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Courageous Love: K. C. Bhattacharyya on the Puzzle of Painful Beauty

ABSTRACT: *In the 1930s, the Bengali philosopher K. C. Bhattacharyya proposed a new theory of* rasa*, or aesthetic emotion, according to which aesthetic emotions are feelings that have other feelings as their intentional objects. This paper articulates how Bhattacharyya's theory offers a novel solution to the puzzle of how it is both possible and rational to enjoy the kind of negative emotions that are inspired by tragic and sorrowful tales. The new solution is distinct from the conversion and compensation views that dominate the existing literature, and it derives its significance from how it ties aesthetic experience to self-awareness.*

KEYWORDS: paradox of tragedy, *rasa*, art, aesthetic value, self, South Asian philosophy

Hariścandra, a former king, now a slave long separated from his family, wanders through a cremation ground littered with corpses. In this hellscape, he hears a woman wailing over her child's body. His initial feelings of sympathy turn into horror when he hears her describe what could only be his own son. He is overcome with sorrow—and so are the tenth-century theatergoers watching the scene unfold in Ārya Kṣemīśvara's play, *Caṇḍakauśika* (1962), originally written around 950 C.E. But what reason do they have to endure this painful experience? The question arises in classical Sanskrit aesthetics and in contemporary South Asian philosophy. Writing in the first half of the twentieth century, K. C. Bhattacharyya gave a distinctive response to the puzzle of painful beauty, drawing on an understanding of the puzzle and also on an account of aesthetic enjoyment and pain (2011b).

1. Puzzles

Human beings have always sought out artworks that evoke sadness, terror, horror, and even disgust. Reflecting on this fact, philosophers have been puzzled. In Euro philosophy (in this paper, 'Euro' denotes Europe and its descendant cultures around the globe), the puzzlement stretches from Aristotle up to the recent appearance of a collection of papers entitled *Suffering Art Gladly* (Levinson 2014).

We thank members of the 2022 seminar in aesthetics at the University of British Columbia, participants in the Smith College workshop on KCB, and two anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions. Adheesh Sathaye advised us on some passages in the *Caṇḍakauśika* and generously shared his draft translation of that work. Jay Garfield advised us on analyses of feeling in 'The Subject as Freedom'. Hande Tuna pointed out how we might interpret KCB as explaining why tales of sorrow have a particular place in human life.

A similar puzzle animated centuries of rigorous debate in medieval Sanskrit aesthetics. This section characterizes two puzzles about painful beauty and some approaches to them in Euro and South Asian philosophy.

A central topic of medieval Sanskrit aesthetics is *rasa*, where the *rasa*s are emotions that works of drama and poetry express or evoke (see Pollock 2016 for excerpts from canonical texts). Included among the *rasa*s are terror (*bhayānaka*), horror or disgust (*bībhatsa*), and sorrow (*karuṇa*). On Abhinavagupta's (1956) dominant interpretation, all *rasa*s are pleasurable. However, terrifying, disgusting, and tragic scenarios do not typically inspire pleasant feelings. Adheesh Sathaye puts the question as follows: 'If the literary experience must ultimately be pleasurable, but also emotional, then what is the pleasure in experiencing unpleasant emotions?' (2010: 364). Sathaye's question articulates a puzzle about possibility: how is it possible for unpleasant states to please?

A second puzzle concerns rationality. Because it is rational to avoid painful experiences, Jerrold Levinson writes that 'one would expect appreciators to avoid' sad songs and the like—'or at any rate regard [them] as inferior' (1997: 29). Instead, many appreciators seek out horrors and tearjerkers. This is puzzling. After all, horrors and tearjerkers evoke painful experiences, and the fact that an experience is painful is reason to avoid it. Yet, it would seem that we have reason to appreciate horrors and tearjerkers. The rationality puzzle is this: what reason do we have to appreciate works that are painful to experience (e.g., Schier 1983; Gaut 1993: 333; Chakrabarti 2016: 153)?

Philosophers have taken two approaches to the puzzles (for surveys see Smuts 2009 and Strohl 2018). First, what have come to be called 'conversion' approaches deny that horrors and tearjerkers evoke painful experiences. On the contrary, they evoke pleasurable experiences. In the right artistic contexts, pain is somehow converted into pleasure. As a result, both puzzles dissolve. On the one hand, there is no puzzle about how painful experiences can please because horrors and tearjerkers do not evoke painful experiences. On the other hand, there is no rationality puzzle because our reasons to appreciate a work do not include the fact that it evokes a painful experience. On the contrary, the work evokes a pleasurable experience. Obviously, conversion approaches must explain how pain is converted into pleasure. A number of proposals have been made in the Euro and South Asian traditions (e.g., Abhinavagupta 1956: 14; see also Patnaik 2016: 52 and Hume 1993). The viability of a conversion approach will depend on the viability of its account of conversion.

Second, what have come to be called 'compensation' approaches grant that horrors and tearjerkers evoke painful experiences. At the same time, on these approaches, horrors and tearjerkers can have various nonhedonic merits. For example, they might have cognitive benefits: they equip us with knowledge of what it is like to suffer (Schier 1983); they acquaint us with facts about the human condition (Lamarque 1995; Shelley 2003; Ridley 2010), or they reassure us that we are capable of having appropriate moral responses (Feagin 1983). Alternatively, even as they evoke painful experiences, literary works can exhibit the genius of the poet or the skill of the performer (Ramacandra and Gunacandra 2016 [*c.* 1200]: 241–42; see also Dutton 2009). If benefits such as these are not

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hedonic, then the puzzles once again dissolve. On the one hand, there is no puzzle about how it is possible for painful experiences to please because horrors and tearjerkers do not please. (Instead, they instruct us or demonstrate artistic prowess.) On the other hand, there is no rationality puzzle because our reasons to appreciate a work do not include the fact that the work evokes a painful experience. Our reasons to appreciate the work are facts about its cognitive or other benefits.

With respect to the rationality puzzle, conversion and compensation approaches share a feature in common. Both deny that our reasons for appreciating painful artworks have anything to do with pain. Conversion approaches deny this because they deny that horrors and tearjerkers do evoke painful experiences. Compensation approaches deny this because they hold that we have only nonhedonic reasons to appreciate horrors and tearjerkers. Yet, it might seem that the fact that horrors and tearjerkers evoke painful experiences is a reason we have to appreciate them; perhaps it is the very best reason we have to appreciate them. The following sections argue that Bhattacharyya's approach to the possibility and rationality puzzles is groundbreaking because it is neither a conversion nor a compensation approach, because it explains how it is possible for a painful state to please, and because it explains why pain produced by a beautiful work gives us reason to appreciate that work.

2. Contemplative Feeling

Part 2 of KCB's essay 'The Concept of *Rasa*' ([1930] 2011) addresses the possibility and rationality puzzles by building on the first half, which outlines his theory of *rasa*. (K. C. Bhattacharyya was widely known during his lifetime as 'KCB', and many scholars now refer to him using these initials.) Interpretations of his theory of *rasa* vary with respect to certain details, and the discussion below relies on some elements of the interpretation by Lopes (2019; cf. Boruah 2016: 137–40 and Miller 2023). On this interpretation of KCB's theory, *rasa* involves contemplative feeling, where contemplative feeling has a distinctive intentional content and a distinctive phenomenology. This section describes the intentional content and phenomenology of contemplative feeling. Section 3 applies the description to *rasa*.

At the center of KCB's essay is a scenario that should resonate with anyone. A child joyfully plays with a toy. Her joy is a primary feeling. Watching his granddaughter, an old man takes joy in her joy. He has a sympathetic feeling: a response to the child's primary feeling. Now imagine someone who witnesses this happy scene and takes joy in the grandfather's joy in the child's joy in her toy. The onlooker's joy is once removed from the grandfather's and twice removed from the child's: it is a response to a response to the child's joy. The onlooker's feeling is an instance of what KCB calls a 'contemplative feeling'. Contemplative feeling has a distinctive intentional content because it represents a sympathetic feeling as representing a primary feeling. Call this the 'intentional content claim' (it will be modified below). Because neither primary nor sympathetic feeling have the same 'nested' contents, the claim partly characterizes what is distinctive of contemplative feeling.

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It does so only partly, though; KCB reflects on the scenario:

> Although the old man is not immersed like the child in the enjoyment of the toy . . . it is still a personal selective interest in the particular child and his feeling. My contemplative joy has no such personal complexion. I am interested in the child's feeling reflected in the grand-father's heart as an eternal emotion or value. I enjoy the essence of the emotion, get immersed in it even like the child in the toy, without, however, being affected by it and thus losing my freedom. (2011b: §10)

A great deal is going on in this passage, but note for now the two references to immersion. These serve to draw a pair of contrasts. On the one hand, the child experiences immersion and the grandfather does not; on the other hand, the onlooker, whose feeling is contemplative, experiences immersion, like the child and unlike the grandfather. How is this to be understood? What is immersion in the context of the passage?

According to KCB, in 'object-immersed feeling . . . the object gets an expression' (2011b: §16). That is, 'the object does not appear . . . as a mere fact but as having a value, an enjoyable look or expression' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: § 3; see also §§5, 14, 16, 27). Objects have an expression in virtue of how we feel about them. For example, 'To a person afraid of an object, the object has a terrible look' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §6). A farmer who chances upon a landmine in her field does not see the object as afraid, however; she sees it as dangerous in a way that befits her fear. Likewise, in the feeling of sorrow, an object has a melancholy expression (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §13). In general, an emotion represents something as having an appearance that is colored by the emotion. Call this 'phenomenal immersion'.

The claim is not that phenomenal immersion exhausts the phenomenology of emotion. Any emotion has a phenomenology: there is something it is like to have the emotion. Part of that phenomenology consists in how the object of the emotion looks. That is, part of what it is like to be afraid of the landmine is to see it as dangerous. Another part of what it is like to be afraid involves bodily feelings: the farmer's heart races, her palms sweat, her feet feel like they are glued in place. Only part of the phenomenology of emotion is phenomenal immersion.

Equipped with the concept of phenomenal immersion, we can begin to understand the passage from §10, quoted above, that contrasts the child, who experiences phenomenal immersion, with the grandfather, who does not. In feeling joy, the child sees the toy as having an expression that fits her joy. Now consider the grandfather. Seeing the child, he feels a joy that involves phenomenal immersion in as much as he sees her as expressing joy. At the same time, his sympathetic feeling also represents the toy, but 'he does not *see* the expression there' in the toy; instead, he 'tends . . . to imagine seeing it there' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §6, emphasis in the original; see also §5). KCB holds that sympathetic feeling involves merely imagining the object of the primary feeling. In addition, he holds that imagining does not involve phenomenal immersion: 'To a person afraid of an object, the object has a terrible look but not [to] one who sympathizes with

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his fear' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §6). This is why the child's feeling involves phenomenal immersion in the object, but the grandfather's does not.

The passage from §10 also states that contemplative feeling involves immersion as does the child's feeling. Yet, there is an important difference between them. Whereas the child is immersed in the toy, feeling a joy that colors how she sees it, the contemplative onlooker is, as KCB writes, immersed in the 'essence of the emotion'.

What is the 'essence of the emotion'? Having no personal selective interest in the toy or the child, the onlooker feels detached from the toy and the child in their particularity as objects. When an expression is 'altogether detached from the particularity of fact, it is a kind of eternal reality, a real eternal value . . . self-subsisting, having a felt independent reality of which the given object is only a kind of symbol' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §8). However, KCB is not committing to a Platonic metaphysics (2011: §1, Miller 2023: 78–80). He also writes that the expressive essence is 'a reality to which the object is somehow adjectival' (2011b: §9). Lopes (2019) proposes that KCB anticipates Nelson Goodman's (1976) notion of exemplification. The onlooker's contemplative feeling represents the essence of the expression of which the toy is a sample, much as a Pantone card is a sample by means of which we can experience Pantone Pepperoni Red, for example. Thus, although the onlooker might see the toy, they do not apprehend the expression as a quality of the toy; rather, they apprehend the toy as a sample of the expression.

What is it, then, for the onlooker to be immersed in the expressive essence of which the toy is a sample? As we saw above, KCB holds that imagining alone does not provide for phenomenal immersion. Phenomenal immersion requires something like seeing. The expressive essence of which the object is a sample 'appears to be seen rather than imagined'; it 'appears to be just as much *seen there* in the object as the terrible look of an object to one who feels terror' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §§9 and 6, emphasis in the original; see also §§7 and 21). If the onlooker is phenomenally immersed in the expressive essence of cuteness, then the experience of the expressive essence of cuteness is colored by their contemplative feeling.

An observation is worth making here. One might be tempted to link phenomenal immersion to attachment and to contrast it with detachment and freedom from objects and their effects. However, we see now that, just as §10 requires, KCB reconciles detachment and freedom with phenomenal immersion in contemplative feeling (see Lopes 2019).

In sum, contemplative feeling differs in its intentional content and phenomenology from primary feeling and sympathy. According to the phenomenal immersion claim, the expressive essence that is part of the content of contemplative feeling is experienced as colored by the feeling. Modifying the intentional content claim, contemplative feeling represents a sympathetic feeling, a primary feeling, and the essence of the expression to which a primary feeling is a response. With the phenomenal immersion and intentional content claims in hand, we can turn, in the next section, to *rasa*, keeping in mind that KCB takes *rasa* to involve contemplative feeling.

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3. Rasa

Aesthetic enjoyment is a species of contemplative feeling partly distinguished by how it stands in relation to beauty. KCB uses *'rasa'* to refer both to aesthetic enjoyment, which is a subjective state, and also to 'that which is aesthetically enjoyed'—'an objective absolute or beauty' (2011b: §§ 2 and 19; see also §§1 and 15). Beauty is 'an eternal value' that 'appears to be seen rather than imagined' (2011b: §9). However, it is 'not seen as a quality or adjective of the object'; rather, the object serves as a sample of (or is 'adjectival' to) beauty. That is, it 'does not appear as . . . a quality of the object like its colour but as an expression or value' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §14). KCB makes clear that in aesthetic feeling, 'what is enjoyed in the object is its beauty which we have taken as an eternal self-subsisting value' (2011b: §18). Accordingly, he writes, 'the objective aesthetic quality cannot be discovered except through the aesthetic feeling' (2011b: §21).

Given that aesthetic enjoyment is a species of contemplative feeling, these passages can be interpreted as consequences of the intentional content and phenomenal immersion claims. According to the intentional content claim, a contemplative feeling represents, among other things, the essence of the expression to which a primary feeling is a response. In aesthetic enjoyment, the expressive essence is beauty. According to the phenomenal immersion claim, the beauty is experienced as colored by the aesthetic enjoyment.

If aesthetic enjoyment is a species of contemplative feeling, then its intentional content includes, in addition to the expressive essence, a sympathetic and a primary feeling. In many cases of art, primary or sympathetic responders are implicit, to be imagined by the contemplator (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §§11–13). However, some artworks do feature counterparts of the toy, the child, the grandfather, and the onlooker—an example is the story of King Hariścandra portrayed in Kṣemīśvara's *Caṇḍakauśika*. Indeed, Kṣemīśvara wrote the play partly in order to educate audiences in how they should respond to painful art (Sathaye 2010).

While on an errand in the cremation grounds, Śaivyā, Hariścandra's wife, turns around to find their little son dead, struck on the heel by an asp. Pleading with Rohitāśva to wake up, she feels agonizing sorrow in the loss of her child. That feeling colors how she sees his body. She gazes at the lifeless form, lingering over its noble features: 'Oh my boy, here is your forehead, pleasantly glowing like the moon; here are your eyes, with tender eyebrows, pink around the edges, so delicately handsome' (Kṣemīśvara n.d.). Her sorrow is wrenching partly because it is phenomenally immersed in what the lifeless body expresses.

Meanwhile, Hariścandra, having sold himself into servitude to a crematorium worker to repay a debt, has been surveying the terrors of the graveyard with sardonic amusement. Jackals prowled with dripping fangs, vultures picked at human skulls, and hideous demons fornicated and quaffed goblets of blood, but he held himself aloof. He was, after all, a king playing the part of a graveyard worker. But on hearing a mourning mother's sobs, his aloofness gives way to sympathetic pity. He exclaims, 'Oh, how her laments touch my heart!' (Kṣemīśvara n.d.). His feeling of pity involves phenomenal immersion: how he

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feels includes how she appears to him as an object of pity. He might also imagine the child's body as she sees it, but merely imagining the object of another's feeling does not involve phenomenal immersion in that object. As a sympathizer, he is affected by her feeling, but not by the object of it, the body (2011b: §5). This all changes the moment he realizes that the woman is Śaivyā, his wife, and that the body is Rohitāśva's, his son's.

The *Caṇḍakauśika* explores a range of responses to the world's horrors. Hariścandra has shown detached aloofness, sympathy, and personal devastation. He can almost be said to move through KCB's levels in reverse. However, he is not an aesthetic contemplator. For that, we can turn to the audience.

Suppose that you are a tenth-century theatergoer enthralled by a performance of the *Caṇḍakauśika*. The narrative climax is approaching, and Hariścandra falls to the ground, grief-stricken. Half-forgetting that you are watching costumed actors on a stage, you feel powerful sorrow. What would make your sorrow a contemplative feeling, a *rasa*? First there is the intentional content claim: your sorrow would need to have the intentional structure of contemplative feeling. If the play merely prompted you to feel sorrow on your own behalf, reminding you of your own troubles, then your feeling would not be contemplative. To be contemplative, your sorrow would have to represent Hariścandra as feeling pity for Śaivyā as someone feeling sorrow at the loss of her child, and it would have to represent an expressive essence that befits feelings of sorrow. With this we come to the phenomenal immersion claim. Because you have no personal selective interest in Rohitāśva, Śaivyā, or Hariścandra, you are not caught up in phenomenal immersion with Rohitāśva' body or Śaivyā's grief. Instead, your feeling is immersed in the expressive essence of sorrow. That expressive essence is something of which the boy's body, together with other elements of the scene, is a sample. Your experience involves phenomenal immersion with the expressive essence in the sense that it is colored by your feeling. The final experience of contemplative sorrow in the expression is the *rasa*.

At the same time, you seem to be having an unpleasant experience. Hariścandra's awful revelation is a punch to the gut, and the parents' agony in the aftermath is even more sickening. Can this ordeal really be called aesthetic enjoyment? How can you access an expressive essence of 'beauty' in this scene, colored as it is by your wrenching sorrow?

4. Painful Beauty

KCB observes that 'a well-told tale of sorrow moves one to tears who yet gets exquisite enjoyment out of it' (2011b: §25). But how is it possible for the unpleasant to please? That is the possibility puzzle. The rationality puzzle is this: what reason do we have to appreciate works that are painful to experience? This section lays out how KCB's theory of *rasa* addresses both puzzles, and it argues that his is neither a conversion nor a compensation approach (see section 1 above).

The approach to the possibility puzzle is the more straightforward. KCB immediately follows the observation in §25 about well-told tales of sorrow with two points. Contemplative sorrow is felt as pain—'an exquisite pain'. However,

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the pain is 'subordinate' to the enjoyment. Subordination comprises at least two components. First, the pain is 'the object of the enjoyment and in this sense subordinate to it' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §26, see also §27). In other words, the intentional content of aesthetic enjoyment includes the sorrow. This is implied by the intentional content claim. The second component of subordination has to do with phenomenal immersion. 'To aesthetically realise or contemplate a person's sorrow is to *feel* the sorrow, not to think it', but feeling implicates phenomenal immersion; therefore, someone who 'contemplates the mere feeling of sorrow' thereby experiences 'such circumstances as bring out the feeling and are suffused with the feeling-value' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §25, emphasis in the original; see also §§ 24 and 26). For example, those attending a performance of the *Caṇḍakauśika* experience such circumstances as the story of the child's death as depicted by the actors and their gestures, their costumes, the staging, and the music. By experiencing all this, the audience can experience Rohitāśva's death as a sample of the expressive essence of the sorrow. They experience how the world is colored in feelings of sorrow across the board. In sum, aesthetic joy subordinates sorrow in the sense that it represents the sorrow and colors the expressive essence to which the sorrow is a response.

How does this answer the possibility puzzle? KCB answers that 'enjoyment and pain cannot simply stand together side by side: one is subordinated to the other' (2011b: §24). In other words, it is not possible for one and the same state to be both a pleasure and a pain, but it is possible to enjoy a well-told tale of sorrow because affective subordination is possible. The possibility of affective subordination is implied by the intentional content and phenomenal immersion claims.

This answer to the possibility puzzle provides an alternative to the conversion and compensation approaches that are standard in the literature (see section 1). According to conversion approaches, the sorrow that audiences feel in response to the *Caṇḍakauśika* is somehow converted into pleasure. There is no puzzle about how painful sorrow can please because the play does not evoke a painful experience. Against this, KCB maintains that aesthetic enjoyment can be taken even in a sorrow that is painful. According to compensation approaches, audience experiences of the play are painful, but they are not pleasurable. Instead, the play has nonhedonic merits that compensate for the pain. Against this, KCB maintains that the sorrow we feel in watching the play is one in which we can take enjoyment.

Turn to the rationality puzzle. What reason do we have to appreciate works that are painful to experience? As we saw in section 1, conversion and compensation approaches to the rationality puzzle share a feature in common. Both deny that our reasons for appreciating the *Caṇḍakauśika* have anything to do with a sorrow felt as painful. Conversion approaches deny this because they hold that the pain is somehow converted into pleasure. Compensation approaches deny this because they hold that we have only nonhedonic reasons to appreciate the play. In contrast, KCB maintains that one reason audiences have to appreciate the play is that it evokes a painful sorrow. But what resources are there, in KCB's theory of *rasa,* to explain how the fact that the play is painful is a reason for audiences to appreciate it?

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Hedonic states are motivating: pleasures motivate us to act in ways that cause them to persist, and pains motivate us to act to remove their causes. This was a common assumption in classical Sanskrit philosophy (e.g., Pollock 2016: 199), and it is widely endorsed in contemporary philosophy (e.g., Aydede 2023). In his reconstruction of Sāṁkhya philosophy, KCB puts it perfectly: 'what is not wished to be terminated is not felt pain' (1956: 129). When pleasure is felt, it motivates its own persistence, and when pain is felt, it motivates its own cessation. In §§22 to 24 of the essay on *rasa*, KCB elaborates on this point in an important respect. Hedonic states are felt, and feeling about an object implies 'an intimacy with it' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §22). In particular, to enjoy an object is to feel an identity with it, and to be pained by it is to feel distinct from it: 'the feeling of identity may be called enjoyment' and 'all feeling of pain is a feeling of distinction between subject and object' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §23). Thus, felt identity with an object is a pleasure, motivating its own persistence, and felt distinction from an object is a pain, motivating its own cessation.

For a more concrete picture of what KCB has in mind, consider how pain works in what he calls the 'normal practical attitude' (2011b: §29). In this attitude, pain motivates us to respond by acting in the world to remove its cause in accordance with our personal selective interests. For example, Śaivyā's object-immersed sorrow is painful because it motivates her to undo what has been done: her child's death. She pleads, examines the body, looks for the snake, and contemplates suicide as a way to end the pain. Her pain could not be more personal: she grieves as a mother who loves her child and is consumed by his death. The equation of pain and felt distinction suggests a re-description: her feeling of pain is a feeling of distinction from the fact of her child's death. Indeed, Kṣemīśvara conveys her experience of estrangement from the object of her sorrow when he portrays her as 'alone' and 'afraid' (1962: 200). However, in the normal practical attitude, felt distinction is 'not explicitly felt as such'; it is recessive, in the background (Bhattacharyya 2011: §23). Presumably, this is because our personal selective interests and their practical upshots for our acting in the world dominate. Śaivyā's attention is fixed on her child and what her sorrow motivates, and so she does not attend to her pain as felt distinction or difference.

'In the contemplative feeling', by contrast, 'both the feelings of identity and difference are explicit' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §23). Here is why. As we have just seen, identity and difference (or distinction) are not felt explicitly in normal practical attitudes, where personal selective interests focus attention on the world and possible courses of action in the world. It follows that identity and distinction can be felt explicitly when attention is not focused by personal selective interests in acting in the world. When that happens, world-directed attention does not obscure the subject's awareness of enjoyment as felt identity and pain as felt distinction. When does that happen? Aesthetic contemplators do not take normal practical attitudes in normal practical predicaments (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §25). Watching Kṣemīśvara's play, you are aware of how their feelings motivate Hariścandra and Śaivyā, but you are not 'entangled' in the same circumstances (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §15, §18). As an attentive audience member, you have left behind your own problems, to-do lists, individualized worldly concerns, and

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personal roles. As a result, your contemplative feelings do not motivate you to act in the world: you do not try to change the story by inserting yourself into the performance. Because in contemplative feeling your attention is not focused by personal selective interests on acting in the world, your enjoyment can be felt explicitly as identity with its object, and your pain can be felt explicitly as distinction from its object.

One more idea is needed in advance of KCB's answer to the rationality puzzle. We have seen that felt identity and felt distinction inherit the motivational profiles of pleasure and pain. Felt identity motivates is own persistence, and felt distinction motivates its own cessation. In addition, we have seen that, in contemplative feeling, identity and distinction are felt explicitly. The final idea is that felt identity and felt distinction have the phenomenology of feelings, which is at least partly provided by phenomenal immersion. According to the intentional content claim, contemplative feeling represents the essence of an expression that would befit a primary feeling—the essence of the worldly situations that befit sorrow, for example. According to the phenomenal immersion claim, the expressive essence is colored by the contemplative feeling. Thus, identity and distinction are explicitly felt to the extent that the expressive essence is experienced as colored by feeling. This is how 'the enjoyer identifies himself with the eternal value' in an affective mode (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §18).

What reason do we have, then, to appreciate works that cause us pain? Pain is what motivates its own cessation, and audiences try to stifle their tears. Yet, they rarely take the obvious remedy of leaving the theater. Even more obviously, they do not limit themselves to beauty relatively untainted with sorrow, pity, fear, or disgust. Do painful artworks, such as the *Caṇḍakauśika,* have a place in human life because audiences have reason to appreciate them? KCB addresses the rationality puzzle in two steps. The first step is to show that well-told tales of sorrow (and other painfully beautiful items) have something special to offer their audiences. They afford contemplative feelings of enjoyment and pain that bracket the personal and the practical. As a result, such tales afford explicitly felt identity and distinction with an essence—specifically, the essence of an expression that befits the feeling. This first step has been completed. Completing the first step is not, however, sufficient to address the rationality puzzle. The question remains what reason audiences have to accept what well-told tales of sorrow have to offer. The second step is to propose that we have reason, in general, to undergo the experiences that well-told tales of sorrow evoke—that is, experiences of explicitly felt identity and explicitly felt distinction. The logic is that if we have general reason to undergo such experiences and if some works of art offer the experiences, then we have reason to appreciate those works of art. However, do we have general reason to undergo experiences of explicitly felt identity and explicitly felt distinction? What would that reason be?

Some passages of the second part of the essay on *rasa,* which discusses painful beauty, gesture at *rasa*'s fundamental human importance. 'The subject feels itself real when . . . it feels the object united or identified with itself'; it 'feels real in joy by consuming the object'; and, indeed, the aesthetic contemplator 'feels himself more real as a spirit through the pain than if he did not experience it'

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(Bhattacharyya 2011: §§ 22, 23, 25). In the 'Concept of Philosophy', written soon after the essay on *rasa*, KCB reiterates the thought that 'the real *I* demands to be known . . . in pure enjoyment' (2011a: §17, emphasis in the original; see also §14). 'The Subject as Freedom', published in the same year as the *rasa* essay, provides an account of subjective self-awareness (1956b; interpreters include Bhattacharyya 2016; Garfield 2017; Odyniec 2018; Babu and Jung 2021; Chakrabarti 2023; Krishna 2023). Ultimately, subjective self-awareness is, as Arindam Chakrabarti puts it, 'nothing else than the function of distinguishing the subject from every possible layer of involvement' with what is not the subject (2023: 122; see also Bhattacharyya 1956a: ¶127, ¶23 and Garfield 2017: 372). Many passages of 'The Subject as Freedom' discuss how feeling can perform this function (esp. 1956a: ¶14, 23, 29 and ch. 7). In the *rasa* essay, contemplative pain and enjoyment are explicitly felt distinction and identity, and therefore they function as vehicles of subjective self-awareness. Thus, we have reason to accept what well-told tales of sorrow have to offer because we have reason to be aware of ourselves as subjects through feeling.

To recap, we have general reason to undergo experiences of explicitly felt identity and distinction: they are a means to achieve felt awareness of ourselves as subjects. Moreover, some works of art offer the experiences, specifically because they evoke *rasa*. That is why we have reason to appreciate those works.

This is not a conversion approach to the rationality puzzle. According to conversion approaches, the pain afforded by a work of art is somehow converted into pleasure. By contrast, KCB considers well-told tales of sorrow to evoke a sorrow that is felt as painful. First, it moves us to real tears, and we are motivated to stifle them and to bring the sorrow to an end. Second, the sorrow is an explicitly felt distinction—a felt estrangement. It is a rejection of what Śaivyā, Hariścandra, and anyone like them are responding to when they feel grief. Finally, the sorrow is painful because it also motivates its own removal, specifically as an obstacle to explicitly felt identity.

More important, KCB's is not a conversion approach because the pain plays a crucial role in the achievement of feeling oneself as a subject. Explicitly felt identity is part of felt subjectivity, but it is not sufficient. Any state of mind where the subject feels complete identity with an object would obstruct a felt sense of self as there would be nothing left to the awareness but the object: the self would fall away. Therefore, there must be more to felt self-awareness than explicitly felt identity. To achieve a felt sense of self through explicitly felt identity with an object, one must, at a minimum, retain enough awareness of distinction to have a feeling of self in the first place. This is why a contemplator should not simply flip a switch and eliminate the pain they feel: their pain also has a role to play in their feeling themselves real as a subject.

This point also explains why KCB's is not a compensation approach to the rationality puzzle. On compensation approaches, we have only nonhedonic reasons to appreciate sorrowful tales—the fact that they evoke pain is not a reason to appreciate them. For KCB, the reason that we have for appreciating works of art is not exactly that they afford enjoyment. They do afford enjoyment, but some also afford pain. The reason that we have for appreciating those works is that they

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mix pleasurable explicitly felt identity with painful explicitly felt distinction in service of a felt awareness of ourselves as subjects. Nothing is compensating for the pain: felt distinction is a crucial part of the package.

The second part of 'The Concept of *Rasa*' (2011b) follows its discussion of painful beauty with a discussion of ugliness. Our next section turns to how experiences of ugliness play a central role in expanding our capacity to feel enjoyment and our felt sense of self.

5. Ugliness and Courageous Love

Grappling with good problems generates more good problems: 'The Concept of *Rasa*' ends with a further thought that extends and deepens KCB's account. When all goes well, audiences attending a performance of the *Caṇḍakauśika* have a contemplative feeling of sorrow that is subordinated to enjoyment because the enjoyment is about the sorrow. However, sometimes all does not go well. Due either to a fault in the work or audience members' receptivity, a work can evoke a 'feeling of ugliness' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §27). KCB has a specific phenomenon in mind, one that is revealed by his account of *rasa*. The 'feeling of ugliness' is an aesthetic 'disgust' or 'repulsion' where 'the joy is the object of the pain' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §29). In other words, the intentional object of the repulsion is the enjoyment that is taken in the sorrow, and it makes 'a torture' of that very enjoyment (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §27). Two questions arise: do we ever take pain in enjoyment? If we do, then how can and should we respond to it? Answering these questions suggests an answer to a third, about the special allure of tragedies and tales of sorrow.

To answer the question of whether we ever take pain in enjoyment, recall that contemplative enjoyment is a felt identity between subject and object in virtue of phenomenal immersion. Since the intentional object of repulsion is as much explicitly felt identity as it is enjoyment, to ask whether we take pain in enjoyment is to ask whether we take pain in explicitly felt identity. Consider cases where a work 'hits too close to home'. Imagine a member of the audience of the *Caṇḍakauśika* has lost a child. The play seduces him, drawing him into the world it depicts, so that he explicitly feels an enjoyable identity with the expressive essence of sorrow. Perhaps his personal experience with bereavement even catalyzes the felt identity. Is it hard to imagine, then, that his joy in explicitly felt identity with the expressive essence of sorrow repulses him? Is it hard to imagine, in other words, that he feels a pain whose intentional object is the joyful explicitly felt identity?

KCB observes that the onset of this repulsion can be 'shaken off' in several ways. First, the grieving parent can 'relapse to the normal practical attitude' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §29). He now attends not to a sample of the expressive essence of sorrow, but solely to his personal grief, just as Hariścandra does when he recognizes the corpse as his son. Aesthetic repulsion is allayed, but the sorrow is now one where personal selective interests and practical motivations dominate. The grieving parent can no longer remain aesthetically engaged in the play.

Second, the grieving parent might remain in the contemplative attitude but shift 'into contemplative channels other than the artistic', such as 'philosophic or

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religious contemplation' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §29; see also Shevchenko 2023). For instance, the gods who contemplate the sorrowful scene in the *Caṇḍakauśika* interpret it as a test of righteousness: they are engaged in religious contemplation. This reaction to ugliness resonates with Feagin's (1983) response to the rationality puzzle: we have reason to appreciate painful art because it makes us aware of the aptness of our moral responses to suffering. The gods' approval of the characters' responses is likewise concerned with *dharma;* it is not aesthetic, not a feeling of *rasa*.

Third, the grieving parent might stay in the aesthetic mode of contemplation but swap the feeling of ugliness for a feeling of the ludicrous. One way to do this is to 'watch it from a secure distance', while another is to exploit the 'explosive power of laughter' (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §29; see also Chakrabarti 2016: 159). For example, Hariścandra surveys the blood-drinking, fornicating ghouls in the cremation ground and laughs, 'Oh, my word! It's like a joke on those of uncultivated taste, for even the love-play of these monsters quickly turns into a different *rasa* altogether!' (Sathaye 2010: 369). He sees the horrors as ludicrous: we call this 'gallows humor'.

That dark humor and intellectualizing are familiar tricks we have for dealing with repulsion at the enjoyment in explicitly felt identity reinforces the claim that we do experience the feeling. KCB closes his discussion by urging on us a fourth response, made available by the recursive structure of his account of *rasa*. KCB writes that there are 'varying depths within the contemplative level', such that what cannot be enjoyed in one contemplative feeling can still be enjoyed in another (2011b: §27). The feeling of ugliness is repulsion at first-order contemplative enjoyment of painful beauty. KCB now introduces a second-order contemplative enjoyment. Just as the intentional object of first-order contemplative enjoyment can be the expressive essence of sorrow, the intentional object of second-order contemplative enjoyment is the feeling of ugliness, the repulsion itself. He calls this second-order contemplative enjoyment 'courageous love' (2011: §29). It is a feeling for 'Beauty Triumphant', for 'a beauty rich and strange' in triumph over the special feeling of ugliness (Bhattacharyya 2011b: §29). KCB does not use the world 'love' lightly here; he is not being cute. Second-order contemplative enjoyment of the feeling of ugliness takes effort and a process of education, but it also takes 'faith'.

Why it takes faith and deserves its name emerges when we turn to the question of why we should attempt courageous love, rather than its three alternatives (i.e., lapsing into the primary attitude, dark humor, and intellectualizing). We have reason to achieve beauty triumphant for the sake of the felt self-awareness that it yields. First-order contemplative enjoyment contributes to felt self-awareness because it balances a joyously felt identity between subject and object with a painful felt distinctness, and we feel ourselves real as subjects when identity and distinction are explicitly felt together in contemplation. Even terrible sorrow can be subordinated to contemplative enjoyment, but the repulsion that we sometimes feel is a refusal to regard sorrow in this way, as a vehicle for felt self-awareness. The grieving parent has reason to feel repulsed and to refuse contemplative joy in painful beauty. Yet, he continues to have reason to cultivate second-order enjoyment. In identifying with our aversion to a joyous explicitly felt identity with

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the expressive essence of sorrow, we come to terms with the necessity of felt self-awareness.

These answers to the questions about how ugliness is possible and how we should respond to it suggest an explanation of why we are right to make room in our lives for tragic and sorrowful tales. Purely enjoyable beauties provide opportunities for felt self-awareness, but painful beauties expand our opportunities for felt self-awareness because so much emotion hurts. Faced with the hurt, we sometimes recoil from the enjoyment we take in it. We see it as ugly, and one response to ugliness is courageous love, which further expands our opportunities for self-awareness. Only such painful beauties as tragedies and sorrowful tales permit the expansion—comedies do not.

In principle, any suffering, no matter how terrible, can be a painful beauty and hence an object of contemplative enjoyment. However, the greater the suffering, the more likely that first-order contemplative enjoyment will trigger repulsion. Therefore, the greater the suffering, the more likely it will be that second-order contemplative enjoyment is needed to open a path to felt self-awareness. Simply put, great suffering in the world cannot impose a cap on felt self-awareness. The world we inhabit is a world to whose horrors we cannot fully respond as affective creatures except through courageous love.

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