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Sophocles and Time

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This paper is not directly concerned with Sophocles' views on time. It is interested rather in considering how structures of time are used in the plays to shape the experiences they depict and provide. In a literary work time is, among other things, a way of organizing material, articulating its meaning, intensifying its force. The sequence of past, present, and future is a framework fundamental to most criticism of drama; but the area of time that will primarily concern us here is the opposition, little explored for drama, between imperfective and perfective. This may sound like an eccentric move from a grammar of drama to a drama of grammar; but what is envisaged is not principally a matter of the forms of verbs, and not at all a matter of linking the grammar of a language to the frame of mind in its users. The grammatical structure of Greek, or Russian, offers essentially only a metaphor for the kind of thing that interests us; and it is not an authority but a stimulus. Can we sharpen our understanding of the tragedies by considering a contrast between (roughly) single, decisive, final events, and continuous states or repeated attempts, which fall short of, or look towards, completion and fulfilment?

Like other basic categories, this apparently elemental division can force us to look more closely and freshly at the shaping and meaning of the plays. It does not limit the interest of the topic that the categories are not fixed and absolute, or that their

Contributing to a volume in Hugh's honour is a delight. It was an incalculable privilege to be taught by him. He was so wonderfully encouraging, and demanding; and for all the passion of his intellectual convictions, he was so extraordinarily tolerant of his pupils' wild ideas. His energy and enthusiasm, his judgement and finesse, the breadth of his scholarship and culture inspired and continue to inspire. The present offering is unworthy of him, of course; but it is at least well meant.

application varies with the stance of the speaker, and with the development of the play. We shall in fact be positively interested by the way that happenings which are looked forward to as perfective can come to acquire a more complex and imperfective appearance as they come closer and the play subjects them to scrutiny. We shall also be interested by the role of the individual's viewpoint in the perception of time, something much stressed in some modern studies of linguistic aspect. The literary kind of 'aspect' that concerns us will be referred to as 'aspect', in inverted commas. It is not implied that Sophocles would have made so abstracted an analysis; but such an approach draws us to things that are important in the plays.[1]

Particularly important in several plays of Sophocles is the portrayal of imperfective suffering. We shall start by considering the *Trachiniae*. In the restricted space of a tragedy, this play continues the depiction of female waiting on which the *Odyssey* had lavished the length and accumulation of epic. Deianira's experience is not imperfective simply in its long duration; it is dominated by emotion towards a possible event in the future, by fear of her husband's death.[2]

Some points in the first part of the play may be considered for their presentation of Deianira's existence. In the narrative of her opening speech, the time before her marriage appears as a miniature

[1] The literature on verbal aspect is huge; for an introduction to it see Fanning (1990: ch. 1); note esp. Galton (1976); add notably Mellet (1988), Tobin (1993). I have not yet been able to see Giorgi and Pianesi (1998). For our purposes, the disputes on the nature of linguistic aspect can be set on one side; in any case, the relation to subjectivity becomes less pressing when one is dealing with drama, precisely because it is formally nothing but a collection of subjectivities, without even a narrator. Some writing on Sophocles makes passing use of 'aspectual' time: I have noticed Winnington-Ingram (1980: 233–4); Segal (1995: 146–7). But I am not aware of attempts to apply such conceptions more sustainedly to ancient or modern drama. Naturally the matter has aroused more interest in narrated genres like the novel or history, especially with references to narrative tenses, see e.g. Reid (1993); Bakker (1997). Note also e.g. Mann, *Der Zauberberg*, beginning of ch. 5. Some interesting remarks which bear, by extension, on the significance of the imperfective: Hamon (1981: 95–8).

[2] These footnotes do not attempt any comprehensive reference to the literature on Sophocles; they are mostly confined to relatively recent work. It follows from what is said above that we should not regard Deianira's suffering as self-contained circularity (Segal (1981: 105–6); for the approach cf. 262–7 on the *Electra*). It is also important that Deianira's fear is for somebody else; cf. Heiden (1989: 28–9).

version of the later suffering which supersedes it (note the sequence in 4–8). Her fear that she will have to marry the unalluring Achelous (*φόβωι*, 24) is ended by Heracles' victory, but this perfective event leads her, ironically, into a perpetual sequence of fears.

> *τέλος δ' ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος καλῶς,*
> *εἰ δὴ καλῶς. λέχος γὰρ Ἡρακλεῖ κριτὸν*
> *ξυστᾶς' ἀεί τιν' ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω,*
> *κείνου προκηραίνουσα. νὺξ γὰρ εἰσάγει*
> *καὶ νὺξ ἀπωθεῖ διαδεδεγμένη πόνον.* (26–30)

The irony is marked by the development of the first sentence. The language of what follows (27–30) expressively conveys the restless continuum of what she endures. The repetitions bring out colourfully both the multitude of her anxieties and how it feels to experience them in time. *νύξ* itself contains a grim imperfectivity: the night-time of worry, powerfully described by Penelope.[3]

The first antistrophe of the parodos portrays the same anguish with lyrical richness, and from a third-person perspective. There is a more sensuous element in the depiction of Deianira's longing for Heracles' return; there also appears the idea of much weeping, which the Nurse had introduced (50–1): *οὔποτ' εὐνάζειν ἀδάκρυ- | τον βλεφάρων πόθον* (106–7). The comparison with a bird, and the potent verb *τρύχεσθαι*, further intensify the portrayal of her continuous pain. The ode sets against Deianira's unchanging lot the tumultuously varied and dynamic existence of Heracles; this too is imperfective, from Deianira's perspective, but plainly in a different fashion. The contrast recalls the *Odyssey*.[4]

Deianira's speech after the parodos brings in a further contrast, with the maidens of the chorus. Deianira's imperfective state, we have seen, is related to a future beyond itself; the sequestered existence of the unmarried girl is unaffected by anything outside. The very sentence that describes that existence moves on, in forceful opposition, to the nocturnal worries of the married woman (144–50). It is interesting that Deianira's plight is connected to the general experience of wives; the passage will also inform the

[3] Hom. *Od.* 19. 515–29; but her worries are more active than Deianira's. (Active and passive make another interesting category . . .)

[4] What follows 106–7 suggests that those lines mean Deianira spends every night weeping. *ἀδάκρυτον* should in my view be taken as proleptic; Lloyd-Jones's Loeb translation seems to indicate a happy change of mind on this point (cf. Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990: 153).

complex scene where Deianira encounters the supposed maiden and fellow-sufferer Iole. Deianira's speech proceeds (153) to her particular reasons for worry now, already indicated in the prologue (79–81). An oracle limits the future which will follow the present state to two possibilities, perfective or imperfective: the event of Heracles' death or the new situation of an untroubled life for him. Fifteen months is both the length of Heracles' latest absence and the time after which things will change (44–5, 164–5): the emphasis on the figure sharpens consciousness both of Deianira's extended misery and of the impending catastrophe.[5]

That brings us to Heracles. When the catastrophe is actually upon us, it wears a more complicated appearance than it had in advance. Heracles' agonized death in some ways continues to be seen as a perfective moment: the ironic end of his labours (*ἀναδοχὰν τελεῖν πόνων*, 825; *μόχθων . . . λύσιν τελεῖσθαι*, 1170–1), the deed of destruction which Deianira, terribly turned from passive to active, has unwittingly performed (1063, etc.). But Heracles' agonies are also presented on the stage, and become an imperfective state of suffering which only the actual moment of death (or apotheosis) will end, outside the borders of the play (1208–9, etc.). The play, the stage, and time are handled with great audacity as Heracles' roaring pain and rage engross the scene. Inventive language and strong death-bed drama give force and extension to the depiction of physical anguish. Thus the unconsciousness into which Heracles has fallen when he appears (974–92) and the attack that breaks in on Heracles' iambic speech (1081–9, cf. 1242, 1253–4, 1259–60) give change and dimension to the time of his torture. The very abundance of verbs used with the disease or the like as subject give a horrible richness to the torment: so *ἐδαίνυτο* (771), *αἰκίζει* (838), *βρύκει* (987), *ἥπται . . . ἕρπει* (1010), *θρώισκει* (1028), *βέβρωκε . . . ῥοφεῖ ξυνοικοῦν . . . πέπωκεν* (1054–6), *ἔθαλψε . . . διῆιξε* (1082–3), *δαίνυται . . . ἤνθηκεν, ἐξώρμηκεν* (1088–9). The magnifying-glass of poetry makes us see the experience in a closer, and different, way.[6]

[5] The perpetual weeping alleged of Iole (325–7) is a particularly interesting element; note further on those lines Dumanoir (1996: 60).

[6] The inventiveness of Sophocles' writing here and in the *Philoctetes* is shown by comparison with the medical writing of the time, vigorous as that can be; cf. e.g. Hipp. *Vet. Med.* 19. 1 for violent verbs, *Morb.* 3. 7 for graphic imagery. On the course of Heracles' suffering Zielinski (1896: 609–16) remains of interest, though curiously literal-minded. It is notable that the chorus think the unconsciousness might be death (969–70; cf. 806); that marks the length and handling of this death, unusual in tragedy.

It seems hard to think that we should not contrast the sufferings of Heracles and Deianira, the physical with the mental, the violent with the loving, emotion centred on the self with emotion related to another. One cannot fail to compare the two figures, and in doing so one surely must compare what they both endure, and in what manner. In a passage full of ironies and pathos, Heracles presents himself as made womanish in his girlish weeping, while Deianira has done a deed unlike a woman's (1062–3, 1070–5). The reversal of categories makes us connect the two characters in their pain; it does not obscure the difference in feeling of Heracles' weeping from Deianira's. Important too is the suggested opposition between the earlier life of Heracles, who was *ἀστένακτος αἰέν* (1074, cf. 1199–201), and that of Deianira, whose nightly longing was never *ἀδάκρυτον* (106–7). From that perspective Heracles' present suffering appears more as a single moment than as an extended period. The last we are shown of both characters is notable: Deianira ends her life with a tearful speech and a heroic act (917–26), Heracles with superhuman endurance ceases his cries and awaits the end (1259–63).[7]

The play, then, illustrates Sophocles' depiction of imperfective suffering, the changes in our conception of events when they come closer, and the relation of 'aspect' in time to the structure and meaning of the work. Sophocles' other play of prolonged female suffering will be considered at rather greater length.

The *Electra* explores the waiting of a woman in a more intense and challenging fashion than the *Trachiniae*. Electra's waiting has a more active and heroic quality than Deianira's. Deianira's suffering is presented more as imposed on her by circumstance. It is seen more emphatically as Electra's own choice to continue her unceasing lamentation of Agamemnon and waiting for Orestes, amid

[7] Note also Deianira's imagined weeping at 846–8. The choruses at 821–61 and 947–70 emphatically connect the present sufferings of Deianira and Heracles. Heracles' previous heroic abstention from crying is of course akin to Ajax's from laments (*Aj.* 317–22); cf. also Hom. *Od.* 11. 528–30, and esp. Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, ch. 95, of *le maréchal Hulot*, 'Et, pour la première fois de sa vie peut-être, deux larmes roulèrent de ses yeux et sillonnèrent ses joues' (the specific point there is that he did not dry the tears before they fell). The contrast Deianira has drawn between maiden and woman is of no importance to Heracles (*παρθένος* 1071 merely sounds even worse). The reversal of the sexes here is discussed by Rehm (1994: 78–9).

persecution from without and disappointment from within. The relation of this unbearably protracted experience to single events is both starker and more complicated than in the less extraordinary experience of Deianira.[8]

Electra's life is first presented in the parodos (86–250). This long lyric sequence brings in a great many elements to depict Electra's imperfective state.[9] As in the *Trachiniae*, the heroine's perpetual weeping is stressed (e.g. *ἀεί El.* 122, *Trach.* 104). As there, the pattern of day and night is exploited (86–94, cf. 259), comparisons are made with birds that continually lament (107, 147–8). The relation of the period to the woman's life is different. For Deianira the 'natural' sequence of marriage after maidenhood has taken a shape of suffering presented in part as normal. Electra's decision to suffer has given her an 'unnatural' life, a permanent deprivation of womanly fulfilment (164–5).

The relation of the period to perfective time is also different, though connected. Deianira's suffering is connected to the future, Electra's to the future and the past. Electra's suffering begins from one terrible past event, the murder of Agamemnon, to which she looks back unceasingly. It is graphically described at 95–9 and 193–206. At 207–8 the relative clauses proceed to connect boldly the killing of Agamemnon with the blighting of Electra's life; it was a single event whose effects endure: *χειροῖν, | αἳ τὸν ἐμὸν εἷλον βίον | πρόδοτον, αἳ μ' ἀπώλεσαν.*[10] There are two ways in which Electra's life of grief might be ended, before her death: she might choose to end it, or Orestes might come. The coming of Orestes has actually occurred; but for Electra that coming is the future event for which she waits, half in despair (186). The relation of present and future is more fully brought out in the spoken continuation of the dialogue with the chorus, where she talks (303–6) of her hopeless waiting for Orestes to come, *Ὀρέστην τῶνδε προσμένους' ἀεὶ | παυστῆρ' ἐφήξειν.* The idea of perfective 'stopping' is important to the play, as will be seen. In the earlier passage the 'always' of her waiting is bitterly

[8] Electra would have concurred with Medea (as reported by Christa Wolf): 'Auch Warten sei eine Tätigkeit, der eine Entscheidung vorausgehen müsse, eben die, daß man warten wolle und nicht abbrechen' (*Medea. Stimmen. Roman* (1996: 171).

[9] It is one of the longest lyric sequences in extant Sophocles; the longest, if one includes the anapaests.

[10] Cf. *Phil.* 1356.

rhymed with the 'always' of his supposed intention to come (165, 171, cf. 303, 305); at 171–2 *ἀεὶ μὲν γὰρ ποθεῖ, | ποθῶν δ' οὐκ ἀξιοῖ φανῆναι* the imperfective intention is forcefully set against the closing perfective (and aorist) verb (cf. 1273–4). The chorus have ended their half of the stanza with an exalted presentation of Orestes' arrival, culminating in his name (160–3, cf. 180–2). Father principally in the past and brother principally in the future: these are the points to which Electra's emotion is directed (cf. e.g. 115–18).

The second possible perfective end to Electra's imperfective condition, her giving the grief up herself, is much exploited in the parodos; it is used to stress that her condition is chosen. It appears on her own lips only in negation: she will never stop. The continual recurrence of the declaration is itself expressive; but the different instances are different coloured. At first Electra presents the negation in sublime language: *ἀλλ' οὐ μὲν δὴ | λήξω θρήνων στυγερῶν τε γόων, | ἔστ' ἂν παμφεγγεῖς ἄστρων | ῥιπὰς λεύσσω δὲ τόδ' ἦμαρ* (103–6). Even at the end of these anapaests, however, she shows the difficulty of this act of will: she can 'no longer' sustain this burden alone (119–20). In response to the chorus's urgings to desist, she seems partly to acknowledge their criticism of her extremity (131, 135), but bluntly insists *οὐδ' ἐθέλω προλιπεῖν τόδε* (132). However, she shows graceful manners here, and there seems to be a reasonable quality in her very profession of unreasonableness; she is not simply a raucous zealot (cf. 254–7, 616–21). In the next stanza she more lyrically and loftily appeals to the examples of perpetual lament supplied by the nightingale and by Niobe: Electra holds Niobe a god, for her unending tears. Later she is again allowing a point to the chorus, the dangers she is incurring by her ferocious attitude; but the language of dissuasion is nobly turned into defiant assertion: *ἀλλ' ἐν γὰρ δεινοῖς οὐ σχήσω | ταύτας ἄτας, | ὅφρα με βίος ἔχῃι* (223–5, cf. 215). The end of the stanza presents the same thought with more pathos: *οὐδέ ποτ' ἐκ καμάτων ἀποπαύσομαι | ἀνάριθμος ὧδε θρήνων* (231–2). Here and elsewhere she stresses the generalizable moral foundation for her stance. The parodos, in my opinion, cannot fairly be seen as leaving a negative impression of Electra; but we see this willed imperfectivity in many lights.[11]

[11] At 135 *ἀλύειν* may suggest a viewpoint not fully shared by Electra, cf. e.g. Virg. *Aen.* 12. 680. Niobe is called a god at *Ant.* 834 (contr. Philem. fr. 102. 3 KA); but here the statement sounds more controversial and paradoxical (cf. 151–2, with

The parodos, then, creates a diverse and powerful vision of Electra's experience. It should not be seen merely as establishing a necessary premiss for the play; its themes are sharpened and intensified in what follows, and the vision is enlarged and modified. Particularly significant is the concrete detail of Electra's coexistence with her family. Her speech after the parodos already introduces her life with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, its recurring but varying encounters, the restrictions (285–6) it imposes on her wish to lament: these complicate the picture of seamless uniformity in her imperfective existence. Her scenes with Chrysothemis and with Clytemnestra strengthen the idea of continual dissension (note e.g. 372–3, 556–7). This is not the first time there have been arguments in this unhappy family.[12] The scene with Chrysothemis gives new force to the theme of Electra's ceasing to lament. That theme has appeared in the scene already (cf. *τῶνδε ληξάσηι γόων*, 353), when Chrysothemis in turn has sought to dissuade Electra and Electra has declined. But Chrysothemis then reveals a plan by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra to imprison her in a cave, *εἰ τῶνδε μὴ λήξεις γόων* (379, cf. 375 *ὃ ταύτην τῶν μακρῶν σχήσει γόων*). Electra faces this extreme pressure with nonchalant bravado (387). The threat is in turn linked (386–9) with another perfective event important in the play: the expected return of Aegisthus.

Electra's continuous way of life and frame of mind is actually ended (she supposes) by an event that lies outside her previous thoughts: the death of Orestes. A brutal exchange (795–8) stresses the stem *παυ-*: *Κλ. οὔκουν Ὀρέστης καὶ σὺ παύσετον τάδε; | Ηλ. πεπαύμεθ' ἡμεῖς, οὐχ ὅπως σε παύσομεν, κτλ.* With moving insight, Sophocles now has Electra saying once again that Orestes has destroyed her hopes, her hopes that he would come; but now it is completely true (809–12, 854–7, *al.*; cf. 305–6, *al.*). Orestes has now joined Agamemnon among the dead (813–14, cf. 968–9). Rather than resume her life but without hope, she bleakly imagines remaining exactly where she is, outside the palace, until perhaps she is killed (817–22).

The next scene produces turns of a Baroque ingenuity and extremity. Chrysothemis proclaims that she has proof of Orestes' return; the return is indeed the true end of Electra's woes

αἰαῖ). For the tone of *ἄραρεν* cf. Cic. *Att.* 9. 10. 3 *init.* On the chorus in the parodos, note Paulsen (1989: 35–6).

[12] Assuredly unhappy, as Tolstoy asserts, in its own particular manner, *po-svoemu.*

(Chrysothemis restrainedly speaks of a respite, *κἀνάπαυλαν ὧν | πάροιθεν εἶχες καὶ κατέστενες κακῶν*, 873–4). Electra harshly destroys this supposed illusion of joy with her own illusion of misery. And yet when Chrysothemis has reached Electra's own point of despair, Electra surprises her (she is always surprising her family). Electra has constructed her own way of ending their woes: *παῦσον ἐκ κακῶν ἐμέ, | παῦσον δὲ σαυτήν* (986–7, cf. *λύσεις* 939). She urges Chrysothemis to help her undertake the killing of Aegisthus, and, when she declines, declares she will undertake it alone. In attempting to persuade Chrysothemis, she fluently sketches the imperfective consequences of this perfective act: some of the points are calculated to appeal to her sister, but the Homeric vision of their future glory reflects her own mentality. The sensationally audacious plan, which almost undercuts the situation of the play (note 1021–2), displays Electra transcending the boundaries of gender. It is no improvisation of the moment (1049, with Hom. *Il.* 9. 527; 1319–21); yet events will make irrelevant this desperate scheme of ending too.[13]

We may pause to consider Electra's great lament over Orestes' ashes, which shows the poet's poignantly imaginative handling of 'aspect'. Thus the terrible power of the destructive moment is conveyed with a drastic metaphor: *πάντα γὰρ συναρπάσας, | θύελλ' ὅπως, βέβηκας* (1150–1). The *πάντα* gains especial depth from the lines before, which refer to the remote past, and a new and moving element; Electra's care for Orestes in childhood, presented as repeated and continuous, has now been annulled in one day (1149–50). After *βέβηκας* come staccato clauses which depict Electra's present situation in its totality: the present state resulting from the separation of the family in death (*οἴχεται πατήρ· | τέθνηκ' ἐγὼ σοί· φροῦδος αὐτὸς εἶ θανών*), and the present exultation of her enemies.

The speech is largely built around perfective moments of sending and receiving. The starting point is the vital event of Electra's sending Orestes forth from the house to rescue him when Agamemnon was killed (*ἐκπέμπειν*, 1128, 1130, 1132–3; cf. e.g. 12, 321). This sending is set against the return of the dead Orestes, sent

[13] For the Homeric use of speech in 975–85, cf. *Aj.* 500–4. The movement of *τάλαινα* in the first part of the scene is noteworthy. Electra uses it several times of her sister (cf. Chrysothemis at 388). Chrysothemis finally (926, 930) applies the word to herself in the present (cf. 902), just after Electra's 924, and with the exclamation that Electra has used (883, cf. 674, and 1108, 1115, 1143).

on a terrible journey (πεμφθείς, 1163), sent by their δαίμων (προὔπεμψεν, 1158), and received by Electra (εἰσεδεξάμην, 1128). The original sending is essentially presented perfectively; but in the initial ὥς ⟨σ'⟩ ἀπ' ἐλπίδων | οὐχ ὥνπερ ἐξέπεμπον εἰσεδεξάμην (1127 f.) the imperfect regards the act from the perspective of her hopes at the time, and also suggests its futility. Electra's perfective act of sending Orestes out is also set against all the imperfective, repeated sending of messages by Orestes to say, in vain, that he would appear as avenger. προὔπεμπες (1155), picked up by προὔπεμψεν (1158) threads this sending into the verbal sequence; the opposition with the original act has been felt in the play already (320–1, *al.*). At the end of the speech, the idea of receiving acquires a bold and stirring development: Electra asks Orestes to receive her into his urn (δέξαι, 1165). The thought expresses her wish, which transcends actuality, to overcome through death their separation by death; it also shows how she can envisage, in the world of the living, no bearable future. The speech shows how the detail of Sophocles' poetry can exploit literary 'aspect' with the greatest richness.[14]

At last Orestes reveals himself, and we might seem to have the desired end; but things prove more complicated as they draw closer. For Electra the decisive event has now occurred, and her life of waiting and misery is over; for Orestes, who naturally has a different perspective, the most decisive event has still to happen. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus have yet to be killed, the enemy have yet to be 'stopped' from laughing (ὅπου . . . γελῶντας ἐχθροὺς παύσομεν, 1294–5). The Paidagogos strongly reinforces this view. Electra displays her own vision as she dwells on the supreme event of the return, so starkly discontinuous with the despair she had felt before it (1262–3, 1281–7, cf. 1362–3).

The dialogue on the stage itself exploits the contrast between Electra and Orestes, through a further opposition between imperfective and perfective time, as Electra gives rein to her feelings, while Orestes urges silence and action.[15] Orestes and the Paidagogos again

[14] Note too, for example, how 1131–42 juxtapose unrealized perfective events in regard to the moments both of Orestes' rescue and of his death. The negative depiction in 1138–40 has a Homeric potency, cf. e.g. *Il.* 21. 123–5, 24. 743–5.

[15] The idea of action as inherently perfective, emotion as inherently imperfective finds notable connections with Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, §620 '*Tun* scheint selbst kein Volumen der Erfahrung zu haben. Es scheint wie ein ausdehnungsloser Punkt, die Spitze einer Nadel', §638, etc.

and again disapprove of speaking 'at length' now, when action is required; such abundant speech must be saved for the future (e.g. 1259 μὴ μακρὰν βούλου λέγειν, 1288–92, 1335 τῶν μακρῶν λόγων, 1363–72, 1372). Electra's emotion can hardly be confined: she asks with vigorous rhetorical questions how anyone could respond to Orestes' return with silence (1260–1), how she could cease from weeping with joy (1313–15). Her declaration οὔ ποτ' ἐκλήξω χαρᾶι | δακρυρροοῦσα (1312–13) movingly and pointedly reverses her earlier οὐ μὲν δὴ | λήξω θρήνων (102–3) and the whole theme of ceasing to lament. This is the more striking in that her tears are meant to be taken by Clytemnestra for tears of grief.

The treatment of time in this scene brings out how the decisive event awaited by Electra is less atomic than it appeared in advance. It contains at least two events (return and killing), and various aspects. The spectator's reaction also starts to split, or does so more definitely than before. The joy of Electra in finding her brother and her freedom must engage every responsive person; her remorseless zeal for the killing contains more to disturb.

The final scene with Aegisthus, an extraordinary way to close a Greek tragedy, exploits time both on stage and more widely. Aegisthus' return is itself a crucial event in the play, which has now acquired an altered significance. He believes that a decisive event has occurred for Electra, Orestes' death: this has brought an end to her resistance and her hopes (1445–6, 1464–5, cf. 1460–3). The passage displays with sharp irony the alternative endings to imperfective periods which the plot has deployed; the political dimension Aegisthus adds to the imagined ending makes him the more disagreeable (1458–63). In fact his death is to be the crucial ending for Electra: her last words chillingly make Aegisthus' death and loss of burial the only release from the period of her woes, ὡς ἐμοὶ τόδ' ἂν κακῶν | μόνον γένοιτο τῶν πάλαι λυτήριον (1489–90). She now has in mind not the fact of deliverance but the emotional satisfaction of revenge.

The opposition on stage of lengthy speaking and swift action appears again with Aegisthus. His talking defers or could defer the crucial moment (μηδὲ (ἔα)μηκύνειν λόγους, 1484; πόλλ' ἀντιφωνεῖς, ἡ δ' ὁδὸς βραδύνεται, 1501; cf. 1491–2). It is Electra who breaks in on his dialogue with Orestes and first urges speed (1483–4, 1487–90). One feels the difference from her lavishly emotional manner at the reunion; now she is as practical and intent on speed as Orestes

is, or more. But this intentness is the disquieting expression of fierce desire. The velocity of the ending to the play sharpens rather than overrides our uneasiness.[16]

The *Electra* has shown a treatment of an extended period of suffering related to that of the *Trachiniae*, but different in nature and significance. The play has developed in the most elaborate and probing fashion the idea of a perfective cessation to the imperfective period. We have seen again how events which look perfective from a distance appear more complex in 'aspect' when they appear; we have seen also how they look different to different characters. The complication of 'aspect' has proved to be bound up with the moral complication of the last part of the play; consideration of time heightens our consideration of meaning.

Two of the plays with male central figures are similarly founded on the long period of suffering which the foremost character has endured: the *Philoctetes* and the *OC*. The exigencies of space allow only a discussion of the latter, and that a brief one. The *OC* is chosen because it is particularly rich and intricate in its use of 'aspect', as of time in general; it should be evident enough that the kind of analysis applied above to the *Electra* and the *Trachiniae* can fruitfully be applied to the *Philoctetes*.

The *OC*, like the other three plays, is built around an extended, imperfective experience which leads up to the present; what is built around it is particularly elaborate. The experience is that of Oedipus' life of exile as a wandering beggar. The idea of wandering is much stressed, though little is said of particular places Oedipus has passed through (compare Walcott's *Omeros*!). By contrast with the fixity of Philoctetes or Electra, Oedipus' experience is defined by unresting motion. The present place as well as the present time are set against this incessant movement. Oedipus will here be received, fixed, and will not move; his wanderings and his life will end. Oedipus announces himself in the first lines of the play as *τὸν πλανήτην Οἰδίπουν* (3, cf. 50 etc.). With that conception are swiftly associated repeated begging, poverty, acceptance, heroic endurance, prolonged life; the idea of extended time is soon explicitly added (22). Ironically Oedipus sees in *ἡμέραν | τὴν νῦν* (3–4) mere

[16] Through 1416 Electra's last speech is emphatically linked with her earlier appalling imperative to Orestes (1415, on which see Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990: 74); note 1407–8, 1413–14). More straightforwardly positive views of Electra have been offered recently by Harder (1995), and March (1996).

repetition of a routine, varied in place but not substance; in fact the present day will provide the perfective end to that routine. The visual side of the opening is no less important: the slow movement, guided by Antigone, which embodies the wandering, and their squalid appearance, which embodies his degraded exile.[17]

Later, when Oedipus speaks of Antigone's life, he conveys in an expressively long sentence the extension of what she has undergone, and the poverty.

> *ἦ μὲν ἐξ ὅτου νέας*
> *τροφῆς ἔληξε καὶ κατίσχυσεν δέμας,*
> *ἀεὶ μεθ' ἡμῶν δύσμορος πλανωμένη*
> *γερονταγωγεῖ, πολλὰ μὲν κατ' ἀγρίαν*
> *ὕλην ἄσιτος νηλίπους τ' ἀλωμένη,*
> *πολλοῖσι δ' ὄμβροις ἡλίου τε καύμασι*
> *μοχθοῦσα τλήμων δεύτερ' ἡγεῖται τὰ τῆς*
> *οἴκοι διαίτης, εἰ πατὴρ τροφὴν ἔχοι.* (345–52)

The rhetorical structure is evident enough: *ἐξ ὅτου, ἀεί, πολλὰ μέν, πολλοῖσι δ'* all stress extended time and repetition, and are opposed to the home which the girl has abandoned. *πλανωμένη* and *ἀλωμένη* both end lines and clauses. Poverty and degradation is conveyed not only by *ἄσιτος νηλίπους τ'* but by the roughness of the elements, which a well-born maiden would escape. Creon uses a verbal structure which applies an emphatic *ἀεί* to both Oedipus and Antigone (746, 750), and emphasizes wandering, poverty, deprivation. Polynices brings out the length of Oedipus' suffering by a repellent personification of filth: *ὁ δυσφιλὴς | γέρων γέροντι συγκατώικηκεν πίνος* (1258–9); the whole description reactivates through language what we see on stage. Polynices connects this state with Oedipus' exile: he is *ξένης ἐπὶ χθονὸς . . . ἐνθάδ' ἐκβεβλημένον* (1256–7). He fails to recognize that Oedipus has now found a 'home'.

However, powerfully as the play evokes the central figure's imperfective existence, it does not expound that existence in the same lengthy and elaborate fashion as the *Trachiniae*, *Electra*, or *Philoctetes*; on the other hand, it devotes a great deal of its ample

[17] On slowness note Dunn (1992: 1). Note the depiction (whether or not of this play) in the *oecus maior* of the House of the Comedians on Delos (N, Met. 7; *LIMC* 1. 1. 820, 2). *τὸν πλανήτην* recalls, for example, the *strannik* (wanderer) used by Lermontov in relation to himself in the poem of exile 'Listok' ('The Little Leaf', 1841, ll. 7, 21 (*Sobr. soč.* (Moscow 1964), i. 124–5).

span to perfective events in the past and future which are connected to or contrasted with this protracted period.

Most fundamentally, the play sets the supreme event of the play, Oedipus' death, against the long time which has preceded it. The shape is already set out plainly, with the authority of an oracle, at the start of the play: Apollo *ταύτην ἔλεξε παῦλαν ἐν χρόνωι μακρῶι* (88, cf. *βίου . . . πέραcιν . . . καὶ καταστροφήν τινα* 102–3, with the rest of the sentence). One sees here the link of the perfective moment with place, in the striking phrase *χώραν τερμίαν* (89); one sees also the effect this moment will have in the future on Athens and Thebes.

The moment itself, the death, is heralded at the end of the play by thunder; this thunder appears for the moment to sweep away all the entanglements of sons and Thebans. It was forecast as a sign in the prologue (94–5); characteristically, this event itself seems less perfective when experienced in stage time: the terrifying sound and sight occur repeatedly. But the decisiveness of the happening is clear, and its meaning as bringing an end to Oedipus' life (1460–1, 1472–3, etc.). The speed and resolution with which Oedipus himself now guides the others, following the god, eerily marks a contrast with the movement at the beginning of the play, and with the life he is now ending (1551–2).[18]

In a speech to his daughters reported by the messenger Oedipus proclaims that 'this day' (1612) sees the end of his life, and of their labours in looking after him. As hitherto, the girls' sufferings are partly a way of talking about Oedipus' sufferings, but are partly distinct. The speech ends in a potent contrast with its beginning: Oedipus will end his life, and so the girls their toil; but they will live on, unlike him, and spend the rest of their lives mourning for him, *οὗ τητώμεναι | τὸ λοιπὸν ἥδη τὸν βίον διάξετον* (1618–19). The very end of the play makes clear the reality of this division, and also the further irony of Antigone's short life. Ismene in lament sets the death she wishes she could share with her father against the unendurable life she must now lead (1689–92). In a poignant

[18] In my view, the thunder must come before 1447; whether audible or (more likely) imagined, its sudden appearance after the penultimate line of the strophe would be unlike tragic lyric. 1456, if the thunder is imagined, would explain what precedes; the asyndeton is either 'explanatory', or produced by the brevity of the clause. With the *παρ'* to follow, *μοι* is not comfortably read as 'ethical'; if it depends on *ἦλθε*, it makes much clearer sense to refer the lines to the thunder.

turning round of Oedipus' speech, Antigone declares that her past life of suffering is now something she longs for (1697–9).

The death of Oedipus acquires a significance far beyond the boundaries of the perfective event. It is not so much the point that he will now become a hero, a chthonic near-divinity. We may set aside the considerable problems over the contemporary hero-cult. In the play there is little stress even on Oedipus' consciousness after death, something much more to the fore with, say, the dead Agamemnon in *Electra*. The blood of Oedipus' foes will be drunk not by Oedipus as 'a vengeful Fury', but by his cold and sleeping corpse, *οὐμὸς εὕδων καὶ κεκρυμμένος νέκυς | ψυχρός . . .* (621–2).[19] It is more important that the fact of his death on Attic soil has large consequences for the future. These can be represented as extending endlessly, *γήρως ἄλυπα* (1519), in forceful contrast to the old age of Oedipus, and of all mortals (607–8). The secret will transcend the death of the individual king (1530–1), and it will be passed on over the generations (1531–2). On the other hand, there is also a crucial moment envisaged in the future, a battle between Athens and Thebes by the site of Oedipus' grave; the presence of Oedipus' body will bring victory to Athens (411, 605, 621–2, 644–7, etc.).[20]

Oedipus makes his choice within the play to help Athens, not his own city, or his own son (1323); but the future event as well as the present is important. Oedipus will then himself, through the Athenian victory, overcome those who have harmed him, *κρατήcω τῶν ἔμ' ἐκβεβληκότων* (646). The reversal of power here is evident; so, in the following sequence of nervous antilabe (652–7), is the contrast with Oedipus' physical powerlessness now. One links too the earlier dialogue with Ismene, where Creon and the

[19] Cf. Segal (1981: 375).

[20] The historical event is discussed most recently, and helpfully, by Edmunds (1996: 95–6). On the question of the hero-cult cf. Kearns (1989: 50–2, 208–9). The best evidence in the play for Oedipus' consciousness after death is 411, where it is most natural that *ὀργῆc* should be referred to the time of the battle. Even 1565–7 need not be taken to imply heroic status (in the thought of the play the honour of the specific power conferred on Oedipus' body would be quite sufficient to justify *αὔξοι*, cf. 394). 1563–4, and 1568–78, do not greatly support an emphasis on the role of hero in 1565–7. (The text of 1565–7 themselves does not seem wholly satisfying even in the *OCT*.) Perhaps Sophocles was reluctant for aesthetic reasons to bring heroization (or deification) too openly and emphatically into his plays; this may be relevant to the *Trachiniae* too. *Phil.* 726–9, 1418–20, not part of the action of the play, would on this view be a different matter.

sons depend for their κράτος on Oedipus, and for this very reason are eager to gain κράτος over him (392, cf. 372; 400, 405, 408). This single moment in the future is thus vital to the themes and action of the play, and the larger shape in time which it foreshadows. An exceedingly impressive part of the play is the speech (607–28) in which Oedipus sets mortal mutability against the unchanging eternity of the gods, and depicts the vast and fluctuating period after his death; but at the end of it all, precisely because the gods are unchangeable and omniscient, will come his moment of power and revenge. This huge vista opens on no extrinsic piece of aetiology, but on an event which is vital to everyone in the play, and most of all to Oedipus.[21]

Highly characteristic of the play, and of Oedipus, is the unwearying scrutiny devoted to the past. Even the moment of killing Laius is explored for its motivation at that instant: would one not react with perfective action, not inquiry, to the imperfective situation of someone trying to kill one (991–6)? Oedipus' question to Creon is full of oratorical acumen.[22] Oedipus' period of wandering is not simply given a terrible perfective event which begins it, as with the sufferings of Electra and Philoctetes. Oedipus resentfully expounds, more than once, a complicated state of affairs. In his condition of mind immediately after the revelation of his deeds, he was eager for a perfective act of punishment, to be stoned (435) or to leave in exile (766); no one granted this (imperfective) desire. His feelings gradually altered with time (437–9, cf. 768–9), and he wished to remain; but there were then plans to exile him, in the midst of which his sons could have intervened but did not (440–4). 'Aspect' is important to this elaborate analysis, and is elaborately handled; the depiction of emotion weakening over time after an immediate response (433–9) reminds one of Hellenistic philosophy. The play is here typically probing, argumentative, explicit. In this respect, it is extremely different from the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[23]

The play shows a different treatment again of imperfective

[21] With 607–28 one may compare and contrast Dem. 20. 161–2, which is related in its presentation of mutability but does not convey the same vastness of time.

[22] Cf. Isae. 2. 25. Edmunds (1996: 134–8) connects the self-defence with the republication of Dracon's legislation on homicide.

[23] The handling of Oedipus' past in both plays may rewardingly be contrasted with the effect of Enescu's *Œdipe*, where the whole span of Oedipus' life is accommodated into the structure of a single work.

suffering; we come to see once more the divisions in characters' perspectives on what happens. A single perfective event is placed in manifold and expressive relations to imperfective periods and perfective moments outside it. Seemingly perfective events even from the past are made to expose a greater complexity.

We have arrived at plays which are not based around an imperfective period of suffering. 'Aspect' may be thought much less relevant to the *Oedipus Tyrannus* than to the *Oedipus Coloneus*; in fact, contemplation of this matter leads one deeply into the design and nature of the play. But statements on this matter as on many other features of the work must be particularly guarded. The *OT*, despite its reputation for infernal lucidity, is in many respects less explicit and explanatory than, not only the *OC*, but Sophocles' other extant plays. It often proceeds by insidious transition rather than emphatic contrast; and the meaning and implications of the catastrophe remain in many respects unstated. The contrast with the *OC* is especially illuminating; for example, the question of Oedipus' guilt and innocence is discussed much more fully and plainly there. Part of the impact of the *OT* lies in its incommensurability and uncanniness; in consequence, criticism has to be unusually cautious in spelling out what the play suggests. This means that the things which 'aspect' enhances without being explicitly perceived are themselves further than usual from explicit perception by the spectator. But some points are clearly of importance, and may be swiftly noted.

Underlying the whole play is the notion of perfective solutions to imperfective situations. The identity of these situations shifts or glides as the play progresses. Some at least of these situations are not, as especially in *El. Phil. OC*, situations which stretch far back into the past and have created the consciousness of the central figures; rather, they are urgent crises in the present. The first imperfective situation to be solved is the plague, which the early part of the play presents with immense descriptive power. A multiplicity of misfortunes, stressed with abundant anaphora and other devices, are presented as all occurring at this time together (ὁμοῦ . . . ὁμοῦ, 4–5; 25–6; ἄλλον . . .ἄλλαι, 174, ἄλλοθεν ἄλλαι, 184; ἀνάριθμα, 168, corresponding to ἀνάριθμος, 179). Present verbs given an urgent sense of a continuous situation now. In both the Priest's speech and the parodos, the two main descriptions of the plague, the account of the present is rhetorical: it is part of a

demand for perfective help. The Priest helps Oedipus for aid (*ἀλκήν τιν' εὑρεῖν ἡμίν*, 42); the chorus, with especially forceful oppositions of imperfective and perfective, beg the gods (*εὐῶπα πέμψον ἀλκάν*, 188, cf. 190–3 etc.). The Priest looks back to the perfective deliverance which Oedipus provided from the imperfective crisis produced by the Sphinx: *ἐξέλυσας . . . δασμὸν ὃν παρείχομεν* (35–6). The stems *λυ-* and *ῥυ-* will be important for the play. Oedipus uses *ἐρυσαίμην* (72) of the rescue he wants Apollo to show him how to achieve; he later uses *ἔκλυσιν . . . νόσηματος* (306–7) of the rescue that would be brought by punishing Laius' slayer. He uses *ῥῦσαι* in threefold anaphora (312–13) to Teiresias as he begs him to rescue the city from the plague which it is in (*νόσωι σύνεστιν*, 303). That appeal is to be conjoined with the appeals from the Priest and chorus, though it forgoes description (302–3); like the Priest's appeal to Oedipus, it has some affinities with prayer. In the ensuing argument, Oedipus looks back to the situation of the Sphinx, and how Teiresias, unlike Oedipus, failed to provide *τι . . . ἐκλυτήριον* (392; contr. 397, *ἔπαυσά νιν*). The plague, then, is the first situation of crisis that needs to be ended.

The quarrel with Teiresias leads the play into a different sort of crisis, with Oedipus' construction of a conspiracy. The conspiracy is not a crisis which is actually as grave as the plague; but that is part of the point. Jocasta rebukes Oedipus and Creon for stirring up private misfortunes at a time of public disaster (635–6); the chorus do not want these woes for the land to be added to the plague (665–8). The two sets of problems are clearly being put together; it is notable that the penalties of exile and death (e.g. 622–3), and indeed Oedipus' own exile (658–9, 669–70, cf. 690–6) are involved with both. The point is partly to mark through the very disproportion between these problems an alteration in Oedipus, as he moves from public-spirited father of his people to, for the moment, self-concerned tyrant; we also see the play narrowing its focus, moving inward. For this factitious crisis, not rescue but resolution is required; on the stage we have Jocasta and the chorus pressing for the present situation to be sorted out: *τὸ νῦν παρεστὸς νεῖκος εὖ θέσθαι* (633; cf. *παύσασθε* 631). This animated and elaborate piece of drama, with three actors and lyric dialogue, intensifies the idea of an imperfective situation set against the moment of its ceasing. This cessation is grudgingly conceded by Oedipus.

The ensuing conversation brings in a different kind of imperfectivity requiring an end: Oedipus' fear. This is another movement inward: the play had proceeded from national crisis to a personal conflict with political significance and now proceeds to the inner state of mind of two people. The entry of fear into the play is graphically marked at 726–7: *οἷόν μ' ἀκούσαντ' ἀρτίως ἔχει, γύναι,* | *ψυχῆς πλάνημα κἀνακίνησις φρενῶν*. (Contrast 67, where it is for the city that Oedipus has been *πολλὰς . . . ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις*.) The description vividly conveys the imperfectivity of emotion.

The fear takes different forms and has different objects as the play twists and turns. Sometimes it appears as an emotion which has only just begun, a thing of the present; sometimes it is a continuation of emotion long experienced. For we soon learn of Oedipus' fears about his 'parents' in the past, again expressively described: *ἔκνιζέ μ' ἀεὶ τοῦθ'· ὑφεῖρπε γὰρ πολύ* (786). At the start of the next scene Jocasta prays to Apollo to provide rescue from Oedipus' present wild state of distress and fear, *ὅπως λύσιν τιν' ἡμὶν εὐαγῆ πόρηις* (921). The form of an entreaty, prominently placed, joins this passage with the earlier appeals and prayers; the identity of the god is particular important. The Priest, at the end of the prologue, had wanted Apollo to come as saviour and finish the plague (149–50); we now see the connecting will of the grim divinity behind both situations, and at the same time perceive the movement in the concerns of the play. Jocasta's final remark that all are afraid because all look to Oedipus their helmsman (921–2) again draws in the city and again shows how the focuses of the play are changing. The generality of Jocasta's own fear is highly ironic for her.

Soon a messenger brings exultant release from long-standing fear. Oedipus has long (*πάλαι*, 947) feared that he might kill his supposed father Polybus; Polybus is now dead. In a striking and pathetically intimate moment, the married couple look back together in satisfied surprise on the recent situation of unresolved worry (note the imperfects): *Io. οὔκουν ἐγώ σοι ταῦτα προὔλεγον πάλαι;* | *Oι. ηὔδας· ἐγὼ δὲ τῶι φόβωι παρηγόμην* (973–4). A fresh long-standing worry promptly occurs to Oedipus, the marrying of his mother; this promptness in the substitution of one anxiety with another could be seen as psychologically acute. The messenger believes he can free Oedipus from his fears: *ἐξελυσάμην* is the verb he uses (1003). A rich vocabulary of synonyms for fearing (1000, 1011, 1014), and vigorous repetition (1013), express the fear

Oedipus has always had: τοῦτ' αὐτό, πρέσβυ, τοῦτό μ' εἰσαεὶ φοβεῖ. The messenger is no saviour now, whatever he may have been when Oedipus was a baby (1030 σοῦ δ' ὦ τέκνον σωτήρ γε τῶι τότ' ἐν χρόνωι, cf. 1179–80). But Oedipus is excited, Jocasta appalled. Soon Oedipus will be in a state of disaster beyond rescue; he, rather than the city, will have to endure a terrible νόσημα (1293).[24]

A further area where 'aspect' is important is in the nature of Oedipus' unwitting sins. In general, this play concentrates its scrutiny of the past on specific perfective moments; it is these moments which Oedipus seeks to reconstruct and make sense of. This gives the play a very different atmosphere from say the *Philoctetes*, where, for all the stress on the single action of the Atridae and Odysseus, the imperfective past is the most important. However, it is worth reflecting further on Oedipus' two unwitting crimes. One thinks of them as neatly symmetrical: he kills his father and marries his mother. But are the actions really both perfective? Is it really the terrible thing that he married his mother, or that he is married to her, or that they have produced children? One could say that the incest itself is the terrible thing; but how is that to be regarded in time? The presentation varies: 366–7, σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις | αἴσχισθ' ὁμιλοῦντ'; 459, γυναικὸς υἱὸς καὶ πόσις; 791–2, ὡς μητρὶ μὲν χρείη με μειχθῆναι, γένος δ' | ἄτλητον ἀνθρώποισι δηλώσοιμ' ὁρᾶν; 1184–5, ξὺν οἷς τ' | οὐ χρῆν ὁμιλῶν, οὕς τέ μ' οὐκ ἔδει κτανών (note the different tenses; cf. further e.g. *OC* 945–6); 1358–9, οὐδὲ (sc. ἂν) νυμφίος | βροτοῖς ἐκλήθην ὧν ἔφυν ἄπο; 1496–9, τὸν πατέρα πατὴρ | ὑμῶν ἔπεφνε· τὴν τεκοῦσαν ἤροσεν, | ὅθεν περ αὐτὸς ἐσπάρη, κἀκ τῶν ἴσων | ἐκτήσαθ' ὑμᾶς, ὥνπερ αὐτὸς ἐξέφυ. The imperfective and present side gives a terrible irony to the portrayal of the royal marriage, dignified yet ordinary in its sorting out of problems and worries; the mixture of 'aspects' and times gives a terrible strangeness to Oedipus' meeting with the beloved daughters whom he knows to embody his crime.[25]

[24] σωτήρ is used at 48 of Oedipus in relation to the Sphinx, at 150 of Apollo, at 304 of Teiresias, both in relation to the plague. Cf. also Segal (1981: 152–4).

[25] The history of the tradition probably lends further significance to the begetting of children as a distinct element in the disaster. It is likely to have been absent from some versions: Pausanias' view of Hom. *Od.* 11. 274 is probably correct, or, if not, natural for earlier readers (Paus. 9. 5. 10–11, cf. e.g. Führer (1978: 1696. 61–4)); he also mentions the *Oedipodeia* (fr. 2 Davies). Accordingly, there had been meaningful addition, omission, or retention at some point before Sophocles, which is of interest for ancient feeling; and the earlier variation gives the feature further weight in Sophocles himself. For discussion of the tradition cf. March (1987: ch. 5); Mastronarde (1994: 20–2).

The killing of Oedipus' father is seen as a perfective act; φονεὺς εἶναι, as one sees from Antiphon, is a way of identifying a person now as the one who killed then. The play does not engage in the *Tetralogies*' ingenious explorations of what is meant by the 'murderer' (see e.g. Γ. δ. 2–8); but it is part of the unease which the play inspires that the killing of Laius was an island in the past, not preceded by evil intention, not followed by guilt. The chorus' notions of anxious guilt and luxuriating wickedness are significantly far from the mark. And yet the moment determines what Oedipus is. The climactic speech where he proclaims himself the child of Fortune is an appalling mixture of error and truth (1080–5); it displays the shadowed question which the play never overtly discusses, of the severance, and the unbreakable connection, between what Oedipus is and what he did.

The shape, and the sombreness, of the play can be more fully perceived by pondering on 'aspect'. We may emerge from the compelling obscurity of that work to touch on one more. There is not space to consider the *Ajax*; but there would be much to say here too, not least about the differing perspectives of different individuals on what occurs. We turn, however, to the *Antigone*, which offers a striking example of how 'aspect' affects the action and themes of a play.

The most important area is death. The significance of 'aspect' in the treatment of death has already emerged in our discussion of other plays. One may add the great scene where Ajax contemplates in advance the perfective moment of suicide and its consequences, dwelling drastically on the idea of a speedy decease (*Aj.* 815–16, 833–4), and bidding himself make haste (853).[26] However, in some ways death receives fuller and more central attention in the *Antigone* than in most of Sophocles' surviving plays; the exploitation of 'aspect' in this regard is correspondingly involved.

Some general points may be mentioned to begin with. Beyond the

[26] Exekias' image seems similarly to contemplate the perfective moment from an imperfective time before it (belly amphora, Boulogne 558, *ABV* 145, 18). The chronological relation of the *Ajax* to the depiction perhaps by the Alkimachos Painter is more uncertain (lekythos, Basle (loan); Schefold, (1976)); for one view see March (1991–3: 32–3). How much of the speech 815–65 is interpolated is a difficult question; note Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1997: 24–5).

perfective moment of death lie various extended periods of time. Polynices' dead body itself lingers hideously on, decaying and smelling (410, 412, cf. 1197–8). Dying is seen by Antigone as the start of unending coexistence with one's dead family: so she remarks, with dry understatement, *πλείων χρόνος | ὃν δεῖ μ' ἀρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε* (74–5). The world of the dead is seen by Antigone and others as having its gods, whose laws share in the eternity of the divine, unlike the momentary proclamations of Creon and the laws of men (451, 518–21, 749, *al.*). These imperfective elements are important to the thought and the feelings about death in the play. But the death of Antigone within the play introduces more elaborate complexities.

There is a general contrast in the play between the final scene with Antigone and the final scene with Creon. The peculiar atmosphere of the scene with Antigone is part of this contrast, which furnishes the moral structure of the play. Antigone has so far thought of dying as a simple moment, on which she has heroically decided (72, 95–7, 555; cf. 497, 546); it is premature, but it will close only an existence of woe (460–4). Indeed, at 559–60, advancing on 555 and closing her dialogue with Ismene, she elides the event altogether: *σὺ μὲν ζῆις, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι | τέθνηκεν*. Creon knowingly predicts a change of attitude when death is seen from closer to (580–1).[27]

Creon's own talk of death has been similarly perfective. He has not indicated much about how the breaker of his edict will die. Even when he knows it is his son's betrothed, he speaks imperviously of Hades 'stopping' that marriage (*Ἅιδης ὁ παύσων τοῦσδε τοὺς γάμους ἐμοί*, 575). In his rage with Haemon, he cruelly purposes to have Antigone slain immediately, *αὐτίκα*, in front of Haemon's eyes (760–1). But when this plan is thwarted, he arranges, still more cruelly but cunningly, to have Antigone immured in an underground cave, with a modicum of food; she will, he imagines, eventually die without direct action by the state (773–80).

This form of death, which resembles the apparently non-fatal punishment to be inflicted on Electra (*El.* 380–2, note 392), suggests the reverse of a decisive moment. The treatment in the play makes it something paradoxical and liminal. In the elegant formulation presented by Teiresias, Creon has blurred the categories of upper and lower, living and dead. Polynices is a dead person kept on earth,

[27] Cf. *Phil.* 518–21.

Antigone is a living person put in the underworld, in a 'tomb' (1066–71); she is still alive (note 1100–1). Antigone presents herself, with emphatic paradox and asyndeton, as belonging to *οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν* (852). The Chorus also emphasize the paradox: she is the only person (*μονὴ δή*, 821) to go living into Hades (819–21, cf. 811, etc.). Creon stresses nastily that the choice of life or death there is her own; even he uses the paradoxical metaphor of the tomb (885–90). The Chorus's mythological elaborations on caves and imprisonment enhance rather than reduce the strangeness of Antigone's fate; but the most haunting comparison is Antigone's own with Niobe. Like her she will be enveloped by rock; but the extension of the comparison, and the chorus's comments, suggest Niobe's continued consciousness and grief (823–37, cf. *El.* 150–2). However we interpret the comparison, a peculiar atmosphere is made to surround Antigone's undecided, ambiguous death in life.[28]

This way of death is, then, the opposite of perfective. The actual scene in which Antigone proceeds to the cavern is expressively drawn out (whatever the original length of Antigone's speech 891–928). Creon, as usual in a hurry, brings out its protraction by his demands for speed (883–90, 931–2). The range of reference and the changes in form and metre make the scene seem particularly ample. It seems so all the more because the official business of the scene is a single movement across stage, as Antigone is conducted by guards on her final journey (807–8, 877–8, 885, 939 *ἄγομαι δὴ 'γὼ κοὐκέτι μέλλω*). The slowness of the scene has particular force, since it marks the change in Antigone's attitude. Now that death is actually upon her, she confronts it not with cowardice, as Creon had surmised (580–1), but with deep grief and a bitter sense of injustice. She is now facing and contemplating the event; she is lamenting at length before it occurs (cf. 883). The stage movement itself becomes an embodiment of her fate. It presents a reversal or perversion of the wedding-procession she has been denied (810–17, 891–4; 876–8, 916–18).[29] It also suggests and perverts a funeral procession: Antigone is still alive, and no member of her extinguished family mourns for her (847–9, 877, 881–2; 919–20). The lingeringly

[28] For the significance of rock here cf. Brown (1987: 192), and also Wecklein (1910: 69). Later authors (developing Hom. *Il.* 24. 617) treat the combination of consciousness and rock more paradoxically, e.g. Call. *H.* 2. 22, Prop. 3.10. 8, Sen. *HF* 391; so too, I think, in the fragment discovered by Hollis (1997), cf. *CIRB* 129. 8.

[29] Cf. esp. Rehm (1994: 62–3).

imperfective scene drives home the pathos, cruelty, and strangeness of the death, and Antigone's movingly altered perceptions.

The deaths of Haemon and Eurydice are the terrible punishment which answers and contrasts with the unjust punishment of Antigone; the final part of the play (1155–1353) answers and contrasts with this scene. There is nothing lingering here. Both the narrative of the messenger and the subsequent movements on stage present a tumult of action. Creon has hurried to the vault (1102–10). Antigone has already hanged herself, a swift and as it were normal close after all that had preceded. Haemon's death takes place in a confused rush of violence. He dies abruptly with the sword, an end the chorus had even contrasted with Antigone's abnormal fate (820). His death too is seen as a perversion of marriage (1236–41, cf. 1205); but here we are shown, not Antigone's slow procession, but an instantaneous perversion of the act of physical union.[30]

The death of Eurydice gives a ghastly speed and tumult to the final scene it would not otherwise have had. The perfectivity of Haemon's and Eurydice's deaths becomes the more pointed and dreadful because Creon sees himself as the agent who has performed these killings (1319, 1340–1). Eurydice herself intensifies this notion from outside: she curses Creon *τῶι παιδοκτόνωι* (1305). But Creon, although he says that Hades is destroying him (1284–5) through these deaths, and although he says he is no more than nothing (1325), does not himself obtain the perfective release of death. He wishes he had been struck a fatal blow with a sword (*ἀνταίαν*, 1308–9); he wishes the day of death would come now (1328–32). He remains alive, with the bodies of his son and his wife, and his consciousness of what he has done.

'Aspect' has now been explored in most of Sophocles' extant plays. We have looked at it on various scales: in the overall shaping of works, in the drama of particular scenes, in the detail of individual speeches and lines. We have seen the power with which Sophocles evokes long periods of misery, the subtlety with which apparently perfective events are made more complicated, and are perceived from different angles by different people. We have observed the elaborate relations within plays between a number of imperfective situations and perfective happenings, and how these relations give the play shape and force. We have noticed all kinds of

[30] Cf. Seaford (1987: 120–1; 1994: 381).

connections and contrasts between plays; we have perhaps intensified our awareness of the individuality of each and its distinctive world. The framework for the analysis is highly abstract; but it helps one (in my own case at least) to articulate things one had felt more obscurely and to notice things one had missed. That suggests the conception may be of critical use; and may even seem enough to justify this general style of approach.

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5

Sophocles and the Democratic City

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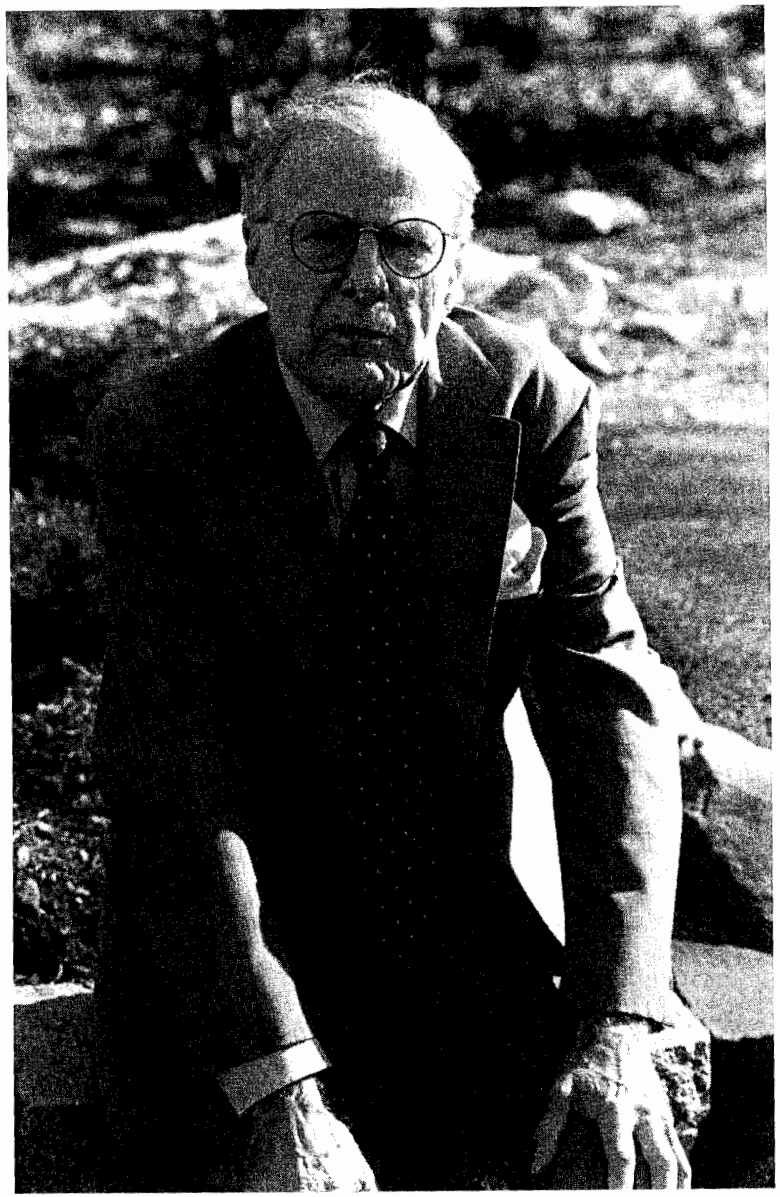
At school in the early 1950s, the first Attic tragedy we read was Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*: in retrospect, perhaps an eccentric choice. To help us we had a small school edition with notes in the back. The notes, broadly speaking, were concerned with questions of two kinds only. One was the reason why the verb in a given verse was in the infinitive, or the noun in the dative. That is, the note gave, in an oracular manner, a name to the case or the mood: an 'ethic' dative, a 'historic' infinitive. The other kind of note, the kind which we really disliked, gave curt and (again) oracular answers to inscrutable disputes between German scholars about the reading of the text. Discussion in class dealt with grammatical questions, not literary criticism; as for discussing the function of tragedy in the democratic city of Athens, such a thing never crossed the mind of any of us, teacher or pupil. The play was simply *there*. We set about it very much for the same reason, and in the same frame of mind, as climbers tackling Mount Everest: roped together by our shared sessions of translation in class, and with our survival kit in the form of our edition with notes in the back.

At Oxford in the late 1950s we advanced from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Now we met with books which did venture a fairly straightforward and unselfconscious literary criticism. Literary it was; so much so that in 1954 Victor Ehrenberg, publishing his *Sophocles and Pericles*, opened defensively by saying that it was 'a prevalent trend of our time' that 'the basis for any discussion of poetry seems to be the idea that a poet ought to be judged by poetical standards only', as against the 'chiefly transatlantic tendency of "sociology"':



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