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## A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY<sup>1</sup> INTO SOME OF THE LITERARY/DRAMATIC ASPECTS OF BECKETT, SHAKESPEARE, AND SOPHOCLES

### *I. Method and Conspectus*

Initially, the topic seems immense and unwieldy. Critically, it may even appear arbitrary. Yet, philosophically, I<sup>2</sup> feel on substantive ground, insofar as the landscape of an Oedipus Coloneus, a Lear, and a Hamm stretches across a continuing canvas, co-extensive and transvaluational. The thrust of this study, then, will be to retain, uncompromisingly, the integrity of two perspectives: a classical comprehensiveness, on the one hand; and a philosophical re-location of ideology, on the other. The purpose will be to stay always within the confines of the text and its

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1. Excerpts from a work in progress. The present state of the study simply demonstrates by juxtaposing theory to *exemplum* without forcing application. A greater integration may reveal itself in its completed state.

2. To rest easy with the use of the 'I' here, allow me to invoke Professor David Halliburton from his remarkable study on Poe: "When I employ the first-person in my analyses of Poe, I am attempting to put myself in a situation that the text presents." *Edgar Allen Poe: A Phenomenological View* (Princeton, 1973), p. 27. By situation Halliburton means a philosophical stance with pre-ontological status, so far as entities and objects in the situation are concerned.

intentionality, and, together with the dual intent of my main thrust, to see the chosen texts in a new light.

No longer does phenomenology as a critical method require explanation; rather, some of its preeminent characteristics need to be assessed in relation to the present study. In phenomenology the pivotal factor to an inquiry is the inquirer, the subjective consciousness confronting the objective possibility of a text or an action; the inquirer stands as the existent who enjoys a special relationship to the thing being inquired about. Heidegger calls this inquirer *Dasein*; his meaning for our purposes is anti-Aristotelian: being-there in the world, stripped of attributes, in a very special relationship to things and others entities, and most forcefully, in an anti-metaphysical relation to time and history. *Dasein* forces the most basic question: it interrogates Being and tries to locate it; that is the determinant factor of its existential ontology. The preontological reality of *Dasein* yields to it an open possibility toward the horizon of Being.

Thus, to the ideological scheme of Western civilization Phenomenology may well stand as a substitution for metaphysics. The resonances of this eventuality to literature and criticism are not new with the twentieth century. Rarely has an age gone by without its inner war with metaphysics, waged inevitably through artistic consciousness, casting the spectre of doubt on the scientific model that rejects the authority of a subjective *Dasein* and looks for the horizon that illuminates Being beyond the world as we know it, in *meta-ta-physica*. In metaphysics we know through reference points, through the Cartesian *cogito*; in Phenomenology we know through the temporal horizon and how things and entities come to have a meaning in the historicity of *Dasein*; that is, how they enter the flow of human time and the consciousness of historical "being-there".

Criticism has long suffered knowledge through scientific models: we know through a pretense of objectivity. In Phenomenological criticism I can know by confronting the text through *its* intentions (not the author's), those ideas that I may confront in a situation as I experience the discrete character of a text and its subjective-objective way of revealing itself to me. A text falls into time, so to speak, and comes to mean through its relation to historical *Dasein*, through signification in human utterances and events.

## II. The Theatrical Imponderable

It is often tempting to say that Phenomenology is to Philosophy what the theatre is to dramatic literature. Yet the equation is unsatisfying because the relationship is more intimate than the parallelism would allow. Clearly, the intimacy is between Phenomenology and the theatre.

1. The theatre, not too unlike ideas, is not a given. Every age must re-locate it virtually *ex-nihilo*, otherwise we would not have a Chekhov, nor an Artaud, and certainly not an Ionesco. In this spirit it becomes imperative to wonder why people do theatre, which I take to be subtly different from why people write creatively. The aspect of literature in this question, although present in its root sense, is here only co-incidental. Predominant focus in this wonderment ought to be given to the "truth and reality" principle which allows parallel micro-constructs of the world, as well as to the world's need of a reconstitutive metaphor in the sense of kinesthetic repeat. In this latter, strictly physical, sense of metaphor, literature is the first and single dimension, while drama is at once the source and the manifestation in the tri-dimensional possibility of theatre as concrete metaphor. Nowhere is this more perfectly demonstrated than in Greek Tragedy, where the concrete picture must be set into motion before meaning can be given its ritual eloquence. And more particularly with the extant works of Sophocles, we find that heroism becomes taut, stripped of attributes, and abandoned to time and suffering.

2. The sovereignty of language on paper, as symbol and signification, may be the fixed and inescapable trauma in the communicative process. Language for the drama is shaped out of the duality of private and public moments. The way language makes assertions in the dramatic context is the way its shaping duality operates in conflict: never through the singularity of logical truth functions, nor particularly through direct signification; instead, the private psychic moment is pitted against the mythic and public moment. This is the elemental way in which language may be understood in the drama. It is in every sense of paramount importance to the concrete metaphor, remaining as it does one dimensional, but serving as the fuel

that sets in motion the picture of the whole. Shakespeare enjoys the vital center of this "public-private" duality, achieving effortless complexity, aided so originally by his Latinate rhetorical art. (When Coriolanus and Troilus transgress and break down the duality, they become brutalized.)

3. The use of metaphor as process is at once a sophistication and a primitive urge of re-playing reality. This urge is both a creative act and an act of violence, for it entails the imminent loss of familiarity and the deep regret for time's fleeting nature. The entailed violence in the re-play is the destruction of fixity by the attempt to recapture the real in metaphoric constructs. The dictum "*creatio ex nihilo*" in regard to creative acts must refer to the nothingness of coordinate parts and to the unified existence of the created object. (Nothingness does not cease with the creative act but continues to be a part of the created object; it is its destructibility, so to speak.) And time is as much the ground for the concrete metaphor as it is for the world; while violence is time's corroborative partner state the creative act of re-playing the real. In this peculiarly elegiac state we find Beckett, struggling to discard reality by re-playing the real. Winnie in *Happy Days* throws reality away the more she allows time's violence to engulf her by repeating "another heavenly day."

4. Theatre presents an enactment of events in real-time; which evokes in us the deepest understanding of ourselves. (I intend real-time as it is opposed to 'captured' time in cinematic-mechanics.) This enactment aspect, I believe, is what gives theatre a hieratic place in the artistic field. And, it is in the sense of enacting the metaphor that we may see theatre itself as Necessary Event.<sup>3</sup> Preliminarily, then, theatre is (a) an event, (b) a landscape for the enactment of events, (c) a metaphor in real-time. In this uncharacteristic understanding of theatre, save for the complex notion of Necessary Event, to which I shall be returning, (a) and (b) are self-evident, while (c), as the subject at hand, needs further tinkering with,

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3. This idea here is coined thus to correspond to Heidegger's Event of Appropriation, a notion from his later philosophy and particularly from *Identity and Difference*. Necessary Event, then, is comparable both schematically and philosophically.



though it does not necessarily need to be justified. Genet plays with this dangerous notion of Necessary Event in real-time, where an Archbishop or a Judge are less than what they seem; yet, at the same time, the necessity of their being what they must in the enactment of the event makes the event necessary – for the deepest understanding of ourselves, for the healing and celebration of the race, if you will.

5. Theatre as metaphor reveals an illusion. Because it is contained within real-time, this illusion is not the ordinary one of art; it is a more dangerous illusion of the nature of a psychic reality. Illusion here, in the concrete metaphor of theatre, presents itself as a negation, insofar as there is a kinesthetic – real space and time – repeat. In one sense, there is nothing complex about illusion as negation in this context; simply, it negates the possibility that theatre (the metaphor in real-time) might become the world in actuality. Negation functions as displacement of real-time. Of course, theatre as metaphor can be seen by its ‘en-actors’ – audience and artists alike – as a process in an attempt to bring order into the world as an *operative hypothesis*. Pirandello through his major works insists on this operative hypothesis, particularly in his ‘theatre trilogy’, where characters and spectators alike become embroiled in the illusion of the metaphor as well as the displacement of real-time. The ‘six characters’ may be searching for their maker in perpetuity, but it is the boy, while putting a bullet through his head, who finds and kills god – or the author, if you prefer, who will always leave things unfinished, no less the spectators.

6. To oversimplify: when opting out to immerse oneself into a theatrical performance (either as spectator or performer) one submits to an illusion in real-time. This illusion, all at once, obliterates the real-time of one’s life – the contiguity of time – in order to replace it with concrete fantasy-time, the illusion’s own manifestation. The manifestation of the theatrical performance, then, has displaced real-time and is itself operating on the *ground* of real-time. Quite naturally, this illusion, for some, may serve as an operative hypothesis for knowing the world *and* real-time on its uninterrupted ground. Though most Brechtian criticism would reject this notion, I believe Brecht’s great works are best accessible through the

fact that the theatre's illusion serves as a point of knowledge of the world and of real-time simultaneously. Granted, however, that we must go beyond illusion, as such; but we need illusion in order that we *can* go beyond to reach the objectifying principle (the needed alienation of his 'epic theatre'), otherwise we could not pass to an understanding (through identifying the difference) of his didactic thrust, which belongs to the world and to real-time on an uninterrupted ground, one to the other. In other words, in Brecht the theatre leads us at once to the world and its real-time.

### III. *Exemplum: Beckett's Endgame*

"Bare interior. Grey light. Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn. Front right, a door. Hanging near door, its face to wall, a picture."<sup>4</sup> This is the setting for *Endgame*. The implication is that the situation or scene, whatever it may be, is discarded from the outside in, whatever the outside—beyond the curtained windows—may represent. And the end of the scene may well be its beging, or the beginning of a situation; for the bareness of things and of people, the reduction to the state of mere existence and pure reality without possible attributes, affords no movement beyond the thereness of the fact. It is the "nearly finished" phrase in Clov's first speech that makes *Endgame* possible. And it is the same phrase that makes the game end. The eternity between "nearly" and the end makes time as insignificant in this case as the question of dialectic; here dialectic is substituted for by poetry, and time by the pureness of no-time. Both dialectic and time are factors of process and change. And in the end Hamm utters, "Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended." (p. 83.)

The impossible heap of which Clov speaks in the beginning is a poetic substitution for a dialectic of phenomena, their cumulative function and

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4. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York, 1961), p. 1. Future references will be included by pagination in the body of the text.

their ultimate rejection in the major metaphor of discarding. Thus the heap is impossible and little, like the "grain upon grain"; and it is unsatisfactory, for it holds no *a priori*; there is no "phenomenal structure" to the heap. It is merely negated; and, in its further metaphor, the knowledge it implies is useless. The meaninglessness of knowledge is demonstrated by Clov in the opening pantomime when he ascends the step-ladder to look at the earth from the small windows. He repeats the process twice, accompanying each look with a brief laugh. He might have continued going from window to window with the ladder had he not been distracted by the ashbins to which he goes next; there, he takes and folds up the covering sheet and opens each lid accompanying his look with a brief laugh. Nagg and Nell inside the bins are protoplasmic in their eternal stasis. They make Clov laugh, perhaps in pain.

Later on Hamm asks him whether he has ever had the curiosity to look at his (Hamm's) eyes; Clov replies: "Pulling back the lids? (Pause) No." Here perception and phenomena have a curious relation; what is seen and what sees have similar attributes. Eyes and body become objects in the game of discarding things. Brutally, the "phenomenal structure" begins to be discerned not as part of the heap, but within the human character. The end of the game, of course, is to discard what is beyond the windows, what is inside the ashbins, and what is behind the dark glasses.

The next phase, then, in the progression between "nearly finished" and the end, is the question of time in a field of action where action itself is related to the bareness of phenomena. First, the phenomena are established—which include, as we shall see later, blood, pain, and suffering—then, the obvious structural circularity of time is negated by ascribing to it the stasis quality. Immediately after Hamm speaks of his eyes having gone all white he asks for the time. Clov's answer is that it is the same as usual, zero. The phase which follows the question of time is a moral phase made possible only through habit and time-past. It is time-past which creates situation in the context of the game; all actions apart from time-past are arbitrary if they are to be momentarily considered, apart from the artist's intended structure; i.e. the rupture of causal rela-

tions. So that in a sense, all that these figures can talk about is time-past, for the present, by its mere arbitrariness, is its own punitive action; and by the very tejection of change, the possibility of future-time is not to be considered.

In the absurdity of the moral phase, which occupies most of the present in the field of action, the game takes on the nature of baiting toward a reduction that is painfully traversed every day. How many times will Hamm have asked of Clov, "Have you not had enough?" And how many times has Clov been threatened that he will be given nothing to eat. The questions, the answers, the facts are always the same. After Hamm's baiting and threatening to withhold food from Clov, he asks, matter-of-factly, for forgiveness. Clov's answer is the question, "Have you bled?" (p. 7.) This leads into Hamm's recurrent wish for the time when his painkiller can be administered, his insistence on asking to be located, the seeming desire for circularity through allusions to bicycle wheels—unsatisfied with the tiny castor wheels of his armchair—and his simple request, "Why don't you kill me?"

It is clear that the moral phase deteriorates through exposure, through assertiveness. It becomes absurdly funny. Nothing moral about it remains. The very act of a moral stance is turned into an objective habit without a history. Since the temporal process breaks down, the historicity of the moment becomes a mock on the thing it is supposed to represent. The moral phase, then, becomes a parody of itself, hence, one further "phenomenon" in the discarding structure.

What Beckett has succeeded in doing up to this point, in no more than seven minutes of playing time, is to turn pain, suffering, blood, death, and the moral order into phenomena, like a stepladder or a toy dog, things to be discarded in the progression of the game. There is no denying, of course, that in achieving this "objectification", a numbing torment of words has aided along in the journey to the arrival point. It cannot be easy to turn off the lightbulbs of knowledge in an act of negation and be able to tame words down to their meaningless state.

Pure reality is a place where Clov's seeds will not sprout and where Nagg's tooth was lost since yesterday, hence losing interest in the middle of reaching to kiss Nell. Perhaps this is a bit extreme; perhaps pure reality is absolute center where Hamm wants to be placed; and in another context it might even be thought of as Nietzsche's 'eternal return'. But one thing is certain: that any exemplification of pure reality is an arrival point which precludes the negation of all real action and possible mutations thereof that have come within the field of the journey through a phenomenal univers; hence the ground of reality and the field of action are equally reduced to an inert state where the only dimension is the *memory* of past-time. The past is relived both for punishment and for joy; hence Nell's elegiac exclamations about yesterday.

The idea that emergence from pure reality is unthinkable is not supported by the concept of existential nothingness. For, at the risk of oversimplification, in that concept the arrival at nothingness is immediately followed by emergence, since nothingness can be taken as a revelatory state. But in Beckett pure reality is everything that is the case. It is the being-there which interrogates Being. Obviously, with this line of thinking, Clov never leaves. And one would be optimistic to think that he does. At the end of the game he remains standing, his only possible position, and Hamm will say no more but will remain with the bloody handkerchief over his face. As for the progenitors, they have no pulse for the moment. But this state awaits only to be substituted for by the procreator, the "near-by boy", whose journey has begun already, and who will, when he gets enough time behind him, end up at this very arrival point (which is also a beginning) to live out his endgame.

It is possible here to shape the easy conclusion, provisionally: whatever we may mean (with Beckett) by pure reality, it must surely be akin to the notion of 'being-there', without attributes, hanging in the balance of a pre-ontological state—yet retaining no thread of connection with any absolute or transcendent point. It could be thought of as a new beginning, much the way *Dasein* has been conceived in more recent years. Consider Werner Marx's views about the later Heidegger, for example:



The concern of all of Heidegger's later works is the preparation of the possibility of another beginning of creative human Being—"another" beginning as compared with the one which was brought about by the poetic philosophizing of the pre-Socratics... The arrival of "another" beginning would be, in Hölderlin's words, the arrival of "das Rettende"—that which would bring about a saving. "Das Rettende" would consist in creative dwelling which, again in Hölderlin's words, on this earth."<sup>5</sup>

I submit the Beckettian state to be, in non-theoretical terms, the very thing Heidegger wishes to name and explore in his later thought. As for Werner Marx's notion of another beginning as compared to the pre-Socratics, I believe, Beckett's position is comparable to that of the late Sophocles. The *Coloneus*, as we shall have occasion to examine, falls into similar ideational structures—as it has long been pointed out that Heidegger shares such similarities with the pre-Socratics.

#### IV. *Pure Reality*

If ontological reality is the way entities show themselves in themselves and their subsequent being-in-the-world as such (intentionality), we must concede that such reality is an advanced state with the complexity of an implied moral structure. In this state two factors become immediately apparent: the factor of knowledge, and the negation-of-what-is. In the first case, knowledge carries the implication of the moral structure along with the relations of consciousness and personal history. Although the phenomenological moment can be said to be a subjective-objective complex, one that does not admit to a personal history, in the case of the moment it must have a pre-ontological status in relation to Being, or else admit to arbitrary objectification, the scientific model understanding of the world. In the second case, negation-of-what-is, we come to understand the "non-sophisticated" aspect of ontological reality, that is, its primal state where a moral dictum does not arise and where knowledge as such becomes a primordial pain, eliciting the profoundest laughter, as Beckett has repea-

tedly shown. This primal state, which appears to be the domain of Beckett's work (both in the novels and the plays), I refer to as *pure reality*. The relationship between ontological reality (the domain of the philosopher) and pure reality (the domain of the poet) is already implied. A further unfolding of this relation occurs with each *exemplum* as this study develops.

Every possibility of knowledge carries with it its own contradiction by exploding the metaphysical myth through which Beckettian knowledge must pass. The perverse negation of all that is affirmed (with the exception of the affirmation of poetry, even in the novel *How It Is*) is an action without a referent; it is a knowledge-situation for Beckett, where the known becomes the negation of the situation and threatens to pose itself, if pursued, as a vicious circle; it is, in short, posited as a meaningless meaning whose intelligibility as action depends on the relational rupture, that is to say, on absurdity. Causal and affective relations do not exist in pure reality—in the same sense that no attributes can be found in what classical thought called pure potentiality; within pure potentiality we find as well the negation of what-is—in precisely the same way that we can say now (through Beckett) that pure reality is the negation of (every-day) reality.

That which is significant here is the proposition that a negation of reality cannot be meaningful except in its function in presenting us with pure reality. Nor is pure reality possible without a negation of reality (and, of course, of literary realism as we know it.) There is no imperative factor in the agent of the action, only an urgency without a referent. Estragon is forever trying to get his boot off. He is *doing* something (ritualistically, if you will), but where is the impetus? How can we explain the apparent rupture of causal and spatial relations? Where is Estragon? Where is Krapp? Where is Hamm? I see it this way: they are in a situation which annihilates itself by three factors: (1) the negation: wait-stasis, (2) the negation: time-circularity, (3) the combined negation: stasis-in-circularity (Hamm demanding to be placed at absolute center with the wheel-chair.)

I believe this annihilation in Beckett is intended to exhibit and demonstrate in the theatre, protensively, the very action of nothingness. But what points to the impossibility of the external world of these works is the negation of knowledge. The annihilation of the situation is shown as even more devastating, because it is not only that there is nothing to be known in the presence of the situation, but there never was anything to be known. The objects of perception are a stupefying, receding present where the imagination tries frantically to salvage their "presence", as it were, by constant enumeration, as Winnie does. Withdrawal of the objects by some centrifugal force of the void makes direct knowledge impossible—because of no signification in our objects at hand. Winnie is forced into her mound of earth where she cannot even exercise a hold over her objects. Is *her* withdrawal a protensive action? Hardly. Is it an affirmation or a negation? To answer with either would be to give time its qualitative attributes. But to see Winnie's situation in *Happy Days* as "thrown-ness" into the world, absolves time, and what we have left is the inert journey through pure reality or that-which-is-not.

For anyone who will insist on finding a touch of moral optimism in Beckett he will probably construct some thing happy concerning the future. One reply to this might be: pure reality has no temporal possibilities; though a more simple answer can be shaped with the idea of boy in *Waiting for Godot* and the "nearby boy" in *Endgame*. Since the situation for each play is the world (i.e. everything that is the case) *and the only possibility for the world*, the function of boy is merely temporal, and more precisely, time-circular—which in turn heightens the stasis function of Estragon-Vladimir-Pozzo-Lucky and of Hamm-Clov-Nagg-Nell character structures. Because, it is made clear that "boy" is Lucky and "boy" is Clov; and whatever else may be "boy" emerging from the outside is only one more entity in the "phenomenal structure"—which changes nothing about pure reality.

This ritualistic (character structure) enclosure of action and its possibilities leaves but one conclusion: that the anti-situation of pure reality is the result of the exhaustion and subsequent negation of all possible real action as we know it in the theatre. Can it be, then, that the final gesture, that pure reality stands as no more than a metaphor since it reveals itself as an

anti-gesture? The answer may be yes for literary criticism, but it is no for a theatre of phenomenology and action. The "phenomenal structures", entailing the inner make-up of human character, provide for us such a conclusion; not a philosophical way of behaving in the world to be sure—but surely not a metaphor for the world either, for pure reality may be a hidden pre-requisite for everyday reality as we know it.

To say that Beckett is providing a line of action for a phenomenological inquiry here is perhaps to be unjust, for he could rightly claim that he is putting down the *groundwork* for this mode of thinking in the literary sense, which has only been laid down (perhaps erroneously) by conceptual philosophy. To be sure, Beckett has his own slant on despair (deeper for its poetic thrust than Heidegger's), which does not have the romantic implications of being 'the negation of hope' but merely Negation without perfection. Hence, the comic qualities of his despair, tinged with the absurd possibility of nothingness.

Now, it is apparent that Beckett's characters are on a journey. They have arrived and they are forever arriving at the arrival point in their painful attempt toward a dimensionless extension. This dimensionless extension, or anti-journey, is Beckett's ultimate pessimism and very much his own immense contribution to philosophical Nothingness. This state eludes exploration after its initial impact. It is an action conveyed, not a concept asserted. Exploration with its implied communication may prove a serious danger to this form theatre. Posited thus as annihilation, it reveals profound comic possibilities. So Beckett's theatre is a tragi-comic journey with primordial sources.

But the other journey, the one that exhausted the possibilities of real action is the sinking into deep water; and on the way, there are light bulbs that one turns off as one sinks deeper and deeper. We run across the light bulb that has lake Como on it, and the one which has the story of the tailor... And when we *reach* the bottom of the sea, where lake Como becomes a ritualistic repetition with everything but everyday meaning attached to it—and the story of the tailor is never "told as badly" as it is each time that it is told.

The journey to despair, then, that is, the sinking down, is itself nega-

ted by the very fact that it is final. The protensive possibility of emergence from the bottom of the sea is non-existent. There is no dread, no viewing of one's own death, no anguish, in fact nothing that intensifies suffering with the implication that at the end of each road there might be hope. All there is in *Endgame* is a primordial pain, as much of the body as of whatever else these existents of pure reality are made of. What else is left in them? One can only resort to metaphors. Perhaps the one thing we can say with some certainty is that they know there is nothing to know. And from that point it seems the only thing left is Beckett's poetry (as it is the poetry of Sophocles at the end of the *Coloneus*) that may well be the other beginning in thought, which is Heidegger's understanding of our age, complimenting the uncontaminated poetic thought of the pre-Socratics.

#### V. *Exemplum: Oedipus at Colonus*<sup>6</sup>

Oedipus Coloneus has the power of the non-vulnerable in the world. He can commit no sin that does not imply *a priori* justification. Through profound punishment for imperfections, he becomes perfect in his knowledge of them. The depth of his suffering provides him with an insight which is not available to other men (cf. 266.)<sup>7</sup> His life process guides him not toward a mortal end, but toward one that makes him non-human. Oedipus becomes, in his final state, not of this world. Because what he knows is the unknowable, he falls to the elements—even though the description resembles an ascension.

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6. Because of the particular approach it is not easy to identify specific debts (of which there are surely many) in classical scholarship. Apart from my great teachers, the following works have influenced my thinking about the *Coloneus*: P.E. Easterling, "Oedipus and Polyneices", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 13 (1967), 1-13. N. Helman, "Oedipus at Colonus: A Study of Old Age and Death", *American Image*, 19 (1962), 91-98. B.M.W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes: Sophocles' Tragic Hero and His Time*, (New Haven, 1957.) T.G. Rosenmeyer, "The Wrath of Oedipus", *Phoenix*, 6(1952), 92-112. T.B.L. Webster, *An Introduction to Sophocles*, (London, 1935.) R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "A Religious Function of Greek Tragedy", *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 74 (1954), 16-24.

7. Reference throughout will be to the University of Chicago translations of Sophocles' works; verse numbers will appear in the text.



The aging figure is sure of his powers from the start. But is this certainly, this knowledge, a gift to him alone, a kind of payment from the gods for having punished him so much that only his apotheosis will redeem them? The gods can no longer do anything to Oedipus. In his suffering he has become 'impregnable'. Death, too, does not come as a punishent; nor does the apotheosis come as a reward but as a final gesture of having a vision of the unknowable. So, in a manner of speaking, Oedipus defeats the gods at their own game. His apotheosis is terrifying and inevitable, for the gods themselves are retreating and seem distant in the end. Sophocles presents an archetypal form of deification, which, in any comparison to its Christian counterpart, the striking quality would be how 'un-glorious' Oedipus' 'ascension' is. What makes it terrifying is that nobody understands his vision and the world goes on in strife and terror as in the last scene of the play.

If this is a benevolent universe, great anger is puzzling. Those who have not received the miserable well will be cursed and damned with violent anger. The crucial question of the play comes with the second verse, "Where have we come to now, Antigone?" The closer Oedipus locates himself to his end, the greater his anger, and in that the more senseless. What he knows, then, becomes a threat, something which for mortals would better remain unknown. He has reached the place where he will rest his body and soul. In the prologue he remains gentle and prophetic. We know that, "Suffering and time, vast time, have been instructors in contentment." (6.) All he needs is a patch of earth to rest his bones, and token kindness from strangers. "The towers that crown the city" of Athens will receive him as a great gift. Thus he sits not in unfitting comfort, but where Antigone places him, describing in her gesture his laborious lot:

But rest on this rough stone.

It was a long road for an old man to travel. (20.)

Through his suffering Oedipus has conquered fear. Colonus is a fearful place. It is a forbidden darkness that resides here, and Oedipus will become one with mysterious earth. Signs of his divination, the horror of his face, are grasped by the stranger at the beginning, who turns to near

reverence before he leaves to bring the elders. Oedipus knows that this is to be his final resting place, and so he asks for Athens, the noble and high civilization, to make a gift of his divination. His prophetic abilities become clear, his knowledge certain. The prayer at the end of the prologue presents the full impact of the power of his suffering. He is in total awareness of his past, and now he sees his future with the clarity of Apollo:

Ladies whose eyes  
Are terrible: Spirits: upon sacred ground  
I have first bent my knees in this new land; (84-85.)  
...  
A resting place  
After long years, in the last country, where  
I should find home among the sacred Furies. (88-90)

The deities which he will join are nameless Furies; their eyes are terrible; they are revengeful and anger easily. Their Godhead is not in the same league as that of Apollo. These deities appear more mysterious and less rational than the Olympians. If Oedipus belongs among them, then he is made of two extremes: he is gentle like the Erinyes, and he is terrifying like the Furies. His final moments are *made* of these extremes. Now in his prayer he remains gentle but firm in his demand that his future be made as he foresees it. This is one of a series of rituals through the play that prepares his soul, stained of evil, for what is to come. He names his predicament in a humble moment:

Unless indeed I seem not worth your grace:  
Slave as I am to such unending pain  
As no man had before. (105-107.)

His prayer is as much to the "children of original Darkness" as it is to Athens, the great city. His view of Athens is one of reverence, and he has no doubts that he will be received with honor there.

When Oedipus emerges from the wood to a bewildered chorus, he may just as well be one of the Furies: "Ah! His face is dreadful! His voice

is dreadful!" (140.) To be accepted for what he is comes hard to the afflicted old man. The chorus is not easily convinced that he is not merely a polluter and an accursed man. When he is asked to leave, he will not beg to stay, but shames them by invoking the piety of their city. There are traces of contempt here that will erupt later with Creon. He begins, for the first time, to give explanations for his past deeds. He claims to have, "Suffered those deeds more than I acted them." (266.) He is certain now of his grace and full absolvment of sin, and, looking back, he sees the forces beyond himself working in his great wrongs; thus he can say:

And yet, how was I evil in myself?  
I had been wronged, I retaliated; even had I  
known what I was doing, was that evil? (270-272.)

His explanations are severe and foreshadow the fury that will come. His long speech is also in the form of a warning:

... I bring  
Advantage to this race, as you may learn  
More fully when some lord of yours is here.  
Meanwhile be careful to be just. (288-291.)

Thus the chorus is convinced and takes heed of the 'prophet's' words and authority. Now the episodic plot (so often wrongly called static) must move on to reveal the afflicted and the terrible Oedipus.

Ismene's arrival rounds out the two motifs of love, the first being Antigone from the start. The young girl's innocence is especially significant at this moment, immediately following what may be described as purification or a state of grace in the eyes of the elders. The news she brings, however, are of a bitter nature, designed to begin in the face of love a striking hatred that will be unrelenting and destructive. His wrath turns on his sons disgrace and banishment. The fault is not clear, though; whether the sons are really to blame rests with the after-knowledge that Oedipus has. At the time in the *Tyrannos*, and as he describes here, he begged for exile, even though it came after the consulting of the oracle. Death did not come naturally as a punishment.

Are the sons then guilty in this light? And for this reason? Their guilt becomes clear later, but on a different level than that they did not prevent his banishment. Hence, his long outburst (421-460) is only an indication of his hatred and curse tirades to come. The important and inadvertent effect here is for the benefit of the elders, who are getting a further insight into this terrifying creature; so his speech ends with:

If you men here consent—as do those powers  
holy and awful, the spirits of this place—  
to give me refuge, then shall this city have  
a great saviour; and woe to my enemies! (456-460)

The chorus out of divine fear pities him in his very power, and suggests that he take libations to the present deities. With certainty, Oedipus passes this action to his child, Ismene; again he does not feel altogether cleansed of evil.

With the arrival of Theseus the play takes a new turn, one toward honor and respect. Here is the benevolent ruler, glorious Athens herself. Even Oedipus is humbled before him. The promises for comfort and protection are more lofty than any expectations. Theseus is juxtaposed against Creon, who comes immediately after the formal paean that, “the land of running horses... takes a guest.” (668-669). Oedipus promises the gift of himself to Theseus before Creon has the chance to try and force his return. The emotions of love and hatred are so rapidly juxtaposed, for time is being stretched to last until the just have benefited and the enemies are cursed.

There are two kinds of time operating in the structure of this play: one is immediacy, the coming of lightning and thunder; and the other is the “vast time” of the opening, which is now beautifully expostulated (607-629) in the best poetic passage of the play. Oedipus himself is vast time both in his suffering and in the knowledge he will have at his apotheosis.

Creon is the crude state of Thebes, and the curse that falls upon him and the land is a relief and a further ritual for Oedipus. Here he disengages himself from crudity and the evil curse that befell him on Laius' land.

But Creon retaliates by abducting Antigone and Ismene, a source of momentary anguish for Oedipus, though his godlike knowledge does not let him believe for long in the power of Thebes. Theseus' men are on the tracks of the girls, while the confrontation takes place where the Athenian ruler disgraces the lawlessness of Thebes. Here Oedipus is harrassed once more with patricide and his ensuing sins, and forced to give his final answer, his justification ritual, "No: I shall not be judged an evil man." He is forever cleansed of those sins and alienated from the self that was. But before his end there is the final surge of the two major metaphors of the play: love and hatred. His daughters are re-united with him in a fit of passion; and his son, Polyneices, appears warranting the greatest fit of hatred up to now.

These two opposite and extremes of emotion are the last mortal sins of Oedipus that justify themselves only through his vast time of suffering. His love is too great for his sister-daughters; he clings to them with great emotional demand on the two children. His love is almost as destructive as his hatred. His final speech of hatred is apocalyptic in its power. Polyneices withers away at the force of it. Oedipus has not taken Antigone's advice:

Think of your mother's and your father's fate  
and what you suffered through them! If you do,  
I think you'll see how terrible an end  
terrible wrath may have. (1196-1199)

But this final wrath is necessary before he goes to the elements. It is not only necessary that he remove himself from his family for his purification to be complete, but that he remove his heirs from the earth, so that the cursed family will be no more.

So Oedipus will not speak again until the thunder. Theseus will follow for the revelation but will shade his eyes at the crucial moment. And thus the ascension or fall of Oedipus remains an unknowable. In the moment before his exit he sings to the non-revealing sunlight, implying the vision of light in the dark underworld. The final irony for him are the words to the children:



And yet one word  
 frees us of all the weight and pain of life:  
 That word is love. (1615-1617)

The most important fact about *Oedipus at Colonus* is the mystical apotheosis, which has no precedence in Greek literature. It is an archetype of deep theological thought. Sophocles has, in this play, removed to a far distance the conventional gods, and is working through a profound archetype that cannot be named any more than to be called Zeus. The terror behind Sophocles' thinking emerges in the scene with the daughters, Theseus, and the chorus at the end. Nobody has understood or seen anything. The world remains the same; strife and terror will be repeated. Life is an immense vacuum of seeming revelations. And nobody of this world knows. The final attraction to Sophocles' theological thought is that it has no illusions and carries no romantic notions. Oedipus became divine through suffering and knowledge, but in all that he also became of another world.

In substantial ways Sophocles' final work stands as the ideological predecessor of Beckett's *Endgame*. Oedipus and Hamm are forever trying to locate themselves in place; their landscape contains a journey. Oedipus is thrown into the world after the devastation of experience, Hamm has lost his history—and though both blind, they operate from inner seeing. Oedipus' pure reality is not a given—his 'being-there' has been won with the greatest of pain—whereas Hamm and Clov find themselves in it. In a sense Sophocles struggles against metaphysics, while at the same time he stakes claim to a religious imponderable. He offers no substitute such as that which Heidegger presents in place of metaphysics. But much like Heidegger he shapes an Oedipus who traverses every inch of the landscape on the way to becoming the interrogator of being. Sophocles has shaped the most perfect pre-ontological entity; so much so, that for Western Civilization he must be thought as of another world.

## VI. *Reality and Truth*

The theatre of phenomenology is a theatre of possibility by nature of the propaedeutic analysis of λέγειν τὰ φαινόμενα or ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαι-

νόμειν, which is Heidegger's formal definition of phenomenology. In respect to possibility, this mode of inquiry is also a journey to despair: a pivotal point for awareness of being-in-the-world, situated as the surd and arbitrary temporal existent. If phenomenology is to be taken as a mode of ontological reality in art, the temporal existent must be an emergent factor in a theatre of possibility. The formal definition of phenomenology (a Heideggerian derivation from the above Greek phrase of his own making: "To let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself")<sup>8</sup> becomes in its own turn an emergent factor, which can only be accessible through the formulation of its own dynamic theatre, since it is showing and demonstrating that we are talking about.

If by theatre in this sense we are forced to mean a theoretical "there-ness", the receptor of our "emergent factor", so much the better for modern dramatists. If by signification and description in phenomenological inquiry we come to mean an imposed clarity on the "emergent factor" (on the scrutinized meaning of an event), then that which is essentially thought becomes accessible through a dynamic theatre in which temporality and Dasein are the major proponents. Indeed theatre as action performed is the only meaningful accessibility of phenomenology's negation, since nothingness, for the most part, eludes mere linguistic expostulation. A given possibility is *one* among a set of possibles; the emergent factor is the protensive possibility of the journey to a kind of despair, despair (as we see in Beckett) which itself arises from a possibility, that of phenomenology; for Heidegger states, "We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility." Why the emergent factor is a protensive action toward despair becomes clear when we consider the awareness of situation for a character or his being-in-the-world. When the protensiveness of despair results in *a*-possible (whose effect is intelligible), namely, *emergence*, then despair takes on the qualities of absurdity, of irony. Indeed we can easily substitute absurdity or nothingness for despair from the start—it is the human condition of awareness of being-in-the-world. Now, the very reason that we call the emergent factor possibility is to be aware of the dread of its opposite. Keeping in mind the phenomenological

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8. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London, 1962), p. 58.

journey, we must consider the extended action of hidden-ness or un-emergence from despair. This too is a protensive action—the act of suicide. It is the dreaded opposite, *another possibility* (whose effect as a protensive action is unintelligible, in the sense that death is an end, and protensiveness cannot be *ex post facto*). Despair, absurdity, or nothingness translated into stage terms carry imminently their emergent factor, which is mockingly enough, knowledge. But knowledge at a very high price: the crushing of tradition-laden ignorance and the unquestioned metaphysic, both of which, combined, are at best “virtuous innocence” and at worst a melodramatic disease—a myth irreconcilable with the order of possible actions in the reality of being-in-the-world.

Thus in a further exegesis, the theatre is the transcendental escalator, so to speak, of phenomenology. For, it appears, through its endless possibilities for action, to eliminate linguistic theory and its threat, and proceeds *only* through a series of possible actions. The hermeneutics of the drama, then, is no more, *and no less*, than the study of the methodology of action; while the concern of phenomenology is the *hermeneusis* of actions in their *phenomenal* state. But this is not to say that a linguistic theory is imminent through such a study; rather, what hangs over one’s head after phenomenological inquiry is the possibility for theatre, the very *thrust* of the emergent factor. *Hence the drama is an inevitable form*. And the immanence and inevitability of its form rejects all aesthetic theory, which is necessarily a linguistic threat, a limiting through imposed and arbitrary frameworks. And if the argument should arise that the study of action will lead us into an aesthetic theory, we shall only be forced into the position of defining action as the *a priori* principle to all components of the drama, where action is one of countless possible specificities that cannot be defined in absentia. (Our use of drama here refers to the literary component of the theatrical experience.) Action is not a limitation; it is a de-limiting factor, a de-conceptualization of time, space, and history. What we understand through action is primordial reality, situation, or *Being-there*—a brute fact. So that the theatre can claim with Heidegger: “Whenever a phenomenological concept is drawn from primordial sources, there is a possibility that it may degenerate if communicated in the form of an assertion”.

Earlier I alluded to a "dynamic theatre". This is, more properly speaking, the logical plane where phenomenology presents its case, the "thereness". For the time, we shall call this plane *ontological reality*. This is the state where the emergent factor becomes what it is; that is, it emerges as awareness from the journey of inquiry in the mode of ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα. It can be further viewed as a referent dynamic where time takes on the qualitative value of protensive history; or, more fundamentally, where the end of an action finds a referent such that it *conditions* the "becoming" of history, thus *making* history.

Ontological reality, then, in our sense, is a poet's and not a philosopher's term. It is made accessible to the dramatist through the comprehensiveness of phenomenology. Phenomenology, in this context, must be where thought and poetry converge. For the dramatist this point of convergence is very important. From Husserl to Sartre, this mode of thought has come to be associated as much with an art aesthetic as with philosophy proper. Even in the novel form Joyce's stream of consciousness experiments surely were prompted, at least in part, from what Husserl called "internal time consciousness".

When we speak of reality and truth as being the same we mean in the primordial sense through which a character shows himself phenomenologically as Dasein; this we characterize as being thrown into the "thereness". Pirandello's six characters are thrown, pitted against existence with hostility rather than care toward Being-in-the-world. Care and hostility is the difference between being oneself and being-what-one-is-not. On the plane of ontological reality that which shows itself as what-it-is-not is a seeming or a semblant which is interconnected with reality not by contrariety but by modality. In short, the distinction between semblance and reality lies in the way phenomena show themselves to be. The six characters, assuming for the present that they all show themselves to be in the same way, are semblances, in our sense, as opposed to the actors in the theatre who show themselves as manifest phenomena in the original definition of phenomenology. Both Troilus and Cressida partake of 'care' and 'hostility' and suffer the psychic and ideological rupture as they oscillate between see-

ming and reality in search of a distant truth that in Shakespeare is more or less the brutalization of being-in-the-world.

### *VII. Exemplum: Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida*

All action in the play is destructive. All events, from the simplest to the most complex, from the casual gesture of bringing two lovers together to the complex event of war, have about them the inevitability of a natural law of destruction. The characters' overpowering need to locate (and live by) some ultimate value falls prey to this natural law. Nor is this law of destruction necessarily cynical; it is seen rather as nature's discard pit where Ulysses' hierarchy of state-metaphysic, Hector's trust and belief in same, Troilus' absolute value in love, Agamemnon's heroic achievements, Ajax's egoism, and Achilles' pride, are thrown into the world of void and slowly serve as ideas to undermine the characters who hold them.

All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes,  
 Severals and generals of grace exact,  
 Achievements, plots, orders, preventions,  
 Excitements to the field or speech for truce,  
 Success or loss, what is or is not, serves  
 As stuff for these two to make paradoxes. (I, iii, 179-184)

At the conclusion of the "degree speech" Ulysses uses his eloquent thought to pass on mere gossip about Achilles and Patroclus: the absurdity of a situation that travels from serious thought through spite to end up ludicrously comic. The great heroes of Troy, after having set down the most visionary of Plato's ideals, proceed to undermine themselves through a most callous stance, a trivial understanding of the ideals expressed; despite the fact that the old fox Ulysses has an ironic view of the whole: he too is duped in the travesty and does not escape blemish.

The talk of the play is fundamentally talk about values. The action is a temporal dimension of experience. An event is seen as accident. This is re-enforced by the failure of the Greeks' intellectual attempt to *order* events (i.e. the Ulysses-Nestor machinations toward Achilles-Ajax). There-



fore, talk and action in the play are functional on two different planes. They are disconnected.

The reason why language in this work seems formidable is because it is rarely used as a means of direct communication; since it has no referent in a value system in relation to actions performed, the relationship of language to lives lived is both tragic and comic—and, of course, archly absurd. Action, situation, and event are more viable, and in the end, more telling communicative tools. This is why I prefer to believe in a spatial proximity of every character to every scene, where all the characters are in a panoramic view, on stage at all times, in clusters and in shadows, reflected in distortive mirrors: in the way time of external (mythic) events reflects internal time, language reflects action, idea reflects situation—all distorted reflections into a passionate deformity, not unlike Thersites himself and his relation to the whole.

*Thersites:* With too much blood and too little brain  
these two may run mad; but if with too much brain  
and too little blood they do, I'll be a curer of madmen.  
Here's Agamemnon, an honest fellow enough,  
and one that loves quails, but he has not so much  
brain as ear-wax;... (V, i, 49-54)

The relation of Thersites to the whole is that of disengaging the emotional substratum from the intellectual thrust, leaving the action without a complete referent, cold and bloodless. Thersites demythologizes everyone around him the better to drive the author's purpose of infidelity and disloyalty—which is at the core of the play's world. His labyrinth of fury makes Thersites an external actor to the story, a figure used by Shakespeare to show the break-down of illusions, to show the collapse of rhetoric, and the rupture between the spiritual and the physical. And he is, above all, an actor who is spatially omnipotent. Therefore, I consider it crucial that the actor be present "epically" with every scene, being-alongside, as it were. This will tax the theatre interpreter in his task of communication through the medium of performance by means of a unified action-participation; especially when some characters are made to witness

a scene of staggering moral and intellectual proportions to which a persona (under the illusion of realism) might never be subjected.

The Epic tradition (Brecht notwithstanding), which goes back to the Chaucerean tale and the Homeric song, has something regenerative operating within; the actor-singer is an all-round participant. He plays both the Miller and the Miller's wife (both Ulysses and Circe). Yes, with a healthy objectivity; for he *is* the spectator of Ulysses when he is singing Ulysses, and the spectator of Circe when he is singing Circe. This spectator-character (objective-subjective) balance is extremely difficult to achieve. It is both a state of self-consciousness and a mental image in the true epic oral tradition.

In *Troilus and Cressida* this balance of self-consciousness and mental image is built into the structure of the work, notably in the disparate functions of talk and action. Here is talk. And there is action. Talk is a state of self-consciousness, in the sense of self-awareness: in some characters it takes the guise of self-justification. Talk is, for the most part, objective. The mental image, here, is of our character in action; and since action (or experience) is seen in this play as a universe of chance, we choose a mental image of ourselves (a character) in action and hold onto it in a subjective way, alongside the talk. We do not hold on to the two factors alongside each other in order to create a whole character, necessarily (nor is Shakespeare in his structure). Rather, we as interpreters, are choosing the means of the Epic to best reveal the writer's work. Shakespeare, on the other hand, is using talk and action in his way to make a philosophical statement; which statement does not concern the actor at the time he is "revealing" the Epic structure. The statement is the effect. The actor knows the effect only as spectator of his own character.

The above is my only thematic justification for keeping all the characters on stage at all times. It is not a theatrical "gimmick", though no doubt it may be seen as such. I feel strongly that the work demands a literal pictorial treatment of its imagistic structure involving the human element

physically. The characters are mirrored, their picture oscillating between talk and action; between themselves alive in a scene and themselves in a secondary relationship to a scene. Each relationship, whether primary or secondary, is constantly shifting in relation to talk-action. Nothing is fixed for long, i.e., a character in secondary relationship (outside of a scene) will be hovering in the shadows, say, for a specific reason, then something is said (or another scene comes in play) and he is altogether altered—still in secondary relationship—only now he is highlighted by the bodies around him. This must be a powerful mental image in the actor, not something that would translate with physical acuteness to the audience; but something that the audience would feel over an extended period of time through the brain-power of the actor-interpreter.

The story in this work is the least important element. The critical stance on existence, which functions on a different plane from the story, is all-embracing.

Shakespeare has set up as his target all of systematic thought. Perhaps he saw that the West—the classical and the modern period—was ravaged by Plato's (misused) conceptions of the state as articulated in Ulysses' great degree speech. Nor are emotions such as love, ordered and systematized in a valueless culture, spared. Nor is intellect spared from the discarding pit. Like the Spartan children who were too frail to be of use in battle and were exposed to die in a deep pit, so here, what is of no use to existence is discarded as if by natural law. "There is no rule in unity," in Troilus' terms. We always try to order things and fix rules for order, shortcuts for understanding experience; but it rarely works.

Shakespeare is attacking short-cuts and generalizations. No, the universe, insofar as human existence is concerned, cannot be a unified whole under which everything falls in place. Cressida is not an unchanging principle. When she arrives at the Greek camp, she is everybody's Cressida; and she is another Cressida in our eyes, just as she is Diomed's Cressida later. There is no unchanging essence there; only the existence of a girl who shapes her whole being passionately according to the situation

she happens to find herself in. She laments her fickleness and the temporal anguish, but she accepts it more freely than anyone else. Cressida is a fascinating character, because she becomes what the other characters see her as. She is intelligent and foolish, honest in response and even con-  
niving. But her honesty of feeling at any given moment redeems her from becoming Diomed's Cressida. At that moment she is fulfilling Diomedes' image of her.

Troilus, on the other hand, creates the girl bigger than life in his groping to find his own understanding of existence. In the Sartrean sense he is dishonest in some deep recess of his consciousness; he is merely prolonging reality, and his own brutalization therein, by seeing Cressida as what she is not.

In characteristic fashion of reversing all order, the only character Shakespeare allows to emerge as a little more human at the end is Ajax. Everyone else is knocked down and mauled about; but Ajax manages to be less of a brute after his confrontation with Hector.

Each character, again true to epic tradition, has inconsistencies and is shaped in ambiguities. Our job is not to smooth over the inconsistencies, but play them to their full effect.

### VIII. *Exemplum: Sophocles' Philoctetes*

Philoctetes wandered by chance into sacred ground, unknowingly. His guilt was ignorance; his punishment, the wound that eats away his flesh slowly. Time has made the wound his life and his life the wound. Where is justice in the order of things Chryse's revenge is out of proportion to the guilt. Sophoclean discord is here on the surface. We are left, then, to contend with two internal factors: suffering, which is primeval, that of the crags and shores of Lemnos as they withstand nature's decay, and time without immediacy. Internal time makes suffering an extended fact; the instrument is the wound, slow decay the outcome. Philoctetes is one with his island; his instrument to fight or appease the world is the bow of



Herakles; it is also his self-preservation. In his life he has everything, and he has greatness. Time has simplified his existence, and exalted him: his life is the wound (its outcome suffering) and the fierce opposite, which checks extinction, the great gift of the bow.

His life, then, is given; but the characteristics of Philoctetes are formulated when petty men, and external time set in briefly to remind him that he is human, to give meaning to his suffering and pain to his wound. Philoctetes is an island but also a profoundly lonely man; and he knows this only in the face of other men. He has no particular age. He may be a docile ninety-year-old Sophocles, but his rage is ageless and fierce, even though the structure conveys serenity.

The structure of *Philoctetes* begins with expedient sophistry and ends with the divine will that is found in men of great suffering. The great inner self of Philoctetes is complemented by Herakles, who alone understands his torture, and who comes as another part of him to rescue the very heroic breed that he himself belonged to when on the earth. If this is technically a God from the machine, it is certainly a very ingenious one, and one who is not unlike Philoctetes himself. The intermediate points of structure consist of the vices and virtues of a lifetime. There is an Odysseus whose end justifies all means and a Neoptolemus whose knowledge is not experience, but a tutored honor, war-making, friend-ship, and the like. His teachers may be good or evil; he is not always able to judge.

Odysseus is realistic in his first exchange with Neoptolemus. He explains what must be done at all costs of morality, and at the same time, in his expedient outlook, he distorts Helenus' prophecy and dismisses Philoctetes as a conqueror of Troy, assuming that his weapons alone are the cause that he was mentioned by the prophet (113,115). There is a cold, war-like necessity to the prologos. It is not until the exchange between chorus and Neoptolemus that we have a glimpse of a charitable youth, who in his innocence is as dangerous as he is good. He can hardly wait to see the "terrible wanderer," (147) who "is trying to shoot birds to prolong his miserable life." (164) This is the description of Philoctetes from men whose life is fleeting, who mark time from birth and death. But for Philoctetes coming to be and passing away is not an immediate fact. The description of his approaching before his appearance has the force of a kind of



deification. We have the feeling that he is the pitiful God of his deserted patch of earth. We await to see a splendid hero who has strangely fallen. According to our expectations he must be fearful, but also benevolent.

But judgment is passed on his lonely character too quickly, before he has seen the men on his island. There is hardly any indication in Philoctetes' first appearance to match what the chorus say of him earlier:

He must have stumbled far down on the path,  
and his moaning carried all the way here.  
Or perhaps he stopped to look at the empty harbor,  
for it was a bitter cry. (216-19)

On the contrary, when Philoctetes speaks for the first time, he is calm and polite. His cries are no doubt real, but they are unreal to him who proceeds as a matter of everyday living. Their appearance reminds him of his loneliness and, panick-stricken, he begs for speech, at least. He does not give the impression of a man stranded on a desert island, but of one who very much belongs to that island. He does not show happiness that these strangers arrived and will surely rescue him; but that they are Greek and speak his tongue. Next he will tell them his woes, for he is among friends. To leave the island is a final thought and a ritual even in the asking. (468-506.) He must ask for a good many things beforehand. He is bound by hatred and love to the Trojan expedition. The life he was forced to leave ten years before haunts him each time men come to his island. Through his questions he finds that there is no justice still in that world, for all the good men are dead and the bad are still living. His spirit is very much like that of Neoptolemos. The discord is all too real: it begins with the senseless death of good men such as Ajax and Achilles and goes from its broad aspect to the particular instance of the Atreidae and Odysseus, who desert one of their heroes because of his wound, a wound inflicted unjustly by a God.

Yet they that outraged God casting me away  
can hold their tongues and laugh! While my disease  
always increases and grows worse.... (257-59)

In his long and beautiful speech (254-317) about life on Lemnos, Philoctetes is painfully aware of time. "Time came and went for me."—*χρόνος δὴ διὰ χρόνου*—(285) But he is also aware that he is not going to die from mere suffering, for always some well-ordered thing would save his life. When speaking of rubbing stone on stone:

... I would at last produce  
the spark that kept me still in life. (297-8)

This spark seems to be produced from day to day in a life of condemned suffering. If we consider further the original, *ἀφαντον φῶς*, which the translator above ignores, we see that the spark is a "hidden light." In an extended suffering, in a lifelong wound, there need be "hidden sparks" to turn moments of sorrow into endurance. But life as depicted in this form is strange; it is something to be avoided;

Boy, let me tell you of this island.  
No sailoilor by his choice comes near it.  
There is no anchorage... (300-302)

There is no doubt that Lemnos has come to represent lonely existence, one apart from men, a bitter one.

Neoptolemus is convinced of his mission on Lemnos and proceeds with the type of deception that easy turns of irony twist into truth. Odysseus is surely hated, and the promise that Philoctetes will be taken home comes to be fulfilled at least in word at the end. There is a good deal of talk about friendship here, which is sincere and which takes hold even beyond the deception, to the point where Philoctetes will consent to the youth's basic goodness and blame his teachers for the evil learned. Friendship is important insofar as there is a suggestion that Neoptolemus may well be the inheritor of the bow; as it is he is allowed to touch it. "... It was for that, for friendly help, I myself won it first." (669-70) At this surge of emotion, Philoctetes forgets his pain, and exalts the man who will be his savior. The language is beautiful and lofty. The rise is such that there can only be a fall. This is foreshadowed by the chorus who harps in

a long Ode on his very suffering. Immediately following, Philoctetes begins to howl, for She has come upon him, the terrible Goddess with the wasting pain. How ironic the chorus passage, just preceding:

But now he will end fortunate. He has fallen in  
with the son of good men. He will be great, after all. (719-20)

Throughout his fearful suffering that follows, he sings a semiconscious dirge to his own death. Structurally, this passage is magnificent, for it foreshadows not what will happen, but what has gone on before; it is an embodying motif, leading into sleep, a symbol of the end of his Lemnian life. This passage is not unlike that of the final moments of Herakles in the *Trachiniae*, and allusions to Herakles are recurrent:

Boy, my good boy, take up this body of mine  
and burn it on what they call the Lemnian fire,  
I had the resolution to do this for another. (799-801)

After sleep, comes a new Philoctetes ready for the fall and humiliation. If this is a new life, then he is not ready for its deceptions and injustices: "Blessed the light that comes after my sleep, blessed the watching of friends." (867-8) From this moment until line 894 we witness, through the words intended for the moment, the exact counterpart of what might be happening at the end when they start for Troy. Then the blow comes. Philoctetes has fully grasped the meaning of it all when he no longer calls him affectionately "boy", but "stranger." When he breaks into impersonal indignation he does not call to the Gods for witnesses, but:

Caverns and headlands, dens of wild creatures,  
you jutting broken crags, to you I raise my cry—  
there is no one else that I can speak to—  
and you have always been there, have always heard me,  
let me tell you what he has done to me, this boy, .... (936-40)

And when he sees how hopeless it is to beg for his bow, he utters the

futile, "Then I am nothing." (951)

Odysseus' appearance will only strengthen Philoctetes' conviction and sense of justice. The ball of persuasion is tossed between the innocent and the guilty conniver, but Philoctetes will not relent. Our sympathies are with him. His strong words and lyric passages gnaw on the conscience of Neoptolemus until he gives into his honor and friendship and returns the bow. His final act of *arete* is to save the life of Odysseus. This gesture is done with the knowledge the youth has acquired during the course of the play. He is baffled and hurt to be sure, but at least he knows what he is doing is right.

Philoctetes ceases to suffer and learns with a sudden shock. His knowledge is the divine will inside him. This is his tragedy. That he must act according to this will, and end his life thus. Time, if it were at a standstill during his dirge, is now moving him toward Troy, cleanly without even the trickle of blood that comes from a mortal blow. Herakles is the perfect image, and the only man or God who would end the matter with perfection. The final gesture is to pray to Lemnos, to turn to the earth.

In this work both care and hostility appear in the center of each character. Neoptolemos, not unlike Troilus, travels the road from good breeding to brutalization through the demand of inevitable events. Philoctetes, too, crashes against the reality of the world—while he knows both the force of hostility and care. For Neoptolemos truth is initially fixed in his heroic *paideia*, while reality comes in the form of necessity to rupture his relation to truth, to show him the shifting nature of truth and reality. In the end, of course, Sophocles points to an identity between the two; but the fact of his having created havoc with the hostile relation between truth and reality can never be forgot—not by Neoptolemos, who experiences it for the first time, not by Philoctetes, who experiences it once more.

### IX. *Non-metaphysical identity*

For the technological age identity stands as one of the unstated dilemmas; unstated because its understanding belongs solely to an ontotheological realm, as tradition would have it. Yet Heidegger showed in 1957

(anniversary lecture, University of Freiburg in Breisgau) that "the principle of identity" needs to be re-examined and understood anew, which, after his fashion, meant to look at the thing simply, and more often than not in the manner of the pre-Socratics.

In his re-examination of the principle of identity Heidegger cuts through Western thought's metaphysical formulation of identity (as a basic trait of Being--in a chain of traits) and returns to Parmenides' understanding of the principle: τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι<sup>9</sup> which is usually rendered as: "thought and being are the same". Initially this can be seen as the notion that every being embodies identity, a special unity with itself. In other words, *A is A*, instead of *A=A* as in metaphysics.

To aid him in his special understanding of the Parmenides fragment as: "thinking and Being belong together in the Same and by virtue of this Same," (p. 27) Heidegger rallies a unique notion from Plato's *Sophist*, 254d. The discussion is on "στάσις and κίνησις, rest and motion. Plato has the stranger say at this point: οὐκοῦν αὐτῶν ἕκαστον τοῖν μὲν δυοῖν ἑτερόν ἐστιν, αὐτὸ δ' ἑαυτῷ ταυτόν.

Each one of them is different from the (other) two, but itself the same for itself. "Heidegger centers on Plato's phrase ἕκαστον ἑαυτῷ ταυτόν "each itself the same for itself" (p. 24), and concludes that the principle of identity should now mean that "every A is itself the same with itself." (p. 25)

The further development and understanding of this is quite remarkable for its extended emphasis on the "belonging together"; in other words, for the emphasis on the *relation* rather than the things related. This stands as the crux of the understanding, what makes identity non-metaphysical. If we stress *together* in the belonging together in the Same (τὸ αὐτό, "idem"), we have a 'coinciding' of two things and a restatement of the metaphysical principle; but if the emphasis is on *belonging* together, the issue turns on ownership and appropriation: man in relation to Being is a *belonging* together in the Same. The relation of man to Being is belonging through the Event of Appropriation. "Man and Being are appropriated to

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9. M. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, tr. J. Stambaugh (New York, 1969), p. 26. Future references by pagination in the text.



each other." (p. 31) When we grasp the import of this issue—to be sure, not through verifiability—then we can begin to understand how it all relates to thought. The intermediate step involves a leap with our metaphysically oriented language, a "spring", as Heidegger calls it. "The spring is the abrupt entry into the realm from which man and Being have already reached each other in their active nature, since both are mutually appropriated, extended as a gift, one to the other. Only the entry into the realm of this mutual appropriation determines and defines the experience of thinking" (p. 33).

In a final thrust, Heidegger relates man to technology in an open face to face relation as with Being. He calls the manner in which man and Being concern each other in the world of technology, the Framework. He takes the Framework to be far more real than atomic energy and the machine—and rejects the turning of man into subject, defined by objects. The tragedy and the peculiar kind of despair of modern man (as Beckett would no doubt hold) is his definition through his objects. Heidegger does not wish technology to become a defining principle for man, for as such it becomes a limiting factor and rushes to the aid of metaphysics. Man should be forever using technology—no matter its advances—as a tool to reach the Event of Appropriation.

Now, this old-new illumination of the principle of identity can open up a wealth of understanding of a body of literature from the standpoint of phenomenology: of contemporary texts, as well as of the classics. With the notion of identity as non-metaphysical we can see in Hamm another dimension; in Lear we can name the anguish of coming face to face with Being, unable to spring into the real; in Ajax, Antigone, Oedipus, Deianira, and Electra we witness a clash between Being and thought, between the same against itself. Perhaps Plato's objection to tragedy was that 'emotional metaphysics' came to the aid of the clash—and that time and suffering played such a crucial and decaying role, deceiving the common sense of man.

#### *X. Exemplum: Sophocles' Ajax*

The Sophoclean hero is self-destructive. The Gods may render him

helpless to choose, but the act of his destruction is his own. For Ajax, suffering is knowledge and shame therefrom. In him there is the sign of a noble and wise man, whose knowledge failed him once with fatal consequences; this failure the dramatist chooses to call madness. The illusion of his madness after the fact is the source of his constant anguish. The blind forces in the universe are the cause — insofar as he can see — of the failure of his senses. This brings about deep shame and contempt for any order or Goodhood. The blind forces have arbitrarily doomed his nature; what remains now is the attempt to absolve shame, and choose in the face of anguish a line of action that would restore the heroic nature. Is this possible, however, in the light of his own pride and self-destruction? The choice is not a free one, but limited within the confines of his wrongdoing. His own knowledge necessitates the limitation and points to an inevitable outcome. Indeed, it might be said that Ajax knows too much and perceives too clearly the depth of his actions to have any hope of salvation in this world.

Anguish and disgust of his own nature turns Ajax into an ironic figure, for juxtaposed against his furious, violent nature, there is the gentle, noble, and redeemed creature. His suffering springs from the opposites in him; the disgust and agony (the meaning of his name, 430.) come from a realization that in him is a powerful beast that he cannot control nor have knowledge of. The irony in his knowledge lies in the fact that it excludes knowledge of self; and here, then, is the full location of his anguish: in the face of the self he does not know, in the face of the actions he commits unwittingly.

It seems that throughout the text, from the prologos to the final scene, the power of Ajax lurks commandingly, whether or not he is on stage. At the beginning we find Odysseus in hot pursuit of him; but the diabolical villain — despite Ajax's own initial guilt of intention — is Athena. She traces him and seems bent on his ridicule like a petty, revengeful mortal: "But to laugh at your enemies— /what sweeter laughter can there be than that?" (78-9). Only at the end of the prologos does she claim that his punishment is the result of his pride. Wounded pride may have been the result of inflicted insult, suffering bad fortune in the hands

of the Atridae, who chose not to give him Achilles's armor. Athena must, in the end, fare badly in this play; it is necessary to the character of Ajax that he be menaced by a cruel God, so that the better to redeem and restore him his nobility.

In contra-distinction to Athena, we have at the beginning the traditional conniver, Odysseus, as a good and rational human. Sophocles' choice strengthens the undercurrent attack on divine order. The Gods are irrational illusions, and the reality is human thought. Only this way can the rehabilitation of Ajax have the meaning that it must for Sophocles. Odysseus is kind and bewildered at the idea that his worst enemy is mad. He cannot fathom the action against the livestock; his response implies honest pity for Ajax. The brief appearance of Ajax — the only time he shows unawareness of his senses — marks a puzzling point in the first part of the play. Is he mad or merely guilty of the worst kind of offense. If Athena can (and needs to) throw powerful darkness before his eyes (85) in order that he may not see Odysseus, then he is not certain of having him hanging from his beam. The point is: either his senses are deceived, and there is no question of madness, or he is sufficiently insane as to be aimless in his actions. It makes a difference to determine which, for in the first case he is the initiator of his own action, and in the second, a mere instrument of the God. If his original gesture of leaving Tecmessa alone with violence in his eyes and making for the camp of the Atridae is a wilful action, then his madness is dubious; in such a case it is merely a set of illusions contrived momentarily by the God. If, on the other hand, his gesture to kill them is one of madness, then there is no need for redemption, nor is there a play. So, strictly speaking, Ajax is never insane; a fact which presents additional problems on the ironic level, for he must consciously maintain part of the illusion of his insanity, lest he should die of shame. His anguish works on a double irony here: the madness that he must show for the madness that never was a part of him.

With the first parodos of the chorus we find that the Salaminian soldiers are expressing shame for the rumours they have heard. They ease into the bitter fact, not wishing to believe it; but in the first s  
e ???

Can it have been wild, bull-consorting Artemis  
That stirred you, evil Tale,  
Mother of my disgrace, to move against the flocks? (172-74).

With Tecmessa's arrival, the chorus confirms further—this time in gory detail—what they already knew. Tecmessa relates his mad fit, but reveals also that it was fleeting and over with: "But now that he recovered and breathes clear,/His own anguish totally masters him" (274-75). In her long speech where the chorus demands to know all, Tecmessa gives the line of action of the whole play. This is a strikingly compressed foreshadowing that comes true to the very last image. There is also the clear foreboding that is never placed in vain:

There are clear sings, too,  
that he's aiming to do some dreadful thing; his words  
And his lamentations both somehow suggest it. (325-27)

The second appearance of Ajax is one of panic born of deep grief. First he calls for his son, then for his brother, Teucer, like a man who is drowning. Time is playing tricks on him—he will not move or act, but stands brooding, unable to go beyond the numbing knowledge at his fit of madness. So time is stilled for him at the point of shame. When he sees his sailors, he responds with a kind of love that lifts his spirits enough to think more broadly of his folly. His first request from them is that they help him die. Then, in friendly company, he touches on the crucial actions:

How could I be so cursed?  
To let those precious villains out of my hand,  
And fall on goats and cattle. (372-74)

This clearly points to his full sanity and wilful action. And, what's more important, the hatred for his enemies is even stronger than before. There are no signs of repentance; if anything, there is additional bitterness. His hatred builds from the mistake.

What follows is the bitter anguish of a doomed man. The beautifully poetic, kommos-like exchange with the chorus, containing all the muffled cries of a suffering hero, those cries his nature abhorred once ("He always used to say such cries were base,/marks of an abject spirit"), reveal all the hybris, fury and violence that he must have had before his great affliction. The important factor still remains that his tragic ridicule and folly have not had the effect of tempering; his bafflement before his action is complete. Perhaps it is because he feels no guilt great enough to see his disgrace as a kind of lesson. Part of his suffering is that he does not understand his guilt; the reason is obviously because there is the missing link to his knowledge. The source of his suffering is that missing link with all its implications of chance and disorder. Amid all these laments for his predicament, he is fully capable of seeing his own pollution:

O

Darkness that is my light,

...

Receive and keep me. I cannot look

To any of the race of Gods for help,

Being no longer worthy,

Nor yet to humankind. (393, 396-400)

In the striking "agony speech", (430-480) Ajax displays brilliant insight and clear thinking in sizing up his situation. There remains no doubt that Achilles' armor should have been given him; he reasons it well. The best statement, describing in passing his fit of madness, is in this speech; in speaking of the Artidae: "... if my eyes and mind had not leapt whirling/Wide from my aim, those two would never again/Cheat anyone with their awards and ballots!" But he is also realistic, and reasons out his doom in this statement of agony. He sees no way out of the dilemma, and decides that in some way he must perish. This is exactly what Tecmessa foresaw earlier. His grief here is apocalyptic; there is no way out. Tecmessa's following plea wins little sympathy with him. In fact, he avoids a direct response to her, but asks instead to see his son.



The long speech to his son echoes his decision to die. He is happy that the boy in his innocence can have no sense of all the suffering. He blames his misfortune to chance, for he tells his son, "... have better luck than your father had,/Be like him in all else; and you will not be base" (550-51). He is angry at the Gods for the blind forces of chance, and will not pray to them. He has no other intent than to die; he will leave his command and kin to Teucer to take back to Salamis. Immediately following Ajax's resolved departure, the chorus sings the paeon to Salamis; then comes the first of the two major puzzles of the play: the long speech with the change of heart and mind. Actually, the change is as an after-thought, and in that plausible enough; what seems of concern to most critics is that it comes too soon after his firm decision to die. There are perhaps two explanations for this: one, that time does not matter in his decision; in fact, the shorter the time the more plausible the suddenness of change "to light and dark again;" two, the decision is not free of the initial grief, nor of a certain ambiguity. Sophocles presents us with a relief that is in many ways half-hearted. From the start the decision seems to come from a certain obligation that he does not not fully believe in. The first three lines set up the ambiguity without any question:

Strangely the long and countless drift of time  
Brings all things forth from darkness into light,  
Then covers them once more... (644-46)

The last phrase is clear enough; the process may well be repeated again, and it is.

The relief of this speech is obviously necessary to the structure. The messenger would have no immediacy if Ajax were going off to kill himself. As it stands he is struck down by Chalcas' prophecy. This is the weak order which Sophocles is bent to test in all his plays. It is ludicrous, of course, but he does satisfy, however feebly, those that would look for a divine hand pushing him onto the sword. He rounds out a framework of surface order, though there is little reason since he has deflated divine order throughout. The final irony is the quiet suicide, quite sudden and jarring,

and yet psychologically fitting. He prays to Zeus that Teucer be the first to find his body; to the Furies for avenging his death against the Atridae; to Salamis and his family; and finally to glorious Athens. When Ajax is no more, there follows a scene of redemption. This is the second major puzzle of the play. Without it his redemption is not complete, his anguish and suffering would be unheroic. With the so-called rehabilitation scene his suffering takes on greater meaning. His enemies are shown for what they really are; Ajax had clearly not misjudged them—with the exception of Odysseus, of course, since he clearly stands counter to the spiteful God-dess, who is never again considered.

In the last analysis, Ajax is a tragic hero who dies untouched by human principles and the order of the Gods. His madness has taught him nothing more than still greater hatred for his enemies and contempt for the Gods. His death redeems him, for he dies under his own ethic: shame, and the anguish he felt in being laughed at, as he imagined. In his rehabilitation scene nobody seems to understand why he died. The greatness of Ajax lies in the fact that he died for his own private reasons, and not for lofty principles of either men or Gods.

### *XI. Exemplum: Antigone*

Antigone's life is a constant which contains its own destruction in the face of finitude. The instance through which we see this girl in Sophocles' play is a tense struggle to "de-limit" the full implications of this finitude. Her anguish and suffering, her repulsions and attractions, and her self-condemnation to instinctive choice are the immutable factors of her existence. The underlining force of her character is the anguish before the limitations of human process.

The predication of anguish for this analysis is an apprehension of Self in a limitless freedom where, say Antigone's, past, future, and Self are her three posited choices; the fact that she continually chooses Self is the necessity and force of her anguish. Suffering is a subsequent to anguish, but it is in the face of love, where the self relates to others; it bears the

burden of choice. Repulsions and attractions are further choices of Self in the light of principles, religiosity, and morality; the direction of these "secondary" choices are from within the self to the world as given. The self-condemnation of choice is the uncertainty of the ultimate value (in the light of finitude) of principle, religion, and morality. So that choice in our sense turns viciously upon itself to make anguish a constant in the tension of Antigone's character. As for the notion of finitude: in the self-condemnation of her choice (any choice), Antigone, excludes a number of other possibilities of action; thus, she (or anyone), because of her contiguity creates her own finitude in the light of action. How Antigone's life-struggle is an attempt to "de-limit" her finitude is the story of her anguish and the point upon which this analysis is based.

Antigone negates her past and imperils her future with the strength and tension of her first appearance. She touches on the uses of Oedipus ("... suffering from our father sprung") and begins to trace and justify her choice. Her tension is leading her blind at the opening; it is not the result of fear, nor will it lead her yet to suffering. It is instead the tension of a choice made irretrievable. The emotional undercurrent makes the act as good as committed. The necessity of her choice makes her place Ismene in the throes of a loaded *dike*:

... you soon will show  
if you are noble or fallen from your descent. (37-8)

Antigone begins to feel the weight of Right when Ismene will not agree to the burial against Creon's law. It is here, in the reflected light of her sister that her blind tension leads to the anguish that will pervade the remainder of her existence. The full implications of her choice are realized by her when Ismene justifies herself thus:

So I shall ask of them beneath the earth forgiveness...  
... I know  
that wild and and futile action makes no sense. (65-8)

Now Antigone's fury subsides; she turns within herself and in her

anguish becomes superior, beginning to acquire the futile heroic proportions when she grants her sister solemnly and with rational power the freedom to choose not to be free. ("Be what you want to"... 7). Her profundity continues throughout this short speech; what emerges at this moment is the love which later will strike the chord of suffering in her expressed desire "to please the dead" more than the living. The overtones of unnaturalness in this desire are complemented by what immediately precedes: *Φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα*.<sup>\*</sup> These are strains that will be picked up in her *Commos*, connecting unnatural images of nature, the union of her parents, and the love she is doomed to feel for all these.

Antigone is now repulsed by Ismene's choice and begins to counteract this with the love of the dead kin she must bury. But Polyneices knows nothing of her love, and this is a further deep source of anguish which begins once more to show in strains of tension. Her final line in the *prologos* shows that tension is her impetus and her external dramatic function. But beneath all this is a telling moment: *ἀλλ' ἔα με καὶ τὴν ἐξ ἑμοῦ δυσβουλίαν/παθεῖν τὸ δεινὸν τοῦτο...* (11. 95-6). This literally rendered: "But let me and the ill-advice that springs from within me/suffer whatever may come..." It is clear, then, that the choice is primordially instinctive and one that will turn upon itself in self-condemnation.

When Antigone re-appears at line 443, she has committed her action and through a preference for one possibility she has at once limited and drawn profound attention to her heroic scope. She has buried Polyneices and created her finitude, *beyond* the mere fact of her oncoming death. This fact sobers the tension of her character: the undercurrent is urgency that will lead us to reconsider the degree of both anguish and suffering for the final act of her death. She is now—in the clarity and calm of her confession—about to raise herself to greatness. She does not speak to Creon as a mere equal, but as his superior. She has full knowledge of her life process and of her imminent death; she has her history before her, her

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\* "Friend shall I lie with him, yes friend with friend." 11.73 ("Friend", however, in all three cases ought to be rendered as "lover").

past and future, and she is unquestionably choosing herself once more. Her speech about the eternal laws (beginning at line 450) is a clear assertion of principle, religion, and moral judgment. Her plane is now high, indeed, for she has little to lose. She is justifying her position well; though later, when inside herself again, and the final anguish sets in before the face of heroism's futility, she will question the very core and value of principles, religion and morality. But now she is given courage by her certainty that the Thebans would praise her act were it not for fear of Creon.

Creon's calling forth of Ismene begins to shake Antigone's nature once again. Her emotions are exposed; she cannot decide whether to love or hate her sister for her cowardly gesture. She has already stated that, "I cannot share in hatred, but in love." (1.523). Antigone's dilemma is her kin, and in the last stichomythia with Ismene she ends by abandoning hatred and implying love, the little love for the only living kin. The key, then, to the final preparation of suffering is both wisdom and love as fully expressed in Antigone's appearance after the burial.

Her *Commos* is the assertion and negation of her principles, the assertion and negation of the Gods, and the assertion and negation of moral force. She is in the face of a senseless finitude, a highly ordered yet irrational force. But that again is only external and dramatic. The internal organic structure of the *Commos* goes from love to bafflement at the unnatural and back to love again; the whole structure is conditioned by the anguish in the face of death, given an inward violent suffering when the curse on her family comes to haunt her. Here the degree of anguish and suffering is at a peak. The first brings forth in a flash her whole history, and the second is the primordial force of her family.

She addresses first the men of Thebes and the sun in sorrowful terms; then she turns to the unnatural images:

... death who brings all to sleep  
takes me alive to the shore  
of the river underground. (11. 810-12)



Her curious death had even a precedence, she tells us. But even this takes the quality of strangeness as her mother's "marriage-bed" and "father-brother". All these modulations go a long way to explain the intensity of love for her kin. Their suffering becomes her suffering, for they have left their sorrow on the earth. Her love is for the unfortunate, which, in her case, is the unnatural as well; but the unnatural too is human, and so her family is given her.

The fascination with her unnatural death is recognition with the human condition. Was she ever part of the human condition? No more and no less than her means to death, or her "brother-father's" act. In the light of this near-perverse blood-tie (and the love attached to it) the controversial lines (906-913) are as plain, as painful and real as can be. She is no longer anything but human and quivering at the face of death. Through anguish she finds her own peace traveling the road of senselessness and nothing. Her final line makes her human and forgiving, yet there will be one more quiver before darkness.

## *XII. Exemplum: Oedipus Tyrannos*

When a work of art is endowed with simple beauty, like the Parthenon, with seeming symmetrical forms, its greatness, no doubt, depends on the subtlety of its internal discord. The structure of the universe in both the Parthenon and *Oedipus Tyrannos* is an illusion; the core of truth lies in strife or discord. To commit oneself to the statement that this is true of fifth-century art forms is merely, in our terms, to take a position concerning strict metaphysical interpretation of that age. In the strife of opposites it is easy enough to determine the balance for the Parthenon: illusion and its serenity dominate, despite disproportion of columns, etc.; but for *Oedipus Tyrannos* it is not easily discernible. Therefore, it should be mentioned that we posit as hypothesis the structure of Sophocles' universe in this play as being an illusion with its opposite as a threatening constant. The end in view will be to prove it.

What is generally referred as verbal irony in *Oedipus Tyrannos* is also verbal fiction or illusion posited in order to be deflated by its warring

opposite, truth itself. This strife of opposites, an old Heracleitean view, was well known to this age. And it is nowhere so fully realized as in this play. Oedipus is not only what he is but also what he is not: he is a benevolent king but also a polluter of his land; he may be a "philosopher-king" in the Platonic sense, but he is also ignorant in the face of his own anguish; he is a dutiful son, but he has committed patricide; he is a husband but also a son of his wife; he is a father but also a brother to his children. The crucial question, then, which will condition our view of anguish and suffering in this play: is the cosmos here an absolute order or only a seeming one, a mere illusion of order called Apollo? If the universe is strictly ordered, that order is vindictive and revengeful. Under such conditions the belief in oracles is mandatory. Certainly the body of the work points to such a religious circle. Yet it is on this level that the structure is illusory. To complete our thematic scheme we have only to locate the "ironic" level. Is the first principle or order so petty as to concern "itself" so closely with a curse—a vengeance? Here we have a compilation of chance upon chance; what does it tell us? Can it be that the opposite of the illusion is a universe of chance and strife, and Oedipus just Oedipus and not Man? The answers to these questions must be located within the text.

Where strife of opposites leads inevitably in "coming to be and passing away", anguish is an implicit fact. Thus after Oedipus has shown himself as a benevolent king the first of these allusions is given by the Priest:

You see our ages; some of us like these,  
who cannot yet fly far, and some of us  
heavy with age... (16-18)

There are two types of suppliants here and both want to be saved from the plague. The Priest gives Oedipus a telling reason why they came:

We have not come as suppliants to this altar  
because we thought of you as of a God,

but rather judging you the first of men  
in all the chances of this life... (31-34)<sup>10</sup>

It is important to notice how the Priest expresses himself, the care which Sophocles takes not to assert the God by giving at least as much weight to chance. On Oedipus'saving the Thebans from the Sphinx, the Priest continues:

... This you did  
in virtue of no knowledge we could give you,  
in virtue of no teaching; it was God  
that aided you, men say... (37-40)

The Priest, due to his position if nothing else, could have easily said, "it was God that aided you," without the ambiguous qualifier. What is clearly established in the Priest's speech, apart from specifics, is a universal suffering in an irrational, inexplicable world of chance. If rationality is later restored through the oracle, it is only conditional; the world still remains inexplicable to mortals. Blind faith is one thing and understanding is another.

In his answer to the Priest Oedipus gives the first thematic statement of opposites in himself. He answers:

Your several sorrows each have single scope  
and touch but one of you. My spirit groans  
for city and myself and you at once. (62-64)

Oedipus embodies in himself the One, but also himself, the Many. This is a clear statement of the Pre-Socratic view of the One-Many, the first of opposites. It cannot be said that one is stretching a point by deducing this from the above three lines, for the two lines following (65-66) have each

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10. The word for chances is *συμφοραῖς* which can also mean misfortunes or accidents. The double irony is clear.

the word "many" and line 67 (Gr. 68) begins with "one" in the Greek. These are patterned as in a syllogism, and very artfully indeed.

ἀλλ' ἴστε πολλὰ μὲν με δακρύσαντα δῆ,  
πολλὰς δ' ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις  
ἦν δ' εὖ σκοπῶν ἡῦρισκον ἴασιν μόνην. (66-68)

After this rich and beautiful part of the prologos, Creon comes bringing word from Delphi. The oracle immediately gives quick excitement and pacing to the indirect action of the play. The present (the plague) is forgotten, and the past is threatening to become the future. And until it does time as such must remain at a standstill. Dramatically the concept is profound; for the search is for absolute determination of past time, complete knowledge in the given scope, or else Thebes cannot "continue". Is there not in this mere fact a discord in the cosmos of Thebes? Order is only apparent within the large disorder. Suffering is universal in the internal order. Anguish is implicit in the process of revelation.

Through this first enlightening of Oedipus by Creon, we are given a further side of him as the tyrannos—though a sign of that was already given with "I Oedipus whom all men call Great." (8). As we know from Xenophon's *Hiero*, a tyrannos took pride in his power, wealth, and intelligence; but he was always suspicious of treachery, especially from his immediate circle of followers. So Oedipus casually utters the lines:

How could a robber dare a deed like this/were he not  
helped with money from the city,  
money and treachery? (123-125)

This observation goes a long way to explain his fiery accusation against Creon and Teiresias. His suspicions are not as unwarranted as so many critics have found them. A further good definition of tyrannos that is not unlike Xenophon's is stated with lines 380-1:

Wealth, sovereignty, and skill outmatching skill

for the contrivance of an envied life.

The beginning of anguish that makes Oedipus respond rashly to various points comes with line 354. Before this there was merely the suffering for the plague and his people. But Teiresias' uttering, "... You are the land's pollution," is something that strikes with a kind of vengeance. The counter-accusation and angry response to it is only natural. The importance of Teiresias' accusation is further accentuated by Oedipus' demand to confirm it by repetition. And with this accusation begin the string of opposites mentioned earlier—the discord within one man. Anguish is further awakened with the second accusation:

I say that with those you love best  
you live in foulest shame unconsciously  
and do not see where you are in calamity. (366-67)

The words οὐδ' ὁρᾶν are important and unfortunately translated here as "unconsciously", perhaps to aid the uninteresting psychoanalytic approach to the play. Actually it means "unable to see" or "unperceiving". The point here is that Oedipus is told for the first time that he is acting in ignorance of his "guilt". This no doubt seeps in his logical thinking just enough to provoke intense curiosity not only for knowledge but to put his mind at ease. He, no doubt, suffers under this tinge of uneasiness. We must take care here, however, not to take this to mean that he begins to know. For he has heard what he considers false gibberish; but to hear "false accusations" prompts the will to know the truth in a man of Oedipus' "skill unmatching skill" type of character.

In order to get at truth once and for all and discount the ravings of the prophet, he lunges at Creon with full certainty. Nor will he back down at Creon's apparent innocence for he can see no other out in explaining the prophet's words. That they be right is not a question that can possibly enter his mind at this point. In fact, the anguished tension that paces the play from this moment to the final revelation, each time Oedipus is on the scene, is such that no other thought can enter into the solid throughline of



mostly inductive (with some deductive) logic (842-847). What he goes through by way of suffering can be measured by the strife and crumbling of illusions and appearances around him.

Jocasta is first a comfort; she saves him from his own anger, but she later becomes an unknowing accomplice in the crumbling of illusions. She even attempts, for his own sake, to destroy the illusion of oracles after hearing of the death of Polybus:

... O oracles of  
the Gods, where are you now?... (945-46)

But Sophocles will not allow this inconsistency, for Jocasta also *prays* to the Gods. Furthermore, the structure of the drama demands as a surface level the working out of oracles. It is the framework, the divine order, that begins to crumble through irony, as we have noted.

Oedipus goes through the first realization and grief when he decides to tell Jocasta the whole story as he sees it so far (771-834). "Who is then now more miserable than I," (815) is a defeating statement at the thought that he may have killed and been kin to Laius. Although the final blow will come with the Corinthian Messenger and the Herdsman, this point is still one of considerable grief; it is not, strangely enough, one of suffering. That is reserved for the final revelation. Oedipus is now abstracted by grief more than anything.

With Jocasta's entrance for prayer we become aware of time once more. Future time is given an almost violent accentuation in the light of events:

For Oedipus excites himself too much  
at every sort of trouble, not conjecturing,  
like a man of sense what will be from what was. (914-916)

And of course in the following scene the future looks almost bright for a brief moment. But the tension that follows is like a series of thunders that

break into the lightning of:

ἰοὺ ἰοὺ τὰ πάντ' ἄν ἐξήκοι σαφῆ.

ὦ φῶς, τελευταῖόν σε προσβλέψαιμι νῦν, (1182-83).

The physical suffering is a vengeance against senselessness and can only be paralleled symbolically with the mental anguish.

"No man but I can bear my evil doom" (1415). And Oedipus will bear it despite the Gods. The opposites in himself are rounded out and time is allowed to go on. But not without the bitter notion that "petty" order is an illusion. All the questions which he asks beginning with, "Cithaeron, why did you receive me?" (1391) point to a clear understanding of the illusion. The petty Gods are not to be deemed capable of such disorder. The system is not quite so small, nor so simple. Sophocles does couch this notion in religious terms, but that is the irony and perhaps the truth. Oedipus is an instance of good and evil; and because he is Oedipus is he tragic.

### *XIII. Exemplum: Trachiniae*

The crushing defeat of a Sophoclean hero is too often the result of his own perception shrouded in a miasma of illusions, spells and oracles. Chance is knowledge come too late; and suffering the universal synthesis of character, situation, and Gods with their deceptive order. In the *Trachiniae* we find characters thrust against characters, then thrown into the inevitability of situations until, finally, they trace a vicious circle against themselves. The point where suffering lies is in the rupture of illusions by brute fact. Pity and anguish after the fact is the realization of chance, of arbitrary order. All this plus the devastation of cruel irony is to be found in the two heroic complements of the *Trachiniae*, Deianira and Heracles.

From her opening speech we are given to understand that Deianira has a very dark side to her indeed, and is by no means the "innocent" that her character development on a surface level would have us believe. The

beasts of the play appear very early to Deianira; she is first the object of affection of the river Achelous who comes as bull, serpent, and man—bull to ask for her hand in marriage. Her rescuer is, of course, Heracles who comes from his father Zeus to free the earth from beasts; in him there is both the God and the brute. That he should die by the cleverness of a beast is only fitting. As for the progression of the river's appearances to Deianira, we must note the importance of the allusion for it is repeated again in the third stasimon (beg. 1. 497). Deianira is no doubt connected—even if as a mere instrument—with the lower dark forces and brute passions in man. Her stance, however, is her own illusion:

I sank down, overwhelmed with terror lest  
my beauty should somehow bring me pain. Zeus of the  
contests  
made the end good—if it has been good. (11. 24-26)

She shows her life with Heracles not in light but in dark, images of night and doubt (1. 30). She is faced here with the complaints she carries around against him and with the present fears for his safety. She foreshadows her own suffering in verbal terms. That she has not come "to Death's house" (1. 4) is as much an irony as her unwitting murderous action. The action she commits is possibly the only one in her life of any significance; she is an agent always acted upon: the river Achelous fights for her, Nessus touches her lustfully (1. 565), and Heracles takes her away—even the chorus "helps" her in the decision of her major action. Death's house has become near through her decision to act. Time plays the important role in bringing together the violent and brutal elements of decomposition, both in a physical sense and in the structure of the play.

In her ensuing dialogue with Hyllus, Deianira shows warmth of character in relation to both son and husband. In this part of the prologos we hear about the ambiguous prophecy for the first time (11. 79-85). And with Hyllus' departing to search for his father, Deianira adds:

There is always some advantage

in learning good news, even if one learns it late. (11. 92-93)

The strength of this kind of verbal irony is not of the same order as that in *Oedipus Tyrannos* but the effect is quite the same, since there are so many people who learn too late in this play. Immediately following this line comes the parodos of the chorus of Trachiniae. Their imagery in evoking the Sun-God to tell them the whereabouts of their king, goes from dark to light only to be rounded out again by Deianira's: "until the time she is no longer called a maiden/but woman, and takes her share of worry in the night." These images of night will come later (1. 501) to be equated with Hades.

To the Trachiniae Deianira expresses now her full fears. And it is here (beginning with line 153) that she achieves full sympathy and the beginnings of her tragic proportions. The prophecy which has Heracles either dying at a certain time, or, if safely passing through that time-limit, living a life without cares, takes on a cumulative effect when we realize that the prediction of the ancient oak of Dodonna will be fulfilled by Deianira herself.

The period of their prediction exactly coincides  
with the present time.. (11. 173-174)  
so that I leap up from present sleep in fright  
... terrified to think that I may have to live  
deprived of the one man who is the finest of all. (11. 175-177)

All that has happened so far is the verbal expression of fears which are now counteracted by the first messenger. Both the happiness which he brings and the joyous paeon of the chorus are of curious, small proportions, almost of a delicate order. These are cut short and quickly forgotten with the arrival of the envoy Lichas. Both action and interest have a serpent-like aura about them in this middle section; the static quality is only counteracted by the expectancy. The most interesting element at this point is the mute testament of Iole, who stands as clear and painful counterpart to Deianira: the beauty of both has caused upheavals in their

homes as well as the destruction of Heracles; both were saved by him and became his by right, and both await now his embrace.

It is natural that Deianira will feel compassion for the girl: but it is also natural that she should fear Iole's youth (11. 547-8). And so the fatal spell is cast with shame in that light:

... In darkness one may be  
ashamed of what one does without the shame of disgrace. (11. 596-7)

The question of Lichas' deception is designed to strengthen the gesture toward the spell of the robe. By the time Deianira actually sends the robe she is almost absolved of any sense of wrong-doing by all concerned, including her own conscience. Chance has helped a great deal in all that has led to this part; in fact, chance may be the only factor working here, for the Gods are not. There is no indication that any of the Olympians are after killing their master's son. Something quite different is at work here, which shall be discussed after some of the strains of the first part are pulled together.

First, the question of time in this section: there is a disruption of temporal contiguity, especially between the moment Lichas takes the robe and the return of Hyllus. But it is beautifully complemented and foreshadowed by the sudden disintegration of the "ball of wool" (1. 695) which Deianira used to smear the blood of the centaur and the poison of Hydra onto the robe. The anguish and fear she feels at this realization have the power to bring about a disintegration of time, at least for her; and since those moments are seen and weighed from her point of view, Hyllus comes too quickly to lay bare her most frightful suspicions. The role of time is much like the role of chance; things happen arbitrarily and they do so with speed, having one end in view: the death of Heracles. The consequences therefrom will evolve naturally. The suffering that Deianira goes through at the news from her son's accusing lips is only equalled by the suffering Hyllus himself undergoes at the moment of her suicide. They



both learn bitterly too late. If she has killed Heracles unknowing, he has contributed to her mother's suicide in the same way. But for Hyllus the shock of knowledge is as of an innocent boy coming to grips with life, whereas with Deianira it is the irretrievable tragic knowledge that can only lead to death to absolve itself. Love leads Deianira inadvertently to murder and she chooses to pay for her blunder.

Insofar as suffering for Heracles goes, we are confronted with a major departure from Sophoclean order. His suffering is god-like, inasmuch as the Gods of the *Trachiniae* are the beasts themselves and one kills off the other. The Hydra is killed, the river Achelous is killed or defeated in its various forms, and finally Nessus who had the power to cast the spell and let it work itself out is killed, again by chance, for there are no Gods in this universe but fearful beasts. The god-like Heracles is in no close proximity, so both, men and time, act rashly in the face of chance.

Heracles is, within this view, in no way to be pitied, but achieves full tragic proportions through sheer beauty and ritualism of his end. His flesh is gnawed away from the contact of Hydra's and the Centaur's blood; and this somehow is the justice of decay, of things passing away, of great things passing away through the force of great things. So that the chorus of *Trachiniae* may watch as small meteors the decomposition of the sun. And in this light and proportion can we make sense of Deianira's tragedy as a single *Trachinias* in process.

As soon as Heracles appears and is awakened the order and control of time is restored. He will now control everything that is to happen until the end of the play and well beyond. If as Hyllus utters in the last line, "there is nothing here that is not Zeus," (1. 1278) is to be taken seriously, we must assume that Zeus is here in the shape of Heracles, or, at least, represented by him. Hyllus, in having to endure all that he does (the "presence" of Zeus, as well) in the last scene probably suffers greatly in the human sense. The god-like madness in his father's suffering is almost unendurable; the oath he is kept to is as painful as the physical woes of Heracles.

Apart, then, from the obvious type of suffering, we have, emerging in this last scene, suffering of a different order. As Heracles begins to know both the truth of the robe and the source of the poison he begins to rage painfully but in full knowledge; this is the suffering of knowing and being helpless in the face of it. What finally takes Heracles, after he has gained knowledge and accepted it, out of the realm of the human is the mystic in him, the secrets he tells his son, the insistence he marry Iole who lay in his bed, and the final request that he be taken to Mount Oeta and burned on top of a pyre.

#### *XIV. Exemplum: Electra*

Electra is the warring force that has suffered suppression. The extent and face of her war-waging action are determined by time. The injustice of suppression finds support in the expression of *sophrosyne* and Xenophonic *paedeia*. Where the propaedeutic locates its function in a Mycenaean universe—or more to the point, for work's historico-political immediacy, an Athenian one—is precisely where suffering and freedom separate. It is after *paideia* is to some extent complete that we find the clash between freedom felt and suppression witnessed or suppression felt and freedom observed. If the one is Orestes, then the other is Electra. The power lies not with good breeding and education, but with the sub-human, base terrors of injustice. What gives this side of life its power is the constancy of time. So that Electra *becomes* "suffering" and her end is revenge. With the illusion that her end is only a means, she allows the force of time to disrupt her process of becoming, as anything other than the sheer power that leads to that revenge; hence, anything beyond her end in view must be an impossibility. Of course, there is Phoebus and his clarity of purpose. But does this present either a necessary or sufficient explanation for the life and actions of Electra and Orestes? That it is stated is clear and perhaps desirable. Whether it presents us with the full story or not is the direction toward which any comprehension of the play ought to lead.

The structure of *Electra* is an enclosure, a framed entity to arrest both action and time. Orestes is a complement but also an opposite so the better to accentuate the concentration on Electra's character. He comes,

and by his coming he defines the problem and resolves time for himself and for Electra. The crux of the tragedy lies in this very resolve. Through the characters of the Paedagogus and Orestes certain observations ought to be made if this particular twist which Sophocles gave to an old story is to be associated with fifth-century Athens. These observations pertain to structure. One, the Paedagogus is a cradle of justice and perhaps Athens itself; two, Orestes is the product of that cradle, the perfect youth; and three, Electra is the suppressed and miserable that arouses revolt through the instincts of justice in the free man—to the very extent that he kill that which gave him birth. If the analogy seems far-fetched perhaps we ought to look into the sociopolitical implications of Sophocles' time. In that, what we posit now as analogy will clearly emerge as symbol. Why Sophocles has decided to make a study of misery is because the perfect youth has no dramatic interest. He offers a solution and a perfect frame, and that is enough for Sophocles' structure.

Electra's first utterance comes from inside the house: *ὦ μοι μοι δούσηος* (77). There is no doubt she is beginning her own threnody in her absence. When she appears, she sings her kommos, (beg. 1. 85) the first of two, the later one for Orestes.<sup>11</sup> (beg. 1. 825) The conventional structure of these pieces convey an internal irony (a familiar Sophoclean rupture in the perfect order of things) which point to their tragedy and symbolic death at the moment they perform their action "in the order of things." That Electra sings both *Commoi* is significant insofar as she is the tragic moment and Orestes an incident, a tool. She claims to be dead when Orestes might be dead, but at the end Orestes is as dead for her as she is for herself in her tragic silence after her final and unrelenting hatred against Aegisthus: "Not one, not one word more" etc. (1483). In her *Commos*, then she calls to the light and the air to witness her maltreatment as, naturally, these abuses took place in the daytime, but tells us that she spends her nights in dirges for her father. Darkness and the

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11. We must note that the beginning of the lament *ἔ, αἶα* line 825 differs from the earlier line 77 quoted above. The difference is between a female-like and a male-like lament. The *ὦ μοι* structure shows personal weakening and perhaps abandon, but the latter one is more noble and masculine. A variation is repeated by Philoctetes for example.

underworld become associated with her when she prays to

House of the Death God, house of Persephone,  
Hermes of the underworld, holy Curse,  
Furies the Dread Ones... (110-112)

for her deliverance from suffering by revenge for her father. It is important to note the structure of this speech: it is her sufferings she mentions first and afterwards her father. In the process of time she has lost certain values. It is from her everyday sufferings that hatred takes now its impetus. The revenge for the father is the ideal which is not immediate. And, of course, Orestes uses this singular terror in her to kill Clytemnestra.

The chorus in this first part does not comment on her everyday woes but only those in relation to her father. This is the constant reminder of her nobility and higher purpose in this suffering, lest she should appear as just an unfortunate, wretched girl. In her state, Electra, through fully understanding what time has made of her, emerges knowing that she may be locked in this dark world of Niobe and the bird "Itys, Itys" lamenting through the night. Like these images she uses, she knows that time has deformed her very hatred, and the vengeance of time is the permanence of this deformity. Electra is no doubt a kind of monster; but she knows that she ought not to be, as well as she knows that she has to:

Terrors compelled me,  
to terrors I was driven.  
I know it, I know my own spirit.  
With terrors around me, I will not hold back  
these mad cries of misery, so long as I live. (221-25)

She proceeds to build on her lament and even analyze it in very perceptive terms. She comments on "... the natural measure of my sorrow," (1.235) and leads shame and piety as human qualities to an important test. If the murderers of her father "do not pay death for death in justice/then shall all shame be dead/and all men's piety." (248-50). Even in her having become a kind of Fury she is still aware of human qualities

and can still find them somewhere deep within her, however dimly. When she speaks of her mother it is as if she is a pursuing Fury: "First there's my mother, yes, my mother, now become/all hatred..." (261-2). This becoming hatred is ironic insofar as, in our eyes, it is more Electra than Clytemnestra who fits the description. And in the conclusion of that same speech she will indict her circumstance and herself even further:

Evil is all around me, evil  
is what I am compelled to practice. (308-9)

In contrast to what we are told is all around Electra the dramatist brings on the scene Chrysothemis, who, apart from her dramatic function is of no characterological significance to the suffering theme. In the language of parallels, like Ismene, hers is a content lot; content to be acted upon and never to act. She gives great strength, however, both of purpose and of endurance to Electra as she shows her withdrawal into feminine *sophrosyne* and inaction. In the *stichomythia* with her, Electra lapses into her more human character, where pity for her predicament begins to work in. It is here also that her major illusion concerning time after her "end in view" is fully voiced: "That I may get away from you all, as far as I can." (391). This she answers when she is asked, in effect, what will happen to her after the arrival of Orestes.

When Clytemnestra appears, there are no warm human traits nor illusions in Electra. She is cold and harsh even after she claims a fair chance to speak. Her mother does not stand as beastly as she might; she admits the killing of Agamemnon, but claims that it was done in justice. Actually, she need not show her cruelty at this point—so much the better for the fluctuations in Electra's character. Pity must not be on her side with so much ease and so early. For Clytemnestra her one gesture is enough to make her μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ: that she rejoices at the news of her son's death. Electra, toward the end of this scene, begins to emerge once more as pitiful with the speech that contains the revealing: "... I know why/I act so wrongly, so unlike myself." (617-18).

Then, the false news comes hard. (It also shows the brilliant complexity and the beauty of what the Paedagogus stands for. His speech has the beauty of a Praxiteles statue.) Clytemnestra responds accordingly, and



Electra emerges into the *Commos* for Orestes. She is now prepared to accept another dirge for her dark nights. But for Electra the death of Orestes is a Kind of solution. She will now, at long last, act. His "death" has almost delivered her to a kind of freedom. Chrysothemis is again used for a foil in the thinking process toward this action. The action is to kill Aegisthus, and Chrysothemis will have no part of it—while she delivers the second of the two important omens in the play. But Electra's suffering is now too deep to read signs.

Up to the brilliant *stichomythia* of the urn, Electra might be said to have lagged in intensity of hatred. She appears compelled to act in the way that Antigone is. But she pours everything out to the "stranger" and Orestes sees the terror, the suffering, and suppression and is deeply wounded and enraged. He suffers as much as his imagination will allow him. He had known the type of separation that existed between freedom and suppression in the good hands of the *Paedagogus*. Now these two clash before him, and he must remove the suffering. Matricide, in this context, is an impersonal fact. (It is more personal for Electra than Orestes.) And in Electra this is a brief moment of liberation especially when she speaks to the *Paedagogus* with such warmth as a father (1352-63). But she knows only how to be at war; when her war is over she can do nothing more: no marriage, no children, no youth, no existence apart from hatred. Her liberation is in fact her death, for the perfect youth has put an end to hatred and to suffering. And Electra was both. In a sense she sacrificed herself for Orestes; she fought his war for him. He merely performed what the oracle said, plus the immediate action of compassion to save his sister. But for that he was too late. The Gods cannot explain their reasons nor the full scope of the play, except as a starting point. And if Sophocles' character, Electra, were to be turned to a legend after her tragic silence, she might be heard as a night bird crying ξ ξ, αλαῖ for the loss of Orestes in her. Freedom is relative and this is her kind, with the closing lines of the chorus:

O race of Atreus, how many sufferings  
were yours before you came at last so hardly  
to freedom, perfected by this day's deed. (1508-10)

## XV. Preliminary Conclusion

I do not believe that I have here set down a critical approach that tries to claim any special authority: what is in these pages does not purport to be "new", nor does it, at the same time, follow the lines of any critical school as such. On the contrary, I have idiosyncratically struggled "against interpretation" which might limit the possibilities of a given text. The provisional approach to juxtapose a certain theory in philosophical terms against an "open" analysis of a text has the advantage of allowing the reader to draw certain conclusions from the "fallout" and reverberations of the mere (understated) collisions. It seems plausible, for the teaching process at least, to follow such a course where the imagination of the student plays such an important role: his own contribution to his learning through the use of a cultural breadth can be immense. It is one way to understand the classics, and understand further their "adaptability" to our own world.

The adapters of classical texts (such as Ezra Pound with *The Trachiniae*, Brecht with *The Antigone* and *Coriolanus*) will be the logical continuation of this work in an expanded version. For it must be understood that the fundamental transvaluation our century has imposed on the history of thought finds its complement in the theatre not through renovations in stage technique or psychological re-formulations for the theatre artist, but rather through forcing the rubrics of thought, in fundamental change, to locate critically a value of ideas within the framework of the modern theatre, which includes *at its crux* a re-transmission of the classics. The breakdown of the relationship of artist to text in the 1960's ought to be more aptly understood as an interim step; a movement to wipe the slate clean of that well-worn convention, our naturalistic dependence, and face an empty stage with an actor whose objects are limited extensions of himself—as we have seen so effectively performed with Greek Tragedy and with Shakespeare.

In the adaptation approach a fine example, for the moment, is Brecht's *Coriolanus*. Shakespeare's work stands as one of the tragedies which has often been thought inferior to the others: inferior as historical drama,

inferior as political tragedy or tragedy of a given hero. Brecht's adaptation of *Coriolanus* refers to no specific historical event in the twentieth century. (The work was completed a short time before the East Berlin worker's uprising of 17 June, 1953; but it was never staged by the author/director himself.) Brecht's *Coriolan*, then, is not an historical drama in the commonly accepted language of the theatre; however, inasmuch as the work is *given* a historicity and informed through Socratic argumentation, a performance of it might best be perceived as "theatre of fact"—a selected documentation of events rather than an aesthetically complete history; or watched from the refracted angle of the *cinema verite* of Jean-Luc Godard with its Brechtian resonances. For *Coriolan* is a work of theatre distinguished by epic rather than dramatic development; it unfolds spatially, anti-illusionistically, to elucidate a dialectic that locates its foundations in the vision of a technological age, an age of "identity and difference" without regard to a metaphysical system—which is not unlike what Shakespeare suggests, at least subtextually. For Brecht, the character of Coriolanus exists in phases—simply. He reveals no change in the conventional fictive sense, but splits his hero's experience into discrete fragments or phases. The conception of a hero for whom heroism becomes no more than the instinct towards a particular kind of suicide, a search for an appropriate death, demands an epic theatricality in which argument and force of story supersede the traditional conventions of character.

In Brecht's conception of the drama, an intellectual commitment con-founded by a network of emotions generates a landscape, not yet hardened, where each member of the audience has the opportunity to make his own imprint, and thus receive the *didaskalia* that has been the theatre's original sin: a didactic perception of reality. That is Brecht's theatre: a difficult proposition for a world with metaphysical languages rooted in realism. For us, Hegel's contradictory consciousness is generally sifted through a pragmatic aesthetics, since models in our world need to have a psychologically determined content. Brecht is not a-psychological, but his use of psychology is more Platonic than Freudian. He demands that thought be necessarily didactic, and speaks to us with the theatre's original intent, exploiting a *didaskalia* informed by the Hegelian and the technological revolutions.