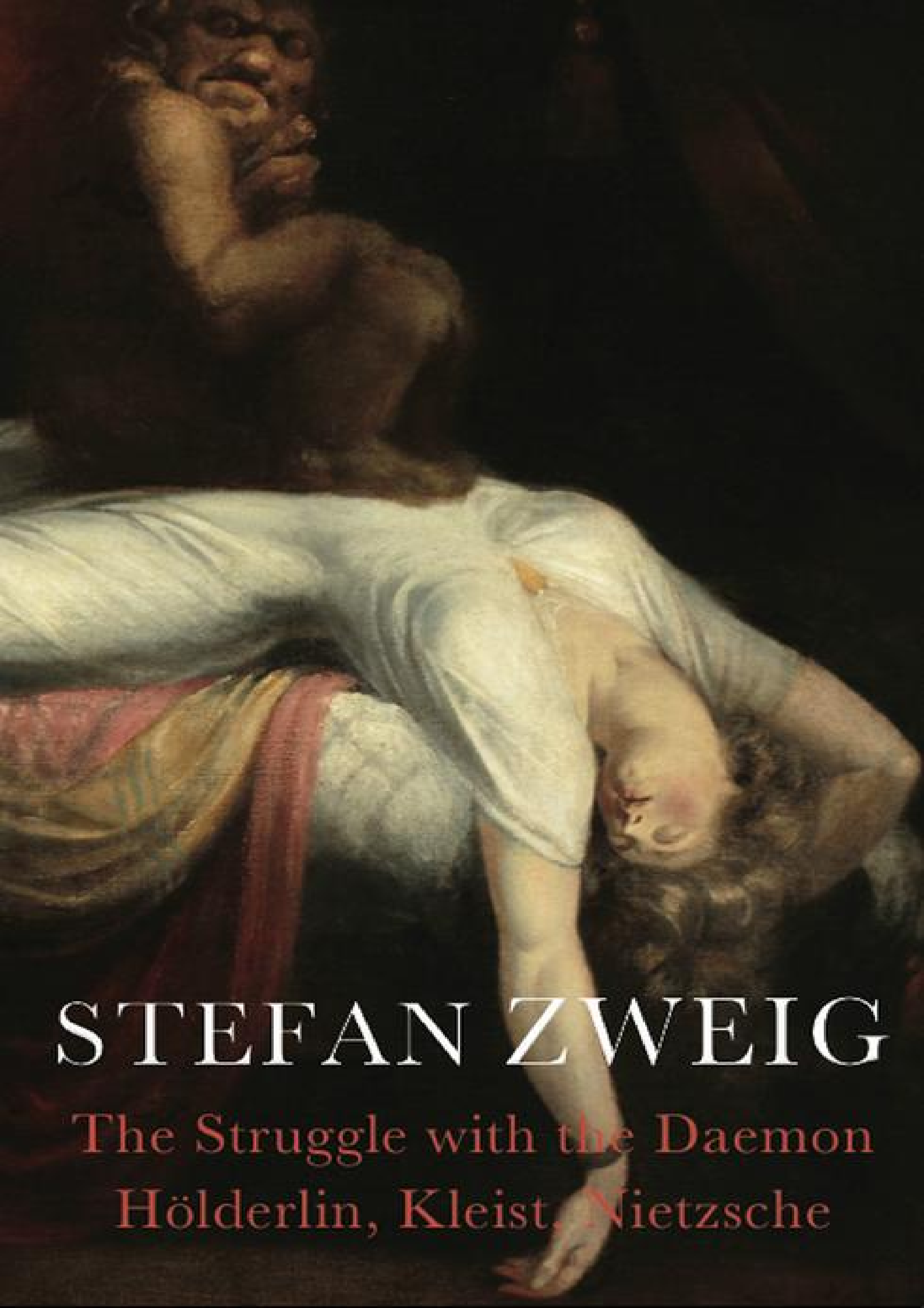

STEFAN ZWEIG

The Struggle with the Daemon
Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche

STEFAN ZWEIG

THE STRUGGLE WITH THE DAEMON

Translated from the German by
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To Sigmund Freud

I love those who know not how to live except through surrender, for they are on the way elsewhere.

Friedrich Nietzsche

INTRODUCTION

The harder it has been for a son of earth to win to freedom, The more mightily does he stir his fellow men.

Conrad Ferdinand Meyer

In the present work, just as in my earlier trilogy *Three Masters*, three imaginative writers are portrayed in a way which will show their spiritual fellowship, but this essential unity is not to be represented with undue concreteness, or as going beyond an allegorical similitude. I am not looking for rigid formulae in which to confine the spiritual, but am disclosing the forms of the spirit. If in my books I deliberately assemble mentalities of like complexion, I do so only after the manner of a painter who likes to hang his pictures in such a room and in such a way that the working of light and counter-light shall bring out analogies of type. Comparison always seems to me a fostering, nay, a formative medium, and I rejoice in it because it is applicable without undue constraint. It enriches where the use of crude formulae impoverishes; it intensifies values inasmuch as it creates illumination by means of unanticipated reflections, and provides a margin of vacant space wherein to enshrine each likeness. This secret of plastic presentation was already known to the first great master of literary portraiture, Plutarch, who in his *Parallel Lives* gave paired descriptions of a Greek notable and a Roman, that behind their personalities the shadow counterpart, the spiritual type, might be made plain. Just as that illustrious writer worked in the field of historical biography, so do I design to work in the kindred field of literary and characterological biography. *Three Masters* and *The Struggle with the Daemon* are the opening volumes of a series dealing with Master Builders, or an Attempt at the Typology of the Spirit. Far be it from me to dream of forcing the inhabitants of the world of genius into the pigeonholes of a rigid system. Fired by a passion for psychological study and driven by a creative urge, I do but follow my bent towards the sculpturing of the figures of those to whom I am bound by the most intimate sympathies. By my own limitations, barriers are imposed against a striving

for completeness; nor do I regret such fragmentary treatment, which would only be a source of grief to one who believed that creative work could be systematised, and who should arrogantly suppose that the infinite universe of the mind might be confined within definite boundaries. The thing that allures me in my plan is that it reaches out into infinity and knows nothing of frontiers. Thus it is that, at once slowly and ardently, with hands working in a way that still seems strange even to myself, I continue to build a chance-begotten edifice upwards into the little portion of time that hangs dubiously over the life of every mortal.

Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche are obviously alike even in respect of the outward circumstances of their lives; they stand under the same horoscopical aspect. One and all they were hunted by an overwhelming, a so-to-say superhuman power, were hunted out of the warmth and cosiness of ordinary existence into a cyclone of devastating passion, to perish prematurely amid storms of mental disorder, and one of them by suicide. With no moorings in their own epoch, misunderstood by their generation, they flashed like meteors athwart the night of their mission. They themselves knew not whither they were bound, nor had they any grasp of their significance, as they hurtled towards the infinite in a parabola which seemed scarcely to touch our world of actualities. A power greater than theirs was working within them, so that they felt themselves rushing aimlessly through the void. In their rare moments of full awareness of self, they knew that their actions were not the outcome of their own volition, but that they were thralls, were possessed (in both senses of the word) by a higher power, the daemonic.

"Daemonic"—this word has had so many connotations imposed upon it, has been so variously interpreted, in the course of its wanderings from the days of ancient religious mythology into our own time, that I must explain the sense in which I shall use it in this book. I term "daemonic" the unrest that is in us all, driving each of us out of himself into the elemental. It seems as if nature had implanted into every mind

an inalienable part of the primordial chaos, and as if this part were interminably striving—with tense passion—to rejoin the superhuman, suprasensual medium whence it derives. The daemon is the incorporation of that tormenting leaven which impels our being (otherwise quiet and almost inert) towards danger, immoderation, ecstasy, renunciation and even self-destruction. But in those of common clay, this factor of our composition which is both precious and perilous proves comparatively ineffective, is speedily absorbed and consumed. In such persons only at rare moments, during the crises of puberty or when, through love or the generative impulse, the inward cosmos is heated to boiling point, does the longing to escape from the familiar groove, to renounce the trite and the commonplace, exert its mysterious sway. At other times the average man keeps a tight hand on any stirrings of the Faustian impulse, chloroforming it with the dicta of conventional morality, numbing it with work, restraining its wild waters behind the dams of the established order. By temperament and training the humdrum citizen is an inveterate enemy of the chaotic, not only in the outer world, but in himself as well. In persons of finer type, however, and above all in those with strongly productive inclinations, the unrestful element is ever at work, showing itself as dissatisfaction with the daily round, creating that "higher heart which afflicts itself" (Dostoevsky), that questioning spirit which expands with its yearnings into the abysses of the limitless universe. Whatever strives to transcend the narrower boundaries of self, o'erleaping immediate personal interests to seek adventures in the dangerous realm of enquiry, is the outcome of the daemonic constituent of our being. But the daemon is not a friendly and helpful power unless we can hold him in leash, can use him to promote a wholesome tension and to assist us on our upward path. He becomes a menace when the tension he fosters is excessive, and when the mind is a prey to the rebellious and volcanically eruptive urge of the daemonic. For the daemon cannot make his way back to the infinite which is his home except by ruthlessly destroying the finite and the earthly which restrains him, by destroying the body wherein, for a season, he

is housed. He works, as with a lever, to promote expansion, but threatens in so doing to shatter the tenement. That is why those of an exceptionally "daemonic temperament", those who cannot early and thoroughly subdue the daemon within them, are racked by disquietude. Ever and again the daemon snatches the helm from their control and steers them (helpless as straws in the blast) into the heart of the storm, perchance to shatter them on the rocks of destiny. Restlessness of the blood, the nerves, the mind, is always the herald of the daemonic tempest—and that is why we call daemonic those women who diffuse unrest wherever they go and who open the sluices to let loose the waters of destruction. The daemonic bodes danger, carries with it an atmosphere of tragedy, breathes doom.

Thus it comes to pass that everyone whose nature excels the commonplace, everyone whose impulses are creative, wrestles perforce with his daemon. This is a combat of titans, a struggle between lovers, the most splendid contest in which we mortals can engage. Many succumb to the daemon's fierce onslaught as the woman succumbs to the passion of the impetuous male; they are overpowered by his preponderant strength; they feel themselves joyfully permeated by the fertilising element. Many subjugate him; their cold, resolute, purposive will constrains his ardours to accept their guidance even while he animates their energies. Often the embrace which is a wrestle and the wrestle which is an embrace persist for a lifetime. In the artist and his work the great encounter becomes, as it were, symbolical; his every nerve is thrilled by the sensuous union between his spirit and its perpetual seducer. Only in the creative genius does the daemonic succeed in making its way out of the shadows of feeling into the regions of language and of light, and we discern the daemon's passionate features most plainly in those who have been mastered by him, in the imaginative writers whom he leads whithersoever he wills—in such as the three men I have chosen as most typical of their kind in the German world—Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche. For if in an imaginative writer the daemon rules autocratically, there flames up in him a peculiar kind of art; he becomes, as it were, drunken with his art; he gives himself up to a frenzied,

febrile creation; there occurs in him a spasmodic exaltation of spirit, convulsive, explosive, orgiastic, the *μανία*[*] of the Greeks, characteristic of the prophet and the pythoness. The measureless, the superlative, is the first unmistakable token of this form of art—an unceasing endeavour to outdo oneself in the effort to reach that limitless sphere to which the daemonic properly belongs. Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche were of the Promethean race which is in revolt against customary forms and tends thereby to destroy itself. The uncanny light of the daemon flashes from their eyes, and it is he who speaks through their lips. He continues, indeed, to speak through their lips when otherwise they would be dumb, and his strength makes itself manifest in them when nothing else remains to quicken the spirit and when the bodily forces are far advanced in decay. Never is the dread guest more plainly perceptible than when the mind of the host, rent asunder by formidable tensions, has collapsed, and the onlooker catches a glimpse of the inmost abysses where the daemon lurks. In all three of those whom this book concerns, daemonic strength (previously veiled) became conspicuous when the guiding intelligence of the ordinary self had tottered and fallen.

To throw light upon the mysterious essence of the writer who has been overpowered by his daemon, to elucidate the true nature of the daemonic, I have (faithful to my method of comparison) inconspicuously delineated an opposing player, as counterpart to the three tragical heroes. But the counterpart to the writer who soars upon the pinions of an uncontrolled daemonism is not one who is himself undaemonic. There is no art worthy of the name without daemonism, no great art that does not voice the music of the spheres. No one ever bore more convincing testimony to this than the arch foe of all that was daemonic, the man who was so unsympathetic to the lives of Kleist and of Hölderlin, namely, Goethe, who said to Eckermann of the daemonic: “Productivity of the highest kind, every notable aperçu … is subject to no one’s control and is uplifted above earthly power.” Great art cannot exist without inspiration, and inspiration derives from an unknown, from a region outside the domain of the waking consciousness. For

me, the true counterpart of the spasmodically exalted writer, divinely presumptuous, carried out of himself by the exuberance of uncontrolled forces, is the writer who can master these forces, the writer whose mundane will is powerful enough to tame and to guide the daemonic element that has been instilled into his being. To guide as well as to tame, for daemonic power, magnificent though it be and the source of creative artistry, is fundamentally aimless, striving only to re-enter the chaos out of which it sprang. Unquestionably great art, art nowise inferior to the daemonic, emerges when an artist wins mastery over this elemental force and imposes on it whatever direction he pleases, when he "commands" poesy as Goethe commanded it, and gives the "incommensurable" a definite form; when, in a word, he becomes the daemon's master instead of the daemon's thrall.

Goethe—there you have the name for the antithetical type which holds symbolical sway throughout this book. Not merely as a scientist, not merely as a geologist, was Goethe "an adversary of Vulcanism"; in art, likewise, he championed the evolutionary against the eruptive, fighting with unusual bitterness against the convulsive, the volcanic, the daemonic manifestations of genius. Yet the embitterment shows more clearly than anything else that for him, too, the contest with the daemon had been the decisive problem of his art. In this field had taken place the struggle for its existence. He could not have regarded the daemon as so terrible an enemy had he not himself wrestled with the fiend, and looked shudderingly into the gorgon's face. Somewhere in the thorny thicket of his youth, Goethe must have fought the battle to a finish. We learn it from *Werther*, the book in which he prophetically averted from himself the fate of Kleist and of Tasso, of Hölderlin and of Nietzsche! The encounter must have been alarming, for throughout life Goethe retained a fierce respect for and was inspired with an unconcealed fear of the powers of his formidable adversary. With the diviner's skill, he recognised his enemy through all disguises—in Beethoven's music, in Kleist's *Penthesilea*, in Shakespeare's tragedies, which in later years he desisted from reading ("it would disturb me"), and the

more his thoughts and energies were directed into constructive work and concerned with self-preservation, the more sedulous was he to escape every possibility of such "disturbance". He knew what was the upshot when an artist surrendered to the daemon; that was why he was ever on the alert to defend himself, and why he warned others against the lion in the path —though his warnings were fruitless. Goethe manifested as much heroic energy in saving himself from surrender as do the daemonic display in their self-surrender. He, too, was striving for supreme freedom; he was fighting to sustain a measure amid the immeasurable, and to secure his own fulfilment, whereas those others were surrendering to the urge towards the infinite.

Only in this sense have I contraposed Goethe's figure to those of the thralls of the daemon, those of Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche; not in the sense of any active rivalry (though such a rivalry existed in their lives). I needed a great voice of the obverse kind, to make it clear that though I venerate the Bacchic, the hymnic, the titanic as set forth in my account of the three imaginative writers to whose life and work this book is devoted, I do not regard these qualities as necessarily characteristic of the most valuable or of the sublimest art. The contrast between the two kinds of art seems to me, indeed, to bring us face to face with an intensely interesting problem in spiritual polarity, and I shall do well to give a plain account of certain aspects of this immanent antithesis. With something that approaches the clarity of mathematical formulae, the contrast, beginning in the abstract realm of form, extends into the most trifling episodes of the protagonists' bodily lives, so that nothing but a direct comparison between Goethe and his daemonic counterparts will serve—as a comparison between supreme but divergent kinds of mental achievement—to throw light upon the enigma.

The first thing that is obvious in Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche is their detachment from the world. The daemon plucks away from realities those whom he holds in his grip. Not one of the three had wife or children, any more than had

their congeners Beethoven and Michelangelo; they had neither fixed home nor permanent possessions, neither settled occupation nor secure footing in the world. They were nomads, vagrants, eccentrics; they were despised and rejected; they lived in the shadows. Not one of them ever had a bed to call his own; they sat in hired chairs, wrote at hired desks and wandered from one lodging house to another. Nowhere did they take root; not even Eros could establish binding ties for those whom the jealous daemon had espoused. Their friendships were transitory, their appointments fugitive, their work unremunerative; they stood ever in vacant spaces and created in the void. Thus their existence was like that of shooting stars, which flash on indeterminable paths, whereas Goethe circled in a fixed orbit. Or (to return to a previous metaphor) Goethe was firmly established upon solid earth, into which his roots spread ever wider and deeper. He had wife and children and grandchildren; women garlanded his life; intercourse with a small group of tried and trusted friends suffused his leisure with content. He lived in a large, well-appointed house, which he filled by degrees with rarities and art treasures; he was comforted by the warmth of an assured reputation, unchallenged for the half-century and more during which he survived as an acknowledged master. He had offices and dignities conferred upon him, was a privy councillor and was styled “His Excellency”, and, on gala occasions, orders innumerable glittered on his broad chest. While those others developed their capacities for wild flights in the mental empyrean, but on the earth grew more unstable as the years passed, running hither and thither like hunted beasts, Goethe, increasingly subject to the force of terrestrial gravity, became continually more steadfast. Where he stood was the centre of his ego, and at the same time the intellectual focus of the nation. From this fixed point his tranquil activities embraced the world, his ties extending far beyond human fellowship to form attachments with the lower animals, with plants and with inanimate nature, wedding him creatively to the foundations of mundane existence.

Like Dionysus, the thralls of the daemon were torn to pieces

by the titans; whereas Goethe, having subdued the daemon, was self-controlled to the end. His career was a strategic conquest of the world; whilst they, fighting heroically but without set purpose, were driven forth from the world and had to flee into the infinite. They were constrained to drag themselves away from the terrene in order to merge themselves in the supramundane, but Goethe need take only one step from the earth in order to find himself in the limitless expanse, or could slowly and patiently draw the limitless into his finite grasp. His method was thus essentially capitalistic, the method of capitalist accumulation. Year after year he stored a definite amount of experience as intellectual profit, entering it like a careful bookkeeper in his "diaries" and "annals", his life bearing interest as a tilled field bears fruit. Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche, on the other hand, were gamblers, staking their all with magnificent indifference upon the turn of a single card, to win or to lose a measureless prize; for the daemon loathes the tedious heaping up of petty gains in a savings box. Experience, which for a Goethe is the very core of life, was for them of no account; their sufferings taught them only how to feel more intensely; and, a prey to fitful enthusiasms, they lost track of their own selves. In contrast with them, Goethe was the unceasing learner, the book of life was for him something to be mastered conscientiously, diligently, page after page and line upon line; always he continued to regard himself as a student, and not until old age was upon him did he venture the mystical utterance:

I have learnt how to live; grant me, ye gods, more time.

For Kleist, Hölderlin and Nietzsche living was not to be learnt, nor worth learning; their intuition of a loftier existence was of far more significance than perception and sensuous experience. What their genius did not give them freehandedly did not exist for them. They cared for nothing but that which was poured for them out of his horn of plenty, and they could be spurred to exertion only by impulses from within, by the ardour of their superheated feelings. Fire became their element; flame, their mode of activity; and their lives were

perpetually scorched in the furnaces which alone made their work possible. As time went on they grew ever more lonely, more estranged from the world of men; whereas for Goethe, hour by hour, each moment that ticked away was richer than those which had gone before. The daemon within them grew stronger, the lure of the infinite more overpowering; there was privation of life in the beauty they fashioned, and beauty gushed forth from their lack of personal joys.

These polar differences in outlook explain why geniuses of the one group and of the other (despite the kinship which genius gives) differ so profoundly in their valuations of reality. To the daemonic temperament reality seems inadequate—Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche, each in his own way, were rebels against the established order. They would rather break than yield, uncompromising even at pain of death and annihilation. This makes them superb figures of tragedy—indeed, their whole life is one long tragedy. Goethe conversely (how frankly he understands himself!) admits to Zelter that he does not feel himself born to be a tragic dramatist, "for my temperament is conciliatory". He does not, like those others, want unending warfare; as a "preservative" and "pacifying force", he wants compromise and harmony. With a sentiment to which one can only give the name of piety, he subordinates himself to life as to a higher power, as to the supreme power, which he reveres in all its forms and phases, saying: "Life is good, whatever turn it takes." But from those who are tormented by the daemon, and hounded by him through the world, nothing is further than the thought of paying homage to reality. They do not value reality at a pin's fee; they revere nothing but the infinite, and for them art is the only way of reaching it. That is why they esteem art more than life, poesy more than reality. Like Michelangelo in his blind ardour hewing at thousands of blocks of marble, with frenzied zeal they cut their way along the dark galleries of the innermost self towards the sparkling stone revealed to them in their dreams as present in the hidden depths; whereas Goethe (like Leonardo) feels that art is but one of the manifold forms of life, dear to him just as science and philosophy are dear, a

fragment, a small and effective constituent of his life. That is why the forms of daemonic activity grow more intensive, whilst those of a Goethe grow more extensive. Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche transform their being in the direction of an overwhelming particularity, ostensibly unconditioned; Goethe moves continually in the direction of an increasingly comprehensive universality.

A love for extant reality directs Goethe's aims (the aims of the anti-daemonic genius) towards security, towards a wise self-preservation. By their contempt for reality the daemonic geniuses are impelled to take gamblers' chances, to march towards danger, towards violent self-expansion, ending in self-destruction. In Goethe, all forces work centripetally, moving from the periphery towards the core; in the daemonics the will-to-power operates centrifugally, striving away from the innermost circle of life, inevitably disrupting it. This flight into fathomless space, this overflow into the formless, is sublimated most conspicuously in a fondness for music. There, where shore and shape are lacking, they can drift unguided into their proper element, so that in decay Hölderlin and Nietzsche, and even the harsher-fibred Kleist, gave themselves up to its magic. Understanding is resolved into ecstasy, language into rhythm. Always (in Lenau likewise) music heralds the onrush of the daemonic spirit. On the other hand Goethe's attitude towards music is "cautious and reserved". He dreads its beguiling force, its capacity to distract the will towards unessentials; in his hours of strength he forcibly represses his interest in it—even in Beethoven. Only in moments of weakness, when he is ailing or in love, does he surrender to its charm. He finds his true element in drawing, in the plastic arts; in all that offers concrete forms; in all that imposes limits upon the vague, the shapeless; in all that hinders the disintegration of matter. The daemonics love that which unbinds, that which confers freedom, that which leads back into the chaos of feeling—but he, with his scientific instinct for self-preservation, grasps at everything which furthers individual stability; he acclaims order, normality, form and law.

In a hundred other ways I could dilate upon this fruitful contrast between those who mastered the daemon and those whom he held in thrall, but shall content myself with a reference to the geometrical as the plainest of them all. The formula of Goethe's life was the circle, a closed curve; that of an existence perfectly rounded and self-contained, with a boundary returning ever into itself, perpetually equidistant from the centre, developing steadily outwards from within. That is why there is no culminating point in Goethe's career, no topmost summit of production. His nature grew equably on every side. But, as already indicated, the daemonics' curve is the parabola—a steep, impetuous ascent, an uprush into limitless space, a brusque change of direction, followed by a no less steep, a no less impetuous decline. The climax, both in respect of imaginative creation and in respect of the artist's personal life, is reached immediately before the fall. There is a strange coincidence here. The collapse of the daemonics' career, the personal collapse of Hölderlin and Kleist and Nietzsche, is an integral constituent of their destiny. This collapse is needed to complete the picture, just as the descending limb of the parabola completes the geometrical figure. Goethe's death, on the other hand, is an inconspicuous point in the circle, adding naught of moment to the story of his life. He dies, not like those others, a mysterious, heroic, quasi-legendary death; he dies a patriarch, in his bed, and vainly has the popular myth that he died with the words "More light" on his lips endeavoured to give a symbolic or prophetic significance to his last hour. Such a life ends only because it has been fulfilled, but the life of the daemonic terminates in an explosion or a conflagration. In the latter case death compensates for the material poverty of life, surrounding its close with an aura of mystery, and he whose career has been a tragedy is vouchsafed a hero's end.

Passionate self-surrender to absorption into the elemental, on the one hand, and passionate self-maintenance with a stubborn insistence upon personal guidance, on the other—both forms of the struggle with the daemon need fortitude, and both are glorious victories in the realm of mind. Alike in

Goethe's fulfilment of life and in the creative self-immolation of the daemonics, there is achieved (though in different ways) the same task—that of making unbounded demands upon life. If, in this book, I have contrasted the divergent types of character, it has been in order to reveal the antithetic beauties of the two. It has never been my wish to establish rival scales of value, and still less to lend weight to the conventional, nay, trivial diagnosis, that Goethe represented health and the thralls of the daemon disease, that Goethe was normal whilst they were pathological. This word "pathological" applies only to the lower world, the world of the unproductive; for when illness creates the imperishable it is no longer illness but a form of super-health, the best health there is. Even though the daemonic is at the utmost marge of life, and passes beyond that marge into untrodden and unattainable fields, it is nonetheless part of the very substance of mankind and lies within the sphere of the natural. For Nature herself, who for millenniums has conferred upon the seed its miracle of growth and has granted the embryo power to develop in the mother's womb, Nature herself, though subject to law, knows her daemonic moments, her phases of outbreak and excess, when (in thunderstorms, in cyclones, in cataclysms) she fiercely lavishes her forces and seems bent on self-destruction. She too at times—though rarely, just as persons of daemonic type are rare—ceases to move in accordance with her usual bland routine, but only then, only in her outbursts, do we become aware of her full might. Nothing but the exceptional makes adequate appeal to our senses; nothing but dread of unfamiliar forces sets our feelings puissantly athrill. That is why the extraordinary is always the standard of greatness. Invariably, even in its most perplexing and most dangerous manifestations, the creative genius has a value supreme over other values, a meaning profounder than that of all other meanings.

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* *mania*

HÖLDERLIN

1770–1843

'Tis hard for mortals to recognise the pure of heart.

The Death of Empedocles

A SPLENDID COMPANY OF YOUTHS

Night would for ever reign supreme, and cold would be the earth,
The soul would be consumed by bitter need, did not the gods,
In their goodness, send down such youths from time to time
To refresh the wilting lives of mortal men.

The Death of Empedocles

WHEN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WAS YOUNG, it was not fond of its young people. A new and ardent generation had arisen. Boldly and strenuously, in a Europe whose traditions had been shattered, it was marching from all quarters towards the dawn of unprecedented freedom. The bugles of the Revolution had awakened it, and, rejoicing in the springtime, it was inspired with a vigorous faith. Before he was thirty, Camille Desmoulins, with a hardy gesture, had razed the Bastille to the ground; a year or two older, Robespierre, the barrister from Arras, had made kings and emperors tremble before the blast of his decrees; Bonaparte, the little lieutenant, a Corsican by birth, had with his sword shaped the frontiers of Europe as he willed, and had seized the most splendid crown in the world—these deeds had made the impossible seem possible, had brought the splendours of the earth within the grasp of any man possessed of unshrinking courage. Youth's hour had struck. In the warmth of the vernal showers, the fresh green shoots of enthusiasm were sprouting everywhere from the soil. Young folk were lifting their eyes towards the stars, were storming across the threshold of the coming century, their own by right divine. The eighteenth century had belonged to the old and the wise, to Voltaire and Rousseau, to Leibniz and Kant, to Haydn and Wieland, to the cautious and the patient, to the great and the learned; now the times had ripened for youth and valour, for passion and impetuousness. Mighty was the wave in which they swept forward. Never since the days of the Renaissance had Europe known a more magnificent surge of the spirit.

But the new century did not like this intrepid offspring. It dreaded the exuberance, was mistrustful of the ecstasy, of its

youthful enthusiasts. Relentlessly it mowed down the crop as soon as the tender green showed above ground. By hundreds of thousands the most intrepid were slaughtered in the Napoleonic wars; for fifteen years the noblest and the best were ground to powder in this murderous mill; France, Germany, Italy, the snowfields of Russia and the deserts of Egypt were littered with their bones. Nor was it enough to slay the body; the soul likewise was destroyed. Murderous wrath did not stop short after weeding out the warriors. The axe fell with equal truculence upon dreamers and singers who had scarcely emerged from boyhood when the century was opening. Never before in so short a time had there been offered up such a hecatomb of writers and artists as those who went to their deaths soon after Schiller (not suspecting the imminence of his own doom) had acclaimed their genius. Never had Fate sickled such an abundance of illustrious and rathe-ripe figures. Never had the altar of the gods been sprinkled with so much divine blood.

They died in manifold ways, prematurely, in the hour of vigorous burgeoning. André Chénier, a young Apollo through whom classical Greece was reborn in France, was driven to the guillotine in one of the last tumbrils of the Terror. Had he been granted twenty-four hours more, had he survived the night between the eighth and the ninth of Thermidor, he would have been saved from the scaffold and would have been restored to his work as a poet in whom the spirit of the singers of ancient Greece had found a new home. But Destiny was inexorable, and would spare him no more than the others on whom her doom had been spoken. In England, after a long lapse into the commonplace, a lyrical genius had come to life, John Keats, delicately attuned to the beauties of the universe—to sing sweetly for a few short years and die at twenty-five. Shelley, his brother in the spirit, the ardent being to whom Nature had revealed her loveliest mysteries, mourned over his grave; *Adonais* was the sublimest elegy ever conceived by one poet for another; yet in little more than a year Shelley was drowned wantonly in a storm and his body was washed ashore on the Tyrrhene strand. Byron, Shelley's friend and Goethe's

favourite heir, hastened to the spot to erect a pyre beside the southern sea and burn the poet's corpse as Achilles burned that of his dead comrade-at-arms Patroclus; Shelley's mortal remains thus flamed into the Italian skies, but Byron himself was to die of fever two years later at Missolonghi. Within a decade the finest lyrical voices of France and England were stilled for ever. Nor was Germany spared a like destiny. Novalis, whose mystical piety had given him insight into the secrets of nature, had his light too soon extinguished, like that of a taper in a draughty cell; Kleist blew out his brains in despair; Raimund, too, committed suicide; Georg Büchner perished of a nervous fever when only twenty-four; Wilhelm Hauff, a writer of fantasies, had no time for his genius to ripen, and went down to the tomb at the age of twenty-five; Schubert died of typhus before he was thirty-two. The members of this younger generation were laid low by the bludgeons and poisons of disease, by the frenzy of self-destruction, by the duellist's pistol or the assassin's dagger. Leopardi, the philosopher of despair, succumbed to a long and painful malady at thirty-nine; Bellini, the composer of *Norma*, was but thirty-four when illness carried him away; Griboyedov, the satirist, the brightest intelligence of awakening Russia, was the same age when stabbed in Tehran by a Persian. His body was brought to Tiflis, and it chanced that in the Caucasus, another great Russian genius, Pushkin, encountered the funeral procession. But Pushkin, too, died young, and by violence, being killed in a duel. Not one of these men lived to be forty, few of them to be thirty. The most luxuriant lyrical blossoming Europe had known was nipped in the bud; devastated was the splendid company of youths who in so many tongues were singing paeans to nature and glorifying the world. Lonely as Merlin in the enchanted forest, unacquainted with the new time, half forgotten and half legendary, Goethe, the ancient sage, lived on at Weimar; there were no lips but his, withered with age, to voice an Orphic lay. At once progenitor and inheritor of this new generation into which he had persisted, he cherished and tended the fires of poesy in a brazen urn.

One only of the splendid company, the most typical,

survived for many, many years in the world whence the gods had fled—Hölderlin, whose fate was the strangest of them all. His lips were still ruddy; his ageing frame still moved to and fro across the German soil; still did he gaze through the window at the beloved landscape of the Neckar; he could still raise his eyes affectionately towards "Father Ether", the eternal sky. But his senses were no longer awake, being shrouded in an unending dream. The jealous gods, though they had not slain him, had blinded the man who had made their secrets known, had treated him as they had treated Tiresias the seer. His mind was enwrapped in a veil. With disordered senses, this man, "sold into slavery to the celestial powers", lived on for decades, dead to himself and to the world, while nothing but rhythms, waves of unmeaning sound, issued from his lips. The springtide with its blossoms came and went, the season he had been so fond of passed him by, for he noted neither its advent nor its going any more. Men flourished and died, and he paid no heed. Schiller and Goethe and Kant and Napoleon, the great figures of his prime, had preceded him into the grave; steam-driven trains were thundering on iron roads across the Germany of his youthful visions. Huge towns were arising, new territories were being formed, but naught in these great changes stirred the numb intelligence. His hair was grey. The ghost of the man he had once been, he tottered hither and thither through the streets of Tübingen, made mock of by the children, despised by the students, none of whom could discern the marvellous mind that lay dormant behind the tragic mask. Long time, now, since anyone had given a thought to Hölderlin. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, Bettina von Arnim became aware that the poet whom in her youth she had acclaimed as a god was lingering on in a carpenter's house, and she was as much startled as if one of the shades had come back to earth from Hades—so forgotten were Hölderlin's glories, so faded was his name. When at length he died, his passing attracted no more attention in the German world than the falling of an autumn leaf. Workmen bore his coffin to the burial place. Of the thousands upon thousands of manuscript pages he left, many were torn up and

burned, while others remained to yellow and moulder in one library or another. Unread, unrecognised by a whole generation was the message of this last and purest of the splendid company.

Like a Greek statue buried in the earth, Hölderlin's image was hidden for decades in the rubbish heap of oblivion. But just as, in the end, careful and loving hands have disinterred the works of the ancient sculptors, so has it happened with Hölderlin, and our generation has been amazed at the beauty of this marble figure. He lives once more as the last embodiment of German Hellenism, his inspiration, as erstwhile, finding expression in song. The springtides that he proclaimed seem immortalised in his personality, and, with the transfigured visage of the illuminate, he has emerged from darkness into the light of a new dawn.

CHILDHOOD

From their tranquil home the gods oft send,
For a brief space, their darlings down to earth,
That, moved by the sight of such sublimity,
Remembering, the hearts of mortals may rejoice.

HÖLDERLIN WAS BORN AT LAUFFEN, a quaint old village on the Neckar, some few leagues downstream from Schiller's birthplace at Marbach. This Swabian countryside is the most appealing in Germany, it is the "Italy of the North". The Alps are not so near as to tower oppressively, and are yet within range; the streams run in silver curves amid pleasant vineyards; and among those who dwell there the harshness of the Alemannic stock is tempered by a cheerfulness which frequently finds vent in song. The land is fertile without undue luxuriance; nature is bountiful without being spendthrift; there is no sharp line of division between handicrafts and peasant agriculture. It is the true homeland of idyllic verse, this region where man's elementary needs are easily satisfied, and even a poet whose mind is shadowed with gloom loses some of his bitterness when his thoughts fly back to the scenes of his childhood:

Angels of this our land! O you before whom even the strongest
Must in his loneliness bow, bending a reverent knee,
Seeking support from his friends, and praying the help of his dear ones,
That they may gladly take part, share in the burden of joy—
Bountiful angels, be thanked!

With what elegiac tenderness does the singer, his melancholy notwithstanding, write of Swabia, whose sky means more to him than the skies of the wider world; how measured become his ecstasies when his mind returns to early memories. Compelled to leave his homeland, betrayed by the Hellas he had so fervently adored, frustrated in his hopes, he can still rejoice in the revival of youthful impressions, and embody them in verse:

Land where the smiling slopes have one and all of them vineyards!
Down on the lush green grass tumbles in autumn the fruit;
Gladly the sun-kissed mountains bathe their feet in the rivers,
Their heads wearing as crowns garlands of shrubs and of moss,
And, like children carried lightly on fatherly shoulders,
Borne on the circling hills, strongholds and farmsteads uprise.

Throughout life Hölderlin yearned for this region where he had spent his childhood, and had enjoyed the happiest hours he was ever to know.

Kindly nature cherished him, kindly women saw to his upbringing, and it was his unhappy fate that his father should have died early, so that there was no one to discipline him by timely severity, no one to harden the muscles of feeling for the contest with his perennial enemy—life. Not in his case was there, as in Goethe's, a pedantic education capable of arousing a sense of responsibility. His only training was in piety, inculcated by his grandmother and his mother (a woman of gentle disposition), and at an early age the dreamer sought refuge from finite actualities in music—that infinity which is the first to lure a sensitive youth. But the idyll was brief. When he was barely fourteen the lad went as boarder to the monastery school of Denkendorf and then to the seminary of Maulbronn. At eighteen he became a student of theology in the university of Tübingen, remaining there till 1793. Thus for nearly a decade the liberty-loving boy was penned behind walls, under cloistral restraint, and dwelt in the soul-deadening proximity characteristic of a communal existence. The change was too glaring to be other than painful and even disastrous, the change from the freedom of hours spent in roaming through fields or beside the river, of days passed under the affectionate supervision of his mother, to the mechanised routine of a conventual discipline. For Hölderlin these seminary years were what the years as a cadet were for Kleist, years of repression which increased his sensitiveness, producing excessive tensions and leading to a flight from reality. A hidden sore remained, a kink which nothing could straighten. Writing ten years later, he says:

"Let me explain to you that since early boyhood I have had a character trait which is still the one I love best, what I may call a waxen impressionability of disposition—but it was this which was most grossly mishandled so long as I was in the monastery." During those years of repression, the noblest and most intimate element of his faith in life was being so maltreated that it was partly withered before the doors opened and he could return to the sunlight of the outer world. Thus early began, though only in a minor degree, the melancholy and the sense of being forlorn in an uncongenial world which were to cloud his spirit, and in the end to deprive him of all capacity for joy.

Such was the beginning, in the twilight of childhood and during the formative years, of that inward cleavage in Hölderlin, of that pitiless gulf between the world at large and the world of his own self. Here was a wound which never healed. To the end of his days he felt like one who has been driven forth into the wilderness; always he looked back with longing to the happiness of his lost home, which often loomed like a mirage amid his poetic intuitions and memories, compounded of dreams and the strains of distant music. Perennially immature, he never ceased to feel that he had been snatched from this heaven of his youth to be thrust into a domain of uncongenial realities. That accounted for his hostility to his environment. Throughout life he remained unteachable. Though, from time to time, seeming joys alternated with gloom, happiness with disillusionment, none of these experiences could modify his attitude of alienation from reality. "From my earliest youth the world scared me, so that my mind was thrust back into itself," he once wrote to Neuffer. That was why he could never form binding ties or enter into effective relationships with his fellows, being what modern psychologists call an introvert, one of those who mistrustfully interpose barriers between themselves and stimuli from without, developing exclusively from within through the cultivation of the germinal characteristics implanted in them before birth. Half, at least, of his poems are inspired by the same motif, that of the insoluble opposition between trustful and carefree youth, on the one hand, and the inimical grown-up existence in which all illusions are lost, on the other; that of the contrast between a "practical" life in time and space and a life lived in the abstract world of thought. At twenty he wrote in mournful mood a poem to which he gave the title *Then and Now*; and in his hymn *To Nature* the same melody which from childhood ran ever through his mind rings forth anew:

When I still around thy veil was playing,

Still to thee, as clings a flower, clung,

Felt thy kind heart in every sound and saying—

Soft in answer stirred a heart still young.

When I still, with confidence and yearning,

Rich as thou, before thy image stood,

Place for tears which comfort still discerning,

Loving much a world that still seemed good;

When my spirit sunward still was turning,

Nature, at thy voice, while still in me

Fond affection for the stars was burning,

And the spring seemed God's own melody;

When in the breeze that made the hedges rustle

Sounded still thy voice, alive with joy—

Full of peace, remote from life's harsh tussle,

Those days of gold when I was still a boy!

But following close upon this paean to childhood comes in a minor key the answer of the young man so early disillusioned:

Dead and gone the world that trained and nourished,

Nature's breasts are now but fountains sealed,

Rounded breasts that like twin heavens flourished,

Sere now and arid like a stubble field.

As of yore, when I am full of sorrow,

Spring intones a kind, consoling song,

But, alas, my life no joy can borrow,

Spring in me has withered overlong.

Where we mortals fondest love have cherished,

Love's a shadow. Ring the shadow's knell!

When the golden dreams of childhood perished,

Nature, kindly nature, died as well.

In days when joy's illusion strings the lyre,

You know not that from home you have been rent,

But never will you win your heart's desire

Save when dreams can bring you false content.

In these stanzas Hölderlin's romantic attitude towards life is already fixed; his glance is forever returning to the "magic cloud in which the good angel of my childhood enveloped me, lest I should too soon catch sight of the petty and the barbarous in the world by which I was surrounded". Even before attaining his majority, he was angrily barring himself from the inroads of experience. Backwards and upwards were the only two directions in which he was willing to move; never would he enter frankly into life but would only try to pass beyond it. Not even in the form of a struggle with them would he bring himself into touch with the forces of his own time. He devoted his energies to silent endurance, to the maintenance of his unsullied aloofness. Hence his isolation.

In essentials, Hölderlin's development was finished when he left school. Thereafter, no doubt, his qualities became intensified, but there was no further unfolding, no acceptance of new outlooks, no enrichment of his nature. Everyday life seemed to him unmeaning; he would neither learn from it nor take over anything from it; animated by his instinct for purity, he would tolerate no admixture of its multifarious ingredients with his homogeneous personality. Thereby he offended against the world's law, and his destiny became one of atonement for pride, for an overweening yet glorious self-exaltation. The world's law demands admixture, and will tolerate no exemption from the universal circulation of substance. One who refuses to bathe in the warm current of life is left stranded on the shore; the non-participant is foredoomed to solitude. Hölderlin's claim that he should be allowed to serve art and not actual existence, the gods and not his fellow men, constitutes (let me repeat—in a sublime and transcendental sense), like that of his Empedocles, an intolerable presumption. None but the gods are privileged to live thus apart, in unchallenged purity. What can we expect but that life should take vengeance upon those who disdain it by subjecting them to its meanest forces, by exposing them to the torture of crude starvation, by enforcing the basest servitude upon those who refuse any and every form of service? Because Hölderlin refused to share his goods, all his possessions were reft from him; because he would not allow his spirit to be bound, his whole existence passed into thraldom. Hölderlin's beauty is the very thing he has to suffer for. His faith in a higher world makes him a rebel against this lower world, from which his sole escape is on the pinions of verse. Only when this unteachable hero recognises the significance of his doom does he for a season become master of his fate. He is vouchsafed no more than the fleeting hours between the rising and the setting of the sun, between the start upon his voyage and the speedily ensuing shipwreck, but the evanescent vision of his youth is a splendid one while it lasts. His ship is encircled by the foaming waves of the infinite; his defiant spirit scales the clouds.

LIKENESS AS A STUDENT IN TÜBINGEN

I never understood the words of men,

But grew up in the arms of the gods.

ALMOST THE ONLY PORTRAIT OF HÖLDERLIN that has come down to us is an early one, and it produces the impression of a gleam of sunshine through a rift in louring clouds. We see a slender youth whose fair hair runs back in a soft wave from a noble forehead. His lips are sharply cut; his cheeks have a tender femininity (one thinks of them as apt to be suffused with blushes); his eyes shine brightly from beneath arched black brows. There is nothing robust in his features, but indications, rather, of girlish bashfulness and of feelings that would be easily hurt. At their first meeting, Schiller recognised his "decorum and good behaviour", and we can picture the youth, his slenderness enhanced by the severely black gown of a Protestant seminarist, gravely and thoughtfully pacing the cloisters. He looked like a musician, somewhat resembling young Mozart, of whom we have a picture at a corresponding age, and it is as a musician that his companions describe him.

"He played the violin; I have never forgotten the regularity of his features, the gentleness of his look, his tall stature, the neatness of his attire and the unmistakable impression of sublimity which his whole appearance produced." We cannot think of these delicate lips as uttering a coarse word, of these enthusiastic eyes as revealing unclean lusts, of this reflective brow as harbouring base imaginings, but it is no less impossible to conceive of his suavely aristocratic reserve melting into genuine cheerfulness. His fellow students, indeed, speak of his reserve as passing due limits, to become self-suppression and even timidity. He took, they say, little or no part in their social life. Enough for him in the refectory to join with a few chosen comrades in the impassioned reading of the verses of Ossian, Klopstock and Schiller, or to unburden his soul in music. Without being proud, he kept others at a distance, and when he left his cell to mingle with the rest of the students, it was "as if Apollo were striding through the

hall". Even the uninspired author of the foregoing phrase, a pastor's son and himself subsequently a pastor, feels impelled to place Hölderlin among the gods and heroes of classical Greece.

Only for a moment, however, does the face thus shine forth in the radiance of a spiritual sunrise, a countenance divinely bright before the shadows of an unhappy fate have gathered thickly around it. In what should have been his prime, no likeness of the man was painted. There has been preserved for us an image of the eternal youth, who, indeed, never properly grew up. The other likeness dates from half a century later, to show the cavernous and shrivelled mask of a man in his second childhood. Meanwhile he had lived through the period of grey twilight, and we have no more than words to tell us how the halcyon sheen, the signs of radiant inspiration, began to fade.

The "good behaviour" of which Schiller speaks soon stiffened into compulsive neurosis, the shyness degenerated into misanthropy. Seated at the lower end of the table, shabbily clad as a tutor and deemed little better than a liveried servant, he had to acquire the humble demeanour of an underling. Anxious, distressed, with nothing more than impotent awareness of his own exceptional talent, he lost the freedom of stride with which he had seemed to march over the hilltops, and inwardly, likewise, his impetus died away, his mental balance was lost. He became suspicious and over-sensitive; "a casual phrase could wound him"; the ambiguity of his position was a misery to him; and mortified ambition, thrust back upon itself, drove a wedge deep into his breast. More and more he learnt to veil his real self from the brutal glances of the intellectual mob he was compelled to serve, and by degrees it grew second nature to him to wear this mask of servility. At length, when he became definitely insane and all attempt to conceal his passions was abandoned, the internal conflict was distressingly revealed. The servility behind which the tutor had hidden the world of the inner man developed into a mania for self-humiliation. Thenceforward it was his way to

greet strangers with unending obeisances, and to overload them with such reverential apostrophes as “Your Holiness!”, “Your Excellency!”, “Your Grace!” His face was weary and listless; the eyes that had flashed so brightly lost their sparkle, except when at times they were fired by the lightnings of the daemon into whose power he had fallen. In later days he seemed even to shrink in stature; he acquired a stoop—ill-omened symbol!—and hung his head as though it were too heavy to carry erect.

In the pencil sketch of Hölderlin at seventy, of the man “sold into slavery to the celestial powers”, we see a wizened and toothless ancient leaning on a stick and groping his way. The other hand is solemnly upraised as he spouts verses into the void. Yet the harmony of feature defies the inward conflict, and the forehead is still nobly arched beneath the grey locks, in spite of the havoc wrought by age. With a shudder, nonetheless, did the old man’s rare visitors contemplate the spectral visage of Scardanelli, vainly endeavouring to trace the lineaments of that herald of fate who had excelled in the reverent depiction of the beauty and the menace of the heavenly powers. Those lineaments had vanished for ever. It was the wraith of Hölderlin that lingered for forty years on earth. The gods had long since recalled the poet to themselves in the likeness of an undying youth. Age could not wither the glory of his song.

THE POET'S MISSION

Those only believe in the divine

Who are themselves divine.

FOR HÖLDERLIN, school had been a prison. When school days were over, it was in a restless mood, and full of anxiety and foreboding, that he came forth to face the world, his enemy. As far as objective knowledge was concerned, he had been amply instructed at the university of Tübingen. He was a master of three dead languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin; with Hegel and Schelling, who had been his fellow boarders, he had sedulously studied philosophy; and his diploma stated that he had not been idle in the acquirement of theological lore. "*Studia theologica magno cum successo tractavit. Orationem sacram recte elaboratam decenter recitavit*."* He could doubtless have taken orders as a Protestant pastor, with fair prospects of obtaining an incumbency. His mother's dearest wish had, so far, been fulfilled. Her son was now fitted for a career either secular or clerical, for the occupancy of a pulpit or of a professorial chair.

But Hölderlin himself had no desire either for the one or for the other; he thought only of his mission as a revealer. At the university (to quote the florid wording of the diploma once more), as a "*literarum elegantiarum assiduus cultor*"* he had written poems—at first elegiacs in imitation of the classics, then as a follower of Klopstock's lead, and finally composing, in Schiller's resounding rhythms, *Hymns to the Ideals of Mankind*. A novel, *Hyperion*, had also been tentatively begun. From these early days the enthusiast was resolutely directing his life towards the infinite, towards the rocks on which it was to be shattered. Nothing could prevent his obeying with self-destructive zeal this call from the unseen.

Hölderlin would hear of no compromise with the practical requirements of a means of livelihood; it would have been "unworthy" to build a bridge (however narrow) between the prose of an ordinary civic occupation and the sublimity of a divine calling:

My mission is

To celebrate higher things, and that is why

God gave me speech and a grateful heart.

He was determined that the purity of his will should be unalloyed, that his essence should remain untainted. He did not want "troublous" reality, but set forth, like Shelley, in search of

some world

Where music and moonlight and feeling

Are one;

where no compromises would be needed, no admixture with base elements;

where the spirit could maintain itself aloof in its intrinsic brightness. In this inviolability, in this splendid contempt for real existence, there is manifest, even more than in any specific poem, Hölderlin's heroism. He knows when he sets out on such a quest that he is renouncing security, house and home and comfort; he knows how easy life would be for him "could he but be light-heartedly happy"; he knows that on the path he has chosen he is doomed "to be for ever and a day cut off from joy". But he prefers the poet's uncertain lot to philistine safety. With his gaze directed upward, his soul steadfast in its earthly tenement, heedless of the privations his body must suffer, he marches towards the invisible altar where he is to be both priest and victim.

This invincible resolution, this mystery of maintaining an absolute purity of purpose, this fixed decision that he would show unqualified devotion to life in its integrity, was the fundamental strength of a youth in other respects frail and unassuming. Hölderlin knew that the poet's goal, the infinite, could not be reached by one with divided heart and mind; that he who wished to reveal the divine must consecrate his own self, must sacrifice his very being, to the task. Hölderlin's conception of poesy was sacramental. The man with a poetic mission must offer up all that others receive from the world. If he is to be near the throne of grace, if he is to walk in the light of the divine, he must, as servant of the elements, live among them in sublime insecurity and ennobling danger. He must have unified his endeavours if he is to encounter the infinite, and unless his will is wholly directed towards his lofty aim, he will reach only the lower levels. At the outset Hölderlin recognised that unconditional devotion was essential. Before leaving the university he had made up his mind that he would not become a pastor or permanently bind himself to any secular career, would allow nothing to distract him from his supreme task as "guardian of the sacred flame". The road was hidden from him, but he had no doubt about the goal. Awake to the perils his weakness in face of the world exposed him to, but firm of purpose, he comforted himself with the reflection:

Are not all mortal men among thy kin?

Has not Destiny consecrated thee to service?

This being so, march onward,

Though weaponless, yet undismayed!

Whatever happens, give it thy blessing.

What befell Hölderlin was the outcome of this sense of consecration for a mission, of this determination to give himself wholly to the cause. The tragedy was that he had to begin his fight by waging it, not against his enemies, not against the rough world that he hated, but against those who were dearest to him and those who loved him best. His most formidable adversaries in his struggle to live life as poesy were his mother and his grandmother, his intimates, whose feelings he did not want to hurt, but whom sooner or later he was bound to disappoint. The heroic trends have no more dangerous opponents than those who mean well by the would-be hero, those whose

hearts are filled with love for him, and who for that very reason urge him to avoid stresses, hoping that the "sacred fire" in him can be damped down so as to smoulder on the domestic hearth. Touching was the way in which, for a decade, Hölderlin ("*suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*"*) found one excuse after another for refusing to fulfil his kinsfolk's wish that he should become a clergyman. Subterfuge was necessary, for he would not avow the true reason —his assurance that he had a poet's vocation. He spoke of his verses as no more than "attempts at poetry", and he told his mother that he hoped one day to prove himself worthy of her affection. Never making much of his successes, he continued to describe himself as a beginner. "I am profoundly convinced that the cause to which I am devoted is a noble one, and that it will show itself useful to mankind as soon as I have cultivated it sufficiently and have found the right method of expression."

Naturally enough, all that his mother and his grandmother could see behind these diffident words was the hard fact that Johann Christian Friedrich, homeless and unemployed, was chasing phantoms through an empty world. Widows both, they had spent year after year in their narrow quarters at Nürtingen, stinting their expenditure on food and clothes and firewood to provide the wherewithal for their darling boy's studies. With delight they read his respectful letters from school, they rejoiced in his good reports, and their hearts swelled with pride the first time some of his verses attained the honour of print. When the period of study was finished, they hoped that he would soon become a minister of religion, would wed a fair-haired maiden and settle down near at hand. Then, on Sundays, they would be able to hear him expound the word of God.

But Hölderlin knew that the dream would never be realised. The best he could hope for was not to awaken them too roughly. He was gentle, therefore, even in the emphasis with which he renounced the clerical career. Knowing that, much as they loved him, they were coming to regard him as a loafer, he tried to explain his mission, writing: "My leisure is not idleness, and it is far from my mind to aspire to an agreeable ease at others' cost." Again and again, he extolled the earnestness and morality of his vocation. "Believe me," he wrote respectfully to his mother, "that I do not think lightly of my relationship to you, and that I often put myself about a great deal in the endeavour to reconcile my scheme of life with your wishes." He tried to convince them that he was serving mankind as effectively as if he had been a pastor—knowing all the time that the attempt was vain. "It is not mere obstinacy that determines my present position. That position is determined by my character and my destiny, these being the only powers which no one can refuse to obey."

In spite of disappointment, the lonely old women stood by him. With a sigh they continued to send the unteachable young man their savings, to make him shirts and knit him socks—tears and sorrows being stitched or knitted into every garment. But as year followed year, and still (so it seemed to them) he shirked the essential duties of life while he wandered from place to place living upon casual engagements as tutor, they ventured once more to press

their wishes upon him. They did not, so they declared, want to interfere with his poetical ambitions, but surely these ambitions were not incompatible with his taking orders? They seemed to be foreshadowing Mörike, a kindred spirit to Hölderlin, who in days to come was to be both Protestant pastor and lyric poet. But the intimation of this possibility was a challenge to Hölderlin's belief that priestly service could brook no rival. He proclaimed his inmost conviction with the pride of one unfurling a banner, writing to his mother: "Many, doubtless stronger than I am, have endeavoured to play a double role, to be a man of affairs or a man of learning and at the same time a poet. But always in the end such persons have been compelled to sacrifice one career to the other, and this has been disastrous … for if a man sacrifices his ordinary career he is playing others false, and if he sacrifices his art he sins against a mission imposed on him by God—a sin as great as or greater than if he should sin against his body."

Unshaken as was the poet's confidence in his mission, not even the most modest of successes came to reward it. Hölderlin was twenty-five, he was thirty, and, still without a home of his own, still a tutor feeding at others' tables, he must write like a schoolboy to thank his mother and his grandmother for the vests, the handkerchiefs and the socks they sent him from time to time; must still put up with their reproaches for the disappointment he had caused them. These reproaches were hard to bear, and he once wrote despairingly to his mother: "I do wish you were quit of me." Again and again, however, he had to knock at the only door which remained open to him in a hostile world, and again and again to implore their patience. At length he came back to their threshold as a wreck. His struggle for the ideal had cost him the life of the real.

Hölderlin's heroism is splendid because it is free from pride and devoid of confidence in victory. All he is aware of is his mission, the summons from the invisible world; he believes in his calling, but has no assurance of success. He is forever vulnerable. Never did he feel, as Siegfried felt when winding the horn, that he was one on whose inviolable armour the shafts of Fate would be splintered. It is the feeling that he is foredoomed to destruction, that a menacing shadow dogs his footsteps, which makes his persistence in his chosen course so courageous. The reader must not think that Hölderlin's faith in poesy as the profoundest meaning of life implies a like belief in his own poetic gifts. As regards these latter he remained humble-minded. Nothing was further from him than the virile, almost morbid self-confidence of Nietzsche, who chose as his motto: "*Pauci mihi satis, unus mihi satis, nullus mihi satis*."* A chance word could discourage him; a word of criticism from Schiller could disturb him for months. When he was a schoolboy he admired such poetasters as Conz and Neuffer. Yet for all this personal modesty, for all this sensitiveness, he had a will of steel to animate his devotion to poesy, to fortify him for self-immolation. "My dear friend," he writes to one of his intimates, "when will people come to see that in our case the greatest force is the most modest in its manifestations, and that the divine message (when it issues from us) is always uttered with humility and sadness?" His heroism was not that of

the warrior, not the heroism of triumphant force; it was the heroism of the martyr who is ready, nay, glad, to suffer for the unseen, to perish on behalf of an ideal.

"Let it be as thou wilt, O Destiny!" With these words the unyielding poet bows in reverence before the doom he has brought upon himself. What higher form of heroism can there be than this, a heroism unstained with blood, untainted by the lust for power? The noblest courage is free from brutality, is not stubborn and pugnacious, but is an unarmed surrender to a necessity that is recognised as at once overwhelming and sacred.

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* *He has pursued theological studies with great success. He has correctly recited holy oration, properly elaborated.*

* *ceaseless cultivator of fine literature*

* *gentle in manner, resolute in execution*

* *Few to me is enough, one to me is enough, none to me is enough.*

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POESY

Men did not teach it me.
A devout heart, fired by unfathomable love,
Drove me towards the infinite.

NO OTHER GERMAN POET had so overwhelming a faith as Hölderlin in poesy and its divine origin. He transferred to the concept of poesy his own unalloyed purity. Strange as it may seem, this Protestant theological student from Swabia had gone back to the world of classical Greece in his attitude towards the invisible powers, believing in "Father Ether" and the sway of the Parcae far more fervently than did his contemporaries Novalis and Brentano in Christ. To him, poesy was what the Gospel was to them—the revelation of ultimate truth, the bread and the wine which brought the finite body of man into communion with the infinite and the eternal. For Goethe, poesy was no more than a fraction of life, whereas for Hölderlin it was the essential meaning of life; for the former it was a personal need, but for the latter it was a suprapersonal, a religious necessity. In poesy Hölderlin discerns with awe and veneration the divine afflatus which fertilises and inspires the world, the one possible harmony wherein, for blessed moments, the eternal cleavage of being can be resolved and man's perpetual tensions loosened. Just as the invisible ether fills the interspace between heaven and earth, so does poesy fill the abyss between the heights and the depths of the spirit, bridge the gulf that separates gods from men. Poesy (I must reiterate) was not for Hölderlin as it was for Goethe a musical supplement to life, an adornment to the spirit of mankind; it was the central purpose and meaning of that spirit, the all-embracing formative principle. Consecration to the service of poesy was therefore the only life worthy to be lived. Unless we understand this outlook, we shall fail to grasp the magnitude of Hölderlin's heroism.

Unceasingly did he expound in his verses the significance, the "mythos", of the poet as thus conceived, and only by following in his footsteps shall we be able to discern the animating principle of his passionate sense of responsibility and the vigour of his demand for freedom from mundane ties. For him, with his faith in the "heavenly powers", the cosmos was dichotomised in the Greek, the Platonic, sense. Above "live the lords of heaven, rejoicing in the light". Below are we poor mortals working at the meaningless treadmill of our daily tasks:

Barred from the light of God's countenance, wandering, lives as in
Hades Our race, lost in the darkness. Here there is no one to help them,
Toiling each for himself, and each in the thunderous workshop
Hears but the clang of his own tools. Hard and unending the labour,
Wearily, mightily striving. Ceaseless, but ever and ever
Fruitless as that of the Furies, tending nowhither, their struggle.

As in Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, the world is cloven into night and light, until the dawn "takes pity on the torment", until a mediator between the two spheres comes upon the scene. The cosmos would remain twin solitudes—the loneliness of the gods and the loneliness of men—did there not arise between them a fugitive tie; did not the higher world mirror the lower, and the lower the higher. Even the gods on high, "moving in the blessed light", would not be happy were it not for these ties; their feelings would be numb but for the stimulus of responsive human feeling:

As heroes garlands need, consecrate elements likewise
Need for their sustenance worship, a human heart's adoration.

The lower domain is drawn towards the higher, the higher towards the lower; spirit swings towards life, and life aspires to spirit; even imperishable nature is unmeaning until it gains mortal recognition, until it wins the love of earthly beings. The rose is not truly a rose unless it is present as such to human perception, the sunset is beautiful only when its glories are reproduced on the human retina. Just as man needs the divine to keep him from destruction, so does the divine need man for its own fulfilment. The gods therefore summon witnesses of their power, fashion the mouths that will sing their praises, create the poet thanks to whom they for the first time become truly gods.

This basic idea of Hölderlin's may (like all his poetic notions) be only borrowed. He takes it on loan from the "stupendous mind of Schiller". Yet how much more exalted is Hölderlin's

conception! Schiller had written:

Friendless was the world's great Master;

Felt a need, and therefore made the spirits,

Blessed mirrors of his blessedness.

Compare with this Hölderlin's Orphic vision of the birth of the poets:

For voiceless and lonely,

Fruitless in his obscurity,

Despite all the signs and lightnings

And floods at his disposal,

Would have been our Heavenly Father,

And never would he have found true esteem among mortals,

But that the congregations can raise their hearts in song.

Thus whereas according to Schiller it is, so to say, to relieve his own tedium that the Divine Being creates the poet (Schiller still thinking of art as a sort of sublime diversion), according to Hölderlin the making of the poet is necessary to God, who is not divine but for the existence of the poet, becomes divine only through the poet's instrumentality. Fundamental in Hölderlin's scheme is the idea that poesy is indispensable to the world; nay, more, that it is not merely a creation within the cosmos, but itself creates the cosmos. Not simply to amuse themselves did the gods make the poet, but because they were constrained to do so; they needed him, "the envoy of the flowing word":

Of their own immortality

The gods have a surfeit. One thing

The heavenly powers need above all,

They need heroes and human beings

And mortals in general. For, inasmuch as

The blessed ones are themselves passionless,

Another perforce—if the phrase be allowed—

Must feel in the name of the gods.

They need him.

They need him, the gods, and in like manner men need poets, the

consecrated vessels

Wherein the wine of life, the spirit

Of the heroes, is stored.

In the poets the upper and the lower run together; they resolve discord into harmony, for

The thoughts of the world-soul

Silently ripen in the poet's heart.

Thus, simultaneously elect and accursed, the poet wanders between solitude and solitude, for he is begotten on earth but permeated with the divine essence, his mission being to contemplate the divine in the plenitude of its divinity while revealing it to mortals in that earthly semblance which their eyes are capable of contemplating. He comes from the world of men, helped along his course by the gods. He is one of the resounding steps of "the stairway by which the sons of heaven descend to make themselves known to the children of men". Through the poet, dull-witted mortals win symbolical experience of the divine; as in the mystery of the chalice and the host, through his words they enjoy the body and the blood of infinity. Therefore does he wear (though they are invisible) priestly vestments, and he is vowed to inviolable purity.

This significance of the poet is the spiritual centre of Hölderlin's world. His writings breathe an

invincible faith in the sacramental mission of poesy. This conviction is what gives his moral attitude its ceremonial solemnity. When, in any of his poems, he contemplates the divine, he loses all sense of personal participation, regarding himself as nothing but an emissary from heaven to earth. He who is "the voice of the gods", "the herald of the hero", or (as he says in another place) wants to be "the tongue of the people", needs the sublimity of speech, the elevation of conduct, the purity, of one whose mission it is to reveal God to man; he is speaking from the steps of an invisible temple to an invisible congregation, to a dream populace which is to arise out of the actual inhabitants of the everyday world—for "what endures is created by the poets". Since the gods are mute, the poet speaks in their name and in their spirit, the sculptor of the imperishable in a life where everything else is fleeting.

Hölderlin never lost the consciousness of his mission, but whereas in the first flush of youth he had been gloriously happy in his sense of election, as the years passed his mood became gloomier, more tragical, when the foreboding of a heroic destiny overwhelmed him. The youth had felt that a lofty position had been graciously vouchsafed him, but in maturer years he came to regard himself as doomed to suffer:

Those who lend us the heavenly fire,

The gods, bestow likewise the sacred gift of pain.

He knew that the sacerdocy of the poet implied the forfeiture of happiness. The chosen one was marked for grief, as a tree in the forest is marked with a red sign for the axe. Hyperion already hints at this, saying: "Cherish genius, and it will rend in sunder the ties of life", but it is only as Empedocles that Hölderlin becomes fully aware of the curse the gods hold in store for those who "contemplate the divine in the plenitude of its divinity".

The poet is in perpetual danger because he is in close contact with the primal forces. He resembles the lightning conductor, whose aspiring point receives the discharge of the infinite; for he, the mediator, must pass the heavenly message down enwrapped in song. Eternally alone, with a challenge he confronts the dangerous powers, and as the condensed fires pass on their way, the tension is almost insupportable. He may not refrain from transmitting the awakened flame, from uttering the prophetic message. Did he do so,

He would himself be consumed,

Would have turned against himself,

For never will the heavenly fire

Endure to be prisoned.

Yet he must not be fully outspoken. It would be a crime in the poet either to suppress the divine word or to be unrestrained in the use of God's ineffable name. He must be ever searching for the divine, the heroic in man, and at the same time must recognise man's baseness without therefore despairing of his fellows, and he must sing the praises of the gods who have left him, their revealer, alone in his misery on earth. Both speech and silence are for him a sacred obligation. The initiates are sealed for their high calling.

Hölderlin, therefore, is fully conscious of the fate which awaits him. A decade before his tragical destiny is fulfilled, the shadow of coming destruction throws itself across his path. But Hölderlin, the pastor's grandson, like Nietzsche, the pastor's son, has the courage of Prometheus, nay, the longing of Prometheus to measure his strength against the infinite. He never tries, as Goethe tried, to dam, to exorcise or to bridle the daemonic exuberance of his nature. Whereas Goethe was perpetually running away from his fate in order to save the invaluable treasure of life which had (he felt) been entrusted to his care, Hölderlin, the stout-hearted, faced the battle with no armour but his purity. At once fearless and pious, he uplifted his voice in a hymn to exhort the brethren and martyrs of poesy to keep alive their faith in the heroism of supreme responsibility, in the heroism of their mission:

We must not disavow our nobility,

The impulse within us to form

The unformed after the fashion of the divine.

The reward, which is beyond price, must not be privily abated by pettiness of mood, by grudging the loss of trivial happiness. Poesy is a challenge to fate; it is piety and boldness conjoined. One who holds converse with Heaven must not be afraid of its lightnings or seek to evade an inexorable fate:

For it behooves us, poets, to stand firm
With heads uncovered 'mid God's storms.
The Father's radiance seize we in our hands,
Passing the heavenly message down
Enwrapped in song,
To the people, our brothers.
For pure-hearted are we,
Like children, innocent our hands,
The Father's radiance will not scorch them,
And, though profoundly moved,
Sharing in God's own pangs,
Our imperishable hearts are undismayed.

PHAETHON, OR ENTHUSIASM

Enthusiasm, we discover
In thine arms a blissful tomb,
Sinking, like a happy lover,
In thy waves, accepting doom.
Then with pride and courage burning,
When the signal calls to fight,
See us, like the stars, returning
Into life's swift-passing night.

FOR A MISSION SO HEROIC as that which is assigned to the poet by Hölderlin, the young enthusiast had himself (why seek to deny it?) inadequate poetic gifts. At twenty-four he displayed no marked originality either intellectually or in craftsmanship. His first poems, even in respect of their imagery and their wording, recall only too obviously the masters he had studied at Tübingen—Klopstock's odes, Schiller's resonant hymns, the German version of Ossian. He is poverty-stricken as regards themes. Nothing but the juvenile ardour with which he reiterates them in numberless variations can blind us to the narrowness of his mental horizon. His fantasies run riot in a formless world. "The gods", "Parnassus", "home" are the perpetual topics of his visions, and there is a wearisome monotony in the recurrence of such epithets as "heavenly", "divine", etc. His ideas are undeveloped, borrowings from Schiller and the German philosophers, and only after he has been writing for a considerable time do flashes of wisdom begin to emerge—a seer's utterances, seemingly not the product of his own mind, but the mysterious breathings of the world-spirit. There is not even a trace of the most important elements of style; we note the lack of material insight, humour, knowledge of human character, in a word, of mundane ingredients. Since Hölderlin repudiates contact with everyday life, his blindness to these matters is intensified until he seems to become an inhabitant of a dream world, a realm detached from the concrete. In his poems there is neither bread nor salt, shape nor hue; they are ethereal, translucent, imponderable; such stuff as clouds are made of, fugitive intimations, dubiously interpretable intuitions. Even his production is scanty, being restricted by nervous exhaustion and by accesses of melancholy. Compared with the primordial opulence of a Goethe, in whose poems the forces and juices of life find vigorous expression, who tills with powerful hand a fertile ploughland watered by refreshing rain and warmed by vivifying sunlight, Hölderlin's poetical output appears thin and poor. Perhaps never before or since in the records of German spiritual life was so great a poet fashioned out of such inadequate elements. His "material" (as one says of a singer) was insufficient. Everything depended upon his delivery. He was a weakling compared with other poets, yet his innate powers carried him with a rush into the upper world. His gifts had very little specific weight, but overwhelming impetus. In the last analysis his genius was not so much a matter of artistry as a miracle of purity. It was the expression of enthusiasm (I use the word in its primitive sense), of the hidden quality of inspiration.

That is why Hölderlin's talent is not culturally measurable in respect either of extent or richness; before all, this writer is a problem of intensity. In comparison with those others who are so powerfully developed, he appears frail and delicate. When contrasted with Goethe and Schiller, the knowledgeable and multifarious, the torrential and the strong, he seems weak and slender—as Francis of Assisi, the gentle and ill-informed saint, seems when contrasted with such steadfast pillars of the medieval Church as Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux and Loyola. Like St Francis, he has angelic tenderness, a fervent sense of brotherhood with the elements, a non-militant enthusiasm, a sense of ecstasy which carries him far beyond the limits of his immediate environment. Like Francis he becomes an artist without art, solely through his faith in a higher world, through an act of self-sacrifice akin to that made by the young Francesco in the marketplace of Assisi.

Thus it was not a fraction of his powers, a detached poetic gift, which made Hölderlin a poet, but his faculty for the ecstatic uplifting of his soul onto a higher level of being, his ability to get away from our familiar world, his capacity for merging himself in the infinite. Hölderlin is moved to write not by an impulse of the blood, the nerves, the senses, or by the happenings of personal experience, but by a surge of enthusiasm, a primary longing for unattainable altitudes. It cannot be said, in his case, that there is one particular motive which led him to become a poet, for he contemplates the

whole universe poetically, and cognises it poetically. The world shapes itself before him as an epic, so that unwittingly he is constrained to regard it in a heroic light—landscapes, men and women, currents of feeling. For him the ether is "Father" no less than for St Francis the sun was "Brother". To Hölderlin as to the ancient Greeks the springs and the stones disclose themselves as breathing lips and captive melodies. Even the soberest, the most prosaic of things, when he touches upon them in his rhythmic words, becomes tinged with the essence of that mysterious Platonic world, becomes diaphanous, emits harmonies differing in wondrous ways from the speech of everyday life. There is a sheen upon his utterance like the morning dew upon a meadow before it has been sullied by human footfall. Never before Hölderlin or after him in German literature was poetry inspired to such sublime flights, far above the levels at which we ordinarily move. Everything is seen as by a soaring eagle, from the heights to which Hölderlin so ardently aspires. That is why the beings he depicts appear, as in dreams, to have shaken off the trammels of gravity, to have become bodiless spirits—for Hölderlin never learnt (this is at once his greatness and his limitation!) to see the world as it is. He poetised about it; never knew it.

Instead of reality, he had a sphere of his own, his true home. Unfailingly he strove upward:

O melodies above me in the infinite,

To you, to you, I rise.

Only through unceasing ascent could he find himself, and the self he sought existed in a nameless and visionary region far above that in which he lived his mortal life. We have early proof that this involved for him a dangerous condition of persistent internal tension. Schiller was prompt to notice, with blame rather than admiration, the violence of Hölderlin's emotions, deploring his lack of steadfastness and thoroughness. But for Hölderlin these "indefinable enthusiasms, when earthly life has ceased to exist, when time is dead, and when the unchained spirit becomes a god", these paroxysmal states of depersonalisation, are fundamental. "In the eternal flux", he can be a poet only with the concentrated energies of his spirit. When uninspired, he is the poorest, the most narrowly hemmed in, the gloomiest of mortals; but when inspired he is the most blissful and the most free.

His inspiration is eminently unsubstantial; he becomes enthusiastic only when he is voicing enthusiasm. For him inspiration is simultaneously subject and object; is formless because, like a gas, it fills every container; has no boundaries because it emerges from and is reabsorbed into the eternal. Compared with Hölderlin's, Shelley's inspiration (although as lyric poet Shelley is so closely akin) seems earth-bound. For the latter, inspiration or enthusiasm is still connected with social ideals, with faith in human freedom, with an evolutionary progress in the material world. Hölderlin's enthusiasm exists apart from the world of men, becoming invisible, intangible, as it rises heavenward. In mortals it is felt as a sense of happiness, expressing itself through enjoyment of its existence, and enjoying itself inasmuch as it finds utterance. That is why Hölderlin is continually referring to the enthusiasm which inspires him, his poems being a perpetual adoration of productivity and a malediction upon sterility—since "the gods die when enthusiasm dies". For him poesy is inseparably linked with enthusiasm, just as inspiration can find vent only in song; that is why (this being in full accordance with his tenet that the poet is necessary to the world) poesy is the redeemer alike of the individual and of society at large. "O rain from heaven, O enthusiasm, thou wilt restore to us the springtime of the nations." His Hyperion is an enthusiast, and the revelation of his Empedocles is that of the immeasurable contrast between divine (productive) and earthly (worthless) feeling. The characteristics of his inspiration are plainly disclosed in *Empedocles*. The primal condition of productivity is the twilit feeling of contemplation, of reverie, wherein neither joy nor sorrow plays a part:

The man whose needs are few,

His world is all his own. In peace divine,

He walks among his flowers, mid soft airs

Which trouble not his mood of sweet content.

He is unconscious of his mundane environment; the force which sustains him, the force of inspiration, wells up from within:

For him the world is mute, and from himself

Alone springs inspiration, pleasure-tinged,

Until from out the night, made tense by joy,

There flashes, like a spark, creative thought.

The poetic impulse, therefore, is not the outcome of an experience, or of an idea, or of a volition; "for me," says Hölderlin, "inspiration, enthusiasm, surges spontaneously from myself." This spark is not generated by earthly collisions as fire is struck from flint by steel; it flames "unanticipated", is unconditioned by objective happenings:

In memorable hour

The unanticipated genius comes,

Divine creative spirit. Whereupon

With senses numbed we stand, and quaking limbs,

When struck by that effulgence from on high.

Inspiration is "effulgence from on high", Jove's lightning. Now Hölderlin goes on to describe his glorious sense of awakening, when his earthly memories are consumed in the fires of ecstasy:

He feels assured that he's

Of godlike elements composed. His joy

Is heavenly song.

The disintegration of the individual has been overcome; in the "heaven of mortals", unity of feeling has been attained.

To be at one with all, that is the life of the godhead,

That is the heaven of mortals,

says his Hyperion. In the fiery chariot Phaethon, the figure symbolising his own life has reached the stars, and can listen to the music of the spheres. It is in these moments of creative ecstasy that Hölderlin attains the culminating point of his existence.

But with this beatitude is mingled a premonition of the fall, a sense of imminent destruction. He knows that for mortals a sojourn in the realm of celestial fire, a vision of the mysteries, a partaking of nectar and ambrosia at the immortals' board, must be brief. He prophesies his own doom:

Man cannot long endure the bountiful life of Parnassus,

But if he has known it once, the vision lingers for ever.

The drive in the chariot of fire ends—as did Phaethon's—in being struck down by thunderbolts:

For it seems

That the gods mislike

Our petulant prayers.

Now, therefore, the genius that has inspired him, hitherto bright and blissful, shows Hölderlin another countenance, the sinister visage of the daemon. Again and again the poet falls headlong back into life, falls, like his exemplar Phaethon, not into the familiar world of home, but to a deeper level, into an ocean of melancholy. Goethe, Schiller and their congeners return from poesy as from a journey, as from a visit to another land, a little tired sometimes, but with a sound mind in a sound body. Hölderlin falls out of the poetic ecstasy like Lucifer falling from heaven, and, finding himself once more in the field of concrete fact, is wounded, crushed, an outcast. His awakening from enthusiasm is a spiritual death. After the crash, his excessive sensitiveness makes him find real life (as ever before) dull and trivial. "The gods die when inspiration dies. Pan dies when Psyche dies." Waking life is not worth living; without ecstasy, all the uses of this world are stale, flat and unprofitable.

Here, then, diametrically contrasted with his unparalleled capacity for exaltation, is the source of Hölderlin's melancholy. This is not the familiar pathological melancholia. Like his ecstasy, his melancholy is self-generated and self-nourished, being only to a minor extent determined by particular experiences, for we must not overestimate the importance of the Diotima episode. His gloom is a reaction from ecstasy, and is therefore necessarily unproductive. Whereas in the ecstatic

state he is full of impetus and feels himself akin with the infinite, in the unproductive period of reaction he has once more become fully aware of his estrangement from life. He is like one of the rebel angels mourning for the lost paradise. He never tries to generalise and externalise this feeling into pessimism, as did Leopardi, Schopenhauer and Byron. He expressly declares himself opposed to misanthropy. Pious to the core, he will not repudiate any part of the universe as unmeaning, but what he feels is that he himself is out of place in practical life. He can communicate with his fellows only in song, is unable to convey his meaning in ordinary conversation. Creative writing is, for him, essential to existence; poesy is his only refuge. Never did any accept more heartily than he the phrase "*Veni creator spiritus*",* knowing that he could not create from within, as a voluntary act; for the creative spirit must come down to him from heaven like a rushing mighty wind. When ecstasy was lacking he was "as if struck blind", an aimless wanderer in a world the gods had forsaken. Life had become a heap of dross. In his sadness he could make no headway against the world; when the melancholy mood was upon him he could utter no music. Poet of the morning glow, he was mute in the twilight.

Waiblinger, who was Hölderlin's closest intimate in the declining years when the poet's mind had become incurably disordered, called his friend Phaethon in a novel. Phaethon, in the Hellenic mythology, was the handsome youth who drove up into the sky in the fiery chariot of song. The gods allowed him to draw near to Olympus, but then they pitilessly hurled him back into the dark abyss. Mortals who dare this approach to Parnassus are punished, crushed, stricken with blindness. Nevertheless, the gods love the desperate adventurers whom they thus destroy, love those mortals who burn with the fire of enthusiasm. In the end, Phaethon and his like have their names written among the stars.

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* *Come Holy Spirit*

SETTING FORTH INTO THE WORLD

Like seed corn in a dead husk,
The hearts of mortals often lie asleep
Till the good hour strikes.

WHEN HE LEFT SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY to set forth into the world, Hölderlin was like a man entering hostile country, knowing from the first his weaknesses and how fierce a struggle awaited him. While still rolling along in the post-chaise, he composed the ode entitled *Fate*, the ode "to the Mother of Heroes, Iron Necessity". At the outset his intuitions prepared him for disaster.

Yet he was given an excellent start. No less a man than Schiller had recommended him to Charlotte von Kalb as tutor for her young son. In the thirty provinces of the Germany of those days it would have been hard for the enthusiast of twenty-four to find another house where poetic enthusiasm was held in such esteem, or where timidity and nervous susceptibility were so sympathetically regarded. Charlotte was herself a "misunderstood woman", and since she was capable of entertaining a passion for Jean Paul, she could not fail to make all necessary allowances for the foibles of a sentimentalist. Major von Kalb gave him a friendly reception; his pupil took a fancy to him; the morning hours were at his own disposal for poetical composition; walks and rides in the neighbourhood brought him once more, after a long interval, into contact with the beauties of nature; while, in excursions to Weimar and Jena, Charlotte introduced him to the best circles and enabled him to improve his acquaintanceship with Schiller and Goethe. Who can fail to admit that Hölderlin could not have been better off? He thought so himself, for a time. His first letters home brimmed over with satisfaction, and even with an unaccustomed cheerfulness. "I am getting fat, now that I am free from cares and vexations." He had begun his *Hyperion*, but his friends had gone out of their way to oblige him by showing some fragments of the poem to Schiller, and thus giving him a chance of publication. It seemed almost as if

the young man were about to make himself at home in the world.

Ere long, however, the daemon was wrestling with him once more; he was seized by that "terrible spirit of unrest" which drove him "like the deluge, to the mountain peaks". Shadows of gloom and discontent crept into his letters. He began to complain of his "dependent position", and the forces at work within him soon became obvious. He could not endure regular occupation, could not bear to participate in the daily round of ordinary people. No existence other than that of a poet was acceptable. In this first crisis he probably failed to understand that the trouble sprang from the daemonism within him, from the jealous exclusiveness of the spirit that possessed him, making mundane relationships impossible. He still rationalised the immanent inflammability of his impulses by discovering objective causes for them. He spoke of his pupil's stubbornness, of defects in the lad's character which he, as tutor, was impotent to remedy. Hölderlin's incapacity to meet the demands of everyday life was in this matter all too plain. The boy of nine had a stronger will than the man of twenty-five. The tutor resigned his post. Charlotte von Kalb, who was anything but obtuse, grasped the underlying truth. Wishing to console Johann Christian Friedrich's mother, she wrote to the latter: "His spirit cannot stoop to these petty labours … or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he takes them too much to heart."

Thus it was Hölderlin himself who spontaneously disrupted the possibilities life offered him. Utterly false, psychologically unsound, is the current assertion of sentimental biographers that, wherever he went, his employers thrust humiliations upon him, that at Waltershausen and at Frankfurt and in Switzerland he was degraded to the position of a servant. The truth is that everywhere and at all times things were made easy for him. But his skin was too thin, his sensibilities were too keen, "he took things too much to heart". To Hölderlin, as to all sensitives, applied what Stendhal wrote of himself in the image of Henri Brulard: "*Ce qui ne fait qu'effleurer les autres*

me blesse jusqu'au sang."* To him, reality was unfriendly, the world was brutal, dependence was slavery. In nothing but ecstasy could he find happiness. Outside this domain he scarcely breathed; in mortal air he was affected with a paroxysm of suffocation. "Why is it that I am as peaceable and good as a child when, undisturbed and in a leisurely way, I can pursue the most innocent of occupations?" he asks himself with amazement, alarmed by the conflicts that rage within him whenever he comes into contact with his fellows. He does not know that his unfitness for life is incurable. He still regards as chance happenings what are determined by the compulsion of the daemon, and he still believes that "freedom" and "poesy" link him to the world. He decides to venture upon an untrammelled existence; inspired with hope by the work he has begun, he makes the risky experiment of freedom. He accepts privation that he may enjoy the life of the spirit. In winter he passes his days in bed, for he can keep warmer there and save fuel; he has one meal a day; he denies himself wine, beer and the most modest pleasures. He goes to Jena only to attend Fichte's lectures, or sometimes by invitation he spends an hour with Schiller. For the rest, he whiles away his time in his bedroom—almost too dignified a name for the poky closet he inhabits. But his soul wanders in Hellas with Hyperion, and he might be styled happy were he not foredoomed to a perpetual recurrence of unrest.

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* *That which only scratches others cuts me to the quick.*

A DANGEROUS ENCOUNTER

Ah, if only I had never entered your schools!

Hyperion

THE PREDOMINANT FACTOR in Hölderlin's determination to be free from the trammels of employment and dependence was his conception of the part the heroic should play in life, his resolve to seek "greatness". But before presuming to look for greatness in his own breast, he wanted to see "the great", the poets, the holy land of his dreams. It was not chance which made him betake himself to Weimar and Jena, for there he could bask in the radiance of Goethe and Schiller and Fichte, and of their brilliant satellites, Wieland, Herder, Jean Paul, the Schlegels—the starry host of the German intellectual firmament. Such was the atmosphere he desired to inhale, he to whom the prosaic was loathsome. Here he hoped to breathe the air of the classic world, to test his powers in this agora of the spirit.

But first he must prepare himself for the struggle. Contemplating Goethe's all-embracing insight, Schiller's "stupendous" power of abstraction, Hölderlin felt that he was culturally and intellectually inadequate. Succumbing to the perennial error of the Germans, he decided that he must "educate" himself systematically, must "attend" lectures on philosophy. Like Kleist a few years later, he did violence to the essential spontaneity of an aspiring temperament by strenuously endeavouring to find metaphysical lights for a heaven which did not exist for him apart from the "blessed world of feeling", by striving to buttress his poetic edifice with doctrines. I doubt if any literary critic has hitherto been candid enough to admit how disastrously German creative writing was influenced by Kant, by the craze which German imaginative writers showed then and afterwards for metaphysics.

Although the conventional view among historians of literature is that a climax in German letters was attained through the speedy adoption of Kant's ideas by the imaginative writers of the day, it is assuredly time to shake ourselves free from this tradition, admitting frankly that the consequences of the invasion of belletristics by speculative dogma were unfortunate. Kant (I am expressing no more than a personal conviction, but one which I hold strongly) hampered the pure productivity of the classical epoch by dominating that epoch thanks to the constructive mastery of his notions. He did incalculable harm by misdirecting literary artists into the field of aesthetic

criticism, thus making them less intelligible, less content with the world of experience, and interfering with the free exercise of imagination. Every writer who came under Kant's sway was less originally creative than he would otherwise have been. What else could be expected? The sage of Königsberg was all brain, all mind, a huge ice block in whose circle of influence the fauna and flora of fantasy could not thrive. He never really lived in the flesh, having been depersonalised to become a thinking automaton; he never held a woman in his embrace, and never went beyond the immediate vicinity of the provincial town in which he had been born; for fifty, nay, for seventy years, every cog in every wheel of his machinery continued to circle upon its appointed path. How could so unnatural a creature, a man so unspontaneous, a thinker who had forced his mind to become rigidly systematised and the quintessence of whose genius was this same fanatical constructivity—how, I say, could such as he ever enrich the work of the poet, the imaginative writer, the work of those whose activities are in need of perpetual stimulation from the realm of the senses and of incessant quickening by contact with the skirts of happy chance, of those whom passion drives ever and anon into the realm of the unconscious? Kant's influence took the swing out of the glorious impulses of our classicists (the primordial impulses they shared with the great artists and writers of the Renaissance), so that unwittingly they lapsed into a new humanism, into a professorial poesy.

How great was the loss to German letters when Schiller, the creator of the most vivid personalities ever staged by our writers, neglected his true vocation to amuse himself by subdividing poesy into categories, into the naive and the sentimental; and when Goethe entered into a discussion with the Schlegels concerning classicism and romanticism. Without becoming fully aware of the fact, the writers of that epoch grew jejune through being infected by the excessive clarity of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; they lost warmth and colour in the cold rationalistic light that emanated from its excessively systematised, crystal-clear spirit, uncompromisingly dominated by the notion of the reign of law. At the time when Hölderlin came to Weimar, Schiller entered upon a phase of prosaic sobriety, having lost the fervour of his erstwhile inspiration, and Goethe (whose healthy disposition had always made him react with inborn enmity against metaphysical systematisations) was turning his attention almost exclusively to science. Their correspondence at this date shows the rationalist trend of their thoughts. Splendid

documents, manifesting a wonderful understanding of the world and its problems, but much more an exchange of thoughts between two philosophers or two professors of aesthetics than between two outstanding poets. When Hölderlin came into close contact with the Dioscuri, the mighty gravitational influence of Kant had drawn them away from the central regions of their being towards the periphery. A phase of classical humanism had opened—with this momentous difference from what had happened centuries before in Italy, that whereas Dante and Petrarch and Boccaccio had turned their backs on the dry learning of the day to take refuge in the realm of imaginative creation, Goethe and Schiller (during irrecoverable years) forsook poiesis in favour of the chill domains of aesthetics and science.

The result was that their disciples, the young men who sat at their feet and reverenced them as masters, fell a prey to the sinister fallacy that it was indispensable for them to be "cultured", to be "philosophically disciplined". Novalis's true element was the abstract world of poetic imaginings, and Kleist was a creature of impulse; to both of them the coldly intellectualised and concrete mentality of Kant was temperamentally antipathetic, but their foundations had been rendered unstable, and the resulting sense of insecurity made them seek safe footing in a region that was basically uncongenial. Even Hölderlin, the inspired being to whom logic was alien and to whom systematisation was repugnant, this apostle of the absolute, this devotee of a worldspirit purged from the dross of intellectualism, forced himself into the screw press of abstract concepts. He felt it incumbent upon him to talk the aesthetico-philosophical jargon of the day. His letters of the Jena period are turgid with shallow conceptual interpretations, with childish attempts to philosophise in a way that ran counter to his intuitions. For Hölderlin's mind was non-logical. His thoughts, though they often flashed like lightning out of the heaven of genius, remained incapable of being wedded one with another, were magian utterances that must remain unlinked and could not be interwoven.

What he said of the "formative spirit",

Only what blossoms do I recognise,

But never what it ponders,

was expressive of his own limitations. He could voice only the perception of becoming, give utterance to the dynamic; whereas the static, the schematic, the concept of being, eluded his grasp. Hölderlin's ideas are meteors; they are not ashlar from an earthly

quarry, hewn stones to be built into a wall (every system is a wall). They arise in his mind without effort, ready to blaze forth into the sky; they do not need to be laboriously chiselled. What Goethe once said of Byron applies far more aptly to Hölderlin: "He is great only when he poetises; when he reflects, he is a child." But this child is now diligently studying Fichte and Kant, gorging himself with doctrine to such an extent that Schiller utters a warning: "You will do better to shun philosophy, which is an ungrateful subject … Keep closer to the world of the senses, and thus you will run less risk of losing yourself in abstractions." Hölderlin needed some time before he was able to recognise the danger of straying into the garden of logic. That sensitive barometer of his—declining productivity—showed him that he, who should soar heavenward, was being cribbed on earth in an atmosphere which dulled his perceptions. Thereupon he jettisoned systematic philosophy. "For long I failed to understand why the study of philosophy, which for most of those who devote themselves to it brings repose as the reward of diligence, robbed me of peace, and even made me more irritable the more I gave myself up to it. I have become aware, at length, that I was turning away from my true bent."

A second and more perilous disappointment came from the poets. Heralds of superabundance had they seemed to him when glimpsed from afar, priests who would help them to uplift his heart to God. Intercourse with Goethe and Schiller would, he hoped, quicken his inspiration. Especially did he expect great things from a riper acquaintanceship with Schiller, over whose writings he had burned the midnight oil at Tübingen, and whose *Don Carlos* had been full of witchery for him in early youth. These great poets would give him, unsteady of purpose, the only thing that could transfigure life—enhanced power of winging his way towards the infinite. In this matter he was subject, of course, to the eternal fallacy which misleads the second and third generations in their attitude towards the masters. Young folk forget that while the works of the great remain, indeed, for ever young, though age cannot wither their perfections or time leave on them its mark, the poets themselves grow old. Schiller and Goethe and Herder had been created "councillors" of one sort or another, and Fichte was a professor; their work had become a familiar harness to them; they were anchored in life. Man is a forgetful creature, and perhaps there is nothing from which he becomes so readily estranged as from his own youth. Misunderstanding was thus rendered inevitable by the difference in

years. Hölderlin looked for enthusiasm, but they recommended caution; he had expected their proximity to fan his flames, but they wanted to damp his ardour. He asked them to help him to achieve freedom and to foster his spiritual life; they were ready to aid him in finding a secure position in the world. He was eager for a tussle with fate, whereas they (in the kindness of their hearts) recommended him to make peace on easy terms. He blew hot and they blew cold; the natural result was disagreement, notwithstanding spiritual kinship and emotional sympathy.

The first meeting with Goethe was symbolical. Calling on Schiller, Hölderlin had met a man well on in years who had, in an indifferent manner, asked him a question or two, to which the young poet had no less indifferently answered—to learn in the evening, with astonishment and alarm, that he had seen and spoken with Goethe. He had not recognised Goethe in the flesh, and was unable to recognise Goethe in the spirit—nor Goethe him, for during the remainder of Goethe's life (nearly four decades) except in his letters to Schiller the sage of Weimar never said a word about Hölderlin. The latter, too, was as exclusively attracted to Schiller as Kleist subsequently was to Goethe. Each of the less famous writers burned with affection for one only of the Dioscuri, and with the hasty judgement of youth held a poor opinion of the other. No less completely did Goethe misunderstand Hölderlin, writing to Schiller of the way in which Hölderlin's aspirations found expression in a "gentle self-satisfaction"; for Hölderlin was filled with divine discontent, and Goethe was damning him with faint praise when extolling him for "a certain grace, sincerity and moderation". How unjust it was to describe the creator of the German paean as "a minor poet"! Goethe's flair for the daemonic failed him in this instance, and for that reason he did not react against Hölderlin with the defensive vigour that was customary to him where the liegemen of the daemon were concerned. His attitude remained one of almost contemptuous good humour. He passed by on the other side. So deeply was Hölderlin wounded by this aloofness that (preserving, even when his mind had failed, a remembrance of long-past sympathies and antipathies) he showed fierce aversion in his declining years when a visitor happened to mention Goethe's name. He had suffered the same disillusionment as other German poets of that period, a disillusionment to which Grillparzer, though much more self-controlled than Hölderlin and less prone to wear his heart upon his sleeve, was at length to give frank utterance: "Goethe turned from

poesy to science, and, in a magnificent quietism, devoted himself to the exclusive furtherance of the moderate and the ineffective, whereas in me the torches of fantasy were blazing." Even the wisest of men was not so wise as to understand, when age came upon him, that youth spells exuberance.

Thus there was no organic tie in Hölderlin's relationship to Goethe. That relationship would have become dangerous to the former if he had followed Goethe's advice and if he had consented to aim no higher than the idyllic and the bucolic. His resistance to Goethe's promptings amounted to a natural desire for self-preservation. But where Schiller was concerned his reaction involved the depths of his being, and held tragical implications. There the devotee had to assert himself against the object of devotion, the pupil against the teacher, the creature against the creator. Hölderlin's veneration for Schiller was fundamental. His world seemed likely to be laid in ruins because of his sensitiveness to Schiller's attitude, which was lukewarm and critical, though kindly, and Hölderlin's reaction was one of loving self-defence, a painful severance, resembling Nietzsche's breach with Wagner. In this instance, likewise, the pupil asserted himself against the teacher, regarding faithfulness to his ideal as more important than fealty to his chief. Hölderlin was in fact more loyal to Schiller than was Schiller himself!

For during these years Schiller was still master of creative energy, was still capable of utterances that went straight to the heart of the German nation, but he was an invalid, older than Goethe though not in years, and had earlier lost the fire of the senses and succumbed to the chill of intellectualism. Not that Schiller's enthusiasm had been dissipated, but it had moved from the concrete to the abstract plane. The rebellious fervour of the young man who had declared war against tyrants had crystallised into a *Methodik des Idealismus*.* Fire of the soul had become fire of the tongue; faith had declined to optimism, which needed but little further change to become "practically useful" like German liberalism. Schiller now had his experiences only in the realm of mind, having lost the power of enjoying that "indivisibility" which Hölderlin demanded, the capacity for an integral perception of all that life had to offer. Strange, indeed, must it have seemed to Schiller when for the first time he saw Hölderlin in the flesh. Hölderlin had been Schiller's creation. Not merely did Hölderlin owe to Schiller the form of his verses and his mental trend, but for years Hölderlin's thought process had been

nourished exclusively upon Schiller's ideas, upon Schiller's belief in human progress. Hölderlin was almost as much a product of Schiller's mind as Marquis Posa and Max Piccolomini. Thus Schiller could see in Hölderlin his own fervour, his own word made flesh. Everything that Schiller asked of youth—enthusiasm, purity, exuberance—was embodied in Hölderlin, who was actually living the idealism which for Schiller was now a rhetorical flourish. Hölderlin had a genuinely religious and not a merely poetical faith in the gods and in Hellas, which for Schiller had long ere this become no more than allegories; he fulfilled the poet's mission, which for Schiller was only a cordial postulate.

That was why Schiller was startled by the discovery of Hölderlin, by the sight of his own creation. He promptly understood the situation, writing to Goethe: "I found in these poems much of myself, and it is not the first time that their author has put me in mind of my own aspirations." He was stirred at sight of the outwardly humble but inwardly self-assertive Hölderlin, stirred by the visions which had fired him as a young man. But to the maturer poet this volcanic energy and surging enthusiasm (though he continued their theoretical propaganda) seemed hazardous in everyday life. Schiller could not approve in the flesh-and-blood Hölderlin what he had acclaimed in the realm of poesy. In actual life it was unfitting to stake all on one throw of the dice, and Schiller therefore repudiated as non-viable the child of his own brain, himself brought back to life. He saw that the idealism he expected of German youth was in place only in the world of tragic drama, whereas here and now, in Weimar and Jena, poetical absolutism would be fatal to any young man who should wantonly disregard conventional standards.

"He suffers from an excessive subjectivity, and his condition is dangerous, for such temperaments are impracticable." Thus wrote Schiller of Hölderlin, whose "enthusiasm" made him "an abstruse phenomenon"—much as Goethe spoke of Kleist as "pathological". Both the elder poets were quick to perceive the seismic struggles of the daemon, the explosive tensions of the superheated and prisoned inner personality. In real life, therefore, Schiller endeavoured in the kindliest fashion to bit and bridle Hölderlin. At the same time, in the most fatherly way, he did what he could to be useful, recommending the young man for tutorial posts, making interest with publishers and so on. Furthermore, to wean Hölderlin from excesses, "to make him reasonable", Schiller gently but firmly repressed his aspirations—without grasping for a moment that he was dealing with one to whom

the most trifling rebuff seemed a smashing blow.

The outcome was that their mutual relations changed for the worse. Schiller's penetrating insight made him detect the axe of self-destruction looming over Hölderlin's head. Hölderlin felt that Schiller, "the only man to whom I have voluntarily surrendered … the only man upon whom I am inevitably dependent", though eager to give him "practical" help, had no understanding of his inmost being. He had hoped to be uplifted and strengthened. "A friendly word from a valiant man's heart is like a spiritual water which wells up out of the depths of the mountains and conveys to us, in its crystal drops, the hidden forces of the earth," says Hyperion. But neither from Goethe nor from Schiller did Hölderlin get any such bountiful encouragement. By degrees it became a torment for him to visit Schiller. "Continually I want to see you, and yet whenever I do see you it is only to feel that I can never be anything to you." At length he gave even franker expression to his sense of disharmony: "I must acknowledge that I am sometimes privily at war with your genius in order to safeguard my freedom." He recognised that he must not disclose the depths of his nature to one who found fault with his poems, one who repressed his exuberance, one who wanted him to be petty and tepid instead of "subjectivist and overwrought". Proud for all his humility, he concealed from Schiller the most vital of his poems; for a Hölderlin cannot defend himself, he can but bow his head and hide. To the last he abased himself, remained on his knees before the gods of his youth, never ceasing to pay homage to those who had first enchanted him and had taught him to raise his voice in song. Schiller tossed the suppliant a pleasant word now and again, while Goethe passed him by with indifference. But neither of them would raise him from his knees, though his back were breaking.

Thus the meeting with the great ones, the encounter he had longed for, proved unfortunate, and the year of freedom in Weimar, during which he had fancied he would be able to perfect his work, was almost fruitless. Philosophy, the "hospital for unsuccessful poets", gave him no help; *Hyperion* was still no more than a fragment, the drama he had planned was unfinished and (despite his thrift) his financial resources were exhausted. He had, so it seemed, lost the first round of the fight for existence as a poet, now that once more he was a burden on his mother, and had to gulp down secret reproaches with every mouthful of bread. Yet the truth was that in Weimar he had outfought the greatest danger that threatened—he had victoriously clung to the "indivisibility of enthusiasm"; he had

successfully rejected his well-meaning elders' gospel of moderation. His genius had preserved its essence. Counsels of prudence notwithstanding, the daemon had kept alive in him an instinct that would not yield to the teachings of experience. His answer to Schiller's and Goethe's attempts to inculcate the golden mean, to make him restrict his energies to the idyllic and bucolic fields, was a wilder outburst than ever. Through Euphorion, Goethe had commended moderation upon poesy: "Be not foolhardy, lest disaster overwhelm thee … For the sake of thy parents, control intemperate and violent impulses, quietly and peacefully cultivating thy field." An exhortation to quietism! Advice to poets to content themselves with the idyllic vein! Hölderlin passionately rejoined:

What solace good repute when the chain galls me,

When, surfeited with fame, my soul burns with desire?

Weaklings! I thrive, I thrive, only where struggle calls me!

Why would you rob me of my elemental fire?

This "elemental fire", in which Hölderlin's soul flourished like the fabled salamander in flame, resisted the chilling influences of the German classical poets. For the second time he who throve only where struggle called him, hurled himself back into life, in search of "that smithy where none but the noble metals are forged".

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* *Methodology of Idealism*

DIOTIMA

Fate pulls even the weakest out of themselves.

MADAME DE STAËL WRITES in her diary: "*Francfort est une très jolie ville; on y dîne parfaitement bien, tout le monde parle le français et s'appelle Gontard.*"* The unsuccessful poet had been engaged by one of these Gontard families as tutor to a boy of eight. Here, as at Waltershausen, to the young enthusiast everyone at first seemed "very agreeable and, indeed, altogether exceptional", even though the zest with which he had set forth into life had vanished. In a letter to Neuffer he wrote: "I am like a flowering plant which, in its shattered pot, has been flung away into the street; its shoots have been broken off and its rootlets have been injured; then someone has taken the trouble to rescue it, has planted it out in fresh soil and (with great labour and pains) has been able to save it from destruction." Hölderlin knew that because of his sensitiveness he could flourish only in a poetical atmosphere—in the Hellas of his dreams. It was not this or that specific manifestation of reality, not this or that house in particular, not Waltershausen or Frankfurt or Hauptwil, which wrought the mischief. Enough that they were reality, harsh reality, for them to be a distressing environment. "The world is too brutal for me," said Hölderlin's spiritual brother Keats. These tender plants wilt in any but poetical surroundings.

It was inevitable, therefore, that his affections should centre upon the one person in the new circle who, even on close acquaintanceship, could still be imaginatively regarded as an emissary from that "other world" for which he craved—upon his pupil's mother, Susette Gontard, "Diotima". In the marble bust which has come down to us we do, indeed, discern a Hellenic purity of line, and it was as a Hellene that Hölderlin contemplated her from the first. "Is not she really and truly a woman of ancient Greece?" he whispered to Hegel when the latter came to visit him in Frankfurt. She seemed to him to have been born in the realm to which he himself belonged, another world than ours; to be a stranger here below, sick with longing, even as he was sick with longing to escape from the unsympathetic inhabitants of this sublunary sphere:

Silent thou art and patient, for they understand thee not,

O noble being. However bright the sun,

Downcast thy eyes and mute thy lips,

Since vainly seekst thou here thy true companions,

Tender of heart like thee. Not here can they be found.

His employer's wife is for the tutor an angel strayed from the heavenly world to which he, too, rightly belongs. No sensual thought of bodily possession mingles with this feeling of intimate spiritual kinship. Just as Goethe had written to Charlotte von Stein:

Surely in some long-forgotten epoch

You my sister were, if not my wife,

so does Hölderlin acclaim Diotima, as one whose return he has eagerly awaited, as the woman who must have been his sister in some earlier metempsychosis:

Long ago your hand I've taken,

Sister by old ties of kin!

You and I now reawaken,

Diotima, spirits twin!

For the first time he discovers in this fragmented, marred world of ours the fellow being of whom he has been in search, who can be "one and all" to him. In her, charm and sublimity and repose and spirit and disposition and body are intertwined to form a gracious unity. For the first time, now, in one of his letters, there resounds the word "happiness". He writes: "I am still as happy as in the first moment when we met. Unendingly delightful, unspeakably sacred, is my friendship with one who has strayed into this impoverished, despiritualised, unorderly century of ours. My sense of beauty can no longer err, for hence-forward it will be unfailingly directed towards this Madonna. My reason schools itself by her instruction, and day by day my uncoordinated temperament is soothed and cheered in the peace and contentment she radiates."

That is the overwhelming attraction of Diotima for Hölderlin—her repose. She gives him calm. Ecstatic being that he is, he does not need to be inspired with ardour. What will bring happiness to him who is perpetually aflame is relief from tension, the boon of rest. She can give him the great gift of moderation. She can do what neither Schiller nor his mother nor anyone else had ever yet been able to do for Hölderlin—tame "the mysterious spirit of unrest by melody". Reading between the lines of *Hyperion* we divine her maternal tenderness, and we see her inducing the storm-tossed youth to come to terms with life. "With advice and friendly exhortations she was continually endeavouring to make me orderly and cheerful, gently reproving me for the untidiness of my hair and the shabbiness of my clothes, chiding me because I bit my nails." This young man who is in charge of her own little boy must himself be treated like a froward child, but she managed him so tactfully, so restfully, that Hölderlin found the training blissful. "You know how it was with me," he wrote to his most intimate friend. "You know how I lived without faith, how I had become chary of affection and was therefore utterly miserable. Could I be, as I now am, happy as an eagle, had not this revelation come to me?" The world was for him purer, more holy, now that the discordant outcry of his terrible loneliness had been resolved into a harmony.

Is not my heart sanctified, more beautiful my life,

Now that I love?

For a brief season the cloud of melancholy was lifted, and Fate no longer frowned. This once, transiently, his life itself became a poem, his condition was one of joyful suspense.

But the daemon within him, "terrible unrest", did not slumber:

The blossom of peace,

So frail a flower, withers all too soon.

Hölderlin is of those who cannot bide long in one place. Even love "soothes him only to make him more savage in the end", as Diotima says of Hyperion (who is made in the image of the author). His intuitions are unrivalled, and though he does not yet "know" in the sense of full awareness, he has a mysterious foreknowledge of the disaster that awaits him, as an outcrop from within. He recognises that Hyperion and Diotima cannot continue to live in peaceful companionship, "as happy as a loving pair of swans", and in his Apology there is plain avowal of the black cloud of discontent that is gathering in his mind:

Sacred being, often have I troubled

Thy golden repose, and it is through me

That thou hast learnt so many

Of the worst pangs life can bring!

The "wonderful yearning for the abyss", the mysterious attraction which his own depths have for him, is gradually increasing; and by degrees he becomes affected with a febrile but still unconscious dissatisfaction. More and more does his daily environment seem overshadowed. Then, like lightning out of the massed clouds, comes in a letter the phrase: "I am rent in sunder by love and hate." He is revolted by the luxurious ease of the house, which affects those who live in it and visit it "as new wine goes to a peasant's head"; his irritated sensibilities lead him to imagine affronts where none have been intended; and at length there is an outburst. The details are obscure. We do not know whether Diotima's husband (to whom the lady's literary tastes and occupations were uncongenial) had merely shown jealousy or had actually been violent. This much is certain, that something happened by which Hölderlin was deeply wounded, and that agonised verses streamed from him like blood:

Should I die of shame, should my soul

Fail to take vengeance on the miscreant,

Should I, overcome by the foes of genius,

Sink into a coward's tomb—

Then forget me, nor strive, kindly heart,

To rescue my name from oblivion.

But he did not rally his forces. There was no virile reaction. He allowed himself to be driven out of the house like a detected thief, and was content from Homburg to arrange for stolen meetings with his Diotima. Hölderlin's behaviour in this decisive hour was boyishly weak. He wrote his beloved fervent epistles, described her in florid language as Hyperion's splendid bride, covered page upon page with the most fantastic hyperboles of passion, but he made no attempt, as would have a bold lover, to carry off his mistress. He did not, like Schelling and like Schlegel, careless of scandal and indifferent to danger, drag his darling from the detested nuptial couch, remove her from a chill marriage, to warm her life at the fires of his own. He could only bow his head and say: "The world is too brutal for me." We should have to stigmatise this failure to arm himself for the fight as poltroonery, were it not that his meekness was underlain by pride and a quiet strength. For this most vulnerable of mortals felt assured that within him was something imperishable, unassailable, immune to the onslaughts of the world. "Freedom—the word has a profound significance for one who can truly understand it. The trouble has cut so deep, I have been so incredibly mortified, am without hope or purpose, overwhelmed with shame—and yet there remains a power within me, something incoercible, which sends a delicious thrill through me whenever it stirs." Therein lies Hölderlin's secret. For all the weakness of his body, the neurasthenic frame is sustained by steadfastness of soul, by the inviolability of a god. For this reason, in the end, no earthly power can master the powerless poet. Mundane experiences pass like fleeting clouds at dawn or sunset across the untroubled mirror of his soul. Nothing that he encounters can enter into absolute possession of him. Even Susette Gontard is, after all, no more than his vision of a Grecian Madonna, and fades like a dream to become a yearning reminiscence.

Neither possession nor loss touches his innermost life; that is why the genius remains invulnerable, however sensitive the man. One who can bear to lose everything, gains everything, and grief therefore stimulates his creative energy. "The more unfathomable a man's suffering, the more immeasurable his might." It is now, when he has been wounded to the quick, "when his soul has been humiliated", that he discloses his utmost strength, the "poet's courage" which scorns to use defensive weapons, and, thus unarmed, he defies Fate:

Art thou not kinsman of all that lives?

Do not the Parcae nourish thee for their service?

March therefore weaponless

Onward through life, undismayed

Whate'er may hap, and blessing all that comes.

Poverty and injustice, man-inflicted, have no power against the man in Hölderlin. But the fate meted out to him by the gods fosters the genius of Hölderlin the poet.

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* *Frankfurt is a very pretty town; one dines perfectly well, everybody speaks French and is called Gontard.*

THE NIGHTINGALE SINGS IN THE DARK

The heart's waves would not foam so
splendidly or rise so high as soaring spirit
were it not that destiny, the mute old
rock, obstructs their course.

IT MAY WELL HAVE BEEN in some such tragical hour when he was able to enjoy the bliss of solitary poetical creation that Hölderlin penned the wonderful lines: "Never before had I had so rich an experience of how true was the ancient saw which maintains that the heart is stirred with a new blessedness when it is able to remain steadfast even in the midnight of supreme affliction, and that it is in the course of the utmost sorrow that the life-song of the world first sounds in us divinely, like the song of a nightingale in the dark." At this juncture what had been no more than the intuitive melancholy of youth hardened in him to become tragical grief, and his elegiac mood found worthy poetical expression. The stars that had guided his footsteps, Schiller and Diotima, had vanished from the sky. He was alone in the darkness when he uplifted his voice in that "nightingale's song" which will live as long as a word of the German tongue endures. At length Hölderlin had been "hardened through and through, and consecrated". The work done by this solitary while he was on the steep divide between ecstasy and the collapse of his mind bears the unmistakable stamp of genius. The husks that veiled his glowing core have been shed. The primordial melody of his being flows forth in matchless rhythms. This is the period of his great trilogy: the finest poems, the novel *Hyperion* and the tragic *Death of Empedocles*—three variations upon the theme of his own rise and fall. Thus it is amid the ruins of his career that Hölderlin voices the most exalted spiritual harmonies.

"One who treads on his sorrow, treads upward to higher spheres," says his Hyperion. Hölderlin has taken the decisive step. Henceforward he stands above his own life, above his personal sorrows; he is no longer a prowling sentimentalist, but one who has become fully aware of his destiny. He

resembles Empedocles on Mount Etna; below him are the voices of men, above him are eternal melodies, in front of him is the fiery crater. He is thus gloriously alone. His ideals have drifted away like clouds; even Diotima's image looms obscurely as if from dreamland. Mightier visions claim his attention. With prophetic insight, he reveals his message in rolling rhythms. Only one care remains—he is afraid he may succumb prematurely, before he has sung the great paean, the chant of victory. Once more, therefore, he prostrates himself in front of the invisible altar, to pray for a hero's end, for death while he is in the article of song:

One summer do but grant, ye Mighty Powers,

And but one autumn, for my ripest song,

That willingly my heart, sated

With joy, may cease its pulsing.

The soul of him whose inborn heavenly rights

Life has denied can find no rest below;

Yet once, at least, on me, to whom poesy

Is sacred, let the Muses smile.

Then gladly shall I join the peaceful shades,

Content, at last, to lay my lyre down.

No more I'll need it, since for a season brief

I've scaled Olympian heights.

It is, indeed, only for a brief season that the Silent Sisters concede him the privilege of using his lyre to good effect. In this matter Clotho is spinning him a short thread, and Atropos is ready to use the shears. But meanwhile he "scales Olympian heights", merges himself in the infinite. *Hyperion*, *Empedocles* and the poems remain as witnesses, a magnificent triad. Yet they, too, are fragments when he falls headlong into the abyss.

HYPERION

Do you know what you are lamenting? It is not some-thing that vanished years ago. We cannot say in so many words when it came and when it went. It has been and it is—in you. You are in search of a better time, a more beautiful world.

Diotima to Hyperion

HYPERION IS HÖLDERLIN'S YOUTHFUL DREAM of the other world, of the invisible home of the gods, the cherished dream from which he never fully awakened to the realities of life. "I have always premonitions, but I cannot find what I seek," we read in the first fragment of the novel. Barren of experience, lacking knowledge of the world, ignorant even of artistic forms, this master of intuition begins to write about life before he has made life's acquaintance. Like all the novels of the romantic school—like Heinse's *Ardinghello*, Tieck's *Sternbald*, Novalis's *Ofterdingen*—his *Hyperion* is anticipatory to experience, is dream, is poesy, depicting a flight into the world of imagination instead of a contact with the world of fact. The younger German idealists were at the turn of the century running away from reality; whereas on the other side of the Rhine their French brethren, who were likewise disciples of Rousseau, were interpreting the master more successfully. In France, people were no longer content to go on dreaming of a better world. Robespierre tore up his poems, Marat his sentimental novels, Desmoulins his verses, Napoleon the story he had penned in imitation of *Werther*—and in their several ways they attempted to remould the world nearer to their heart's desire. The Germans, on the other hand, continued to luxuriate in prophetic fantasies. They gave the name of "romance" to something that was in part a record of their dreams and in part a diary of their sensibilities. They let their dreams run riot until the dreamers were exhausted by a sort of spiritual orgasm. The triumph of Jean Paul signified the climax and marked the commencing decline of the novel in which sentimentality was pushed to an extreme, which was perhaps music rather than poesy—was a fantasia upon the strings of tensed feeling, a passionate participation in the

world-melody.

Of all these soul-stirring, pure and divinely boyish romances, Hölderlin's *Hyperion* was the purest, the most soul-stirring and also the most boyish. It had the futility of the childlike enthusiast and the rushing impetus of genius; it was impracticable to the pitch of absurdity, and was none the less impressive because of its bold inroad into a boundless realm. Its faults, failures and immaturities are too numerous to be listed. Since there is now a tendency to idolise Hölderlin—his worshippers (like those who idolise Goethe) being apt to bow in reverence before his defects as well as his merits—we must have the courage to admit that the book was foredoomed to be in many respects ineffective owing to the inherent characteristics of the author's genius. It does not, and it could not, deal with the lives of real flesh-and-blood individuals. Hölderlin's estrangement from humankind made him temperamentally unfit for creative psychology.

He had clairvoyantly written:

Neither myself do I know, nor yet the life of my fellows.

All the same here he was, in *Hyperion*, attempting the impossible. He who had never drawn near to human beings now tried to chisel their features; to describe war, of which he knew nothing; Greece, a country he had never visited; and a time (the present) he had sedulously ignored. The consequence was that he was compelled to borrow unconsciously from others' books in order to get his setting. The names were simply "lifted" from other novels, the landscapes were filched from Richard Chandler's *Travels in Greece*, the situations and the characters were clumsy imitations of those in contemporary works, the narrative was plagiary, the epistolary form was kidnapped, the philosophy was little more than a fanciful reproduction of writings and conversations. Let us face the facts—nothing in *Hyperion* is Hölderlin's own except (the exceptions are fundamental) the torrential inspiration and the soaring rhythm of the diction with its surge towards the infinite. It is as music, in the widest sense of the term, rather than as a novel that this book must be classed.

Thus as far as original notions are concerned, the thought content of *Hyperion* can be compressed into a nutshell. Only one idea emerges from the lyrical sublimity of the resounding words, and (as always with Hölderlin) even then it is more of a feeling than an idea, being his dominant conviction that the external, commonplace, miscellaneous and valueless world of everyday experience can have nothing in common with the serene world of inner experience. He is a dualist about life, which is for him vitiated by inherent disharmony. The idealist aim of the individual and the world must be to combine the internal and the external into a supreme form of unity and purity, to establish on earth the "theocracy of the beautiful", the *ἓν καί πᾶν*, * the one-and-all. "Holy nature, thou art the same within us and without. Surely, then, it cannot be so hard to unite what is outside me with the divine that is within?" Such is the sublime religion of unification cherished by the youthful enthusiast Hyperion. He is inspired, not by the cold will of Schelling, which is little more than a verbal formulation, but by the ardent will of Shelley, who craves for an elemental union with nature, or, let us say, by Novalis's yearning to break the thin membrane that separates the world from the ego, in order to flow voluptuously into nature's warm body. In this poet's craving for the all-embracing unity of life and the all-embracing purity of the spirit, the only original elements contributed by Hölderlin are his mythological conception that once upon a time there was a golden age when such a condition existed as a primal fact, in an Arcady where the inhabitants were sublimely unaware of it, and his religious faith that the golden age will return. What the gods once gave and the ignorant foolishly gambled away, the striving spirit will recreate in centuries of arduous toil. The nations set out from the harmony of their childhood to stray into their present discords, and with the re-establishment of harmony, a maturer harmony, the world's great age will begin anew, the golden years will return. "Beauty will be universalised, man and nature becoming merged in the godhead." For (Hölderlin here makes a remarkable suggestion) man can dream nothing which has not at one time or another been a reality. "An ideal is

something which once existed as a part of nature." In the halcyon days of the past, the world must have been what we would fain make it now. Furthermore, inasmuch as we long to refashion it in accordance with the old model, power will be granted us to do so. We must make a new Hellas beside the Hellas of history—a Hellas of the spirit. Hölderlin, its noblest champion among the Germans, creates it for us in the world of the imagination. This is to be our universal home.

Hölderlin's youthful emissary goes hither and thither in search of his "lovelier world". Hyperion, Hölderlin's double, discovered his ideal in nature's universal embrace, but nature could not cure the innate melancholy of the seeker, for nature, being integral, eluded his severed sensibilities. Then he tried to find a durable tie in friendship, but this, too, proved inadequate. Next, love seemed to offer the blissful unification, but Diotima vanished from his life, and the dream ended almost before it had begun. Perhaps heroism, the struggle for freedom, would serve his turn, but this ideal likewise was shattered on the rocks of reality, the fight being debased into ravin and slaughter. The pilgrim, therefore, returned to the original home of his gods—only to discover that Greece was no longer Hellas, for an unbelieving generation had desecrated the ancient shrines. Nowhere could Hyperion discern completeness or harmony. It was his doom, he felt, to have entered the world too soon or too late, when the times were out of joint. Terra was disillusioned and dismembered.

For the sun of the spirit, the lovelier world, has evanished,

And in the frostbitten night hurricanes wrathfully roar.

His uncontrollable anger drives him back to Germany, where he finds men and women still under the curse of separateness, specialisation; a life far from being integral. Thereupon he uplifts his voice in admonition. It is as if the seer had visioned the perils threatening the West: Americanism, mechanisation, the despiritualisation of the coming century to which he had looked forward in the hope that it would establish the "theocracy of the beautiful".

Toiling each for himself, and each in the thunderous workshop

Hears but the clang of his own tools …

… ceaseless, but ever and ever

Fruitless as that of the Furies, tending nowhither, their struggle.

Hölderlin's detachment from the present develops into a declaration of war upon the epoch, upon his homeland, when he perceives that not there is his new Hellas, the "Germania" of his dreams, to be found, and consequently, though he is so ardent a believer, he utters a malediction harsher than any words which a German inspired by frustrated affection had ever before used of his own people. He, who had set forth into the world as a seeker, flees in his disappointment to the world beyond, returns to the realm of ideology. "I have finished my dream, the dream of man and his doings." But where does Hyperion find a place of refuge? The novel does not answer this question. In *Wilhelm Meister* and in *Faust*, Goethe answered: "In activity." Novalis declared that it was in the land of fable, of magical reverie. Hyperion could only ask; he could not answer. "He had intimations only, and never achieved discovery."

The music of an intimation—that is *Hyperion*; no more. It is not a finished work of imagination. Even without critical study, the reader cannot fail to see that various phases of the writer's development are huddled together; that what the youth had joyfully begun in the intoxication of enthusiastic planning had been finished by a disillusioned being in a mood of profound discouragement. The second part of the novel is autumnal and weary. Here and there only, as in a glass darkly, do we see the flames of ecstasy, and it is hard to recognise "the vestiges of earlier thoughts" amid the encircling gloom. *Hyperion* remained an unfinished dream; yet we forget its blemishes and inadequacies in the rhythm of the diction, which charms our senses in the uninspired no less than in the inspired passages. German imaginative writing can show

nothing more ethereal than the melody which continues throughout this work. Sublime words rose spontaneously to Hölderlin's lips, and the music of speech was his element. Melody therefore suffuses *Hyperion* without the sense of effort, endowing even its weaknesses with charm. It fills out the garments of the improbable characters, giving them a semblance of life; it endows the poverty-stricken ideas with so much linguistic force that they seem to be the voice of God; and the borrowed descriptions of places on which the author had never set eyes are equipped with the magic of music heard in dreams. Hölderlin's genius derives its strength from the impalpable, the incommensurable; his impetus is inexhaustible; he overpowers our hearts by swooping into them from the lofty skies of another world. Despite his weakness as an artist and his incompetence for life, he conquers by his singleness of purpose and by the music of his words.

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* *one and all*

THE DEATH OF EMPEDOCLES

Clear as the tranquil stars of heaven

From lasting doubt pure characters proceed.

IN *EMPEDOCLES* WE HAVE an intensification of the sentiment underlying *Hyperion*. Whereas the earlier work was an elegy of intuition, the later is a tragedy of the full awareness of destiny. The dreamer, the seeker, has become the hero, awake and fearless. After "his soul had been utterly mortified", Hölderlin made a huge stride forward towards resignation—and beyond into that voluntary acceptance of destiny characteristic of the great figures of antiquity. Hence, though the music of both these works is mournful, there is a striking contrast between them. What in *Hyperion* is no more than a murky dawn has in *Empedocles* become a storm cloud louring with the menace of imminent destruction. Whereas Hyperion was still concerned with the hope of a noble life, with the unity of existence, Empedocles, in whom dreams had been replaced by sublime knowledge, looked forward, not to a great life, but to a great death.

Hence the figure of Empedocles towers above that of the confused and weakly Hyperion. *Empedocles* has a nobler rhythm, for it embodies the demands of genius, whereas *Hyperion* had merely disclosed the casual distresses of our human lot. The lad's sorrows are common form, but the pangs of the man of genius are peculiar to himself. Such sufferings are holy. "Their pain is divine."

A voluntary death, accepted wholeheartedly and intended to force a passage into the realm of the beautiful—this was what Hölderlin wanted to portray, with himself thinly veiled as the chief person of the drama, for there can be no doubt that he had been near to suicide. Among his papers there is the sketch of a play to be entitled *The Death of Socrates*. The heroic death of a sage, a free spirit, was to be depicted. But soon the shrewd sceptic Socrates was replaced by the traditional image of Empedocles, of whom we know little more than that "he proudly declared himself to be something greater than ordinary mortals, who are foredoomed to corruption". This conviction that he was different from other men made him Hölderlin's spiritual ancestor, the philosopher handing down across the millennia his disillusionment with the integrated world and his wrath with unbelieving and selfish humanity. To the lad Hyperion, Johann Christian Friedrich had been able to transmit only his musical intuition, a vague yearning, but into the reincarnated Empedocles he infused his mystical interlinking with the universe, his ecstasy and his profound intimation of doom. In *Hyperion*, Hölderlin had been able merely to poetise and to symbolise, but in *Empedocles* he manifested a divine frenzy and incarnated his longing to enter into communion with the universal.

As Hölderlin's first draft of the poem explains, Empedocles of Agrigentum was "a sworn enemy of all narrowness". Life and mankind were a distress to him because he found it impossible "to live with his fellows and to love them with an open heart, as intimately, as freely, as expansively as a god". That was why Hölderlin equipped him with his own most essential characteristic—indivisibility or "purity" of feeling. As poet, as true genius, Empedocles had the grace of "heavenly kinship with eternal nature".

Yet for the very reason that his thoughts and feelings were universally comprehensive, the Master suffered because life is disintegrated; "because all that exists is subject to the law of succession"; because gradations and thresholds and doors and partitions are perpetually restricting unity—so that even enthusiasm is unable, in its crucible, to fuse existence into a homogeneous whole. Thus did Hölderlin project into the cosmos the personal experience of cleavage between his faith and the jejuneness of the world; endowing Empedocles with the ecstasy of his inspiration, and also with the depression which was its obverse. At the moment when Hölderlin brought him onto the stage, Empedocles was no longer wholehearted in his self-confidence. The gods (for Hölderlin this was equivalent to what he meant by "inspiration") had forsaken him, "had robbed him of his powers", because, in the pride of his strength, he had vaunted his happiness:

Our brooding god

Abhors

Untimely growth.

Empedocles's sense of sublime isolation had been intensified to rapture. In his Phaethon flight he

had soared so high that he had come to regard himself as god, declaring:

Nature, craving a master,

Has become my handmaiden.

If honoured still, to me she owes it.

What were the seas and the skies,

The islands and the constellations,

What were the things that delight men's eyes,

What this dead lute, unless to them all

I gave tone and speech and soul?

What were the gods and their spirit

But for me, their revealer?

Now he has lapsed from grace; overwhelming power has been replaced by powerlessness; and to the stricken man "the wide world, abounding in life", has become "a lost heritage". The voice of nature no longer awakens harmonious echoes in his breast; he has fallen from heaven to earth. This is the story of Hölderlin's experience when inspiration failed and he was hurled back into the world of chill realities, for the drama incorporates his reminiscences of the humiliations which had engulfed his own self. Men recognise the genius grown impotent, vent their spite upon him, attack him when he is defenceless, driving Empedocles from his city and his home (just as Hölderlin had been driven from his home and his love) and hunting him into solitude.

But there, on the summit of Mount Etna, where Nature spoke once more to the lonely man, he regained his full stature, raised his voice as of old in heroic song. As soon as Empedocles had quaffed a draught of the crystalline water of the mountain top, the purity of nature was magically reinfused into his blood.

'Twixt thee and me

The old love dawns anew.

Sorrow is transformed into knowledge, and necessity transmuted into a joyful affirmation. Empedocles perceives the way home; he will pass beyond men into loneliness, will quit life for death. His supreme and blissful longing is to return to the All, and, inspired with faith in the universe, he proceeds to fulfil his desire:

Mostly

The children of earth dislike the new and the strange.

… In life their chief concern

Is love of worldly possessions. At last,

Relinquishing these, they must follow the call

They have dreaded to hear. And then,

Refreshed with a strength elemental,

They bathe in the waters of youth.

For to man is the privilege granted

Of finding rejuvenation

In a death at the fit moment chosen,

Since thereat, like Achilles dipped in the Styx,

Invincible rise up the nations.

"Oh, give yourselves to nature ere she claims"—such is the intoxicating thought of a voluntary death, now that the sage has come to understand the esoteric significance of a timely departure, of the inward or subjective obligation to die at will, instead of waiting for a doom objectively imposed. Life destroys us by disintegration; death restores our purity by reabsorbing us into the infinite.

("The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.") Purity is the supreme law of the artist. What he has to preserve unpolluted is not the vessel but the spirit it contains:

Betimes

Let him depart through whom the soul has spoken;

For Nature, the divine, oft shows herself

Divinely to us men, in this same way

To earnest seekers what they seek revealing,

And he whose heart she fills with ecstasy

Will faithfully proclaim her. Thereupon

Delay thou not to break the chosen vessel,

For else it may some baser usage serve,

What should be God's, becoming only man's.

'Tis better they should die, these fortunates,

Before (to trifles, shames and weaknesses a prey)

They perish ignominiously. 'Tis better, far,

For the free man to choose his time for death,

A loving sacrifice to the high gods.

Only death can cherish the sacred fire of the poet, enthusiasm cleansed from life's besoiling touch; only death can give his existence an undying purpose:

… as befits him for whom,

When death came in a consecrated hour,

The heavenly powers had their veils withdrawn,

And unto whom light was vouchsafed, whose soul

Was quickened by the Spirit of the World.

From the premonition of death he derived the last and loftiest inspiration. Like the dying swan, he once more uplifted his soul in song, a song that began gloriously but remained unfinished. Hölderlin could not transcend the beatitude of self-dissolution, though from beneath rose a chorus, to accompany the voice of the departing seer, in praise of ἀνάγκη, eternal necessity:

Thus must it, then, happen,

By the spirit's decree

And when the time is ripe.

Once at least must blind mortals

Behold a miracle.

Then the antistrophe extols the inconceivable:

Great is his godhead,

And the victim is great.

With his last word, with his last breath, Hölderlin continued to sing the praises of Fate, remaining a worshipper of "sacred necessity".

Never did Hölderlin the creator draw so near to the world of Hellas as in this tragedy, whose twofold presentation of sacrifice and sublimity lifts it to the level of the dramas of ancient Greece. What Goethe had failed to do in *Tasso* because he conceived the poet's torments only in terms of wounded vanity and the illusions of a presumptuous love, Hölderlin made a success of in *The Death of Empedocles* because the tragedy rings true. Empedocles is depersonalised. His tragedy is the tragedy of poiesis. There are no futile episodes, there is not a fragment of theatrical padding, to

hinder the onrush of the drama; no women impair the movement with erotic interludes; no underlings play a part in the dread conflict between the solitary and his deities. As in the works of Dante, Calderón and the Greek dramatists, the destiny of the individual is given ample surroundings and stands under the skies of the ages. No other tragic drama penned in the German tongue has so vast an amphitheatre; no other makes us forget so completely the stage with its footlights, transporting us to the agora, the festival, the sacrificial altar. In this fragment, as also in Kleist's *Robert Guiscard*, a vanished world is made alive for us once more by the writer's passionate will.

HÖLDERLIN'S POETRY

That which is pure from birth onwards is an enigma which even song can scarcely solve; for as you begin, you will remain.

OF THE "FOUR ELEMENTS" known to the Greeks—fire, water, air and earth—Hölderlin's poetry has but three. There is lacking to it earth, the dark and clinging element, connective and formative, the emblem of plasticity and hardness. His verse is made of fire, the symbol of the ascent heavenward; it is light as air, perpetually athrill like the rustling breeze; it is transparent as water. In it scintillate the colours of the rainbow; it is ever in motion, rising and falling, the unceasing respiration of the creative mind. His poems have no anchorage in experience; they have no ties with the fertile earth; they are homeless and restless, scurrying clouds, sometimes tinged with the red dawn of enthusiasm and sometimes darkened with the shadow of melancholy, sometimes gathering into dense masses from which flash the lightnings and thunders of prophecy. Always they climb towards the zenith, towards the ethereal regions far from solid ground, beyond the immediate range of the senses. "Their spirit stirs in song," writes Hölderlin of the poets, and again: "Warmed by its own fire, the spirit rises." Feeling is sublimated by combustion, vaporisation, clarification of that which is material.

Thus for Hölderlin poesy is a dissolving of earthly matter into spirit, a sublimation of the world into the world-soul; it is never a condensation, a thickening, a consolidation. Goethe's poems, even the most highly subtilised of them, have substantiality; we feel the fruit that has formed in them and can cognise them with our senses, whereas Hölderlin's are such stuff as dreams are made on. In Goethe's writings there is a tang of warm corporeality, an aroma of the epoch to which they belong, a sapid flavour of earth and human destiny. They contain emanations from the individuality of Johann Wolfgang, fragments of his particular world. Hölderlin's verses are expressly depersonalised. "That which is individual conflicts with the pure which it apprehends," he writes

somewhat cryptically, and yet with a meaning that emerges. Because of this lack of substantiality his poetry has a statics all its own. It does not circle quietly, self-contained and self-supported, but is, like an aeroplane in flight, sustained only by its impetus. As we read, we never lose a sense of the angelic, of something that is divinely white, sexless and soaring, of something that moves across the world like a dream, blissfully imponderable and merged in its own melody. Goethe stands on the ground as he sings, but Hölderlin sings from the upper levels of the atmosphere. For Hölderlin, poesy (as for Novalis, for Keats, for all the geniuses who died young) is the overcoming of gravity, is self-expression in music, is a return to the ethereal.

The fourth of the elements, on the other hand, the hard and heavy earth, plays no part (let me repeat) in the winged structure of Hölderlin's poetry. For him it is base and hostile, something from which he has to escape, the embodiment of gravity which continues to remind him of his earthly lot. Yet earth likewise furnishes splendid energies to the creative artist, giving stability, contour, warmth, momentum, divine afflatus to him who knows how to use it. Baudelaire, who, writing with no less passion, wrought out of earthly substance, was perhaps the perfect lyrical antithesis to Hölderlin. His poems, wholly the outcome of condensation whereas Hölderlin's were the result of rarefaction, were as steadfast in face of the infinite as was Hölderlin's music; their crystal clarity and impetus are no less sure than Hölderlin's transparency and sublimity. The two writers are as sharply contrasted as earth and sky, as marble and cloud, but in both, the intensification and transmutation of life into form, plastic in one case and musical in the other, are complete. They are the respective extremes of condensation and rarefaction. In Hölderlin's poems, the ignoring of the concrete, or (as Schiller called it) "the repudiation of the accidental", is carried so far, the circumstantial is so entirely disregarded, that often enough the titles seem to have no relation to the contents. Read, for instance, the odes to the Rhine, the Main and the Neckar, and notice how even the landscape is depersonalised, so that the

Neckar debouches into the Attic sea of his dreams, and Greek temples adorn the banks of the Main. His own life is resolved into a symbol; Susette Gontard is spiritualised into the vague image of Diotima; the fatherland becomes a mystical "Germania". The lyrical process of combustion leaves no earthy ash behind, no dross of personal experience. Whereas for Goethe experience was transmuted into verse, for Hölderlin experience vanished or evaporated to become a poem, dissolved into melody. Hölderlin does not transmute life into poesy, but flees from life into that which for him is something higher and more real than what is usually called reality.

This lack of earthliness, of sensuous distinctness, of plastic contour, affects not only the objective characteristics of Hölderin's poetry, making it seem void of bodily substratum; the medium as well, the language, has no substance, no weight, no colour, no smell of earth, no "fruitiness"; it is wraithlike, diaphanous, impalpable. "Language is a great superfluity," says his Hyperion, but underlying this is a haunting sense of inadequacy. The fact is that Hölderin's vocabulary is scanty, for he refuses to draw from all available sources, will employ only very select words found in the purest springs. His linguistic treasury contains barely a tenth of Schiller's riches, barely a hundredth of Goethe's, for Goethe went boldly and unprudishly into the marketplace to cull and rearrange the homely flowers of folk speech. Hölderlin's verbal equipment, thrice-sifted, has nothing torrential in its flow, lacks multiplicity, is inapt for the expression of the finer shades of meaning.

He was aware of this arbitrary restriction which his temperament imposed on him and of the dangers involved in renunciation of the world of the senses. "What I lack is not so much strength as delicacy of touch, not so much ideas as nuances, not so much a fundamental tone as manifold coordinated overtones, not so much light as diversified shades, and this depends upon a very simple cause—that I dislike the meannesses and common-places of actual life." He would

rather remain poor, would rather leave language in its charmed circle, than transfer into his holy of holies the minutest particles from the abundance of an unsifted world. Rather than vulgarise lyrical speech, he would restrict himself, "without any ornamentation, almost exclusively to great tones, each of them integral, and sounded in varying successions of harmony". According to him poesy is not something to be contemplated in a mundane sense, but to be perceived as a thing divine. Even monotony is preferable to sullying purity, for purity is more important than wealth of diction. That is why, in his writings, we find ceaseless repetitions (though with masterly variations) of such adjectives as "divine", "heavenly", "sacred", "eternal", "blessed". It would seem as if the only words acceptable to him were those hallowed by antiquity, and that he must have deliberately rejected those to which there still clung a lively odour of his own time, those which came to him warmed by close contact with the thronging masses. As an officiating priest must be clad in white raiment, so Hölderlin's poems had to be dressed in an unadorned linguistic vesture which would distinguish them at the first glance from the writings of the frivolous, the shallow and the pleasure-seeking among German poets. He deliberately chose nebulous words, esoteric terms, conveying a spiritual, ceremonial, consecrated aroma—carrying a whiff of incense. The racy, the readily comprehensible, the plastic elements of literary style were rejected. Hölderlin never picked out his words for their weight or their colour, never selected them because of their suitability to stir the senses, but because of their power to make an appeal to the imagination, to withdraw the reader from the sensuous universe, to lift him out of his mortal life into the realm of "divine ecstasy". The epithets "blessed", "heavenly", "sacred"—angelic and sexless words—are as colourless as white sails, but they carry us upwards into the empyrean when bellied like sails with the breath of enthusiasm, with the hurricane of rhythm. The essential characteristic of his poems is their aspiring trend. Their opening lines arouse the impression that we are quitting solid ground to soar into space.

What a contrast with Goethe! In the latter's writings we are aware of no abrupt transition as we pass from his poetic prose (that of his early letters, in particular) to his poems; he is an amphibian, equally at home in both worlds, that of prose and that of verse. Hölderlin, on the other hand, is heavy unless he is singing; in his letters and his essays his prose stumbles over philosophical formulae; this man who moves with such ease in his natural medium of inspired verse limps in this sphere. Like the albatross in Baudelaire's poem, the creature that wings its way so gloriously among the clouds makes a poor showing on the ground. But when Hölderlin sings, he soars. In *Empedocles*, for instance, there is not a line in which he drops back to earth. Poesy was more natural to him than mundane speech—was, so to say, his idiom. His personal fate symbolised this, for when Hölderlin became insane he was incapable of ordinary conversation, and yet to the last hour his trembling lips could give utterance to melodious rhythms.

Not in early youth, however, could it be said of him that he was a "born poet". In his first boyish endeavours, he lacked the power of untrammelled flight into the ether. His poems did not acquire strength and beauty until the daemon had overpowered the "reasonable" man. His first attempts at poesy were crude, of little account and devoid of individuality. The lava had not yet forced its way through the crust. At the outset he was an imitator to an almost inexcusable extent; for not only did he borrow the form of his verses and their intellectual atmosphere from Klopstock, but he unscrupulously inserted lines and stanzas of the latter's into what purported to be his own manuscript poems. Soon, however, Schiller's influence became predominant at the Tübingen seminary, and Hölderlin, now "inalterably dependent" upon him, adopted his mental atmosphere, his classical settings, his rhymed measures, his strophic pulsation. The bardic ode gave place to the euphonious, clear-cut, resounding and somewhat ponderous Schillerian hymn. But the pupil excelled the master. (To me, at any rate, Hölderlin's *To Nature* seems more beautiful than the most beautiful of Schiller's poems.)

Already in these later writings, modelled upon those of the poet whom the young man at this date chiefly admired, there became manifest an elegiac trend, an inclination to develop the melodious form characteristic of the Hölderlin that was to be. All that was needed for the birth of "Hölderlinian verse" was a further advance along the same line, an unconditional surrender to the impulse towards the sublime, an abandonment of the form of classic verse while adopting the essential features of Greek and Latin poesy—freedom of rhythm and absence of rhyme.

In the end, however, he sloughs this last skin of the traditional, the last remnants of the systematised Schillerian constructions. He recognises the splendour of the lawless, learns the transcendent value of lyric writing that relies exclusively upon an aspiring rhythm. Bettina von Arnim is an untrustworthy witness, but we can rely on her report of what Hölderlin said to Sinclair: "Spirit is the outcome of enthusiasm, and rhythm can be mastered only by him in whom spirit has quickened. One trained for poesy in the divine sense must recognise the spirit of the highest to be above the law, and must be prepared to sacrifice the law, saying: 'Not as I will, but as thou wilt.'" For the first time in his career as a poet Hölderlin breaks away from rationalism, and allows himself to be taken unawares by the elemental force within him. The daemonic now finds rhythmical though lawless expression. The music of his innermost nature—chaotic, savage, eminently individual—wells up. It is the music of him who wrote: "Everything is rhythmical; man's whole destiny is a heavenly rhythm, just as every work of art is a unique rhythm." Regularity disappears henceforward from his lyrics, which have a melody all their own, the melody of an informal rhythm. The poems have become wholly incorporeal; light as air, and as unsubstantial, they have soared far above the realm of the senses. Hölderlin's melody, like that of Keats and (sometimes) of Verlaine, issues from the universe and not from this little planet of ours. Its ultimate mystery is magical, inimitable and unique in the world of letters.

Hölderlin's rhythm is not stable, like (for instance) that of Walt Whitman—whom he resembles in the flow of his words —which is like that of a mighty river. At the outset of his career as a writer, Whitman discovered the method appropriate to him as a poet, and having discovered it went on using it for as long as he was able to write. Hölderlin, on the other hand, was continually strengthening his rhythm, which became more and more rustling, impetuous, confused, elemental and stormy. He began like a gently bubbling spring, to end as a raging torrent. This liberation of his rhythm from restraints, this growth in masterfulness, this outburst of exuberance, took place (as in Nietzsche) concomitantly with a process of mental decay. The rhythm became freer proportionally with the severance of the logical ties in his mind, until in the end the poet could no longer control the flow, and therefore, a living corpse, he was swept away by the current of his own song. This movement towards freedom, towards a dictatorship of rhythm at the cost of intellectual orderliness, was gradual. At first Hölderlin discarded the clanking fetters of rhyme; then he found the restraint of having to clothe his thoughts in stanzas oppressive; then his verse hurtled into the infinite as bare of trappings as a Greek athlete. Conventional forms of verse checked the flow of his inspiration. All depths became too shallow, all words too dull, all rhythms too cumbrous. The lyrical structure, originally classical in its regularity, bent and broke; thought emerged ever more obscurely, powerfully, stormily, from a dense cloud of imagery; simultaneously the rhythmical breathing grew deeper; bold inversions often connected a series of strophes into a single sentence. The poems are songs, hymned appeals, prophetic visions, heroical manifestos. Hölderlin began to contemplate the world mythologically, to poetise existence. Europe, Asia, Germania, landscapes of the imagination, loom from spectral horizons; far and near, vision and experience, are fused in mighty improvisations.

"World becomes dream, and dream becomes world"—Novalis's description of the final illumination of the poet is at length realised for Hölderlin. The sphere of the individual has

been transcended. “Love songs are a weariness,” he writes, “so are exultant songs of patriotism.” The transition to mysticism has begun. Time and space have sunk into “empurpled obscurity”; reason has been sacrificed to inspiration. No longer does he write poems, but “poetic prayers”, enveloped in Pythian vapours from which the lightnings flash fitfully. The enthusiasm of the youthful Hölderlin has become a daemonic inebriation, a sacred frenzy. These great poems have no course set for them; they move rudderless across a sea that has no limits, drifting at the mercy of the elements and obeying calls from an unseen world. At last Hölderlin’s rhythm is stretched to the breaking point; his language ceases to convey any meaning, being no more than “tones from the prophetic grove of Dodona”. Rhythm does violence to thought, being “like Bacchus, foolishly divine and lawless”. Poet and poem waste themselves in wanton exuberance, their energies dissipated in the infinite. Meaning has vanished in a chaotic twilight. The earthly, the individual, the shapely have disappeared in complete self-annihilation. Void of significance, mere Orphic melody, are his later words as they wing their way back into the ether which is their home.

FALL INTO THE INFINITE

What is unique, breaks.

Empedocles

Thus in stately fashion
Sets the star. Made drunken
By its light, the valleys shine.

Pausanias

HÖLDERLIN WAS THIRTY when the new century opened. During the last two years of the eighteenth century he did his best work. He had perfected his lyrical form and had created the heroic rhythm of his finest poems; he had placed his own youth on record in the figure of Hyperion the dreamer, and in *The Death of Empedocles* had immortalised the tragedy of the spirit. He had reached the zenith, and a piteous decline was at hand, a decline of which he had clairvoyant intimations, as when he wrote:

Against his will a longing strange
Draws him, draws him from rock to rock,
Rudderless, towards the abyss.

It avails him nothing to have been one of the great creative spirits of his time. He who has longed for love, harvests only misunderstanding:

This is
A froward generation, which loves not
To hear a demigod; nor to behold,
Formless amid the clouds, a presence divine;
Nor yet to see the face of one who reverences
The pure, the close, the omnipresent God.

At thirty, he is still eating the bread of dependence, is still a private tutor, a probationer. He is still tied to his mother's and his grandmother's apron strings. The mother is an elderly woman now, and the grandmother very, very old, but the two of them still knit socks for him as they did when he was a boy, still make his underclothing. Having saved a trifle, he renewed in Homburg the attempt already made in Jena to support himself as a poet, since a poet's life was the only one which really suited him. This meant semi-starvation, but he was sustained by the hope "of attracting the attention of my German fatherland until people will at least begin to ask where I was born and who my mother was". By degrees the silence of the world undermined Hölderlin's courage. He knew at the bottom of his heart that "the holy remains holy, even when men fail to regard it as such"; in the end, however, faith was shattered by this lack of recognition. "We cannot continue to love our fellows unless some of them love us." His loneliness, long a sunlit stronghold, became wintry and ice-bound. "Silence grows on me, so that I am more and more heavily burdened, until I am

irresistibly overshadowed." Again, in a letter to Schiller: "I freeze and stiffen in the winter that encompasses me. Under an iron sky, I harden into stone." There was nothing, there was no one, to warm him in his icy solitude. "So few still believe in me," he complained, and at last he ceased to believe in himself. What since childhood he had regarded as a sacred mission no longer appealed to him; he doubted the significance of poesy. His friends were far away; fame left him unregarded.

Often I think it would be better

To sleep than to be thus companionless,

Than to persist. For what to do and what to say

I know not, and why be a poet in so arid a time?

Again he was compelled to recognise how impotent is the mind to make headway against reality. Having "found it impossible to live exclusively by authorship unless one is willing to be subservient", he bowed his neck once more beneath the yoke. First of all he revisited his beloved home, and spent some happy hours with friends at the "autumn festival" in Stuttgart. Then he betook himself to Hauptwil in Switzerland, returning to drudgery as a private tutor.

Hölderlin knew that his sun was setting, that the clouds were gathering round him. He mournfully bade farewell to youth, and his verses shivered with the chill of eventide:

Scant, scant my life, yet the cold breath

Of nightfall comes. Mute as a shadow

Am I already, and my sad heart

Slumbers already songless in my breast.

His pinions were broken, and his balance was lost, for he did not truly live except when he was winging his flight, sustained by poetic impetus. He had to pay "for not having been content to remain at the surface of things", to pay "for having exposed my whole soul, whether in love or in work, to the risks of reality". The aureole of genius fell from his brow; he shrank into himself that he might hide from his fellows, for association with them had become physically distressing. As his power of self-control waned, the activities of the daemon grew more conspicuous in the twitchings of his nerves. The disorder of his mind showed itself in physical outbursts. Trifles made him irritable, and thereupon he threw aside the armour of humility. Over-sensitive, regarding himself as despised and rejected, everywhere he encountered fancied slights. He reacted more violently than of yore to changes in his mental environment. What to begin with was only a "sacred discontent", developed into a neurasthenic malaise, into something catastrophic. His gestures were more violent, his moods more fulminating, his cheeks more sunken, and his once clear and steady eyes were clouded and vacillating. The trouble invaded his personality. The daemon gained increasing power over the victim. Unrest took possession of him, hunting him from one extreme to another, from hot to cold, from rapture to

despair, from country to country and from town to town. The febrile irritation spread from his nerves to his thoughts. At length the infection influenced his writing, the instability of the man showing itself as incoherence in the poet, who was now incapable of sticking to a point and of developing an idea in logical sequence. Just as he moved on restlessly from house to house, so did he leap from image to image, from thought to thought. This daemonic conflagration did not burn itself out until the whole inner man had been consumed, so that nothing remained but the blackened framework of his body.

Thus in the pathography of Hölderlin, in the story of his mental breakdown, there is no sharp borderline between sanity and insanity. The process of internal combustion was a slow one. The daemonic energy did not suddenly devastate his intelligence as if it had been consumed in a blazing forest, but burned it slowly, slowly, as though in a furnace with banked fires. Part of his nature, the elements most intimately associated with his poetic genius, had the resistance of asbestos. In him, imaginative insight survived the decay of his waking intelligence, melody outlasted logic, and the rhythmic faculty persisted when the linguistic faculty was moribund. During the onset of mental failure, the manifestations of restlessness, of nervous dread, of tetchiness, became from time to time intensified to maniacal excitation, and such crises, while growing more and more violent, succeeded one another at shorter intervals. Thus, whereas in his earlier engagements as tutor he had been able to keep at work for months and even years before the tensions accumulated to produce a catastrophic discharge, at Hauptwil and in Bordeaux he was able to stay only a few weeks. His unfitness for ordinary life showed itself once more in incapacity for self-control, in aggressiveness; whereupon, like a piece of flotsam, he would drift back to his mother's house, the shore on which he was cast up after each of his voyages. In despair the shipwrecked mariner stretched out a hand for help to the poet who had been a formative influence in his youth, writing a poignant appeal to Schiller. But Schiller vouchsafed no answer, leaving the poor wretch to sink like a stone into the abyss of destiny. Unteachable as ever, he made a final attempt to earn his livelihood as tutor—at Bordeaux, far from home. Then, having failed yet again, he bade a last farewell to the uncongenial occupation.

Round this phase of his career a veil has been wrapped. We know, indeed, that he "wandered through France in fine spring weather", and we read of a night spent "on the dreaded and snow-clad mountains of Auvergne, amid storm and wilderness and icy cold, with loaded pistols beside me on my rough couch". We know that he reached Bordeaux to become a member of the household of the German consul in that city, and then left at short notice. Thereafter the mists redescend upon the story of his life. Was he the stranger of whom (ten years later) a lady spoke in Paris, as having seen him in her garden holding friendly converse with marble statues of the gods? Is it true that he had sunstroke while tramping back to Germany; that "fire, the mighty element", laid him low; that, as he related, "Apollo" had pierced him with a flaming shaft? Did footpads really strip him of his clothes and take from him what little money he had? These questions are likely never to be answered satisfactorily. This much is certain, that one day "an emaciated man, pale as death, long-haired and bearded,

wild-looking, habited like a beggar", turned up at Matthisson's in Stuttgart and, when Matthisson shrank from him as from a ghost, the waif murmured the name "Hölderlin".

The wreck was now complete. The derelict whom reason had abandoned had drifted back once more to port, but thenceforward Hölderlin's mind remained under the shadow of a night that was illumined only from time to time by Orphic flashes. In conversation the plainest meanings were beyond the scope of his understanding; when he tried to write a letter the simplest purposes would be entangled in inextricable confusion; his intelligence became more and more cut off from the world, while his utterances were sound without sense. The conscious personality decayed stratum by stratum, until the unconscious assumed control, and he was but "the mouthpiece of an imperative from beyond" (in Nietzsche's sense of the phrase), spokesman of the sublimities which his daemon whispered to him and of which he was no longer consciously aware.

Most people shunned him because of his intense irritability, or they made mock of him in his rages. Only Bettina von Arnim (who resembled Beethoven and Goethe in her instinctive recognition of genius) and his faithful friend Sinclair could still perceive the divine spark in the man who had been "sold into slavery to the celestial powers". Bettina writes: "When I look at and listen to Hölderlin it seems to me as if a divine being must have overwhelmed him in a flood—a flood of language in which his intelligence is drowned." Most of Hölderlin's daemonic utterances in this later phase have been lost, like Beethoven's improvisations, but Bettina gives us echoes of them when she reports to Karoline von Günderode: "To listen to him was like listening to the intermittent roaring of the wind, for again and again he would burst out into paeans, which died away into silence. Then would come a saying so profound that one forgot he was insane, and his remarks on verse and language seemed on the point of throwing light on the mystery of the latter. Ere long, however, his mind would darken once more; he would grow confused and incoherent …"

After his return from Bordeaux, Hölderlin was for a time cared for by his mother at Nürtingen. Improving a little, in 1804 he was given the sinecure post of librarian to the landgrave of Hesse-Homburg, and lived in Homburg under the supervision of friends. Growing worse again, he spent two years in an asylum, from which he was discharged as incurable but harmless. By now his wild rages had ceased, and a permanent home was found for him as boarder in the house of a carpenter at Tübingen. This was in 1807, and he survived until 1843. Hölderlin, the youthful enthusiast, was no more. Like Iphigenia in Aulis, the gods had taken him to themselves in a cloud. What remained below was a living corpse, a being unaware of his identity, and even of his name; for sometimes he called himself "Herr Bibliothekarius" and sometimes "Scardanelli".

EMPURPLED OBSCURITY

If anyone lacking the frenzy of the Muses should try to enter the gate of poesy, his poems will pale before the art of one affected by this creative madness.

Plato

THE GREAT THOUGH CRYPTIC POEMS which Hölderlin wrote during those years of twilight and darkness, his *Songs of the Night*, have no counterpart in literature—unless perhaps we may compare with them William Blake's books of prophecy, penned by that inspired contemporary likewise regarded as "an unfortunate lunatic whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement". Both men wrote what the daemon dictated; neither could give an exoteric explanation of his esoteric compositions; in the case of each of them a hand unskilled for the tasks of ordinary life fashioned a heaven of its own above the familiar skies. For both, poetry (and in Blake's case draughtsmanship as well) was the vehicle of oracular messages. Just as the Pythian, made drunken by the vapour issuing from the chasm at Delphi and by the visions that revealed themselves to her in the fumes, would convulsively speak the words put into her mouth by Apollo, so did Hölderlin's daemon and Blake's hurl forth lava and red-hot scoriae from what had seemed extinct craters of the mind. In Hölderlin's later poems it is not the earthly understanding which speaks (after the utilitarian manner of ordinary human beings), but rhythm itself, divorced from meaning, rhythm that has lost its way in the incomprehensible, yet will from time to time throw a strange illumination into the dark abysses of the world. The seer dwells in an apocalyptic realm:

The mountain of prophecy

Towers above the valleys and the streams,

That man may look forth into the east,

And be guided by its transformations.

But from the ether falls

The picture true; thence rain God's sayings numberless,

To resound in the innermost grove.

The language of dreams has become melodious revelation, "resounding in the innermost grove", a voice from beyond, the expression of a will far higher than that of the ostensible speaker, for the poet is but the unconscious herald of the primal word. It is the daemon who speaks behind the mask of what was once Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin.

For these *Songs of the Night*, these fragmentary clairvoyant inspirations, no longer derive from the carefully tilled and well-lighted precinct of earthly art, from a region that has been measured and plotted. They are not sedulously wrought in the workshop of the mind, but are shapeless masses of meteoric metal, fallen to earth out of the invisible heaven of inspiration, and bearing with them the magic of their extra-terrestrial origin. Every true poem is a tissue woven out of two strands, a warp that is unconscious and inspirational, and a woof that is purposive art. Sometimes the warp and sometimes the woof will predominate. In a "normal" man of letters—typically in Goethe—we find that as age advances there is a tendency for technique to outweigh inspiration; that what was to begin with mainly intuitive has been transformed into the deliberate mastery of a craft.

In Hölderlin's poems, on the other hand, we note a steady increase in the inspirational, the daemonic element, in the improvisations of genius; whereas the intellectual, the purposefully artistic element passes more and more into the background and ultimately disappears. Rhythm takes charge, has become autocratic. The writer does indeed attempt, from time to time, to rebel against this autocracy, tries to develop one or another of his poetic themes in some sort of logical sequence. But the waves of the half-formed wrench him from his holds, and he groans:

Ah, how little we know ourselves,

For within us a god rules!

The threads grow entangled, and he gives vent to whirling words, rhythmical indeed, but without beginning or end. Often fatigue overwhelms him and, forgetting what he has begun to say, he bridges some impossible gap with an inappropriate "namely" or "therefore", or breaks off resignedly by writing "much more might be said about this".

Yet in these stammering vocables, despite their seeming incoherence, there is often a sublime meaning. The writer is a prey to chance impressions, which his mind, "a garden full of weeds", can no longer knit into a concerted whole. Nevertheless, the living breath of Hölderlin's poesy still breathes through the tangled web. The seer's gaze envisages the world as one vast poetical conflagration. He even shows a profundity that was lacking prior to the wreck of his intelligence. "Thence rain God's sayings numberless, to resound in the innermost groves." His songs are now cosmic visions of the chaos which is their home.

Groping in the dark, illumined only by lightning flashes and half blinded by these, he perceives wondrous interconnections. Shortly before the end there is a last, a unique miracle. In the heart of the labyrinth Hölderlin grasps what he had vainly sought in earlier days—the mystery of Hellas. On all the paths of his childhood he had looked for the key to this enigma; as a youth he had tried to find his Hellas in the heaven of idealism, in the land of dreams; vainly he had sent Hyperion to visit the shores of the present and the past. He had conjured up Empedocles from the shades and had conned the books of the sages; he had preferred "the study of the Greeks" to converse with his friends; he had been estranged from his homeland and from the age into which he had been born because he was continually voyaging to discover the Hellas of his imagination. In astonishment at the witchery, he had often asked himself:

What is it, then,

Which thus binds me fast

To these old, these blessèd coasts?

Why do I love them more than my fatherland?

For, like one sold into slavery

To the celestial powers, my home

Is where Apollo walked of old.

Then, when his mind was hopelessly disordered, the mystery of Hellas suddenly revealed its meaning. As Virgil guided Dante, so did Pindar lead the bewildered Hölderlin, until the dazzled man saw—undimmed by mythology, sparkling like a great ruby that glowed from a new-made cleft in the rocks—that Hellenism of which none before him had dreamt.

In his chaotic renderings of Pindar and Sophocles, Hölderlin's language transcends the purely Hellenic, purely Apollonian clarity of the outset. Our lukewarm modern speech is transfused with the ardours of the Greek tongue. Like Michelangelo with his half-sculptured blocks of marble, in these shapeless fragments Hölderlin outdoes perfection, since perfection implies finish. Here the primal energy of the universe when it was without form and void, and not the voice of an isolated poet, finds sonorous expression.

Thus gloriously, in "empurpled obscurity", does Hölderlin's spirit sink into the night, a funeral pyre that spouts tongues of flame heavenward before collapsing into ashes. Like his genius, which is that of the enthusiast, his daemon, fierce and melancholy, is godlike in stature. In other poets when the daemonic erupts, the volcanic eruption is usually tainted with the fumes of alcohol (Grabbe, Günther, Verlaine, Marlowe, Poe) or mingled with the stupefying incense of self-adulation (Byron, Lenau). But Hölderlin's intoxication is pure, and for this reason his exit is not a sinking beneath the waters of destruction but a hero's return to the realm of the infinite. He is redissolved in his primal element. His decline is music; his departure, song. As with Euphorion, the symbol of poesy in *Faust*, the son of the German spirit and the Greek, it is only the perishable, the bodily part of Hölderlin's being which is lost in the darkness of annihilation. His immortal song, the music of his lyre, rises for ever towards the stars.

SCARDANELLI

He is far away now, far, far away;
A wanderer he; for geniuses are
Not of this earth; he communes with the gods.

WELL-NIGH FORTY YEARS did Hölderlin survive as a madman. What remained was the shade known as "Scardanelli", this being the name he wrote beneath his often unintelligible verses. Just as the world had forgotten him, so had he forgotten himself.

With the friendly carpenter, Scardanelli lived as boarder until far on into the new century. His fair hair was greyed and then whitened by the touch of time. Change and destruction wrought their will on the world of which he knew nothing. Napoleon made raids into Germany, Austria and Russia; was driven back by the combined forces of a resurgent Europe; was sent to Elba and broke forth for the Hundred Days; and was then safely prisoned in remote St Helena, chained there like Prometheus to the rock for six years until he died, and became a legend. But the lonely poet in Tübingen who had once sung the praises of "the Hero of Arcole" knew naught of these things. Schiller died in 1805, and his body mouldered for more than twenty years in its first resting place, until in 1827 it was removed to another cemetery, and thoughtfully for a moment or two Goethe held his long-dead friend's skull in reverent hands. But all this time Hölderlin, who had so fondly admired Schiller, had forgotten the very meaning of the word "death". Five years later, when Goethe was eighty-three, his own turn came to follow Schiller and Beethoven and Kleist and Novalis and Schubert into the land of the shades. Waiblinger, the young poet who as a student had often visited Scardanelli, had died prematurely two years before. Yet for more than a decade after Goethe's passing, Scardanelli lived on. Hölderlin's best-loved sons, Hyperion and Empedocles, forgotten for many years, had been recalled to the memory of others, and were enshrined in the hearts of the new generation, but no word of this revival made its way into the retreat at

Tübingen. The recluse was dead to the world.

From time to time some stranger would call, curious to see the once great poet in his decay. There was a small house clinging to the old tower in Tübingen, and in a turreted chamber here were Scardanelli's narrow quarters, a room with a grated window commanding a fine view. The visitor would be shown upstairs to a door, through which came the sound of a voice—not of conversation, for the inmate of the room was only talking, poetising, to himself, as he did for hours without ceasing. At other times he would sit at the piano, playing a brief succession of notes again and again and again, while his fingernails, grown rank, clicked on the worn keys. In one way or the other the demented man would perpetually satisfy his need for rhythm, an elemental music sounding through his worn-out brain as the wind murmurs for ever through the strings of an Aeolian harp.

At length the awed listener ventures to knock at the door, and, being answered by a faint but startled "Come in", opens it, to see a lean figure, like one that appears to have stepped out of the *Tales* of Hoffmann, standing in the middle of the room. Scardanelli is a little bent with age, his white hair grows but thinly above the finely arched brow. Fifty years of sorrow and loneliness have not wholly destroyed the nobility of aspect which was Hölderlin's in youth. Even more finely cut than of yore runs the line of the profile. Now and again the face, the hands, the whole frame, twitch convulsively, but meanwhile the eyes, once glowing with enthusiasm, remain motionless and blank. Yet there is life and there are gleams of understanding still in the ghost of what used to be Hölderlin, for poor Scardanelli bows subserviently as if in obeisance to some exalted visitor.

Yet it was strange. In this man whose intelligence was utterly obscured, in this man who could no longer be allowed to walk the streets (because the intellectual elite of Germany, the students, made fun of him, and amused themselves by giving him beer to drink and thus provoking violent outbursts), even beneath the ashes of a mind that had burned out, the

spark of poesy was glowing. Scardanelli wrote verses—much as Hölderlin may have written verses during childhood—verses and imaginative prose. Hour after hour would he spend, filling one manuscript book after another. Mörike relates that "clothes baskets full of these manuscripts" (which he heedlessly destroyed) were brought to him from time to time. When a visitor asked Scardanelli for a memento, the poet would at once sit down and, in a handwriting as good as ever, pen jingles about the seasons or Greece or some "spiritual" topic. For instance:

Like day, which men with its clear radiance lights

And with the light which out of scorn derives

The twilit world of happenings unites,

Is knowledge, in whose light the spirit thrives.

Inscribing at the foot a fancy date (of actual dates he knew nothing), he would sign: "Yours obediently, Scardanelli."

These jingles of the last phase, when mental failure was complete, are different from the writings of that earlier period of "empurpled obscurity" when the *Songs of the Night* were written. They emanate from a second childhood, having no more serious thought in them than nursery rhymes of the "Simple Simon" order. Free verse has been abandoned in favour of rhyme (or occasionally mere assonance), and the torrential current of undivided rhythms has given place to pools of short stanzas. The weary poet clings to rhyme as a crutch. None of the poems are perfectly clear and reasonable, and yet none of them are entirely unmeaning. They are still poems of a sort, these outpourings of Scardanelli's, not mere verbiage like the jingles penned by other lunatics with a turn for verse—for example, those produced by Lenau in the Wenigstädt asylum, "*Die Schwaben, sie traben, traben, traben*."[*] Scardanelli continues to use similes, though they are not always easy to understand, and with distressing frequency he shows awareness of his unhappy state, as in the heart-rending quatrain:

The pleasures I once knew have long since left me;

Of all my joys, alas, has time bereft me;

The merry months of springtime have departed,

And I am naught, life-weary, heavy-hearted.

Like a clock which has lost its hands, but whose mechanism continues to tick aimlessly, Scardanelli goes on poetising in a world of which he is no longer a part. Poetry is still the breath of life for him, even though he is "naught, life-weary, heavy-hearted". In truth his supreme longing has been fulfilled, though, tragically enough, in a manner which smacks of caricature. What survives in him is poetry, and nothing more. The man has died before the poet; reason, before melody. His end is that which, long since, he had proclaimed to be the true end of the true poet: "Consumed in the flame, to atone thereby for his failure to control the flame."

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* *The Swabians, they trot, trot, trot.*

KLEIST

1777–1811

The dying oak tree will outlast the storm.
The soundest oak of all, the forest's pride,
Falls to the ground, uprooted by the blast.
And why? Because its branches catch the wind.

Penthesilea

THE HUNTED MAN

No doubt you find me hard to understand.

Take comfort, friend; through me God speaks to you.

The Schroffenstein Family

THERE WAS NO POINT OF THE COMPASS towards which Kleist did not travel in Germany, nor any town of note in which he, a homeless wanderer, did not sojourn for a time. He was almost unceasingly on the go. From Berlin he drove by diligence to Dresden, into the Erzgebirge, to Bayreuth, to Chemnitz; then he was off again to Würzburg; thereafter, athwart the Napoleonic campaigns, to Paris. He had planned to spend a year in the French capital, but within a few weeks he set out for Switzerland, moving from Berne to Thun, to Basel, and then back to Berne. Next, as if flung thither like a stone, he suddenly appeared at Osmanstedt, Wieland's home, near Weimar. After a brief stay there, he went hotfoot to Milan, visited the Italian lakes, and betook himself to Paris once more. Having made a futile rush to Boulogne, where he was in the midst of a hostile army, he found himself in Mainz, recovering from a dangerous illness. The next flight was to Potsdam, and the next after that to Königsberg, where he actually remained a year, occupying a post he had longed for. Breaking loose again, he set out for Dresden, which meant crossing the French armies on the march. Arrested on suspicion of being a spy, he was sent to Châlons, and had no choice but to stay there six months. Released at length, he zigzagged back to Dresden, whence, during the full blast of the Austrian campaign, he started for Vienna, was arrested at Aspern while the battle was in progress, but escaped and fled to Prague. Sometimes he vanished like a river that runs underground, to emerge at an immense distance, but always, again and again, a sort of gravitational force drew him back to Berlin. With broken pinions he fluttered away once or twice more, at length to his birthplace Frankfurt an der Oder, where he had relatives and hoped to find a refuge from the hunter who was ever on his trail. Nowhere could he rest. For the last

time, therefore, he climbed into a post-chaise (which had been his only true home during the thirty-four years of his life) and drove to Potsdam, where, beside the Wannsee, he blew out his brains. He was buried by the roadside.

What moved Kleist to take these journeys, or, rather, what force moved him hither and thither? For his journeys had no meaning, nor usually any definite aim. They elude logical explanation. Unbiased study discloses that the "reasons" for them were in most cases mere pretexts, masks to hide the visage of the daemon. To sober-minded thinkers, the wanderings of such an Ahasuerus remain enigmatical, and it was natural that he should have been thrice arrested as a spy. In Boulogne, Napoleon was waiting with a great army in the hope of invading England. When the man who not very long before had been an officer in the Prussian service turned up like a sleepwalker among the French troops, only a miracle saved him from the firing squad. Then, when the French were marching on Berlin, he strolled across their files—to be seized and interned. At Aspern the Austrians were fighting a decisive battle, and again our somnambulist appeared among his French enemies, armed with no better warrant for his presence than a few patriotic poems in his pocket. Such heedlessness is inexplicable on rationalist principles; nothing can account for it but obsession, nothing but the unrest of a tortured spirit. Certain authorities speak of secret missions. The explanation may apply to some of the numberless journeys, but not to the perpetual flittings characteristic of the man. In general his wanderings were purposeless.

His wanderings were purposeless. He did not aim at any particular town, any specific country, any clearly contemplated goal. He sped through the air like a random shaft whose only object was to escape from a tensed bow. He was running away from himself. He changed one town for another as a man in a fever changes one pillow for another. Lenau, inwardly akin to Kleist, uses this very image in his poem *The Madman*. At each remove, no doubt, he hoped to find healing, but those hunted by the daemon are granted no respite and never know the joys

of home. In like manner did Rimbaud storm from country to country; Nietzsche, from place to place; Beethoven, from dwelling to dwelling; Lenau, from continent to continent. The whip that drove them was part of themselves, elemental restlessness, tragical inconstancy. They were the quarry of an unknown power, foredoomed never to escape. Escape was impossible, since the hunter circulated in the blood of the hunted, and was dominant within the victim's own brain. Only by self-destruction could they destroy the inner enemy, their lord and master, the daemon.

Kleist knew from the outset that the daemon was hounding him into the abyss. What he did not know was whether he was striving to avoid the abyss or hastening towards it. At times he seemed to be convulsively clinging to life, to be digging his fingers into the last clods of earth that could save him from falling into the depths. He struggled to escape, held out imploring hands to his sister, to various women, to men friends. At other times, he craved for the fatal plunge. He was unceasingly aware of the gulf that yawned, but not whether it yawned in front of him or behind him, whether it was life or whether it was death. Because the chasm was within, he could not escape it. It went with him everywhere like his shadow.

In his passage from land to land he was like one of those Christian martyrs who by Nero's orders were wrapped in tow and lighted, so that, living torches, enveloped in flames, they ran madly, knowing not whither. Kleist never saw the milestones on his road, and one may wonder whether he fully opened his eyes in the towns through which he scampered. His life was unceasing flight, and he panted as he fled with wildly throbbing heart. That is why he uttered a cry of jubilation, at once glorious and horrible, when at length, weary of his torments, he voluntarily hurled himself into the abyss.

Kleist's life was not a life but a mad chase in which he was the quarry, a hunt with its smell of blood and its sinister atmosphere of cruelty, amid the trumpet calls of excitement, the baying of hounds and the death-halloos of huntsmen with nerves atwitch for the slaughter. A pack of misfortunes was

ever hard upon his heels; a stag close-pressed, he would flee into a thicket; then, turning at bay, he would make one of the hounds of destiny his victim (three, four or five works composed in the heat of passion bear witness to these sudden changes of will); and thereupon, dripping blood from his wounds, he would again betake himself to flight. But when at last the survivors of the pack thought to seize him and rend him, with a splendid rally of his forces he eluded them by a sublime effort of self-destruction.

LIKENESS OF THE UNPORTRAYABLE

I know not what I am to say to you about myself who am indescribable.

From a letter

WE HAVE NO LIKENESSES worthy of the name. The clumsy miniature and the poorly executed portrait show a puerile face, although at the time they were taken Kleist was a man fully grown. He might be any German youth with a gloomy and questioning expression. There is no sign of a powerful imagination, or even of intellect; not a trait to arouse our curiosity or make us ask ourselves what spirit can have animated this cold brow. Having glanced at the depictions, we pass on our way unsatisfied, unsuspecting, uninterested. Kleist's inner life lay deep. The secrets of his soul were not to be read in his countenance.

Nor have these secrets been disclosed to us by the verbal reports of his friends and contemporaries, which are scanty and convey little information. In one respect only they are unanimous, for all who knew him declared him to be inconspicuous, reserved, aloof and, on the whole, "ordinary" to outer seeming both in nature and in looks. His was not an aspect that would entice a painter to take up the brush, a writer the pen. He must have been so inscrutable as not even to arouse the challenging impression of inscrutability! Friends and acquaintances met him year after year without being stimulated thereby to commit their thoughts of him to paper. We have not so many as a dozen anecdotal descriptions of him for all the thirty-four years of his life. If you would understand how vague, how shadow-like was the impression produced by Kleist on his generation, you will do well to recall, in contrast, Wieland's account of Goethe's arrival in Weimar, and to remember how the fiery radiations that emanated from Johann Wolfgang blinded even those who saw him only from afar. Think, too, of the witchery exercised by Byron and Shelley, by Jean Paul and Victor Hugo—a charm made manifest by innumerable letters, by thousands of references to them in prose and verse. Hardly anyone has troubled to describe a

meeting with Kleist. The three lines written by Clemens Brentano embody the most vivid pen-portrait that has come down to us, and even here the writer was more concerned with the character than with the aspect of the man: “a stocky fellow of thirty-two, with a bullet head and the signs of manifold experience in his face, variable in mood but with the goodness of a child, poor and staunch.” No one looked him in the eyes to read his nature. When he disclosed himself to anyone, it was from within.

His shell was too hard—and this was the tragedy of his existence. He was reserved to excess, and kept everything locked up within himself. He did not express his passions either in looks or in spoken words. In fact he spoke little, partly because he had a slight stammer, of which he was ashamed, and partly because he kept his feelings under lock and key.

In one of his letters he made a distressing avowal of his incapacity for utterance, of the way in which his lips were sealed. “There is a lack of means of communication. The only one we have, language, is inadequate; it cannot depict the soul, and conveys no more than fragments. That is why I always have a feeling of horror when I am called upon to disclose my innermost self in words.” Thus he remained mute, not from dumbness or sloth, but from an overpowering chastity of feeling; and this silence, this dull, brutalising, oppressive silence, which he would maintain for hours when in company, was his most salient characteristic—that and absence of mind, a confusion which obscured his clarity of intellect. When talking he would suddenly break off and stare into vacancy (contemplating the depths within). Wieland tells us: “At table he would often mutter to himself, with the air of a man who believed himself to be alone, or with that of one whose thoughts were far away.” He could not converse unconstrainedly in an exchange of the small talk of ordinary life. Conventional and customary obligations were repugnant to him, so that many assumed there must be something “dour and sinister” in this unusual companion; while others were

wounded by his harshness and cynicism and bluntness when, as happened now and then, pricked by his own silence, he threw off all restraints. There was never any gentleness in his conversation, no sympathy in his looks or his words. Rahel von Ense, who came nearer than most to understanding him, said of him aptly: “The atmosphere round him was severe.” Even she, who in general gave such vivid descriptions of the persons she encountered, shows us only this unportrayable aura, and fails to present us with a likeness. Thus he remains, for all time, a man unseen and “indescribable”.

For the most part those who met him failed to pay any heed to him; others avoided close contact with him because he inspired dislike and even repulsion. Those who knew him loved him, loved him passionately, but even they, when in his company, were affected with a dread which annulled their power of expressing their affection. When his defences broke down, he disclosed his hidden depths, permitted glimpses of a formidable, a fathomless abyss. The result was that no one felt at ease in his presence, and yet he exerted a magical attraction; the pressure of his atmosphere, his intense passion, his exaggerated claims (it was usual with him to demand a joint suicide!) made him insufferable. Everyone was drawn to him, but everyone shrank from his daemon; everyone felt him to be alarmingly close to death and destruction. When Pfuel called at his rooms one evening in Paris and found that he was not at home, the terrified visitor rushed off to the morgue to look for Kleist’s body among the suicides. When Marie von Kleist had not heard from him for a week, she feared the worst and sent her son to see what had happened. Those who did not know him intimately believed him cold and indifferent. His intimates, on the other hand, were afraid of the fires that consumed him. That was why no one could get into close touch with him or give him a helping hand, since he was too hot for some and too icy for others. Only the daemon remained faithful to him.

He knew that he was a thorny subject and once said: “It is dangerous to have anything to do with me.” Consequently he

made no complaint when people drew away from him, being aware that those who came near to him were singed by his flames. Through the extravagance of his mortal demands he troubled the youth of Wilhelmine von Zenge, his betrothed; squandered the property of Ulrike, his favourite sister; left Marie von Kleist, who was also dear to him, in loneliness and neglect; and dragged Henriette Vogel down with him to death. Becoming ever more keenly aware of the perilous effects of his inner life, of his daemon, upon others, he retired more and more into himself, growing more solitary even than nature had created him. During his last years he would spend day after day in bed, smoking and writing. Rarely did he go out, and then only to coffee houses. As his aloofness increased, people almost forgot his existence, and when in 1809 he disappeared for a few months, his friends (with little concern) assumed that he must be dead. Nobody wanted him. So lost was he to the world that no one would have noticed his departure from it had he not died in so melodramatic a fashion.

We have no likeness of him, neither of his bodily self, nor yet, except for his published works and his long letters, of the inner man. There was, indeed, an essay in self-portraiture which profoundly moved the few to whom he showed it. It was entitled *History of My Mind*, being a confession like that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The autobiography was penned not long before his death, but has not come down to us. Either he burned it, or else the uninterested guardians of his literary remains destroyed it, as they destroyed his novel and a good many of his other writings. Thus did his visage, throughout obscured by shadow, recede into utter darkness. We have no likeness of him, and know only his gloomy familiar, the daemon.

PATHOLOGY OF FEELING

Accurst the heart that knows naught of moderation.

Penthesilea

THE MEDICAL EXPERTS summoned instantly from Berlin to examine the suicide's body found it healthy and vigorous. There was no sign of disease in any of the organs, no cause of death but the obvious one—the self-inflicted injury to the brain. Still, it was necessary for them to display their learning, so they reported Kleist to have been "*sanguino-cholericus in summo gradu*",* and that there were reasons for inferring the pre-existence of "a morbid emotional state". Empty words and unsubstantiated inferences! What is psychologically important is that direct examination showed all the organs to be sound. Nor does this contradict what some of those who had known Kleist declared after his death, that he had been subject to strange attacks of nervous collapse, that his digestion had been sluggish and that he had had numerous other ailments. It seems probable that these troubles were the outcome of what nowadays psychoanalysts call "flight into illness", manifestations of the body's urgent need for repose after periods of mental stress. His physical heritage was robust almost to excess; his illness did not inhere in his flesh and blood; it was his doom to suffer from a ferment of the spirit.

Yet he was not a psychopath, was neither a hypochondriac nor a misanthrope (although Goethe once harshly said of him: "his hypochondria is extreme"). Kleist was not hereditarily tainted, was not mad; at most he was overwrought, as an outcome of mental stresses, of "conflicts" (to use another psychoanalytical term). His strings were taut, and when the genius touched them they twanged like those of a harp. He had too much passion; an overplus of feeling which could never secure adequate expression in word or deed, being held in check by a no less excessive moral conviction, a sense of subordination to the Kantian imperative. He was passionate to a fault, but passion was conjoined with an almost morbid sense of purity. He wanted to be invariably frank and outspoken, and yet he felt obliged to constrain himself to silence. That accounts for his unceasing

tension and stagnation, and for the intolerable torment of his repressed urges. He had too much blood with too much brain, too much temperament with too much self-discipline, too much longing with too much moral restraint; was at one and the same time too much the man of feeling and too much the man of pitiless intelligence. Thus the conflict raged ever more furiously, and in default of a safety valve the inward tensions could not fail to cause a rupture. Kleist had no safety valve. He had no satisfactory means of expression in speech; none of his tensions found an outlet in conversation, in amusement, in transient erotic adventures; he never sought relief in alcohol or opium. Only in his dreams—his writings—did his luxuriant imaginings, his heated and often obscure impulses, find vent. In the fully waking state he sternly repressed them, though unable to conjure them out of existence. Had there been in his composition some admixture of laxity, indifference, boyishness, heedlessness, his passions would have lost the ferocity of chained beasts of prey, but he, whose feelings were so riotous, was a martinet where his behaviour was concerned, and he was therefore continually at war within. Like a bear-tamer, he used a red-hot iron, a fiercely ardent will, to daunt the savage creature of the wild. But again and again the hungry monster rose in revolt, dashing furiously against the bars of its cage, until in the end it broke loose and tore him to pieces.

This incongruity between Kleist as he really was and Kleist as he would have liked to be formed the warp and the woof of the man's destiny. The two halves of his nature did not fit, and the result was everlasting friction. By temperament he was a Russian, a man of extremes, but he had been forced into the tunic of a Brandenburg Junker; he had great lusts, and was at the same time strongly convinced that he must not indulge them. He had an intellectual craving for idealism, but he did not, like Hölderlin, demand idealism from the world. The ideal morality he looked for was incumbent, not upon others, but upon himself. Furthermore, rushing always to extremes, he pushed this demand for morality beyond reasonable limits. It would have troubled him little to know that his friends, men or women, fell short of his code. But it was a continual hurt to his pride to find that the surge of his own desires was more than he could cope with; that,

for all his determination to do so, he could not keep himself in hand. This accounts for the self-accusatory tone of his letters, for his feeling of self-dislike and self-contempt, for the sense of criminality which made him dread to look within, arrested his speech and wounded him to the soul. He was always conducting an assize in which he was the accusing counsel, and in which the accused was himself. As Rahel von Ense said, "the atmosphere round him was severe", and no one suffered more from this severity than Heinrich von Kleist. When he looked within (and though he dreaded to do so, he had the ruthless courage to contemplate his own depths), he was horrified as if by a sight of the gorgon's head. He fell far short of what he wanted to be, and hardly anyone has ever expected more of himself—small as was his capacity for fulfilling so lofty an ideal.

For, in truth, behind his cool and impenetrable mask, there was incubating a serpent's brood, each of the reptiles helping to keep the others cosy. His friends never glimpsed this infernal spawn beneath the impassive exterior, but its existence was no secret to himself. Only too well was he aware of the passions that flamed in his soul. During boyhood they had forced themselves upon his notice, and they never ceased troubling him. In Kleist the tragedy of the senses began early; from first to last they were too easily stimulated. I need not prudishly hesitate to mention this crisis of his youth, since he was frank enough about the matter to his betrothed and to his closest male friend. Besides, it is the clue that leads us into the labyrinth of his life of feeling. When still a cadet, and before he had had carnal knowledge of woman, he had done what nearly all warm-blooded boys do in the springtime of sexuality. Being what he was, being Kleist, he knew no moderation in his indulgence, and, being Kleist, he endured immeasurable moral agonies because of what he regarded as the culpable weakness of his will. He fancied that such auto-erotic voluptuousness tarnished his soul and would bring ruin upon his body, for his imagination, ever prone to run riot, painted the consequences of his boyish "vice" in flaming colours. What others learn to ignore as a youthful peccadillo was for him a cancer eating into his spirit. At twenty-one the (supposititious) failure of his sexual powers loomed before him like a gigantic spectre. In a letter he describes a

young man he had seen—or fancied he had seen—in a hospital, "dying as a result of the errors of boyhood, with pale, nude, contorted limbs, sunken chest and hanging head". This was "a warning and a terror" to him. We feel, as we read, how the blue-blooded young Prussian was filled with self-loathing and self-contempt because of his inability to resist the promptings of his lust.

To heap tragedy upon tragedy, ignominy upon ignominy, the man who now believed himself to be impotent became engaged to a pure-minded and sexually unenlightened girl to whom he (while convinced that he was besoiled in every corner of his inner life) delivered interminable homilies on morality, and to whom he (while doubting his own capacity for fatherhood) gave detailed instruction on conjugal duties and the craft of motherhood. It was at this date that there began in Kleist the cleavage which resulted in persistent and intolerable tension. For a long time, in an agony of shame, he kept the trouble to himself, but at length he confessed to a friend the haunting conviction that his youthful self-indulgence had rendered him permanently impotent. This friend, Brockes by name, was not, like Kleist, prone to exaggeration. Taking a sensible view of the matter, he advised the sufferer to consult a Würzburg surgeon, and a few weeks' treatment—ostensibly an operation, but presumably according to modern lights the power of suggestion—effected a cure.

Kleist had no longer reason to regard himself as stricken with sexual inferiority. Organically, at any rate, he was thenceforward fully potent, but it would seem that his erotic life never became perfectly normal. In most biographies it is, perhaps, needless to lay much stress on these private matters, but as far as Kleist is concerned they provide a key to his writings. The wanton, extravagant, unbridled, orgiastic character of these, and his general tendency to hyperbole, were unquestionably the outcome of the before-mentioned sexual excesses. I think the works of no other famous imaginative writer have so clear a stamp of an immature virility, of the fantasies of one who lets his mind range uncontrolledly amid the phases of what the Freudians term "*Vorlust*"—anticipatory pleasure. Their clinical imprint (I expressly avoid writing their "stigma") is that of daydreams

which simultaneously excite, irritate and exhaust, without achieving adequate gratification. Though in other realms than that of sex no author could be more lucidly matter-of-fact, when erotic episodes are in question Kleist instantly becomes oriental in his profusion. Then his waking visions outdo the extravagance of dreams (the descriptions of Penthesilea, the perpetually recurring image of the Persian bride, fresh from the bridal bath, totally nude and dripping with sandalwood oil). On this side his organism, otherwise so sedulously hidden, has its nerves always exposed, with nerve endings twitching at every stimulus. We recognise that the erotic hypersusceptibility of his youth was inextinguishable, that the inflammability of his senses was chronic, despite unceasing efforts at repression and in later years an inviolable silence. The balance of his love life was never re-established; never was he able to direct his energies undeviatingly towards the aim of normal, healthy virility. There remained, on the one hand, a deficit, a lack of straightforward impulse, and, on the other, a surplus, an excess of ecstasy, of superheated passion.

In every relationship of life Kleist displayed the strangest, most multifarious and most dangerous combinations of the too much and the too little. Just because the direct urge of desire, and perhaps of capacity, was unknown to him in the domain of sex, he was a prey to all kinds of intermediate shades of feeling. That explains his intimate acquaintanceship with the byways and aberrations of Eros, his strange and profound knowledge of what I may call the transvestitism of the sexual impulse. Never, in the exploration of these manifold possibilities, does he exhibit an unambiguously normal erotic desire. Although the primary direction of his cravings had certainly been heterosexual, there were obvious vacillations. Whereas in Goethe and in most of our poets and novelists the needle of love pointed steadfastly towards the pole of woman (notwithstanding the minor tremblings that were the expression of flickerings in the magnetic attraction), Kleist's unbridled desires led him at varying times towards all points of the compass. When we read his letters to Rühle, to Lohse and to Pfuel, we come across what seem to be the avowals of an invert. For instance: "How often, when you were stripped to bathe in the Lake of Thun, have I

looked at your beautiful body as a girl might contemplate it!" Or, again, in plainer terms: "You brought back into my heart the age of Hellas, so that I should have liked to sleep with you!" Yet Kleist was not really a homosexual. All that had happened was that his love sentiment, for want of the normal outlet, had flowed for the moment into devious paths. With equal erotic ardour did he write to "the incomparable", to his stepsister Ulrike, who (parodying the femininity of his own mode of feeling) used to dress as a man when she travelled with him.

Invariably his feelings were salted with an excess of sensuality; invariably did they show themselves to be aberrations. Towards Luise Wieland, when she was but thirteen, he played the role of spiritual seducer without any attempt at bodily misconduct; his feeling for Marie von Kleist was quasi-maternal; with the last of his inamoratas, Henriette Vogel, he did not enter into an intimacy (detestable word in this sense!), being bound to her only by the voluptuous craving for union in death. Even when he was most profoundly stirred he did not surrender himself wholly and with the full tide of his energies to a love experience; never did he free himself (as did Goethe, for instance) either by action or by flight; always he remained grappled without power to grasp; always was he "the sensual, over-sensual wooer", inflamed by the subtle poisons in his blood. Masculine and feminine, the craving to possess and the longing to surrender, kindliness and cruelty, spirituality and sensuality—these conflicting elements were links of the chain that bound him. In the erotic sphere as in the other domains of life, Kleist was never the hunter, but invariably the hunted, thrall to the daemon of passion.

But for the very reason that his sexual impulses were ambiguous, and perhaps for the very reason that he was in this respect physically inadequate and lacked directness of aim, he excelled other writers of his day in the breadth of his knowledge of Eros. The overheating of his blood, the sensibility of his nerves, made conscious in him the passions which in more normally constituted persons wither in the twilight of the unconscious. These passions were incorporated into the characters portrayed in his writings. They are minutely depicted, but at the same time with an exaggeration which magnifies every

feeling until it transcends the limits of the normal. The diversified phenomena which nowadays are crudely classified under the caption "*psychopathia sexualis*" find expression in his works with an almost clinical vividness. Virility is overstressed to the verge of sadism (Achilles and Wetter vom Strahl); sexual passion is shown working itself out as nymphomania and lust-murder (Penthesilea); feminine self-surrender displays itself as masochism and thraldom (Käthchen von Heilbronn); and with the foregoing are intermingled the dark forces of the soul, such as mesmerism, somnambulism and clairvoyance. It was not so much that he delighted in the uncanny as that he could (in some measure) gain control over the passions that raged within him only by flogging them forth into these creatures of his fancy. His art was a method of exorcism, a casting out of evil spirits from his own tormented body into the realm of imagination. His Eros, failing to secure expression in the actual world, sought an outlet in fantasy. That accounted for the elements of distortion, gigantism and menace in his creations—elements which alarmed Goethe and have repelled so many of Kleist's other readers.

Yet nothing could be more wrong-headed than for this reason to regard Kleist as fundamentally an eroticist. We must not forget that in every temperament the erotic aspects overstress themselves as compared with the spiritual. If by an eroticist you mean a voluptuary, the term is inapplicable to Kleist, in whose experiences active voluptuousness was completely lacking. He was the very opposite of a voluptuary, being always the sufferer, always the prey of his passions, one who could never achieve the realisation of his ardent dreams. Besides, Eros was but one of the hounds that hunted him through life. His other passions were no less fierce, no less bloodthirsty. In this arch-exaggerator, every need, every feeling, was intensified to the pitch of the morbid, the maniacal, the suicidal. Whenever we open his books, whenever we contemplate his doings, we seem to be looking at a pandemonium of passions. He was full of hatreds, full of resentments, full of aggressive susceptibilities. We catch a glimpse of his frustrated will-to-power when the beast of prey breaks the chain and would like to bury its fangs in the throat of one of the titans—of a Goethe or a Napoleon. "I will tear the laurels from his brow"—these are the mildest among the words

he uses to express his fury against the man whom he had earlier reverenced "upon the knees of his heart".

Another of the hounds in the pack of his overstrained feelings was ambition, running in leash with an insane pride which roused him to fury at the lightest breath of criticism. Also there was a vampire sucking his blood, sapping his strength, gnawing at his brain—melancholy. This was not, like the melancholy of Leopardi or of Lenau, a passive mental state, a musical twilight of the soul, but, as he wrote, "a gloom I cannot master", a burning agony which drove him into solitude like the intolerable smart and the stench of Philoctetes's poisoned wound. This solitude was a fresh source of distress. The torture of being unloved (which in his *Amphitryon* he ascribed to the deity who created nature) was in himself accentuated into a frenzy of loneliness. Whatever stirred in him showed itself as morbidity or excess. Even spiritual trends, such as those towards morality, truth and righteousness, manifested themselves as caricatures. The very love of justice became disputatious (*Michael Kohlhaas*); truthfulness grew fanatical; morality displayed itself as an icecold dogmatism. Always he overshot the mark; he thrust barbed and poisoned arrows into his flesh; he had to endure the bitterness of disappointment. He suffered thus intensely because these impulses, these virulent poisons, could not find exit; they struck inward and led to a dangerous fermentation; they failed, as his erotic impulses failed, to discharge themselves in action.

His hatred for Napoleon made him luxuriate in the thought of assassinating the tyrant, of laying the French soldiers low, but he never grasped the dagger or shouldered the musket. In the fragment *Robert Guiscard* he had planned to outdo both Sophocles and Shakespeare, but only a fragment the work remained. His melancholy goaded him out of his solitude and drove him to the unceasing search for a companion in a joint suicide, but he had to wait ten years before he could discover this fellow traveller in a disillusioned woman already dying of cancer. His energies sustained, not actions, but only dreams, and made these both savage and sanguinary. Vainly, like Hamlet, did he wish that "this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew!"; vainly did he seek "rest, rest from the passions". His daemon continued to ply the whip, lashing Kleist

onward through the thorny thicket into the abyss.

Yet, for all that he was thus hunted, it would be a grievous error to regard Kleist as a man without an aim. The supreme tragedy of his life was an internal conflict. Driven forward by his passions, he at the same time longed to be steadfast; hunted by his impulses, he craved for purity. It is in the strength of this countervailing urge that Kleist differs so markedly from certain poets who in other respects seem of one flesh with him, from Günther, from Verlaine and from Marlowe. Like Kleist they were men whose passions drove them towards destruction, but, being likewise men whose will was weak and womanish, they offered no resistance. They drank, they gambled, they squandered their substance in riotous living, and Fate brayed them in a mortar, but they did not fall headlong into the chasm; they drifted gently from phase to phase of their moral and spiritual decay, with ever less and less inclination to put up a fight against the powers of darkness. In Kleist, on the other hand, a daemonic strength of the passions was countered by a no less daemonic strength of will—just as, when we study the man's writings, we see that they are the output of a frenzied visionary coupled with a sage, coupled with a cold and incredibly clear-sighted calculator. The will that opposes the impulse is over-strong, like the impulse itself, with the result that a heroic combat rages.

Often enough Kleist seems to himself like Guiscard who, lying sick in his tent (his soul), is covered with boils and ulcers, racked with fever, poisoned by morbid humours, but by sheer force of will rises from his pallet and, stoically, hiding his secret sores, strides forth among his fellows. Kleist will not give ground, will not allow himself to be hurled unresistingly into the abyss:

Stand firm of foot, stand firm as is the arch

Because its every stone thrusts to the fall.

Offer thy head, the keystone, to the flash

Of God's own lightnings, with the cry "Well hit!"

Making no moan when cloven to the chine,

So long as but a fragment of sound stone

Remains in thy young breast to brave the storm.

In this mood he defied fate; in this mood he set up against the hot impulse towards self-destruction the equally hot impulse towards self-preservation and self-exaltation. His life was a heroic struggle. He was not like most men who, of polar opposites, have too much of one and too little of the other; he had too much of both, too much spirit and too much blood, too much morality and too much passion, too much discipline and too much licence. He was a man cursed by superfluities, and, as Goethe phrased it, "the incurable disease with which this well-intentioned body was afflicted was, really, an excess of power". Of the ingredients out of which nature compounds a human being, she gave him more than one poor mortal can endure. The overdosage proved disastrous; the juices were too plentiful to be contained within the frail rind of man's body. The wine burst the bottle.

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* *sanguine-choleric in the highest degree*

PLAN OF LIFE

Everything in me is in a tangle, like the fibres of tow on a distaff.

From an early letter

VERY SOON KLEIST BECAME AWARE of the chaos in his feeling. During boyhood and adolescence, even more strongly than when at twenty he was an officer in the Guards, he perceived (half unconsciously) the revolt of the inner self against the restrictions imposed on him by the environing world. Yet he believed that his sense of conflict and estrangement was but the fermentation of youth, was produced by an unfortunate attitude towards life, and was, above all, the result of the lack of due preparation dependent upon a want of systematisation on his part, caused by defects in his education. It is true that Kleist was never properly trained to meet the exigencies of life. Orphaned when still a child, he was boarded out with a parson who acted as tutor; then he was sent to a cadet school to study the art of war, although his tastes were musical (the primary expression of his longing for communion with the infinite). Only when off duty could he gratify this instinctive desire by playing the flute, on which he is said to have been a creditable performer. His military duties in the strictly disciplined Prussian army had always to come first; the call to the parade ground for drill, drill and yet again drill. Then came the campaign of 1793, the dullest, most contemptible, most unheroic war in the annals of German history. He never referred to his experiences of active service as heroic exploits, and an *Ode to Peace* breathes his yearning to escape the foolishness of war.

For him the tunic was a straitjacket. He felt that great forces were stirring within him and would remain without effect upon the world until he had learnt to control and to guide them. Since there was no one to teach him, he must be self-taught; he must "carve out a plan of life for himself", or must, as he also phrased it, "live rightly"; and, Prussian that he was, his first aim was necessarily to establish order. He must "order" his days, in accordance with principles, with ideals, with maxims.

He hoped to put disorder to flight by leading a regulated life, by establishing a purposive routine, by moderation in all things. Then he would achieve "a conventional relationship towards the world". His fundamental notion was that everyone should have a plan of life—an illusion which stayed by him almost to the end. Everyone must conceive a goal, and then ponder the requisites for its attainment. In the conduct of the individual life, as in strategy and mathematics, ways and means could be carefully calculated. "A free spirit does not stay where chance has planted him … He knows that he can master his fate, that he can guide his destiny into the proper path. By the use of his rational faculty he determines where he can find the sublimest happiness, and as the outcome of this recognition he sketches his plan of life … Until he is competent to form his own plan of life, he remains immature, subject in childhood to the authority of his parents, and in manhood to the tutelage of fate." Thus did the stripling of twenty-one philosophise about life and believe himself empowered to override the decrees of destiny. He did not know that fate lay within him, beyond his control.

He marched sturdily forward into life, and, as a first step to the fulfilment of the "plan", he stripped off his uniform. "A military career," he writes, "had grown so hateful to me, that by degrees I had come to find it intolerable to take any part in army life." But now, having broken the chains of one kind of discipline, could he find another discipline to replace it? I have already said that Kleist would have been no true Prussian had he not been imbued with a strong sense of order. Let me add that he would have been no true German had he not looked to education, to culture, as the supreme instrument for the establishing of the internal order he desired. For him, as for his co-nationals, culture was the arcanum. He read the authorities, attended lectures diligently, wrote copious notes, paid close attention to what the professors had to say. Such were the pointers that would serve as guide through the world. With the aid of maxims and theories, of philosophy and science, of mathematics and the history of literature, Kleist hoped to find the clue to this mysterious universe, to win an understanding

of its spirit, to exorcise the daemon that possessed him.

Our extremist hurled himself into study. Whatever he set himself to do, he attempted with the red heat of his daemonic will; so that he became, as it were, drunken with sobriety and rioted in an orgy of scholarship. Like his spiritual forefather Doctor Faustus, he found the line-upon-line, here-a-little-and-there-a-little acquisition of knowledge too tedious. He wanted to reach the goal in a rush, with a leap; wished to grasp knowledge in a moment; and in a flash win to an understanding of life, and gain perception of its "true" form. Misled by the writings of the apostles of the Enlightenment, he believed, with the fanaticism typical of his impulsive nature, that "virtue" (as the Greeks understood it) could be "learnt"; he believed in a formula of life, which "culture" would reveal to him, and to which he could then have recourse, after the manner of one who uses a table of logarithms, for the solution of every problem of conduct. He therefore devoured learning, devoting himself now to logic, now to pure mathematics, now to experimental physics, then giving Latin and Greek a turn; "with the utmost diligence", and yet in truth aimlessly, as could only be expected in view of his undisciplined and over-zealous temperament.

He had to set his teeth in order to persevere. "My aim can be achieved only by the straining of my energies and the uninterrupted utilisation of every minute of time", but the "aim" remains shadowy. He studied in the void, and the more feverishly he piled up knowledge, the less clearly did he perceive to what end. "I cannot find any branch of science more attractive than the others. Am I to go on perpetually changing from one department of knowledge to another, while remaining always on the surface of things and never reaching the core?" In the hope of convincing himself that his studies were bearing fruit, he became a preacher, trying to indoctrinate his unlucky betrothed with a pedantically formulated code of moral behaviour. For months in succession he pestered the poor girl, schoolmaster fashion, with fair copies of documents in the question-and-answer style, insufferably logical, penned

expressly for her educational benefit. Never was Kleist more uncongenial, more inhuman, more the scholastic freshman, more inveterately Prussian, than in this distressing phase when he was trying to discover his inner man by the light of books and lectures and aphorisms, when he was striving to mould himself into a "useful citizen".

But Kleist could not outrun the daemon; he failed to escape the hunter by burying him beneath tomes and pandects. A day came when out of his books there arose a consuming flame. Of a sudden, in an hour, between night and morning, his plan of life was annihilated, in that he forswore the religion of reason and lost faith in science. He had been reading Kant, the arch-foe of the German poets and novelists, their seducer and destroyer. The cold, clear light of the Königsberg philosopher dazzled him. With horror he found himself constrained to renounce what had been a heartfelt conviction. He became spiritually bankrupt. No longer could he believe in salvation by culture, in the cognisability of truth. "We are unable to decide whether that which we call truth is really truth or only its semblance." The "pointed shaft of this thought" penetrated into the "innermost sanctum" of his heart. Stricken to the core, he wrote in a letter: "My only, my supreme goal has been shattered, and I am bereft of purpose." No longer having a "plan of life", Kleist was once more left alone with himself, alone with this terrifying, enigmatic, burdensome ego which eluded control. Since, after his manner, he had staked his whole existence upon a single card, the spiritual collapse was infinitely perilous. Whenever Kleist lost faith, whenever one of his immoderate cravings was frustrated, it seemed to him that all was lost. Both the tragedy and the greatness of the man lie in this, that whatever feeling dominated him was, for the time, exclusive and overwhelmingly powerful. Only by an explosion, only through devastation, could he find issue into another path.

It was by destruction that he secured release. With a curse he shattered against the wall of destiny the chalice out of which for years he had quaffed intoxicating draughts. Reason,

hitherto his idol, was henceforward "pitiful" reason. He fled from books, from philosophy, from theorems, from the rationalism he had cultivated to excess, and took refuge in the opposite extreme, pursuing, with equal bigotry, a new ideal. "I loathe all that vaunts itself as knowledge." Like one who tears yesterday's leaf from the calendar, he threw his sometime faith upon the scrapheap. He for whom education spelt deliverance, for whom knowledge had magical powers, for whom culture was the means of salvation, for whom study was defensive armour, now sang the praises of stupefaction, of ignorance, of the primitive, of a bucolic, a Boeotian existence.

Instantly—since patience and deliberation found no place in Kleist's vocabulary—he formulated a new plan of life, as weak as the old in its construction, as devoid of any foundation in practical experience. Our Prussian Junker now wanted "to lead a retired, tranquil, obscure existence"; he thought to turn farmer, to enjoy the solitude of which, not very long before, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had written with so much fervour. He asked for nothing more than the chance of devoting himself to the tasks which, according to the magi of old, were (when well performed) pre-eminently gratifying to the Almighty—to wit, "tilling a field, planting a tree and begetting a child". Hardly had the thought entered his mind when it took possession of him. With his customary haste, he wanted to exchange wisdom for stupidity. Forthwith he quitted Paris, whither the desire to study a dismal philosophy had misled him; forthwith he broke off his engagement because his affianced did not unhesitatingly adapt herself to his change of mood, and expressed doubts whether she, the daughter of a general, could take kindly to the life of a milkmaid. Kleist could not wait. He was in a fever to put his new "plan" into practice. He read agricultural treatises, worked side by side with Swiss peasants, scoured the cantons (at the moment devastated by war) in search of land to buy—daemonic as ever, even when his aim seemed unimpassioned, whether it was learning or agriculture.

His plans of life were like tinder—took fire and were

reduced to ashes at the first contact with reality. The more he exerted himself to reach a goal, the more certain was he to miss the mark, for his fundamental characteristics led him to destroy his purpose by extravagance in its pursuit. Whenever he succeeded in anything, it was in spite of himself; for the dark forces within him achieved ends of which he had no conscious intimations. While first in the direction of culture, and then in the direction of unculture, he had sought an issue, his unconscious impulses were finding their own road; while, *secundum artem*,* he applied this remedy and that in the hope of relieving the fever that was consuming him, the secret ferment had been at work, the daemon had burst its bonds in sunder to break forth in song.

A prey to the somnambulism of his feelings, Kleist had in Paris aimlessly begun to write *The Schroffenstein Family*, and had diffidently shown his friends this first fruit of his fancy. Thereupon, precipitately recognising that literary composition could open a safety valve for his surcharged feelings, that here was a world in which the restraints and limits imposed upon his imagination could at length be thrown off and transcended, he rushed into this realm of boundless freedom—frantically eager, as usual, to reach the goal within a moment or two from the start. In poesy for the first time Kleist obtained a sensation of release. With jubilation he gave himself up to the promptings of the daemon (under the spell of an illusion that thereby he would escape the hunter) and hurled himself into the chaos of his own being.

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* *in accordance with the art [of medicine]*

AMBITION

It is unwarrantable to awaken the ambition that lies within us, for then we are delivered over as prey to a Fury.

From a letter

UNEXPECTEDLY RELEASED, as it were, from prison, Kleist leapt into the anarchy of poesy. At length there was a possibility of being freed from his tensions; his fancy could devote itself to the shaping of imaginary characters, could indulge in a riot of words. But he could never find true enjoyment anywhere, because of his proclivity to excess. Hardly had he begun to write his first book when he aspired to become the greatest, the most splendid, the mightiest penman of the ages, and was even prepared to claim that his initial effort surpassed the finest works of the Greeks and of the classical masters of his own country. His conviction that he could reach the goal in one stride was transferred to the world of letters. Others had begun timidly, with hopes and dreams, with modest endeavours, and had been happy, as tyros, to produce a work of some merit. Kleist, living among superlatives, expected the instant attainment of the unattainable. *Robert Guiscard*, which he embarked upon immediately after finishing *The Schroffenstein Family*, was to be the most outstanding tragedy of all time. He was, in a flash, to rank with, nay, to outclass, the immortals. Unexampled in the history of literature is the audacity with which he expected to attain a supreme position in the world of letters before he had served his apprenticeship. Only now are we beginning to see how much arrogance was compressed within the superheated chambers of his mind. If a Platen talks at large about writing *Odysseys* and *Iliads*, we know we are listening to the ravings of a weakling. But Kleist was in deadly earnest when he hoped to vie with the great masters; his ambition was a conflagration. Hurling defiance at the gods, he set himself to composing a play which (he gravely informed Wieland) was to give expression to “the spirits of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Shakespeare”.

Kleist began his work in a spasm of energy, in a rapture of intoxication. With him, even creation was orgiastic. Delight and despair, groans and cries of joy, found expression in his letters. So enthralled was he by the alternatives of success or failure, that the approval of his friends, which encourages and invigorates other men of letters, was for him a new source of anxiety and longing. What brings happiness to others was for him a danger. "The opening of my poem, which is to disclose to the world your affection for me," he wrote to his sister, "arouses the admiration of all to whom I show it. If only I am able to finish it! God grant me this one wish, and then He can deal with me as He wills."

Thus he staked his life upon *Guiscard*. An anchorite upon his lonely islet in the Lake of Thun, plunged in the void of his own abyss, he wrestled with the daemon for freedom, even as Jacob wrestled with the angel. At one moment he rejoiced. "Soon I shall have something delightful to tell you, for I am approaching the climax of earthly happiness." The next, he was aghast at the recognition of what sinister spirits he had conjured up out of himself. "How deplorable is ambition! It poisons my joy." In the phases of depression he longed for death, and prayed that God would take him to Himself—to be overwhelmed, almost in the same breath, by the dread of dying before he had finished his work.

Robert Guiscard was to be something more than the mere literary mirror of his inner self. The titanic figure of the great Norman adventurer was to represent the tragedy of Kleist's existence, the boundless cravings of the spirit of one whose body was weakened by unsuspected infirmities. The completion of his work would symbolise the taking of Byzantium, the attainment of world-empire, the realisation of the dream of universal power, which the resolute conquistador was to win despite the flaws in his body and the reluctance of his people. Kleist longed to tear out the flames that consumed him; he wanted to escape from the daemon by hunting the hunter out of himself into an emblem, an image. For him, completion of his *Guiscard* would signify cure; victorious

achievement would bring deliverance; ambition was the outcome of the impulse to self-preservation. That was why his nerves were twitching with eagerness, his every muscle tensed for the fray. It was a life-and-death struggle. His friends understood this when they advised him: "Finish *Guiscard* at any cost, though Caucasus and Atlas obstruct your path."

Never again did Kleist devote himself so unremittingly to a task. He wrote the tragedy, rewrote it and rewrote it yet again, destroying his work each time as soon as it was finished. He knew it by heart, so that he could recite every word of it to Wieland. For months he would roll the massive and ponderous stone towards the hilltop, and then, baffled, would watch it rolling back into the valley below. The daemon had too firm a grasp for him to be able to free himself by one stupendous effort, as did Goethe in *Werther* and in *Clavigo*. Not thus, for Kleist, could the haunting spectre be laid. At length the pen dropped from his tired hand. "God knows, my darling Ulrike —and may He strike me with His wrath if this be not the unvarnished truth—that I would gladly give a drop of my blood for every letter of a missive which I could open with the words, 'My poem is finished.' But I have attempted something beyond my strength. For half a thousand days, and for most of the nights as well, I have been striving from among so many garlands of fame to wrest one for our family. At length my guardian angel tells me to desist … It would be crazy of me to continue the attempt to carry a burden which experience has shown me to be too heavy. I withdraw, leaving the field free for one who is yet to come, bowing my head in reverence before the spirit of him who will be born a millennium hence."

For a moment, indeed, it seemed as if Kleist were ready to accept the decree of fate, as if his intelligence would prove able to hold his feelings in leash. But his constitutional incapacity for moderation persisted; he could not maintain the heroic attitude of renunciation; his ambition, once awakened, could not be lulled back to sleep. His friends vainly endeavoured to soothe him in his despair, counselling change of scene, a journey to a brighter clime. What they had thought

of as recreative travel became a senseless flight from place to place and from country to country, unavailing flight from gloomy thoughts. The failure of *Guiscard* was a dagger thrust to his pride, and overweening arrogance was replaced by a gnawing sense of inferiority. The youthful dread of impotence recurred in a new form, being transferred from the life of sex to the realm of art. "My half-talents are the gift of hell, for Heaven bestows all or nothing." To Kleist, the extremist, there were but two alternatives—eternal fame or nonentity.

Since eternal fame was denied him, he hurled himself into nullity, adopting the mad expedient of spiritual suicide (a more desperate choice than the bodily suicide of eight years later). Reaching Paris in the course of his headlong flight, he burned the manuscript of *Robert Guiscard* together with other unfinished drafts, hoping thus to liberate himself from the tormenting desire for fame. Now his plan of life had once more been destroyed, and its destruction (as always with Kleist at such moments) was, so to say, a spell calling up a counterpart, the plan of death. Freed from the curse of ambition, simultaneously exultant and wretched, he penned what was perhaps the most wonderful letter ever written by an artist in the hour of failure: "My dear Ulrike, what I have to say to you will perhaps cost you your life, but I have no choice, no choice. In Paris I reread my work, so far as it was finished, found it wanting and burned it. There is an end of the matter. Heaven denies me fame, the greatest of earth's gifts. Like an obstinate child, I reject any other gifts it may choose to offer. I cannot show myself worthy of your friendship, and yet I cannot live without that friendship. I shall therefore seek death. Be easy in your mind, dear one; the death shall be a noble death upon the battlefield … I intend to enlist in the French army, which is about to be shipped across the Channel. The universal danger lours seaward, and I rejoice at the prospect of a glorious tomb." In sober truth, with darkened senses, he attempted to put this plan into execution, made his way to Boulogne, was then persuaded by a friend to return to Germany, where he spent the next few months under medical care at Mainz.

Thus ended Kleist's first artistic effort. He had tried at one clutch to wrench the daemon from his breast—unsuccessfully, inflicting on himself a terrible wound, and having left in his hands nothing more than a fragment, though one of the most magnificent ever penned by an imaginative writer. The only finished portion of this fragment is—symbolically enough—the scene in which Guiscard, iron-willed, overcomes his sufferings and his weaknesses. But Byzantium is never reached, the work remains for ever incomplete. Nevertheless this tragical struggle was heroic. Only one who had an inferno raging within could have wrestled as Kleist wrestled with himself in the endeavour to produce the work.

THE URGE TO DRAMATIC WRITING

I sing because I must.

From a letter

WITH THE DESTRUCTION of his *Guiscard* the tortured man believed he had strangled the persecutor within himself. But ambition was not dead. The destruction of the manuscript had been as unmeaning an act as that of one who should fire at his image in a mirror. True, the menacing reflection may be shivered into fragments, but since that is merely a wraith, the true double continues to lie in ambush. Kleist could no more renounce art than the morphinomaniac can wean himself from morphine. At length he had found a safety valve; for a brief space he could discharge the overplus of his feelings, could lower the tension of his mind by allowing his fantasies free rein, could secure an outlet in poesy. Dimly aware that he was becoming enthralled by a new passion, he made an attempt to escape from its toils, but, suffering as he did from a congestion of the feelings, he could not dispense with the relief of this form of blood-letting. Besides, he had squandered his property, had ruined his chances of a military career, and his impulsive temperament made him revolt against official routine, so he was constrained to write for a livelihood, although "to pen books for money" seemed to him a martyrdom. Creative activity had become a material need; the daemon had assumed bodily shape, and entered with him into his works. The "plans" he so methodically drafted had been torn to tatters by the storms of destiny. Henceforward he must submit to the blind will, to the folly and the wisdom, of his nature. Out of infinite torment men fashion the infinitely great.

Henceforward his art became an obsession. That accounts for the strangely coercive character of his plays, which remind the reader of the explosion of a shell. With the exception of *The Broken Pitcher* (which, written for a wager, is light in touch, though strong), they are outbreaks of feeling, expressions of the escape from the inferno of his soul. They

have an intensely irritable tone, like the cry of a man able to draw breath freely after he has been on the verge of suffocation; they twang like an arrow from the bowstring as they are discharged from overstrained nerves; they are ejaculated (the reader must pardon the image, for it so aptly embodies the truth) like semen in the sexual orgasm. Only to a minor degree fertilised by the intelligence, no more than faintly tinctured by reason, naked and unashamed, they are spurted into the infinite by an unquenchable passion. Each of them condenses feeling to a superlative degree; each of them represents an explosion of the overwrought mind and of one which has blindly followed the promptings of instinct.

In *Guiscard* he spewed forth his Promethean ambition; in *Penthesilea* he gave violent expression to his sexual ardours; in *Hermann's Battle* his animal ferocity found vent. All of them show the fever of the author's blood rather than the usual temperature of the environment. Even in the works that are less intimately representative of Kleist's ego, in his gentler writings such as *Käthchen von Heilbronn* and the short stories, we feel the vibration of his nerves and are aware of the swiftness of transition from epic intoxication to sobriety.

Wherever we follow Kleist, we find ourselves in the sphere of magic, in a region where the affective life is intense though overshadowed by gloom—to be irradiated from time to time by lightning flashes that pierce the sultry atmosphere. It is this coercive element, together with the sulphurous and fiery discharges, which make his dramas so strange and so splendid. Goethe's plays embody vital transformations, but no more than episodically; they are disburdenings, self-justifications, flight and release. They never have the explosive character of Kleist's, in which lava and scoriae are vomited from the unconscious. This ejection upon the borderline between life and death is what distinguishes Kleist's works on the one hand from those of Hebbel, which are thoughts in fancy dress, where the problems derive from the superficial strata of the intelligence, and on the other hand from those of Schiller, which are works of art, but untroubled by the primal needs and

perils of existence. No other German writer has incorporated his own inmost being into his works to the same extent as Kleist, tearing out his vitals (as it were) to fashion them. Music alone among the arts is as volcanic, as compulsive, as self-revealing as Kleist's writings—and it was this kinship which exerted so powerful a charm upon Hugo Wolf (unique among musicians in the plumbing of hazardous depths) and which led him to give musical setting to the scourged passions of *Penthesilea*.

More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle demanded of tragic drama that it should "liberate from a dangerous emotion by vehement discharge". How splendidly does the compulsive trend in Kleist's plays comply with this canon! It is upon the epithets "dangerous" and "vehement" (ignored by French and by most German commentators) that the emphasis lies. Thus Aristotle's definition might have been penned with an eye to Kleist, for whose affects were more "dangerous" than the latter's, whose discharges more "vehement"? Kleist was not, as was Schiller, an author who mastered the problems he mooted or solved, but one who was obsessed by them, and it was this constraint that they imposed on him which made his outbursts so violent and so convulsive. His creative work was not the outcome of a deliberate exteriorisation; it resulted from a frenzied endeavour to escape from internal and almost fatal stresses. Every character in his plays feels, as the author himself felt, that the cross laid upon him is the one important thing in the world; each of them is the slave of his passions; each of them stakes the limit, hazards his very life. Whatever happens to Kleist, and therefore whatever happens to his dramatis personae, cuts to the bone. His country's distresses, which for other authors are topics for fine writing; philosophy, which Goethe dallied with in a sceptical mood and so far as was requisite to his own spiritual growth; Eros and the sorrows of Psyche—to Kleist, all these became a fever, a mania, and placed him on the rack. Kleist's problems were not, like Schiller's, poetical fictions; they were personal tragedies, cruel realities, which gave his writings their unique atmosphere. The polar contrasts of his nature found vent in them. Because he

himself was unable to take anything lightly, his Kohlhaas, his Homburg and his Achilles had to wrestle with their counterparts, and because their struggles (like his own) were superhuman, he portrayed with supreme power man at war with destiny.

Nothing but tragic drama could give adequate expression to the agonising oppositions of Kleist's temperament. The epic vein lends itself to more conciliatory, more easy-going formulations, but tragedy demands meticulous finish, and was more accordant with the extravagance of his character. This became his chosen method of expression. Yet "chosen" is not the apt word. He did not choose this method, but was driven to it. His passions, rather than the thinking Kleist, shaped his works. Nothing could be more fallacious than to suppose that he purposively elaborated what he wrote. Goethe spoke sarcastically of the "invisible theatre" for which these plays must have been composed. Now, for Kleist there did exist an invisible theatre, and it was the daemonic world which by forcible cleavage, by establishing diametrical oppositions, created such stresses as could not fail to shatter a concrete and visible stage. Their themes are too vast for the "boards". Kleist was never "practical", and to write with an eye to the necessities of dramatic production would have conflicted with the passionate unrest of his nature.

His themes and his conceptions are always casual and careless; the ties that bind the different parts of his work together are loose; his technique is hastily devised. Consequently, whenever his genius ceases to sustain him, he becomes stagy and melodramatic; lapsing, at times, into the mannerisms of third-rate comedy, of Mr Crummles, of the pantomime. Then, of a sudden (like Shakespeare), he soars from clownish gambols to the sublimest altitudes. His topic is a pretext, is the clay he moulds; the essence of his work is that it is suffused with passion. Thus it is that he often succeeds in creating dramatic tension out of what seem the tritest, the clumsiest, the most adventitious means (*Käthchen von Heilbronn, The Schroffenstein Family*), and yet when his

fervour is red-hot, when the stresses of his internal oppositions find vent, he attains to unexpected splendours.

The machinery is crude; the arrangements are faulty and trivial; slowly and by devious paths he finds his way to the heart of the conflicts he is describing—but thereupon, with a vigour that is unrivalled, comes the discharge of pent-up feelings in a dramatic explosion. Before this can happen, he has had to mine to a great depth. Like Dostoevsky, he needed tedious preparations, subtilised confusions, labyrinthine underways. In the opening of his plays (*The Broken Pitcher, Robert Guiscard, Penthesilea*), details and situations seem hopelessly thronged—as if he were massing the clouds from which alone the thunderstorm could burst. He loves this dark and oppressive atmosphere because it is that of his inmost being; because perplexed staging is accordant with that "confusion of the feelings" for which Goethe (who mastered the daemon instead of becoming its thrall) regarded Kleist with disdainful sympathy. Beyond question there underlay this enigmatic tendency to complicate and to hide, a masochist element, a perverse delight in torture, in spinning out the agony, in playing with his own and others' impatience. Kleist's dramas irritate before they bring relief to our strained feelings. Like the music of *Tristan and Isolde*, they luxuriate in monotony, in puzzling intimations, in ambiguities.

Guiscard is the only one of his dramatic works in which the curtain rises on a plain disclosure of the whole position. All his other plays (*Homburg, Penthesilea, Hermann's Battle*) begin in what seems an insufferably involved scenario, and then, out of these complications, the primal passions of the dramatis personae burst forth and clash with the increasing violence of an avalanche. Often they are so overwhelming as to shatter the frail dramatic scheme designed as their container. Except in the case of *Homburg*, one always feels with Kleist that the characters have run away from their creator into some fourth-dimensional sphere beyond the range of his waking imagination. Whereas Shakespeare makes his figures do what he wills, manages his problems according to

his own discretion, Kleist's figures and Kleist's problems take the bit between their teeth. Each character becomes one of the irresponsible fiends called up by a magician's apprentice. Kleist is no more accountable for their doings than any of us is for words uttered in sleep, words which (uninhibited) reveal longings hidden from our conscious mind.

The form as well as the substance, the language no less than the thought content, of Kleist's dramatic writing, are subject to like coercions, to the same dominance of unconscious passion over conscious intelligence and will. The wording of the plays is like the breathing of one who is greatly excited—sometimes the speech foams and splashes; sometimes it is bald and curt, for it comes in gasps, followed by unexpected silences. There are incessant contrasts and counterparts. From an exemplary terseness, monumental in its reserve, he passes abruptly to bombast and hyperbole. Now and again, in the latter phase, he may be successful for a time, manifesting the transient vigour of one with a bounding pulse, until the verse collapses like a pricked bubble. Never does he show complete mastery of his verbal technique; his sentences twist and wind till the reader wonders whether they will ever end; the lines do not flow into one another harmoniously, but effervesce irregularly with unbridled passion. That is why not one of his poems, except for the magical *Death Litany*, is a masterpiece. It was only the imminence of death that made him musical.

Driver and driven, hunter and hunted, Kleist takes his place amid the figures of his own creation, and what renders his dramas so tragical is not so much their animating ideas, that in them which is spiritually willed, nor yet their episodes and their details, as their vast and clouded horizons that stretch forth into the illimitable void. It is the agony of a world which forms their substance. He carries the burdens of his fate with him into his writings, and the incurable wound in the breast of every one of his heroes is at the same time the gulf that severs in twain a universe divided against itself. Nietzsche, with a seer's insight, said of Kleist that he was occupied with that malady of nature for which no healing could be found, noting

how often he spoke of the "infirmity of the world". It was this recognition of the universe as an insoluble enigma that gave Kleist his faculty as a tragic dramatist; for only one who regards it both as subject matter and as object of accusation can approach it both as debtor and as creditor, both as accuser and as judge, asserting the rights of individuals against the injustices of nature, which makes man so unfinished, so dismembered, so perpetually unsatisfied. Doubtless such a vision of the world is not that of those whose gaze is clear and untroubled. Of another thinker overshadowed by gloom, Arthur Schopenhauer, Goethe wrote in his album:

If in your own worth you'd rejoice,

To the world's worth uplift your voice.

Kleist, regarding the world as fundamentally tragical, could never (as did Goethe) "uplift his voice to its worth", and for this very reason he could never "rejoice in his own worth". All the creatures of his fancy are destroyed because of his dissatisfaction with the cosmos; offspring of a tragedian, they never cease kicking against the pricks and running their heads against the impenetrable wall of fate. Goethe's conciliatoriness, his resignation to life as he found it were reflected in his characters, in the problems he mooted and in the solutions he found for them—with the result that the persons of his dramas never attained classical greatness, even when they wore the tragedian's gown and cothurnus. Those that are cast in the most tragical mould (Faust and Tasso, for instance) find consolation for themselves, secure appeasement and are "saved" from themselves, rescued from destruction. Goethe knew that genuine tragedy would disturb his equanimity, and he was too far-sighted to tolerate this disturbance. Kleist, on the other hand, was heroically unwise; he had the courage to plumb the depths; voluptuously he followed his dreams into the uttermost gulfs, knowing that they would drag him down to doom. Contemplating the world as a tragedy, he fashioned tragic dramas out of his world, and of these dramas his own life was the greatest tragedy of all.

WORLD AND TEMPERAMENT

Only in my own company can I be cheerful, for there alone can I be wholly genuine.

From a letter

KLEIST KNEW VERY LITTLE of reality, but was intimately acquainted with the essence of things. He lived apart from, nay, in enmity with, his own time and what should have been his own circle, understanding others' tepidity or others' kindliness no better than he understood his own stubbornness and exaggerations. His psychology was weaponless, perhaps blind, in face of common types, in face of ordinary phenomena; his clairvoyance began only when he had to deal with abnormal feelings, with persons dwelling in ultradimensional space. Only through his volcanic passions was he linked with the outer world. His isolation persisted except where human nature becomes unfathomable. Like many animals, he did not see clearly in the daylight, for his eyes could not serve him until he was in the twilight of the feelings, in the chiaroscuro of the heart. Nothing but the larval depths of man's nature seemed akin to the fires that glowed within him. There, in the eruptive chaos of the primal affects, his fierce metaphors embodied the insight of the seer; whereas at the upper levels of life, with its hard shell, with its superficial formalities, he established no contacts. Being too impatient to observe coolly, to experiment slowly and realistically, he fanned events to a glow as if in a smith's forge, taking no interest in any problems that could not be made red-hot. He never described people. All that happened was that the daemon in him recognised its brother in them behind the veil of the earthly and was in tune with its nature.

That is why his heroes lack balance, why they transcend the limitations of daily life, why they suffer from excess of passion. These unruly children of an unrestrained imagination seem to derive (as Goethe said of Penthesilea) from a generation peculiar to themselves; each of them exhibits Kleist's own traits, his unconciliatory disposition, bluntness,

obstinacy, mulishness, immalleability. At the first glance we detect in them the mark of Cain, perceiving that they must either destroy or be destroyed. They have the same mingling of hot and cold, too much and too little, rut and shame, flux and retention; the stormful explosion of overcharged nerves. They produce unceasing disquiet in those towards whom they wish to show their love—and Kleist did this in his own intimates. An awesome fire flashes from their eyes. That is why they have never become popular heroes and heroines, thoroughly congenial to ordinary folk, heroes and heroines of the Robin Hood and Maid Marian type. Even Käthchen, whom one step nearer to the commonplace would have reduced to the level of such a heroine of the fair booth, has a morbid element in her mind, an excessive disposition to self-sacrifice, which to common folk remains incomprehensible, and Hermann (Arminius), the national hero, has too much policy and hypocritical shrewdness (too much of the Talleyrand, in fact) to become a patriot's ideal.

Invariably the trivialism in Kleist's leading personalities, which might have sufficed to make them popular ideals, is tinctured by a drop or two of some perilous ingredient which estranges them from the folk. In Homburg, the Prussian officer, we have (splendidly true to life, but incompatible with the nimbus) the fear of death; in Penthesilea, the Greek Queen of the Amazons, we have Bacchic lusts; in Wetter vom Strahl, a virile inclination to lay about him with a horsewhip; in Thusnelda, a grain or two of stupidity and of feminine vanity. They all rescue Kleist from the operatic tenor, the Walter Scott, the twopence-coloured note, by something superhuman in their composition, which discloses itself shamelessly in their emotions as these thrust aside the stage trappings. Each of them has something eccentric, unexpected, disharmonious, atypical in his mental visage; each of them (save for figures that play to the gallery) has, like Shakespeare's dramatis personae, some piquant trait. Just as Kleist is un-stagy as a playwright, so as a creator of types he is an anti-idealist. For idealisation invariably arises either from a deliberate retouching or else from lack of insight. Kleist saw clearly, and

detested pettiness of feeling. He was more likely to lack taste than to be trivial, to be stubborn and hyperbolical than saccharine. To him—the blunt, the acerb, the man of many trials, the man who had known suffering—gush was utterly uncongenial; with the result that he was deliberately unsentimental, and put the controls on at the point where, in commonplace authors, the romantic stop is pulled out. Especially was he reticent in his love scenes, allowing his characters no words, nothing more than a blush, a stammer, a sigh or an impassioned silence. The hero, to Kleist's way of thinking, must not make himself common. That is why Kleist's heroes (let us frankly admit it) have had only a literary success, whether in Germany or elsewhere; have never been able to get off the stage and into the hearts of the people. They can be accounted national only for a fancied German nation, being as theatrical as must necessarily be the figures of that "imaginary theatre" of which Kleist spoke to Goethe. They are inharmonious, incongruous; they share their creator's self-will and unconciliatoriness and therefore each of them is a lonely figure. Kleist's dramas have no ties with those of his predecessors and successors; they neither inherited a style nor engendered one. Kleist was unique, and he lived in a unique world.

A unique world, for it did not belong to the epoch from 1790 to 1807; it did not bear the imprint either of Brandenburg or of Germany; it was not permeated by the spirit, by the breath, of classical literature, nor yet overshadowed by the Catholic twilight of romanticism. His world was as remote and as timeless as himself, a Saturnian sphere, turning away from daylight and clarity. Kleist was interested in nature, in the world, as in man, only at that uttermost bourne where it grows daemonic; where the natural passes into the magical; where the mundane shades into the supramundane, transcending the limits of the customary and the probable; where (I might even say) it becomes monstrous, vicious, abnormal. In events, as in human beings, his interest is riveted only by deviations from the rule (the Marquise von O, the Beggar Woman of Locarno, the earthquake in Chile); always, therefore, at moments when

they seem to be breaking away from God's appointed orbits. He had been profoundly impressed by his reading of Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert's mystical *Nightside of the Natural Sciences*. The twilit phenomena of somnambulism, sleepwalking, suggestion and animal magnetism were welcome material for the working of his over-stimulated fantasy, which—inadequately directed towards the manifestations of human passion—busied itself with the mysterious forces of the cosmos, that they might make the entanglements of the creatures of his imagination yet more involved, confounding facts in order to confound feelings. Kleist was most at home in the peculiar, the eerie; in desolate regions where, amid shadows and chasms, he could sense the presence of the daemon by whom he was so strangely allured, where he was not embarrassed and intimidated by the proximity of the commonplace—to him always uncongenial. Thus did he, ever lacking restraint, plunge deeper and deeper into the enigmas of nature. In the cosmos, as in the realm of feeling, he was incessantly searching for the superlative.

At the first glance there would seem to be a kinship, because of this revolt from the obvious and the trite, between Kleist and his contemporaries the Romanticists. Yet in truth a gulf yawns between them and him, between their partly deliberate and partly spontaneous superstition and devotion to fable, on the one hand, and his obsession with the fantastic and the abstruse, on the other. For the Romanticists, the cult of the "wonderful" was tantamount to a religion; whereas for Kleist, the strange, the inexplicable, was a malady of nature. Novalis luxuriated in his faith; Eichendorff and Tieck tried to resolve the harshnesses and contrarieties of life in playfulness and in music, but Kleist, avid of mystery, longed to grasp what was hidden by the veil of semblance, and to wallow in the luxury of extremes. With his coldly passionate, inexorable lead, he sounded the depths of obscurity. The more remarkable, the more outré, an occurrence, the more concretely did it stimulate him to relate it. Indeed, he took an uncanny pride in a sober relation of the incomprehensible, boring through stratum after stratum until he tapped the depths where the magical in nature

and the daemonic in man are inexplicably wedded. In this respect he resembles Dostoevsky more closely than does any other German writer. Kleist's figures, too, are burdened with all the morbid and exacerbated energies of the nerves, and these nerves are somewhere and somehow painfully interconnected with the daemonic elements of the cosmos. Like Dostoevsky, Kleist is not only sincere, but sincere to a fault, and that is why the "atmosphere" of his writings is often obscured by a blight—the chill clarity of the intelligence being suddenly replaced by the sultry obscurity of fantasy and troubled by windy outbursts of passion. Kleist's spiritual atmosphere is often exhilarating. He has a profound insight into essentials, profounder maybe than that of any other German imaginative writer. Yet the air he makes us breathe is irrespirable for long (he himself could endure it for only a decade), since it tenses the nerves unduly, tormenting our senses with its crude contrasts of heat and cold, and making repose impossible. Even as an artist this man, cloven in sunder, was homeless. There was no solid ground beneath the rolling wheels of his perpetual flight. He lived in the realm of the wonderful without believing in it, and he created realities while having no love for them.

THE TELLER OF TALES

The quality of true form lies herein, that the spirit momentarily and directly emerges from it; whereas defective form holds the spirit prisoned like a badly made mirror, and discloses nothing but itself.

Letter from one poet to another

KLEIST'S MIND DWELT IN TWO WORLDS—in the torrid zones of fancy, and in the sober, cold and concrete region of analysis. That was why his art was bifid, pushing in either direction to an extreme. Kleist the playwright and Kleist the teller of tales have often been treated as one, or the teller of tales has been regarded as a variant of the dramatist. In reality, however, the two forms of literary art were for him contrasted expressions of the ambivalence of his temperament. As playwright, he seized his material without restraint, and heated it red-hot in his fires; as writer of novels, he put the curb on his participation, held scrupulously aloof, so that none of the breath of his own life should inspire the narration. In his dramas it was himself that he was fanning into flame, but in his novels it was others, his readers, whom he wished to render ardent; in his plays he spurred himself forward, in his stories he reined himself back. Both these modes, stimulation and restraint, were pushed to an extreme. His plays are the most subjective, the must surgent, the most eruptive known to the German stage; his tales are the baldest, the chilliest, the most terse among German epics. Always the superlative!

In his novels, Kleist excluded his ego, suppressed his passions or (rather) switched them onto a different track. For we are not at the end of Kleist's exaggerations. He stressed this self-exclusion to reach a climax of objectivity which imperilled his art—but risk was his chosen element. Never again has German literature achieved so ostensibly tranquil a narrative method, such masterly objectivity, as in Kleist's seven novels and short stories, so that only in one respect, perhaps, do they lack perfection—that of naturalness. We feel that his lips are tightly compressed, lest a sigh should betray the torment of his soul; we are aware that the hands are rigidly withheld from gestures, that the whole man is being forcibly

repressed in order to remain “objective”.

Compare Cervantes’s *Exemplary Novels*, their cheerful and frivolous deceit, their guttersnipe playing at hide-and-seek, with Kleist’s strained and laboured technique, which pushes sobriety to excess and talks to the reader through clenched teeth. Wanting to be cool, he becomes ice-bound; wanting to talk softly, he grows constrained; aspiring towards a Latin, a Tacitean brevity, he writes in a style that is unduly compressed. Whether it be to the right or to the left, Kleist oversteps reasonable limits.

He did not (after the manner of Hölderlin, Novalis and Goethe) use the German language as if it were a harp, but as if it were a trenchant weapon, or a plough. With his unwieldy tongue he related the most burning, the most moving, the most unquiet of topics; his Protestant sobriety and clarity wrestled with the most fantastic of problems. He wrapped his subject in enigmas, entangling the threads of the narration arbitrarily so that he might perplex and alarm his readers, only to cut loose from the tangle a moment before it would be too late. One who fails to understand that it is Kleist’s fiendish delight to force others to accompany him into a region of intense sensations, into a domain of horror and of peril, may well regard as fanatical self-violation the technique which is in truth the obverse of profound passion.

Through repression, Kleist betrayed all that was not good, all that was hidden away out of sight; betrayed them because calm and self-mastery were alien to his temperament. Absolute freedom (the artist’s supreme magic) was lacking to him when he wished to impose upon himself a tranquillity foreign to his nature.

Yet how much, after all, does his will achieve! The daemon enabled him, in these novels, to transfuse living blood into the arteries of speech. We feel this mastery most of all in haphazard fragments, in purposeless writings, in the trifling anecdotes and episodes which he wrote as “fillers” for his newspaper. Here his will was unfettered, so that he worked easily and without artifice. With plastic skill he would give

imperishable form to twenty lines of a police report, to an account of a cavalry skirmish during the Seven Years War. Here the factual lucidity is perfect. In the longer tales, on the other hand, the effort towards objectivity is always conspicuous. Kleist's passion for complexity and distortion, his mania for undue condensation, his delight in mystery make them stimulating rather than restful. Indeed their apparent coolness renders them heating, disturbing, so that *The Marquise of O* (an eight-line anecdote from Montaigne) as a charade, or *The Beggar Woman of Locarno*, produces the impression of a nightmare. The tormenting effect of these dreams is all the greater because the figures are not presented in dream fashion before the inner vision, confusedly or in chiaroscuro; they disclose themselves in sharp outline, simultaneously material and spectral.

Just as Stendhal had a penchant for writing cold, non-metaphorical, anti-sentimental prose, and daily read a chapter or two of the Civil Code to get the frigid, matter-of-fact atmosphere he wanted, so did Kleist take the chroniclers as his exemplars. But whereas with Stendhal this was a matter of technique, with Kleist there ensued a passion for dispassionateness, with the result that his own tensions were transferred to his readers. Always we feel the excess which was natural to him, and for this reason the ablest and strongest of his stories is the one which was an appropriate embodiment of the motive force of his own personality—*Michael Kohlhaas*, the most splendid, most symbolical type Kleist ever created; the man whose forces are destroyed by lack of control, the man in whom level-headedness degenerates into obstinacy, and a craving for justice into litigiousness. Kohlhaas (though Kleist probably was not aware of it) was the emblem of his creator, one whose best qualities became his greatest peril, and who was pushed over the edge by the fanaticism of his will. When he would be disciplined, when he would exercise restraint, Kleist was as immoderate as when he gave his passions rein.

Most effectively, as I have said, is this contradiction

manifested in those little anecdotes he wrote without artistic aim, and also in those superb creations of an eccentric, his letters. No other German imaginative writer has disclosed himself so wantonly to the world as did Kleist in the few of his letters that have come down to us. I should not dream of comparing them with the psychological documents left by Goethe and Schiller; for Kleist, in his inviolable sincerity, was enormously bolder, freer from inhibitions, profounder and more unconditioned than were the two great masters of German classical literature who, in their letters, remained stylists and aesthetes, unconsciously posing before the camera of futurity. Kleist at the confessional was still an extremist; his pitiless self-analysis was pleasurably tinged; he had not merely love but a sort of lust for the truth, and there was an element of ecstasy even in the climax of his pain.

What could be more poignant than the cries of this heart, which come to us as if from an immeasurable height, like the agonised scream of a wounded bird of prey? What could be more awe-inspiring than the heroic pathos of his solitary plaint? We seem to be listening to the lament of Philoctetes, alone in the island of the spirit, railing at the gods who are torturing him. When, in the agony of self-knowledge, Kleist rends the clothing from his body, he stands naked before us, bleeding, scarred, like one just escaped from a combat. We hear the groans of a lacerated god, of a mutilated beast, mingled with words that dazzle us with the clear light of their intelligence. His letters more than any other of his writings contain the whole man, his mingled brevity and exuberance, ecstasy and analysis, discipline and passion, modernity and primitiveness. It may well be that his *History of My Mind* gave unified expression to all these flames and lightning flashes, but this work, which must certainly have been fanatically truthful, and not a mere compromise between fact and fancy like Goethe's *Poetry and Truth*, has not been preserved. In this case as in others Fate has imposed silence upon him, has forbidden the "inexpressibly human" in him to disclose its inmost secrets. Thus we can know him only as overshadowed by his daemon, and not as he was in his ultimate solitude.

LAST TIE

The sense of justice triumphs over all.

The Schroffenstein Family

IN EVERY ONE OF HIS PLAYS Kleist was a self-betrayer; in each of them the molten lava of his soul erupted into the outer world, giving objective shape to his passion. Through them, therefore, we can gain a partial acquaintance with the contradictions of his nature, but he would not have become one of the immortals, his personality fully disclosed, had he not been able in the last of his works to give a picture of himself and his limitations. In this posthumous drama, *The Prince of Homburg*, he depicted (with that outstanding genius which Fate rarely grants to an artist more than once in his life) himself, the conflict that had always raged in him, the tragic antinomy of passion and discipline. In *Penthesilea*, in *Guiscard*, in *Hermann's Battle*, one impulse dominated, an urge towards the infinite. In *Homburg* the interplay of impulses finds expression—pressure and resistance in which neither is victorious, but in which counterpoise and suspense ensue. Now, what is suspense of the energies other than the most perfect harmony?

Nothing can be more artistic than the depiction of those beautiful moments in which the immoderate is tempered to moderation; in which, during the flicker of an eyelash, discord is resolved into harmony; in which, after seemingly hopeless estrangement, the fiercest oppositions are stilled, and transiently embrace one another with love. The more savage the previous conflict, the wider the antecedent severance, the more sublime is the concord of the meeting streams. Kleist's *Homburg* is unrivalled among German plays in respect of this release from tension. Thus the most spiritually perturbed of German playwrights, just before committing suicide, gave his nation its finest tragedy, even as Hölderlin, when the darkness was about to obscure his intelligence for ever, penned the Orphic hymns that sound through the wide world; even as Nietzsche, when his mind was on the verge of disintegration,

uttered his most inspired, his most sparkling words. The magical working of this sense of imminent destruction is incomprehensible, as inexplicably beautiful as the last uprush of blue flames from a dying fire.

In *Homburg* Kleist gained control over the daemon for an instant, ridding himself of the haunter by incorporating him into the written work. He did not—as in *Penthesilea*, in *Guiscard*, in *Hermann's Battle*—merely cut off one head of the hydra whose tentacles entwined him. Seizing the monster in an irresistible grip, he embodied it wholly in his creation. Here, then, we feel his power, because force is not dissipated in the void, because passion does not hiss aimlessly like the steam escaping through the safety valve of a superheated boiler, but energy wrestles with energy. Nothing runs to waste in *Homburg*. Kleist found deliverance through a restraint which brought redoublement. The opposing forces are no longer destructive, inasmuch as they no longer leave outlets for this or that unregulated impulse. The antinomy of his nature has been made clear to him through the writing of his own work. But clarity brings knowledge, and knowledge ensures atonement. The passion and the discipline of his soul cease to strive against each other, and look each other quietly in the face. Discipline (in the person of the Elector, who has Homburg proclaimed as victor in the church) honours passion, and passion (in the person of Homburg, who asks for his own death sentence) honours normality. Each recognises the other as part of the eternal Power, which demands unrest for the sake of movement, while demanding discipline for the sake of order, and inasmuch as Kleist tears his earthly opposite out of his troubled breast and discloses him beneath the stars, Kleist himself for the first time is delivered from solitude to become joint creator of the world.

As if by magic, whatever the author had hitherto striven to achieve, was now achieved in a purified and sublimer form, tranquillised and appeased by the sense of atonement. The passions of thirty years were limned, no longer with masterful exaggeration, but mollified and clarified. Guiscard's crazy

ambition had, in Homburg the hero of the play, been transformed into a youth's natural ardour for action; the crude and brutish, the bludgeon-swinging and barbarous patriotism of *Hermann's Battle* had become a gentle yet virile love of one's native land; Kohlhaas's disputatiousness and cantankerousness had been humanised into the Elector's clear-sighted respect for the law; the charm of *Käthchen von Heilbronn* shone gently upon the garden scene, where death was but a sweet scent wafted from the other world; and Penthesilea's passion, her greed of life, had ebbed to be no more than a peaceful yearning.

For the first time there emanates from Kleist's work a muted tone of kindliness, an aroma of sympathy; as he fingers his harp, we hear what we have never heard before in his melodies, the notes of the silver strings. There is a gathering together of every variant of human motives. Just as it is sometimes said of the dying (especially of those who die by drowning) that their last thoughts are a condensed recapitulation of a lifetime's memories, so does Kleist's whole past, a seemingly misspent existence, sketch itself here in outline, sketch itself so dexterously that his errors, his omissions, his follies and his futilities are seen to have significance. The Kantian philosophy, which at twenty he had taken so much to heart that it had almost crushed him by imposing on him his "plan of life", so skilfully guides the Elector in the choice of words that he who would otherwise have been a mere crowned puppet is spiritualised. The years spent as a cadet, the military training (which Kleist had cursed again and again while experiencing them) are recreated in the magnificent fresco of the army, which is a glorification of fellowship. Everything he had broken away from—tradition, discipline, the era to which he belonged—now became the sky that arched his work, for at length he was producing out of an inward home, out of the determinative essence of his self. The air is no longer sultry; the nervous tensions of the author no longer distress the reader; the verses are unconstrained and musical. The spirit world, which elsewhere in his writings seems as though it were spewed forth from hell, here hovers

twilit over the interplay of the mortal figures. With a sweetness echoing that of Shakespeare's last plays, serene knowledge and assured deliverance, the curtain falls upon a harmonious universe.

The Prince of Homburg is the sincerest of Kleist's dramas because it embodies the totality of his life. The criss-crossings and complications of his temperament are there—his love of life and his craving for death, his discipline and his indiscipline, his heritage and his acquirements. Only here, where he pours himself out so freely and drains himself to the dregs, does he, unconsciously, become perfectly genuine. Hence the prophetic note in the death scene, the intoxication of a voluntary end, the dread of an impending fate—a vaticination of his suicide and a simultaneous and integral reliving of his earlier life. Only those consecrated to death have this sublime insight, this twofold vision into the past and the future. Among German dramas, none but *Homburg* and *Empedocles* have sounding through them this elfin music, ringing into the infinite. For nothing but ultimate need can melt the soul in its crucible; nothing but resignation can attain that distant sphere which passion has failed to reach. What destiny had stubbornly denied to Kleist's covetous grasp and to his fierce onslaught, she now vouchsafed in the hour when he had ceased to hope—perfection.

A PASSION FOR DEATH

The uttermost which human strength can try
Have I now tried—th'impossible essayed.
I staked my all upon a single cast.
The die decisive lies before my eyes.
I look, I look—and know that I have lost.

Penthesilea

IT WAS SIGNIFICANT FOR KLEIST that at the very time when he had attained a mastery of his craft, in the year when *Homburg* was written, he should also have been more lonely than ever before. He was forgotten by the world, was homeless and aimless. He had resigned his official post, had been deprived of his newspaper and had had no success in what he conceived to be his mission of summoning Prussia to take sides with Austria in the war. His arch-foe Napoleon held sway over a submissive Europe; the King of Prussia, who had been the emperor's vassal, had become an ally. Kleist's plays were refused by manager after manager, or if performed were coldly received; his books were rejected by the publishers; he could not regain even a minor position in the public service. Goethe was estranged from him; other noted men of letters scarcely knew his name or regarded him as of no account; his former patrons ignored him and his friends neglected him. Even the most faithful of his intimates, his "once so Pylades-minded sister" Ulrike, had forsaken him. He had played card after card in vain, and now his highest trump, *The Prince of Homburg*, was left useless in his hands, the manuscript was of no avail to him. He had scarcely an acquaintance left, and no one regarded his writings as of the slightest value.

At length he attempted a reconciliation with his family, turning up after being lost to their ken for months. He appeared at Frankfurt an der Oder, hoping to have his heart quickened by some signs of affection, but his relatives sprinkled salt on his wounds and smeared gall on his lips. Every dinner he ate with the Kleists was a renewed affliction to him, for they regarded him with contempt as a cashiered

official, an unsuccessful newspaper editor, an incompetent playwright. He was a poor relation who did them no credit.

"I would rather die ten deaths," he wrote in his despair, "than endure once again what I endured the last time I sat at the family board in Frankfurt." Rejected by his kin, he was thrust back upon himself, thrust back into the hell within his own breast. Gloomy, ashamed, humiliated, he made his way to Berlin. For a few months, down at heels and out at elbows, he carried on there as best he could, begging the authorities for a job, fruitlessly offering his novel, his *Homburg*, his *Hermann's Battle* to one publisher after another, afflicting his friends by his pitiable aspect. At length they grew weary of him, just as he had grown weary of the hunt for work or a market for his literary wares. "My heart is so sore," he said towards the close of this period, "that I might almost say the daylight hurts my nose whenever I stick it out of the window." His passions had cooled, his strength was spent, his hopes were dashed.

His fruitless cry the ears of all ignore,

And, when he sees the banner of the times

A-flutter as it spreads from door to door,

He ends his song, to sing has no desire,

But sadly, sadly, lays aside his lyre.

Then the silence (perhaps the silence that surrounded Nietzsche is the only parallel in the case of a man of such outstanding literary genius) was broken by an obscure voice from within, by a voice which he had heard ever and again in moments of discouragement and despair, a voice telling him that a voluntary death offered the best way of escape. He had known its lure since early youth. Just as when he was no more than a hobbledehoy he had formulated his plan of life, so likewise had he long since formulated his plan of death. Again and again had the idea taken shape in hours of impotence; it thrust itself upwards like a dark rock in a raging tide whenever his passions and his hopes ebbed.

Innumerable were the occasions when, in Kleist's writings and conversations, this ardour for life's end found vent. One could almost venture the paradox of saying that he could endure life only so long as he was ready, from moment to moment, to fling it away. Always he craved for death, and if his suicide was so long delayed this was not through fear, but only because of his temperamental exaggeration. Whatever he wanted, he wanted in excess; so for him even a death self-chosen must come in a moment of exaltation. He did not wish to slay himself in a petty or cowardly fashion. As he declared in that letter to Ulrike, he yearned for "a splendid death". Even this gloomiest, most appalling of thoughts was voluptuously tinged.

He wished to hurl himself into death as onto a huge nuptial couch. His erotic trends, which never found normal outlet, overflowed in the dark corners of his nature, and thus it was that he came to picture to himself as a mystical love-death, as the annihilation of twin souls, this death he was ardently to embrace. A deep-rooted and primal anxiety (which he immortalised in the death scene of *The Prince of Homburg*) made him, who had had such bitter experience of loneliness, dread the continuance of this fearful solitude into the eternity of death. Hence, from childhood onwards, it had been his ecstatic way to beseech anyone he loved to die with him. The man of all men most keenly in love with life yearned for a love-death. In earthly existence no woman could satisfy his demand for the superlative, none could keep pace with his vehemence; none, not his betrothed, not Ulrike, not Marie von Kleist, could comply with his claims. Only death, not to be outbid, could gratify his insistence upon an unrivalled proof of life, and *Penthesilea* disclosed the man's secret ardours. The woman who would die with him was the only woman he really desired, and (as in his farewell letter he announced with jubilation) "her tomb was dearer to him than the beds of all the empresses in the world". That was why he had continually adjured those he had been fond of to accompany him into the land of darkness.

Caroline von Schlegel, with whom he had no more than a passing acquaintance, was informed of his willingness to shoot her and himself. Flatteringly, passionately, he told his friend Rühle: "I cannot rid myself of the idea that we must still do something together. Let's do something fine, and die in the doing of it. One of the millions of deaths we have already died and shall die in days to come. It's just like going out of one room into another …" As always with Kleist, thought was richly suffused with emotion, till it grew ecstatic. More and more did he become obsessed with the idea of putting a term to the decay of his energies, with the notion of an irrevocable and heroic act of self-destruction. Thus, amid a flourish of the trumpets of his own admiration for what he was doing, he would escape from the pitiful restrictions and inadequacies of an existence in which his feelings were starved, he would escape into a glorious death. His daemon quivered at the prospect of at length achieving reunion with the infinite.

Like every other of his hyperbolical affects, Kleist's passion for a fellowship on which a joint suicide could alone put the seal remained a mystery to his friends. Vainly did he seek a companion into the Valley of the Shadow. One and all they contemptuously or shudderingly rejected the proposal. At length, at the very time when his soul was surcharged with bitterness and disgust, when his spirit was darkened, he encountered a woman, hitherto almost a stranger, who thanked him for his strange invitation. She was an invalid, whose death could not in any case be long delayed, for her body was inwardly devoured by cancer even as Kleist's mind was devoured by weariness of life. Though herself incapable of forming a vigorous resolution, she was sensitive and highly suggestible, and therefore open to the promptings of his morbid enthusiasm; she agreed to plunge with him into the unknown.

He had found one who would deliver him from solitude in the supreme moment of that plunge. There ensued that strange bridal night of the pair who did not love one another. The elderly, mortally sick and ugly woman (whose face was

transfigured for him by the violence of his own feelings) agreed to travel with him into the void. At bottom this somewhat priggish and sentimental wife of a tax-collector was of a type uncongenial to Kleist. One may suppose, indeed, that in the sexual sense he never even regarded her as a woman, but that he wedded her under another star, a different sign, in the sacred priestcraft of death. She who would have been too petty, too soft, too weak for him as a living companion, was welcomed by him as a comrade in death, for she was the only creature who would surround his departure with a spurious afterglow of love and fellowship. He offered himself to her; she had merely to accept him, for he was ready to go with her.

Life had made him ready, too ready; it had trodden him underfoot, enslaved, disillusioned and humiliated him. Nevertheless he stood erect once more, and out of his impending death constructed his last heroic tragedy. The artist in him, the undying exaggerator, fanned the embers of resolution into a mighty flame. Joyance blazed forth from him at last, now that his voluntary death was assured, now that (as he phrased it) he had "ripened for death", now that he knew himself to be, not life's thrall, but life's master. He who had never, as had Goethe, been able heartily to accept life was able gladly and of set purpose to accept death. For the first time the notes of his song became perfectly harmonious. Like the ringing of a pure-toned bell, every word sounded forth clear beneath the hammer blows of destiny. His days were no longer full of sorrow. He drew deep breaths of relief; the tensions of his spirit were relaxed, since he contemplated being merged into the infinite; the tribulations of everyday life could be ignored now that his world glowed with an inner light. His ego was at length a delight to him, and the delight found expression in Homburg's utterance when destruction was at hand:

Now art thou wholly mine, O Immortality,

And through the bandage covering my eyes

There shines the radiance of a thousand suns!

Lo, from my shoulders twain do pinions grow;
Athwart ethereal spaces soars my soul;
And as a ship, before a favouring wind,
Sees the coast drop behind the horizon's marge,
So fades all life and sinks from out my gaze.
A moment still its tints and shapes I see;
A moment more, they've vanished in the brume.

THE MUSIC OF DESTRUCTION

Not every blow, I think, should man endure.

Let him whom God has stricken drop his sword.

The Schroffenstein Family

OTHER IMAGINATIVE WRITERS have lived more finely, have rowed with a longer stroke, have been in closer touch with life, furthering by their own existence, and transforming thereby, the destinies of the world. None has died more splendidly than Kleist. Of all deaths, none was ever so enveloped in music as his, none so marked by an exhilarating impetus. "The most distressful life that any mortal has lived" (*Death Letters*) ended as a Dionysiac sacrificial feast. The heroic end was successfully achieved by the obscure workings of that spirit which in the ordinary affairs of life had made so lamentable a mess of things. Many (Socrates, for instance, and André Chénier) have displayed in the closing moment of their lives a moderato of feeling; a stoical, nay, humorous indifference; have accepted death wisely and uncomplainingly. But Kleist made a passion of death itself—an intoxication, an orgy, an ecstasy. His passing was a joyful self-surrender, such as he had never known before. Singing like a bacchant, he strode forward to his doom.

Only this once was Kleist's spirit freed; for the first time was his voice unconstrainedly joyful. No one but his companion in death saw him during these farewell days, but we feel assured that his countenance must have disclosed the rapture welling up from within. As far as the pen was concerned, he excelled anything he had written in the past. His *Death Letters* are, to my way of thinking, the most perfect of his works, challenging Nietzsche's *Dionysus Dithyrambs* and Hölderlin's *Songs of the Night*. We hear in them strains from unknown worlds, where there is no taint of our sublunary sphere. Music, for which he had had so great a fondness, but which he had deliberately kept out of his verses, found renewed expression, so that what he now wrote overflowed with rhythm and melody. In these days he penned his only true

poem, the *Death Litany*—obscure, tinged with a sunset glow, half a stammer and half a prayer, but magical beyond the understanding of the sober senses. The stubbornness, the harshness, the acerbity, the intellectualism, the ultra-sobriety hitherto characteristic of his efforts, has here been resolved in music; his Prussian stringency has been relaxed in melody. The earthly no longer has him in its grip.

Thus soaring to a great height, "like two happy air navigators" he writes in his *Death Letters*, he looks down once more on the world and parts from it without bitterness. Why should he feel bitter? Everything that had hitherto troubled him seemed remote and meaningless now that he contemplated it from infinity. Although another woman swore to be his companion in death, his thoughts turned to her for whom he had lived and whom he loved, to Marie von Kleist. He wrote her a farewell greeting from his inmost soul. Once again he embraced her in the spirit, but with the self-possession and moderation of one who has set forth on his voyage into eternity. Then he wrote to his sister Ulrike. As regards her, the shame he had endured still rankles, and his words ring harsh. A few hours later, however, he grew aware that he had been unjust, amid the beatitude of his chosen end, to mortify her; so he wrote a second time, affectionately and full of forgiveness, to the sister of whom he had once been so fond, sending her his best, his very best wishes. As for these latter, the loveliest thing Kleist can wish for her is worded as follows: "May Heaven grant you a death even half as joyful and ineffably serene as mine."

Order has been established; the man who has ever been restless has at last found peace. Most unexpected, most improbable of happenings, Kleist, whose every tie had been severed, feels himself linked up with the world. The daemon, his purpose achieved, no longer has power to goad his victim. Kleist, impatient to get away, flutters his manuscripts once again. There is a finished novel; there are a couple of plays; there is the story of his inner life. No one wants them; no one knows or shall know them. Even the spur of ambition has

ceased to operate. Relentlessly he burns the papers, among them the *Homburg*, which was saved for posterity through the chance survival of a forgotten transcript. Posthumous fame, a literary reputation which may endure for a few centuries, what do these matter to one setting forth into unnumbered aeons? There remain some trifles to attend to; they are dealt with carefully and sensibly, in a way which shows that the would-be suicide was perfectly clear in his mind, untroubled by dread or any other passion. Peguilhen is to see to the sending of a few letters, and to settle outstanding debts, enumerated to the last pfennig, for Kleist remains conscientious to the end. Probably no farewell letter was ever penned more matter of fact than that missive to the War Office: "We shall be found lying shot on the Potsdam road," he begins, as coolly as if these were the opening words of one of his novels, and, as in his novels, the account of an unprecedented death is limned with amazing plasticity and clearness. Nor is there any other farewell letter so permeated with the daemonism of exuberance as that to his beloved Marie von Kleist. In his last hour we still discern the ambivalence of his life, its restraint and its unrestraint, both on the heroic plane.

His signature is the line drawn beneath the account of all that life still owes him. He writes it firmly. Now the complicated balance sheet has been drawn up, and the creditor is about to cancel the obligation, to tear up the bond. In the high spirits of honeymooners, the couple drive to the Wannsee. The host at the inn hears them laughing, sees them sporting merrily in the fields, can tell how they drank their coffee with gusto in the open air. Then, at the prearranged hour, came the two pistol shots, in swift succession, the first that with which Kleist pierced his companion's heart, the second that with which (barrel in mouth) he blew out his own brains. His hand did not falter. It was true that he knew better how to die than to live.

Kleist's personal fate and his atmosphere were integral parts of his work. Foolish to me, therefore, seems the question, to what heights he might have raised German tragedy had he not

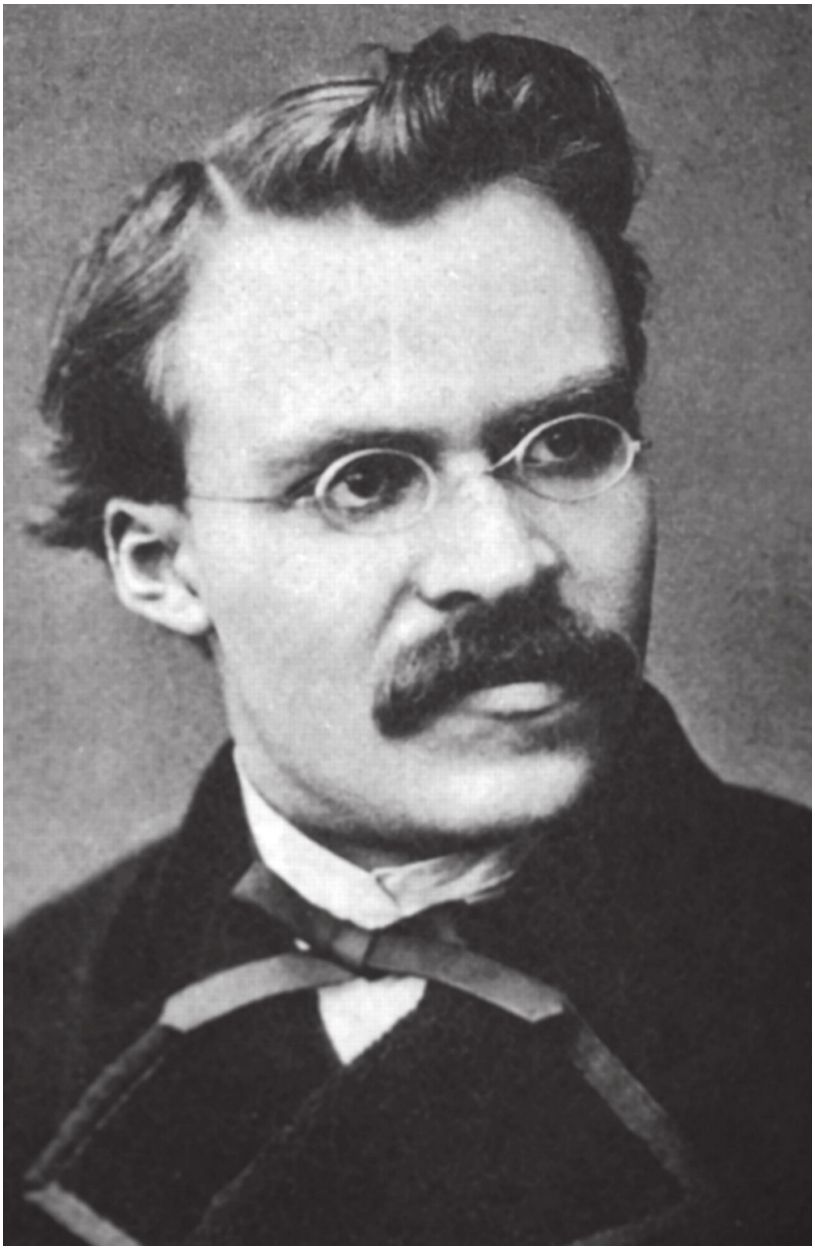
perished prematurely by his own hand. He acted according to his nature, and if his *Homburg* was a masterpiece, so likewise was his suicide. Side by side with those mighty ones who are (as was Goethe) masters of life, there must now and again arise one who is master of death, and who, out of death, creates a poem. “Often a good death is the most fitting close to a career.” Unhappy Günther, who wrote the foregoing, did not know how to seek and find a good death; he lapsed to lower and yet lower levels of misfortune until he flickered out like a farthing rushlight. Kleist, on the other hand, master of the art of tragedy, fashioned his sorrows into the imperishable memorial of his own end, and all suffering grows symbolical when it enjoys the privilege of creation.

NIETZSCHE

1844–1900

A philosopher counts, in my estimation, only in so far as he is able to set an example.

Untimely Meditations



A ONE-MAN DRAMA

To get the best out of life, we need to live dangerously.

THE TRAGEDY of Friedrich Nietzsche's life was that it happened to be a one-man show, a monodrama wherein no other actor entered upon the stage. As the acts of the play precipitate themselves like an avalanche before our eyes, the solitary fighter stands alone beneath the louring skies of destiny—not a soul is at his side to succour him; no woman is there to soften by her ever-present sympathy the stresses of the atmosphere. Every action takes its birth in him, and its repercussions are felt by him alone. The few figures which, at the outset, creep by in the shadow of his person, accompany his heroic enterprise with gestures of dumb astonishment and fear; soon they glide away and vanish as if faced by some danger. Not one person ventures to enter wholeheartedly into the innermost sanctum of Nietzsche's destiny; the poet-philosopher is doomed to speak, to struggle, to suffer alone. He converses with no one, and no one has anything to say to him. What is even more terrible is that none hearken to his voice.

In this unique tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche had neither fellow actors nor audience, neither stage nor scenery nor costume; the drama ran its course in the spaceless realm of thought. Basel, Naumburg, Nice, Sorrento, Sils-Maria, Genoa and so forth are so many names serving as milestones on his life's road; they were never abiding places, never a home. The scene having once been set, it remained the same till the curtain was rung down; it was composed of isolation, of solitude, of that agonising loneliness which Nietzsche's own thoughts gathered around him and with which he was entrapped as by an impenetrable bell glass, a solitude wherein there were no flowers or colours or music or beasts or men, a solitude whence even God was excluded, the dead and petrified solitude of some primeval world which existed long ago or may come into being aeons hence. What made the emptiness and sadness of this isolation so horrible, and at the

same time so ludicrous, was the fact that it existed, intellectually speaking, in the very heart of a new Germany filled with the rattle of trains, with telegraph wires, with the roar and thunder of machinery, in the heart of a civilisation whose members suffered from an almost morbid curiosity, whose publishing houses swamped the market every year with forty thousand volumes of printed matter, whose professors and students were daily endeavouring to solve innumerable problems, whose theatres were night after night staging a hundred different tragedies, while divining nothing, feeling nothing of the tremendous mental drama unfolding itself in their very midst.

For it was precisely when the tragedy of Friedrich Nietzsche reached its sublimest moments that the German world failed to provide an audience, a spectator or a witness of what was taking place. At first, while he was professor at Basel University and could speak his mind from the professorial chair, and while Wagner's friendship thrust him into the limelight, Nietzsche's words drew attentive listeners, but the more he delved into his own mind, the more he plunged into the depths of time, the less did he find responsive echoes. One by one his friends, and even strangers, rose to their feet and withdrew affrighted at the sound of his monologue, which became wilder and more ecstatic as the philosopher warmed to his task. Thus was he left terribly alone, upon the stage of his fate. Gradually the solitary actor grew disquieted by the fact that he was talking into the void; he raised his voice, shouted, gesticulated, hoping to find a response even if it were no better than a contradiction. He invented a special music to accompany his words, an intoxicating, Dionysian music, but no one heard his minstrelsy. He tried to be blithe and gay, but his mirth was forced and piercing to the ear; he gave his sentences twists and turns, hoping that these antics would attract disciples to listen to his deadly earnest evangel, but not a hand was raised to applaud him. Then he invented a dance, a dance betwixt crossed swords, and, stabbed and bleeding, he practised his new art before a public which had no inkling of what such

pleasantries were meant to convey, nor did any suspect the mortally injured passion that lay concealed beneath his strident levity. Thus the drama was played to a finish before empty seats, and no one guessed that the mightiest tragedy of the nineteenth century was unrolling itself before men's eyes. Unwitnessed were the last gyrations of his thoughts as they spun upon a dizzy mountain peak, and, with one final and magnificent whirl, tumbled to earth exhausted, "dead before immortality".

Such was Friedrich Nietzsche's tragedy, and it had its roots in his utter loneliness. Unexampled was the way in which an inordinate wealth of thought and feeling confronted a world monstrously void and impenetrably silent. Not even an adversary worthy of his steel was vouchsafed him. His indomitable will-to-think had to fall back upon his personal resources; for nowhere but in his own breast could he find answer, and meet with resistance. His all-consuming ardour of thought clung to him like a Nessus shirt, and in order to divest himself of it he tore away strips of his own burning flesh, to stand bared before the ultimate truth, before himself. Icy airs blew upon his nakedness; the cry of his spirit met with a stony silence; the leaden skies sank low above the head of this "murderer of God" who, since no opponent was forthcoming, proceeded to attack himself, "a self-slayer, a self-knower, showing no mercy". The daemon within him hounded him out of his world and his day, chasing him to the uttermost marge of his own being.

Shaken, alas, by unfamiliar fevers,

Trembling at touch of iron-bound shafts of ice,

By you I am chased, O thoughts!

Unnamable! Inscrutable! Horrible!

There were moments when he recoiled as he grew aware how far life had swept him away from the living and from everything that existed before his advent on earth. But so tumultuous a rush was not easy to stay. In a convulsive ecstasy of self-knowledge and self-esteem he let Fate have her will of

him and accomplished the destiny his beloved Hölderlin had foreshadowed—that of Empedocles.

A landscape on the heroic scale but wherein there was no sky, a vast display at which there were no spectators, a silence growing ever more perceptible around the cry of this lonesome spirit—these are the elements of Nietzsche's life drama. We should have every right to abhor them as another among so many of nature's insensate cruelties, were it not that Nietzsche himself accepted them with rapturous assent, and that he chose and loved the unique harshness of his doom precisely because of its uniqueness. For it was voluntarily, in full lucidity of mind, that he renounced a secure existence in order to build for himself a life apart, doing so out of a profound tragical instinct. With unprecedented courage he challenged the gods, so that he might, in his own person, "experience the highest degree of danger it is possible for man to live through". *Χαίρετε δαίμονες*! Hail daemons!

It was with this presumptuous cry that one fine night Nietzsche and his friends defied the Powers. At that mystic hour when the spirits are abroad, they poured red wine from their brimming glasses into a sleeping street of Basel as a libation to the Unseen—a fanciful joke such as students love, but containing a prophetical warning, nevertheless. For the daemons, likely as not, hear the summons and may dog the footsteps of him who throws down the gauntlet. Nietzsche never tried to evade the demands of the monster whose grip he felt. The harder the blows, the more resonantly did the unflawed metal of his will respond. And upon this anvil, brought to red heat by passion, the hammer descended with increasing vigour, forging the slogan which was ultimately to steel his mind to every attack: "The greatness of man; *amor fati;*[*] never desiring to change what has happened in the past, what will happen in the future and throughout eternity; not merely to bear the inevitable, still less to mask it, but to love it." This fervent love song to the Powers smothers the cry of his heart. Thrown to earth, oppressed by the mutism of the world, gnawed by bitterness and sorrow, he never once raised

his hands to implore a respite. Quite otherwise! He demanded to be yet further tortured, to become yet more isolated, to be granted yet deeper trials, the greatest to which mortal man can be put. Not to escape his lot, but solely with a view to making it more thoroughly part and parcel of himself did he lift his hands in prayer: “O will of my soul that I call fate, thou who art in me and above me, take care of me and preserve me for a great destiny.”

He who prays so earnestly will have his prayers answered.

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* *love of fate*

TWOFOLD PORTRAIT

Theatrical poses are not consonant with greatness; anyone who feels a need for posturing is false … Beware of those who aim at appearing picturesque!

NIETZSCHE WAS NOT A POSEUR, nor was he represented as a hero during his lifetime. Since his death, many who claim to be his disciples have pictured him as an archetypal hero. Defiant carriage of the head; a lofty brow furrowed with sombre thoughts; thick, wavy hair, clustering down to the strong column of the neck; two falcon eyes beneath bushy eyebrows; every feature of this masterful countenance taut with willpower, health and strength—such is the portrait usually given of him. Like a second Vercingetorix, he is shown with a heavy moustache falling manfully over the hard-set lips which surmount a prominent chin, and involuntarily the image called up is that of the barbarian warrior, a Viking of the Teutonic north striding forward sword in hand to victory, his hunting horn slung over his shoulder and a spear within easy reach. It is thus that our sculptors and painters delight in portraying him, a Germanic superman, a Prometheus bound, hoping thereby to render this great recluse more accessible to men of little faith who, corrupted by school books and stage presentations, are incapable of detecting tragedy unless it is draped in theatrical trappings. But genuine tragedy is never theatrical, and the true portrait of Nietzsche is far less picturesque than busts and paintings of him would have us believe.

To obtain a real likeness of the man, we need to see him in his actual surroundings. What were they? A dining room in some modest boarding house, quarters in an equally modest hotel among the Swiss mountains or on the Italian Riviera; insignificant fellow boarders, for the most part elderly females, experts in small talk. A gong sounded for the third time and the guests filed in to dinner. One of them was a slouching figure, peering before him as if he had just emerged from a dark cave—for Nietzsche, who was "six-sevenths blind", always groped his way when entering a room. His

clothes were dark of hue and carefully brushed; his face was gloomy and crowned with a mane of brown hair; his eyes, too, looked melancholy behind the thick lenses of his spectacles. Quietly and even timidly he sought the place reserved for him at the table, and he remained shrouded in an uncanny silence during the meal. One felt that this was a man who dwelt among the shadows, a man beyond the pale of human society and conversation, one who winced at the slightest noise. He would bow courteously to his fellow guests, wishing them politely "Good day", and in return his fellow guests would with equally polite indifference greet "the German professor". With the tentative movements of near-sighted persons he would draw his chair up to the board; with the cautiousness of those suffering from a weak digestion, he would examine every dish, asking whether the tea was not perhaps too strong, the food too highly spiced—for an error in diet might cause him days of racking pain. There was never any wine or beer or coffee served where he sat; he smoked neither cigar nor cigarette after meals; allowed himself nothing that would cheer, refresh and relax; kept up a perpetual Lenten abstinence accompanied by a trickle of superficial conversation with a chance neighbour, but when he made the effort to talk it was as if he had not done so for many years, had lost the knack and dreaded lest he be asked too many questions.

Immediately the meal was ended he would retire to his room, a typical *chambre garnie*, exiguous and chilly and dowdy. The table was usually littered with sheets of manuscript, with jottings on scraps of paper, with proofs. Not a flower, not an ornament, hardly a book, seldom a letter would be found. Away in a corner was a heavy and clumsily made wooden trunk—his only possession in addition to a change of underlinen and a second suit. On a shelf were ranged innumerable bottles of tinctures of this, that and the other medicament to cure headache (to which he was a martyr), colic, spasmodic vomiting, constipation; more numerous than any other drugs in his pharmacopoeia were chloral and veronal, those terrible specifics against insomnia. A ghastly collection of poisons, the only resources he had to

fall back upon in case of need in the dreary silence of his lair, where he knew no other kind of repose than the brief interval of artificially produced sleep.

Wrapped in a loose overcoat, a woollen muffler round his throat—for the miserable stove merely smoked when lit and gave forth no heat—his fingers stiff with cold, two pairs of spectacles on his nose, which almost touched the paper as he wrote, he scribbled for hours at a stretch, scribbled down words which his eyes were hard put to decipher when the work was done. These poor eyes burned, and watered with fatigue. One of the rare joys in his life was when a friendly person came along and offered to take down his thoughts from dictation for a couple of hours.

On fine days he might take a stroll, but he would invariably go alone, alone with his thoughts. Never did he encounter a soul to cheer him, never did he have a companion, never did he meet an acquaintance. He hated grey weather, rain, snow which dazzled his eyes, and during such inclement days he would remain a prisoner in his dingy room. He never paid calls, never came into touch with other human beings. Of an evening he supped on a few biscuits and very weak tea, which having swallowed he would resume his endless communing with his thoughts. Hour after hour sped by in the glare of a sputtering lamp. Then the tension would relax and a welcome lassitude invade him. A gulp of chloral or other soporific, and he would snatch at sleep, at sleep which is the facile boon of those who do not think overmuch and who are not perpetually harassed by the daemons.

There were days which he spent entirely in bed, a prey to cramp in the stomach, to nausea, reduced to semi-consciousness by pain, his temples pulsing furiously, his eyes blinded by suffering. No one came near him to place a cooling bandage on his forehead, to read to him, to talk or to laugh.

Everywhere he went, the *chambre garnie* was the same. The names of the towns he visited changed from Sorrento to Turin, from Venice to Nice or Marienbad, but the *chambre garnie* remained identical, a rented room, a room totally

lacking in any feeling of home, a room filled with dreary, old, worn-out furniture, with a table at which he worked, with a bed upon which he suffered, and with his unalleviated solitude. During all the years of his pilgrimage he never once put up in friendly and cheerful surroundings, never at night felt the warm body of a woman pressing against his; never did the sun rise to see him famous, after a thousand nights of dark and silent labour. How immeasurably vaster was Nietzsche's loneliness than is the picturesque highland of Sils-Maria where between luncheon and tea our tourists wander in the hope of capturing some of the glamour that clings to a spot sanctified by his presence. Nietzsche's solitude was as wide as the world; it spread over the whole of his life until the very end.

If on some rare occasion a stranger dropped in, Nietzsche was no longer able to respond. Fifteen years of solitude had hardened the crust around his heart, so that he felt incapable of being genial and sociable. The anchorite could breathe, assuaged and comfortable, only when his chance visitor had departed! Conversation wearied and irritated him who constantly gnawed at his own vitals and whose hunger for himself, and himself alone, was never satiated.

One little ray of brightness came at times to pierce the gloom—music. He would hear *Carmen* performed in a second-rate theatre at Nice, or catch the lilt of melody in some concert hall, or spend a few hours at the piano. But this relaxation, too, hurt him, moved him to tears. A pleasure once renounced becomes so lost to him who has forgone it that he can henceforward feel it only as suffering, as something that pains.

Nietzsche's lonely pilgrimage from one *chambre garnie* to another lasted fifteen years. During that time he remained unknown to everyone but himself. He wandered like a wraith in the shadow of great towns, in dusty trains, in various sickrooms, while all around him the vanity fair of the arts and sciences was in full swing. The only other life journey in the slightest degree comparable is that of Dostoevsky, who during the almost identical period was experiencing similar poverty

and oblivion. In both cases alike the work of a titan masks the sepulchral figure of a Lazarus who dies daily from his poverty and his sores, and who daily rises from the tomb through the saving miracle of his own creative will. Every day, for fifteen years, Nietzsche rose from the grave which was his lodging-house room, to go back to it anon, lapsing from torture to torture, from one death to another, from one resurrection to another, until in the end his brain, overheated in the furnace of his energies, was shattered.

Strangers found him, the man who was so great a stranger to his own epoch, lying in a street at Turin. They conveyed him to a strange room in the Via Carlo Alberto. None witnessed the death of his mind. His intellectual end is shrouded in obscurity, in a saintly isolation. Solitary and unknown, the most lucid genius of the epoch was precipitated into the night of his own soul.

APOLOGIA FOR ILLNESS

What does not kill me makes me stronger.

NIETZSCHE'S BODY WAS AFFLICTED with so many and varied tribulations that in the end he could with perfect truth declare: "At every age of my life, suffering, monstrous suffering, was my lot." Headaches so ferocious that all he could do was to collapse onto a couch and groan in agony, stomach troubles culminating in cramps when he would vomit blood, migrainous conditions of every sort, fevers, loss of appetite, exhaustion, haemorrhoids, intestinal stasis, rigors, night sweats—a gruesome enumeration, indeed. Added to these was the fact that he was nearly blind, that after the smallest strain his eyes would swell and water so that he should not have imposed on them more than one and a half hours of work a day. Ignoring such precautionary measures, he would spend ten hours at a stretch over his writing table. But his brain took revenge for this excess; cephalalgia was the result. His nervous tension would at such times be so extreme that it was impossible for him to relax. Though his body was wearied to exhaustion he could not sleep. Unless he forced matters by a dose of veronal or the like, his mind persisted in elaborating thoughts and visions; and to bring about this urgently needed rest, increasingly massive doses of the hypnotic had to be absorbed (in two months Nietzsche consumed as many ounces of chloral hydrate). The stomach would then rebel, and the vicious circle would start anew—vomiting, headaches and so forth, to which fresh remedies had to be applied. His bodily organs were a battlefield, reacting upon one another to their common disadvantage. Without let or pause his sufferings were a daily martyrdom; he was never allowed a month of contentment during which to forget himself and his miseries. In all his correspondence there are barely a dozen letters in which a groan or a cry of lamentation does not go up from every page. Goaded to despair by his sensitive nerves, he wrote: "Lighten the burden of your fate—die!" Or, again: "A pistol is for me now a source of relatively pleasant thoughts." And yet again: "This terrible and almost

unceasing martyrdom makes me yearn for the end, and, judging by certain indications, I fancy the brainstorm that will free me is near at hand."

A time came when his vocabulary of superlatives was exhausted, and he found no words to describe his anguish. The rack called forth monotonous cries, repeated with increasing rapidity and becoming less and less human. They reach our ears from the depths of what he described as "a dog's life". Then, suddenly, like lightning in a clear sky—and none of us can fail to be taken aback by so unprecedented a contradiction —he announced in his *Ecce Homo: "Summa summarum,*[*] I have enjoyed good health" (he is referring to the fifteen years which preceded his mental death)—a fine profession of faith, strong, proud, clear-cut, seeming to tax with falsehood the groans of despair that had gone before.

Which are we to believe, the cries of distress or the lapidary aphorism? Both! Nietzsche had a good constitution which made him capable of resistance. His body was well built, a column which would not bend under the heaviest load. His parsonic ancestors were true men of the German countryside, hale in life and limb. In a general way, and taking it all in all, both his temperament and his body, both his mental and physical equipment, were sound. But his sensitiveness made him unable to cope with the violence of his feelings, so that his nerves were constantly in revolt. Yet this revolt was never able to shake the man's iron command over his intellectual activities.

Nietzsche found an apt way of describing his condition on the borderline between safety and danger, when he wrote of his sufferings as "the pepperings of musketry fire". The besieging armies of his aches and pains never breached the walls of the citadel. He lived like Gulliver in Lilliput, a giant perpetually tormented by a thousand pygmy ailments. His nerves were on the alert, eternally keeping vigil, forever on the watch, engrossed in the defence of his organism. As for a downright illness, he never had such a thing. Yet for twenty long years an illness was undermining the innermost sanctum

of his being, was laying the charge which was to blow up the fort when the time was ripe. A mind as monumental as Nietzsche's does not succumb to a petty fusillade; an explosion alone is capable of shattering the granite strength of such a mind.

Thus an enormous capacity for suffering was juxtaposed with an enormous capacity of resistance to the ravages suffering entails, and a too vehement sensibility confronted an all too delicately poised motor system. Each nerve of the stomach, the heart, the sense organs, constituted a manometer whereon were recorded with the utmost precision the minutest modifications and tensions let loose by pain. His body, like his mind, was acutely aware of its actions and reactions. The tiniest fibre, which in ordinary mortals gives no sign of its existence, immediately made him aware of its message by a spasm, so that his "mad irritability" broke up into a thousand sharp splinters the vitality which was by nature a source of strength within him. That is why such agonising wails were forced from him when at every step through life he unexpectedly touched one of these vibrant nerves on the raw.

This hypersensitiveness, which could be shaken acutely by the most airy of impacts—impacts hardly penetrating the superficial layers of consciousness where ordinary mortals are concerned—was the root and origin of his woes, and the wellspring of his amazing power to appreciate values. If his blood coursed more swiftly through his veins on occasions, no tangible or affective cause could be adduced to account for the physiological phenomenon—all that was needed to set him in vibration was the air he breathed, with its hourly changes. I doubt if there ever has been a man so sensitive as Nietzsche to atmospheric alterations, one who so minutely responded to meteorological tensions and oscillations. His whole body was like quicksilver, like a barometer. An intimate relationship existed between his pulse and the atmospheric pressure, between his nerves and the degree of humidity in the air; an electric current seemed to flow from him outward, and from the universe back to him. Every few feet of altitude were

registered within him as on an aneroid, every oscillation of temperature announced itself by a succession of pain and suffering within his body, which reacted promptly to each jolt of nature. His vitality was less resistant during rainy and overcast weather: “grey skies make me feel horribly depressed”; heavy clouds disturbed him “to the very inwards”; “rain takes all the strength out of me”; dampness enfeebled, drought renewed his vigour, the sun brought him to life again, winter was for him a kind of “lockjaw” and filled his mind with thoughts of imminent death. The fluctuations of his nerve barometer were like those of April weather, rushing from one extreme to another; “he triumphed and he saddened with all weather”. What he needed was a serene, a cloudless landscape, high up on a plateau of the Engadine, where no wind came to disturb the peace and calm.

These physical responses to natural phenomena had their equivalent in the world of his mind. Every time a thought was born within him, it flashed like a streak of forked lightning. The act of thought was fulfilled with so intoxicating an ecstasy, with so electrical a spasm, that it dealt with his body as a storm does with a countryside. At every explosion of feeling, no more than a second was required to modify the circulation of his blood. In this most vital of thinkers, body and mind were so intimately wedded to atmospheric phenomena that for him interior and exterior happenings were identical. “I am neither mind nor body, but a tertium quid. I suffer everywhere and for everything.”

Nietzsche’s inborn disposition towards an unduly violent reaction to every stimulus was undoubtedly fostered by the fifteen years he spent in a stifling atmosphere of seclusion. Since during the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year nothing corporeal, neither woman nor friend, came into personal contact with him, since he exchanged scarcely a syllable with anyone but himself, he carried on an uninterrupted dialogue with his own nerves. The compass of his sensations lay for ever in his palm and, like all anchorites, hermits, introverts, eccentrics and originals, he noted with

hypochondriacal precision the slightest modifications in the functioning of his organs. Ordinary mortals are able to forget themselves in talk with their fellows, in business interests, in sport and relaxation; they dull their irritability by means of wine and indifference. Not so a Nietzsche! His genius as diagnostician constantly tempted him to gratify his curiosity in the domain of psychology by taking himself and his sufferings as subjects for "personal experiments". Simultaneously playing the parts of doctor and patient, he dissected out the pains that tortured him, laying bare his nerves, and, like all sensitive and imaginative persons, he thereby succeeded in intensifying his hyperexcitability. Being sceptical in his attitude towards physicians, he became his own physician, and "doctored" himself continually. He tried treatment after treatment—electrical massage, dieting, drinking special waters, taking medicinal baths. Sometimes he had recourse to bromides in order to blunt his excitability; at other times he tuned his nerves up to snapping point by tonic medication. He was perpetually seeking to create a special atmosphere for himself, a realm peculiar to himself, "a climate for my soul" to dwell in. Lugano attracted him on account of its "lake air and the absence of wind"; then he went to Pfäfers; next, to Sorrento. Then followed Ragaz, where he thought to find relief in the baths, St Moritz, the spas of Baden-Baden and Marienbad. A springtime spent in the Engadine made him feel that he had found a spot which possessed a kinship to his own nature because of its ozone-laden air. Soon, however, the "dry" climate of Nice lured him south again, and after staying there for a while he went to Genoa and Venice. Now he longed for the woodlands, then he craved for the sea; again he wished to live on the shores of a lake, or in some quiet little town where he could procure "simple but nourishing food".

I wonder how many thousands of kilometres Nietzsche travelled in quest of the fairyland where his nerves might find repose. He pondered over huge works on geology, hoping to find the exact place where he might win repose of body and tranquillity of mind. Distance was no obstacle to its attainment —he planned a journey to Barcelona, and voyages to the

mountains of Mexico, to Argentina, to Japan. The geographical position, the climate, the native diet shaped themselves gradually into a peculiar science in relation to his morbid symptoms. Notes were made on the temperature and the atmospheric pressure at each place he selected; the local rainfall was scheduled with the utmost exactitude.

As to the actual precautionary measures he took to secure immunity, here is a selection—tea must be of a special brand, the dose to be accurately measured; meat was poison to him; vegetables needed to be cooked in a special way. Little by little this constant doctoring and diagnosing led him into a morbid state of solipsism, became a mania. Self-vivisection naturally made things worse. As is invariably the case with a psychologist, Nietzsche suffered twice as much as a layman, because he had to suffer both subjectively and objectively.

But Nietzsche was a battlefield of contradictions. Goethe in his wisdom knew how to steer clear of danger, but Nietzsche audaciously went forth to meet danger, to take the bull by the horns. Though psychological study and intellectuality are prone to sweep an impressionable man into an abyss of suffering and despair, they are also capable of bringing him back to health and sanity. Nietzsche was gifted with a genius for self-analysis, and, just as his ailments were mainly due to this gift, so by it he was once again made whole. Thus psychology in this instance became therapeutics, became a marvellous application of that "alchemist's art" which boasts of being able to "extract value from something which contains no value at all".

After ten years of struggle, Nietzsche's "vitality reached its lowest ebb"; he seemed to have been beaten in the duel with his nerves, a prey to depression, pessimism, despair. Then, unexpectedly, a change took place in his spiritual balance, one of those quasi-miraculous "recoveries", those auto-salvations, which render the story of his mind so dramatic, so splendid and so moving. He grappled with the illness which was undermining him and hugged it to his heart. A mystical moment, the time of whose advent cannot be fixed with any

certitude, one of those fulminating moments which would burst like an inspiration into the heart of his work, a moment when he "discovered" his illness, when it was suddenly and to his surprise borne in upon him that he was still alive, that in spite of the profoundest depression and during the most anguishing epoch of his existence his productivity had never ceased, had, indeed, grown in amplitude, a moment when he could proclaim his conviction that his sufferings, his privations formed an essential part of "the cause", the only cause so far as he was concerned, the sacred cause of his life. As soon as his mind had ceased to pity his body, no longer participated in its sufferings, he recognised that his life had acquired a new perspective and his illness a deeper significance. Consciously, well knowing what he was about, he now accepted the burden, accepted his fate as a necessity, and since he was a fanatical "advocate of life", loving the whole of his existence, he accepted his sufferings with the "Yes" of his Zarathustra and, as accompaniment to his tortures, sang the jubilant hymn "again and yet again for all eternity!" Knowledge thus became recognition, and recognition gratitude. For now that he was able to contemplate his anguish from the heights, to see in it the road leading to himself, he discovered (with the joy he invariably felt in the magic of extremes) that he owed to no earthly power so much as to his illness, that, indeed, it was his tortures that he had to thank for his greatest blessing—his freedom, physical freedom and freedom of the mind. For whenever he had tried to settle down, to lead an easy life, to grow fat and flabby, whenever he ran the risk of losing his originality by prematurely becoming petrified in an official post, a profession, a special form of intellectual activity—illness had goaded him from his refuge. Ill health prevented him from being enrolled in the army, and he was thus enabled to continue his scientific studies; to ill health, again, he owed it that he did not fall into a rut but was plucked away from science, from the university circle at Basel, and thrust out into a larger world, the world of his own being. Through his afflicted eyes he was protected from enslavement to books, "one of the greatest services I owe to myself". Every tie that

threatened to be imposed on him was severed by suffering—a cruel but necessary operation. “Illness itself frees me,” he wrote; illness was the midwife that brought his inner man into the world, and the pains he experienced were labour pains. Thanks to illness, life never became a routine but remained a perpetual regeneration, an adventure, a discovery. “I discovered life as something new, myself included.”

Henceforward the tortured poet-philosopher sang a paean of gratitude to “holy suffering”, recognising that through suffering alone can man attain to knowledge. Animal health, which is inherited and has never been shaken, can find contentment unconsciously. People who enjoy perfect health are not capable of becoming psychologists, for they desire nothing and they ask no questions, being satisfied with current everyday happenings. Suffering, on the other hand, leads to knowledge, for “pain seeks out causes, whereas pleasure is inclined to remain in situ and never to look backwards”. One “is fined down by suffering”. Suffering digs and delves and ploughs the soil of the soul so that it is made friable and prepared for the new harvest. “Great suffering is the ultimate liberator of the mind, it alone constrains us to plunge into our innermost depths”, and he who has suffered “even unto the agony of death” has the right to pronounce the words: “I know life better because I have so often been on the verge of losing it.”

Nietzsche did not triumph over his sufferings by jugglery, by negation, by palliatives or by idealising his body’s torture, but by the primal strength of his disposition, by awareness. The prince of discoverers of values disclosed to his own self the value of his ill health. A martyr by contraries, he was not put to the torture because of a faith which had already become established in his mind. No, it was out of torment, it was when he was upon the rack, that he formulated his creed. Thus our chemist of the soul discovered, not merely the value of illness, but likewise its polar opposite, the value of health. The two need to be conjoined if life is to be appreciated to the full; there must be a perpetual state of tension between torment and

ecstasy if man is to be projected into the infinite. Both are indispensable, illness as means and health as the goal. Suffering, according to Nietzsche, is but the shadowy side of illness. The other side is irradiate with the idea of recovery. But we can reach this sunlit shore only by way of suffering. Now, to get well, to regain health, means more than just to achieve a normal condition of life; it is not merely a transformation; it is infinitely more, for it is an ascension, an assumption, an increase in sensitiveness. One recovers from illness "with a new skin", "more ticklish", possessing a "finer taste for pleasure", a "finer palate for the appreciation of delicacies, a livelier voice and a second, more dangerous, innocence in the midst of joy", like a child's, yet far more subtle than any experienced in youth. And this secondarily acquired health, which was the outcome of a "conquest over suffering", which was not granted to him blindly and gratuitously but by levying a heavy toll of sighs and groans, was a thousandfold more vigorous than the well-being of persons who are always well. Once having tasted the delight of recovery, he forever desired the joy to be renewed that he might once again experience the thrill. Thus he ran over and over again to the dolorous encounter so as to recapture "the enchanting sensation of good health", that "scintillating drunkenness" to undergo which Nietzsche renounced the Elysium of alcohol and nicotine.

No sooner had he grasped the meaning of his illness and enjoyed the voluptuous delight of health than he wished to transform it into an apostolate and to explain by it the meaning of the universe. Like all those possessed by the daemon, he was a slave to his own ecstasy, and he found henceforward no comfort in the dazzling see-saw between pleasure and pain. He desired further and more agonising martyrdom so as to swing higher and ever higher into the uppermost and most blessed sphere of recovery, where all is serenity and strength. In the excess of his enthusiasm, he came to confound his wish to be well with health itself, to take his feverishness for vitality and his vertiginous fall into the depths of illness for an increase in power. Health! Health! This was the device inscribed upon his

banner. Health was the standard of every value, the aim of life, the meaning of the universe. After ten years of groping in the dark, suffocating with torments, he quelled his groans so as to intone a hymn of praise in honour of vitality, of brute force, of power-intoxicated strength. The will-to-power was the life principle. The will-to-be-hard must be the goal of man in the coming age. Little did he imagine that the force which gave him the strength to shout his message was already standing with bow taut to let loose the arrow which was to kill him.

For this spurt of health was a fiction of Nietzsche's imagination, an autosuggestion. In *Ecce Homo* he boasted of his unfailing health, denied that he had ever been ill, and yet this book was penned on the eve of his mental breakdown. His paean was not sung to life triumphant but, alas, to his own death. No longer are we listening to the ideas of a scientifically trained mind but to the incoherent words of the daemon which had taken possession of its victim. What he mistook for illumination, for the fiery glow of his blood, was in reality the poisonous germ of the catastrophe which awaited him. The euphoria of this penultimate phase is a well-known symptom preceding the final collapse. His last hours of consciousness were suffused by a silvery sheen which made him aware of the vibrations in another realm, in the realm of the daemon, the realm of the beyond. But he, in his intoxication, was incapable of grasping the plain facts. He was filled with self-satisfaction and self-assertion, illuminated by the splendour and beneficence of the earth.

Ideas flowed from him like a cascade of fire, his tongue spoke with a primitive eloquence, music invaded every nook and cranny of his being. Whithersoever he looked, he saw the reign of peace. Passers-by smiled at him as he roamed the streets. Every letter he wrote conveyed a divine message, glowed with happiness. In the last letter he was fated to write, he said to Peter Gast: "Sing me a new song—the world is transfigured and the heavens rejoice." Out of these same heavens came the bolt which laid him low, mingling in an indissoluble interval of time every suffering and every

beatitude. The two extremes of feeling entered together into his being, and his pulses throbbed at one and the same instant with life and with death.

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* *In total*

THE DON JUAN OF THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD

What is of genuine importance is eternal vitality, not eternal life.

KNOWLEDGE WAS KANT'S DAILY and nightly companion; she lived with him and bedded with him for forty years on the same spiritual couch; he procreated with her a family of German philosophical systems whose descendants still live with us in every middle-class circle. His relationship to truth was essentially monogamous. The urge that brought Schelling, Fichte, Hegel and Schopenhauer to philosophy was a desire for order, a desire which has nothing daemonic about it, but is typical of the easy-going German nature, objective and professional, tending to discipline the mind and to establish a well-ordered architectonic of existence. They love truth, honourably, faithfully, durably. No selfishness has any place in this love, there is nothing erotic about it, no desire to consume or be consumed in the furnace of passion. Truth is for them a docile spouse from whom they do not part until death calls. They, too, remain faithful until the end. Their relation to truth, therefore, invariably smacks of domesticity, and as an actual fact, each one of them built a house, that is to say, a special philosophical system, wherein to accommodate bride and bed. With a master hand they plied harrow and plough in the spiritual field they had wrenched from chaos in order to bequeath it to mankind. They pushed the frontiers of knowledge far beyond the culture of their times and, in the sweat of their brows, they increased the spiritual harvest.

Nietzsche's craving for knowledge arose from a totally different emotional world. His attitude towards truth was a passionate and breathless tremor, was high-strung and inquisitive, never satisfied, never appeased, never contented with achievement but precipitating itself, beyond every response, into further impatient and insatiable questionings. Having acquired the knowledge he was in search of, he was incapable of making it his own in perpetuity, of espousing it, of shaping it into a system, a doctrine. Everything allured him; nothing was able to retain his interest. So soon as a problem

had lost its virginity, had lost the charm and mystery of maidenhood, he forsook it pitilessly, without jealousy, for others to enjoy if they cared to—as did Don Juan, his brother so far as the impulsive life was concerned, in the case of his "*mille e tre*".[*] For just as genuine seducers are forever seeking among womankind the one and only woman of their hearts, so did Nietzsche seek among all kinds of knowledge the unique knowledge of his choice, the knowledge doomed to everlasting unreality and eternally eluding his grasp. It was not desire for conquest and possession and sensual enjoyment which stirred him, thrilled him and reduced him almost to despair, but invariably questionings, doubts, the pursuit of knowledge. He loved insecurity not certainty; and consequently his lusts turned for gratification to metaphysics and consisted of *amour-plaisir*[†] in knowledge. He yearned to seduce, to lay bare, to penetrate voluptuously, and to violate every spiritual object—"to know" in the biblical sense of the word, when a man "knows" a woman and thereby filches her secret. This everlasting relativist of values recognised that his acts of possession never knew truth to the uttermost limits, for, in the last resort, truth never gives herself wholly to anyone: "He who fancies he is in possession of truth, has no inkling of how much eludes his grasp."

Nietzsche, therefore, never set up house with knowledge so as to economise and preserve; he built no spiritual home over his head. Maybe it was a nomadic instinct which forced him into a position of never owning anything. Like a Nimrod of the mind, he ranged through the forests of the spiritual world, alone, with no roof to protect him, no wife, no child, no servant; nevertheless, he was filled with the pleasures of the chase, a hunter incarnate. As in Don Juan's case so in Nietzsche's the duration of an emotion was a matter for indifference; what held import for him was the fleeting "moments of grandeur and rapturous delight". Hazardous activities of the mind, those "dangerous maybes" which make a man glow with ardour and which goad him to the pursuit but fail to satisfy his longing when once attained, these were the only adventures that attracted Nietzsche. He did not desire the

quarry but the spirit, the spur, the pleasures of the hunt for knowledge, upward and onward to the outermost stars, until in the end there was nothing left for him to hunt but the residue of all that is harmful in knowledge—"like a toper who finally comes down to drinking absinth or nitric acid".

For the Don Juan in Nietzsche was not an epicure, he was not dainty in his choice, neither could he enjoy robustly—this finical aristocrat with his quivering nerves lacked the sleepy ease of digestion, the lazy contentment of satisfied appetite, the boastfulness which makes the common mortal parade his conquests. The woman-hunter is himself hunted by his insatiable desires—thus, likewise, the Nimrod of the mind; the unscrupulous seducer is himself seduced by consuming curiosity, he is a tempter who is everlastingly tempted to tempt women to forgo their innocence, just as Nietzsche was perpetually interrogating the universe for the mere pleasure of questioning and to gratify his inextinguishable psychological lust. For Don Juan the mystery was contained in everything and in nothing, in each woman for one night and in no woman thereafter. Thus is it also in the case of a psychologist for whom in every problem truth resides but for a moment and never permanently.

Nietzsche therefore was denied repose and calm in the realm of thought. His mental life was full of unexpected twists and turns. Other German philosophers lived in a quasi-epic tranquillity; they spun their theories quietly from day to day, sitting commodiously in an armchair, and their thought process hardly raised their blood pressure by a single degree. Kant never produces the impression of a mind seized by thought as by a vampire, and painfully enduring the terrible urge of creation; Schopenhauer from thirty onwards, after he had published *The World as Will and Idea*, seems to me a staid professor who has retired on a pension and has accepted the conviction that his career is finished. They have chosen a road, and calmly walk along it to the end; whereas Nietzsche was forever tracked down and pushed towards the unknown. That is why Nietzsche's intellectual story (like Don Juan's bodily

story) assumes a dramatic aspect, constitutes a chain of unforeseen episodes, a tragedy which passes unintermittently from one vicissitude to another even more perilous, until it culminates in annihilation.

Now, what renders this life unique and tragical is precisely the absence of repose in Nietzsche's searchings, his incessant urge to think, his compulsory advance. These make his life a work of art. Nietzsche was doomed to think without respite like the legendary hunter who was condemned to an everlasting chase. What was once a pleasure became for him a bugbear, an affliction, so that his style grew breathless and spasmodic like a panting beast which recognises that it will soon have to face the hounds, at bay. Nietzsche's complaint, therefore, moves us profoundly. "One falls in love with something, and hardly has this something had time to become a deep-felt love than the tyrant within, which we should do well to name our higher self, claims our love for the sacrifice. And we yield to the dictator, though ourselves consumed in a slow fire." Don Juan natures have ever to be wrenched from love's embraces, for the daemon of dissatisfaction incessantly urges them to further exploits—the same daemon that harried Hölderlin and Kleist and harries all those who worship the infinite. Nietzsche himself exclaimed: "Everywhere I go, I find gardens of Armida and, consequently, ever-fresh bereavements and ever-renewed bitterness of heart. I am forced to lift my foot, my weary and wounded foot, and it is precisely because I am constrained to advance that I throw a backwards glance into the past, a covetous glance upon the beauties it contains—begrudging them because of their inability to hold me!"

Such cries, wrenched from the depths of a suffering human creature, are not to be met with among the German philosophers who preceded Nietzsche. We may encounter them in the mystics of the Middle Ages, the heretics or the saints of the Gothic era, but then they are for the most part uttered between clenched teeth and strike the ear less stridently. Pascal in his day went through a purgatory of doubt,

and he experienced a similar upheaval and annihilation of the questing spirit, but neither Leibniz nor Kant nor Hegel nor Schopenhauer is capable of stirring us with so primitive a groan. Loyal they may be, courageous and resolute, yet they never throw themselves heart and soul and destiny into the heroic game with knowledge. Theirs is the light of a candle, that is to say, they burn from the top only, with head and with mind. They have their reserves, keeping their private existence sheltered from the blows of fate. Nietzsche, on the contrary, gave himself completely, fronting danger not merely "with the antennae of cold and inquisitive thought", but with voluptuous ardour, with the whole weight of his destiny. His thoughts do not come only from on high, are not simply conjured out of his brain, but are at the same time engendered by the fever of his blood, by violently quivering nerves, by ungratified sense organs, by the consuming might of the entirety of his vital forces. Hence his ideas, like those of Pascal, tend to become "a passion-fraught history of the soul"; they are the extreme consequence of perilous, nay, almost mortal, adventures, a living drama moving us profoundly. Yet even when he was in the bitterest distress Nietzsche had no desire to change his lot for another, milder, fate; he did not wish to exchange his "dangerous life" for stability and repose of mind, would not for any consideration dam up the overflow of his feelings. Nietzsche hated such a prospect, seeing therein a diminution of vitality. Away with security! Out upon satiety and contentedness with what one has! "How is it possible to be placed in this amazing uncertainty and multiplicity called 'existence' without questioning its meaning, without trembling with curiosity, and without the voluptuous emotion engendered by questioning?" Thus did he rail at our sit-by-the-fires, and make mock of those who are easily satisfied. He, the typical adventurer in the long savannas of thought, was not even inclined to possess his own life; here again he demanded a surplus on the grand scale: "What is of genuine importance is eternal vitality, not eternal life."

For the first time on the ocean of German philosophy the black flag was hoisted upon a pirate ship. Nietzsche was a man

of a different species, of another race, of a novel type of heroism; his philosophy was not clad in professorial robes, but was harnessed for the fray like a knight in shining armour. Others before him, hardy navigators of the spiritual world, discovered continents and founded empires; they were animated to a certain degree by a civilising and utilitarian intent, hoping to win those unknown lands to the profit of mankind, to complete the map of the philosophic world by penetrating further and ever further into the terra incognita of thought. They set up the standard of God or of the mind in these new-found lands, they built cities and temples, planned out streets and avenues in the unknown, while governors and administrators followed in their steps in order to reap the harvest of the pioneers' labours—commentators, dons, men of culture and the like. But the aim of these forerunners in the philosophical universe was repose, was peace and security. They desired to increase terrestrial possessions, to promulgate norms and laws, to inaugurate a superior kind of order. Just as the filibusters invaded the Spanish world towards the close of the sixteenth century—a lawless gang of desperadoes, lacking restraint, acknowledging no king, men without a flag and without a home—so Nietzsche made an irruption into the philosophical world, conquering nothing either for himself or for those who should come after; his victories were not achieved for the sake of a monarch or dedicated to the greater glory of God, but purely for the intrinsic joy of conquest, since he did not wish to possess or to acquire or to conquer. He was a disturber of the peace, his one desire being to plunder, to destroy property relationships, to trouble the repose of his fellow mortals. With fire and sword he went forth to awaken the minds of men, an awakening as precious to him as is a fusty sleep to the vast majority of mankind. In his wake, as in the wake of the filibusters of old, churches were desecrated, altars were overturned, feelings injured, convictions assassinated, moral sheepfolds sacked; every horizon blazed with incendiary fires, monstrous beacons of daring and violence. Never did he look back to gloat over his acquisitions or to appropriate his conquests. He strove everlastingly

towards what had never been explored and conquered; his one and only pleasure was to try out his strength and to rouse up those who slumbered. He was a member of no creed, had never sworn allegiance to any country. With the black flag at his masthead and steering into the unknown, into incertitude which he felt to be the mate of his soul, he sailed forward to ever-renewed and perilous adventures. Sword in hand and powder barrel at his feet, he left the shores of the known behind him and sang his pirate song as he went:

I know whence I spring.

Insatiable as a flame,

I glow and consume myself.

All I touch flashes into fire,

All I leave is a charred remnant.

Such by nature am I—flame.

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* *one thousand and three*

† *love based on pleasure*

PASS ION FOR SINCERITY

One commandment suffices thee—Be sincere.

EARLY IN HIS CAREER Nietzsche had planned to write a work entitled *Passio nuovo, or the Passion for Sincerity*. The book was never written; but, what was perhaps better, it was lived in Nietzsche's own person. For throughout the philosopher's years of growth and change, a fanatical passion for truthfulness remained as the primitive and fecundating element of all he undertook.

Sincerity, uprightness, purity! Strange that we find in this amoralist none of the primitive and erratic trends. Any grocer or merchant or lawyer—worthy bourgeois all—could preen himself on so much virtue at least, could vaunt his honesty, his sincerity even unto the grave. Nietzsche's desideratum was, then, no more than an intellectualised virtue of ordinary folk, mediocre and conventional.

But where the emotions are concerned it is not so much the substance that matters as the intensity. Even ideas which have become commonplace, when taken up by daemonic natures, may be transported into the chaos whence issues the creative impulse, may be carried upward into a sphere of everlasting tension. Such temperaments can endue the most insignificant and outworn conventions with a vesture of ecstatic enthusiasm. That which is seized upon by one possessed of the daemon immediately returns to its chaotic condition and is filled with an overwhelming strength.

For such reasons the sincerity of a man like Nietzsche has nothing akin to the trite honesty of a carefully trained gentleman. His love of truth is a flame, a demon of veracity, a demon of lucidity, is a hunting beast ever on the prowl, its senses alert to scent the prey, its carnivorous instincts whetted for the onslaught. Nietzschean candour has nothing in common with domesticated caution; it was never curbed and disciplined so as to be a welcome guest at some decent, self-respecting merchant's hearth, nor was there in his

straightforwardness any of the gross brutality of such a thinker as Martin Luther or of such a man of action as Kleist's Michael Kohlhaas, who, wearing metaphorical blinkers, look neither to right nor left, but charge forward in pursuit of one single truth—which happens to be the only one they can see.

Now, though Nietzsche's passion for truth was sometimes violent and savage, it never became limited or narrow-minded; it was too highly strung, too cultivated for that. It was never obstinate, never stuck in a groove, but leapt from problem to problem with the ardour and agility of a flame, consuming and illuminating each in turn, flashing up and burning to temporary extinction—but never appeased. Such duality is a fine thing to contemplate—passion and sincerity mutually reinforcing each other. I can remember hardly any philosophical genius who possessed at one and the same time so much ethical stability and so great a probity of character.

Nietzsche was predestined to become the clearest of thinkers. He who understood and practised psychology with so profound a passion became aware of his whole being with a sense of gratification experienced only by those who have brought something vital to perfectionment and completion. His candour, his truthfulness, his veracity are like music, like a mighty fugue, satisfying the intellect and emotions simultaneously, passing from a virile andante to a magnificent maestoso, perpetually renewing itself, a marvel of polyphonic grandeur. Clarity in Nietzsche's case became a magic art. This man who was more than half blind, who groped his way, who lived in the darkness like an owl, had, where matters psychological were concerned, the eye of a hawk which instantaneously, like all birds of prey, with infallible precision, pounces from a great height to seize its victim. In this respect his gaze was piercing, and no shade, however subtle, could elude it. Nothing was hidden from this greatest of psychologists, who could transpierce clothing, skin, flesh, and reach the innermost depths of a problem as though his intellect were equipped with X-rays. And just as, physically, he reacted to atmospheric pressure as though he were a barometer, so his

mind registered with unimpeachable exactitude every delicate difference in the moral sphere.

Nietzsche owed his psychological insight, not to his intellect, which was as hard and scintillating as a diamond, but to his hypersensitiveness. He smelt, he sniffed, he savoured with the spontaneity of a physical function, writing: "My genius resides in my nostrils." Thus he could detect everything that was not wholly pure and healthy in the intellectual life of mankind. "I have a quite uncanny irritability of the instinct for purity, so that I actually feel, indeed I smell, the proximity, the depths, nay, the very entrails of every mind."

Thus everything which had been adulterated with spurious moralism, with ecclesiastical incense, with lying artificiality, with patriotic phrase-mongering, or with any other narcotic to quiet the conscience, was ferreted out by Nietzsche with unerring assurance. His sense of smell was so fine that nothing corrupt, putrefying or unwholesome could escape his notice. Clarity, purity, cleanliness were as necessary to his mind as were fresh air and limpid contours to his body. Psychology was for him, as it should be for every psychologist, an "interpretation of the body", a prolongation into the cerebral sphere of what had already been discerned in the nervous. Compared with Nietzsche's seer's vision, the other psychologists of his epoch seem dull and commonplace. Even Stendhal, who had nerves as keenly attuned, wilts in comparison with Nietzsche, for he was lacking in passionate insistence and in vehemence. He was content to jot down certain observations, whereas Nietzsche precipitated himself with the utmost enthusiasm upon the tiniest experience, as a bird of prey pounces upon the most inconspicuous of animals. Dostoevsky alone was Nietzsche's peer in the matter of "nerve lucidity", the former's nervous insight being likewise due to hypertension, to a morbid and excessive sensibility. On the other hand, Dostoevsky's sense of veracity was far less highly developed; he was capable of injustice and exaggeration in the very article of revelation, whereas even at the height of ecstasy Nietzsche never sacrificed an iota of the truth. For this reason

it would seem that never had there been a man so admirably predestined as Nietzsche, alike by nature and by inborn capacity, for the psychologist's career; never was a spirit more exquisitely adjusted to serve as barometer for the meteorological records of the soul; never before had the study of values been equipped with an instrument as precise as it was sublime.

But the perfect psychologist needs to wield other tools than the finest and most trenchant of scalpels, than the most delicately balanced instrument of thought; he must also be possessed of a hand as hard and pliable as steel, a hand that will not tremble or draw back once the operation has begun—for psychological operations demand something more than talent, they require character and the courage to think one's thoughts out to their logical conclusion. Psychology consists, further, in the faculty for knowing conjoined to a virile and primitive desire to know. A genuine psychologist must will to see with as much force as he desires to see; personal anxiety and personal feeling must not deter him from looking straight at truth; his feelings and scruples must not be allowed to lull him to sleep. The plain duty of loyal thinkers is unremitting vigilance; they must keep compromise at bay, dare not allow themselves to be indulgent, or timid, or compassionate; none of the ordinary civic virtues (or weaknesses!) can be conceded them. These warriors, these conquistadors of the mind, dare not, out of complacency, allow a single truth, taken prisoner in the course of their venturesome patrol, to escape. In the domain of knowledge "blindness is not a mistake, but is poltroonery", good nature is a crime, for he who fears to be put to the blush, he who shrinks from wounding his neighbour, he who dreads the cry of pain from a person unmasked, he who recoils before nakedness, such a one will never discover the secret of secrets. Truth which fails to attain the utmost limits, which is not absolute, has no ethical value. Such an attitude of mind accounts for Nietzsche's detestation of those who, through slackness or cowardice in the realm of thought, neglect the sacred task of straightforwardness; hence his anger against Kant, because that philosopher, while turning his blind

eye to the postern, allowed the concept of the godhead to slip back into his system; hence Nietzsche's hatred for those who, in the realm of philosophy, close or even blink their eyes to truth; hence his loathing for "the devil or the demon of nebulousness" that veils or smudges ultimate truth. Truth is not to be reached through flattery; secrets cannot be disclosed in the course of friendly and seductive conversation. One needs to draw "the bolts of Nature's secrecies", to attack her with violence, if her most precious mysteries are to be revealed. The "atrociousness and majesty of infinite claims" can be attained "on the grand scale" only if we resort to brute strength. We must brace all our sinews, must harden our hands, if that which is hidden is to be wrenched from its abiding place. Lacking sincerity, we cannot hope to attain to knowledge; lacking resoluteness, we cannot hope to be sincere. "I become blind from the moment when I cease to be sincere. If I wish to know, I needs must be sincere, that is to say, I must be hard, severe, narrow-minded, cruel, inexorable."

The fairy that presided at Nietzsche's birth endowed him with a falcon eye, but failed to give him the necessary hardness and implacability. The latter virtues he was obliged to acquire at the cost of his life, his tranquillity, his sleep and his general well-being. He was by nature a gentle soul, liking good company, and eminently accessible, but his mission compelled him to be harsh so far as his own feelings were concerned, and quite half his life was spent (so to say) in the fires. To understand the moral agony of such a process we need to delve deep into our own selves. We have to understand that, while consuming all that was gentle and kindly in his disposition, Nietzsche had likewise to destroy the human attributes which linked him to his fellow mortals. In the end, his life became so heated by the intensity of his own ardours that those who wished to approach him were scorched by the concentration of his personal fire. Just as a wound is cauterised to purify it, for the same purpose does Nietzsche tear out his sensibilities. He is mercilessly sincere in the use of the red-hot iron of his will. His very loneliness is self-enforced. Like all fanatics, he sacrificed even those he loved (as in the case of

Richard Wagner, whose friendship had been for Nietzsche one of the most hallowed). He allowed himself to become penurious, solitary, detested, an anchorite and miserable, solely with a view to remaining true to himself, in order to fulfil his mission as apostle of sincerity. This passion for sincerity became, as time elapsed, a monomania in which the good things of life were absorbed. Needless for us to worry our heads with such questions as, "What did Nietzsche want?"; "What did Nietzsche think?"; "What system of philosophy did he aim at constructing?" He revelled in his passion for sincerity, and all he desired was to gratify this passion to the full. Finality, therefore, cannot be expected. Nietzsche wished neither to better the world nor to inform the world, nor yet to assuage himself. His ecstasy was an end in itself, a delight sufficient in itself, a personal voluptuousness, wholly egoistical and elementary. The stage of "noble child's play and an essay at dogmatism" having long been left behind, Nietzsche, in spite of a vast expenditure of energy, never in his riper years tried to formulate a doctrine, still less to found a religion. "I have nothing of the founder of a religion in me. Religion is a mob affair," he wrote.

Nietzsche practised philosophy as a fine art, and, as an artist, he was not concerned with results, with definitive things, with cold calculations. What he sought was style, "morality in the grand style", and as an artist he experienced and enjoyed the pleasures of unexpected inspiration. It may be a mistake to apply the word philosopher to such a man, for a philosopher is "the lover of wisdom". Passion can never be wise, and nothing was more alien to Nietzsche's mentality than to achieve the usual goal of the philosopher, to achieve a nice balance in the emotional sphere, to attain to repose, to "*tranquillitas*", to a satiated "brown" wisdom, to a fixed point where one could be convinced once and for all. He "uses and discards" one conviction after another, and throws away his gains in the philosophical sphere. More appropriate to him would be the appellation "*philaleth*", a passionate lover of Aletheia, of truth, of the virginal and cruelly seductive goddess who never tires of luring her admirers into an unending chase,

and finally remains inaccessible behind her tattered veils. Nietzsche did not envisage truth under a rigid and crystalline form, but as an ardent will to be true and to remain true; it was not for him the ultimate term of an equation, but a perpetual ascent towards a higher power, towards the greater tension of his vital feeling, towards the exaltation of life in the utmost plenitude. He did not want to be happy but to be true. Nine-tenths of philosophers seek rest. Not so Nietzsche. He, as the slave and servant of the daemon, sought excitement and movement pushed to an extreme. Such a fight for the inaccessible has a heroic quality, and heroism almost invariably ends in the destruction of the hero.

Excessive claims for truth come into conflict with mundane affairs, for truth is implacable and dangerous. In the end, so fanatical an urge for truth kills itself. Life is, fundamentally, a perpetual compromise. How well Goethe, in whose character the essence of nature was so exquisitely poised, recognised this fact and applied it to all his undertakings! If Nature is to keep its balance, it needs, just as mankind needs, to take up an average position, to yield when necessary, to concede points, to form pacts. He who presumes the right of non-participation, who refuses to compromise with the world around him, who breaks off relationships and conventions which have been slowly built up in the course of many centuries, becomes unnatural and anthropomorphic in his demands, and enters into opposition against society and against nature. The more such an individual "aspires to attain absolute integrity", the more hostile are the forces of his epoch. If, like Hölderlin, he persists in the endeavour to give a purely poetical twist to an essentially prosaic existence, or if, following Nietzsche's example, he aims at penetrating into the infinitude of terrestrial vicissitudes, in either case such an unwise desire constitutes a revolt against the customs and rules of society, separates the presumptuous being from his fellow mortals, and condemns him to perpetual warfare which, splendid though it may be, is foredoomed to failure. What Nietzsche named the "tragic mentality", the resolve to probe any and every feeling to the uttermost, transcends spirit and invades the realm of

fate, thereby creating tragedy. He who wishes to impose one single law upon life, who hopes, amid the chaos of passions, to make one passion (his own peculiar passion) supreme, becomes a solitary and in isolation suffers annihilation. If his actions are unconscious, he is merely a foolish dreamer; if he is aware of the danger and nevertheless faces that risk defiantly, then he is a hero. Nietzsche was undoubtedly a passionate seeker after truth, but he knew very well what he was about. He recognised the peril which confronted him; from the outset, from the moment when he first put pen to paper, he saw that his thoughts were gyrating around a menacing and tragical focus, that his life was beset with pitfalls. But, as a hero in the realm of thought, he loved life precisely because it was dangerous and annihilated his personal existence. "Build your cities on the flanks of Vesuvius!" he exclaimed, addressing the philosophers in the endeavour to goad them into a more lofty consciousness of destiny; for the only measure of grandeur is, according to Nietzsche, "the degree of danger at which a man lives in relation to himself". He only who stakes his all upon the hazard has the possibility of winning the infinite; he only who risks his life is capable of endowing his earthly span with everlasting value. "*Fiat veritas, pereat vita*"—what does it matter if life be sacrificed so long as truth is realised? Passion is greater than existence, the meaning of life is of more worth than life itself.

Little by little Nietzsche clarified this idea, giving it mighty expression so that in the end it outdistanced his own fate. "We all of us would rather see mankind perish than witness the destruction of knowledge." The more he comes to recognise how full of peril is his lot, how closely suspended over his head the thunderbolt which is to kill him, the greater is his joy in battle. "I know my fate," he cried on the eve of his collapse. "On a day to come my name will be associated with something quite out of the ordinary, with a crisis such as the world has never heretofore experienced, with the profoundest clashes in the conscience, with a decision entered upon in defiance of all that has so far been held sacred and as an article of faith."

Nietzsche loved this abysmal depth of knowledge, and his whole being went forth to meet the deadly resolve. “What dose of truth is man capable of enduring?” This intrepid thinker was constantly putting the question to himself. But in order to find an answer, Nietzsche had to step beyond the bounds of safety and to reach the zone where a man is no longer secure, wherein ultimate knowledge proves deadly, wherein light is so near that the eyes are blinded. The last few steps he took into this sphere were the most unforgettable and the most impressive in the gamut of his destiny. Never before had his mind been more lucid, his soul more impassioned, his words more tipped with joyful music, than when he hurled himself in full consciousness and wholeheartedly from the altitudes of life into the abyss of annihilation.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN SEARCH OF THE TRUE SELF

A snake which cannot slough its skin is doomed to perish. So likewise, a mind which is prevented from changing its opinions ceases to be a mind.

MARTINETS, though as a rule they are blind where originality is concerned, possess an infallible instinct for detecting things that are inimical to themselves. Thus, long before Nietzsche had shown himself the amoralist he proved to be, these lovers of "order" sensed in him a foe. He made them feel uneasy. He was an outsider, a mongrel philosopher, a second-rate philologist, revolutionary, an artist, a musician, a man of letters. From the outset, the specialists took a dislike to him as a jack of all trades. When Nietzsche's first work on philology was published, Wilamowitz, who his life long remained a professor of philology and nothing more, took his young colleague to task for having overstepped professional limits. Yet Nietzsche was destined to achieve immortal fame. The Wagnerians mistrusted his panegyrics upon the master, the philosophers looked askance at his ideas upon cognition. Before he had emerged from his philological chrysalis and had grown his wings, Nietzsche found the experts arraigning him. Richard Wagner, alone, a genius himself and an initiate of change, loved his future enemy in the developing youth. All the others felt him to be a dangerous being, too audacious and far-reaching in his suppositions. They suspected that he would not remain faithful to his initial convictions; they dreaded his unrestrained freedom. Even today his authoritative sayings scare our specialists and make them wish to shut the "outlawed prince" into a "system", a "doctrine", a "religion" or a "message". They would like to have him safely pigeonholed in a specific conception of the universe. But Nietzsche showed as much licence towards himself as towards things in general. A definite attitude of mind wherein there could enter no contradiction was what he dreaded above all things. Yet this is precisely what people would fain impose upon him who is no longer able to defend himself. Their

supreme desire appears to be to set this temperamental nomad on a pedestal in a temple, under cover; he who never had a permanent roof over his head during his lifetime and never wanted any such thing.

But it is impossible to cage Nietzsche in a specific doctrine; he cannot be pinned down to one set of convictions. Nor have I in these pages endeavoured to extract, schoolmaster-fashion, from out of one of the most moving tragedies of the mind, a "theory of cognition", a "system of epistemology". Nietzsche was a passionate advocate of the relativity of values, and never made a foible of consistency, never clung to any word his lips had uttered or to any previous conviction. He did not consider himself bound in any way. "A philosopher must utilise and consume convictions" is his answer to those who, once having arranged their thoughts to their satisfaction, are henceforward satisfied to stew in their own juice, and plume themselves upon their steadfastness.

Each of Nietzsche's convictions formed a period of transition. Even his proper self, his skin, his body, his mental equipment were never more in his eyes than a multiplicity, a "meeting place for numerous souls". One of his most challenging sayings runs: "It is a great disadvantage for a thinker to be tied to one individuality. When a man has succeeded in finding himself, he should try from time to time to lose himself again, and then to seek and find himself once more." He was ceaselessly undergoing transformation, ceaselessly losing himself and finding himself anew; that is to say, he underwent an everlasting process of becoming, was never rigid, never at rest. Hence his precept: "Become the person you really are." In the same sense Goethe was fond of repeating whimsically that he was always at Jena when people sought him at Weimar, and Nietzsche's favourite metaphor concerning the snake sloughing its skin was used a century earlier in one of Goethe's letters. But what a contrast between Goethe's deliberate evolution and Nietzsche's eruptive metamorphoses! Goethe's life expanded around a fixed point, just as year by year a circle invisible to the outer world is

added to the trunk of a tree. The tree may shed its bark, but the core is sound, the limbs are strong, its growth is ever more lofty, its view increasingly wide. Patiently, thanks to an active though stubborn concentration of his energies, Goethe attained his maturity; he resolutely guarded his ego while defending his proper growth. Nietzsche's development, on the other hand, was spasmodic and violent owing to the impetuosity of his will. Goethe's enlargement was effected at no sacrifice of his true being; he was never called upon to deny himself in order to rise to higher things. Nietzsche, the changeable, was perpetually obliged to destroy himself that he might reconstruct himself wholly. His spiritual gains, his fresh discoveries, were the result of self-inflicted tortures, of lost faiths, of decomposition. If he wished to attain to more exalted peaks, he was constrained to discard a part of himself; whereas Goethe sacrificed nothing, merely transforming and distilling his individual elements.

In the kaleidoscopic universe he created, nothing was allowed to remain fixed and uncontested, and it is for this reason that the phases of his own development did not succeed one another smoothly and amicably but were invariably filled with hostility. Throughout life, he trod the road to Damascus. He did not change his belief once merely, but many, many times, for a new spiritual element did more than penetrate his mind, worrying its way into his vitals. Moral and intellectual knowledge was transformed in him, modifying his circulation, changing his feelings, giving an unexpected trend to his thoughts. Like a gambler who stakes his entire fortune upon a single cast, Nietzsche—like Hölderlin—"exposed his whole soul to the destructive force of reality". From the start, therefore, his experiences and his impressions were similar to volcanic eruptions.

When, as a student in Leipzig, he read Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*, he was unable to sleep for ten days. It was as if a cyclone had passed over him. All the beliefs which had seemed fixed and stable were shattered in the tumult of his spiritual storm. Gradually, as he emerged from the ruins and

got a grip of himself once more, he grew aware that his mental world had completely changed and that he possessed a totally new outlook on life. In much the same way his meeting with Richard Wagner was the beginning of a passionate friendship which led to an unending enlargement of the range of his sensibilities. On returning to Basel from Triebschen he discovered that life held a new meaning for him—betwixt night and morning the philologer had died, and the backward look into the historic past yielded place to a forward look into the future. Precisely because his affection for Wagner was so overwhelming did the subsequent rupture of amicable relations wound Nietzsche so profoundly.

Each of Nietzsche's spiritual earthquakes destroyed the whole edifice of his convictions, and the philosopher was obliged to start building anew from the foundations. Nothing ever grew quietly and imperceptibly and naturally within him; his inner being was never given a chance to develop and extend by a process of stealthy labour. Invariably he is struck "as if by lightning"; always his universe must be annihilated in order that the new cosmos may emerge. In him, the explosive force of the Idea was unparalleled. "I should like to be freed from the expansions of feeling that bring such things in their train," he wrote one day. "It has often occurred to me that I shall suddenly die during one of these explosions."

Nor was his surmise greatly exaggerated, for, with each of his resurrections, something did actually die within him, was actually and irremediably lacerated as though a knife had been plunged into his antecedent relationships. The fires of a new inspiration burned the spiritual habitation he had been at pains to construct, and left not a wrack behind. His process of growth was accompanied by the tortures of martyrdom; in his search for his own personality he bled himself well-nigh to death. His books might almost be described as case histories of these innumerable operations, as commentaries upon his methods of vivisection, as a treatise on the means by which the free spirit is brought into the world. "My books tell the story of the victories I have gained over myself." They relate his

manifold transformations, his spiritual pregnancies and lyings-in, his deaths and resurrections; they are tales of the merciless warfare he carried on against himself, the punishments and summary executions he inflicted upon his own being; they are the biographies of all the creatures Nietzsche impersonated during the twenty years of his mental existence.

What makes Nietzsche's transformations so peculiar is that they seem retrogressive. If we take Goethe as the prototype of an organic nature in harmony with the forward march of the universe, we perceive that his development is symbolical of the various ages of life. In youth he was fiery and enthusiastic; as a man in his prime he was actively reflective; age brought him the utmost lucidity of mind. His mental rhythm corresponded in every point with the temperature of his blood. As with most young men, he began in chaos and ended his career in orderly fashion, as is seemly with the old. After going through a revolutionary period he turned conservative, after a phase of lyricism he became a man of science, after being prodigal of himself he learnt how to be reserved.

Nietzsche took an opposite course. Instead of aspiring to an ever more complete integration of his ego, he desired complete disintegration. As he advanced in years he became increasingly impatient, vehement, revolutionary and chaotic. His outward aspect was in strident opposition to the customary evolution of a man. While his university companions were still delighting in the usual horseplay of undergraduates, Nietzsche, though but twenty-four years old, was already a professor, aspirant to the chair of philology at Basel, that famous seat of learning. At twenty-four, Nietzsche's intimates were men of fifty and sixty years of age, sages such as Jakob Burckhardt and Ritschl, while his closest friend was the most celebrated artist of the day—Richard Wagner. He deliberately put the brake upon his poetical aspirations and upon his love of music. Like any other pedant, he sat over his Greek texts, revising pandects and compiling erudite indexes. From the outset, Nietzsche's eyes were turned towards the dead past. Old before his time, a confirmed bachelor, he had no true joy in

life. Professorial dignity swamped his cheerfulness, dimming what should have been his natural exuberance. He was wholly immersed in printed texts and in dry-as-dust problems.

His first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, was completed when he was twenty-seven. Herein he breached into the present, though his face was still wearing the mask of a philologist. Nevertheless, the reader is aware of the promise of future fires, has an intimation that the author is conscious of the present and is vulnerable to artistic passion. At the age of thirty, when most men are starting life, when Goethe became a minister of State, and when Kant and Schiller were full-fledged professors, Nietzsche had kicked over the traces of his official duties and, with a sigh of relief, had quitted the chair of philology at Basel University. Now at last he came to grips with himself, seeking to penetrate into his personal universe, undergoing an initial transformation, rupturing old ties and making his debut as an artist. This initial step into the realm of the present was the moment when the real Nietzsche was born, the tragical Nietzsche with gaze fixed upon the future, with yearnings focused upon the New Man whose advent was prophesied. Meanwhile, having precipitately leapt from philology to music, from gravity to ecstasy, he passed on from scientific patience to the joyful dance. By the time he had reached his thirty-sixth year, Nietzsche had become an outlaw, an amoralist, a sceptic, a poet, a musician. He had regained "a better youth" than had been his lot in earlier days, had thrown off the shackles which bound him to the past, had freed himself from his own science, refusing to allow the present to put claims upon him, and thereby pledging himself heart and soul to companionship with the man who was to be.

Thus instead of, as is the case in a more normal artist, the years of development serving to stabilise his life, making it systematic and serious in tone, they liberated Nietzsche more and more. Such a course of rejuvenation is almost unprecedented. Having reached his fourth decade, Nietzsche's language and his thoughts, his whole being, indeed, possess a freshness, a colour, a fearlessness, a passion and a music he

had never known as a lad of seventeen. The recluse of Sils-Maria had a lighter touch, his words soared on freer pinions, his feet danced more joyously through his works than had those of the prematurely old professor of twenty-four summers. The sense of vitality, far from quieting down, became livelier; his metamorphoses were swifter, more varied, more tensed, more defiant and cynical; he could find no halting place for his restless mind. Hardly had he settled down somewhere when he felt his "skin chapped and rent". In the end, his life's pace was no longer capable of keeping up with the mutability of his mind, and his mental processes took on certain characteristics of the latter-day "movies", wherein repose is unknown. His intimates of earlier years, having rooted themselves firmly in their scientific careers, their opinions and so forth, were at every fresh encounter amazed by Nietzsche's erratic evolution, and discovered new features in his mental physiognomy. He himself felt as if he were confronting a ghost when someone referred to "Professor Friedrich Nietzsche of Basel"; it was hard enough even to remember that he had been such a person twenty years before. Has any human being, before him, made so trenchant a cleavage between past and present? Does not this severance account for the terrible solitude of his latter days? He had broken all the links which attached him to the past, and the furious rhythm of his life and of his ultimate transformations was too ardent for him to create new ties. At top speed he flew by mankind and every other phenomenon, and as he drew nearer—or seemed to draw nearer—to his real self, the intenser grew his desire to escape from himself.

As change succeeded change they became more violent and more painful. At first Nietzsche merely "divested" himself of his infantile beliefs and of a youth's convictions; this was as easy as it is for a snake to slough its skin. But as he grew expert in psychological processes he found he had to cut a path into the deeper layers of his consciousness; he was forced to become, as it were, his own executioner. In the end his constant self-vivisections laid bare the innermost zones of his sentient being—and these are dangerous operations to embark

upon. His ruthless amputation of the Wagner complex proved to be an extremely perilous surgical intervention, one that was almost fatal, because it came so very close to the heart. It approximated to suicide and, by its sudden and relentless violence, took on the quality of a lust-murder, since at the moment of supremest intimacy Nietzsche's savage instinct for truth made him violate and throttle his nearest and dearest friend. There was something voluptuous in Nietzsche's cruel delight at his innumerable autos-da-fé of ideas he had come to regard as heretical. Little by little the instinct towards self-destruction became an intellectual passion. "I know the joy of destruction to a degree which harmonises with my power to destroy." His transformation of himself gave rise to a desire to contradict himself, to become his own antagonist. One part of his books is in vehement opposition to another part; every "yes" is contraposed to a "no", and every "no" to a "yes". He stretched the poles of his being into the infinite in order to enjoy the electrical tension which was engendered between the two extremes. He fled from himself in order to catch up with himself; he was "the soul fleeing from itself and which seeks to overtake itself in the widest possible sphere". This led him in the end to an excitability of mind which bordered on madness and had fatal results. For, precisely at the moment when the form of his being was stretched to the utmost, his mental tensions culminated in disruption. The primitive and daemonic power exploded, annihilating the superb series of incorporations which he had created from his own blood and out of his own life while storming the hidden battlements of the infinite.

DISCOVERY OF THE SOUTH

We need the South at any price; we need limpid, innocent, joyous, happy and tender intonations …

"WE ARE THE AERONAUTS of the mind," Nietzsche announced one day, wishing to vaunt the liberty of thought which finds new avenues in the limitless and unexplored ether. And in very fact his excursions into the infinite took place in the upper, frontier-free spheres of the spirit. Like a captive balloon from which ballast is perpetually being thrown in order to allow it to rise higher and higher, Nietzsche jettisoned his attachments and convictions so as to reach the topmost altitudes of mental activity and thus obtain a wider and more magnificent panorama, an individual perspective exceeding the bounds of time. Again and again did his aerostat veer this way and that ere it was shattered in the final tempest.

But there was one moment in Nietzsche's life that was of peculiar symbolical significance. It was the dramatic moment when the last cable was cut and the aeronaut passed from immobility to freedom, from earthly ponderousness into an imponderable element. This moment was the day when he left his moorings in Basel, renounced his professorship, his career, and shook the dust of the German-speaking world from his feet, never to return to his native land except on a flying visit and in a mood of superlative contempt. Everything that had happened to Nietzsche until that moment was of little importance so far as the historical personality of the man was concerned. His first metamorphoses were no more than attempts to know himself better. Had the decisive step towards freedom been lacking, he might, for all his intellectual endowments, have remained a professor, a specialist, a man who reaps his laurels in a limited circle, whom we respect though he brings no revelation as to our spiritual universe. What made of Nietzsche a prophetic figure and transformed his destiny into legendary wonder was the fact that his daemonic nature was given free rein; his intellectual passion

was allowed to express itself without let or hindrance; and his elementary urge towards liberty could find a congenial outlet. Since my object is to portray Nietzsche's life, not as a biography but as a tragedy of the spirit, as a work of dramatic art, for me his true work began when the artist in the man was released and became conscious of enfranchisement. So long as

Nietzsche remained in his professorial chrysalis he was nothing more than a problem for professorial brains to cudgel themselves over. But the winged being, "the aeronaut of the mind", belongs to the realm of creative intelligence. Nietzsche's first journey as an aeronaut of the spirit was directed towards the south, and this remained the parent metamorphosis of all his subsequent changes. In Goethe's career, too, a trip to Italy was a turning point, a decisive caesura in the line of his life; he, likewise, sped southwards in order to discover his true self, to pass from bondage into liberty, from a vegetative existence into a world of creative experience. In Goethe, too, when for the first time he crossed the Alps and beheld the splendour of the Italian sun, a change took place with eruptive violence. "I feel as if I had just returned from an expedition to Greenland," he wrote. He, too, was made ill by the grey skies of a German winter; he, too, with his sunny nature and his craving for light and clarity, felt as though an inner spring of emotion had been tapped and was now bubbling up to the surface of his being, he felt expanded and freed, he felt the need for a new and more personal liberty. But unhappily for Goethe the south revealed itself too late. His first journey to Italy took place when he was approaching forty; a hard rind had formed around his character, which was essentially of a methodical and reflective kind; a part of his being, of his thought, had remained behind at Weimar, was lingering around his home, the court, his dignities, his functions. He had become so firmly crystallised within himself that no element in the world was henceforward capable of completely modifying him. Besides, he was not a man to permit of outside forces mastering him; Goethe always wished to be the ruler of his own destiny, and permitted external things to influence him only within certain very definite limits.

Nietzsche, Hölderlin and Kleist, on the other hand, were spendthrifts and gave themselves up heart and soul to every impression, happy when the new experience hurled them back into the scalding waters of the river of life. In Italy, Goethe found what he was in search of and very little else—he sought profounder interconnections, where Nietzsche sought higher freedom; he evoked the glorious memories of the past, where Nietzsche looked towards a glorious future enfranchised from all that pertains to history; he was concerned with things dead and buried—classical art, the Roman spirit, the mysteries of plant and stone—whilst Nietzsche's gaze was aloft, his eyes delighting in the sapphire skies, in the clear and infinite horizons, in the magical sensation of this luminosity flooding him through every pore. Goethe's impression of Italy was, therefore, a mental and aesthetic affair, whereas Nietzsche's was vital in the extreme—the former brought home with him an artistic style, whilst the latter discovered in the land of the sun a style of life. Goethe was merely fecundated, whereas Nietzsche was completely uprooted, transplanted, renewed.

Goethe, indeed, felt the need of renewal, writing: "It would undoubtedly be better were I never to return home if I cannot go back with life renewed"; but, like everyone who has become partly benumbed, he was capable of subjecting himself only to "impressions". The man of forty was already too encrusted, too much an authority unto himself, and above all too unwilling to permit of so radical and complete a change's taking place within him as Nietzsche, who when his day came, accepted with exultation. Goethe's strong and solid instinct for self-preservation, which in his latter years became rigid as a cuirass about him, could not yield more than an exiguous place to change within his stable world. Wise and abstemious in all things, he absorbed only that which he deemed profitable to his nature, thus proving his fundamental opposition to the Dionysian disposition, which takes everything in excess of its needs and is constantly flying in the face of danger. Goethe's one desire was to enrich his own nature by contact with outer phenomena, but he never wished to lose himself in their depths until he was transformed by

them. We are not astonished, therefore, when we read his summing up of his impressions of Italy, to find that his words are chosen with care, that he is reticent of his thanks, and, in the end, stands on the defensive. "Among the many laudable things I have learnt in the course of this journey is the fact that it is impossible for me to live alone and away from my own country."

Turn this dictum the other way about and we get substantially the effect the south produced upon Nietzsche. His conclusions are diametrically opposed to Goethe's, since he finds that henceforward he can live only in solitude and away from his native land. Goethe, after making an instructive and interesting journey, returns to the exact point whence he took his departure, carrying in his boxes, his heart and his brain things precious and delightful for a home, for his home in particular. But Nietzsche expatriates himself and finds his true self, the "outlawed prince", happy at having no home, no possessions, cut off for ever from the "parochial interests of a fatherland" and released from "patriotic strangulation".

From then onward Nietzsche's mind was enthralled by the idea of "the good European", of the man who is fundamentally a nomad, "a supra-national type of individual" whose inevitable advent Nietzsche felt in the air. So far as Nietzsche was concerned, a man of intelligence made his home, not in the country of his birth—for birth belongs to the past, is mere history—but in the place where he himself is father, engendering and bringing life into the world. "*Ubi pater sum, ibi patria*."[*] The inestimable gift he brought away from the south was the awareness that the whole earth was simultaneously a foreign land and a mother country, where there were no frontiers, but only the endless open horizons on every side and as far as eye could see. Goethe, conversely, according to his own words, imperilled his personality while at the same time safeguarding it by encircling himself "with closed horizons".

Having thus come to rest "in the south", Nietzsche ever after found himself beyond the tentacles of his past, he

degermanised himself just as he had thrown off the professorial trappings and had rid himself of Christianity and morality. Nothing could be more characteristic of his excessively impulsive and forward-going nature than the fact that he never took a backward step, and never cast a wistful glance into the past. This navigator upon the seas of the future was far too happy at having set sail "by the directest route to Cosmopolis" for him ever to suffer from homesickness, or to wish to be in a land where but one language was spoken, a land which was unilateral and uniform. It is an error, therefore, and one that is common today, to try to regermanise Nietzsche.

Once a freeman, always a freeman. Having felt the limpid Italian sky over his head, Nietzsche could no longer bear a suggestion of "obscurity", whether proceeding from the clouds or from a professorial chair, from the Church or from the army. His lungs, his "atmospheric nerves" were no longer able to suffer the smart of a northerly wind, and revolted at the idea of having to put up with the German climate; closed windows and doors were henceforward impossible to him; he felt life no longer worth the living in mental fogs and twilights. To face truth frankly was for Nietzsche to be perfectly clear-thinking, to envisage things broad-mindedly, to draw precise outlines into infinite space. Having made lucidity his idol, having imparted to the trenchant light of the south the attributes of divinity, he refused ever again to have truck with "the peculiarly German devil of obscurity". Now that he had adopted "the south" as his place of abode, he could see in German mental fare only that it was too heavy, "too indigestible", for a man of his refined appetite. Never again, so far as Nietzsche was concerned, would Germany be free enough and light enough as nourisher of the mind.

This sense of mental indigestion applied even to authors he had previously admired. He found Wagner's *Meistersinger* heavy, over-ornamented, baroque, with a futile assumption of jollity; Schopenhauer was mastered by a gloomy contempt for mankind; Kant left a bad taste in the mouth with his

hypocritical State morality; Goethe seemed weighed down by his dignities and offices, and had deliberately closed his horizons. But in his antagonism to all things German there was expressed not only the uneasiness of the intellectual before the edifice of what was at that time the mentality of the new, the all too new, Germany; not merely political discontent at the setting up of the "Empire", of hatred for those who had replaced the German idea by the "ideal of the cannon"; not solely an aesthetic dislike for the Germany of the "plush furniture" and "victory columns in Berlin" period. Nietzsche's "lesson of the south" demanded clarity in all problems, not alone in those concerning the nations; he required that throughout the gamut of life precision and luminosity should prevail—"light, only let there be light shed upon even the vilest things"—supremest pleasure achieved by way of the plainest truth, a "gay science", a joyful wisdom far removed from the tragically dreary pedantry of the schools, infinitely remote from the patiently acquired erudition and objectivity of German professors, an erudition smelling of the fusty lecture room and the study. It was not his mind which rose in revolt against the north, against Germany, against his homeland, but his heart, his nerves, his very fibres. His cry was a cry of delight at having at length "found the climate that suited his soul", at having discovered "freedom". That is why his exultation was so unbounded, that is why he exuberantly shouted: "I gave a leap!"—"I took a leap!"—"I escaped!"—"I have escaped!"

While the effect of his southern travels helped him to throw off Germany, it also helped him to throw off Christianity. As he lay basking in the sun, his soul aflame with the brightness, he began to ask himself what it was that had so long cast a shadow over the earth, rendering mankind uneasy, depressed and pusillanimously conscious of sin; had deprived the loveliest, the most natural, the most vigorous things of their values; and, in its decrepitude, had robbed the world of its most precious possession, namely, life. He came to see that the malevolent thing was Christianity with its belief in a life beyond the tomb; that this was the principle which cast a

shadow upon the modern world. “Evil-smelling Judaism, a compost of rabbinism and of superstition”, had ruined and suppressed the sensuality and merriment of the world. For fifty generations it had served to dope and demoralise mankind, to paralyse all that had previously constituted the vital force of the universe. His future mission in life was to crusade against the Cross and reconquer the holy places of man’s realm, existence upon this earth. His “overwhelming sense of being alive” made him keen-sighted where mundane affairs were at stake, enabling him to perceive animal truth and immediacy—the things of here and now. On making this discovery he suddenly became aware for how lengthy a period “the healthy, red life” had been hidden away behind the incense fumes of morality. In the south, “in that great school of medicine for the healing of body and mind”, he learnt to be natural, to enjoy himself without remorse, to know what it was to lead a happy life unafraid of a coming winter, without the dread of God—in a word, he learnt to affirm life instead of renouncing it. The revelation came from on high, not from an unseen God, but from the most candid and beneficent of mysteries, the mysteries of sun and light. “At St Petersburg I should be a nihilist. Here I believe in the sun, instinctively, as does a plant.” His philosophy had its roots in his liberated bloodstream. To a friend he says: “Remain in the south, were it only for faith’s sake.” Since clarity had become so sovereign a remedy, it could not fail to assume a divine quality, and indeed it was henceforward sacred to him. In its name he marched forward to campaign against all that on earth constitutes a menace to clarity, to cheerfulness, to lucidity, against all that threatens to destroy the naked truth and the sun-intoxicated joy of life. “War to the knife against the present”—that was to be his attitude of mind for the days ahead of him.

Together with this supremely courageous way of approaching life, there entered into his soul a feeling of pride, violently disturbing the circulation of his blood, which had become adapted to the fusty atmosphere of the study and had consequently grown almost stagnant. Crystal-clear were the

ideas that now gushed from his mind, sparkling like diamonds in the sunshine around him. His words seemed to belong “to the language of the wind which heralds a thaw”, as he himself writes of the first book he composed in the south. There is a tone of forcible liberation pervading this work, a sense of release as when the ice breaks up and spring speeds across the land. Let the light enter into the abysses, let luminosity flood the tiniest nooks and crannies, let music be welcomed in every silence, let words be winged, while overhead the halcyon skies are limpidly radiant.

There is all the difference in the world between the lyrical style of this book and the more sombre style of those that preceded it. Granted, the latter were well written, well constructed, coherent, but they lacked life, seeming to be petrified. The new language he utilised was sonorous, joyful, supple and winged, liking free gestures and grimaces as do the Italians when they talk, instead of remaining motionless while speaking as do the Germans, whose bodies seem to take no part in the conversation. No longer is it the grave, frock-coated professor who speaks to us, the heir of the German humanists. The thoughts of the reborn Nietzsche were culled by the wayside as he took his walks abroad; these children of freedom needed a free language wherein to find expression, a flexible language springing lightly forward, naked and agile as a gymnast, a language capable of running, leaping, rising in the air and dropping to earth again, of bracing its muscles, of dancing every conceivable step from those peculiar to the melancholy and reflective round dance to the wild madness of a tarantella, a language which could fearlessly voice every idea and every sensation. All that could be considered tame and domesticated in his style was swallowed up and gave place to a style which soared upwards by leaps and bounds, making use of jokes and wordplays on its way to the serenest altitudes, resounding at times with a note of tragedy as though with the booming of some ancient bell. Overflowing with fermenting energies, it resembled champagne, the beaded bubbles of his aphorisms sparkling at one moment and a foam of words spilling rhythmically the next. It was luminous with

the solemn and golden light of old Falernian, magically transparent, sunny and joyful. It seems to me that in no other German author was the style of his writing so swiftly and completely renewed. Certainly none other was so flooded with sunshine, or ever became so enfranchised, so essentially southern, so divinely light of foot, so full of a good vintage, so pagan.

To find a change as rapid we have to turn to a painter in search of a comparison. A similar miracle, wrought likewise by the sun of the south, took place in Van Gogh. The passage from the lugubrious tints in brown and grey of his Dutch canvases to the violent, crude and strident colours splashed so generously upon his pictures of Provence was just as eruptive a transition. Van Gogh's sudden mania for sunlight, his sudden and complete transference from one style of painting to another, is the only analogy that comes to my mind in the least comparable with the illumination the south brought to Nietzsche's entire being. These two fanatical lovers of change were intoxicated with light, absorbed light with the vampire lust of passion, gulped down light in rapid and inconceivably large doses.

But Nietzsche would not have been a true son of the daemon if he had been satisfied and assuaged by any and every kind of intoxication, and he was, therefore, constantly in search of a superlative in relation to the south in general and to Italy in particular. Not satisfied with light, he desired "super-light"; clarity must be "super-clarity". Just as Hölderlin transferred his Hellas into Asia, that is to say, into the East, into barbarism, so in the end did Nietzsche's ecstasy become charged with tropical, with African frenzy. He wanted to be burned by the sun, not merely to be illuminated by it; clarity must have cruel teeth that bite; joviality must develop into a voluptuous orgasm. There arose in him an unquenchable desire to transform the delicate jingle of his senses into a veritable intoxication, to convert his dance into a flight and to raise his ardent realisation of life to a white heat. While such greeds were pulsating in his veins he found that language no

longer sufficed his indomitable spirit. Language, in its turn, became too narrow a medium, too material, too ponderous. A new element was required for the Dionysian dance that had begun within him; he needed more far-reaching liberties than could be offered while he remained a thrall to the written tongue. He therefore turned back to his first love, to music. His most recent source of inspiration was the music of the south, a music wherein clarity engenders melody and where the spirit acquires wings. He set out on his quest for this diaphanous music of the south, seeking it at all times and in all places, without ever finding what he sought. In the end he had to invent it.

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* *Where I am father, there is my fatherland.*

FLIGHT INTO MUSIC

Come to me, cheerfulness, you golden one!

NIETZSCHE HAD ALWAYS LOVED MUSIC, but this affection had remained latent, being constantly thrust aside by a yet stronger desire for a spiritual justification. As a boy he had delighted his friends with his improvisations, and in his youthful diaries we find frequent mention of his own compositions. But the more he devoted himself to the study of philology and, later, to philosophy, the more did he push this natural gift into the background, where it remained languishing and yearning to find expression. For him during his professorial days music was but an agreeable form of rest and recreation, on the same footing as the theatre, reading, riding, fencing, a kind of mental gymnastics for leisure hours. So well damned up were the springs of music that not a drop was able to seep through into his works. As he himself writes in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, it is only as an object, as a spiritual theme, that music is of any use to him, and we are never allowed to hear any of its modulations in either his language or his poetry or his thoughts. Even his very early lyrics are lacking in musical feeling, and his attempts at composition were, in Bülow's opinion—and surely Bülow was a competent judge—no better than exercises in harmony, betraying an amorphous and typically unmusical inspiration. For many years music remained a private amusement to which he delivered himself up in a spirit of irresponsible pleasure, with the pure delight of an amateur, a pastime altogether outside his main "mission" in life.

Music flooded his being only after the philological crust had been removed, only when his erudite objectivity of outlook had become disintegrated, when his cosmos had been shattered as if by a volcanic eruption. Then the sluices were opened and the waters broke forth in an amazing torrent. Music is prone to invade with cataclysmic force the souls of those who have been enfeebled by a recent spiritual earthquake, who have been subjected to violent tensions and

rent in sunder by some terrible trial. Tolstoy had the experience, and for Goethe the same experience spelt tragedy. True, Goethe kept a watchful eye upon music; it disquieted him and made him reserved as did everything that smacked of the daemon, and in each of his metamorphoses he recognised that the tempter lay ambushed somewhere, ready to pounce. Nevertheless, for all his precautions, Goethe succumbed to music's charms in his moments of relaxation, when he was off guard, when his whole being was in a state of upheaval and on that account weak and accessible. On each occasion (the last being when he fell in love with Ulrike) when he was a prey to his emotions, when he was no longer master of himself, music burst through the strongest dam, drew tears from his eyes as tribute, and as a thank-offering a poem whose music was more enchanting than anything he had composed before. We all know that music requires of us a condition of feminine receptivity, it demands that we shall fling wide our doors to allow it free entrance, so that it may fecundate our feelings. At such a moment as this, music approached Nietzsche, just at a time when the south had forced wider horizons upon his vision, and he desired to live at the level of utmost ardour and passion. By a strange caprice of fortune music insinuated itself into his life at the very moment when he was emerging from a peaceful existence and turning towards the tragical. He thought to give expression to the Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music and disclosed the exact opposite, namely the Birth of Music from the Spirit of Tragedy. The mighty surge of his new sensations could not be expressed in measured terms; it required some more powerful, some magical means—song. "O my soul, you needs must sing!"

Precisely because he had pent up these primal springs of his nature for so long behind the dams of philology, erudition and indifference, did they gush forth so vehemently and penetrate into every crevice, irradiating and liquefying his literary style. It was as if his tongue, which had hitherto sought to explain tangible things, had suddenly refused its allotted task and insisted upon expressing itself in terms of music. The andante maestoso of his earlier works changed into a sinuous and

flexible movement possessing the qualities of a genuinely musical idiom. The delicacies of touch we expect from a master of the art are there for the seeking—the crisp staccati of the aphorisms, the mezza voce of the hymns, the pizzicati of his mockery, the daring harmonisation of his prose and his maxims. Even his punctuation—unspoken speech—his dashes, his italics, could find equivalents in the terminology of the elements of music. His German reads like an orchestral score, a prose sometimes written for a small band of players and at other times for a considerable company. An artist in language finds as much delight in the study of Nietzsche's polyphony as a musician in examining the score of a master composer. Numerous are the harmonies dissembled among the intentional discords, and limpid, indeed, is the spirit hidden behind the rich façade of tumultuous and disorderly words. The details of each work are vibrant with music, and the works as a whole read like symphonies. They no longer belong to the realm of architecture, of intellectualised and objective creations, but are the direct outcome of musical inspiration. Of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* he himself says that it was written "in the spirit of the first phrase of the *Ninth Symphony*". And how better can I describe the opening of *Ecce Homo* than as a magnificent organ prelude destined to be played in some vast cathedral? *Song of the Night* and *Gondolier's Chanty* resemble the croonings of primitive men in the midst of an infinite solitude. When was his inspiration more joyous and dancing, more heroic, more like a lilting cadence of the Grecian music of antiquity, than in the paean indited during his ultimate outburst of happiness, in the Dionysian rhapsody? Illuminated from on high by the pellucid skies of the south, soaked from beneath by the waters of music, his language became as it were a wave, restless and immense, and in this elemental sea Nietzsche was henceforward to live and labour until the whirlpool sucked him under and destroyed him.

But the impetuous influx of music did not blind Nietzsche to the danger that the raging cataract might carry him away from his task and leave him marooned on a desolate shore. Whereas Goethe "assumed a cautious attitude towards music",

as Nietzsche once observed, Nietzsche himself went forward gallantly, scorning the peril. His system of defences was composed of "transmutations of values" and of changes of front. Thus, as with his ill health, he converted a poison into a remedy. Music had to become something different from what it had been for him in earlier days. Then he required of it that it should tense his nerves to the highest pitch, that it should inject a cordial into his feelings, as Wagner's music succeeded in doing. Its intoxication was to act as an antidote to his life of placid erudition, as a stimulant to his professorial sobriety. Now, when his thoughts led to an excessive expenditure of feeling, he needed music to function as a moral bromide, as a sedative. Intellectual activity having become intoxication, he no longer needed to be intoxicated, but music must bring him "holy sobriety", as Hölderlin so happily phrased it. "Music as a recuperation not as a stimulant", music as a refuge when his heart was lacerated or when the chase after ideas had overwhelmed him with weariness, music as a refreshing and cleansing bath, divine music descending from on high and not arising from a heart aflame, oppressed, and filled with a sultry atmosphere; a music which would help him to forget himself, not one which would thrust him back upon his own emotional crises; a music which would speak and act affirmatively; a music of the south, limpid as water, simple and pure; a music "any man could whistle". Not the sort of music which lay dormant within himself, the music of chaos, but the music of the seventh day of creation; a music of repose wherein the spheres serenely sing the praises of the Creator. "Now that I have reached a haven, give me music, and more music!"

The lightness of thistledown, this was Nietzsche's ultimate love, his highest measure of things. That which imparts buoyancy and health is good, whether it be food for the body or the mind, whether it be in the air, in the sun, in the landscape or in music. That which enables a man to soar, which helps him to forget the weight and gloominess of life, the ugliness of truth—that is the wellspring of grace. On such a soil was nourished Nietzsche's belated love for art, a stimulant to life because it made life worth while. Music,

limpid, freedom-giving and light, became the dearest solace of Nietzsche's agitated mind. "Life without music is nothing but fatigue and error." A person sick of a fever never stretched his cracked and burning lips towards a cup of cooling water with greater longing than, in his final crises, did Nietzsche towards the sparkling draught of music. "Was a man ever so athirst for music as I?" This was his final escape, escape from himself.

In view of this craving, we can have no difficulty in explaining his apocalyptic hatred for Wagner, whose art troubled the purity of the stream of music by pouring narcotics and stimulants into its crystalline waters; hence, likewise, the sufferings he endured when contemplating "the destiny of music", it seemed to him "an open wound". He, the solitary wanderer cast out by the gods, desired only that they should not rob him of this one consolation, this nectar, this ambrosia which eternally refreshed and reinvigorated the soul. "Art, nothing but art! Art was given us that we might not be slain by truth." With the desperate energy of a drowning man he clung to art, to the only living power which is not subject to the laws of gravitation, hoping that this spar would save him and would bring him happily into port.

Music stooped graciously towards him, and received into her own hands the body of him who implored her aid in such moving terms. The world had forsaken him; his friends had long since gone their ways and ignored his existence; his thoughts strayed forth on interminable pilgrimages. Music alone walked by his side, accompanying him into his final, his seventh, solitude. All he touched, she touched with him; when he spoke, music lifted up her voice and sang with him; if he stumbled, she was quick to succour him. When in the end he fell into the abyss, she watched over his obliterated mind. Overbeck, coming into the room after the catastrophe, found the unhappy madman sitting at the piano, his fingers fumbling the keys in a vain effort to find the harmonies so dear to him. During the long journey to Basel the sick philosopher sang without ceasing, sang his own *Gondolier's Chanty* to the accompaniment of the roaring and rattling rhythm of the train.

In the valley of the shadows, when his mind was bedimmed, music remained his faithful companion, permeating with her daemonic presence the last days of his life and remaining with him till he died.

THE SEVENTH SOLITUDE

A great man is pushed and hustled and martyrised until he withdraws into solitude.

"O SOLITUDE, you are my home!" Such is the melancholy chant which issued from an icy world of silence. Zarathustra composed his evening song, the song of his homecoming. Has not solitude always been the dwelling place of the wanderer, his cold hearth, his stony shelter? Nietzsche lived in many different towns; he travelled into countless realms of the mind; frequently he endeavoured to escape from solitude by crossing a frontier into a foreign land; but always his journeyings brought him back to solitude, heartsore, weary, disillusioned.

During her constant roaming with this man of many transformations, she herself suffered a change, so that when he looked her in the face he was alarmed, for she had become so like himself in the course of these peregrinations, harder, crueller, more violent; she had learnt to make another suffer and had grown threatening. Though he still continued to call her his "dear old solitude", the affectionate familiarity seemed out of season; his solitude had become complete isolation, the final, the seventh, solitude, wherein one is not merely alone but also forsaken. A void surrounded him, an awe-inspiring silence; no hermit or anchorite in the desert was ever more abandoned. They, at least, still had their God whose shade dwelt in their huts or fell upon the tops of their columns. But he, "the murderer of God", had neither God nor man to companion him. To the extent that he drew nearer to himself, he receded from the world, and, as his voyages extended, "the desert widened" around him. Generally the works conceived and written in loneliness gain more and more ascendancy upon the minds of men; by a magnetic force they attract increasing numbers of admirers into the invisible circle of their influence. But Nietzsche's books alienated even his friends; each successive issue cost him the affection of some person who was dear to him. Little by little all interest in him and his

writings was extinguished. The first to desert Nietzsche were his professorial colleagues, then Wagner and the Wagnerian coterie, then the companions of his youth. In Germany no publisher would any longer accept his manuscripts. During his twenty years of production, his manuscripts accumulated in a cellar and came to weigh many hundredweight. He had to draw upon his own slender resources in order to get his books printed. Not only did nobody buy the few volumes that were issued, but he found no readers when he gave them away. The fourth part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was printed at Nietzsche's expense in forty copies only, and he intended to distribute them among his friends. But he could muster only seven people to whom to send the gift. Is not this sufficient proof of the man's loneliness? In order not to forfeit the friendship of Overbeck, the last remaining intimate of youthful days, he wrote apologetically: "Dear old friend, please read the book from beginning to end, and pray do not allow it to disturb you or alienate you. Summon all your kindness in my favour. If the work as a whole is intolerable to you, maybe you will yet find a hundred details to your liking."

Thus humbly did the greatest mind of the century petition his contemporaries to consider the greatest book of the epoch, and the finest thing he could say of his most intimate friendship was that nothing had been able to disturb it, "not even *Zarathustra*". Not even *Zarathustra*! So heavy a burden, so distressing an ordeal had Nietzsche's creative work become for his nearest and dearest, so vast was the chasm between this man's genius and the pettiness of the time. More and more did the air he breathed become too rarefied, too soundless, too emptied of commonplace interests, to be respirable by others.

This stillness made an inferno of Nietzsche's last, his seventh, solitude, against whose metallic walls he was knocking out his brains. Practically no reviewer or critic took the slightest notice of *Zarathustra*, which the author described as "the greatest gift ever bestowed upon men". One day he lamented: "After such an appeal as my *Zarathustra*, a cry that came from my heart, it is terrible not to hear a responsive

word, to hear nothing, absolutely nothing, to be surrounded by silence, to be a thousand times more isolated than heretofore. This is a situation exceeding all others in horror; even the strongest might die under the strain … And I am far from being the strongest. Sometimes it seems to me as though I were indeed wounded unto death." Yet what he asked for was not applause, agreement, renown. Quite the contrary! His bellicose temperament would have thoroughly enjoyed savage opposition, indignation on the part of his readers, disdain, even mockery. "For a man whose tensions are at breaking point every emotion is wholesome so long as it is violent and passionate." Any kind of response would have been welcome, were it icy or heated or lukewarm, but at least a sign that he was alive and had a spiritual existence. His handful of friends behaved as badly as the critics and other strangers, vouchsafing no comment either in their letters or elsewhere, avoiding outspoken opinions as something unpleasant. This gnawed at his vitals, undermining his proper pride, inflaming his self-assertive impulse, consuming his soul. Lack of recognition was the shaft which poisoned his isolation, and raised his temper to fever heat.

The fever lurked in his veins like a smored fire beneath the turves, until at length it burst into flame. If we make a closer examination of Nietzsche's writings and letters of the years immediately preceding the final breakdown, we shall find that the blood was pulsating more violently as if at an excessive altitude. Mountain climbers have had experiences of the sort after reaching very great heights. In Kleist's last letters the same dangerous vibrations may be detected, the boiling and bubbling of a machine on the verge of bursting. Nietzsche's attitude of patience and calm yielded place to an access of nervous irritability. "Prolonged silence has exasperated my pride." At all costs he wanted a response, sending letter upon letter, telegram upon telegram, to his printers, urging them to push on with the job—as if the least delay would be a calamity. He had intended to finish his leading work *The Will to Power*, but he could no longer stick to his plan. Instead, he detached fragments of the book and hurled them like flaming

brands into the midst of his epoch. The "halcyon tone" vanished; groans of suffering, cries of wrath, rose up from his impatient heart. He who had habitually shown the utmost indifference to his contemporaries now set about provoking them in the hope of forcing a reaction among them. *Ecce Homo*, a kind of autobiography, was a challenge to his time, for herein he recounted the adventures of his life with "a cynicism which will become part of universal history". He was daunted by a morbid anxiety lest he should fail to achieve success before he died. One feels as one reads that he paused to take breath from time to time during the furious onslaught, in the hope of hearing a cry from those he attacked so savagely. Not a voice was raised. No reply reached him in his "azure solitude". At length he understood that no power, divine or human, was going to come to his assistance and rescue him from his isolation.

Blindly and wildly he flung his missiles far and wide, never looking to see if they hit the mark. Since he had slain the gods, he set himself up as a divinity. "Must we not become gods if we are to be worthy of such deeds?" Having overthrown all the altars, he built an altar for himself in order to praise himself, seeing that no one else would acknowledge him. He chanted his own dirge with enthusiasm and exultation, mingling it with songs celebrating his deeds and his victories. To begin with, a twilight covered the landscape of his mind as when black clouds stalk up from the horizon and distant thunder growls; then a strident laugh rent the sultry air, a mad, violent and wicked laugh full of despair, heartbreaking—this was the paean of *Ecce Homo*.

As the book develops, its cadences become increasingly spasmodic, the yells of laughter are more shrill amid the glacial silence; he is, as it were, outside himself. His hands are raised, his feet stamp rhythmically; he breaks into a dance, a dance over an abyss, the abyss of his own annihilation.

DANCE OVER THE ABYSS

If you look long into an abyss, the abyss, likewise, looks into you.

THE AUTUMN OF 1888, the period of Nietzsche's last creative outburst, is unique in the annals of productive artistry. Never before, in so brief a period, did any man of genius think so intensely, so uninterruptedly, so stupendously and in so revolutionary a fashion. Never before had mortal brain been so fertile in ideas, so full of imagery, so flooded with music, as this brain whose doom was already decreed. The history of the mind offers no parallel for such an intoxication of destructive ecstasy conjoined with such a fury of creation—unless it be that in the same year and almost under the same skies we remember the activities of a painter similarly spurred to supreme activity by the onset of madness. In the garden at Arles and in the asylum, Van Gogh was painting with equal swiftness, possessed with similar wonderful visions, endowed with the same maniacal superfluity. The instant one of his glowing pictures was finished, his unerring brush was at work upon a new canvas; there was no hesitation, no planning, no deliberation. Creation had become an overwhelming urge; he had a daemonic clarity and swiftness of insight, an unbroken succession of visions. Friends who had left Van Gogh only an hour before would be amazed on their return to find that during their absence he had finished a new picture, and that, with ardent eyes, he was already at work upon a third. The daemon that was driving him would allow him no rest, recking not a whit whether he was destroying the body of his victim.

Thus, too, did Nietzsche produce work after work, breathlessly, unrestingly, with the same unprecedented lucidity and swiftness. Ten days, a fortnight, three weeks, such were the incubation periods of his concluding works, their procreation, their carrying and their birth all included. Completion seemed to tread on the heels of the first proposal. There was no search, no groping, no modification and no correction. All was equally immaculate, definitive, unalterable, simultaneously hot from the forge and cool as

tempered steel. Despite this extraordinary speed of production, we find no trace of labour or of effort. For a long time, now, his work had been effortless, laissez-faire—the uncontrolled operation of higher forces than those of the conscious mind. This man permeated with spirit need merely lift his eyes to discern (like Hölderlin in his last soaring towards mythical contemplation) vast epochs in the past and in the future, but Nietzsche made palpably clear all that he saw under stress of his translucent daemonism. He had only to stretch forth his hand in order to seize and to hold fast, and whatever he thus grasped was instantaneously made alive with metaphor, palpitating with music, marvellously inspired. Nor did the current of ideas and images stagnate for a moment during these truly Napoleonic months. It flowed on with elemental strength. "Zarathustra inundated me." Always, in this last phase, he speaks of an inundation, of his being whirled away as by a flood against which his conscious self could make no stand. For though Nietzsche says of his last writings: "Perhaps never before did anyone produce with such a superfluity of energy," he does not dare even to hint that the energy which animated him, which drove him on his frenzied course, was his own. He knew himself to be intoxicated; to be inspired only as "the mouthpiece of a supramundane imperative"; to be possessed, as it were, by some daemonic being higher than himself.

But who can venture to describe this miracle of inspiration, the shuddering dread of this five months' unceasing storm of production, seeing that Nietzsche, in an ecstasy of thankfulness, has so vividly pictured his own experience? Let him speak for himself:

> *Has anyone, at the close of the nineteenth century, a clear notion of what imaginative writers belonging to a stronger age than ours meant when they spoke of inspiration? I shall do my best to describe it. However little superstition may remain in one's mind, one hardly finds it possible to repudiate the idea of becoming the mere incarnation, the mere mouthpiece, the mere*

instrument of supremely powerful forces. The term revelation, in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and refinement, something becomes visible, audible, something that moves one profoundly and overwhelms one, is but a bald description of the facts. We hear, without seeking to hear; we accept, without knowing who bestows. A thought would come to me like a lightning flash, determined in its form, unhesitatingly acceptable. I seemed to have no choice in the matter. A rapture whose intensity sometimes culminated in a storm of tears, a rapture in which one may involuntarily hasten at top speed for a while and then suddenly go dead slow; a complete release from the sense of personal identity to the accompaniment of the most distinct awareness of numberless fine bodily thrills extending into the tips of the toes; a passion of joy amid which the extremity of pain and the extremity of gloom do not seem to be contrasted elements, but conditioned, indispensable, the necessary colour tone of such a superfluity of light; an instinct of rhythmical relationships outstripping the widespread boundaries of established forms—such an expanse, such a need for a widely extended rhythm, is almost the token of a power of inspiration, a sort of compensation for its pressure and its tension … All happens in the highest degree involuntarily, but to the accompaniment of a stormy conviction of freedom, of unconditionedness, of divine strength … The involuntariness of the image, of the parable, is the strangest feature. One no longer has any idea of what is image or what is parable; everything presents itself as the most immediate, the most accurate, the simplest expression. To recall one of the sayings of Zarathustra, it would really seem as if the things came on their own account and offered themselves in the form of parable. "Here come all things caressively at your summons, ingratiatingly; for they want to ride on your back. Here on every metaphor you ride to every truth. Here the words and word cupboards of all being spring open to

you; all being wants here to become word, all becoming wants to learn speech from you." Such is my own experience of inspiration. I doubt not that I should have to go back thousands of years to find anyone who would say to me: "It is also mine."

This self-addressed paean of intoxicated happiness is, I know, regarded by modern physicians as a morbid euphoria, as the last pleasure in a decaying brain, as the stigma of that megalomania which is characteristic of the early stage of paralytic dementia. Still, I should like to ask them who else has with the same diamantine clearness chiselled for all eternity a description of creative frenzy? For such is the unexampled miracle of Nietzsche's last writings, that in them the utmost lucidity is accompanied by an extreme degree of somnambulist frenzy, that they display the wisdom of the serpent side by side with their bacchantic and almost bestial energy. Others affected with similar exaltation, others whose soul Dionysus has made drunken, have a heavy speech, and their words are shrouded in obscurity. They speak the confused language of dreams. Having glimpsed the depths of the abyss, they are wont to speak even in our world in an Orphic, a Pythian, a mysterious tone which confounds our senses and which the mind cannot fully understand. But Nietzsche talks clearly and incisively amid the ardours of intoxication. No other mortal, perhaps, has ever in full awareness and without a trace of giddiness leant so far and seen so clearly over the edge of the precipice of lunacy. His mode of expression is not, like that of Hölderlin, like that of the mystics of all ages, that of one whose words darken counsel. On the contrary, never was he more lucid, never did he speak more plainly, than during the last hours before his mind was darkened. One might even say that his sense of mystery brought him an excess of illumination. No doubt the light that sparkles here is a perilous one. It has the phantasmal and morbid luminosity of a midnight sun glowing red above icebergs; it is a northern light of the soul whose unique splendour makes us shudder. It does not warm us, it terrifies us. It does not dazzle, but it slays. He is not carried away as

was Hölderlin by an obscure rhythm of feeling, is not overwhelmed by the onrush of melancholy. He is scorched by his own ardours, is sunstruck by his own rays, is affected by a white-hot and intolerable cheerfulness. Nietzsche's collapse was a sort of carbonisation in his own flames.

Long ere this, the excessive clarity of his vision had at times been an agony to him; in his clairvoyance, he had been affrighted by this luminosity and by the wild jubilation of his spirit. "The intensity of my feelings makes me tremble and laugh." Still, nothing could stem the onrush of this tide, nothing could hinder the falcon swoop of thoughts which invaded his mind, clashing and glittering, day and night, night and day, hour after hour, while his temples throbbed to bursting. At night, indeed, chloral came to help him, gave him a feeble though protective roof of sleep to guard against the tumultuous downrush of his visions. But his nerves glowed like red-hot wires. His whole being was electrified, was atwitching, dazzling, scintillating light.

Is it to be wondered at that in these rapids of inspiration and vertiginous thought Nietzsche should have lost contact with earth and come to forget who he was? He, the illimitable, could not recognise his own limitations. Convinced, in this last phase, that his hand was guided by higher powers and no longer by himself, he hesitated to sign his name, Friedrich Nietzsche, at the end of his letters. The son of a Protestant pastor had long felt that a man of such humble origins could not be the bearer of such amazing things as he, Nietzsche, experienced. The creature who was thinking and recording these extraordinary thoughts must surely be a nameless martyr in humanity's cause. For that reason the signature of the final revelations was always symbolical: "The Monster", "The Crucified", "Antichrist", "Dionysus". In his own eyes he was no longer a man but an impersonal force, an apostolic missionary: "I am not a human being, I am dynamite"; "I am a historical event by which the history of our race is divided into two episodes." Thus does his megalomania, for it came to this, shout into a formidable silence.

Just as in burning Moscow, at the outset of the long Russian winter and backed up only by the pitiful remnants of what had been the mightiest of armies, Napoleon continued to issue thunderous proclamations, magnificent up to and beyond the border of absurdity; so did Nietzsche, in the midst of the flaming Kremlin of his brain, rendered impotent because the once-powerful legions of his thoughts had been scattered, fulminate in terrific pamphlets. He commanded the German emperor to go to Rome in order to be shot; he summoned the European powers to take united military action against Germany, to encircle his fatherland in a ring of iron. Never did apocalyptic wrath shout more savagely into vacancy, never did so glorious a presumption scourge a mind beyond earthly bounds. His words issued like hammer blows striving to demolish the edifice of established civilisation. The Christian era was to cease with the publication of his *Antichrist*, and a new numbering of the years was to begin; he set his own image upon a higher level than those of the great men who had preceded him. Even at the onset of paralytic dementia, Nietzsche's delusions were grander than the delusions of others whose minds had been darkened; here, likewise, there prevails the most illustrious though most dangerous excess.

"No one has written, felt, suffered in such a manner before; the sufferings of a god, a Dionysus." These words, penned when his mental disorder had already begun, are painfully true. The little room on the fourth floor, and the hermitage at Sils-Maria, not only sheltered the man Friedrich Nietzsche whose nerves were breaking under the strain, but also served as the places from which were issued a marvellous message to the dying century. The Creative Spirit had taken refuge beneath the attic roof heated by the southern sun, and was bestowing its entire wealth upon a timid, neglected and lonely being, bestowing far more than any isolated person could sustain. Within those narrow walls, wrestling with infinities, the poor mortal senses were stumbling and groping amid the lightning flashes of revelation. Like Hölderlin, he felt that a god was revealing himself, a fiery god whose radiance the eyes could not bear and whose proximity was scorching.

Again and again the cowering wretch raised his head and attempted to look upon the countenance of this deity, his thoughts running riot the while. Was not he who felt and wrote and suffered such unthinkable things, was not he himself God? Had not a god reanimated the world after he, Nietzsche, had slain the old god? Who was he? Who was Nietzsche? Was Nietzsche the Crucified; the dead god or the living one; the god of his youth, Dionysus; or both Dionysus and the Crucified—the crucified Dionysus? More and more confused grew his thoughts; the current roared too loud beneath the superfluity of light. Was it still light? Had it not become music? The narrow room on the fourth floor in the Via Carlo Alberto began to intone; the shining spheres made music; all heaven was aglow. What wonderful music! Tears trickled down his face, warm tears. What sublime tenderness, what auspicious happiness! And now, what lucidity! In the street, everyone smiled at him in friendly fashion; they stood up to greet him; the apple woman selected the finest fruit for him; they made obeisance to him, the slayer of gods; they were all so delighted to see him. Why? Why? He knew. Antichrist had appeared upon earth, and men acclaimed him with hosannas. The world hummed with jubilation, was full of music. Then suddenly the tumult was stilled. Something, someone fell down. It is he, himself, in the street, in front of the house where he lodged. He was picked up. He found himself back in his room.

Had he been asleep for a long time? It seemed very dark. There was the piano. Music! Music! Then, unexpectedly, people appeared in the room. Surely one of them must be Overbeck. But Overbeck is in Basel—and where is he, Nietzsche? He no longer remembers. Why does the company look at him so strangely, so anxiously? He is in a train, rattling along the rails, and the wheels are singing; yes, they are singing the *Gondolier's Chanty,* and he joins in, sings in an interminable darkness.

He is in a strange room, and always it is dark. No more sunshine, no light at all, either within or without. People talk

in the room. A woman among them, surely it is his sister? He had thought she was travelling. She reads aloud to him, now from one book, now from another. Books? “Was not I once a writer of books?” Comes a gentle answer, but he cannot understand. One in whose soul such a hurricane has raged grows deaf to ordinary speech. One who has gazed so intently into the eyes of the daemon is henceforth blinded.

THE TEACHER OF FREEDOM

Greatness means to give guidance.

"AFTER THE NEXT EUROPEAN WAR, people will understand me." Such is the prophetic utterance that shines conspicuously forth from among Nietzsche's last writings. In very truth, the real significance, the historical necessity of this seer is made plain to us only in relation to the tensed, unstable and dangerous condition of our world at the turn of the century. In this sensitive, who transformed every atmospheric convulsion from nerve into spirit, from intimation into word, there occurred a foreboding discharge of all the tensions of the morally obtuse Europe. There was a cataclysm in Nietzsche's mind as a presage of the most terrible cataclysm in human history. His "far-thinking" vision glimpsed the crises while others were comfortably warming their hands before the agreeable fires of well-turned phrases. He discerned the causes of what was about to happen: "The national cardiac pruritus and the blood-poisoning thanks to which, throughout Europe, nation shuts itself off from nation as if they were quarantining against one another's plagues." He saw "the nationalism as of horned cattle", of brute beasts whose highest conception was selfishness based upon a narrow interpretation of history, when time, the impetus of all the forces in the making, was already urging upon them a new and more sublime synthesis. Wrathfully he predicts catastrophe in view of the convulsive endeavours "to eternalise particularism throughout Europe" and to defend a morality established upon egoistic interests and upon business. In letters of fire upon the wall he wrote: "This absurd state of affairs must speedily be brought to an end; we are skating upon very thin ice, and the warm breeze of a thaw is blowing."

No one heard more plainly than did Nietzsche the ominous cracking in the edifice of European society; no one, in a time of unwarranted optimism and self-satisfaction, sounded so loudly as he the summons to flight—a flight into straightforwardness, into clarity, into the utmost intellectual

freedom. No one felt so strongly as he that the old order was decayed and done with, and that, amid death-dealing crises, a new and mighty order was about to begin. Now at length we know it, as he knew it decades ago.

Such agonising foresight was his greatness and his heroism. The incredible stresses which ultimately shattered his anguished mind linked him with a higher element; it was the fever of our world before the abscess burst. Stormy petrels invariably herald momentous convulsions and catastrophes, and there is a spiritual truth underlying the belief of simple souls that before wars and crises comets pursue their erratic course athwart the sky. Nietzsche was such a beacon in the upper atmosphere, the summer lightning that preludes a storm, the rumbling we hear from distant mountains before the thunder bursts in the valleys. He alone recognised how frightful a hurricane was about to disturb our civilisation.

But it is the perennial tragedy of the spirit that what it perceives in its higher, more luminous spheres can never be communicated to those who dwell in the heavier atmosphere upon the lower levels; that the present never grasps what is impending, is never able to read the message of the skies. Even the most translucent genius of the nineteenth century could not speak plainly enough to enable his contemporaries to understand him. No more was vouchsafed to him than the cry of warning which was incomprehensible to his contemporaries. Then his mind gave way.

To my thinking, however, it was Jakob Burckhardt, the most intelligent among Nietzsche's readers, who best divined his message when in a letter to his friend he wrote that the latter's books had "increased independence in the world". Note that this shrewd and well-informed critic expressly said "independence in the world" not "the independence of the world". For independence exists only for the individual as a unit, it cannot be indefinitely multiplied among the masses; it does not grow out of books or out of culture: "there are no heroic ages, but solely heroic persons". It is the individual who achieves independence within the world, and for himself

alone. Every free spirit is an Alexander. Like a torrent he overwhelms provinces and makes vast conquests, but he has no heirs. The realm of freedom is invariably divided up among Diadochi and satraps, among commentators and elucidators, who are enslaved by the written word. Nietzsche's independence did not therefore transmit, as the scholiasts declare, a doctrine, but, rather, an atmosphere—the limpid and passionate atmosphere of a daemonic nature, which finds vent in storm and destruction. When we open his books we encounter ozone-laden air, an element freed from dross, from nebulousness and sultriness; that which we breathe is fit only for strong hearts and emancipated spirits. Freedom is Nietzsche's ultimate significance, is the meaning of his life and the meaning of his overthrow. Just as, in the domain of natural forces, there is need at times for whirlwinds wherein the excess of energy rises in revolt against stability, so likewise, now and again, in the realm of mind is there need for a daemonic being whose transcendent powers shall make him the spearhead of a revolt against the triviality of habitual thought and the monotonousness of conventional morality. There is need of a man who will embody the forces of destruction and who will destroy himself likewise. But these heroic disturbers of the peace are sculptors of the universe no less than are those whose creative work is done silently and without the raising of a riot. These latter, doubtless, manifest the plenitude of life, but the destroyers show its immensity. It is through a study of tragical natures that we become aware of profundity of feeling. Only because there are some whom no yardstick can measure do the rest of us realise our own possibilities of greatness.

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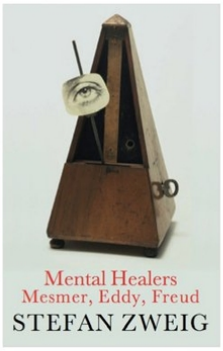

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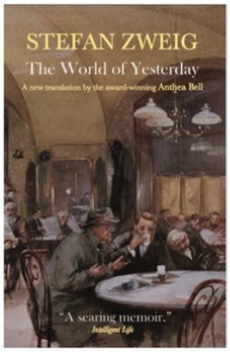

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