

SIXTEENTH LETTER

We have seen how the beautiful emerges from the reciprocity of two contrary impulses, and from the connection of two contrary principles; and whose supreme ideal is thus to be found in the most perfected bond and equilibrium of reality and form. This equilibrium can, however, remain only an idea that reality can never quite achieve. In reality, one element will always outweigh the other; and the most that we can expect from experience is a fluctuation between both principles, in which now reality now form is preponderant. Beauty as an idea is therefore eternally an indivisible unity, because there can be only one single equilibrium; by contrast, beauty in experience will always be dual, because fluctuation can disturb the equilibrium, now to one side, then the other.

In one of my earlier letters I remarked, and it can be rigorously deduced from what I have written so far, that we might expect from the beautiful an effect both of release and of tensioning: a releasing effect, to keep both sensuous and formal impulses within bounds; and a tensioning effect to maintain the powers of each. Ideally, however, these two effects of beauty should be one and the same. Beauty should release, so that both natures might be equally tensioned; and it should be tensioned, so that both might be equally released. By working together with the sensuous and the formal impulses they each draw their own boundaries; and in that each holds the other to its limits, beauty has given to both their proper liberty. This follows from the concept of reciprocity, by virtue of which both parts simultaneously and necessarily condition each other and are conditioned by each other, the purest

product of which is **beauty**. However, **experience** offers us no such example of **perfect reciprocity**; instead it will always turn out that a preponderance will to a greater or lesser extent give rise to a deficiency, and a deficiency to a preponderance. Hence, what then is for the **ideal** of **beauty** a distinction **made** in imagination **is** for the **beauty** found in **experience** an existential difference. The **ideal** of **beauty**, although indivisible and simple, evinces in its different relationships a property both liquifying and energetic; while in **experience** **there is** liquifying and energetic **beauty**.ⁱ That is the way it is, and that is the way it will always be in all cases where the absolute is subject to the limits of time, and **ideas** of reason are to be realized in mankind. The reflective man **thinks** in this way about virtue, truth and happiness; but the active man will simply practise **virtue**, simply grasp **truth**, and simply enjoy **happy days**. **To link these experiences to the former abstractions -putting morality in the place of morals, knowledge in the place of what is known, happiness in the place of good fortune – is the business of physical and moral culture; making beauty out of beautiful things is the task of aesthetic culture.**

Energetic **beauty** can as little preserve men from a certain residue of savagery and hardness as it can protect liquifying **beauty** from a certain degree of softening and enervation. For since the effect of the first is to brace the soul physically and morally, increasing its powers of response, so it happens all too easily that the resistance of temperament and character reduces receptivity to impressions, so that even the most delicate humanity undergoes a repression meant only for raw **nature**; and raw **nature** shares a gain in strength meant only for the free person; so it is for this reason that one finds in times of strength and abundance the true greatness of imagination paired with the gigantic and the extravagant, and the sublimity of conviction paired with the most appalling outbreaks of passion; so it is that in times of rule and **form** **nature** is just as often oppressed as mastered, just as often offended as transcended. And because the effect of liquifying **beauty** is to soften the soul both morally and physically, it as easily comes about that the **energy** of feeling is smothered along with the force of the appetites, and that

character also **experiences** a loss of power that is meant only to affect passion; and so in what are **thought** to be more refined eras it is not rare for gentleness to become softness, breadth to become shallowness, correctness to become empty **formality**, liberality to become arbitrariness, making light of things frivolity, calm to become apathy, and to see the most despicable caricatures in the closest proximity to the most wonderful humanity. Liquifying **beauty** is therefore a need for man constrained either by **form** or by **matter**; for before he begins to be receptive to **harmony** and grace he has long been moved by greatness and power. For the man ruled by the indulgence of taste energetic **beauty** is a need, for when in a condition of refinement he is only too ready to squander a strength that he retained from the condition of savagery.

And so I **think** that the contradiction that one commonly encounters in the opinion of men about the influence of the **beautiful**, and in their appreciation of aesthetic culture, has been explained and answered. The contradiction is explained as soon as one recalls that there are in **experience** two kinds of **beauty**, and that both parts claim a whole that each is capable of demonstrating itself only in part. This contradiction is removed once we distinguish the dual need of mankind to which this dual **beauty** corresponds. Both parts will probably prove to be right, if only they can first agree between themselves which kind of **beauty** and which **form** of mankind they have in mind.

I will therefore, in the continuation of my investigations, assume as my own the path that **nature** takes with man in æsthetic **matters**, deriving the general concept of **beauty** from its two kinds. I will examine the effect of liquifying **beauty** on the tensioned man, and the effect of energetic **beauty** on the relaxed man, so that I might finally resolve both contrary kinds of **beauty** into the unity of the **ideal-beautiful**, as the two contrary **forms** of mankind resolve into the unity of the **ideal** man.

LIQUIFYING BEAUTY: SEVENTEENTH LETTER

So long as it was merely a **matter** of deducing the general **idea** of **beauty** from the concept of human **nature**, we were unable to **think** of any limitation of the latter that was not founded directly on its essence, and which is inseparable from the concept of finitude. Disregarding the contingent limitations to which human **nature** was subject in its actual manifestations, we deduced its concept directly from reason, the source of all necessity; and with this, the **ideal** of mankind was formed along with the **ideal** of **beauty**.

But now we descend from the region of **ideas** to the arena of actuality, encountering man **in a determinate** condition, together with limitations that do not come from his simple concept, but flow from his external circumstances and the contingent use of his freedom. Whatever may be the varied ways in which the **idea** of mankind is contained within him, the basic content of this teaches us that, altogether, there can be only **two** contrary deviations from it. If his perfection consists in harmonizing the **energy** of his **sensuous** and intellectual powers, then any short-fall in this perfection must be due either to a lack of **harmony** or to a lack of **energy**. Hence even before we have questioned the witnesses of **experience** about this, we have already established by pure reason that actual (limited) man will find himself in a state either of tension or of relaxation, depending upon how the independent activity of individual forces disturbs the **harmony** of his being, or the unity of his **nature** arises from the uniform slackening of his **sensuous** and intellectual powers. As

will now be demonstrated, both contrary limits will be elevated by **beauty**, restoring **harmony** to the tense man and vitality to the relaxed man; and in this way, in accordance with its **nature**, leading a limited condition back to an absolute one, rendering man perfectly complete in himself.^{1 ii}

Thus **beauty** conceived in reality in no way belies the concept we have already formed of it in speculation; only that, here in reality, it has much less freedom than it had in speculation, where we might apply it to the pure concept of mankind. The man presented to **beauty** by **experience** is material already spoiled and recalcitrant, who robs it of so much of its **ideal** perfection when mixing it with his **individual** character. It is consequently everywhere in reality only a special and limited species, never a pure genus; in tensed souls it dispenses with its freedom and diversity, while in relaxed souls it loses its vitality, but now that we have become familiar with **beauty's** genuine character we will not be confused by this contradictory appearance. Far from defining its concept in terms of individual **experience**, as do the great majority, hence making **beauty** responsible for the faults that man displays under its influence, we know that it is man who transfers to **beauty** the imperfection of his individuality, so creating an insuperable obstacle in his subjective limitation of its perfection, reducing its absolute **ideal** to two limited forms of its appearance.

Fluid **beauty**, it has been said, is for tense souls; energizing **beauty** for relaxed souls. However, I call the man tense both when he is driven by **sensations** (under the unilateral power of the material impulse) and also when he is driven by concepts (under the unilateral power of the formal impulse). All exclusive domination of either one of his basic impulses is for him a condition of compulsion and force; liberty consists only in the concurrence of his two **natures**, in the **harmony** of both

¹ The excellent author of Principles of Aesthetics etc. (Erfurt, 1791) distinguishes in **beauty** the two basic principles of grace and vitality making **beauty** the most perfect union of both: coinciding exactly with the explanation given here. His definition thus already states the basis for the division of **beauty** into a fluid **beauty**, comprising grace, and an energetic form, in which vitality predominates.

necessities. The man unilaterally ruled by his feelings, or led by his **senses**, is therefore released and liberated by **form**; the man unilaterally dominated by rules, or led by intellect, is released and liberated by **matter**. Liquefying **beauty**, to meet this dual task, will show itself in two distinct guises. **Firstly**, its tranquil **form** will calm the wildness of life, creating a bridge from sensations to **thoughts**. **Secondly**, as a living image it will arm a shrunken **form** with **sensuous** power, guiding the concept back to intuition, and rule to feeling. The first service is **performed** for the man of **nature**, the second for the man of artifice. But since in both cases it does not have complete control of its human material, but rather depends upon that offered either by **formless nature** or by **unnatural** artifice, so in each case it will bear the marks of its origins, losing itself more in material life here, in empty **form** there.

To be able to **form** a concept of how **beauty** can become a medium through which this dual tension can be removed we must investigate its origin in the human soul. Please allow me to remain a little longer in the domain of speculation before leaving it for good, so that we might then set out into the field of **experience** with a firm tread.

ⁱ SIXTEENTH LETTER: *Liquefying and energetic beauty: Schmelzende and energische Schönheit* in the German original. While preserving the transcendental unity of **beauty** as freedom in appearance, Schiller here reworks the established distinction between the **beautiful** and sublime in eighteenth-century aesthetics with respect to **beauty's** psychological effects in **experience**. The function of liquefying **beauty** is to relax the dominating impulse, while energetic **beauty** aims at strengthening the weaker impulse. The aim is a balance between the material and the formal impulse. Sociologically, this double function of **beauty** should, on the one hand, lead to a cultivation of raw passions among the less privileged classes, On the other hand, it should strengthen resolve to act according to the moral law among the refined elite. Schiller elaborates this **idea** first in the Letter to the Prince von Augustenburg of 11 November 1793 (Enclosure).

ⁱⁱ SEVENTEETH LETTER: *excellent author of Principles of Aesthetics etc: Schiller refers to Grundsätze der Aesthetik, deren Anwendung und künftige Entwicklung* (Erfurt: Keyser, 1791), written by his friend Karl Theodor von Dalberg (1744–1817), a member of the Illuminati order, administrator of Erfurt, designated successor of the archbishop of Mainz and as such future arch-chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire.