his true identity before gaining some advantage over

the cousin and uncle he aims to exploit. Meanwhile, Derviere, Emmeline's father, has arranged a meeting with an eligible bachelor named Rinvile, who possesses a decent fortune and good prospects. Rinvile himself is keen for the marriage, for Emmeline has a reputation for beauty and she is known to be the sole daughter of a wealthy man. As Rinvile is set to arrive at the household, Emmeline is in an agitated state. She has already refused a dozen offers of marriage, and, as she insists, it is her duty to continue refusing such offers until the return of Charles. When she nearly faints at the thought of meeting this new suitor, whom she utterly despises in advance because he is not Charles, her father, in his weakness regarding his daughter, agrees to write a letter to Rinvile to cancel the visit. Miraculously, with her father's concession, Emmeline instantly recovers from her swoon. But before their servant manages to take the letter to the Rinvile estate, Rinvile arrives at the household and manages to glean the contents of the letter without revealing his identity to the servant tasked with carrying it.

Knowing now of Emmeline's preemptive aversion to the marital arrangements sought by her father because of her unshakable 'love' for her long-unseen cousin, and rightly assuming that the interval since Emmeline's last glimpse of Charles is sufficient time to support the ruse, Rinvile concocts a plan to pass himself as Charles until he can win over Emmeline with his own (presumed) mystifying charm and thereupon admit his true identity in the security of her newfound love for the (presumably) better man. In their first interaction, Rinvile finds perfect success in his disguise, and Emmeline is overjoyed to see him—that is, until she discovers that he does not possess the original ring which secured their childish vow to marry. Having no concept of the real Charles, she has no concept of what a counterfeit Charles could look like, and accordingly any conversation or interaction is distorted by her inability to perceive the present actuality as distinct from her picture of things. Rinvile's failure to produce the ring does not even alert Emmeline to his misgiven identity, of course: Emmeline is too blinded and emotionally primed for his return. Rather, the failure causes her to scorn this pseudo-Charles for losing possession of the ring and therefore betraying the old vow. In other words, Rinvile's trespass in masquerading as Charles is to have violated Emmeline's image of Charles as an unfaltering Romantic no different from herself. Later, after Charles has arrived and Rinvile has easily convinced him to give over the ring—no feat at all, since Charles cares nothing for it and does not even want to appear as himself—Rinvile as pseudo-Charles is able to win over Emmeline once more. As A writes, 'The only way [Rinvile] can influence her is by coming in touch with her fixed idea, that is, by means of the ring' (EO 1:272; SKS 2:264).

How powerless he is becomes manifest in her not loving him when he does not have the ring and loving him again when he does have it, from which it seems probable that for Emmeline this ring is a magic ring and that she would love anyone who showed up with this ring. (EO 1:255; SKS 2:248)

It is not love Emmeline experiences but her Romantic idea of love. It is not Charles she fetishizes, but the ring; it is not his person to which she is attached but the accidental and external qualities he possesses in her memory and imagination. Around these insignificances, these mere *occasions*, she has built a fiction that has no connection to the state of affairs. The image she has formed is based purely upon one material ornament and is capable of seeming vivid to her precisely because it lacks any essential significance, and therefore it is malleable to her tremendously shallow subjectivity. In short, her image of Charles is based upon a nothing, a void, just as much as her mentality is a thinly-concealed void of inherited nonsense. As the situation unfolds, the actual situation mocks Emmeline's idealism through a perfectly ironic misrelation between the two voids that appear to her to be a perfect relation and the fruition of her desires. She projects all the force of this overblown emotion upon the duplicitous Rinvile and the conjured occasion of his having obtained the ring from the equally duplicitous Charles. The misunderstandings proliferate.

A derives his ultimate judgment of the play from Emmeline's final lines, which are also the final words spoken in the play. The situation seems to have been resolved for all four characters. Mistaken and misgiven identities are eventually revealed, Charles admits to being married, Rinvile admits to masquerading as Charles in order to win Emmeline's love, Emmeline agrees to marry Rinvile, Derviere is so overjoyed that he agrees to pay off Charles's debts, and everyone seems quite happy. But whatever her manifold motivations for giving her hand to Rinvile, A tells us, Emmeline reveals in her closing comment that she has learned nothing from her folly, nothing from the hilarity of a Romanticism gone so awry as to impose upon her life the exact opposite of her stated wishes. She turns to Rinvile, extends her hand, and says, 'It was a mistake; I confused the past with the future' (one is reminded of 'The Unhappiest One'). A insists that if the play were merely moralizing, these lines would signify a lesson learned on Emmeline's part. Rinvile would have succeeded in winning her affection away from a cad such as Charles; and in finally recognizing the better man, Emmeline would have been freed of her excessive fetishism and romanticism. The point, however, is that Rinvile has not had the opportunity to act as his own true self before Emmeline (and consequently she has not seen Rinvile as Rinvile) nor has he revealed any redeeming qualities whatsoever. Rather, he has shown only his own willingness to deceive the woman who, for no genuine reason, he wishes to marry.

When Emmeline speaks those final lines to him, then, the audience perceives that she is persisting in the original absurdity and illusion. With these lines, that is, she convinces herself and others that her *first love* for Charles, which was non-existent but which she nevertheless tricked herself into feeling twice—first for the real Charles (imaginatively reflected through the prism her Romantic education) and next for the Rinvile as the pseudo-Charles (occasioned by his acquisition of the ring)—actually was an anticipation of her love for Rinvile. She means to suggest that her confusion arose because in loving the person she thought was Charles, she actually loved the substance of Rinvile, a statement which the audience must see as entirely untrue and even preposterous. The circumstantial manner in which the situation mocks Emmeline remains beyond her grasp, and thereby it has no powers of improvement upon her. The play does not end in resolution or reconciliation for this victim of misunderstanding, but instead in a renewal of her painless misrelation, where the imaginary ideality Emmeline invested in Charles now finds purchase in her unsubstantiated ‘love’ for Rinvile: this man who stands as her new *occasion* for Romantic fetishizing and self-glorification. As A puts it, ‘the jest is altogether aimless, the wittiness infinite, the comedy a masterpiece’ (EO 1:277; SKS 2:268).

THE OVERBLOWN OCCASION AS FABRICATED OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE

In discussing the exposition entitled ‘Silhouettes,’ it may be recalled, I mentioned an idea that T. S. Eliot eventually articulated very well in his criticism of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. One quote in particular stood out as potentially indicative of Hamlet’s overflowing subjectivity and his consequent near-suicidal anxiety and melancholy:

Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him. (Eliot 1919, 125)

T. S. Eliot wanted to express his belief that Shakespeare’s tragedy itself was an artistic failure exactly because, in portraying an individual who cannot discover any objective correlative for his surplus of inexplicable moods and negative emotions, the encompassing artwork, too, can yield no adequate objective correlative for the audience. The subjectivity of Hamlet

is artistically unknowable. In a partial rebuttal to this criticism, however, I offered the counter-position that, despite this ostensible failure inherent to the play and its central character, nevertheless Shakespeare succeeds in expressing precisely the quintessential modern issue of incommensurable subjectivity, and the notion of inward life as too massive even for the vastness of the exterior world, and in so doing succeeded in creating the most *interesting* dramatic character. Generation after generation of audiences tend to relate to Hamlet because, in his incommensurable position, he exemplifies the modern condition latent in anyone who cannot achieve faith, i.e., he instantiates the discrepancy between inner and outer that automatically renders one a member of the *Symparenekromenoi*.

Let us assume that the romantic personality A is evaluating in 'The First Love' (and that he believes Eugene Scribe himself satirises so well) is a distorted, less self-conscious sort of Hamlet. I mean only that as an individual she writhes under the modern surplus of subjectivity without recognizing that this problem is afflicting her. The result is a tension between, on the one hand, a disenfranchisement from the universal—a subjective isolation and a profound feeling of incommunicable solitude, doubt, and disenchantment with the objective world—and on the other hand a lack of subtlety in envisioning the fact that isolation and self-generated authority coalesce into the governing condition of her own mentality and thus her motivations. Such an individual might devote all her energies to concealing the basic problem from herself: for to look the problem in the eye, so to speak, is to witness the full dread and terror of the unhappy human void, and to become as self-consciously sick, melancholy, and hopeless as a Hamlet, a Faust, or an A.

We know that Don Giovanni is really the prototype of such striving towards self-distraction (and this is why the Don Juan idea is often expressed as a comic figure in the literature). His life is the attempt to avoid becoming like Hamlet and Faust. The reader may remember how, in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' A wrote that 'most versions of the Don Juan . . . approach the comic . . . As soon as passion, in being depicted, is denied the means to its satisfaction, either a tragic or a comic turn will be produced. A tragic turn cannot very well be produced when the idea is perceived to be wholly unjustified, and therefore the comic is so close at hand' (EO 1:109; SKS 2:109). In Mozart, Don Giovanni is a quasi-comic figure. The audience chuckles now and then, precisely because his passions are not denied. But, as we have seen, his erotic force comes from his monomaniacal sensuous pursuit of the universally feminine. His budding individuation from the world inspires in him a false and insatiable overvaluation of the sensuous experience, under the illusion that he can realize or regain the universal—and thus eradicate or forestall his *substantial anxiety*. 'The problem of the self-deceived man,' writes Stephen Crites, 'is not simply that his professions do not correspond

to his real motives, but that his professions conceal the fact that he has no clear motives at all, but only a muddy confusion of desires. He is absent to himself' (Crites 1972, 198).

Emmeline is a more profound, modern, and comic version of this sort of self-deceived individual. Her striving towards distraction from anxiety and doubt reveals her own muddy confusion of desires. Unlike Don Giovanni, however, who wants to integrate with the universal as though his own life is governed by the category of necessity, Emmeline wishes to attribute her erotic necessity to a single, particular object. The ring, for her, has all the apparent wealth that 1,003 women have for Don Giovanni, and in her subterranean tension she believes that the accidental, the fateful, and the particular have singled her out by necessity, and that her first love is the highest truth. All the good fortune of the world is designed to bring her ultimate happiness. This is what A finds so comical—and so archetypically Romantic. Not wanting the afflictions of freedom, autonomy, anxiety, and moral individuation, she stares at a fixed idea she herself has concocted as though it is her absolute and singular substantial determinant. Such obsession allows her to lounge unscathed by accountability.

Feeling the true *pathos* of this problem, yet remaining unaware, perhaps, of its source, the individual under the influence of the Romantic temperament passionately channels all of her surplus subjectivity into an object bearing enormously less significance than she credits it with having. As A. G. George wrote of this sort of tendency, 'Romantic individualism on the whole stresses the experiential side of man, rejecting the moral will in existence. Consequently, personality is viewed under the category of necessity. The aesthetic individual is the accidental individual. And aesthetically viewed, the substantial unity of the self is a datum, and not the result of an ethical choice' (George 1962, 66). Emmeline, yet another sort of proto-aesthete the psychology of whom A therefore understands perfectly well, is programmed from early youth to believe in this romantic/aesthetic outlook, and thereby she can experience exoneration from the accountability of the modern free agent, and yet still—ostensibly to her—witness in the future the culmination of all of her desires. Unfortunately, this is not the way of things. Such a delusion, if it persists, can only lead to the individual being mocked by actuality.

Of course, A puts himself in the same sort of position. If we live in contradistinction from the *cosmos*, if even the *cosmos* is insufficient to facilitate our spiritual integration, and if therefore no arrangement of phenomena can repay us with an objective correlative to merge the inner life with the outer experience, then how can a single object such as a ring, a lock of hair, a lover's toe, the scent of a scallop-shaped lemon cookie, or a brown penny be expected to locate and hold in promise the fulfilment of our most immense and ineffable desires and our 'indefinable wealth of mood'?¹³ The thought

alone is ludicrous. Yet, for this reason, it is soothing for A to witness a person who, on a stage, can persevere under such a ludicrous illusion, and to such a degree that her spirit remains unscathed. Despite promoting contradiction after contradiction, such a character can live in delusional happiness while remaining totally ignorant as to the depths of her own unhappiness.

Yet, despite knowing and expressing this so well, A himself becomes rather comic in this exposition—or at least the comic is dormant in his attribution of such unlimited enthusiasm to a rather mediocre play. A has articulated the baseline, superlative unhappiness. In his fully-knowing attempt to escape its restless grip, he is willing to attribute masterpiece-level praise to a simple theatrical moment of twenty minutes or less—one in which his own misrelation to the world is forgotten because of the more tangible misrelation of a young miss who believes all the necessity of the world is contained by a mere, little, child's ring. As it turns out, to invest so much in a mere trifle of art is an indication that something has gone awry. One might even suggest that A, here, is asserting his subjectivity in pure form.

NOTES

1. A's fifth exposition is also entitled 'The First Love.' To avoid any confusion, I will use italics in reference to Scribe's play, and inverted commas in reference to A's exposition.

2. Cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 514.

3. As quoted in the previous chapter, John Hare writes the following: 'there is a loss of pathos between the three sections preceding *The Unhappiest One* (sic) and the three succeeding sections' (Hare 1995, 93). Although I will remind the reader that I disagree with Hare in part, because I feel A's search for *pathos* is not yet finished.

4. Unfortunately, this is all the ever-insightful Swenson has to say about 'The First Love.'

5. In an essay entitled 'The Explosive Maieutics of Either/Or,' Jacob Howland convincingly compares the entirety of *Either/Or* (both volumes) to a fractal—a geometrical pattern which assumes the same appearance and shape at different levels of magnification. By pointing out that the term derives from the Latin *fractus*, or 'fractured,' Howland draws a connection between the 'formal reduplication' of divisions within the text and 'the theme of existential fragmentation announced in the title' (Howland 2017, 110). While it is not my intention to comment on this grand formal theory of *Either/Or* (since we are concerned with A's dramatic trajectory and *movement* along the dialectic of the *interesting*), I do wish to draw attention to the fractured and fractal-like nature of 'The First Love' (i.e. on the smaller scale), since even just this exposition alone appears to be identical at all levels of magnification, and since its source is indeed the *unhappy* division at the centre of aesthetic consciousness.

6. The etymology of the Danish *anledning*, as A points out, signifies a *leading to* (EO 1:233; SKS 2:225).

7. This argument appears in much more detailed form in the 'Interlude' to *Philosophical Fragments*. The phrase I have quoted appears in a footnote to Stephen Crites's essay 'Pseudonymous Authorship as Art and as Act,' (Crites 1972, 188).

8. It is noteworthy that Coleridge, one of the most talented and prolific of the Romantic poets, was inclined to preface his poems with anecdotes or explanations of the circumstantial details which led to their composition (i.e. the *occasions*). The most famous and labyrinthine example of this is described the prefatory note to 'Kubla Khan,' in which he describes falling into an opium-influenced sleep with a book in his lap, his subsequent waking effort to transcribe the inspired contents of the dream, and the interruption of this effort by an unwelcome visitor from Porlock, which cut short his poem but provided a new occasion for the preface (thus introducing the popular Romantic theme of fragmentation). See also his 'The Wanderings of Cain,' 'To William Wordsworth,' 'Lines Suggested by the Last Words of Berengarius,' 'Work without Hope,' etc. This tendency may also be noted in the general titles of other poets, such as Coleridge's friend Wordsworth, who wrote such poems as 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,' etc.

9. Thus A's analysis of this type of poet (and of Emmeline) is a prefiguration of Anti-Climacus's analysis, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, of the human who experiences the form of the sickness wherein 'necessity's despair is to lack possibility,' and so the person, unaware of the depth of human spirit, 'is just as much in despair whether things go well or badly' (SUD: 39–41; SKS 11:153–156).

10. Cf. *Fear and Trembling*, 101; SKS 4:199.

11. 'If one loves a third time, one says: My present love is, nevertheless, my first true love, but the true love is the first—*ergo* this third love is my first' (EO 1:254; SKS 2:247).

12. It is remarkable how similar Emmeline is to Marianne Dashwood, one of the primary characters in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.

13. This phrase is taken from Kierkegaard's 'On the Occasion of a Wedding' (TDVS 43; SKS 5:419).

Chapter 7

Novelty and Control

DOING JUSTICE TO AESTHETICS

Whereas in prior expositions, we see A discussing *interesting* characters and situations within the different art forms, expanding as he does so his working knowledge of the concept through extenuating genres and variations of his own mood, now, in the culminating turn of his long aesthetical endeavour, we see him delineating a ‘theory of social prudence’ in an exposition entitled ‘Rotation of Crops.’ Immediately following this short piece, A describes the hypothetical application of the crop-rotation theory in the form of a fictitious work called ‘The Seducer’s Diary.’ In each of these two expositions, A is dealing with the perpetual problem of boredom. The question he seeks to address in the former exposition concerns how one is to avoid boredom’s corrupting and *boring* grip; the question he seeks to address in the latter concerns how *interesting* it might be to use another human being as means to this very end of overcoming boredom.¹

All of this is to say that after his overblown discussion of Eugene Scribe’s ‘The First Love,’ A shifts his focus from the sphere of art-appreciation and criticism to the sphere of what we might call *existential aesthetics*: the application of aesthetic considerations to practical activity and interpersonal conduct. At one point, A calls this prioritisation of boredom-avoidance ‘living artistically’ (EO 1:292; SKS 2:281). As we are about to see, however, he might as well have called it ‘living manipulatively’ or ‘taking hermeneutical control.’ While it has been obvious throughout our reading that aesthetics is the supreme and perhaps only source of value in A’s life (as unstable and relative as this value continually proves to be), these final two pieces reveal a widening of the sphere of aesthetics to a total worldview. Rather than writing passive if highly creative armchair reflections on diverse art forms and archetypal personalities, A, in this closing stage of his project, promotes and

describes an aesthetically organized, morally bereft activity that in its calculated quest for *interesting* experience trumps ethical decision-making, interpersonal decency, and even lucidity and consistency of conduct. As such it is a furtherance of the negative aesthetics begun in his work on comedy. Clearly, the ascendancy of the aesthetic is not attended by any moral ascendancy, and what is becoming to the aesthetic sensibility can be highly unbecoming to the moral sensibility. Rather than attempting to sympathize with the inward *pathos* of suffering and pained characters, A is increasingly manifesting his willingness to stand aloof with respect to the spiritual and psychological well-being of others.

Strikingly, A is once again caught in the phenomenon he describes—this time, boredom—even if he presumes to have a method for overcoming it. Contrary to his conviction, his unmatched knowledge of what boredom is and how it comes about is still not enough to generate a strategy to free himself from its corrupting power. While he believes he can manipulate the world in such a way as to outfox the advance of boredom, the two closing expositions reveal that even to the cleverest aesthete boredom is rather like quicksand: the more one struggles against it, the deeper one must sink into its depths. We cannot fail to note the fact that A has been pursuing the concept of *interesting*, in some fashion or other, from the very beginning of his enterprise. And yet here we are, taking the turn into his final pair of expositions, and the problem of boredom is more explicitly urgent to him now than at any prior moment. As such, these concluding sections of A's collected papers also reveal his ultimate despair as an aesthete—as he must eventually concede the irreconcilability of inner and outer, and thus the inescapable solitude and restlessness of modern human consciousness.

The penetration into Don Giovanni's inner life, and the consequent ironizing of Mozart's opera, now appears to us as a proleptic tendency, an almost helpless reflectivity prefiguring A's inability to leave phenomena alone or untouched by his personal hermeneutics. From that first anxiety-inducing yet subterranean rupture between inner and outer, to the later visions of totally acknowledged incommensurability between inner incentive and outer conduct, A has been fascinated by the inexpressible essence lurking ever deeper beneath the surface of human life. With boredom and the new method of boredom-avoidance, his striving comes full circle, and we glimpse with sharper clarity the vacancy-as-impetus that has been cumulatively present from the start. His awareness of boredom has only grown as he has sought the *interesting* discrepancy between phenomenon and essence more fervently. Now the incapacitations of boredom have become his *only* concern, boredom being the inability to engage meaningfully with any temporal phenomenon.

Our aim for this present chapter, then—which should be understood as a sort of preparation for our reading of 'The Seducer's Diary,' the culminating

failure of A's endeavour to master the *interesting*—will be to ask ourselves whether the *interesting* and the *boring* are not, in the end, exactly the same thing. This has been a hidden question driving our entire investigation. Should our discovery be affirmative, then it will become evident that to be in the thrall of the *interesting* means to be under the influence of the *boring*, always playing boredom's game, so to speak, and never getting anywhere—a very *boring* outcome, therefore, and the ultimate sign of the contradictions and counter-productive tendencies of modern aesthetics under which the crises of disenchantment and subjectivity grow under the effort to impede them, triggering a spiral in which an original vacancy widens *ad infinitum*.

VAIN AND PRIVATE EMPIRES

Having exhausted all the pertinent art forms without achieving any enduring fulfilment or renewing his sense of enchantment (under the influence of which essence and phenomenon are harmonious and inseparable for the perceiving individual)—without, that is, coming into contact with any sense of a discernible and ordered reality beyond his own self-consciousness—A is more bored and disillusioned now than he was anxious and restless when he began. It is as though boredom is more or less the intellectual exasperation one experiences after the smarting blister of anxiety becomes an insensitive callous. How easily we can recall a time when A's soul was astounded by Mozart, when he first turned to aesthetics in an attempt to bridge the great gulf between thinking and being, appearance and reality, inner and outer. His experience of *Don Giovanni* had temporarily eradicated his sense of the nothingness holding together all the accidents and mere contingencies of existence: the nothingness, the chaos, the formless void, the incommensurable relationship between subjectively advanced human concepts and externally perceived objects of the natural order. His first exposition opened with such an enthusiastic encomium to Mozart—and, by association, to the arts more generally—that an innocent reader could not have anticipated the slow deterioration of aesthetics that has actually occurred, nor, along with this deterioration, the psychological descent into irony, cynicism, and unhappiness to which we have seen the aesthete succumb. But having shown repeatedly the inadequacy of artworks to express the true inner guilt, doubt, pain, and anxiety, and thus the true inner reality of the modern individual, and having experienced reflection's tendency to annihilate the immediately apparent content of an artwork without, however, providing the means by which to restore or replace what has been destroyed—A has forced himself continually into disillusionment with the art form under scrutiny.

With each advancing attempt to reconcile the *interesting* tensions of self-consciousness, he has diminished his capacity to be entertained or amused or gratified by a work of art. His voracious mental tendency has overwhelmed him to the point where lately he is consuming merely mediocre works of art and using his reflective prowess to puff up these trifles into masterpieces. The emerging consequence is that aesthetics *qua* art appreciation has been losing its value for him. Yet he has not paused to re-evaluate the question of whether there are other, *un-aesthetic* or *supra-aesthetic*, ways of existing. The *interesting* is that which reveals a discrepancy between inner and outer and cajoles the observer to seek the inner with the promise of a hidden essence. The pursuit of the essential, of course, leads to new discoveries which are yet inessential and which amount to merely secondary phenomena concealing yet newer levels of hiddenness, and so on in continual regress. Eventually, one develops an acute awareness that the inner is not and can never be the outer, reminding us of Victor Eremita's opening salvo. That being the case, the inner is always subject to doubt and possibility, with the effect that the criterion for an engagement with external reality continually escapes one's grasp.

In 'Rotation of Crops,' rather than reorienting himself and testing this aesthetic value-system against other possible human value-systems or worldviews (such as ethical or religious perspectives, to cite the two other Kierkegaardian 'spheres' of existence), A doubles the wager and becomes—suddenly—*more aesthetic*. His life itself has grown more boring and deficient of content with each consecutive paragraph he has recorded in his attempt to forge a lasting relation to art and the objects of human perception.² By now he is so repulsed by what he identifies as the superficiality and utter inessentiality of his milieu that his only recourse is to 'poeticize' existence by turning every event and human interaction into an occasion for the play of his own reflective possibility and personal fancy.

If the world is merely a confluence of accidental properties which in the course of human history has been given deceptive shape from our tremendous human desire for coherence, then what should stop an aesthete from creating novel, whimsical, personal, and secret significances by which to orient things anew? The aim is not to expose himself to an endless variety of unusual experiences, and thus to rotate continuously to new and novel phenomena, but imaginatively to generate a private, subjective, and silent underlying significance behind the phenomena to which one is already exposed. Whereas other bored individuals jump from star to star, object to object, in what A calls a spurious infinity (following Hegelian terminology), traveling around the world, so to speak, and hoping incessantly for some new distraction from boredom, the individual who performs a properly *interesting* crop rotation has the infinite always within reach. 'The method I propose,' he writes, 'does not

consist in changing the soil but, like proper crop rotation, consists in changing the method of cultivation and the kinds of crops. Here at once is the principle of limitation, the sole saving principle in the world. The more a person limits himself, the more resourceful he becomes' (EO 1:292; SKS 2:281). This strategy is tantamount to returning one's gaze to the undeniably accidental and, through a correct emphasis upon interpretation and imagination, transforming any object, custom, behaviour, or normative standard into one's own personally *interesting* masterpiece of discrepancy between the inner and the outer. 'I shall give an example,' he adds:

There was a man whose chatter I was obliged to listen to because of the circumstances. On every occasion, he was ready with a little philosophical lecture that was extremely boring. On the verge of despair, I suddenly discovered that the man perspired exceptionally much when he spoke. This perspiration now absorbed my attention. I watched how the pearls of perspiration collected on his forehead, then united in a rivulet, slid down his nose, and ended in a quivering globule that remained suspended at the end of his nose. From that moment on, everything was changed; I could even have the delight of encouraging him to commence his philosophical instruction just in order to watch the perspiration on his brow and on his nose. (EO 1:299; SKS 2:288).

Of course, as this example shows, A fails to recognize the equivalent futility of this method, for it guarantees the failure of any hopes to gain an engagement with other human beings, or to achieve an unmediated relation to any external reality.

A suggests that 'justice is done to aesthetics' only when individuals attempt to make life *interesting* (EO 1:286; SKS 2:276). Apparently, he has yet to learn the lesson that the quest for the *interesting* can be immensely destructive—or rather, he has yet to learn that the destructive tendency is dangerous to his own mentality. In the early stages of the concept's development and application, it is destructive to the artwork. We saw this destructive capacity in action as A voraciously dismantled the immediacy and harmony of *Don Giovanni* by attempting to reflect on the opera. We saw it again as he failed to rewrite *Antigone* for the modern stage, then once more as he circumscribed the idea of *reflective sorrow* by stripping heartbroken characters from their original dramatic homes in order to create written images depicting the oscillations of their restless forms of *pain*, and even as he puffed up Eugene Scribe's trivial entertainment into a theatrical masterpiece. In its middle stages, the quest for the *interesting* is destructive of A's own mood as spectator (in addition to damaging the object whose essence it attempts to penetrate), a circumstance we saw most clearly in the exposition called 'The Unhappiest One,' but one which had been attaining progressive clarity from the contemptuous tones

and writing styles he has assumed in every sequential exposition (and most particularly in his discourses to the *Symparenekromenoi*).

In its final stages, as we are about to see, the quest for the *interesting* is destructive of all semblance of given significance. It is destructive of other human beings, and it is destructive of human relationships. Again, this is an entirely predictable consequence of the aesthetically-oriented life: for if the aesthetic is granted priority over the ethical or the religious worldviews, then questions of good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, obedience and defiance, revelation and reason, faith and doubt, etc., will always hold a secondary status in relation to questions of boredom and interest, universality and singularity, ugliness and beauty, tediousness and amusement, repetition and novelty. Thus A says more than he knows when he writes, in the opening paragraph of 'Rotation of Crops,' that boredom is the root of all evil:

The gods were bored; therefore they created human beings. Adam was bored because he was alone; therefore Eve was created. Since that moment, boredom entered the world and grew in quantity in exact proportion to the growth of the population. Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*. After that, the population of the world increased and the nations were bored *en masse*. To amuse themselves, they hit upon the notion of building a tower so high that it would reach the sky. This notion is just as boring as the tower was high and is a terrible demonstration of how boredom had gained the upper hand. Then they were dispersed around the world, just as people now travel abroad, but they continued to be bored. And what consequences this boredom had: humankind stood tall and fell far, first through Eve, then from the Babylonian tower. (EO 1:286; SKS 2:276)

Every evil act, from the first sin of Adam and Eve, to the murder of Abel by Cain, to the building of the Tower of Babel, is here attributed to the human tendency to look for rewarding content beyond what is present or immanent, or, in other words, to look for what is meaningful in what is *not present*. In this picture, dissatisfaction with the given substance of one's life is what drives Adam and Eve to seek new knowledge in the taste of a forbidden fruit. It is what drives Cain to end his ostensibly more contented and capable brother's life. And it is what drives postdiluvian humanity to build a tower towards the heavens in their pursuit of godlikeness or the godly perspective. With time, as more humans populate the Earth, boredom grows discretely with each additional individual. This is because we are all bored, and boredom is inevitable. New inventions, varying customs, novel ideas, unique ideals, scientific discoveries, unforeseen amendments to tradition, hopeful revolutions, restless technological advancements, and so forth: All of these developments spread throughout history into an ever-growing cacophony of

bored persons, because with each new datum of experience we are reminded that there is nothing new under the sun. So long as the essential criterion remains elusive to human knowledge (in the Faustian sense), and so long as self-consciousness remains suspended restlessly within itself, unable to find true content beyond its reflective peregrinations (in the Wandering Jew sense), spatiotemporal experience and immanence cannot offer any aesthetic fulfilment of more than momentary duration or minimal distraction.

A's solution, as we will see over the course of these next two chapters (and as we can anticipate, knowing A as we do), is not going to be very successful. Rather than accommodating himself to the aesthetic limitations of worldly existence, he is going to attempt to take control of chaos, to be its originator rather than its victim; and rather than taking boredom in his stride, seeking not to avoid it but to live with it as a perhaps necessary by-product of experience, and turning therefore to categories of judgement and understanding beyond those traditionally classified as *aesthetic*, he is going to attempt to manipulate the significance of experience through detachment and deliberate hermeneutical arbitrariness. Such is his obvious mistake. As readers, we might think that in acknowledging the repulsive power of boredom, along with its capacity to inspire evil deeds, A would simultaneously acknowledge that the negative motion away from boredom always ends in destructive behaviour. This is really his central point—and yet he does not register its reach. Like all the other humans he accuses of falling under the repulsive influence of boredom, he misguidedly decides to take new measures against boredom. Perhaps he thinks he is more exceptional than the builders of the tower in Babel, and wiser than Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, and all the bored people who have wandered the Earth ever since the dawn of humankind. Perhaps he feels superior to all the bored bourgeois individuals in provincial Copenhagen and in larger but still provincial Europe. Even if we grant for a second that he is more exceptional than any other bored person in history, won't this rarity and the attendant pride merely heighten the evil of his *boring* reaction to boredom? Who was prouder, rarer, more bored, and more defiant than Lucifer as he plummeted from the heavens, soon to 'hatch vain empires'?³

A's belief that boredom, in its effect upon the human mind, is the ultimate source of our imprudent actions, the true motive power of all our business and busyness, the root of all evil—a belief he makes fully explicit in this exposition—still does not give him pause to think in terms beyond the scope of what is *boring* versus what is *interesting*. Still he fights against boredom—which is to say that still he plays under the rules boredom creates. 'Rotation of Crops' is his attempt to explain his *novel* approach as one that is somehow superior to all prior approaches undertaken by humankind. 'Now,' he writes, 'if boredom . . . is the root of all evil, what then is more natural than to seek to conquer it? But here, as everywhere, it is primarily a matter

of calm deliberation, lest, demonically possessed by boredom in an attempt to escape it, one works one's way into it' (EO 1:291; SKS 2:280). Even in outright identifying the trap he wishes to avoid and insisting upon its danger, A is going to walk directly into it. It will be the final trap of aesthetics, as I will argue in the ensuing chapter: for within the trap lies despair, or, rather, the trap itself is indistinguishable from despair.

THE CONDITION OF BOREDOM

But what is boredom? A's description is multifaceted. If we are to understand the rationale behind his proposed solution to the mood, it will be helpful to delineate precisely what he means when he speaks of boredom and the *boring*. Naturally, even the most unreflective individual is aware that boredom is the inability to enjoy anything within one's given environment. Generally, we think of it as an inability that may last a mere hour, for instance in the case of a bemused child who is required to sit still during an Easter mass, or in the case of an uncomprehending adult who is seated in an undecorated room in which all the speakers are communicating in an unknown language. Yet in the full blown case—the case which concerns A, and which he believes actually applies to all individuals, whether they acknowledge it or not—boredom amounts to the unending human incapacity to find any significance in the events and phenomena comprising our duration of experience.

Boredom pertains almost intrinsically to a person's inability to find any connection at all between phenomenon and essential content, or it is, as I have suggested already, the mood in which the individual perceives, consciously or unconsciously, an insurmountable lack of content behind the empirical milieu. Boredom, A says, 'is built upon emptiness.' It 'rests upon the nothing that interlaces existence; its dizziness is infinite, like that which comes from looking down into a bottomless abyss' (EO 1:291; SKS 2:280). A's definition here reveals a remarkable similarity between boredom and two moods he has discussed earlier in his papers, specifically *anxiety* and *unhappiness*. In this regard, boredom shares a fundamental similarity with these other moods as being the problematic relation between the self-conscious individual and his or her awareness of the passage of time. In boredom, time becomes mere flux, lacking in any revelation, development, or concretion. But this generates a contradiction for our desires: at once we hope for time to pass more quickly, that we might escape the specifically boring circumstance impinging upon us, and yet we know that time is our only true commodity as mortal beings, and to wish the hours away is to hate the thing that is least insignificant in the picture as we see it. It is to wish for the culmination of an even greater void and an even higher unreality: the absolutely content-less and unknowable

state of death. This explains why boredom is the root of all evil. More so than money, which A suggests has no reality, and more so than traditions such as marriage, which A suggests have no reality, and more so even than what takes up space, which can deceive our senses, time is the only inescapable reality, and our time diminishes as we accumulate more of it. To be placed in the contradiction, where we hope for its loss, is indeed a bad state of affairs, and we will do anything to escape from the paradox. Therefore, the greed for time instils a desperation within us, and like hunted beasts desperate for survival, we will do *anything* to escape the contradiction under which we become our own predators, so to speak. Experiencing boredom, in other words—since it is in part the hope for the swifter passage of time—is tantamount to willing a swifter death while simultaneously, instinctively, willing the opposite. Hence it is comprehensible to consider why the urge to get out of it will trump morality and human goodness.

Perhaps the best way to get to the bottom of what this means will be to discuss the two different types of *boring* person A describes in this exposition. As he explains, “the word ‘boring’ can designate a person who bores others just as well as someone who bores himself. Those who bore others are the plebeians, the crowd, the endless train of humanity in general; those who bore themselves are the chosen ones, the nobility. How remarkable it is that those who do not bore themselves generally bore others; those, however, who bore themselves entertain others” (EO 1:288; SKS 2:278–279). The former category contains all those individuals who fail to register the lack of essential content in their daily activities. In observing their movements, we become dimly aware of a repetitiveness of herd-like action without any significance, ‘an indefatigable activity that shuts a person out of the world of spirit and places him in a class with the animals, which instinctively must always be in motion’ (EO 1:289; SKS 2:279). Here we see the impetus of boredom manifesting in a busyness the unconscious aim of which is avoidance of boredom and any attentiveness to the nothingness interlacing all existence.⁴ As soon as one has discerned this secret to the activities of the crowd, one has obtained the key to interpretation, and so everything becomes as predictable as the movement of ants in a colony or of water in a funnel.

Even if he does stand out from the crowd because he is a late-medieval/early-modern archetype (a border figure) and is therefore the focus of many poems and dramatic works of art, the Don Juan character is an apt figure to consider here because of his misrelation to time. Let us focus on Mozart’s version. In his urge for novelty, Mozart’s Don Giovanni gets caught in an irony of repetition. His entire life is devoted to *extensivity*: jumping from female victim to female victim and yet never achieving a feeling for the particular or unique features which differentiate the next one from the prior. Yet in this failure to grasp the particular and distinguishing characteristics of his series

of victims, Don Giovanni experiences merely sameness: the universally feminine. While it is true that Mozart's opera catches Don Giovanni at an *interesting* moment, at the very end of his life and at the far limit of his boring striving, in other words at a moment in which he is beginning to individuate himself and discover the problematic behind his unconsciously driven sensual movements and which culminates in his descent to hell, one can still imagine a terribly monotonous opera depicting Don Giovanni's earlier life of, say, one year prior. In attending such a work—which would take place in, say, Spain, upon Don Giovanni's arrival there—the spectator would witness a series of 1,003 seductions, all the same, all performed to the same mood of music, over the course of twelve hours, without intermission (obviously this opera would never be produced, unless as a massive joke upon the audience). Acts would be irrelevant because there would be no opposition to desire, no conflict, no development, no concretion, no dynamics of character, no change. Thereby the *extensive* angle of Don Giovanni's life would become artistically apparent to the audience: Don Giovanni would be presented as a boring individual of the sort who is incapable of seeing the futility and meaninglessness of his own indefatigable activity, but who nevertheless highlights musically that very boredom, meaninglessness, repetition, and contentlessness. His immorality is his means of deferring boredom: He destroys women's lives to keep from becoming aware of time's emptiness. Yet time is nevertheless all the emptier for him.

The second class of boring individual, 'the superior ones,' as A puts it, 'are those who bore themselves' (EO 1:289; SKS 2:289). The difference amounts to a higher degree of self-awareness in these individuals with respect to life as lived under the aegis of boredom: Here we have individuals who are in full cognizance of their own inescapable malaise, and who thereby create novel if futile techniques to overcome the condition. According to A, these individuals generally amuse others, most likely because their behaviour, as they attempt to throw off the shackles of meaningless activity, individuates them from the crowd of people who operate under the influence of boredom without knowing it. Novelty of action, unexpectedness, suddenness, and unserviceable creativity, all jumbled together, generate a sense of fascination or perhaps even admiration as we look upon their clever machinations and unanticipated gestures. 'In all of these cases,' writes Gabriel Josipovici, echoing Kierkegaard without citing him, 'doing something other people seem to have no difficulty doing becomes an intolerable imposition, not because it is fiendishly difficult but because it is so boring. And what makes it so boring? That it is meaningless, and that therefore spending time on it feels as though it were robbing one of a portion of one's life' (Josipovici 2010, 137).⁵

A quintessential example of this character is Dostoevsky's so-called underground man, the narrator and protagonist of *Notes from Underground*.⁶ An

excessively reflective and disillusioned individual, the underground man has seen through the ineffectuality of all philosophical systems, all religious belief, all custom, and all striving. In his excessive regard for human freedom as the only value—as the only capacity we have to avoid the aforementioned ineffectuality of the world—he is consistently driven to counter-intuitive actions and desires. He devotes himself to such behaviour simply in order to individuate himself and to emphasise his own freedom from the boring bourgeois values he perceives others to relish. Famously, he is so averse to the predictability of human behaviour that he takes pleasure in toothaches and illness, if only because the pleasure signifies his ability to differentiate his will from the defining elements of sensual and immediate existence—and yet this is the very problem he has inherited as a modern, reflective individual. Problematically, of course, such radical attempts to demonstrate his own freedom only further unhinge his capacity to see significance in anything other than his self-consciousness—for in such negative movements, he must wilfully sacrifice all positive grounding in reality and all points of connection even to the basic features of material experience. He fully blames his erudition and intelligence for this state of affairs, since such qualities have given him the dubious benefit of reflectively penetrating into the utter lack of fulfilment inherent to all human activity and thought. Resounding with a tone of voice remarkably similar to his A's, the underground man has this to say about his own condition:

And how am I, for instance, to put my mind at ease? Where are the primary causes I can lean on, where are my basic premises? Where am I to find them? I exercise myself in thought, and hence, within my mind, every primary cause immediately drags after itself another, still more primary, and so on to infinity. Such is the very essence of all consciousness and thought. We're back, then, to the laws of nature. And what is the ultimate result? Why, the same thing again. (Dostoevsky 1981, 18)

By way of the comments I have just quoted, both from A and his *boring* successor the underground man, it is rather easy to understand how both types of *boring* individual—and thus boredom itself—can be defined in terms of a problematic and contradictory temporality. Neither type of boring individual is capable of acquiring content through an engagement with the world. Neither type is capable of developing an ideal history or of progressing *towards* something durable with the passage of time. Time amounts to mere instability and sheer variability of accident, yet despite the meaningless movement of the hands of the clock, time is the only true commodity. Reality remains remote and disaggregated, fragmented beyond repair—as that which is nothing but time and yet which becomes nothing through time.

With the addition of time comes only loss, and memory is the proof of this loss. Nothing essential or ideal ever accumulates. Everything is merely ‘the same thing again.’

Although he does not mention ‘Rotation of Crops’ or the concept of boredom, Ronald Hall, in an essay entitled ‘Spirit and Presence: A Kierkegaardian Analysis,’ provides an excellent description of the sense of temporality we are discussing here.

For A . . . the concrete is defined in terms of its connections to the historical, and the abstract is defined in the opposite direction, i.e., in terms of its disconnections. A central category of the historical, of course, is time, the temporal succession of before and after. The concrete is what is closest to historical time, the abstract is the farthest removed from historical time. But although the abstract is removed from historical time, this does not mean that it is removed from any sense of time—quite the contrary . . . The point here is that not every sense of time is historical. Clearly Don Giovanni lives in time (as opposed to space), but in its most abstract sense, not in its historical sense. The Don lives in time as *mere flux*, time as the perpetual movement of *disconnected moments*, time without a continuity of past, present, and future . . . Historical time, to the contrary, is concrete just because it establishes continuity and connection: it is a succession of before and after to be sure, but it is a succession of *moments that radiate in two directions from a centered personal presence*, a radiation that situates the present within, and connects it to, a past of established actuality and orients it toward, and hence connects it intrinsically to, an open-ended future of possibility. (Hall 1995, 273–274)

The point I wish to express by citing this long passage is simple: Boredom is the ahistorical passage of time, or the inability to live historically. Boredom is the inability to enjoy anything, the inability to be present with anything, and the inability to develop anything but a sense of arbitrary change from the fluctuations of experience. Yet this inability is attended by a sense of ever-widening loss of something valuable. It bores away at us. The insignificant present pushes ever-forward into the insignificant future. Boredom in the superior individual does not arise because of the lack of *interesting* objects in the world—such as one may suppose—since after all, for practical purposes, the world at hand is infinite and many are its ambiguities and concealments—but because of a development in the individual intellect which amounts to an overtreatment of the *interesting*, ending in the discovery of the flimsiness and transparency of the external world and thus the groundlessness of the internal world. If objects are not subject to the significance they broadcast, then in our interaction with them we feel disillusioned by their immediate presence, and thus our interaction falls short of active engagement. In the same manner by which an adolescent may be bored by a companion who is a pathological liar,

and who therefore appears to have no reliable content with which to engage on a basis of continuity, so too, in a broader sense, do all of the objects of the world fail to excite the fractured modern individual who has lost faith in objects themselves as meaningful points of reference. The bead of perspiration on the nose of an interlocutor rises to the echelon of greatest value.

BECOMING INTERESTING: THE ARBITRARY SOLUTION

When A says that boredom ‘is annulled only by amusing oneself,’ he implies not merely that amusement and inspiration are counterpoints to boredom, but also (and more subtly) that evasion of boredom requires activity and not passivity (EO 1:290; SKS 2:279). Since A ‘knows’ historical time is an illusion, i.e., that change is always only fluctuation and not progress or development, temptations to continuity must be rejected as temptations to illusory, self-deceptive concretion. To ensnare oneself in the trap of a continuous relation to something merely relative is to become, once again, a boring individual of the first type, namely one who bores others because he knows not the indefatigable futility of his own conduct. The proper response to existence, therefore, is to reject the deceptive inducements towards continuity, such as the temptations to friendship, marriage, and offices bearing respectable titles. Such resistance will allow one to remain outside of the given frameworks under which the crowd of lowly and *boring* people operates. Only through imaginative departure from custom and universally recognizable conduct can one generate any amusement from life. In an insightful précis of this activity, Roger Kimball summarizes it as a technique in which one ‘short-circuits reality by transforming it into the product of one’s own imagination’ (Kimball 19). A explains it in terms of the cultivation of arbitrariness:

Arbitrariness is the whole secret. It is popularly believed that there is no art to being arbitrary, and yet it takes profound study to be arbitrary in such a way that a person does not himself run wild in it but himself has pleasure from it. One does not enjoy the immediate object but something else that one arbitrarily introduces. One sees the middle of a play; one reads the third section of a book. One thereby has enjoyment quite different from what the author so kindly intended. One enjoys something totally accidental; one considers the whole of existence from this standpoint; one lets reality run aground on this . . . It is very advantageous to let the *realities* of life be undifferentiated in an arbitrary interest like that. Something accidental is made into the absolute and as such into an object of admiration. (EO 1:299; SKS 2:288).

Here the aim is to turn every experience into a sort of poetic occasion.⁷ In full knowledge of the absence of any essential relation between the inner and the outer, the aesthetically oriented individual can derive amusement and pleasure from the random opportunities experience has to offer the imagination, that region of inner reflective possibility. This stance is indistinguishable from a sort of preparation by which one waits for a convenient moment through which to transform the accidental into the (subjectively) essential: 'Something accidental is made into the absolute and as such into the object of admiration.' This sort of detached attachment, or anticipatory indifference, gives one the 'scissors with which one snips away what cannot be used' and in so doing allows one to shape the fabric of experience into a suitable private structure. A mentions, in this regard, his favourite example of such 'poetic remembering.' He says that a poet named Jens Baggeson 'tells somewhere that a certain man is no doubt a very honest fellow but that he has one thing against him: nothing rhymes with his name' (EO 1:299; SKS 2:288). An otherwise trivial observation—specifically that some fellow has a name bearing no possibilities for rhyming and therefore no poetic potential—is consequently attributed as much significance as a reputedly eternal virtue such as honesty. In approaching the man in this way, rather as an object of no value other than as something to be imaginatively exploited for the purpose of novelty and arbitrariness, Baggeson's quip at once reveals what he perceives, ironically, to be the insignificance of the virtue of honesty and the significance of the capacity for a surname to rhyme with other words. Under this criterion, a man named Fruit is infinitely more valuable than a man named Orange—and if these two men switched names their value as human beings would be adjusted correspondingly.

In other words, in advising such an absolutely aesthetic approach to the world, A attributes worth to whatever observations can be used to overthrow ethical touchstones and inherited forms of common sense. The givenness of experience is to be snipped away, especially if such experience has gone unquestioned by the innumerable crowds of *boring* individuals who have come before him. Nothing could be more egotistical or destructive of order, compassion, communication, or morality (as we are going to see in alarming detail in the ensuing chapter). Furthermore, as readers, we can well imagine the emotional detachment and 'disinterest' this perverse perspective must cultivate if it is to be successful. In addition to sacrificing all regard for other human beings, the individual who rotates the crops according to A's method, demonstrating his wish to elevate himself above universal considerations through hermeneutical cleverness, merely isolates himself further in the process. Such calculated arbitrariness can be enjoyed only in spiritual and communicative solitude. It is a private movement toward incalculable, demonic inwardness, because the general idea is that the practitioner should attempt

always to think and behave in an effort to subvert the preconceived meanings and usages employed by society at large.⁸

CONCLUSION

The question we must consider now, as we close our discussion of A's crop-rotation theory of boredom-avoidance in preparation for our discussion of its practical application, regards the relationship between the concept of the *interesting* and this method of crop rotation. How is the pursuit of the *interesting* both the cause and the consequence of boredom? The fact is that we have entered yet another vicious circle. For the past six chapters, I have been at pains to show how, in A's papers, the slow expansion of the concept of the *interesting* has outpaced the capacities of art to satisfy interpretative voraciousness. In his need to glimpse what is essential behind human conduct, and what is irreducible in human consciousness, A has continually transformed the phenomena under consideration. The *interesting* criterion of aesthetic judgment is a paradox: It recognizes that its true criterion—a determinate, rational foundation for aesthetic judgment—is absent from view, and it goes deep behind appearances in search of that absence. It relishes ambiguity, irony, the hidden mechanism, the secret motivation. Like a fisherman A 'sits and looks fixedly at the float; the float, however, does not interest him at all, but rather the movements down at the bottom' (EO 1:174; SKS 2:172). In his attempt to get behind the outer deception, he rejects what he sees. 'Therefore the exterior does indeed have significance for us, but not as a manifestation of the interior, but rather as a telegraphic report that there is something hidden deep within' (ibid). Just when he thinks he has found that inner something, however, he sees only himself: for the realm of *possible* interpretations is the realm of *doubt*, and the aesthetic judgment is always indeterminate. The more the aesthete looks past the phenomenal, then, the more he must doubt. The more he doubts, the freer play he gives to his imagination. The freer play he gives to his imagination, the further he alienates his self-consciousness from the world. Eventually, all human conduct loses significance, and everything is sheer possibility: a possibility so infinite that it is indistinguishable from *nothing*. Hence the first taste of possibility is the first, deceptive taste of boredom: the failure of self-consciousness to acquire or accumulate any essential content.

This recalls the original etymology of 'interest' and the 'interesting': *inter-esse*, or, in English, *being-between*. The reality of the being we observe cannot be observed. Self-consciousness itself is suspended between itself and the other, which is outside of it—even if it, self-consciousness, is the condition that makes the other possible to the individual observer. Just as

the Unhappy Consciousness was present from the beginning but only became apparent in its fundamental form once A had *journeyed through a series of configurations* capable of bringing to light the original shape of his own consciousness (italics paraphrased from Taylor 1981, 335), so too has boredom existed latently from the moment A reflected away the harmony of form and content in *Don Giovanni*. Boredom is really the quintessential outcome of a Hegelian-Kierkegaardian Unhappy Consciousness that has been unhappy for too long: excessive lack of fulfilment, prolonged dalliance with an unidentifiable essence, unverifiable quest for ideals and criteria. The *interesting*, here, is the perceived solution, but, again, it has been so from the start. The single difference is this: that whereas in the beginning the *interesting* was strictly passive and observational, a curiosity over and obsession with *telegraphic reports* from beneath the surface of things, now the *interesting* is active. One must rotate one's crops within the given limitation. One does not seek the extensive, like Don Giovanni. Instead, one seeks the intensive. One does not change fields, one changes crops. One recedes deeper into oneself and plays games with the proximate experience. If today one happens to be on the lookout for the colour red, then the haemophiliac neighbour may just have greater value than a neighbour whose blood clots perfectly well. A simple pinprick might do the trick, as long as the aesthete enjoys himself enjoying himself.

A, it seems, wishes to be the most extreme type of bored individual: one of the superior ones, yet one who nevertheless amuses himself. In short, he wishes to divide in two: to *watch himself* with fascination rather as we watch the underground man with fascination. Rather than attempting to reconcile the inner and the outer (having relinquished that aim as hopeless), he wishes to remain at the point of separation and highest tension between detachment and attachment, disinterest and interest, managing forgetfulness and recollection to suit his imagination, treating every moment as an occasion, therefore remaining morally aloof from all experience, but only aloof enough to be an ironist in the face of all reality—not quite aloof enough, that is, to become hermetically sealed in spiritual devotion to something higher and absolute. This, as it turns out, is the ultimate aesthetic manoeuvre, the magnification of everything that had been present from the start. It will be put into practice in 'The Seducer's Diary,' when A truly divides into actor and observer. The one will sit back and watch, aghast, while the other conducts a thought experiment, the end goal of which will be to see the reality of another individual's *pain*—but only imaginatively and without certainty.

NOTES

1. Even as we begin to read, we take it for granted that, whatever A's theory amounts to, his practice will once again end in failure, since the notion of corruption is implicit in the activity of a seducer.

2. This is Kierkegaard's true indirect blow to Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

3. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, lines 377–378.

4. A is impatient to clear up what he perceives to be a common confusion between the idea the boring and the idea of the idle, two concepts which, as he sees it, bear no necessary relation. One can be bored in busyness as easily as in idleness. Those capable of being idle, in fact, are the blessedly unbored. To witness a person exhibiting patience or serenity in idleness is to witness the absence of boredom.

5. Josipovici, in *Whatever Happened to Modernism*, the book from which this quote is taken, cites Kierkegaard aplenty. The attention I call here to his failure to cite Kierkegaard is not an accusation. I merely wish to point out that I am slightly distorting the context of Josipovici's quote without violating the author's intent.

6. Naturally, A is really the quintessential example of the superior *boring* character—since, as readers of his work, we are endlessly amused and even captivated by his ways of responding to the lack of discernible content or absence of any adequate belief system in his life. However, because he is indirectly claiming to differentiate himself through the crop-rotation method even from these superior boring figures, he falls outside of the category for the time being. Josipovici, by the way, cites Kafka's hunger artist as the quintessentially amusing boring person of the superior type (and also Holden Caulfield, along with Beckett and Kafka and other modern artists themselves). The hunger artist—whose carnival act is the fast publicly for long periods of time—cannot help but fast: He never found a food he enjoyed.

7. It may an occasion is exactly the opposite of an ideal, in that it cannot be repeated. It is a point of departure in time, and it has no ideal form (FT 274–275). See also Howard Hong 'Historical Introduction' to *Fear and Trembling* (FT xii–xvii).

8. If we take a step back for a moment and acknowledge Kierkegaard as the satirical author behind A's writings, it is easy to see that in writing 'Rotation of Crops' he was anticipating the deconstruction movement by over a century. Furthermore, he understood the psychological motivation behind deconstruction, along with the evils and dangers he believed it necessarily entailed. It is fascinating to note that philosophers such as Derrida, so well read in the history of philosophy, nevertheless exemplify the worst of what Kierkegaard diagnosed in a mere fourteen pages: boredom, narcissism, and inescapable egotism as the cause of a deep dread of rational discourse, tradition, and historically-generated normativity.

Chapter 8

The Final Division

VORACIOUS HERMENEUTICS

According to the view the aesthete offered in ‘Rotation of Crops,’ genuine boredom is an ever-present absence of content, the affliction under which an individual experiences the inescapable ‘insignificance of actuality’ and therefore the collapse of any purposive relation to what is extant spatiotemporally (EO 1:306; SKS 2:296). Boredom has such a *boring* effect that an aesthetically oriented individual under its influence may be willing to do anything to escape it. This provocation is compounded by the fact that when nothing has essential significance, nothing is sacrosanct; and only that which can potentially rescue one from the wasteland of insignificance has subjective value. Hence a sense of moral impunity liberates the bored individual to perform evil or immoral activities under the presumption of developing *interest* (*qua* significant relation to something essential governing appearances), and he may stand willing to consecrate any apparently *interesting* remedy at the expense of other human beings or against socially understood categories of thought. As a repulsive stimulus, then, boredom is the root of all evil. Boredom may be considered the most hopeless of all conditions because, when an aesthete experiences boredom, time, his only irrefutable commodity, exerts a paradoxical effect on his psyche. The bored individual knows his own timespan is finite and inexorably diminishing, and yet in his boredom he hopes for it to diminish more quickly. The contradictory nature of self-consciousness begins to manifest in a restless and most unpleasant manner, and it feels as though the external environment is to blame.

Prior to this aesthetic discovery, as A attempted to find a way out of his original sense of disenchantment and alienated subjectivity—or what we might call the substantial and general despair of the modern age, individually reflected—A came to position himself at such an emotional distance from

empirical experience that unhappiness, already the *alpha*, had come to be also the *omega* of his self-consciousness. Nothing in his past had the capacity to provide gratification or a sense of lasting and essential relevance, but nothing in his future was foreseeably capable of captivating him or providing cause for hope. Given his awareness of a lack of identity between phenomena and their ‘determining concepts,’ most especially in the arena of human conduct, the very possibility of fulfilment in relation to anything or anyone external was lost to A. Unhappiness was the omnipresent awareness of his own absolute relativity, a ‘circle from which he could find no exit.’ As such, it was the precursor to boredom—since forever traveling a maze with no exit is bound to enervate one’s nerves and fatigue one’s sensitivities. This is why we can surmise that boredom, genuine boredom, is excessive exposure to the restlessness of the unhappiness A described in ‘The Unhappiest One’ (and vice versa).

At such a precarious point of unpropitious aesthetic *sophistication*, so to speak, A recalibrated his ambition, and rather than attempting to accelerate deeper into phenomena in the pursuit of an essential—and essentially hidden—criterion upon which to build a subjective foundation, and perhaps now believing re-engagement with phenomena unmanageable given the distance he had travelled from the original promise of restored immediacy inspired by *Don Giovanni*, he attempted to occupy himself directly with the insignificance of objects and concepts by using his formidable irony and his cerebral grasp of the comic. In reflecting on comedy and the idea of laughter, he was able to distance himself from the folly of overblown misattributions of significance such as Emmeline’s in *The First Love*, where the remembered occasion becomes everything and as such the individual is unaware that she is asserting her subjectivity in pure form, ascribing a sense of necessity and essence to the merely accidental and inessential. Yet comic misunderstandings are, for the spectator, mere distractions from the unpleasantness of his own unhappiness and unmoored relativity. To elevate the comic portrayal of misunderstanding and contradiction to the place of highest significance is merely to attempt to affirm oneself with a double-negative. Laughter in the theatre is as fleeting as immediacy in the opera house. A was confronting the triviality of all experience one finds at irony’s limits, where ‘language breaks down, and thought is confused,’ where ‘life is but madness, and faith but foolishness, and hope but a staving off of the evil day, and love but vinegar in the wound’ (EO 1: 230; SKS 2:223). Hence his fully acknowledged boredom, in presumably liberating him from all received wisdom—moral, religious, aesthetic, or otherwise—now serves as his grounding impetus. And any perceived solution—moral, religious, aesthetic, or otherwise—will come

as an undeniable temptation. This is why he has insisted that boredom is the root of all evil. It is the desperation of the human soul.

A self-conscious awareness of the root of evil, however, does not necessarily make one good. As a proposed solution, A's rotation method for overcoming boredom remains under boredom's sphere of influence. This is the same as saying that he remains an aesthetically-oriented individual who has exhausted all avenues for self-conscious re-integration with the world, and yet the world remains spectacle for him. Furthermore, to be an aesthete and to be bored is both shameful and exasperating. One can only compare it to being a mathematician who, because of a tendency to calculate complex formulae from dawn to dusk, has confused herself permanently and lost the ability to add and subtract, or to a monomaniacal painter who has gone blind through her own refusal to close her eyes before her own paintings. If boredom is the root of all evil—the impetus behind all sinful and evil acts since the dawn of human society—how much more diabolical might it be when it appears as the culmination of all of one's conscious efforts to avoid it, as proof of one's futility or even counter-productive facility? How frustrating and *tragic* to bring about the very outcome one has sought to avoid, upending means and ends, and creating an outcome that is a rebuke to everything one has essayed. How much more willing would an aesthete in such a situation be to pursue the *interesting* at all costs, not only to salvage himself from boredom but to escape from the self-blame and accountability.

With all of this in mind, therefore, as we shift our attention to A's final exposition, we should remember that, despite his recent claims to having achieved a method for the avoidance of boredom, he is still imprisoned in the spiral maze. The quest for the *interesting* is what brought him to this point in the first place. He has brought boredom upon himself by seeking the *interesting* experience. In whatever intellectual efforts A has made throughout this long process—be they of the first movement, in which he aimed to correlate the inner and outer existences of his favourite dramatic and literary characters, or of the second, in which he accepted as inevitable the regress of inner-outer compatibility and consequently chose to explore comedy and the negation of any given relation—we have seen the aesthete undergo a dialectic between aesthetic disinterestedness and aesthetic interest. The intellectual neutrality of Kantian disinterest requires of an aesthete, if he wishes to judge objectively, soundly, and freely, that he pursue enough detachment from the natural appeal of the phenomenon to be confident that no instrumentalism is influencing his powers of discernment. The discerning aesthete must forego appetitive desires as well as practical needs and ends in his attention to the object.

This aesthetic distance, however, yields in its practitioner a paradoxical quest for *interesting* subject matter, most specifically artistically represented

characters who betray a depth of consciousness that is hidden from the surface-level connotations of their self-presentation or conduct. The *pathos* that an aesthete develops (i.e. once aesthetics has been established as his supreme value) derives its tension and ambiguity from the fact that the original purpose of aesthetics is to re-enchant the phenomenal, and to cultivate an objective and reliable taste by which to judge the beauty of those phenomena. Yet aesthetics requires 'psychical distance,' and to judge properly one must further disengage from whatever phenomenon is in question. This is how the astounding achievement of Mozart's opera was slowly transformed into irony in the long process of aesthetic evaluation depicted in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages.' One cannot reflect one's way into immediacy (one cannot reflect towards but only away from). Within this sort of contradiction, the *pathos* of the aesthete's growing subjective inner distance from the actuality he perceives as his primary influence is inseparable from his urge to witness an equivalent *pathos* in the moment of spectatorship—an individuality who, like him, is ironized in the world. Decreasingly immediate figures are increasingly sympathetic to him: like the aesthete, they too experience the anxiety of inner-outer distance, along with doubt, along with the *pain* of amphiboly when bad outcomes are brought to fruition through their own autonomously directed approach to the law-governed and causal world. Only such individuals know truly what it is to be uncertain in the face of reality, what it means really to withdraw into one's inmost self and to live a buried life in the quest to realize exposure to and immersion within the universal.

As this dialectic has unfolded in *Either/Or*, we have seen the gradually widening shadow-line between immediacy and detachment. Given the potency of his own doubt regarding appearances and reality, especially in the domain of human conduct and society, A is unprepared to stake any wilful decision towards existential attachment or moral and ethical activity. To compensate for the consequent lack of investment or engagement with others, he searches out opportunities for amusement, intellectual gratification, and imaginative stimulation. He wants to get to know the inward life of another human being from a distance, to feel sympathy, to pay witness to a reality mirroring his own—but all of this without venturing to risk his coddled and anxious subjectivity. Yet we have noted over and over how risk-laden this detachment really is for the psyche. It is the risk of not hazarding anything, the risk of waiting until all epistemic difficulties are resolved before committing to action. A major side-effect of the disinterested attitude, obviously, happens to be the intensifying inconsequentiality of self-consciousness itself in its longing for enchantment and any sense of the world as important, essential, and self-identical. In other words, A's disenchantment and incommensurable subjectivity proliferate in tandem as, with his reflective prowess and cunning intelligence, he plays with multiplying possibilities of interpretation and the

growing irony of his own worldview. The world only becomes more deceptive rather than less so, and subsequently his detachment increases, and his inward reality grows more insulated and unanchored within itself. His sense of Faustian relativity and doubt are disseminated to every sphere of perception. His calculated dispassion surpasses its intended effect and no foreseeable *occasion* promises to bring him back to the world.

This is the epitome of *voracious hermeneutics*. It is the consequence of the modern elevation of aesthetics to a supreme worldview. If doubt opens the possibility of multiple interpretations, then the more one plays the *interesting* game of veil-lifting and speculation, seeking out the hidden activity beneath the external appearance, trying to identify ever-more inward laws for ever-more outward behaviours, the more the original intuitive sureness of the immediate aesthetic judgment comes to weaken in response to the rational indeterminacy of the reflective judgment. All experience is digested and regurgitated without nourishment, novelty becomes an unfulfilled wish, and desperation is the commonality underscoring all the shifting moods of the individual, such as boredom, irony, unhappiness, and anxiety. This is his voraciousness. It entirely driven by his own intellectual-emotional appetite. And when all escape routes from the vortex of self-consciousness have been deemed insufficient, the aesthete comes to the full realization of his failure to get beyond his own mentality and into the world as it is. As I have tried to imply throughout our discussion of the second movement of A's papers, he is beginning to acknowledge that each successive aesthetic reflection has failed because the whole strategy has been misguided from the start.

Soon he will have to transform his attitude and mode of thinking or else languish in the ever-expanding wasteland between certainty and doubt, reality and the imagination, actual outer life and possible inner meanings. In fact, on my reading, this final exposition, 'The Seducer's Diary,' reveals the high potentiality for a transformation in A's worldview. It details the build-up to the final moment before he either does or does not undergo such a transformation through the wilful decision to reorient his outlook and his approach to experience. As a final indication of aesthetic failure, this long and complex conclusion is also a propaedeutic moment of discovery in which emerges the possibility of a free and deliberate leap into another sphere of human knowing: either the ethical mode—which diligently embraces a given universal criterion and lives a life of practical reason in accordance with the assumed certainty and continuity of this embrace; or else the religious mode—which takes it on faith that there is a transcendent absolute to which the human must relate absolutely in suffering and atonement.

Unlike commentators such as Bradley Dewey—who rightly insists that the transition from aesthetics to ethics is not a necessary transition in Kierkegaard's authorship, but who wrongly insists that 'at some point, the

aesthetic could achieve so much control of one's life that change would be extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible'¹—I maintain that someone as exploratory, reflective, resourceful, imaginative, and comprehensively thoughtful as A must begin to develop a new strategy and perhaps even a conscience as soon as he recognizes the infinite regress of aesthetics as a zone of practical detachment. A proper reading of 'The Seducer's Diary' will support this claim.

THE DICHOTOMY OF THE DIARY

To see how 'The Seducer's Diary' reveals the likelihood of A's imminent but not necessary conversion, it will be helpful first to take a look at its dichotomous structure. Crucially, this final aesthetic exposition has two separate components. These two components should not be read chronologically. The first to appear as we turn the page from 'Rotation of Crops' to 'The Seducer's Diary' must be read as the second piece chronologically, and therefore as the aesthete's last word as an author. The second to appear, the diary proper, is the first piece chronologically understood. This inverted order will be clear almost instantaneously to anyone who reads the former, which functions as a sort of preface to the diary, for, as prefaces tend to do, this short opening presupposes and references the text it introduces. According to his story, A purloined the diary from the desk-drawer of an acquaintance named Johannes, and he has secretly secured a 'clean copy' of the manuscript. After describing the circumstances of this theft more specifically, A goes on to express his emotional reaction to and moral reservations regarding the diary's contents. The diary proper, he informs us, is a running commentary on the intensive, long-term seduction of a young girl named Cordelia by the predatory fellow named Johannes who is its supposed author.

Here it will be worthwhile recalling Victor Eremita's own introductory remarks to *Either/Or* as a whole. In one passage towards the end, he stresses his belief that, despite the aesthete's claims, he, A, is the true author of 'The Seducer's Diary.' Victor simultaneously insists that the diary proper is not a diary of factual events but a work of fiction—in other words that Johannes the seducer is A's poetic creation—and that by reading A's own preface to the diary one has to conclude that the very fiction he created was frightening even to its own inventor. 'It really seems as if A himself had become afraid of his fiction,' he writes, 'which, like a troubled dream, continued to make him feel uneasy, even in the telling. If it was an actual event of which he had secret knowledge, then I find it strange that the preface carries no trace of A's joy over seeing the realization of the idea he had often vaguely entertained' (EO

1:9; SKS 2:17). The long-entertained idea to which Victor refers, of course, is the idea of an *intensive* rather than an *extensive* seduction.

Don Giovanni's erotic busyness was *extensive*, as we learn in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' in the sense that his sexual drive sought the momentary possession of innumerable women in succession. Don Giovanni instigated and promised to satisfy their hunger for sensuality *qua* harmonious mutual immediacy. That was his inadvertent and uncalculating 'method.' Inversely, the seduction method Johannes the seducer employs is driven by his demonic aspiration to develop in a single young woman reflective sophistication, doubt, defiance of bourgeois conventions (such as engagement and marriage), and an aesthetic sense of freedom from substantial determinants that, subsequently, will lead her to fully cognizant and impassioned sexual abandon *qua* boundary-less and thus ostensibly infinite and ongoing union. 'She will herself become the temptress who seduces me into going beyond the boundary of the universal,' Johannes writes at one point (EO 1:425; SKS 2:412). The successful seduction is not the consequence of an unintelligible erotic force driving away the unpleasant subjectivity and anxiety of the chosen victim, but rather the consequence of a development in the other direction, towards a heightened subjectivity, sense of reflective freedom, pride, and eroticism beyond the intellectual reach of other humans save the reciprocal beloved.

We will return to intensive seduction in a moment, but it is important to note first that 'The Seducer's Diary' represents the fruition of an idea the aesthete has toyed with all along, even as far back as his exposition on Don Giovanni. And this is Victor's point about A's reaction to the diary when he insists that it is surprising to see in A the sudden fear his own idea. This is why I concluded the previous chapter by saying that A, in his application of the rotation method, will truly divide into actor and observer. One might even suspect that the mood of reservation and anxiety running through the preface betrays a new tone of voice from A, one marked by a note of conscience and moral awareness, rather than one marked by cynicism and disillusion. Here he is explicitly wary of what he describes, betraying a tone of moral repulsion we have yet to witness in his writings. The choice to *imagine* the application of the rotation method in relation to a vulnerable young girl, rather than to *enact* the application of the method in real life, shows A's hesitancy towards interpersonal violation as much as his eagerness to remain detached from actuality.

In creating and writing the diary he remains in the thrall of the idea of *intensive* seduction as a solution to boredom, yes, and yet he also begins to separate from the idea in light of a nascent conscience. In condemning the persona that is his own creation, in calling him 'criminal' and 'evil,' A remains divided from himself, too fascinated to look away from the idea as a

possible approach to ironized social engagement, but too revolted to commit to the idea in any actual sense. Such tendencies are the mark and culmination of an aesthete through and through. In writing the diary, he is literally 'living poetically,' deferring, in his uncertainty, the decision to engage wilfully with and within actuality (EO 1:304; SKS 2:295). By achieving the pinnacle of the aesthetic attitude in this final section, he also reaches its highest point of crisis. And so the question we must ask concerns whether this crisis will culminate in a transformation of attitudes.

Before we can touch upon the full details and implications of A's prefatory section, then, we will need to go through the important elements of the diary proper. If we wish to conclude our own investigation with a final verdict on A's obsession with the *interesting* criterion (which is, of course, the criterion that emerges in the absence of any stable universal criterion), and with confidence that we have explored the full reach and implications of the concept of the *interesting* within *Either/Or*, then we need to see what is going on in the diary, the most technically *interesting* section of the seven. We must take the first part first and the second part second. As we have been doing all along, we must continue to read A's papers chronologically. Only then will we see accurately where the aesthete comes to an end.

If my foregoing arguments have been sound, then an obvious inference emerges. Johannes the Seducer begins where A left off at the end of 'Rotation of Crops.' As an imaginative sounding-board for A's own idea of *intensive* seduction as the cure for existential boredom, Johannes is the poeticized harbinger, a figure sent ahead imaginatively into regions to which A is hesitant to travel, yet which he wishes nevertheless to explore as having the potential to achieve the ultimate in aesthetics. Johannes, in other words, is repulsed by boredom just as A is—which is to say that his activities as depicted in the diary are going to be directed towards the most *interesting* developments he can fathom. In pursuing the rotation method of limitation and forgetful recollection, of profound and intensive penetration into the governing consciousness of an individual woman (rather than superficial and extensive dalliance with a never-ending sequence of representatives of universal physical womanhood), his aim is to be always on the side of the *interesting*. Simply to provide a bit of quantitative evidence to ground what might appear to be a mere hypothesis, I will point out that the word *interesting* appears over fifty times in the diary—fifty-one, by my count—often with the definite article preceding it: *the interesting*. This suggests Johannes's full awareness of the concept, and it hints at its role as the central motive power behind his activities.² Here are but three examples from the dozens:

It is in itself something great to find a purely immediate womanliness, but if one dares to risk altering it, one has the interesting. (EO 1:345; SKS 2:334)

It must gradually become manifest that nevertheless something surprising was implicit in it. This is always the law for the interesting. (EO 1:365; SKS 2:354)

The whole episode must be kept as insignificant as possible, so that when she has given her consent she will be unable to throw any light whatever on what may be concealed in this situation. It is precisely this infinite possibility that is the interesting. (EO 1:372; SKS 2:360)

So then, Johannes wants to keep life *interesting* in an aesthetically technical sense. Seduction will be his method for doing so. We will have to explore what this means. From the three passages I have just quoted, we can easily observe a bidirectional element to his usage of the word *interesting*. In the first passage, Johannes refers to achieving the *interesting* for oneself by interfering with a victim's immediacy. By encroaching on her life and cultivating something other than 'purely immediate womanliness,' one can coax a victim into a different and deeper sort of womanliness in order to bring the *interesting* to hand. In the second passage, the usage is more neutral. Johannes articulates the 'law' that brings the *interesting* into the equation, reinforcing our already strong knowledge of the aesthetic principle as pertaining to that which is implicitly different from what is explicit. In the third passage, Johannes seems inclined to appear *interesting* to his victim by eschewing her interpretive grasp and, as a result, by keeping her thoughts regarding their shared past in the realm of hermeneutical possibility, since Johannes's actions will 'simultaneously reveal that they are not subject to their immediate meaning and [will] fail to provide an adequate determination of the one that they are governed by instead' (to quote Lisi once again). Hence by noting these three passages we gain a foretaste of the important detail that, for Johannes, the *interesting* is both the means to and the end of seduction. He will seduce his victim by relying upon his knowledge of the *interesting*, by becoming *interesting* to her, and by making her *interesting*; but also, in so doing he will manipulate his experiences into *interesting* ones. The whole affair will become a matrix of *interesting* occasions.

In what ensues here, we will have to take these two elements in turn, discussing first what it means to seduce a person by means of the *interesting*, and second just how this seduction heightens the aesthetic principle of the *interesting* and keeps boredom at bay.

THE INTERESTING AS SEDUCTION AND THE SEDUCTION AS INTERESTING

The objective Johannes has set for himself is to seduce a young virgin. The pleasure he wishes to derive from the process is not the merely sensual pleasure of physical possession, but the apparently greater pleasure of 'possession in a more profound sense' (EO 1:377; SKS 2:366). His efforts will be directed towards awakening his victim's disdain for bourgeois edifices, marriage, custom, and the familiar substance of modern Copenhagen life. If he can stir her desire to achieve a personal sense of individuation from the forces that appear to act upon and operate throughout that to which she has felt herself to be subject within society, if he can bring her to see 'beyond what immediately appears' in order to glimpse 'the marvellous,' and if in so doing he can also slowly reveal to her his own intriguing and hidden independence from the smokescreen of immediate actuality, then, he believes, he can manipulate her into a freely chosen sexual encounter as a private counterdemonstration to the vacuous conventions they will have come mutually to disdain. Through this process, Johannes will slowly and increasingly appear to her to be different than he seems, and his insinuated hiddenness will hold the promise of an inward, individualistic, defiant, superior, essential truth to which she will be promised access: his erotic love for her. As he puts it, '[she] will gain courage to believe in erotic love, to believe in it as an eternal force, when she sees its dominion over me, sees my movements' (EO 1:384; SKS 2:372).

Johannes feels he must convince his victim that this hidden love is too boundless to fit into the customs ostensibly designed to join two lovers in union, and that it is too transcendent for public understanding. She must believe the social forms of engagement and marriage are merely external templates, hence nominal and even counterfeit procedures intended to yoke together mundane persons who lack freedom and erotic energy, and that thereby such forms have nothing to do with the inexpressible vastness of a socially unknowable reciprocal love such as Johannes and his victim share. Only then will she self-consciously give herself to him outside of engagement or marriage, in a free act of perfectly balanced egotism and sympathy, independence and dependence. He does not want to achieve his sexual deception by stoking the ephemeral sort of passion one observes in the primal abandon of Don Giovanni's victims. He wants an internal and free abandon, which is to say he wants to stoke his victim's spiritual fire in order that she might demonstrate to him, sexually, her self-conscious and proud autonomy as an individual. Once he has begun to teach her—indirectly—that the inner is not the outer, her decision to give herself to him beyond any external guarantor or social consideration will become, for him, the objective correlative of

her entire *pathos* as a person on the cusp of womanhood and self-conscious individuality. He will glimpse the inward reality of another human being by developing and then consuming it. And then he will desert her straightaway and instigate in her the oscillations of *reflective sorrow*.

For Johannes, feminine adolescence is equivalent to the immediate erotic stages of consciousness brought to fruition in the character of Don Giovanni—a liminal stage between total identification with the environment and particularized desire, which, once developed, will act as the engine of individuation and self-consciousness. Let us therefore think of a young woman in terms similar to those Mark C. Taylor has used to describe Don Giovanni. In an essay entitled ‘Natural Selfhood and Ethical Selfhood in Kierkegaard,’ Taylor writes the following: ‘It is essential to recognize that even at the final stage of immediacy [as exhibited by Don Giovanni], the self has not arrived at consciousness. The distinction between subject and object is affective rather than cognitive. In addition to this, the self is not an autonomous individual who stands in relation to a particular object but is a restless embodiment of a purely natural force’ (Taylor 1989, 175). Something very similar may be said of the immediacy a virginal female will exhibit when she is on the cusp of sexual maturation. Rather than masculine desire, however, she experiences her awakening distinction from the natural setting by affectively perceiving her virginity as *being-for-other*. Since she experiences her budding sexual potential as *being-for-other*, she implicitly grasps her differentiation or *otherness* from the other for whom she should be. Yet because she has not identified, in the form of erotic love, the particular other for whom she wishes to be, she is not yet conscious (cognitively) of this distinction. Her virginity, like the early stages of male desire described in ‘The Immediate Erotic Stages,’ is at this point a nothing or an absence of any established relation to a particular object. Naturally, she begins to seek re-integration with her environment as she feels she is parting ways with it as an individual; and ‘[n]ot until she is touched by the erotic does she awaken’ (EO 1:430; SKS 2:418–419).

In the paragraph following this line from his diary, Johannes adds this comment: ‘As being-for-other, woman is characterized by pure virginity. That is, virginity is a being that, insofar as it is being-for-itself, is actually an *abstraction* and manifests itself only for other. Feminine innocence has this same characteristic’ (EO 1:430; SKS 2:418, my emphasis). Insofar as a virginal adolescent girl has yet to identify the particular object upon whom she wishes to concentrate this being-for-other—insofar as she has yet to fall in love, that is, she experiences her virginal state merely as the dawning of possibility and the potential for consummation through this being-for-other. In her innocence, she has yet to experience the awakening of her desire to *be*

for a particular individual, and thus her differentiation from the substantial milieu is not yet firmly established. Like Don Giovanni, she experiences only substantial anxiety, and, like Don Giovanni, she is not yet *interesting* or fully individuated but only potentially so. Johannes wishes to be the cultivator of development, to witness thereby as his *beautiful* young victim develops into an *interesting* one, and to be the instigator and object of her erotic awakening.

Given the bourgeois structure of Copenhagen society, the trajectory for a young woman is more or less decided in advance. While this process is not really articulated, we can summarise it from Johannes's point of view as follows. Virginity is *being-for-other* in its purest and most natural iteration, as possibility without an object. In its nascent state, it wants to reintegrate with the world by being the *being-for-other* for the totality of otherness from which it feels itself to be divorcing—much like the first stages of masculine desire, which mark the interference of one's immediate identification with the environment, and wherein the consequent anxiety of differentiation seeks total reintegration with the manifold: 'The object of desire,' in this stage, 'is not specific but is a manifold of sensible intuition' (Taylor 1989, 175). Eventually, the girl falls in love. Her erotic love identifies the particular other for whom this natural and general gift of *being-for-other* is to be directed, an elaboration that coincides with the young girl's arrival at self-consciousness *qua* differentiation from the particular object of her desire. Hence her *being-for-other* is 'consolidated into a concrete object' (Taylor 1989, 175), namely her beloved. These mutually occurring developments are recognized and symbolized, if the young girl is fortunate, by an engagement to the object of her desire. An engagement, of course, remains a stage of possibility under which her *being-for-other* is not yet actualised but only prepared for actualisation. And so, finally, marriage represents the self-conscious decision that finally and permanently actualizes the young girl's possibility and formalizes her self-conscious identity as an individual being whose being is for an individual other. The marriage is consummated when she sacrifices the non-entity that is her virginity.

Because the *interesting* always concerns what is individuated, because it seeks out that which is discrepant from and incommensurable with the universal, Johannes believes he can interfere with this bourgeois pattern to his own benefit by generating in his chosen victim a sense of irony (negation of what is immediate or given) *prior* to the particularisation of her desire. Generally, of course, an individual's sense of irony follows the particularisation of her desire, since desire is the naturally-occurring divergence between subject and object which, as such, seeks re-convergence and union. Only after individuation does one come to recognize that phenomena do not necessarily align with essence, that things are not what they appear. So, if Johannes can become *interesting* to an adolescent virgin who is seeking a particular

other for whom to *be*, simultaneously she will become *interesting* to him as a slowly individuating subject. The question will become whether he can direct her attention sufficiently to foster in her a desire for him as she develops in contradistinction from the environment he is throwing into doubt. If he can find an adolescent virgin who has yet to fall in love, he can begin the process of individuation and then, as the impetus and source of this individuation, direct the currents of its seeking. He can capitalize on the inadequacy of the universal bourgeois model truly to fulfil the voraciousness of individual erotic longing—which, as we have seen over and over again, cannot be satisfied because it is always concealing a deeper desire for total reintegration with the *cosmos* or manifold. To put this another way, it is this desire for total communion which, for a modern individual, has no objective correlative and thus manifests as a surplus of subjectivity.

For his victim, Johannes chooses Cordelia, a young and intelligent girl of bourgeois upbringing. Given such upbringing, she simply accepts as a given truth what the contemporary crowd of young persons accepts, specifically the notion that marriage and domestic love are the woman's highest calling, and that therein lie the woman's fulfilment and happiness. This is the form of her immediacy and the unquestioning stance he seeks to ironize. When Johannes first discovers her during one of his sidewalk reconnaissance missions, he is baffled by her beauty. Soon he learns that she has yet to experience erotic love for any particular man, and so she has no cause either to doubt or even to consider the validity of received social practices—nor does she necessarily look to the future with romantic excitement, since love to her is an unknown experience she presumes she will someday come into. The accepted practices of engagement, love, and marriage are beyond her experience, too, and yet they shape her perceptions and sense of orientation like a familiar but unvisited steeple in the centre of the city.

She is, however, already marginally unique in the eyes of Johannes, for she has the advantage of having lost both of her parents at a young age—a favourable circumstance because the early sorrow has instilled in her a subterranean sense of pride and resilience, and thereby the potential for strong individuation, without yet emboldening her towards un-virginal reflection and *pain*. Her parents' deaths occurred so early in her life and were so beyond her control that she is not even consciously alert to the 'horizon under which she has lived' (EO 1:337; SKS 2:327). Her sorrow is normal to her; and these conventional attitudes, combined with early suffering, as well as reflective potentiality in the form of latent pride, are just what Johannes seeks in his victim (in addition to youthful radiance), since eventually 'she herself must be developed in herself; she must feel the resilience of her soul; she must come to grips with the world and lift it' (EO 1:360; SKS 2:349). To initiate

this higher stage of development, Johannes must bring her into the dialectic of the *interesting*: ‘the strategic principle, the law for every move in this campaign, is always to have tangential contact with her in an interesting situation. Consequently, the interesting is the territory in which the struggle is to be carried on; the potency of the interesting must be exhausted. If I am not much mistaken, her whole nature is designed for this, so that what I ask for is precisely what she gives—indeed, what she asks for’ (EO 1:345–346; SKS 2:335).

Obviously, the bulk of the 145-page diary is devoted to describing this process in intricate detail, and so a full summary of his specific and sequentially *interesting* manoeuvres is not possible here. Not only would the length of the summary go beyond the scope of our inquiry, but also the sacrifice of detail requisite to abridgments would be an injustice to the diary’s subtlety and complexity. It should serve our purpose instead to examine a few major elements of the seduction. It is worth noting that everything is sensitively dependent upon Johannes’s ability to exploit the opportunities actuality provides—to get beneath the surface of outward experience in order to leverage and control ideas and outcomes according to his secret plan *a la* crop rotation. He sees it as his task to transform the given situation into an occasion for his own inspiration, and to sweep up Cordelia into this inspiration. And the more successfully he does so, the more Cordelia will be intrigued by the potency of subjectivity *over* the phenomenal and given: hence the more *interesting* he will become and the more interested she will be in appropriating mere appearances according to her own hermeneutical alliance with Johannes.

Towards the beginning of his efforts, for instance, Johannes recounts a rather surprising and counterintuitive stroke of what he considers good luck: a young man named Edward is already ‘head over heels in love with [Cordelia]’ (EO 1:346; SKS 2:335).³ Rather than perceiving a rival in Edward and struggling against him, Johannes decides to exploit Edward’s infatuation by promoting it and appearing to help him towards an engagement with Cordelia. After inciting Edward to confess his secret affections to him, Johannes convinces Edward to visit Cordelia in order to begin a courtship—and even to invite Johannes along as a sort of advisor and chaperone. By means of this incitement, Johannes is able to infiltrate Cordelia’s household without suspicion, almost as an avuncular figure. As the days pass and such tandem visits become routine, Johannes behaves indifferently towards Cordelia in an attempt to inspire her indignation and neutralize her inherent sense of ‘womanliness’ (EO 1:346–347; SKS 2:335–336). Instead of attempting to win her over, as Edward does, Johannes converses coolly and droningly with her aunt on the topic of agronomy.

In this boring way, day after day, Edward and Johannes visit Cordelia’s household. While Edward bashfully fumbles and falters in Cordelia’s

presence, and ‘dresses for her sake alone, puts on his new black suit for her sake alone, his fancy cuffs for her sake alone—and thus cuts an almost ludicrous figure among other daily company in the drawing room’—Johannes pays no attention to his own appearance or to Cordelia’s, instead choosing monotonously and repetitively to discuss soil management, market prices, and the butter churn. His first goal is to teach Cordelia to smile ironically at her aunt and himself, to cause her to become silently defiant against their boring ways. Once this is achieved, and once this boredom begins to spread to her perception of Edward as well, Johannes waits for an opportune moment to flash forth a signal to Cordelia from his own heretofore subdued position of irony. When he notices she is listening to a specific moment in his mundane conversation with her aunt, for instance, ‘far off on the horizon there comes a flashing intimation from a different world’ as he gives her a glimpse of his own special mockery of the situation (EO 1:352; SKS 2:342). As he repeats this sort of behaviour, and as these events pile up, Johannes begins to create more and more little ironic signals to Cordelia to suggest that this whole routine is to him a whimsical and elaborate joke, and to bring her in on it so that she begins to harbour with him a secret scorn for the superficial elements of social life. ‘Cordelia always perceives the irony,’ he eventually writes, once he perceives his method to be working, ‘which is precisely what I want’ (EO 1:353; SKS 2:343). By this slow process, Johannes exploits the situation, and Edward in particular, in order to give Cordelia a ‘distaste for love’ and to ‘awaken in her a consciousness of what she disdains’ (EO 1:362; SKS 2:351).

Before she falls in love with him, however—and while his behaviour remains mysterious, unexpected, and unaccountable—Johannes does the most surprising thing of all: he proposes to Cordelia. Naturally, she is taken completely unawares (as is Edward, who rightfully becomes indignant with Johannes and then falls into despair and lassitude). Cordelia defers to her aunt, who, given her fondness for Johannes and his knowledge of agronomy, encourages her niece to accept the engagement. And then once again Johannes pursues the counterintuitive by playing games with the idea of engagement similar to the games he played with the idea of Edward. Rather than trying to win her over to the joys of engagement, Johannes seeks to show Cordelia how boring engagement really is. He takes her to social functions for engaged couples and assumes an ironic attitude towards all of the routines he and Cordelia witness together: the public, dispassionate kissing, the parlour games, the entirely quotidian conversations, the gestures that the men and women assume and repeat like fashion trends that go undisputed. All the while, he writes Cordelia impassioned love letters revealing to her, in their temporary separation, a depth of soul and a strength of desire that she never glimpses while he is present, thus deepening her appreciation of the discrepancy between his surface and his depth and inspiring in her both an

urge to get beneath the surface and a deepening of her feeling for her own such discrepancy.

As we know from the title of this diary, the endgame of this process is not to forge some sort of channel by which to communicate and share truths with Cordelia, but to demonstrate to her the incommensurability between subjectivity and the forms by which individuals are encouraged to mediate their desires and emotions and abundance of interiority. If she can accept that the universal social patterns to which others subject themselves lack the capacity to embody and secure her heightened subjectivity, then she might wilfully reject these patterns; if she rejects engagement and marriage as foolish rituals intended to placate the lukewarm passions of less intelligent persons, then she might come to Johannes outside of wedlock, in the freedom of her own self-conscious choice, recognising no authority but her own, in total faith in Johannes as the other to whom she wishes to bestow the gift of her virginity, thus the concentration of her individuated selfhood as *being-for other*. This she eventually does. In the morning, Johannes abandons her.

THE PATHOLOGY OF THE INTERESTING MAN

Needless to say, this sort of seduction involves patience, planning, expertise, cunning, artistry, linguistic skill, and tactical irony. Only an aesthete who operates with these qualities deserves the title of *genuine* intensive seducer. This is something the aesthete hinted at long ago, as far back as 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' when he argued that '[Don Giovanni] lacks the time to be a [genuine/intensive] seducer, the time beforehand in which to lay his plan and the time afterward in which to become conscious of his act. A seducer, therefore, ought to possess a power that Don Giovanni does not have, however well equipped he is otherwise: the power of words.' One paragraph later, still making the case for the difference between the extensive and intensive types of seduction, A added this remark: 'the aesthetic interest here is also something else: namely the how, the method' (EO 1:99; SKS 2:103). According to A, it is through the methods of deception, intrigue, and dissimulation that the intensive seduction somehow generates its *interesting* qualities for the seducer in question. That is, the seduction process itself is also *interesting*. The obscurity concerns what it will reveal in time, i.e., what is concealed or nascent within the present.

Johannes is in full agreement with A for two related reasons. First, the true, intensive method of seduction is enjoyed from start to finish in a sometimes months-long process. Rather than providing the seducer with merely physical pleasure in one fleeting moment of sexual contact, the whole process of intensive seduction is pleasurable, especially in moments when the

outcome is questionable, and even though a successful seduction is achieved with painstaking difficulty. In fact, difficulty and suspense are the tensing elements that contribute to the more intellectual-spiritual and ‘profound’ pleasure of the process. The aesthetic concern here is focused in part on the method itself—namely the skill, sagacity, and energy one brings to it—and in part on the question of whether one will overcome all the obstacles to success. This latter question generates a temporal suspense equivalent to the more spatialized suspense of an *interesting* concealment such as a veiled or masked personality. I believe this is what Leonardo Lisi means to say, in his essay on Faust’s seductive qualities, when he argues that ‘the reflexive [intensive] seducer becomes interesting precisely at the moment that the obstacles to his success are so great that the outcome remains doubtful’ (Lisi 2015 a, 225).

Second, Johannes believes that an extensive seducer such as Don Giovanni is more or less a rapist. Given the erotic *force* of Don Giovanni, the female victim who falls under his hungry and objectifying gaze loses her subjectivity and free will and basically collapses into his arms. Not only is this ‘method’ no method at all (we do not admire Don Giovanni as an individual but rather we feel his immediate aesthetic potency through Mozart’s music, and we admire Mozart as the artistically gifted synthesizer of form and content), but also the enjoyment he derives is transitory and obviously unfulfilling:

The majority enjoy a young girl as they enjoy a glass of champagne, at one effervescent moment—oh, yes, that is really *beautiful*, and with many a young girl that is undoubtedly the most one can attain. [. . . But this] momentary enjoyment is a rape, even if not outwardly but nevertheless mentally, and in a rape there is only imagined enjoyment; it is like a stolen kiss, something nondescript. No, if one can bring it to a point where a girl has but one task for her freedom, to give herself, so that she feels her whole happiness in this, so that she practically begs for this devotedness and yet is free—only then is there enjoyment, but this always takes a discerning touch. (EO 1:341–342; SKS 2:331, my emphasis)

Remarkably, despite these two considerations, and despite the obvious threat this dubious sort of achievement poses to the victim’s mental and emotional well-being, Johannes claims throughout the diary that he has fallen in love with Cordelia. If this is the case, why does he pursue seduction rather than a balanced relationship of affection, care, mutual regard, and emotional reciprocity? The most obvious answer is that he does not know what love is. He readily admits this as a possibility when he writes, ‘Perhaps someone would say that I have never really been in love—maybe so’ (EO 1:348; SKS 2:337). Another obvious answer is that he is pathological. To be successful, he will have to distance himself from the immediacy of the loving feeling that threatens to transform his alienation into enchantment. It certainly is hard

to fathom why what he calls love does not move him to attempt a constructive and communicative relationship—unless we return to the idea that he begins intellectually and psychologically where A left off at the conclusion of ‘Rotation of Crops’: namely, in unhappiness and boredom, in despair of escaping the restless entombment of self-consciousness, unable to hold out hope of achieving contact with the inward reality of another individual—and ‘living’ from the vantage point of an estranged psyche. If this is the case, then he may be understood to perceive and comprehend the outside world while feeling unable to get beyond himself and into the essential reality that world appears to conceal.

Consider the declaration with which he opens a diary entry dated May 16. ‘How beautiful it is to be in love; how interesting it is to *know* that one is in love’ (EO 1:334; SKS 2:323, my emphasis). From the beginning of the diary up until the moment of this declaration—a span of a month and a half—Johannes has been stalking the streets in search of an appropriate victim. He has been conversing with himself as he observes young girls from afar, as he brings himself just barely to enter their periphery, envisioning their innermost thoughts and anxieties, relishing the distant spectacle of their youthful innocence and beauty. In the several entries that appear prior to the May 16 entry, Johannes betrays the voyeuristic pleasure he derives from lurking in the shadows and watching young women’s movements without interpersonal engagement or emotional risk. He calls himself a ‘natural scientist’ and a ‘physician’ and believes he is able to discern their apprehension as liminal beings inhabiting the intermediary mind-frame between innocence and womanhood, between the *beautiful* and the *interesting*.⁴ In the very first entry of the diary, for instance, he records an evening episode in which he has watched a young girl in a silk dress step down from her carriage and walk towards her house. He imaginatively inhabits her perspective as follows (referring to himself as the ‘dark figure’): ‘True, a dark figure appears, enveloped to the eyes in a cape. It is not possible to see where he is coming from, for the [street]light is shining right in one’s eyes. He passes by you just as you are entering the front door. At precisely the crucial moment a sidelong glance falls on its object. You blush; your bosom is too full to unburden itself in a single breath’ (EO 1:314–5; SKS 2:305).

By the time May 16 rolls around, Johannes has seen Cordelia twice. On the first occasion, on May 9, he was so overwhelmed by her virginal splendour that he lost his ordinary capacity for aesthetic self-mastery and control. Recollecting his first glimpse of Cordelia, he wrote, ‘My eyes fixed unswervingly upon her. They no longer obeyed their master’s will; it was impossible to shift my gaze and thus to overlook the object I wanted to see—I did not look, I stared’ (EO 1:323; SKS 2:313). And now, on the second occasion, seven days later, he confesses to the diary that he has fallen in love. When he

decides that Cordelia will be his next victim, the contradiction has become clear already: Johannes wants to destroy the youthful happiness of a young girl he claims to love. All of this is to say that, indeed, he is pathological or else he does not know what love truly is. Perhaps these evaluations amount to the self-same issue; perhaps the aesthetic worldview has yielded yet another vicious circle in which cause and effect are equivalent, reversible, and self-perpetuating, where pathology interferes with the ability to love and the inability to love is pathological. In support of this likelihood, let us refer once again to what Iris Murdoch wrote about love: 'Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real' (Murdoch 1959, 51).

In favouring the *interesting* over all other considerations, Johannes feels he must maintain a willed self-division. As we have just seen, the May 16 entry shows this division implicitly when Johannes claims to experience both the beauty and the aesthetic interest, respectively, of *being* 'in love' and *knowing* one is 'in love.' More explicitly, at a much later point in the diary, Johannes explains that 'to enjoy [the erotic] properly one ought to be on a somewhat higher level—not just as someone being baptized but also as the priest' (EO 1:342; SKS 2:331–332). His essential task is to maintain the distance between inner and outer, thus to remain *interesting* to Cordelia and to keep his own experiences with her *interesting*. Only then, in this state of division, can he enjoy the seduction. Bradley Dewey captures this personality division very acutely when he suggests that Johannes is a schizoid:

While . . . the special demands of the aesthetic lifestyle create an unbridgeable gulf between the aesthete and the rest of the human community, they also produce a split deep within the aesthete himself . . . his manipulative, deceitful lifestyle demands what might be called an aesthetic bifurcation of the self. On the one hand, Johannes seems to possess a participant "agent self" which carries out specific acts in the world of flesh and blood—moving about living rooms, speaking, touching. But Johannes also possesses another self which "hovers," invisible, near the agent self, directing its activities and reveling in the pleasurable stimuli it thus receives. If the hovering self gets too closely involved with the activity itself—i.e., identifies too closely with the agent self—it loses the aesthetic distance it needs to direct the action and enjoy the stimuli. (Dewey IKC, 185).

Rather than allow himself to pursue a more virtuous sort of love which aims at devotion to and harmonious continuity with this other individual, and which would seem to hold at least the promise of interpersonal dignity through reciprocal knowledge, he presumes that such active love guarantees only its own frustration or eventual diminishment. Just like all other *concepts*, it will eventually become too banal or over-elasticised to arouse the

original sentiment which a relationship consistently and endlessly attempts to regenerate. Therefore, he actively wills himself to escape the self-unity of his immediate love by pursuing the *interesting* division entailed in knowing he is in love and observing himself in love, by rejecting the urge to cultivate this love on equal terms with his beloved, and by prolonging its simultaneous consummation and destruction. Aesthetics has no faith in natural duration. The aesthete exerts control over himself by trying to enjoy the situation rather than by trying to exist fully within it and therefore losing a part of himself when its temporality takes hold. As such, the situation of being in love becomes an occasion by which to operate artistically, skilfully, methodically, and towards a private, narcissistic, solipsistic, self-interested goal. An aesthete must remain detached enough to witness the drama of life's unfolding as though from an armchair or theatre seat, while also being the actor he himself is observing.

To Johannes, falling in love is a bit of good fortune that must not be squandered by continued exposure to the decay of actuality. Falling in love 'is something that cannot be elicited by skill or study—it is a gift,' he writes. 'But if I have succeeded in stirring up erotic love again, *I do want to see how long it can be sustained*. I coddle this love as I never did my first. The opportunity falls to one's lot rarely enough—therefore the point is truly to *utilize* it if it does come along' (EO 1:334; SKS 2:323, my emphases). In his apparent prior experience with suffering and sorrow, pain and guilt, lost love, and frustrated desire; in his lurking sense of boredom's potential; and in his inability to witness and engage with a reality beyond his own, Johannes's solution is aesthetic detachment from himself and his body and milieu. Of course, detachment from himself and his body and milieu was the original problem, his first repulsive impetus. He is stuck in a contradiction. Paradoxically, he believes now that detachment is the only way to maintain his interest in and enjoyment of the world. 'Most people rush ahead, become engaged or do other stupid things, and in a turn of the hand everything is over, and they know neither what they have won nor what they have lost' (EO 1:335; SKS 2:324). This sort of thoughtless individual 'will miss out on an enjoyment, for he does not enjoy the situation since he himself is wrapped up in it, hidden in it. Which is the more beautiful is difficult to decide—which is the more interesting is easy' (EO 1:335; SKS 2:324).

Early in this chapter I mentioned the dialectic between aesthetic disinterest and aesthetic interest: as one side is cultivated, the opposite emerges with greater influence, creating an ever-growing contradiction in the condition of self-consciousness. I argued that, all along, throughout the six previous expositions, A has revealed himself to be subject to this dialectic. Now we see that Johannes, A's poetic creation, is the shining archetype of the effects of this dialectic: a total exacerbation of the tensions A experiences. In his cultivated

detachment, Johannes has become so hungry for contact with another human being, and he has lived an entombed and alienated life for so long, that he is willing to suck the spiritual blood of the person with whom he has fallen in love, merely for a taste of her individual reality. On my view, this is the crucial implicit element of the whole diary. And this is what the extant scholarship tends to overlook. Johannes *is* in love in his pathological way. His loving feeling can be likened to the desire to engage with the inward truth of another human being combined with a doubt that such engagement has durability. In this way, his love must be considered as an erotic potential rather than a mutually generated task of interpersonal significance. Knowing not how to engage with such a reality without relinquishing his aesthetic worldview—that is, without sacrificing his detachment and thereby risking the loss of intellectual content—he believes the only option is to glimpse the *pathos* of his beloved by tearing her open emotionally and exposing the truth of her resulting psychological *pain*. As we are about to see, this *pain* will emerge from her sense of misused freedom with respect to externally governed circumstances.

If we return our attention to the important mood of *reflective sorrow*, we will remember how, in the chapter on ‘Silhouettes,’ we saw that, as founder-in-chief of the *Symparenekromenoi*, A wished to speak for this entire Society of Buried Lives when he exclaimed,

we, too, now and then go out into the world like knights errant, each his own way, not to fight monsters or come to the aid of innocence or be tried in amorous adventures. All of this is of no concern to us, not even the last, for the arrow in a woman’s eye does not wound our hardened breasts, and the cheery smiles of happy maidens do not move us, but rather the secret hint of grief . . . We shall be proud that no secret sorrow escapes our attention, that no solitary sorrow is so prudish and so proud that we do not succeed in penetrating its innermost hide-out! . . . Our choice is made: we love only sorrow. (EO 1:173–174; SKS 2:171)

The seduction Johannes performs is determined by a single aim—to develop his victim’s freedom so that her decision to seek his passionate embrace is autonomously performed outside of the appetitive compulsion of immediate passion or the social compulsion of marriage. Once Cordelia comes to disdain the insufficiency of the universalised customs of engagement and marriage, and to invest her ostensibly superior private love with publicly unknowable meaning, once she has willingly broken her engagement to Johannes like a ‘defective mold,’ her decision to consummate their relationship without external guarantees will be hers alone: the true indication of her freedom in devoting herself to him. Correspondingly, once Johannes spurns her promptly thereafter, her *reflective sorrow* will cripple her to an even greater degree than it did Marie Beaumarchais, Elvira, and Margarete.

The *Symparenekromenoi* loved these women for their pendulum-like grief. Yet A fully admitted that *reflective sorrow* ‘cannot become a subject for artistic portrayal’ (EO 1:172; SKS 2:171). The forms of art, both of the spatial domain (the plastic arts) and the temporal domain (poetry and drama) proved insufficient to the task of revealing to spectators the subjective reality of other human beings. *Reflective sorrow* was the final mood A sought to uncover in the first movement of his papers; as a mood it was more profound, even, than modern tragic guilt. This is because *reflective sorrow* is the richest, most acutely particularized iteration of the general inescapable *pain* and *amphiboly* of individual self-consciousness, which, conditioned by doubt, cannot sort out for itself the ratio between substantial determinants and subjective agency, and which, when a bad outcome is realised, knows not where the guilt lies, nor where to place the blame, nor how to adjudicate between the truths and falsehoods of memory. These doubts, in the more general sense, comprise the tragic ambiguities and paradoxes of human self-consciousness. While it remains the case that *reflective sorrow* cannot be said to have an objective correlative, since its key features are its dynamic unending fluctuations and its paradoxical (egotistical-sympathetic) underpinning, Johannes, as A’s alter-ego, nevertheless must be read as possessing a knowledge of the mood’s indications corresponding to the psychological knowledge A has been demonstrated to possess. If so, Johannes will have the power to cause *reflective sorrow* and to intuit its presence once he has brought it into being in another self-consciousness. While proof is never within the reach of self-consciousness, this mood is the closest thing an aesthete has to the certification of a reality beyond himself.

What could generate more pathological, aesthetic sympathy than an actual love affair the causes for destruction of which the victim cannot ever fathom, no matter how long she swings mentally like a pendulum in the effort to come to terms with what has happened? What could better elevate the inner contradictions and thus the inner reality of a beloved individual than the ambiguity she must experience when, after ostensibly transcending all social determinants in a private moment of mutual freedom with her lover, she is left holding nothing except the erasure of the most significant and important relation she has ever known? What greater amphiboly between responsibility and helplessness, guilt and suffering, could be imagined? What could transform happy memories into miserable ones more quickly and efficiently? Where can one find greater *pathos* outside of oneself? Where can one seek a more *interesting* moment in which to plunge the depths of another soul without risking one’s own?

THE FORM AND MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIARY

This whole diary is, of course, A's thought-experiment. This means that if we now take the last part last by considering his preface, we will be able to approach his own perspective regarding the fictitious work he has created—and we will be able to approximate his concluding point of view as an aesthetic writer. Our closing consideration must address two questions in turn, the first concerning the form of the diary and the second concerning A's ostensibly moral reaction to it. We need to ask why it is that, for A, a diary is the appropriate artistic medium for the portrayal of an *interesting* and *intensive* seduction. Why does A explore these matters through a 'running commentary' from the point of view of a predatory seducer rather than by means of, say, a novelistic or dramatic approach? Having produced a satisfactory answer, we will be able to ask why A chooses to portray the events fictitiously rather than attempting to experience the events first-hand through the actual application of the seduction method he so thoroughly delineates. Presumably, as I have suggested, this decision is related to his blossoming but still under-developed moral conscience. Therefore, as we conclude, we will need to ask whether this preface, which contains A's final words as an aesthete, signals that he has reached a transitional stage or border territory between aesthetics and ethics.

In "The Immediate Erotic Stages," A wrote the following:

[The *intensive*] Don Juan is not presented as possessing his object with one single blow—he is not the immediately qualified seducer; he is the reflective seducer. That which occupies us here is the subtlety, the cunning, whereby he knows how to steal into a girl's heart, the dominion he knows how to gain over it, the enthralling, deliberate, reflective seduction . . . The musical Don Juan enjoys the satisfaction; the reflective Don Juan enjoys the deception, enjoys the craftiness. The immediate pleasure is past, and reflection on the enjoyment is enjoyed more. (EO 1:108; SKS 2:111)

When he wrote this, A was in the middle of a passage explaining why Lord Byron's long poem, *Don Juan*, constitutes an aesthetic failure in comparison with Mozart's treatment of the Don Juan legend. He argued that the extensive seducer must be represented as a *force*, and that Mozart's music conveys both the 'wild craving of desire' and the pre-emptive 'victoriousness' of Don Giovanni. In Mozart's portrayal, the Don Juan idea as presented in the musical form of *Don Giovanni* achieves, simultaneously, the presentation of irresistible immediacy. The strength and voluptuousness of the don's desire is in fact the force behind his endless seductive successes in a manner equivalent

to the harmonic success of the music. If the seductive character is portrayed in language, however, then he becomes a point of reflection, with a historical past, a present of continual self-conscious becoming, and a future of open possibility. As a result, he must be read as a developed individual confronting a perceived and problematic worldly opposition to his desires. Being immediate, Don Giovanni remains undifferentiated from his environment, and the opera, ultimately, is the depiction of the problematic development of his sense of individuation. The anxiety accompanying reflection, the awareness of time as a historical or potentially concrete matrix, and the self-conscious discernment of overt obstacles to identifiable goals, all taken together, would diminish the certain voluptuousness and the sure victory that is the central potency of the medieval seducer archetype. Lord Byron's work fails to express Don Juan because of an incongruity between the Don Juan idea as such and the idea of poetry as the most concrete and historically-oriented medium of expression. The figure becomes an individual rather than a representative of the natural force of sensuality. 'If by means of turgid words [Don Juan] were to be presented here as absolutely victorious, one would promptly feel this to be unsatisfactory, since it does not belong to an individual as such to be victorious, and one demands the crisis of a conflict' (EO 1:107; SKS 2:109).

From our examination of 'The Immediate Erotic Stages,' we know exactly why A believes opera is the appropriate artistic medium for the portrayal of an immediate and extensive seducer. Immediacy is abstraction in time, and music is the most abstract artistic medium, or the art form most impoverished of concrete significance. Naturally, music and painting would be insufficiently historical for the expression of an endeavour with a questionable outcome, since the meaning of music exists only in the moment its notes are heard, whereas painting, while it has physical duration over time, is merely spatially expressive (i.e. indicative of a single moment without flux). Neither art form has the capacity to engender a sense of emotional duration and thus fluctuation under the inward-outward discrepancy—generated by the opposition between the desiring subject and the otherness of the world with which it seeks to integrate—to the degree that poetry and language do.

But why a diary specifically? To represent a more self-conscious individual who plans dissimulation-based seductions, a diary is, in fact, most fitting. Firstly, a diary is a thoroughly subjective form of expression. The diarist can neither escape his own perspective nor know how the story will end: as A says, 'his diary is not historically accurate or strictly narrative: it is not indicative but subjunctive' (EO 1:304; SKS 2:294). Unlike a memoir or first-person narrative, in which a character remembers and reflects upon past events with a view to explaining more recent events or even clarifying the present state of affairs, a diary draws its suspense from a future that remains uncertain to its author even as his words accumulate. A diary is lived and

written looking forwards and backwards concurrently, so to speak. The writing is private, confessional, and contemplative; it evinces the articulation of one's desires, strategies, plans, obstructions, and defeats, along with one's impromptu thoughts; and, most importantly, it has as its central presupposition the notion of development and concretion, opposition and effort, and personal continuity.

By establishing an aim and keeping a record of his obstacles and schemes, by chronicling the degree to which this or that event has lived up to his hopes and expectations, and also by expressing the manner in which such events have catalysed new desires and expectations, the author of a diary begins *to nurture a relationship to himself in which the past and the future interweave in the ongoing present*. Patently, such interweaving will potentially restore the semblance of content to the passage of time, giving the experience of temporality once more the semblance of historical accrual and subjective import. A diary is a self-contained, dynamic, dialectical documentation of the interplay between possibility and actuality, desire and object. Hence it is the perfect medium for aesthetic salvation from boredom, since time alone will reveal what the diarist seeks to uncover or realise through his own exertions. Time becomes *interesting* once again. The future is the concealed factor.

This brings us directly to the moral question. We must acknowledge again that in exploring intensive seduction fictitiously, A does not actualize his idea in the social and practical arena of human conduct, but only plays with it by the use of his rich imagination. Rather than applying his rotation method against a real human being by fully descending into the immoral and demonic state of the intensive seducer, A chooses to descend only poetically and intellectually, through inspiration, reflection, and a rather complex thought-experiment. Consequently, he endangers no real human victim, and furthermore he refrains from compromising his own moral self-consciousness. If he remains suspended in this sphere of intellectual possibility, he cannot become guilty. Now, if we view aesthetics as an attitude in which the individual prioritises aesthetic judgements over the imperative of practical judgements, and if thereby we acknowledge A's *amorality*, then certainly we must acknowledge signs of his certain disinclination to shift towards the demonstrably *immoral*. And if we view aesthetics as the effort towards capitalising upon the demonic freedom one has when one cares only about oneself—either because one cannot work out the means by which to recognise and nurture the reality of individuals beyond oneself, or because one is pathologically indifferent to any such realities—then certainly we must acknowledge that A is reluctant to disseminate his own cognitive chaos to other existing subjectivities. The aesthetic trajectory, originating from and fuelling anxiety, boredom, and unhappiness, has left A with nowhere to turn except towards the demonically self-interested (after all, in 'Rotation

of Crops' he has admitted that self-interest and private re-interpretation of social significances is the only solution to the misery of boredom). And yet his final exposition, and his preface to it, reveal his reluctance to execute the idea *existentially*.

In short, the aesthete distances himself from a morally dangerous solution to his problem by bringing it to fruition with his own pseudonymous pen. The aesthete suspends any genuine decision between the active pursuits of the demonic and the ethical—a suspension that is in itself an archetypal picture of aesthetic activity, which, when properly disinterested and detached, is always at least one degree removed from actuality, the better to judge before engaging, and which, given its original impetus of disenchantment, views the outer or phenomenal dimension of life more as spectacle than as the province wherein one passionately pursues practical relations. As we have seen repeatedly, the aesthetic principle is marked by 'the absence of genuine decision' (Taylor 1989, 173). Under the aesthete's inescapable disenchantment with the world, his artistically-oriented quest for an epistemic security grounded by experience should be seen as the anxious deferment of practical agency, and thus of accountability. Until some form of certainty can be achieved with respect to reality, he continuously seeks new avenues for the identification of an individual *pathos* to which he can wilfully relate. Yet the result of this relentless pursuit is that he has grown only more subjectively isolated and thus more estranged. Because he cannot know the implications of his idea until the idea is actualised, he is afraid to actualise the idea. Instead, he imagines its actualisation. He is neither demonic nor ethical. Rather, he is suspended between the two, afraid of each for opposing reasons. The diary, like so much else the aesthete touches, is marked by privacy and fictitiousness.

In 'Rotation of Crops,' A warned against developing a continual relation to anything that appears to have intrinsic reality. He advises against friendship, marriage, a respectable occupation, attributing value to money, or accepting as significant or content-laden any of the social and substantial determinants to which the herds subject themselves in their affective boredom. His concern is that these traditional objects, norms, and rituals of social life appear to the modern human being as solutions to boredom when in fact they only perpetuate boredom—that is, they provide the illusion of intrinsic reality without actually possessing intrinsic reality. Rather than solving the problem of nothingness, then, they lock the individual into a perpetuated relation to a nothing that appears to be something, and while this bored individual presumes to be devoted to development, concretion, and continuity, the opposite is really the case. For instance, A wrote that 'through marriage, one falls into a very deadly continuity with custom, and custom is like the wind and weather, something completely indeterminable' (EO 1:297; SKS 2:286). However, such customs are tempting precisely because boredom is the inability to

develop a continuous relation to something determinable in order to restore a sense of meaningfulness to time itself.

It is not continuity that A rejects, but the illusion of continuity by which custom lures the masses. In fact, A longs for continuity and content. A truly continuous relation to something determinable would amount to a criterion for life and the diminishment of his alienation and disenchantment—perhaps it might even put an end to his buried existence. Not knowing how to achieve such a constructive relation, he submits to the intensification of the same dialectic that has been present all along: he goes further inward. I say this is the same dialectic because inwardness and inner-outer irreconcilability, as we have seen, make one more desperate for a solution to the moods of boredom and anxiety, thus more willing to succumb to evil self-interest as a means of distraction. Yet as this occurs, one's moral sensibilities—guilt and accountability—obviously assume a greater level of influence.

This final exposition reveals a continuation of the pattern A has exhibited all along: an aesthetic detachment and a refusal to assimilate ethically or socially. Still, this final exposition reveals intimations of a repulsion from the dangerous place aesthetics threatens to take him. In this regard, on my reading, A stands now in the border territory between aesthetics and ethics. As he writes these important words in his preface to the fictitious diary, I submit, A is diagnosing himself as much as his creation, Johannes:

But it was not the good that beckoned him away, nor was it actually evil—even now at this moment I dare not say that of him. He has suffered from an *exacerbatio cerebri* [exacerbation of the brain], for which actuality did not have enough stimulation, at most only momentarily. He did not overstrain himself on actuality, he was not too weak to bear it; no, he was too strong, but this strength was a sickness. As soon as actuality had lost its significance as stimulation, he was disarmed, and the evil in him lay in this. He was conscious of this at the very moment of stimulation, and the evil lay in this consciousness. (EO 1:306; SKS 2:296)

Here, as we read the concluding passages of A's intellectual enterprise, we see the very strong possibility that our pseudonymous author is coming to terms with the futility, perhaps even the moral danger, of elevating the aesthetic attitude to the place of supreme value.

NOTES

1. Dewey calls this the 'capture-effect' of aesthetics and claims that Johannes the Seducer 'is on his way toward becoming an absolute aesthete—one captured by the aesthetic, one whose self has been slowly, subtly, irreversibly altered' (Dewey 1995,

182). Dewey is right about Johannes the Seducer. But the point is that Johannes is A's creation: the exploration of a bad scenario rather than an existential entrance into it.

2. With this count, I refer to the actual word 'interesting,' not to every form of the lexeme INTEREST.

3. Of course, the counterintuitive is always more *interesting* than the intuitive. A successful outcome based on counter-intuition is almost by definition an *interesting* outcome: it reveals a latent discrepancy between immediate judgement and penetrative vision.

4. 'I continually seek my prey among young girls, not young women. A woman is less natural, more coquettish; a relationship with her is not beautiful, not interesting; it is piquant, and the piquant is always the last' (EO 1:324; SKS 2:314).

Coda

A MOST INTERESTING MAN

In the introduction to this inquiry, I suggested that the story of the human Fall from innocence and immediacy amounted to a sort of allegory concerning our first step in the recognition of a division between what German idealists call the inner and the outer. By intimating to Adam and Eve that the taste of a particular apple would reveal something beyond the observations of mere sense-perception, and by intimating this particular tree concealed something more crucial than mere matter, God's prohibition in the Garden effectively introduced the division between the *beautiful* and the *interesting*. Whereas prior to the incoherent questions inspired by God's prohibition, nature was *beautiful* to Adam and Eve—a transparent adornment for the spirit that acted upon and operated throughout it—now the pair were cast into doubt and freedom, and, simultaneously, *interest*, wherein what was truly significant or even absolute was understood as transcending the territory of phenomena. What Adam and Eve found in tasting the fruit, of course, was their own respective subjective limitations regarding the hidden essence of the world. What they discovered was the constitutional flaw which amounted to a surplus not identifiable within the causally-determined and law-governed milieu which originally appeared to be the horizon, condition, and extent of their own existence. Theologically speaking, this action and discovery was equivalent—as we know—to the first sin.

Aesthetics seeks to find some means towards reintegration with what has been lost through science and the acquisition of universal, abstract knowledge. The discipline fully developed as a unique mode of inquiry only after our original intuition of a discrepancy between the causal outer world and inner human freedom intensified into an irrefutable opposition when Newton revealed a set of universal mechanical laws governing the physical processes of the outer world. This is why the first step of aesthetics is always backwards towards the *beautiful*. It is rooted in an insatiable desire to reunite with the wholeness and unity of that from which we have been divided and alienated through the processes of self-consciousness, desire, decision, and knowledge.

This is true historically—as we saw in our opening discussion of Kant, Hegel, Lessing, and Schlegel—as well as psychologically, or in the life of an individual aesthete—and it is true in the case of A's endeavour. Because aesthetics requires reflection, its developments are counter-productive to the task it establishes for itself: namely the task of diminishing the sense of *difference* and discord requisite to human self-consciousness, mental representation, desire, and reflection. When A praised Mozart to the skies for immediately depicting the true archetype of erotic immediacy, he saw eventually that he could not reinstate the *beautiful* for himself, nor could he prolong the harmonies of abstract music through the concrete medium of language. He fixed his vision, ultimately, on the *interesting* discrepancy between Don Giovanni's nascent but developing subjectivity and his external conduct, and upon the idea that *Don Giovanni* captures the long human moment in which spirit and matter separate from their dreamlike initial cohesion—a moment that concludes with Don Giovanni's descent into hell. From that point forward, A became progressively obsessed with the concept of the *interesting*, focusing on characters who either could not or would not reconcile the inner, subjective composition of their psyches with the outer, objective composition of their conduct. With each subsequent investigation, A grew ever dizzier and ever more restless, ever unhappier, ever more bored by the insufficiency of objects to correlate to the wealth of interiority that is called subjectivity.

In approaching the first volume of *Either/Or* as a chronological sequence of writings, I believe we have vindicated the claim I offered in the prelude, when I suggested not only that A's aesthetic expositions were indeed arranged in the order in which they were written, but also, and more importantly, that only by comprehending A's trajectory and examining his dialectical advance as an aesthete would we be able to grasp the subtlety and dynamics of the aesthetic sphere of existence, from its origins in the quest for beauty to its 'concluding' quest for the most *interesting* experience. The modern mind is obsessed with the *interesting*, and yet the excavation of what is hidden only leads to the creation of further objective concepts, more refined and less vague, and to new divisions and classifications of what has become outward and apparent; as such, the modern mind goes ever deeper into the spiral of relativity, chaos, unhappiness, self-contradiction, and doubt. Such are the conditions afflicting Kierkegaard's aesthete. A has become, along with Hamlet and Faust, one of the most quintessentially *interesting*, anxious, reflective, and misguided of modern characters. In creating A, Kierkegaard prophesied so many interrelated intellectual disasters of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio, argues that the *interesting* is 'the category of the turning point' (FT 82–83; SKS 4:173). Presumably he means that it is the category that emerges when we judge an object or phenomenon which seems to hover between two

previously established categories or concepts, namely when neither one nor the other is sufficient to capture the particularity or peculiarity of the experience in question. It is a reality that logic cannot capture or explain. An *interesting* problem for philosophers is one that promises, therefore, to reveal a newer or more highly developed conceptual grasp of the world. For instance, for thousands of years we have been beguiled in our attempts to discern just when it is that a heap of sand, from which grains are being removed one by one, ceases to be a heap. The point of qualitative transition from heap to non-heap cannot be explained through logic alone, thus it cannot be made conceptually apparent to us when the change occurs, and the *interesting* quantity is the number of grains of sand in the border region between heap and non-heap. Of course, any novel, original, and highly particularised experience, one seemingly ungraspable by the concepts a thinker has within his extant schemata, will engage his deep curiosity precisely because it will appear to hide something heretofore undiscovered—something promising and potentially *instrumental* for the growth and betterment of his subjectivity, or for the perfectibility of general human understanding.

Yet Johannes de Silentio, in the same paragraph in *Fear and Trembling*, adds another mysterious claim regarding the *interesting*. He says that the *interesting* is a border category, a *confinium* between aesthetics and ethics. On the one hand, this does seem rather similar to, if not more specific than, the notion that the *interesting* is the category of the turning point. For, in the realm of human activity, a border region between two approaches to existence is merely the ambiguous space inhabited by an individual who has not yet definitively chosen to go in one direction or the other: He faces an either/or. What is fascinating—or what is inexhaustibly *interesting*—is the fact that, as I believe *Either/Or I* reveals, A lives in this sort of turning point in the same way as Don Giovanni does, albeit more intensely. The moment of his transitional phase is long, but A is moulting as an individual. By the end of the volume, his investigations into the *interesting* have allowed him, finally, to walk the shoreline of the region of life Kierkegaard calls the *ethical*. He is not yet situated within that new territory, but still, as we learned from ‘The Seducer’s Diary,’ he has begun nonetheless to distance himself from the temptations of private, self-interested behaviour. He does not act upon the idea he imaginatively elaborates in his own fictitious diary—he merely explores it in such a way that he endangers neither any actual victim nor his own moral integrity. We must admit that his reservations regarding the diary itself smack of nascent moral conceptualisation of what had been, initially, merely aesthetic. For readers, A will remain in this ambiguity forever, stuck between two worlds, the outer world of disclosure and community-oriented conduct, and the inner world of concealment and personally-oriented conduct. His interest in the *interesting* has brought him to the turning point—to

the border region between aesthetics and ethics. Along the way, if we have read his formidable exertions properly and attentively, we may have come to see the regress of the aesthetic, and thereby we may have come to feel the urge, ourselves, to investigate the potential in the neighbouring region, which Kierkegaard calls the ethical.

Aesthetics, which ultimately or inevitably privileges the *interesting* as the highest of all criteria—as the category of the exception and of the exceptional, as the criterion of the turning point, and as the line between what is disclosed and what is concealed—seems to be the ‘solution’ that exacerbates the problem which stands as its original impetus: the insufficiency of the content of outer experience to correlate with the content of inner experience. The question we are now invited to consider concerns whether the ethical worldview has the capacity to provide an individual with the means towards reintegration with the outer world from which he or she has been estranged—that is, to resolve the incommensurability between inner and outer. To address this question, we will have to turn our attention to the writings of Judge William, the pseudonymous author of the second volume of Kierkegaard’s undeniable masterpiece of diagnosis, in which and through which is meticulously depicted the crisis of modernity. It is a crisis that, it seems to me, has only intensified over time, even if nowadays we call ourselves postmodern or posthuman or anything else under the beautiful sun.

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