

ON THE TRAGIC ART

Friedrich Schiller

The state of passion in itself, independently of the good or bad influence of its object on our morality, has something in it that charms us. We aspire to transport ourselves into that state, even if it costs us some sacrifices. You will find this instinct at the bottom of all our most habitual pleasures. As to the nature itself of the affection, whether it be one of aversion or desire, agreeable or painful, this is what we take little into consideration. Experience teaches us that painful affections are those which have the most attraction for us, and thus that the pleasure we take in an affection is precisely in an inverse ratio to its nature. It is a phenomenon common to all men, that sad, frightful things, even the horrible, exercise over us an irresistible seduction, and that in presence of a scene of desolation and of terror we feel at once repelled and attracted by two equal forces. Suppose the case be an assassination. Then every one crowds round the narrator and shows a marked attention. Any ghost story, however embellished by romantic circumstances, is greedily devoured by us, and the more readily in proportion as the story is calculated to make our hair stand on end.

This disposition is developed in a more lively manner when the objects themselves are placed before our eyes. A tempest that would swallow up an entire fleet would be, seen from shore, a spectacle as attractive to our imagination as it would be shocking to our heart. It would be difficult to believe with Lucretius that this natural pleasure results from a comparison between our own safety and the danger of which we are witnesses. See what a crowd accompanies a criminal to the scene of his punishment! This phenomenon cannot be explained either by the pleasure of satisfying our love of justice, nor the ignoble joy of vengeance. Perhaps the unhappy man may find excuses in the hearts of those present; perhaps the sincerest pity takes an interest in his reprieve: this does not prevent a lively curiosity in the spectators to watch his expressions of pain with eye and ear. If an exception seems to exist here in the

case of a well-bred man, endowed with a delicate sense, this does not imply that he is a complete stranger to this instinct; but in his case the painful strength of compassion carries the day over this instinct, or it is kept under by the laws of decency. The man of nature, who is not chained down by any feeling of human delicacy, abandons himself without any sense of shame to this powerful instinct. This attraction must, therefore, have its spring of action in an original disposition, and it must be explained by a psychological law common to the whole species.

But if it seems to us that these brutal instincts of nature are incompatible with the dignity of man, and if we hesitate, for this reason, to establish on this fact a law common to the whole species, yet no experiences are required to prove, with the completest evidence, that the pleasure we take in painful emotions is real, and that it is general. The painful struggle of a heart drawn asunder between its inclinations or contrary duties, a struggle which is a cause of misery to him who experiences it, delights the person who is a mere spectator. We follow with always heightening pleasure the progress of a passion to the abyss into which it hurries its unhappy victim. The same delicate feeling that makes us turn our eyes aside from the sight of physical suffering, or even from the physical expression of a purely moral pain, makes us experience a pleasure heightened in sweetness, in the sympathy for a purely moral pain. The interest with which we stop to look at the painting of these kinds of objects is a general phenomenon.

Of course this can only be understood of sympathetic affections, or those felt as a secondary effect after their first impression; for commonly direct and personal affections immediately call into life in us the instinct of our own happiness, they take up all our thoughts, and seize hold of us too powerfully to allow any room for the feeling of pleasure that accompanies them, when the affection

is freed from all personal relation. Thus, in the mind that is really a prey to painful passion, the feeling of pain commands all others notwithstanding all the charm that the painting of its moral state may offer to the hearers and the spectators. And yet the painful affection is not deprived of all pleasure, even for him who experiences it directly; only this pleasure differs in degree according to the nature of each person's mind. The sports of chance would not have half so much attraction for us were there not a kind of enjoyment in anxiety, in doubt, and in fear; danger would not be encountered from mere foolhardiness; and the very sympathy which interests us in the trouble of another would not be to us that pleasure which is never more lively than at the very moment when the illusion is strongest, and when we substitute ourselves most entirely in the place of the person who suffers. But this does not imply that disagreeable affections cause pleasure of themselves, nor do I think any one will uphold this view; it suffices that these states of the mind are the conditions that alone make possible for its certain kinds of pleasure. Thus the hearts particularly sensitive to this kind of pleasure, and most greedy of them, will be more easily led to share these disagreeable affections, which are the condition of the former; and even in the most violent storms of passion they will always preserve some remains of their freedom.

The displeasure we feel in disagreeable affections comes from the relation of our sensuous faculty or of our moral faculty with their object. In like manner, the pleasure we experience in agreeable affections proceeds from the very same source. The degree of liberty that may prevail in the affections depends on the proportion between the moral nature and the sensuous nature of a man. Now it is well known that in the moral order there is nothing arbitrary for us, that, on the contrary, the sensuous instinct is subject to the laws of reason and consequently depends more or less on our will. Hence it is evident that we can keep our liberty full and entire in all those affections that are concerned with the instinct of self-love, and that we are the masters to determine the degree which they ought to attain. This degree will be less in proportion as the moral sense in a man will prevail over the instinct of

happiness, and as by obeying the universal laws of reasons he will have freed himself from the selfish requirements of his individuality, his Ego. A man of this kind must therefore, in a state of passion, feel much less vividly the relation of an object with his own instinct of happiness, and consequently he will be much less sensible of the displeasure that arises from this relation. On the other hand, he will be perpetually more attentive to the relation of this same object with his moral nature, and for this very reason he will be more sensible to the pleasure which the relation of the object with morality often mingles with the most painful affections. A mind thus constituted is better fitted than all others to enjoy the pleasure attaching to compassion, and even to regard a personal affection as an object of simple compassion. Hence the inestimable value of a moral philosophy, which, by raising our eyes constantly towards general laws, weakens in us the feeling of our individuality, teaches us to plunge our paltry personality in something great, and enables us thus to act to ourselves as to strangers. This sublime state of the mind is the lot of strong philosophic minds, which by working assiduously on themselves have learned to bridle the egotistical instinct. Even the most cruel loss does not drive them beyond a certain degree of sadness, with which an appreciable sum of pleasure can always be reconciled. These souls, which are alone capable of separating themselves from themselves, alone enjoy the privilege of sympathizing with themselves and of receiving of their own sufferings only a reflex, softened by sympathy.

The indications contained in what precedes will suffice to direct our attention to the sources of the pleasure that the affection in itself causes, more particularly the sad affection. We have seen that this pleasure is more energetic in moral souls, and it acts with greater freedom in proportion as the soul is more independent of the egotistical instinct. This pleasure is, moreover, more vivid and stronger in sad affections, when self-love is painfully disquieted, than in gay affections, which imply a satisfaction of self-love. Accordingly this pleasure increases when the egotistical instinct is wounded, and diminishes when that instinct is flattered. Now we only know of

two sources of pleasure--the satisfaction of the instinct of happiness, and the accomplishment of the moral laws. Therefore, when it is shown that a particular pleasure does not emanate from the former source, it must of necessity issue from the second. It is therefore from our moral nature that issues the charm of the painful affections shared by sympathy, and the pleasure that we sometimes feel even where the painful affection directly affects ourselves.

Many attempts have been made to account for the pleasure of pity, but most of these solutions had little chance of meeting the problem, because the principle of this phenomenon was sought for rather in the accompanying circumstances than in the nature of the affection itself. To many persons the pleasure of pity is simply the pleasure taken by the mind in exercising its own sensibility. To others it is the pleasure of occupying their forces energetically, of exercising the social faculty vividly--in short, of satisfying the instinct of restlessness. Others again make it derived from the discovery of morally fine features of character, placed in a clear light by the struggle against adversity or against the passions. But there is still the difficulty to explain why it should be exactly the very feeling of pain,--suffering properly so called,--that in objects of pity attracts us with the greatest force, while, according to those elucidations, a less degree of suffering ought evidently to be more favorable to those causes to which the source of the emotion is traced. Various matters may, no doubt, increase the pleasure of the emotion without occasioning it. Of this nature are the vividness and force of the ideas awakened in our imagination, the moral excellence of the suffering persons, the reference to himself of the person feeling pity. I admit that the suffering of a weak soul, and the pain of a wicked character, do not procure us this enjoyment. But this is because they do not excite our pity to the same degree as the hero who suffers, or the virtuous man who struggles. Thus we are constantly brought back to the first question: why is it precisely the degree of suffering that determines the degree of sympathetic pleasure which we take in an emotion? and one answer only is possible; it is because the attack made on our sensibility is precisely the condition necessary to set in motion that

quality of mind of which the activity produces the pleasure we feel in sympathetic affections.

Now this faculty is no other than the reason; and because the free exercise of reason, as an absolutely independent activity, deserves par excellence the name of activity; as, moreover, the heart of man only feels itself perfectly free and independent in its moral acts, it follows that the charm of tragic emotions is really dependent on the fact that this instinct of activity finds its gratification in them. But, even admitting this, it is neither the great number nor the vivacity of the ideas that are awakened then in our imagination, nor in general the exercise of the social faculty, but a certain kind of ideas and a certain activity of the social faculty brought into play by reason, which is the foundation of this pleasure.

Thus the sympathetic affections in general are for us a source of pleasure because they give satisfaction to our instinct of activity, and the sad affections produce this effect with more vividness because they give more satisfaction to this instinct. The mind only reveals all its activity when it is in full possession of its liberty, when it has a perfect consciousness of its rational nature, because it is only then that it displays a force superior to all resistance.

Hence the state of mind which allows most effectually the manifestation of this force, and awakens most successfully its activity, is that state which is most suitable to a rational being, and which best satisfies our instincts of activity: whence it follows that a greater amount of pleasure must be attached necessarily to this state. Now it is the tragic states that place our soul in this state, and the pleasure found in them is necessarily higher than the charm produced by gay affections, in the same degree that moral power in us is superior to the power of the senses.

Points that are only subordinate and partial in a system of final causes may be considered by art independently of that relation with the rest, and may be converted into principal objects. It is right that in the designs of nature pleasure should only be a mediate end, or a means; but for art it is the highest end. It is therefore essentially important for art not to

neglect this high enjoyment attaching to the tragic emotion. Now, tragic art, taking this term in its widest acceptation, is that among the fine arts which proposes as its principal object the pleasure of pity.

Art attains its end by the imitation of nature, by satisfying the conditions which make pleasure possible in reality, and by combining, according to a plan traced by the intelligence, the scattered elements furnished by nature, so as to attain as a principal end to that which, for nature, was only an accessory end. Thus tragic art ought to imitate nature in those kinds of actions that are specially adapted to awaken pity.

It follows that, in order to determine generally the system to be followed by tragic art, it is necessary before all things to know on what conditions in real life the pleasure of the emotion is commonly produced in the surest and the strongest manner; but it is necessary at the same time to pay attention to the circumstances that restrict or absolutely extinguish this pleasure.

After what we have established in our essay "On the Cause of the Pleasure we derive from Tragic Objects," it is known that in every tragic emotion there is an idea of incongruity, which, though the emotion may be attended with charm, must always lead on to the conception of a higher consistency. Now it is the relation that these two opposite conceptions mutually bear which determines in an emotion if the prevailing impression shall be pleasurable or the reverse. If the conception of incongruity be more vivid than that of the contrary, or if the end sacrificed is more important than the end gained, the prevailing impression will always be displeasure, whether this be understood objectively of the human race in general, or only subjectively of certain individuals.

If the cause that has produced a misfortune gives us too much displeasure, our compassion for the victim is diminished thereby. The heart cannot feel simultaneously, in a high degree, two absolutely contrary affections. Indignation against the person who is the primary cause of the suffering becomes the prevailing affection, and all other feeling has to yield to it. Thus our interest is always enfeebled when the unhappy man whom it would be desirable

to pity had cast himself into ruin by a personal and an inexcusable fault; or if, being able to save himself, he did not do so, either through feebleness of mind or pusillanimity. The interest we take in unhappy King Lear, ill-treated by two ungrateful daughters, is sensibly lessened by the circumstance that this aged man, in his second childhood, so weakly gave up his crown, and divided his love among his daughters with so little discernment. In the tragedy of Kronegk, "Olinda and Sophronia," the most terrible suffering to which we see these martyrs to their faith exposed only excites our pity feebly, and all their heroism only stirs our admiration moderately, because madness alone can suggest the act by which Olinda has placed himself and all his people on the brink of the precipice.

Our pity is equally lessened when the primary cause of a misfortune, whose innocent victim ought to inspire us with compassion, fills our mind with horror. When the tragic poet cannot clear himself of his plot without introducing a wretch, and when he is reduced to derive the greatness of suffering from the greatness of wickedness, the supreme beauty of his work must always be seriously injured. Iago and Lady Macbeth in Shakspeare, Cleopatra in the tragedy of "Rodogune," or Franz Moor in "The Robbers," are so many proofs in support of this assertion. A poet who understands his real interest will not bring about the catastrophe through a malicious will which proposes misfortune as its end; nor, and still less, by want of understanding: but rather through the imperious force of circumstances. If this catastrophe does not come from moral sources, but from outward things, which have no volition and are not subject to any will, the pity we experience is more pure, or at all events it is not weakened by any idea of moral incongruity. But then the spectator cannot be spared the disagreeable feeling of an incongruity in the order of nature, which can alone save in such a case moral propriety. Pity is far more excited when it has for its object both him who suffers and him who is the primary cause of the suffering. This can only happen when the latter has neither elicited our contempt nor our hatred, but when he has been brought against his inclination to become the cause of this misfortune. It is a singular

beauty of the German play of "Iphigenia" that the King of Tauris, the only obstacle who thwarts the wishes of Orestes and of his sister, never loses our esteem, and that we love him to the end.

There is something superior even to this kind of emotion; this is the case when the cause of the misfortune not only is in no way repugnant to morality, but only becomes possible through morality, and when the reciprocal suffering comes simply from the idea that a fellow-creature has been made to suffer. This is the situation of Chimene and Rodrigue in "The Cid" of Pierre Corneille, which is undeniably in point of intrigue the masterpiece of the tragic stage. Honor and filial love arm the hand of Rodrigue against the father of her whom he loves, and his valor gives him the victory. Honor and filial love rouse up against him, in the person of Chimene, the daughter of his victim, an accuser and a formidable persecutor. Both act in opposition to their inclination, and they tremble with anguish at the thought of the misfortune of the object against which they arm themselves, in proportion as zeal inspires them for their duty to inflict this misfortune. Accordingly both conciliate our esteem in the highest sense, as they accomplish a moral duty at the cost of inclination; both inflame our pity in the highest degree, because they suffer spontaneously for a motive that renders them in the highest degree to be respected. It results from this that our pity is in this case so little modified by any opposite feeling that it burns rather with a double flame; only the impossibility of reconciling the idea of misfortune with the idea of a morality so deserving of happiness might still disturb our sympathetic pleasure, and spread a shade of sadness over it. It is besides a great point, no doubt, that the discontent given us by this contradiction does not bear upon our moral being, but is turned aside to a harmless place, to necessity only; but this blind subjection to destiny is always afflicting and humiliating for free beings, who determine themselves. This is the cause that always leaves something to be wished for even in the best Greek pieces. In all these pieces, at the bottom of the plot it is always fatality that is appealed to, and in this there is a knot that cannot be unravelled by our reason, which wishes to solve everything.

But even this knot is untied, and with it vanishes every shade of displeasure, at the highest and last step to which man perfected by morality rises, and at the highest point which is attained by the art which moves the feelings. This happens when the very discontent with destiny becomes effaced, and is resolved in a presentiment or rather a clear consciousness of a teleological concatenation of things, of a sublime order, of a beneficent will. Then, to the pleasure occasioned in us by moral consistency is joined the invigorating idea of the most perfect suitability in the great whole of nature. In this case the thing that seemed to militate against this order, and that caused us pain, in a particular case, is only a spur that stimulates our reason to seek in general laws for the justification of this particular case, and to solve the problem of this separate discord in the centre of the general harmony. Greek art never rose to this supreme serenity of tragic emotion, because neither the national religion, nor even the philosophy of the Greeks, lighted their step on this advanced road. It was reserved for modern art, which enjoys the privilege of finding a purer matter in a purer philosophy, to satisfy also this exalted want, and thus to display all the moral dignity of art.

If we moderns must resign ourselves never to reproduce Greek art because the philosophic genius of our age, and modern civilization in general are not favorable to poetry, these influences are at all events less hurtful to tragic art, which is based rather on the moral element. Perhaps it is in the case of this art only that our civilization repairs the injury that it has caused to art in general.

In the same manner as the tragic emotion is weakened by the admixture of conflicting ideas and feelings, and the charm attaching to it is thus diminished, so this emotion can also, on the contrary, by approaching the excess of direct and personal affection, become exaggerated to the point where pain carries the day over pleasure. It has been remarked that displeasure, in the affections, comes from the relation of their object with our senses, in the same way as the pleasure felt in them comes from the relation of the affection itself to our moral faculty. This implies, then, between our senses and our moral faculty a determined relation, which

decides as regards the relation between pleasure and displeasure in tragic emotions. Nor could this relation be modified or overthrown without overthrowing at the same time the feelings of pleasure and displeasure which we find in the emotions, or even without changing them into their opposites. In the same ratio that the senses are vividly roused in us, the influence of morality will be proportionately diminished; and reciprocally, as the sensuous loses, morality gains ground. Therefore that which in our hearts gives a preponderance to the sensuous faculty, must of necessity, by placing restrictions on the moral faculty, diminish the pleasure that we take in tragic emotions, a pleasure which emanates exclusively from this moral faculty. In like manner, all that in our heart impresses an impetus on this latter faculty, must blunt the stimulus of pain even in direct and personal affections. Now our sensuous nature actually acquires this preponderance, when the ideas of suffering rise to a degree of vividness that no longer allows us to distinguish a sympathetic affection from a personal affection, or our own proper Ego from the subject that suffers,—reality, in short, from poetry. The sensuous also gains the upper hand when it finds an aliment in the great number of its objects, and in that dazzling light which an over-excited imagination diffuses over it. On the contrary, nothing is more fit to reduce the sensuous to its proper bounds than to place alongside it super-sensuous ideas, moral ideas, to which reason, oppressed just before, clings as to a kind of spiritual props, to right and raise itself above the fogs of the sensuous to a serener atmosphere. Hence the great charm which general truths or moral sentences, scattered opportunely over dramatic dialogue, have for all cultivated nations, and the almost excessive use that the Greeks made of them. Nothing is more agreeable to a moral soul than to have the power, after a purely passive state that has lasted too long, of escaping from the subjection of the senses, and of being recalled to its spontaneous activity, and restored to the possession of its liberty.

These are the remarks I had to make respecting the causes that restrict our pity and place an obstacle to our pleasure in tragic emotions. I have next to show on what conditions pity is solicited and

the pleasure of the emotion excited in the most infallible and energetic manner.

Every feeling of pity implies the idea of suffering, and the degree of pity is regulated according to the degree more or less of vividness, of truth, of intensity, and of duration of this idea.

1st. The moral faculty is provoked to reaction in proportion to the vividness of ideas in the soul, which incites it to activity and solicits its sensuous faculty. Now the ideas of suffering are conceived in two different manners, which are not equally favorable to the vividness of the impression. The sufferings that we witness affect us incomparably more than those that we have through a description or a narrative. The former suspend in us the free play of the fancy, and striking our senses immediately penetrate by the shortest road to our heart. In the narrative, on the contrary, the particular is first raised to the general, and it is from this that the knowledge of the special case is afterwards derived; accordingly, merely by this necessary operation of the understanding, the impression already loses greatly in strength. Now a weak impression cannot take complete possession of our mind, and it will allow other ideas to disturb its action and to dissipate the attention. Very frequently, moreover, the narrative account transports us from the moral disposition, in which the acting person is placed, to the state of mind of the narrator himself, which breaks up the illusion so necessary for pity. In every case, when the narrator in person puts himself forward, a certain stoppage takes place in the action, and, as an unavoidable result, in our sympathetic affection. This is what happens even when the dramatic poet forgets himself in the dialogue, and puts in the mouth of his dramatic persons reflections that could only enter the mind of a disinterested spectator. It would be difficult to mention a single one of our modern tragedies quite free from this defect; but the French alone have made a rule of it. Let us infer, then, that the immediate vivid and sensuous presence of the object is necessary to give to the ideas impressed on us by suffering that strength without which the emotion could not rise to a high degree.

2d. But we can receive the most vivid impressions of the idea of suffering without, however, being led to a remarkable degree of pity, if these impressions lack truth. It is, necessary that we should form of suffering an idea of such a nature that we are obliged to share and take part in it. To this end there must be a certain agreement between this suffering and something that we have already in us. In other words, pity is only possible inasmuch as we can prove or suppose a resemblance between ourselves and the subject that suffers. Everywhere where this resemblance makes itself known, pity is necessary; where this resemblance is lacking, pity is impossible. The more visible and the greater is the resemblance, the more vivid is our pity; and they mutually slacken in dependence on each other. In order that we may feel the affections of another after him, all the internal conditions demanded by this affection must be found beforehand in us, in order that the external cause which, by meeting with the internal conditions, has given birth to the affection, may also produce on us a like effect. It is necessary that, without doing violence to ourselves, we should be able to exchange persons with another, and transport our Ego by an instantaneous substitution in the state of the subject. Now, how is it possible to feel in us the state of another, if we have not beforehand recognized ourselves in this other.

This resemblance bears on the totality of the constitution of the mind, in as far as that is necessary and universal. Now, this character of necessity and of universality belongs especially to our moral nature. The faculty of feeling can be determined differently by accidental causes: our cognitive faculties themselves depend on variable conditions: the moral faculty only has its principle in itself, and by that very fact it can best give us a general measure and a certain criterion of this resemblance. Thus an idea which we find in accord with our mode of thinking and of feeling, which offers at once a certain relationship with the train of our own ideas, which is easily grasped by our heart and our mind, we call a true idea. If this relationship bears on what is peculiar to our heart, on the private determinations that modify in us the common fundamentals of humanity, and which may be withdrawn without altering this

general character, this idea is then simply true for us. If it bears on the general and necessary form that we suppose in the whole species, the truth of this idea ought to be held to be equal to objective truth. For the Roman, the sentence of the first Brutus and the suicide of Cato are of subjective truth. The ideas and the feelings that have inspired the actions of these two men are not an immediate consequence of human nature in general, but the mediate consequence of a human nature determined by particular modifications. To share with them these feelings we must have a Roman soul, or at least be capable of assuming for a moment a Roman soul. It suffices, on the other hand, to be a man in general, to be vividly touched by the heroic sacrifice of Leonidas, by the quiet resignation of Aristides, by the voluntary death of Socrates, and to be moved to tears by the terrible changes in the fortunes of Darius. We attribute to these kinds of ideas, in opposition to the preceding ones, an objective truth because they agree with the nature of all human subjects, which gives them a character of universality and of necessity as strict as if they were independent of every subjective condition.

Moreover, although the subjectively true description is based on accidental determinations, this is no reason for confounding it with an arbitrary description. After all, the subjectively true emanates also from the general constitution of the human soul, modified only in particular directions by special circumstances; and the two kinds of truth are equally necessary conditions of the human mind. If the resolution of Cato were in contradiction with the general laws of human nature, it could not be true, even subjectively. The only difference is that the ideas of the second kind are enclosed in a narrower sphere of action; because they imply, besides the general modes of the human mind, other special determinations. Tragedy can make use of it with a very intense effect, if it will renounce the extensive effect; still the unconditionally true, what is purely human in human relations, will be always the richest matter for the tragic poet, because this ground is the only one on which tragedy, without ceasing to aspire to strength of expression can be certain of the generality of this impression.

3d. Besides the vividness and the truth of tragic pictures, there must also be completeness. None of the external data that are necessary to give to the soul the desired movement ought to be omitted in the representation. In order that the spectator, however Roman his sentiments may be, may understand the moral state of Cato--that he may make his own the high resolution of the republican, this resolution must have its principle, not only in the mind of the Roman, but also in the circumstances of the action. His external situation as well as his internal situation must be before our eyes in all their consequences and extent: and we must, lastly, have unrolled before us, without omitting a single link, the whole chain of determinations to which are attached the high resolution of the Roman as a necessary consequence. It may be said in general that without this third condition, even the truth of a painting cannot be recognized; for the similarity of circumstances, which ought to be fully evident, can alone justify our judgment on the similarity of the feelings, since it is only from the competition of external conditions and of internal conditions that the affective phenomenon results. To decide if we should have acted like Cato, we must before all things transport ourselves in thought to the external situation in which Cato was placed, and then only we are entitled to place our feelings alongside his, to pronounce if there is or is not likeness, and to give a verdict on the truth of these feelings.

A complete picture, as I understand it, is only possible by the concatenation of several separate ideas, and of several separate feelings, which are connected together as cause and effect, and which, in their sum total, form one single whole for our cognitive faculty. All these ideas, in order to affect us closely, must make an immediate impression on our senses; and, as the narrative form always weakens this impression, they must be produced by a present action. Thus, in order that a tragic picture may be complete, a whole series is required of particular actions, rendered sensuous and connected with the tragic action as to one whole.

4th. It is necessary, lastly, that the ideas we receive of suffering should act on us in a durable manner, to excite in us a high degree of emotion. The

affection created in us by the suffering of another is to us a constrained state, from which we hasten to get free; and the illusion so necessary for pity easily disappears in this case. It is, therefore, a necessity to fasten the mind closely to these ideas, and not to leave it the freedom to get rid too soon of the illusion. The vividness of sudden ideas and the energy of sudden impressions, which in rapid succession affect our senses, would not suffice for this end. For the power of reaction in the mind is manifested in direct proportion to the force with which the receptive faculty is solicited, and it is manifested to triumph over this impression. Now, the poet who wishes to move us ought not to weaken this independent power in us, for it is exactly in the struggle between it and the suffering of our sensuous nature that the higher charm of tragic emotions lies. In order that the heart, in spite of that spontaneous force which reacts against sensuous affections, may remain attached to the impressions of sufferings, it is, therefore, necessary that these impressions should be cleverly suspended at intervals, or even interrupted and intercepted by contrary impressions, to return again with twofold energy and renew more frequently the vividness of the first impression. Against the exhaustion and languor that result from habit, the most effectual remedy is to propose new objects to the senses; this variety retempers them, and the gradation of impressions calls forth the innate faculty, and makes it employ a proportionately stronger resistance. This faculty ought to be incessantly occupied in maintaining its independence against the attacks of the senses, but it must not triumph before the end, still less must it succumb in the struggle. Otherwise, in the former case, suffering, and, in the latter, moral activity is set aside; while it is the union of these two that can alone elicit emotion. The great secret of the tragic art consists precisely in managing this struggle well; it is in this that it shows itself in the most brilliant light.

For this, a succession of alternate ideas is required: therefore a suitable combination is wanted of several particular actions corresponding with these different ideas; actions round which the principal action and the tragic impression which it is wished to produce through it unroll themselves like the yarn

from the distaff, and end by enlacing our souls in nets, through which they cannot break. Let me be permitted to make use of a simile, by saying that the artist ought to begin by gathering up with parsimonious care all the separate rays that issue from the object by aid of which he seeks to produce the tragic effect that he has in view, and these rays, in his hands, become a lightning flash, setting the hearts of all on fire. The tyro casts suddenly and vainly all the thunderbolts of horror and fear into the soul; the artist, on the contrary, advances step by step to his end; he only strikes with measured strokes, but he penetrates to the depth of our soul, precisely because he has only stirred it by degrees.

If we now form the proper deductions from the previous investigation, the following will be the conditions that form bases of the tragic art. It is necessary, in the first place, that the object of our pity should belong to our own species--I mean belong in the full sense of the term and that the action in which it is sought to interest us be a moral action; that is, an action comprehended in the field of free-will. It is necessary, in the second place, that suffering, its sources, its degrees, should be completely communicated by a series of events chained together. It is necessary, in the third place, that the object of the passion be rendered present to our senses, not in a mediate way and by description, but immediately and in action. In tragedy art unites all these conditions and satisfies them.

According to these principles tragedy might be defined as the poetic imitation of a coherent series of particular events (forming a complete action): an imitation which shows us man in a state of suffering, and which has for its end to excite our pity.

I say first that it is the imitation of an action; and this idea of imitation already distinguishes tragedy from the other kinds of poetry, which only narrate or describe. In tragedy particular events are presented to our imagination or to our senses at the very time of their accomplishment; they are present, we see them immediately, without the intervention of a third person. The epos, the romance, simple narrative, even in their form, withdraw action to a distance, causing the narrator to come between the

acting person and the reader. Now what is distant and past always weakens, as we know, the impressions and the sympathetic affection; what is present makes them stronger. All narrative forms make of the present something past; all dramatic form makes of the past a present.

Secondly, I say that tragedy is the imitation of a succession of events, of an action. Tragedy has not only to represent by imitation the feelings and the affections of tragic persons, but also the events that have produced these feelings, and the occasion on which these affections are manifested. This distinguishes it from lyric poetry, and from its different forms, which no doubt offer, like tragedy, the poetic imitation of certain states of the mind, but not the poetic imitation of certain actions. An elegy, a song, an ode, can place before our eyes, by imitation, the moral state in which the poet actually is--whether he speaks in his own name, or in that of an ideal person--a state determined by particular circumstances; and up to this point these lyric forms seem certainly to be incorporated in the idea of tragedy; but they do not complete that idea, because they are confined to representing our feelings. There are still more essential differences, if the end of these lyrical forms and that of tragedy are kept in view.

I say, in the third place, that tragedy is the imitation of a complete action. A separate event, though it be ever so tragic, does not in itself constitute a tragedy. To do this, several events are required, based one on the other, like cause and effect, and suitably connected so as to form a whole; without which the truth of the feeling represented, of the character, etc.--that is, their conformity with the nature of our mind, a conformity which alone determines our sympathy--will not be recognized. If we do not feel that we ourselves in similar circumstances should have experienced the same feelings and acted in the same way, our pity would not be awakened. It is, therefore, important that we should be able to follow in all its concatenation the action that is represented to us, that we should see it issue from the mind of the agent by a natural gradation, under the influence and with the concurrence of external circumstances. It is thus that we see spring up, grow, and come to maturity under

our eyes, the curiosity of Oedipus and the jealousy of Iago. It is also the only way to fill up the great gap that exists between the joy of an innocent soul and the torments of a guilty conscience, between the proud serenity of the happy man and his terrible catastrophe; in short, between the state of calm, in which the reader is at the beginning, and the violent agitation he ought to experience at the end.

A series of several connected incidents is required to produce in our souls a succession of different movements which arrest the attention, which, appealing to all the faculties of our minds, enliven our instinct of activity when it is exhausted, and which, by delaying the satisfaction of this instinct, do not kindle it the less. Against the suffering of sensuous nature the human heart has only recourse to its moral nature as counterpoise. It is, therefore, necessary, in order to stimulate this in a more pressing manner, for the tragic poet to prolong the torments of sense, but he must also give a glimpse to the latter of the satisfaction of its wants, so as to render the victory of the moral sense so much the more difficult and glorious. This twofold end can only be attained by a succession of actions judiciously chosen and combined to this end.

In the fourth place, I say that tragedy is the poetic imitation of an action deserving of pity, and, therefore, tragic imitation is opposed to historic imitation. It would only be a historic imitation if it proposed a historic end, if its principal object were to teach us that a thing has taken place, and how it took place. On this hypothesis it ought to keep rigorously to historic accuracy, for it would only attain its end by representing faithfully that which really took place. But tragedy has a poetic end, that is to say, it represents an action to move us, and to charm our souls by the medium of this emotion. If, therefore, a matter being given, tragedy treats it conformably with this poetic end, which is proper to it, it becomes, by that very thing, free in its imitation. It is a right--nay, more, it is an obligation--for tragedy to subject historic truth to the laws of poetry; and to treat its matter in conformity with requirements of this art. But as it cannot attain its end, which is emotion, except on the condition of a perfect conformity with the laws of nature, tragedy is, notwithstanding its

freedom in regard to history, strictly subject to the laws of natural truth, which, in opposition to the truth of history, takes the name of poetic truth. It may thus be understood how much poetic truth may lose, in many cases by a strict observance of historic truth, and, reciprocally, how much it may gain by even a very serious alteration of truth according to history. As the tragic poet, like poets in general, is only subject to the laws of poetic truth, the most conscientious observance of historic truth could never dispense him from his duties as poet, and could never excuse in him any infraction of poetic truth or lack of interest. It is, therefore, betraying very narrow ideas on tragic art, or rather on poetry in general, to drag the tragic poet before the tribunal of history, and to require instruction of the man who by his very title is only bound to move and charm you. Even supposing the poet, by a scrupulous submission to historic truth, had stripped himself of his privilege of artist, and that he had tacitly acknowledged in history a jurisdiction over his work, art retains all her rights to summon him before its bar; and pieces such as "The Death of Hermann," "Minona," "Fust of Stromberg," if they could not stand the test on this side, would only be tragedies of mediocre value, notwithstanding all the minuteness of costume--of national costume--and of the manners of the time.

Fifthly, tragedy is the imitation of an action that lets us see man suffering. The word man is essential to mark the limits of tragedy. Only the suffering of a being like ourselves can move our pity. Thus, evil genii, demons--or even men like them, without morals--and again pure spirits, without our weaknesses, are unfit for tragedy. The very idea of suffering implies a man in the full sense of the term. A pure spirit cannot suffer, and a man approaching one will never awaken a high degree of sympathy. A purely sensuous being can indeed have terrible suffering; but without moral sense it is a prey to it, and a suffering with reason inactive is a disgusting spectacle. The tragedian is right to prefer mixed characters, and to place the ideal of his hero half way between utter perversity and entire perfection.

Lastly, tragedy unites all these requisites to excite pity. Many means the tragic poet takes might serve another object; but he frees himself from all

requirements not relating to this end, and is thereby obliged to direct himself with a view to this supreme object.

The final aim to which all the laws tend is called the end of any style of poetry. The means by which it attains this are its form. The end and form are, therefore, closely related. The form is determined by the end, and when the form is well observed the end is generally attained. Each kind of poetry having a special end must have a distinguishing form. What it exclusively produces it does in virtue of this special nature it possesses. The end of tragedy is emotion; its form is the imitation of an action that leads to suffering. Many kinds may have the same object as tragedy, of emotion, though it be not their principal end. Therefore, what distinguishes tragedy is the relation of its form to its end, the way in which it attains its end by means of its subject.

If the end of tragedy is to awaken sympathy, and its form is the means of attaining it, the imitation of an action fit to move must have all that favors sympathy. Such is the form of tragedy.

The production of a kind of poetry is perfect when the form peculiar to its kind has been used in the best way. Thus, a perfect tragedy is that where the form is best used to awaken sympathy. Thus, the best tragedy is that where the pity excited results more from the treatment of the poet than the theme. Such is the ideal of a tragedy.

A good number of tragedies, though fine as poems are bad as dramas, because they do not seek their end by the best use of tragic form. Others, because they use the form to attain an end different from tragedy. Some very popular ones only touch us on account of the subject, and we are blind enough to make this a merit in the poet. There are others in which we seem to have quite forgotten the object of the poet, and, contented with pretty plays of fancy and wit, we issue with our hearts cold from the theatre. Must art, so holy and venerable, defend its cause by such champions before such judges? The indulgence of the public only emboldens mediocrity: it causes genius to blush, and discourages it.