

Introduction to Nathan A. Scott, “The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith”

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My prompt is to address how Nathan Scott’s “The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith” read in 1963 and in turn how it reads now, some fifty-five years later. Such a comparison pivots on the question of what has changed and what remains the same about our sense of interdisciplinary work in theology. Scott himself was the chief—certainly the most prolific and outspoken—progenitor of the discipline of theology and literature, which he and his colleagues formulated at The University of Chicago Divinity School in the 1950s. It was one of the Divinity School’s “dialogical fields”; the others were religion and personality and ethics and society. Shaped toward consonance with the correlative theological project of Paul Tillich, Scott’s “theology and literature” sought to think theologically with and through cultural forms. Scott, in my view (and as this essay demonstrates), advanced well beyond Tillich’s postulate that culture provided the form and theology the content. This was for Scott precisely the site at which one could locate a culture’s formation of what Tillich termed “ultimate concern,” but unlike Tillich Scott explored the inherent reciprocity of form and content. The informing concern of Scott’s essay (in its complementary literary formulation) is precisely how to move beyond Aristotelian formalism; he regarded formalism as the regnant literary critical mode of his day, and as especially inept for the explication of tragedy’s existential demand that of necessity overcomes—even explodes—form. Scott’s essay is a masterful exposé of the limits of this limit of literary formalism (a hallmark not only of the Aristotelians but

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of the New Criticism). But his critique does not end there: if the truly engaged literary critic cannot avoid theology, theologians can truly fail to engage tragedy by subsuming it within Christian eschatology. In 1963, this was in Scott's hands a truly dialogical field: it fostered criticism across the *and* linking *theology* and *literature*.

This critical equipoise can be easily missed today; Scott's tone seems almost alarmingly confident about the world and theology's relevance to it. For all his emphasis on the humbled position of the followers of Jesus, Scott proclaims his message from decidedly Parnassian heights. Christian thought is, for better and for worse, a comparatively humbler enterprise in 2018. Scott displayed scant appreciation in his late work for what Harold Bloom termed "the School of Resentment," and there is little anticipation of its chastening force in the essay.

What remains striking about the essay, despite this dissonance, is its remarkably explicit anticipation of recent developments in tragedy (ones that, at least to date, have themselves neglected to recognize Scott's foreshadowing of their efforts). I am thinking specifically of the foundational premise of George Steiner's *Real Presences*, namely, that humans occupy the temporality of Holy Saturday and create art that gestures either back toward Good Friday or forward toward Easter Sunday.¹ It would be fascinating to see Scott reckon with Steiner's formulation (and Steiner's concomitant valorization, so similar to Scott's essay, of the Eucharist). I am also thinking of David Tracy's important intervention on tragedy, in which Friedrich Nietzsche and Simone Weil necessarily displace Aristotle, because what is truly tragic is so decidedly beyond the mundane that no form can encompass it.² And I am thinking of Rowan Williams's *The Tragic Imagination: The Literary Agenda*.³ Scott would surely discover validation for his mid-twentieth-century project in the fact that one of the twenty-first century's most distinguished theologians lavishes so much of his attention on the theological significance of such unusual suspects as Flannery O'Connor and Fyodor Dostoevsky. One wonders whether Scott might also have discerned in Williams a similar concern to what the

¹ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

² David Tracy, "Horrors and Horror: The Response of Tragedy," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (Winter, 2014): 739–767.

³ Rowan Williams, *The Tragic Imagination: The Literary Agenda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

essay discusses with respect to Karl Jaspers: a tendency to assimilate too readily the tragic to the Christian. Williams might rightly respond that in doing so, he is doing very much for our world in 2018 what Scott was doing for his in 1963. Whatever their difference, the roads of theology and literature, while they may be two in number, do not in fact diverge; indeed their convergence makes all the difference.

The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith

NATHAN A. SCOTT, JR.*

In the last decade or so there is perhaps no single issue that has more deeply engaged students of Western literary tradition than the problem of tragedy. Year after year the literature in this field continues to grow, and, since the early fifties, there has been an unremitting flow from publishing houses of books bearing such titles as *The Spirit of Tragedy* (by Herbert Müller), *The Tragic Vision* (by Murray Krieger), *Tragedy: A View of Life* (by Henry Alonzo Myers), *The Vision of Tragedy* (by Richard Sewall), *The Harvest of Tragedy* (by T. R. Henn), *The Death of Tragedy* (by George Steiner), and *The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith* (ed. by Nathan A. Scott, Jr.). In part this is doubtless a development that results from a reaction among younger literary scholars and critics against what is felt to be the excessive formalism that has characterized the central tradition in the literary criticism of our period. For, after a long period of having been taught that a work of literary art is or should be an absolutely self-contained and discrete set of mutually interrelated references, a newly emerging generation in criticism begins now to ask whether the mode of existence of imaginative literature is really characterized by such isolation from the other departments of experience. The direction which is now being aimed at was nicely suggested a few years ago by Leslie Fiedler in one of his spirited essays, when he said:

The 'pure' literary critic, who pretends, in the cant phrase, to stay 'inside' a work all of whose metaphors and meanings

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are pressing outward, is only half-aware. And half-aware, he deceives; for he cannot help smuggling unexamined moral and metaphysical judgments into his 'close analyses,' any more than the 'pure' literary historian can help bootlegging unconfessed aesthetic estimates into his chronicles. Literary criticism is always becoming 'something else,' for the simple reason that literature is always 'something else.'¹

"Literary criticism is always becoming 'something else,' for the simple reason that literature is always 'something else.'" Here Mr. Fiedler means to say that the work of art is involved in the total human experience, the experience from which it issues and the experience upon which it is, in some way or other, a comment. And all the more interesting fresh tacks that criticism has taken in recent years have represented various attempts to pay a kind of partial tribute to this fact and, more and more, to push literary analysis in the direction of a new philosophical (and perhaps even theological) criticism. What is being increasingly recognized is that, though the literary work is a special sort of linguistic structure, that which holds the highest interest for us is the special seizure of reality which this structure is instrumental toward. The nature of literature itself, in other words, is felt to require the critic finally to move beyond the level of purely verbal and stylistic analysis to the level of metaphysical and theological valuation. Thus it is that such an issue as the nature of tragedy has come to be a central preoccupation among students of literature in our time.

Yet this is a preoccupation that is not to be accounted for solely in terms of the inner dynamics of recent *literary* history. For ours is "a century of homelessness and exile, of nervous disorder and persecution, of actual enslavement and barbaric cruelty."² And since it is the peculiar office of the tragedian to be attentive to the inner and outer insecurities of man's lot and to the background of danger against which the human drama must be enacted, it is not surprising that our generation should have turned to him for assistance in discerning the signs of the time. The bite of events, in other words, and the disorders in the days of our years have been the most fundamental cause of the great reawakening of interest in the problem of tragedy over

¹ Leslie Fiedler, "Toward an Amateur Criticism," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. XII, (1950), p. 564. Quoted with the permission of the publishers.

² Ralph Harper, *The Sleeping Beauty*, p. 15.

the past twenty years. Man has become a question to himself, and, in this icy aeon of perplexity, he feels the definitive category of his self-interpretation to be the tragic.

So the great literature of tragedy, from Sophocles to Shakespeare and from Melville to Faulkner, has today an unrivalled prestige, and a major critical effort on the contemporary intellectual scene is one which involves an attempt to redefine the special kind of insight into human experience that is made available by the tragedian.

This is, of course, a territory whose first occupant was Aristotle, for it is from him that the first great interpretation of tragedy in Western tradition descends. So it is not surprising that, even now, virtually every theorist in this area initiates his own enterprise, almost in the manner of an automatic reflex, by first tacking on footnotes and marginal glosses of various sorts to the *Poetics*. There are perhaps no pieties that exert a stronger claim than the pieties of academic scholarship: the dusty classics of the schoolroom are not easily put aside, and they continue to have an intimidating influence long after they have ceased to have anything more than a limited usefulness. And, in the field of literary theory, there is perhaps no better example of this than Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is unquestionably a treatise of very high importance, and this, to be sure, is the first word that it deserves to have said. In the consistency with which it follows inductive procedures, in the rigorous empiricism with which it analyzes its concrete specimens into their component parts, and, in the lucidity of its conclusions, it is one of the great models in the theory of literature. But, in its concentration on such matters as imitation (*mimesis*) and discovery (*anagnorisis*) and reversal (*peripeteia*) and purgation (*katharsis*), the *Poetics* is so heavily committed to formalistic definition as to neglect very nearly altogether the question as to what it is that converts these categories into the stuff of tragedy; and it leaves quite untouched all the complex issues that we want to raise today concerning the attitudes and perspectives and ideas that make up what Unamuno called "the tragic sense of life."

So, though we shall not want to discard this ancient Greek text, it is well to recognize that it may not be the best starting-point for contemporary inquiry. First of all, it is important for us to reach some clarity about the general atmosphere and the basic issues that constitute the tragic experience; and, in this the Stagirite is not very helpful.

Now when one attempts to define the central story, the essential myth or fable, that underlies those great actions—the *Oedipus*,

Lear, *Moby Dick*—that most fully exemplify the tragic *genre*, one must say first of all that it is a story of collapse and of disintegration. In the tragic universe life is experienced as having broken down: that congruence between the highest aspirations of the human spirit and its world-environment apart from which existence seems utterly futile is no longer discernible, and the protagonist finds himself adrift in a rudderless bark whose passage is through deeps uncharted and unconsoling.

Roger Hazelton has inveighed against what he calls “the toothache view of tragedy,”³ and this is a very proper demurrer. For, in the daily usages of common parlance, we are all incorrigibly habituated to the designation as tragic of events and experiences that put us in mind of what Virgil called “the tears in things.” We go through the evening newspaper and learn of a little girl mercilessly brutalized and murdered by some human beast of prey, or of a brilliant young artist whose life has been suddenly snuffed out in an airplane crash, or of a dozen other sad and pitiful occurrences that have happened in the course of the day—and we say, “How tragic!” But thus to nominate the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to is so to rob the tragic vision of “its own specific gravity and point”⁴ as to make all genuine discriminations in this area impossible. What is constantly to be kept in mind is that the primary literature of this subject is marked by certain consistencies which indicate a measure of preciseness that belongs to the concept of tragedy; and, unless this preciseness is properly honored, we shall end by viewing tragedy as a seamless garment and as something coextensive with existence as such, the term thus ceasing to have any specific reference at all.

So, keeping this cautionary word in mind, along with the great primary texts of tragic literature itself, when we undertake to define what it is that characterizes the tragic experience, the first thing to be put aside is “the toothache view” of the matter. For, with the tragic worlds of Sophocles and Shakespeare and Melville in view, it is apparent that it is not merely the sad and the pitiful shocks and ailments of life that establish a particular situation as tragic. On the contrary, the first and the basic fact in the worlds of Job and Oedipus and Hamlet and Ahab is that “the time is out of joint.” And what the tragic

³ Roger Hazelton, *God's Way with Man*, p. 138.

⁴ *Ibid.*

protagonist is overborne by a sense of shipwreck,⁵ a sense of a radical fissure or rift in the realm of ultimate reality.

This breakdown or wreckage of life registers with the tragic man as a sense of discrepancy between the facts of his situation and what would appear to be the requirements of justice and right reason. Indeed, the tragic man is very close to him whom Albert Camus described as "the metaphysical rebel." The metaphysical rebel, said Camus,

. . . attacks a shattered world in order to demand unity from it. He opposes the principle of justice which he finds in himself to the principle of injustice which he sees being applied in the world. . . . Metaphysical rebellion is a . . . protest against the human condition both for its incompleteness, thanks to death, and its wastefulness, thanks to evil. . . . [The] rebel refuses to recognize the power that compels him to live in this condition. The metaphysical rebel is therefore not definitely an atheist, as one might think him, but he is inevitably a blasphemer. Quite simply, he blasphemes primarily in the name of order, denouncing God as the father of death and as the supreme outrage.⁶

And though, unlike this modern adventurer of Camus, the tragic man may not give himself to acts of sabotage against the world that threatens him, he is one in whom the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune are not merely suffered but become the occasion of a darkly sceptical brooding on the reliability of that fundamental order of things which constitutes the theatre of the human enterprise.

Indeed, at the heart of the tragic experience there is a certain sense of nausea and vertigo that is induced by the apparently complete collapse of the world's order. "Tragedy occurs," says Dr. Jaspers, "wherever the powers that collide are true independently of each other. That reality is split, that truth is divided, is a basic insight of tragic knowledge."⁷ Which is to say that the universe of tragedy is a

⁵ Vide Karl Jaspers, *Tragedy Is Not Enough*, tr. H. A. T. Reiche, H. T. Moore, and K. W. Deutsch, p. 80.

⁶ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, tr. Anthony Bower (Alfred A. Knopf), pp. 23f.

⁷ Karl Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

universe direly strained by oppositions between irreconcilable forces, and forces whose impact is felt not externally but as a part of the interiority of the human situation itself. Aeschylus's Orestes, for example, is enjoined by Apollo to avenge himself against his mother Clytemnestra for her murder of his father Agamemnon. But, though this would be for him to honor the bond between himself and his dead father, it would, at the same time, be for him to violate the other loyalty which is equally as sacred—namely, that which is owed by a son to his mother. And it is out of this irresolvable antinomy that Aeschylus weaves the various complex and bitter strands of his great play.

Or, again, Sophocles' Antigone is beset by a similarly baffling quandary. Her brother, in leading a foreign army against their uncle Creon, who is the ruler of their city, has become guilty of treason. And thus, given the traditions of the time, it is not unreasonable that, following his death in the ensuing battle, Creon should ordain that his corpse be left to rot unburied outside the city walls. Yet, for Antigone to obey this edict and to acquiesce in the denial to her dead brother of the proper burial rites would be for her to commit an act of sacrilege against the gods of the dead. So she defies her uncle, and, as a consequence, is sentenced to the promised penalty of death. But, though Antigone is thus punished for her refusal to accede to the valid claims of the state upon her, Creon does not himself go unscathed for his abrogation of the sanctity of the family. For his son Haemon, who was affianced to Antigone, maddened by grief after her death, dies a suicide—his death being followed by that of his mother whose grief over the loss of her son leads her in turn to commit suicide also: thus it is that Creon's offense against the pieties of family life leads to the destruction of his own family. And thus it is also that the action of the Antigone culminates in complete and utter waste. But, as A. C. Bradley remarked, "in this catastrophe neither the right of the family nor that of the state is denied; what is denied is the absoluteness of the claim of each."⁸

The world of tragic experience, in other words, is a world presided over by clashing antinomies, by tensions and antagonisms that are ontological as well as moral: its people live under the dominance of potencies which are veiled and therefore vaguely menacing. It is a world of mystery and insecurity, of anxiety and dread, for the executive

⁸ A. C. Bradley, "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," The Appendix in *Hegel on Tragedy*, ed. by Anne and Henry Paolucci (Anchor Books), p. 371.

powers to which man owes his loyalty are powers that are themselves involved in opposition to one another. So the human protagonist finds himself to be fundamentally uncertain as to the relation in which he stands to the transcendently real: the spheres of man's self-experience and of ultimate reality are sundered, and the commerce between them moves obscurely and unpredictably, in a way that eludes any conceptual chart.

Now, these characteristic dissonances of tragic experience, and the sensations of nausea and vertigo to which they give rise, the sense of the time being out of joint—these are not alone sufficient to establish the full tragic situation. They figure indispensably, of course, in the general atmosphere which the tragedian inhabits, but what is essential is that these incongruities should so shock a protagonist out of his normal and hitherto unquestioned prepossessions as to drive him towards some radical effort at their alleviation, or at least towards some defiant assertion (as Camus put it) of that "principle of justice which he finds in himself." And here we are put in mind of that *hybris* which has traditionally been held to be the dynamic, existential source of the tragic action. This is a term which it is customary to translate into English as "pride"—which is doubtless a rendering that does a rough kind of justice to that insolent self-assertiveness which the Greeks supposed it to be the divine office of Nemesis to punish.

But "pride" is a term which carries as perhaps its major connotation the notion of egotism, and it is this which disqualifies it finally as an adequate substitute for the Greek *hybris*. For it is not egotism which is the mainspring of the tragic action. The tragic hero does, to be sure, stand in a peculiar relation to himself. But what is at issue here is not overweening vanity or superciliousness but, rather, the fact, as Kierkegaard would say, of his having "chosen himself": that is to say, he is a man who has taken upon himself the full burden of his own destiny; and he wants to speak out in his own behalf against whatever it is that threatens to humiliate or to baffle or to unhinge his humanity, in some intolerable way. Indeed, we ought perhaps by *hybris*, or by any other term which we adopt in its place, to mean that extreme passion with which the tragic man hurls himself against the boundaries of his existence in an effort to summon out of the innermost depths of reality some promise of the possibility of his being finally accommodated.

But, though this "heroic" position of the tragic man is wrongly understood if its mainspring is regarded as being simply "egotism," it

remains to be said, on the other hand, that it is by no means a position which is morally neutral. For the “pathetic” element in the “tragic” situation arises out of the fact that the protagonist’s self-affirmation tends generally to involve his championship of some particular value which, however valid it may be in itself, yet remains only a partial and limited good; and thus the ardor of his commitment to what is after all only a limited and determinate good, in rendering him insufficiently responsive to other aspects of his total situation, has the effect of throwing his life out of gear with certain facets of reality which also have a valid claim upon him. So the choice of self becomes the occasion of guilt and of the protagonist’s subjection to that retributive justice which the Greeks called Nemesis.

The whole slant and bias of the authentically tragic drama, in other words, is humanistic.⁹ In both ancient tragedy (e.g., the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus) and modern tragedy (T. S. Eliot’s *The Family Reunion*) divine personages are sometimes present, but the central emphasis always falls on the human protagonist who is exhibited as one interrogating the executive powers, protesting against the obscurity of their ordinances and demanding that what is ambiguous in reality consents to clarify itself. “The tragic *agon*, unlike the ritual contest between divine powers, introduces a strictly human plane of reality and involves phases of reflection and decision that spring from man’s individual autonomy.”¹⁰

Yet what is bitter and ironic is that it is precisely in thus choosing himself and assuming the burden of his own destiny that the tragic man becomes a guilty man. For his commitment to the truth as he sees it is, inevitably, a commitment to a truth that is something less than the Whole Truth: he is finite, his perspectives are limited, his standpoint can never in the nature of the case afford a sufficiently spacious view of his total situation: *finitum non capax infiniti*—which is to say that, in the quest for meaning, man is at a fundamental disadvantage, simply by reason of being human.

This is the real crux of the tragic fatality. For what is defective and enervating in the tragic hero’s situation is not such an egotistical propensity as is suggested when, after identifying his central flaw or *hamartia* as *hybris*, we then proceed to translate *hybris* as “pride.” No,

⁹ Vide Herbert J. Muller, *The Spirit of Tragedy*, p. 18.

¹⁰ Susan Taubes, “The Nature of Tragedy,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. VII, (1953), p. 198.

what is most fundamentally disabling in the situation of the tragic man is not a merely remediable defect of character, but, rather, it is simply his finitude itself—and this is without remedy. Once he “chooses” himself, he must then, in the course of the adventures life brings his way, make all sorts of further ambiguous choices, by way of defending against the taciturn indifference of the world what he recognizes in himself to be the distinctively human thing; and these are choices that involve his giving his suffrage to certain particular values—whether it be the cause of human enlightenment (Prometheus) or the redress of regicide (Oedipus) or the sanctity of the family (Antigone) or the penetration and mastery of “that intangible malignity which has been from the beginning” (Ahab).

But no sooner does the tragic man affirm some particular value than he is caught in the ultimate axiological morass that awaits all men; for whatever the commitment may be that he has undertaken it proves to be one that renders him inattentive to other values that have an equally strong claim upon him. And thus it seems that to affirm value must at the same time be to negate value. But since there would be no guilt—and hence no suffering—had not the protagonist committed himself to some partial and limited good, and since this is a commitment that he would not have undertaken had he not been attempting through it to affirm his humanity, it must be concluded that the fundamental cause of his guilt is that act of transcendence whereby he “chose” himself.

The ultimate offense, in other words, of the tragic man is his very existence as a limited and conditioned creature. His *hybris* is not so much his “pride” as his presumptuousness in daring to speak out at all in his own behalf. His suffering is the inevitable concomitant of his equally inevitable wrongdoing¹¹—which is inevitable because simply for him to be is for him to be guilty of trespass against the executive powers. And the classic case is still that of Sophocles’ Oedipus, who entangles himself ever more deeply in disaster with each step that he takes to resolve the difficulties that he and his fellow Thebans face: the more resolutely he searches out the murderer of Laius the more surely he brings about his own undoing: every effort he makes to establish his own true being and that of his City is frustrated, and, at every stage of the action, he is the instrument whereby his own fate is worsened.

¹¹ Vide R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus*, p. 60.

Not only does he take the leading role in the search for Laius' murderer, but it is he who pronounces the curse on the murderer—so that, most ironically, he does himself initiate the whole chain of events which culminates in the final revelation that he is the murderer of the King. He pronounces the curse, of course, in his own capacity as King: this is a gesture whereby he seeks to express his sense of being responsible for the welfare of his City. And it is just this assumption of responsibility—the pronouncing of the curse—which sets going the sequence of events that culminates in his own downfall. For when, in assuming responsibility, the human protagonist thus gives expression to the creative capacities that make him human, he becomes guilty of that which in the universe of tragedy is the primal offense, of “choosing” to be a man: his irredeemable crime, in other words, is his very existence and his great woe is simply that of being alive.

Our circle has not as yet, however, been fully drawn, for the tragic action has a certain shape that has thus far been only partially indicated. And nowhere is the essential pattern defined with greater economy and precision than in Francis Fergusson's brilliant book *The Idea of a Theater*, in which he makes an adaptation of a schema first proposed by Kenneth Burke when, in *A Grammar of Motives*, he designated the central moments in “the dialectic of tragedy” as “*poiema*, *pathema*, [and] *mathema* (the act, the sufferance or state, the thing learned)”: these, says Mr. Burke, “are at the very center of [tragedy's] dialectical motivation.”¹² Now Mr. Fergusson very suggestively translates these traditional designations as *Purpose*, *Passion* or *Suffering*, and *Perception*. They are, he says, in their consecutive order, the beginning, the middle, and the end of the tragic action.

In the *Oedipus*, for example, the first major moment of the drama is initiated by the protagonist's “reasoned purpose of finding Laius' slayer. But his aim meets unforeseen difficulties, evidences which do not fit, and therefore shake the purpose as it was first understood; and so the characters suffer the piteous and terrible sense of the mystery of the human situation. From this suffering or passion, with its shifting visions, a new perception of the situation emerges. . . .”¹³ And it is, says Mr. Fergusson, in the kind of movement presented by Sophocles' play that we have an archetypal instance of the “tragic rhythm of

¹² Vide Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, pp. 38–41.

¹³ Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, p. 18.

action”¹⁴—which is a rhythm that moves from Purpose to Passion to Perception.

Now, in describing the tragic man as one who wants to speak out in his own behalf, who “chooses” himself and who assumes the burden of his own destiny, I have already treated that dimension of things which Mr. Fergusson designates as Purpose. And the tragic *agonia* (or Passion) has, of course, also been remarked. But now, in addition, what needs at this point to be emphasized is that the dialectic of tragedy is a rhythm which drives finally towards Perception. Always the movement of the action is one that brings man through the worst that, under the circumstances, can be imagined; and at last, on some chill boundary of the world, where all certainties have collapsed and all hope has disappeared, the tragic man *perceives* that the universe into which he has been thrown is divided against itself and askew. On some lonely crag or cliff of the mind he *sees* at last that human life is irremediably fated to shipwreck and defeat in a world where implicit in all human accomplishment is an “inescapable nexus of guilt and doom.”¹⁵

His last state, in other words, is one of sober incredulity and utter disenchantment; and though in this state Karl Jaspers describes a certain “deliverance,” it turns out that by this he means little more than that the tragic man stands fast in the end and, in refusing to flinch before what he sees, wins through to such a victory as is represented by the head that is bloody but unbowed. So, in *Hamlet* (V, 2), the young prince says at last to Horatio: “. . . thou wouldst not think how ill all’s here about my heart . . . the readiness is all.” And Brutus speaks for many another when, almost at the end of *Caesar*, he says to Clitus:

Night hangs upon mine eyes; my bones would rest,
That have but labour’d to attain this hour.

The tragic story is, then, a story of man besieged by hazard and adversity, and of man standing at last amidst shipwreck and defeat: on some forsaken heath or ash-heap the tragic man comes finally to see himself as outmatched and overborne by the terrible voiceless Mystery of the world. And, at this outer extremity of his existence, as he remembers the misery and the ruin which he has suffered and as he

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Karl Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

contemplates the irremediably tragic structure of reality, he cries out with Prometheus, "Behold me! I am wronged." Sophocles' Oedipus and Shakespeare's Hamlet, Racine's *Athalie* and Melville's Ahab, Hardy's Jude and Faulkner's Quentin Compson are all figures who suffer a terribly ultimate kind of cheat and who are finally overwhelmed by "powers and passions, elemental forces, and dark abysses of suffering; [by] . . . the central fire, which breaks through the thin crust of civilization, and makes [a great holocaustal glow] . . . in the sky above the blackness of ruined homes."¹⁶

The tragic vision is, in short, an unpalliated vision of shock and crisis, and of man in the extremest possible situation where all guaranties of meaning and security in his pilgrimage on earth have disappeared.

Yet so to state the matter is very sharply to contradict much of the received testimony about the tragic perspective in the literature of modern criticism. For this is a literature that is replete with proclamations of the great triumphs that are won by the tragic man. "Tragedy arises," says Joseph Wood Krutch, "when, as in Periclean Greece or Elizabethan England, a people fully aware of the calamities of life is nevertheless serenely confident of the greatness of man. . . ."¹⁷ And this is the kind of tone and accent that modern theorists of tragedy characteristically like to take. They tell us about how "the sturdy soul of the tragic author . . . uses [suffering] . . . only as a means by which joy may be wrung out of existence. . . ."¹⁸ And they enthrall themselves by imaginings of those great peaks of victory up to which the tragic man is swept in the course of his brave battling with the dragons he encounters in his earthly journey.

The tragic story is, on this accounting a story of "heroic" adventure, in the sense of the term that is advertised by the Hollywood film studios: it ends in magnificence and exaltation. In some way or other "the human spirit" is validated and vindicated, and the final scene gives us a glimpse of an Eternal City wherein the sovereignty of man is enduring and indestructible. The frustrations, the ordeals, the disappointments that the tragic man encounters are there, as it were, only to provide opportunities for his revealing how resplendently valiant and invincible his humanity is. Spirit somehow wrests a victory from Nature, and at that great height where "ecstasy is not to be

¹⁶ Walter Raleigh, *Shakespeare*, p. 197.

¹⁷ Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper*, p. 122.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

shunned," the tragic protagonist is to be beheld as "alone, unique and sufficient"—as a "star in the dark."¹⁹

Now there is, of course, a measure of truth in this kind of witness about the rhythms and cadences of tragedy, and it is a witness that can claim the immensely prestigious support of both Aristotle and Hegel. What Aristotle meant by the doctrine of *katharsis* poses, to be sure, a question that may be answered in many various and contradictory ways; but, even if Aristotle's testimony is not unambiguous, there is the magisterial example of Hegel to be cited as that of a great theorist of tragedy in the tradition who clearly envisaged the tragic experience as moving finally towards "reconciliation." Yet merely to invoke, or to deprecate, time-honored authority is not effectively to adjudicate between the claims of a theory of tragedy whose central principle is the cathartic principle and a theory of the tragic situation which asserts that, in the end, it is one in which great enterprise miscarries and all the energy and aspiration of man are threatened by nullification. Is the end of things in the tragic universe the glimpse of some "brave new world"; is it some still point where there "is no unrest, no travel, no shipwreck"; or, is it all blackness, all defeat, a place where "all wilts and yields, as if loaded down"? Perhaps it is both—but in what sense, and how? This is the essential nub of an old and still baffling perplexity—which one sometimes feels it has been the precise purpose of modern theory to evade.

It is just here, however, that we may be very greatly helped by the formulations of Murray Krieger, whose contribution to the theory of tragedy is the freshest and most cogent in recent literature. And what is perhaps most clarifying in Professor Krieger's way of tackling our problem is the distinction which he makes between "tragedy" and "the tragic vision." The "tragic vision," in his analysis of things, is "born inside tragedy, as a part of it: as a possession of the tragic hero,"²⁰ but it is distinct and separable from that formal arrangement of his story which is properly named "tragedy" and whose very formality requires that "the fearsome chaotic necessities of the tragic vision"²¹ be soothed and palliated in the interests (if of nothing else) of aesthetic form itself. The "vision" of life as tragic, says Professor

¹⁹ William Van O'Connor, *Climates of Tragedy*, pp. 44f.

²⁰ Murray Krieger, "Tragedy and the Tragic Vision," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. XX. (1958), p. 283.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

Krieger, is something which comes into being in a moment of “shock,” when a man all at once discovers himself to be “outside the universal.” Like the hero of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*,

he can one day . . . wake up and find himself irrevocably arrested ‘without having done anything wrong.’ Or an Ahab, living until then by the proper laws of seamanship, can one day lose his leg to the leviathan; a Lord Jim, living until then by a schoolboy’s code of honor, can one day be paralyzed into inaction and be made to play the coward’s role. Melville’s Pierre, having dedicated himself at all costs to absolute righteousness, can discover in his righteousness a lust that has led to incest; Conrad’s Kurtz, having dedicated himself through altruism to a missionary zeal, can discover in his zeal a worship of self and of gold that has led to blood-sacrifice.²²

And it is “this shattering seizure,” however swiftly and unexpectedly it comes, which jars a man loose from his moorings and precipitates him into “the sickness unto death,” the despair which is, says Professor Krieger, “the essence of the tragic vision.”²³

What the tragic man beholds, in other words, on this reading of his situation, is “the existential absurdity” of human life, the fragility of its moral ground and meaning. He is a man who has been “seized from without by the hollowness of [a world] . . . whose structure and meaning have [hitherto] . . . sustained him.”²⁴ And, in this terrible extremity, bereft of all consolations, he is under the dominance of that “underground” reality which Nietzsche named the Dionysian principle.

But, now, the Dionysian principle, as we are again reminded by Professor Krieger, is powerless to yield the coherences that make up aesthetic form. For it is “a product of crisis and of shock, is an expression of man only in an extreme situation, never in a normal or routine one.”²⁵ The peculiar function of the Dionysian principle is, in other words, to disclose life as “unalleviated, endlessly and unendurably

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 291f. Quoted with the permission of *The Kenyon Review*, publishers

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

dangerous, [as] finally destructive and [even] self-destructive. . . .”²⁶ But, though it belongs to the nature of the aesthetic form that we call “tragedy” to try to absorb and contain this kind of material, it needs, simply by reason of the requirements of aesthetic form itself, to have the dissonances of “the tragic vision” exploded.

Indeed, “even if there were no thematic elements of release for the passions aroused by the tragic performers, the disciplining and restricting demands upon aesthetic contemplation made by the rounded aesthetic whole would effect the catharsis demanded by Aristotle.”²⁷ And this is why, even when the final scene on the tragedian’s stage is a scene of wreckage and woe and utter defeat, the disaster and the doom are not altogether unbearable. For the very fact that “tragedy” is an aesthetic form means that what is substantive—“the tragic vision”—has been *shaped*, has been *contained*. And thus it is, as Professor Krieger rightly argues, that “tragedy” becomes, through the sheer energy of its *formal* power, “a force for affirmation.”

From this standpoint, then, it should be apparent that the old and often renewed argument about the possibility of such a thing as “Christian tragedy” is an argument that is somewhat supererogatory. For if “tragedy,” by its very nature, must in some measure conciliate or resolve the dissonances of “the tragic vision,” it will be empowered to achieve this transcendence only by invoking some principle of healing and redemption—which need not, of course, be a distinctively Christian principle but which is yet not, in the nature of the case forbidden to be. And Preston Roberts—in his analysis of the beginning, the middle, and the end of a Christian play; of the nature of a Christian hero; of what must be involved in a Christian *peripeteia*; and of the effect upon us of a Christianly organized dramatic action—has given us a most thorough specification of what the pattern of things will look like when it is an authentically Christian pattern.²⁸

So the question that has been perennially fidgeted over, as to whether there can be such a thing as “Christian tragedy,” is a question that can easily be answered in the affirmative. But the question as to whether there can be any *modus vivendi* between Christianity and what is *substantive* in “tragedy,” namely, “the tragic vision”—this is

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

²⁸ *Vide* Preston Roberts, “A Christian Theory of Dramatic Tragedy,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. XXXI, (1951), pp. 1–20.

an issue that is somewhat more complicated and less easily resolved. And the answer that has generally been given in recent literature is an answer which, in flatly asserting an absolute contradiction between the two perspectives, has not tended to do full justice to the intricate subtleties that are present in the problem.²⁹

It is Karl Jaspers who gives us what is perhaps the most convenient summary of this line of argument, and his contention is, quite simply, that "every one of man's basic experiences ceases to be tragic in a Christian context,"³⁰ that "tragic knowledge must escape the Christian."³¹ For, in his view of the matter, the "darkness of [tragic] terror" is, in the soulscape of Christian life, "pierced by the radiance of blessedness and grace."³² Under Christ's dispensation, all the fearful discrepancies and discordancies of human existence to which the tragedian gives expression are ultimately quelled, and the Christian's equanimity derives from his assurance that "the boon that is his through faith" guarantees him an exemption from any kind of final disaster: "the substance of . . . tragic knowledge must [therefore] escape [him],"³³ for, in the event of Jesus Christ, things were once again made right and valid, and, henceforth, the world could be only "a proving ground" for the pilgrim's preparation of himself for entrance into the Eternal City.

According to Dr. Jaspers, the Christian lives within a firmament of value in which "the world exists as a flow of events guided by Providence. Here all is but way and transition. . . ."³⁴ Whatever threatens or imperils the human enterprise is believed, ultimately, to be set at naught by the sovereign purposes of God: no ache, no wound, no woe, can be untouchable by God's power to heal and to save. And hence, for the Christian man, there can be no "shipwreck" of any kind in the last act of the drama which man enacts. For, in the deed of God in Christ, the sting of all misfortune, both actual and imaginable, is alleviated and subdued. So, for faith, what is tragic in existence has been overcome, has indeed been effectively annulled. And thus, says Dr.

²⁹ *Vide, eg.*, Karl Jaspers, *op. cit.*; Laurence Michel, "The Possibility of a Christian Tragedy," *Thought*, Vol. XXXI, (1956), pp. 403-428; Richard Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy*, Chapter V; and D. D. Raphael, *The Paradox of Tragedy*.

³⁰ Karl Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82f.

Jaspers, it should be no occasion of surprise for us that in writers like Dante and Calderón the tragic predicament undergoes so profound a transformation, for, inevitably, it must, by the Christian poet, be included “within the plan of Providence and the operation of Grace, a plan and an operation that deliver man from all the vast nothingness and self-destruction in this world.”³⁵

Now what ought perhaps to strike us as most remarkable in formulations of this problem that are of the sort exemplified by Dr. Jaspers’ is the complete extrusion from the world of Christian thought and experience of the kind of vibrant eschatological tension that is so much a part of the Gospel. But surely any account either of the faith of the primitive Church (as we have its deposit in the New Testament literature) or of the historic theological tradition must reckon with the kind of double vision that has been persistently characteristic of the Christian imagination. That is to say, the Church, on the one hand, has always wanted to declare (as Paul puts it) that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” that “through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:1–2): it has, in short, wanted to speak of Christ’s Lordship as a fact established and altogether immitigable, and its great dream has been that “every tongue [might] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). But, then, on the other hand, always the Church’s faith has also been an affair of anticipation, being not only a response to a deed already done but also the hope of the great final victory yet to be accomplished which, when it is realized through God’s mighty act, will definitively subdue everything in the world which resists His sovereignty.

This is the tension to which the Christian faith, in its great classical and historic forms, has always been committed. Under the tutelage of the New Testament proclamation, it asserts, on the one hand, that, the Word having become flesh and dwelt among us, the New Age has already arrived. The great dream of Hebraic prophetism, of a time which would bring time to a halt, when all the moral ambiguities of history would be resolved and God’s purposes for the human community would be fully revealed—this dream, Christianity declares, has in fact been fulfilled in the event of Jesus Christ. For, in Him and through His miraculous ministry, man has at last been rescued from the dominion of the powers of darkness: that darkness has been

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 82f.

pierced by new Light which makes it henceforward incapable of affording man any shelter against the Divine Imperative. In Christ the Eschaton, the End, has arrived, for in Him we have the firstfruits of the Kingdom of God. And, therefore, the whole family of mankind now stands in a radically new relation both to time and to eternity: indeed, as Paul says, "if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Corinthians 5:17).

But, then, on the other hand, the Christian imagination has always had to reckon with the unignorable fact that, though Eternity has given itself to time in the advent of the Incarnate Word, human life continues to be stained by the improbities and corruptions of man's sin. Those who give themselves to Christ in faith are raised with Him to newness of life and are enabled to behold in Him the End; nevertheless, the End is "not yet," and the life that is lived "in Christ" is but a pledge and foretaste of the "last things" which shall be the absolutely decisive finis, when what are now the firstfruits shall be the complete and final consummation.

The scene of man's historical existence has, in other words, always been understood in Christianity to be an "interim" period between that *disclosure* of history's meaning which occurred in the drama of the Incarnation and that final *fulfillment* of its meaning which is the Christian's ultimate hope and expectation and which, in the Biblical *mythos*, is expressed in the symbol of Christ's "second coming." And, when he posits a simple and absolute incommensurateness between "tragic knowledge" and Christian faith, what Dr. Jaspers does in effect is completely to elide from the soulscape of the Christian man the eschatological tension in which his life in fact has always been lived. For he belongs to the "interim" that history has become since the Incarnation: he belongs to "the age between the Ages": and, though Dr. Jaspers may forget it the Christian man has always known, indeed could never help but know, that

in the meantime, in the time between the resurrection and the end, whatever that may be, the world still hurts us, it still bears its demons that need to be exorcised, it still contains mammon, anxiety, and self-righteousness that need to be fought. . . . We are now the Lord's, to be sure, and this is our confidence, our peace, and our warrant for living gladly in this world; but we shall be the Lord's too, and this explains

our loneliness, our suffering, our experience of the world as threat and as enemy.³⁶

The kind of exemption from the qualms of tragic experience that (on the basis of a stiffly undialectical over-interpretation of the doctrine of Providence) Dr. Jaspers claims for the Christian life is, in other words, simply untrue to its actuality. And what is wrong in his analysis is a consequence of a most drastic oversimplification of the full complexity of Christian existence.

There is, however, another angle from which it is also possible to oversimplify or to attenuate what is manysided and complicated in Christian experience, and it is one which, in the English-speaking world, arises in the modern situation in the so-called "realized eschatology" which the distinguished British scholar, C. H. Dodd, has developed from his exegetical studies in the New Testament.³⁷ This is a position which involves a very great emphasis on that aspect of the New Testament proclamation which speaks of the "End" as having already entered the historical process in Jesus Christ; and, though Professor Dodd develops it with a most admirable tact, its extremer versions expressed by some of his associates and disciples have sometimes had the effect of very considerably blunting what is genuinely radical in Christian eschatology. But, even if the extremest renderings of "realized eschatology" were wholly adequate and we did not have to reckon with the kind of *tension* that has here been imputed to the Christian experience of life, it would still be impossible to maintain, as Dr. Jaspers does, that "tragic knowledge" is something utterly alien to the universe of Christian thought. For, if the Christian man knows nothing of the Christ who is to come and knows only the Christ who did come, what he surely cannot escape is the fact that this man of Galilee whom he calls Lord is one in whom lordship assumes the form not of pomp and power but of lowliness and suffering and humiliation. This is the irrefragable testimony of the New Testament record, that

though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking

³⁶ William Hamilton, *The New Essence of Christianity*, p. 113.

³⁷ Vide C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching; and History and the Gospel*.

the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6–11)

And, when Paul speaks in this way, he is wanting to declare that God's way of being present to man is one which involves His "taking the form of a servant" and that the very extremity of the humiliation which Christ consented to endure is that which proves His lordship, which proves that at His name "every knee should bow." In Him, in other words, the Christian man beholds "very God of very God"—in, that is, *this* human life which is totally pledged in responsibility *for others*, and which is crucified.

But, then, to affirm that the Crucified One is Lord—that in the shape and pattern of His life the meaning of all life is revealed—is also to make a still further affirmation that is even bolder and more radical. For, if the Christian's way of talking about God, about what is Radically Ultimate, involves his pointing first of all to the Cross, it is for him to declare that there is suffering in the life of God Himself and that He is moved and harrowed by everything that menaces or threatens the destiny which He has ordained for His creatures. "To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that humiliation, patience, and suffering are the ways God has dealt with man in the world, and thus are also the ways the Christian man is to deal with the world."³⁸ As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it,

Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world. He must therefore plunge himself into the life of a godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness with a veneer of religion or trying to transfigure it. He must live a 'worldly' life and so participate in the suffering of God. . . . To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some

³⁸ William Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 106f.

particular form of asceticism (as a sinner, a penitent or a saint), but to be a man. It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world.³⁹

There is, then, a central and very important sense in which a Christian perspective of human life may lead a man to say, as Ignazio Silone says, that "in the sacred history of man on earth, it is still, alas, Good Friday."⁴⁰ Therefore, between this perspective and what Dr. Jaspers calls "tragic knowledge" there can be no simple and absolute antithesis.

But, though there is no simple and absolute antithesis between "the tragic vision" and the Christian faith, the relation is, nevertheless, always one of strain; and, indeed, *finally*, it is one in which what is tragically broken in life is taken up and absorbed into the great Eucharistic action of offering, consecration, and communion whereby the self-oblation of the Church becomes one with Christ's own oblation of Himself for our redemption. Here it is, in the celebration of the rich mystery of the Divine Liturgy, that "time is . . . redeemed [and] brought back into the possession of its rightful owner. Time has become so limp, so lifeless; the *kairos*, the opportunity . . . so fragile and volatile . . . so easily swung this way and that. . . . Only God can recapture it and nurse it back to life, so to speak—back to its own life, which is really His."⁴¹ And this, in what has always been the Christian testimony, is what He does in the Eucharist—which is the supremely efficacious form of the Divine action in the period of the "interim."

The Eucharist is, to be sure, a fact about the Christian man, for he and his fellows in the Church are "the eucharistic people, the people who take their lives, and break them, and give them, in daily fulfillment of what our Lord did and does."⁴² Yet it is even more ultimately true that the Eucharistic mystery springs out of the very life of God Himself, for the Eternal Son of God is not only the One who is offered but the One who offers. The sacrifice of the eucharistic people is in

³⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner of God*, p. 166. Quoted with the permission of The Macmillan Co., publishers.

⁴⁰ Ignazio Silone, *And He Hid Himself*, p. vi.

⁴¹ Martin Jarrett-Kerr, C. R., *The Atonement in Our Time*, pp. 155f.

⁴² Stephen F. Bayne, "The Eucharist and the Church," in *The Eucharist and Liturgical Renewal*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., p. 17.

Him, and His sacrifice is in them; and thus Eucharist is not only the central fact about the Christian man, but, far more profoundly, it is, as Bishop Bayne says, “an eternal fact about God,” and it “can only be understood in terms of an eternal offering, which indeed may be re-presented or re-enacted on every altar, every day, but which is, first of all, outside Time altogether.”⁴³

It is true, of course, to say (as Reinhold Niebuhr did many years ago in his brilliant and moving book *Beyond Tragedy*) that Christianity finds the resolution of tragedy in the Cross, that “here suffering is carried into the very life of God and overcome.”⁴⁴ Yet, if nothing more than this is said, then the event of Calvary must itself be an essentially bootless thing which occurred in the first century A.D. and which may now produce mental and emotional reactions of various kinds but which does not, in any ontological way, enter into the living present that we today inhabit. But, of course, in point of fact, Calvary, for the Christian man, is not simply “past history,” and it is not so precisely because of the strange and wonderful relation to it in which the Eucharist makes it possible for him to stand. For, though the sacrifice of Calvary was made two thousand years ago, it is yet also made “by Christ, in us, every time we offer ourselves to Him. . . . And the Eucharist is Calvary. It is the taking and the breaking and the giving of His life, world without end, by us, in us, with Him, in Him, until the dying of the Lord Jesus in the lives of all His flock is accomplished, and His life reigns unchallenged and serene.”⁴⁵

Thus it is not only Calvary but the bridge between Calvary and the *Parousia* (the “Second Coming”) in the strength of which the Christian man is empowered to live in the “interim”: here it is that, for him, the agitations of “the tragic vision” are overcome and laid to rest. It is not that in the Eucharist—which is, it need hardly be said, not merely a form of Church worship but the very shape and pattern of Christian existence—it is not that in this great drama of the Christian life man, as Karl Jaspers thinks, is simply wafted above the rough weathers of history: indeed it is just here that we are made most keenly aware that “our lives are lived on the boundary, the frontier between the Kingdom and this present world of sin, suffering,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, pp. 155f.

⁴⁵ Stephen F. Bayne, *op. cit.*, pp. 16f.

and death. . . .”⁴⁶ The antithesis, in other words, between “the tragic vision” and the Eucharistic life is not a simple antithesis. But what is finally availing is the fact that, in this rich and fecund Mystery, “at every point we are met by [the risen] Christ whose grace is offered not as a means of escape from the world but as power to transform us and all [of] life.”⁴⁷ And thus it is that, in the full spectrum of Christian experience, Silone’s word—“In the sacred history of man on earth, it is still, alas, Good Friday”—has, finally, to give way before the majestic message of Easter morning, that

If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For . . . neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31–39)

Now, to be sure, this ultimately *eucharisto-centric*⁴⁸ character of the Christian faith may rarely, if ever, provide the Christian tragedian with the immediate materials of his art. But it does, nevertheless, stand as what most basically antecedes the distinctive mutations which he introduces into tragic literature. For, having heard (with Wordsworth)

Authentic tidings of invisible things,
Of ebb and flow and ever-during power,
And central peace subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation,

⁴⁶ Arthur C. Lichtenberger, “The Social Implications of the Liturgical Renewal,” in *The Liturgical Renewal of the Church*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., p. 110.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ I am indebted to Fr. Martin Jarrett-Kerr for this phrase: *vide op. cit.*, p. 151.

the poets of *Lear* and *Polyeucte*, of *Billy Budd* and *The Idiot*, of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Requiem for a Nun* do verily (if sometimes obscurely) descry the horizons of a “brave new world.” And it is a world the bridge to which, far from bypassing what is tragic in human life, does indeed lead, rather, directly into the fields of anguish—but by way of a dialectical route through death-and-renewal that recapitulates the great central Mystery of Christian existence.