I

The Sophoclean Hero 1

THE MODERN concept of tragic drama takes for granted the existence of a single central character, whose action and suffering are the focal point of the play—what we call 'the tragic hero.' For us it is difficult to imagine *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. This figure of the tragic hero is a legacy inherited by Renaissance and Neo-classical tragedy from Seneca, and so from the Greeks.[1] The literary theory which is associated with it claims as its source, rightly or wrongly,[2] the *Poetics* of Aristotle, where a famous passage seems to most critics to imply that tragedy presents the 'reversal' of a single character.[3] It was natural that Aristotle should make such an assumption, because his point of view on tragedy is primarily ethical, and the problem of moral choice is most clearly and economically presented in this way.[4] There was a firm base for such a view in the fifth-century tragedies he cites, for many of them, and especially the play he clearly regarded as the most perfect example of the tragic art, the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, do in fact center on such a single figure. This dramatic method, the presentation of the tragic dilemma in the figure of a single dominating character, seems in fact to be an invention of Sophocles.[5] It is at any rate so characteristic of his technique that we may fairly and without exaggeration call the mainstream of European tragedy since his time Sophoclean. It is Sophocles who presented us with what we know (though the Greeks of course did not use the term) as 'the tragic hero.'[6]

Even the titles assigned to Sophocles' plays suggest that this peculiarity of his drama was recognized in the ancient world. We do not know who assigned these titles, nor, as a rule, when they were assigned,[7] but they clearly reflect some common (and, on the whole, early) impression of the nature of his dramaturgy. Of the seven extant tragedies, six are named after the central figure; only one, the *Trachiniae*, after the chorus, and that is the only one of the seven which is not clearly based on the figure of a tragic hero. The titles of the seven extant plays of Aeschylus present a different picture: the *Suppliants*, the *Persians*, the *Agamemnon* (but here surely no one can ever have thought that *he* is the tragic hero), the *Libation Bearers*, the *Eumenides*. The *Prometheus Bound* is rightly named, and does present us with a fully developed heroic and dominant figure (though he is not a man but a god), but this play is so unlike the rest of Aeschylean drama that it is a problem in itself; it is a play 'to be argued to, not from' as Kitto said of the *Heraclidae* of Euripides.[8] It must have been written late in Aeschylus' career (later than the end of it some scholars think) and may thus show Sophoclean influence, as the *Oresteia* does in its adoption of the third actor.[9] The other surviving play of Aeschylus which concerns itself with the tragic dilemma of an individual does so in a very Aeschylean way: the bulk of the play is made up of elaborate descriptions of the persons and armor of the opposing champions in the final assault on Thebes, and the play was known, as early as the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, not as the '*Eteocles*' but as the *Seven against Thebes*.

The difference in the kind of title given the plays of the two dramatists is of course merely a symptom of their fundamental difference in method and outlook. For one thing, every Aeschylean play we possess, except the *Persians* (the only play we have where the poets deserted the myth for history), is part of a trilogy. And every Sophoclean play is complete in itself.[10] Sophocles' abandonment of trilogic form was probably a revolutionary step, for the fact that the Dionysiac festival continued to demand the production of three tragedies in succession by the same dramatist long after the connected trilogy had become the exception rather than the rule suggests that three was the number demanded of the dramatist when the festival was first established; and this in turn suggests that the connected trilogy was the form in which he was expected to compose.[11] Whether this revolutionary step of Sophocles produced the tragic hero or was the result of such a conception is a problem no more soluble than that of the priority of chicken or egg; all we can be sure of is that they are closely connected. The reduction of the scope allowed for the tragic subject from three plays to one led to or sprang from but in either case made possible the artistic decision to present the tragic dilemma in terms of a single personality facing the supreme crisis of his life.

It seems clear too that Sophocles was responsible for both innovations. For the step he had taken in substituting three separate plays for the connected trilogy could be developed in other ways. In Sophocles the abandonment of trilogic form and the concentration of the resulting independent play on the tragic dilemma of a single hero are different sides of the same coin, but they did not have to be. For Euripides the release from trilogic form opened up other possibilities, the full range of which he exploited with marvellous bravura. He could take a leaf from the Sophoclean book and write a *Medea* in which the central character does dominate the action, but he could also use the new form for a drama like the *Hippolytus* which brings on stage the tangled skein of a relationship between four equally important characters.[12] The *Medea*, in fact, with its Sophoclean concentration, is unusual for Euripides; he did not in his other extant plays repeat the pattern. Even plays like the *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Heracles*, and *Electra*, which in organization and tragic intensity are close to the *Medea* and the Sophoclean type, dissipate in various ways the unrelenting concentration on the central figure which is the Sophoclean hallmark.[13] This is not to dismiss them as failures; it is simply, as Kitto has taught us to say, that Euripides was trying to do

something different, as he clearly was in such plays as *Troades*, *Phoenissae*, and *Orestes*. Plays like *Ion* and *Helen* do not concern themselves with what we would call tragic issues at all, and in the *Bacchae* it is not Pentheus, but Dionysus who dominates the action.

These are formal considerations, but there are others, which, though not divorced from form (for it is only with inferior art that the distinction between form and matter can be clearly made), yet admit of discussion in other than purely formal terms. The single Sophoclean play is the medium for a vision of human existence which differs fundamentally from that of Aeschylus, and which demands the form Sophocles found for it. In the Aeschylean trilogies (and with the help of the *Oresteia* we can see dimly the grand design of the others) the onward flow of time, οὐπιρρέων χρόνος, reveals not only the chain of causation of human action, presented through the persons of successive generations, but also the intimate and in the end clearly defined connection of all these events with the will and action of the gods. The action of the characters is an organic part of the larger design; it has its being in a hugely imagined world where the sweep of history affords us a perspective for the suffering we see on stage, and offers us consolation by giving it meaning; where also the human beings, involved in an action too great for them to understand, are warned or encouraged, judged or defended, by gods, from afar and eventually in person. Human suffering, in this all-embracing vision, has a meaning, even a beneficent purpose; it is the price paid for human progress. The violence, Aeschylus has his chorus sing, is in some way the grace of god.[14]

But the Sophoclean single play rules out the future which might serve to lighten the murk and terror of the present: the *Trachiniae* makes no reference to the eventual deification of the tortured, poisoned hero who raves in agony on the stage, the *Electra* only ambiguous references to the sequel of the matricide,[15] the *Oedipus Tyrannus* only a dark and despairing allusion to the future of the polluted and self-blinded hero. It

also, in its characteristic form, cuts the close tie between men and gods. Athena appears to Ajax only in his madness and then only to mock and expose him; Philoctetes sees Heracles only when of his own free will he has embarked on a course which will prevent Troy's fall and prove the prophecies false; elsewhere the will of the gods is a distant enigma, expressed in oracles that seem to equivocate, in encouragement that seems to fail, in answers to prayers that seem to bring the opposite of what was prayed for.

In a Sophoclean drama we are never conscious, as we always are with Aeschylus, of the complex nature of the hero's action, its place in the sequence of events over generations past and future, its relation to the divine plan of which that sequence is the result. The Sophoclean hero acts in a terrifying vacuum, a present which has no future to comfort and no past to guide, an isolation in time and space which imposes on the hero the full responsibility for his own action and its consequences. It is precisely this fact which makes possible the greatness of the Sophoclean heroes; the source of their action lies in them alone, nowhere else; the greatness of the action is theirs alone. Sophocles presents us for the first time with what we recognize as a 'tragic hero': one who, unsupported by the gods and in the face of human opposition, makes a decision which springs from the deepest layer of his individual nature, his *physis*, and then blindly, ferociously, heroically maintains that decision even to the point of self-destruction.

Once again, the example of Euripides serves to reinforce the point. Except for Medea, the characteristic Euripidean hero suffers rather than acts. Heracles, Pentheus, Hippolytus, and many another are victims rather than heroes. The Sophoclean characters are responsible, through their action and intransigence, for the tragic consequences, but in Euripidean tragedy disaster usually strikes capriciously and blindly, and it comes most often, not from the reaction of his fellow men to the hero's stubbornness, but from the gods themselves: from Aphrodite, who announces Hippolytus' death sentence before the play

begins, from Hera, who sends her agent Madness against Heracles, from Dionysus, who in person tempts Pentheus and leads him to his hideous death at his mother's hands on the mountains. Euripides turns his back on the characteristic isolation of the Sophoclean tragic hero; in his tragedies man is once more in a world where the autonomy of his action is in doubt; the great gods walk the stage again. But now they intervene brutally in human lives to bring events round to the pattern of their will, and their will is no longer, as in Aeschylus, revealed in time as beneficent. Hippolytus and Phaedra, Heracles, Pentheus, and many another are victims of gods whose power is exercised, as they expressly tell us, for no other purpose than their own aggrandizement or the vindication in the sufferings of humanity of their own wounded self-esteem.[16] The divine action is violence, but can no longer be called 'grace.' There is no historical perspective, either, to give meaning to the suffering; the only consolation that can be offered the broken victims of this unfeeling universe is the advice to suffer with dignity. "The noble among men," says Theseus to Heracles, "bear the calamities sent by the gods without flinching."[17]

Between these two views of the human situation, the Aeschylean and the Euripidean, these poles of hope and despair, Sophocles creates a tragic universe in which man's heroic action, free and responsible, brings him sometimes through suffering to victory but more often to a fall which is both defeat and victory at once; the suffering and the glory are fused in an indissoluble unity. Sophocles pits against the limitations on human stature great individuals who refuse to accept those limitations, and in their failure achieve a strange success. Their action is fully autonomous; for these actions and the results the gods, who are the guardians of the limits the hero defies, bear no responsibility. Yet the gods are presences felt at every turn of the action, in every line of the dialogue and lyric, and by some mysterious poetic alchemy we are made to feel, without being expressly told, that the gods have more concern and

respect for the hero, even when like Ajax or Oedipus *tyrannos* he seems to fight against them, than for the common run of human beings who observe the mean. Sophocles is no theologian; his conception of man's relation to god is presented to us only in dramatic action which is as powerful as it is enigmatic; all one can say is that the gods too seem to recognize greatness. Athena, though her mockery is bitter, treats Ajax in his madness almost as an equal, and Zeus answers his last prayer; Heracles tells Philoctetes to yield but utters no word of reproach; Antigone is justified after her death by the gods' spokesman Tiresias; Electra is given her victory at last. Even Oedipus at Thebes knows obscurely, in the hour of greatest despair, that the gods have reserved him for some special destiny, and in the last play of all they summon him to join them. The grace of god is even more violent than in Aeschylus, and more mysterious, but, though it has nothing now to do with human progress, it is there; its presence confers on Sophoclean tragedy that balance and restraint which is so conspicuously absent from the Euripidean cry of despair.

Aeschylus is indeed, as Gilbert Murray called him, the 'creator' of tragedy, but Sophocles, in his less flamboyant way, is equally original. Not only did he abandon the trilogy and add the third speaking actor, he also invented tragedy as we know it: the confrontation of his destiny by a heroic individual whose freedom of action implies full responsibility. These three 'inventions' are of course one and the same. The concentration of the dramatic spotlight on the great crisis of the hero's life demands not only the single play but the third actor too; it cannot afford that leisurely development, expressed in soaring lyric rather than the cut and thrust of dialogue, which is found in the *Suppliants* and *Agamemnon*, but must plunge into the action and maintain a breakneck pace. The swiftness of the exposition in the *Ajax* prologue, the headlong forward movement of the central scenes of the *Philoctetes*, the frantic speed of the final revelation in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, all these depend on the presence of the third actor.

This new medium, the single play, focussed on the tragic dilemma of a single individual and technically reinforced by the introduction of a third actor, is used by Sophocles to present dramatic situations which, for all their human and dramatic variety, are surprisingly similar. In six of the extant plays (the exception is of course the *Trachiniae*) the hero is faced with a choice between possible (or certain) disaster and a compromise which if accepted would betray the hero's own conception of himself, his rights, his duties. The hero decides against compromise, and that decision is then assailed, by friendly advice, by threats, by actual force. But he refuses to yield; he remains true to himself, to his *physis*, that 'nature' which he inherited from his parents and which is his identity. From this resolution stems the dramatic tension of all six plays: from Ajax' decision for death rather than submission, from Antigone's steadfast loyalty to her brother, and Electra's to her father, from Philoctetes' bitter refusal to go to Troy, from the stubborn insistence of Oedipus at Thebes on knowing the full truth, first about Laius' murder and then about himself, and from old Oedipus' resolve to be buried in Attic soil. In each play the hero is subjected to pressure from all sides. Ajax is assailed by Tecmessa's appeal and then by his own doubts as he argues with himself, putting the case for compromise in terms so eloquent that many have believed he accepts it. Antigone is faced with the sisterly urgency of Ismene, the threats of Creon, the strong disapproval of the chorus, with imprisonment in a tomb and with the absence of any sign of approval from those gods she champions. Oedipus *tyrannos* runs into Tiresias' majestic refusal to speak, the compromising advice of Jocasta and her final desperate appeal, the agonized supplication of the herdsman at the very last moment. Later at Colonus he faces the strong disapproval of Theseus, the revulsion of the chorus, the arguments, threats, and violence of Creon, and the appeal of his son. Electra is confronted with the arguments of her sister, the call of the chorus for moderation, the threats of her mother, and above all the news that Orestes, her one hope of

rescue, is dead. Philoctetes is subjected to the threats and violence of Odysseus as well as the friendly persuasion of Neoptolemus and the chorus. And all of them hold firm against the massive pressure of society, of friends as well as enemies. The Sophoclean hero and his situation are best described in that marvellous image which in the last play of all compares the blind old man to "some sea cape in the North, with the storm waves beating against it from every quarter," πάντοθεν βόρειος ὥς τις ἀκτὰ/ κυματοπλὴξ χειμερία κλονεῖται (*OC*, 1240–1241). Like the cape, the hero rides out the buffeting of the storm and remains unmoved.[18]

In six of the extant plays, the figure of the hero is cast in the same mold and placed in the same situation. This figure may wear the mask of a young woman (does so in fact twice), of a fierce and brutal soldier, a brilliantly successful and vigorous ruler, a sick marooned outcast, or a blind filthy old beggar, but behind all these masks remains basically the same type. The hero faces the same situation with the same intransigence, but this is not all. Both he and his opponents express themselves in language that employs the same formulas from play to play.

There is of course no single definition which can contain the variety and vitality of the six plays, the uniqueness and living personality of the different heroes; all that is claimed here is that there is in them a recurrent pattern of character, situation, and language which is strongly enough marked to be called characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy. That pattern I shall now attempt to establish in detail, for without detailed evidence such an assertion cannot be taken seriously. It cannot be supported solely by analysis of character, for previous attempts to constitute a typically Sophoclean character are open to the damning objection that interpretation of character in Sophoclean drama is too elusive and subjective a basis on which to build.[19] It must rest on the only objective basis we have—the words of the Sophoclean text. The proof will call for extensive quotation, and for this my excuse is that too many theories of Sophoclean tragedy have been based on words which are re-

markably rare in the plays Sophocles wrote.[20] In this field the critic must, like the old-time preacher, quote chapter and verse; his thesis stands or falls on its relation to the text, those words which are all we have left of the original performance in the theater of Dionysus.

The hero's decision, his resolve to act, that rock against which the waves of threat and persuasion will break in vain, is always announced in emphatic, uncompromising terms. "Some enterprise must be sought (ζητητέα 470) which will show my father I am no cowardly son." "The man of birth must either live nobly or nobly die (καλῶς τεθνηκέναι). You have heard all I have to say" (479–480). "The other weapons shall lie buried with me" (τεθάψεται 577). "But I will go" (εἶμι 654). "I shall go now, where I must go" (εἶμ' . . . ὅποι πορευτέον 690). "I must begin the work, and fast" (ἀρκτέον 853). So Ajax speaks of his resolve to die. The use of the verbal adjective, a form expressing necessity, of the future tenses, above all of the tone which brooks no argument—all this is characteristic of the hero's resolve to act. Antigone's expression of her resolve is just as simple and emphatic. "Be what you decide," she says to Ismene, "but I shall bury him" (θάψω 72). "If the action brings my death, it is a noble death" (καλόν . . . θανεῖν 72).[21] "I shall lie with him" (κείσομαι 73); "I shall lie there forever" (κείσομαι 76). And, a few lines later, "I shall go now (πορεύσομαι 81) to heap up a tomb for the brother I love." So Oedipus at Thebes makes his decision to find the murderer of Laius; "I shall reveal" (φανῶ 132),[22] and this is what he stubbornly proceeds to do, deaf to appeals, until the whole truth is laid bare. He repeats his inflexible determination many times. "I could not possibly be persuaded not to learn the truth" (οὐκ ἂν πιθοίμην 1065). "This is something that could not happen (οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο 1058), that with such evidence in hand, I should fail to find out the secret of my birth." "I must rule," he says to Creon in the quarrel between them (ἀρκτέον 628)[23] and later, on the edge of the fearful revelation, "I must hear" (ἀκουστέον 1170). For Electra, mourning for her father

is, as she explains (355 ff.), a form of action against his murderers, and she makes a strong affirmation that she will never abandon it. "I will not cease (οὐ . . . λήξω 103) from gloomy laments, as long as I see the shining tracks of the stars and the light of day." "I will never put a stop to these frenzied lamentations as long as I live" (οὐ σχήσω 223). When she learns the false news of Orestes' death she proclaims her determination to continue her demonstrations of mourning and rebellion in even more uncompromising forms. "Never from now on will I enter the house to live with them, rather at these gates I will sink to the ground and friendless let my life wither away" (εἴσειμ' . . . αὑανῶ 817–819). "I shall never," she tells her sister, "follow your path" (οὔ . . . μὴ μεθέψομαι 1052), using a type of emphatic future negative she has already used in a formula of refusal.[24] "My mind is made up," she says (δέδοκται 1049), and when Chrysothemis refuses to help her she "must do the deed alone" (δραστέον 1019). Philoctetes too has his mind made up (δέδοκται 1277); "even more firmly than I can express," he answers when the question is put to him.[25] And his refusal to go to Troy is absolute. "Never (οὐδέποτέ γε 999). No matter if I have to suffer every evil." "Never, never (οὐδέποτ' οὐδέποτ' 1197), not even if the firebearing thunderbolt comes flaming on me." "Never" (οὐδέποθ' 1392), he repeats the word to Neoptolemos, "never of my own free will shall I see Troy." The blind old man at Colonus announces his resolve so unexpectedly and emphatically that his interlocutor is astounded. "There is no possibility that I shall leave this place" (οὐχ . . . ἂν ἐξέλθοιμ' 45). "What does that mean?" asks the confused native of Colonus, who thought he was dealing with an abject suppliant. The old man's announcements grow more emphatic still. "They will never have control of me," (οὐκ . . . μὴ κρατήσωσιν 408), he says of the Thebans and again, "They will never have me on their side" (οὐ . . . μὴ λάχωσι 450).

This heroic resolve, announced in absolute and forbidding terms, is nevertheless put to the test. The form of attack on the hero's resolve which he finds hardest to resist is the emotional

appeal of those who have claims on his affections. Tecmessa appeals to Ajax in the name of her love for him and of his son. "Pity your son, my lord" (510). She speaks with the urgency and abject desperation of the suppliant. "I beg you" (λίσσομαι 368). "I implore you" (ἀντιάζω 492). "On my knees I supplicate you" (ἱκνοῦμαι 588). Ajax is indeed moved, as we learn from his famous speech—"I pity her" (652)—but these appeals do not turn him from his chosen course. Chrysothemis similarly implores Electra (λίσσομαι 428, ἀντιάζω 1009) but with even less effect. Jocasta, who cannot argue with Oedipus, for she dare not reveal the truth she has just come to understand, implores him not to continue the search for his identity, "I beg you, do not do this" (λίσσομαι, μὴ δρᾶν τάδε 1064). Earlier in that same play the chorus implores the *tyrannos* to reconsider his death sentence on Creon: "Consider, we beg you" (λίσσομαι 650). And Polynices, associating his sister with him in his appeal to his blind father at Colonus, begs the old man as a suppliant (ἱκετεύομεν 1327) to join him against his brother.[26]

But the assault on the hero's will usually takes the form of argument, of an appeal, not to emotion, but to reason. The attempt to move the hero is described as 'advice' (παραινῶ) or 'admonition' (νουθετῶ). "Even though I am young to advise you" (παραινέσω 1181), says Antigone as she tries to persuade her father to listen to his son. "How shall I distrust his words, this man who gives me friendly advice?" (παρῄνεσεν 1351), says Philoctetes, when Neoptolemos makes his final appeal, and when he rejects it, he repeats the word: "You who give me this terrible advice" (αἶνον αἰνέσας 1380).[27] So Jocasta tries, unsuccessfully, to 'advise' Oedipus (παραινοῦσ' 918).[28]

Sometimes the word used is νουθετῶ which has a stronger sense: 'reprove, admonish, warn, correct.' "Others too have bad sons," says Antigone to her father, "and a sharp anger, but admonished by the incantations of those that love them (νουθετούμενοι 1193) their natures are charmed." "When you learn what I have to say, *then* reprove me" (νουθέτει 593), says Oedipus to Theseus, earlier in the play. "And even so, you

reprove me" (νουθετεῖς 1283), cries Philoctetes indignantly after Neoptolemos has made his appeal; later Neoptolemos repeats the word: "If anyone admonishes you in friendly style, (νουθετῇ 1322), you loathe him." So Electra is reproved by her sister. "All this reproof of me (νουθετήματα 343) you learn from *her*," says Electra to Chrysothemis; "You have no right to reprove me" (νουθετεῖν 595), she says to her mother. And when Chrysothemis rejects her plan for an attack on Aegisthus, she says: "Your reproof (νουθετεῖς 1025) shows that you will not act with me."

The advice or admonition is an appeal to reason. "Consider, think" (φρόνησον 49), says Ismene to her sister, and again, "Reflect" (σκόπει 58). "Consider this" (σκέψαι δὲ τοῦτο 584), says Creon to Oedipus *tyrannos*; "Consider, we beg you" (φρονήσας 649), says the chorus to him later and Jocasta bids him, "Consider" (σκόπει 952). "Now is the moment for thought" (φρονεῖν 384), says Chrysothemis to Electra.[29] "Consider well" (φρόνησον εὖ 371), says the chorus to Ajax. Neoptolemos leaves his sailors with Philoctetes in the hope that he may have some 'better thought' (φρόνησιν . . . λῷω 1078), and the sailors repeat the phrase, "You could have thought under a better inspiration" (λῴονος ἐκ δαίμονος 1099).[30] Theseus sternly bids the blind old man 'consider' (σκόπει 1179) whether he should listen to his son, and Antigone, taking up the task where Theseus fails, uses the same word (ἀποσκόπει 1195).

The method of rational argument is persuasion, and this word, πείθω, and its middle form, πείθομαι, with its harsher meaning 'obey,' occurs in every confrontation of the hero with his friends and his adversaries. "Will you not be persuaded?" (σὺ δ' οὐχὶ πείσῃ; 592), says Tecmessa to Ajax, as the tent is closed on him and his resolve to kill himself, and Chrysothemis uses exactly the same words to Electra in the first argument between them (σὺ δ' οὐχὶ πείσῃ; 402). "I beg you to be persuaded by me" (πιθέσθαι 429), she says to her sister again; and later the chorus, which has been whole-heartedly on Electra's

side so far, momentarily supports Chrysothemis against Electra's resolve to act alone with the same word: "Be persuaded" (πείθου 1015). Oedipus *tyrannos*, too, is urged to accept persuasion: by Tiresias—"if you will be persuaded" by me" (ἤν ἐμοὶ πίθῃ 321); by the chorus—"Be persuaded" (πιθοῦ 649); and in the last desperate appeal of Jocasta—"Yet be persuaded" (ὅμως πιθοῦ μοι 1064).

For Antigone a special related word is used: ἀπιστέω, to refuse persuasion, to disobey. "Do not coöperate with those who disobey this decree" (τοῖς ἀπιστοῦσιν 219), says Creon to the chorus, and soon Antigone is brought on stage by the guards. "Do they bring you as one who disobeyed the royal law?" (ἀπιστοῦσαν 381), the chorus asks her. And Creon refers to her as "the only one in the city who disobeyed" (ἀπιστήσασαν 656). There can be no question of persuading her, nor of her obeying; she has already by her irrevocable act of defiance made such words irrelevant. It is Ismene who says, "I shall obey" (πείσομαι 67), and later, much later and too late, Creon will say the same thing (πείσομαι 1099). Philoctetes "will never be persuaded" (οὐ μὴ πίθηται 103), says Odysseus in the prologue, and so he must be deceived. Philoctetes hears the news that Odysseus will come to persuade him to go to Troy with scornful incredulity. "Is it really true that *he* . . . swore he would persuade me and ship me off to the Achaeans?" (πείσας 623). "I shall as soon be persuaded, when I am dead, to come back from Hades to the light," he goes on (πεισθήσομαι 624). "You must obey" (πειστέον 994), a triumphant Odysseus tells him later, but when force fails to move him, Neoptolemos tries persuasion, with no better result. "I was persuaded by your words before" (πεισθεὶς λόγοις 1269), says Philoctetes bitterly. "I wish you could have been persuaded by my words" (πεισθῆναι 1278), says Neoptolemos, and later, acknowledging failure, "I seem to persuade you not at all" (πείθειν . . . μηδὲν 1394). Creon comes to Colonus, so he says, "to persuade this man" (πείσων 736). "Be persuaded by me" (πεισθεὶς 756), he says to Oedipus later. But Oedipus is not moved. "This will be most pleasant for me," he tells Creon, "if you are unable to persuade either me or these men here" (πείθειν 803). Later his daughter Antigone (πιθοῦ 1181) and his son Polynices (πιθέσθαι 1334), use the same word.

The hero, as his friends and enemies see him, needs to learn, to be taught. "If you could learn," says the chorus to Electra, "to benefit from her words" (μάθοις 370), and Chrysothemis says to her sister, "There is no capacity to learn in you" (μάθησις 1032). "Listen and learn from me," she says again (ἄκουσον . . . μαθοῦσα 889). "You are not willing to be taught" (διδαχθῆναι 330), she tells her but Electra fiercely rejects such teaching. "Don't try to teach me to be a traitor to those I love" (μή μ' ἐκδίδασκε 395). "Judge me when you have learned" (μαθών 544), says Creon to Oedipus at Thebes, but Oedipus replies, "I am no good at learning—from you" (μανθάνειν 545). "Listen to me and learn . . ." (μαθ' 708), says Jocasta to him later, and, much later still, in the depths of degradation, self-blinded, helpless, he tells the chorus, "That what I have done was not the best thing to do—do not try to teach me . . ." (μή μ' ἐκδίδασκε 1370). "We shall learn," says Ajax in his great speech, "to feel reverence for the Atridae" (μαθησόμεσθα 667), but his earlier estimate of himself was truer: "You are a fool if you think you can educate my nature so late in the day" (παιδεύειν 595). "Do not lament," says Neoptolemos to Philoctetes, "before you learn . . ." (πρὶν μάθῃς 917). "What lesson?" (μάθημα 918), asks the hero. It is a lesson he will not learn from any mortal man. "My good man," says Neoptolemos to him in exasperation, "try to learn not to be overbold in your misfortunes" (διδάσκου 1387).

What the hero is really asked to do, the demand behind the appeal to reason and emotion, the advice to reflect and be persuaded is—to yield, εἴκειν. This word (with its compounds) is the key word of the Sophoclean tragic situation; it occurs in every one of the six plays in the significant context of the attack on the hero's resolution.[31]

It seems to be a favorite Sophoclean word; not only is

Sophocles unique among the dramatists in his use of the aorist formation εἰκαθεῖν,[32] but also the use of this word group to characterize the demand made on the hero of the play is almost exclusively Sophoclean. In Aeschylus such a use is found only in the *Prometheus Bound*,[33] a play which in vocabulary and style differs sharply from the rest of the Aeschylean corpus;[34] in Euripides the word is used in the context of attack on a heroic resolution only in the *Hippolytus*, where the Nurse urges Phaedra to yield to her passion for Hippolytus (τὸν μὲν εἴκονθ' ἡσυχῇ μετέρχεται 444), and even there it is not directly addressed to or said of the person concerned, nor, for that matter, is Phaedra the 'hero' of the play.[35]

It is a word which has a long history in Greek poetry, and one of its meanings in Homer is 'to give ground, to retreat.' That basic meaning of 'retreat,' of giving ground before the enemy, pervades its transferred meaning of 'concede, permit.' What it means in Sophoclean tragedy is spelled out for us in a famous passage of the *Antigone*. Haemon is trying to persuade his father to spare Antigone's life. "You see how by the bank of the winter stream in flood, many of the trees give way (ὑπείκει 713) to preserve their branches, but those that resist are destroyed root and branch. In the same way, the man who stretches the sheet sail taut and does not give way at all (ὑπείκει μηδέν 716), turns over and sails the rest of his voyage with the decks below the keel. No, give way (εἶκε 718), retreat from your passionate temper."

This is the appeal made to all the Sophoclean heroes. To yield, to give ground, to retreat. "She does not know how to give in to misfortunes" (εἴκειν δ'οὐκ ἐπίσταται 472), says the chorus of Antigone in the same play. They are right, it is something she does not know how to do, and that is true for all of them. "A hard saying, one that does not give way to misfortunes" (φάτιν . . . κοὐχ ὑπείκουσαν κακοῖς 1046), says the chorus of Philoctetes' reply to Odysseus' brutal orders; later, when Philoctetes debates with his own pride and anger the offer made to him by Neoptolemos, he uses the same word.

"Well then, shall I give in?" (ἀλλ' εἰκάθω δῆτ'; 1352). "What do you want me to concede to you?" (εἰκάθω 651), says Oedipus *tyrannos* to the chorus, when they implore him to reconsider his death sentence on Creon. It so happens he does make this concession, but in such a way that Creon tells him, "You are hateful in your yielding" (στυγνὸς μὲν εἴκων 673).[36] "Do not force me to give in to you in this" (τάδ' εἰκαθεῖν 1178), cries Oedipus to Theseus when asked to listen to his son's appeal. "Yield to us, let our brother come" (ὕπεικε 1184), says Antigone and repeats the word: "Yield to us" (εἶκε 1201). He does consent to listen, but to Polynices' appeals to give in, "Withdraw your grievous anger" (μῆνιν . . . εἰκαθεῖν 1328), "I urge you to be persuaded, to give in" (παρεικαθεῖν 1334), he replies with a terrible curse. "Oh in the gods' name, give in" (ὕπεικε 371), says the chorus to Ajax, and in the great speech later he puts the case for surrender. "We shall learn to give in to the gods (θεοῖς εἴκειν 667). . . . things strange and most enduring give in to authority" (ὑπείκει 670).[37] But Ajax does not give in. Nor does Electra. "Even if they gave me all the gifts in which you now live luxuriously, I would never give in to them" (ὑπεικάθοιμι 361), she tells her sister; it is in vain that Chrysothemis urges her twice, in exactly the same words, to "give in to those who have the power" (τοῖς κρατοῦσιν εἰκαθεῖν 396, 1014).[38]

The hero refuses to yield. And in his reply to the demand that he should, he uses another word characteristic of the Sophoclean tragic situation, ἐᾶν 'to leave alone, allow, let.' "Let me be thus distraught" (ἐᾶτέ μ'ὧδ'ἀλύειν 135), says Electra to the chorus when they try to moderate her mourning for Agamemnon. "Leave me alone, get out" (οὔκουν μ'ἐάσεις 676), shouts Oedipus *tyrannos* to Creon, and later, a broken man but still of the same heroic temper, he says to Creon, "Leave me to live on the mountains" (ἀλλ'ἔα με ναίειν 1451). "Reprove me," says Oedipus at Colonus to Theseus, "when you learn what I have to say, but now let me" [speak] (τανῦν δ'ἔα 593), and later in the same speech he repeats the word: "Leave

me alone in the decision I made to start with" (ἔα μ'ἐν οἷσιν ἠρξάμην 625). "Leave me to live here," he says to Creon (ἡμᾶς δ' ἔα ζῆν 798). And so too, later still, as he goes off to his mysterious death: "Do not touch me, but let me find by myself the holy burial place" (ἐᾶτέ με 1544). So Philoctetes to Neoptolemos: "Let me suffer this, whatever I am to suffer" (ἔα με . . . 1397).[39] And Antigone too uses the word: "Leave me and my ill-counsel to suffer this dreadful fate" (ἀλλ'ἔα με 95).[40]

It is no easy task to urge surrender on the hero, in fact it is difficult to tell him anything at all; he will not listen. "Speak to those who listen to you" (τοῖς ἀκούουσιν 591), says Ajax to Tecmessa as she pleads with him not to kill himself. "He never at any time would listen to my words" (λόγων ἀκοῦσαι 1070), says Menelaus, when Ajax is dead. "The good man must listen to those in authority" (κλύειν 1352), says Agamemnon, arguing against Odysseus' defense of Ajax. And Menelaus says the same thing: "It is the mark of an evil man, that a man of the people should not recognize that he should listen to his masters" (κλύειν 1072). These words, κλύειν and ἀκούειν, often have in Sophocles this sense of 'be subject to authority, obey'—precisely what the heroic nature will not admit. So Chrysothemis, defending her hypocritical surrender to Clytemnestra and reading her sister a lesson in conduct, makes the marvelously paradoxical statement, "If I am to be free, I must listen to the powers that be in everything" (ἀκουστέα 340). So Creon proclaims that when the city has set a man in authority, "one must listen to him" (κλύειν 666), and Ismene advises her sister: "We must listen to these things and things even more painful than this" (ἀκούειν 64). But the words do not always have this extra sense of 'submission'; usually the problem is to get the hero to listen at all. "Hear an equal reply" (ἀντάκουσον 544), says Creon to the *tyrannos;* and immediately afterwards, again; "Listen to what I am going to say" (ἄκουσον 547). "Listen to me" ('πάκουσον 708), says Jocasta; "Listen to this man and as you listen, reflect" (ἄκουε . . . κλύων 952). The hero does

not want to hear. "Who would not be angry listening to such words?" (κλύων 340), says Oedipus as Tiresias evades his questions; and later: "It is intolerable to hear such things from him" (κλύειν 429). "Listen to me in the gods' name, so that you may learn" (ἄκουσον 889), says Chrysothemis to Electra. Philoctetes will not listen to Odysseus: "I would sooner listen to the serpent, my mortal enemy" (κλύοιμ' 632). And Neoptolemos knows that it is no easy thing to tell him what he must know: "Do not be angry as you listen" (μὴ θυμοῦ κλύων 922). When he makes his final attempt at persuasion he makes the same appeal: "Hear my words" (λόγους δ'ἄκουσον 1267); "Listen" (ἄκουσον 1316). "Listen to me and come home" (κλύων 740), says Creon to Oedipus at Colonus. When Oedipus realizes that the suppliant he is asked to hear is Polynices, he calls him, "the man of all men whose voice I could least bear to hear" (κλύων 1174). "Can you not listen to him?" (ἀκούειν 1175), says Theseus. "Why is this so painful to you, to hear him?" (κλύειν 1176). And Antigone repeats the argument. "What harm in hearing what he says?" (ἀκοῦσαι 1187). They are all the same. They have to be implored to listen, and even when they do the words fall on deaf ears.[41]

The hero will not listen, but he hears enough to know that he is under attack. And his reaction is violent and swift. The role of those who try to advise him is not easy. Ajax, when Tecmessa begs him for her sake and the child's not to kill himself, uses language that would be harsh even to an enemy: "Get out. Go back to where you came from . . . You have said too much already . . . You are a fool." Ajax of course is a savage warrior but the princess Antigone is not much gentler with her sister: "You be whatever you decide—*I* will bury him." "Don't fear for me; make a success of your own life." "All right, that's your excuse. But I shall go and bury the brother I love." "If you talk like that I shall hate you." Later when Ismene makes a distraught attempt to share Antigone's fate she is treated even more contemptuously: "Don't appropriate what you had no part in." "Save yourself. I don't begrudge you your escape."

"You chose to live." Ismene's sincere and pathetic question, "What pleasure will there be in my life, deprived of you?" is answered brutally: "Ask Creon. He's the one you care for." The sister she once tried to enlist in her enterprise she now treats as an enemy; she has in fact earlier told Ismene to denounce her to the authorities. "I will hate you all the more, if you keep silent." Electra is no kinder to her sister Chrysothemis: "I loathe you (στυγῶ 1027) for your cowardice." "You seem vile (κακή 367) to people, traitor to your father and your family."[42] Like Antigone, she treats the sister who will not join her desperate action as one of the enemy: "Go to your mother and tell her everything" (1033). Oedipus at Thebes is no easy person to advise either. True enough, Tiresias' obstructive silence is enough, as Oedipus says, to make a rock angry, but his anger surpasses the worst the prophet could foresee and actually provokes him to reveal what he had intended to keep hidden. "Vilest of the vile" (κακῶν κάκιστε 334), Oedipus calls Tiresias, and later Creon fares no better: "I have found you my enemy, a burden to me" (546). "Do not try to tell me you are not vile" (κακός 548). "You were born vile" (κακός 627).[43] And when he does grant Creon a reprieve from the death sentence, he shows no lessening of repugnance: "This man, no matter where he may be, will have my loathing" (στυγήσεται 672). Then, like Ajax: "Get out." Philoctetes, even after the bow has been restored to him, is not much more conciliatory: "You wish to betray me to my enemies." "You will destroy me with those words of yours, I know you." Neoptolemos describes him accurately: "If anyone reproves you, speaking in your best interests, you loathe him" (στυγεῖς 1323). Oedipus at Colonus is cast in the same mold. The appeal of Creon is met with the same invective (he calls him 'vile,' κακὸν, 783) and with a baleful curse; that of Polynices with demonic rage and a father's curse, and the same epithet (κάκιστε 1354, κακῶν κάκιστε 1384).[44] Even Theseus is fiercely put in his place: "When you learn from me, *then* reproach me" (593). All of them treat advice and objections in the same fierce way;[45] friendly advice

is met with the same imperious rejection as hostile threat.[46] Their watchword is: 'he who is not with me is against me.'

The attempt to sway or hinder them provokes their anger; they are all angry heroes. Long before we see the culmination of old Oedipus' rage in the curse he pronounces on his son, there has been anger enough in the play. "You gratify that anger which has always been your bane" (ὀργῇ χάριν δοὺς 855), says Creon to the blind old man, and Ismene tells him the oracles speak of a Theban defeat "stemming from your anger when they take their stand at your tomb" (τῆς σῆς ὑπ' ὀργῆς 411). The fierce anger the old man displays towards his son, expressed first as a refusal to speak to him, is twice described with the word that recalls the baleful wrath of Achilles (μῆνιν 1328, μηνίεις 1274)—a word which is used in the earlier play (*OT* 699) to describe the wrath of the *tyrannos* towards Creon. Philoctetes too rages in anger against Neoptolemos, who tells him later, when he has returned the bow: "There is no ground now for you to be angry at me" (ὀργὴν ἔχοις νῷ 1309). Antigone's anger at Ismene, at Creon, at the chorus, is plain to see: "Your self-willed temper has destroyed you" (αὐτόγνωτος . . . ὀργά 875), the chorus tells her. "I know," says Electra to the chorus, "I know, I am aware of my own passion" (οὐ λάθει μ' ὀργά 222). "Nothing in anger, in the gods' name" (πρὸς ὀργὴν 369), says the chorus to her later, and Chrysothemis tells her: "Restrain your temper" (κατάσχες ὀργὴν 1011). The chorus earlier spoke of her 'too bitter wrath' (ὑπεραλγῆ χόλον 176), the same word Athena used of the wrath of Ajax—'made grievous with wrath' (χόλῳ βαρυνθεὶς 41).[47] Of the wrath of Oedipus at Thebes little needs to be said; the word ὀργή in the sense of 'anger' occurs in various forms seven times in less than two hundred lines.[48]

To the rest of the world, the hero's angry, stubborn temper seems 'thoughtless, ill-counselled.' Chrysothemis twice urges her sister not to come to grief through 'lack of thought, ill counsel' ('ξ ἀβουλίας, ἀβουλίᾳ 398, 429). Jocasta calls the furious quarrel Oedipus provokes with Creon 'ill-advised' (ἄβουλον

634). And Antigone ironically adopts this term for her own conduct: "Leave me and my ill-counsel to suffer this dreadful fate" (τὴν ἐξ ἐμοῦ δυσβουλίαν 95). So Ajax is called 'ill-calculating'[49] (δυσλόγιστος 40) by Odysseus, though he shows later that he is perfectly capable of reflection and calculation (λογίζεσθαι 816), in his own terms. But the hero's temper seems more often not merely a failure to think out the right course of action, it appears to the surrounding world as something to be denounced in stronger terms, as 'mindless, senseless, mad' (ἄνους, ἄφρων). Ismene tells her sister that excessive, extraordinary action has no sense (νοῦν οὐδένα 68), and ends by calling her 'senseless' (ἄνους 99), the same word Creon applies to her later (ἄνουν 562). The chorus, when she is brought in under arrest, fears that she has been taken in 'madness' (ἀφροσύνῃ 383), and later attributes her daring action to 'foolishness of speech' (λόγου τ' ἄνοια 603). Calchas, the prophet, reported by the messenger in the *Ajax*, speaks of 'mindless bodies' (κἀνόητα σώματα 758). He means of course Ajax, and a few lines later we are told that Ajax proved 'senseless' (ἄνους 763), when his father gave him good advice, which he rejected 'mindlessly' (κἀφρόνως 766).[50] Chrysothemis, at the climax of her argument against Electra's determination to attack Aegisthus single-handed, bids her 'have some sense' (νοῦν σχές 1013), and the chorus, with its exhortation to Electra to be 'persuaded' by her sister, adds the sentiment that the best profit for human beings to acquire is forethought and a wise mind (νοῦ σοφοῦ 1016). "If you think that self-willed obstinancy without sense (τοῦ νοῦ χωρὶς *OT* 550) is a prized possession," Creon says to the *tyrannos*, and later at Colonus taunts the old Oedipus with an insulting phrase, "a mind like yours" (ὅτῳ γε νοῦς ἴσος καὶ σοὶ πάρα 810). The hero can even be described as μῶρος, 'foolish.' Even the gentle Theseus, appalled at Oedipus' rage against his own people, reproves him harshly with this word, "You fool" (ὦ μῶρε 592). Antigone knows that Creon will think her a fool (μῶρα δρῶσα τυγχάνειν 469) and casts the word back at him in advance (μώρῳ μωρίαν ὀφλισκάνω 470).[51]

But the condemnation of the heroic temper is moral as well as intellectual. To friends and enemies the hero's mood appears as 'overboldness, rashness, insolence, audacity'—τόλμη and θράσος. "Did you then have the audacity to break these laws?" (ἐτόλμας 449), says Creon to Antigone, and Antigone knows that in Creon's eyes she has shown 'dreadful daring' (δεινὰ τολμᾶν 915).[52] "Even the bold try to escape when they see death near" (χοἰ θρασεῖς 580), says Creon of Antigone, and the chorus tells her she has "advanced to the last limit of audacity" (ἐπ' ἔσχατον θράσους 853). So Odysseus speaks of Ajax' attempt on the chieftains as 'daring and rashness of heart' (τόλμαις . . . καὶ φρενῶν θράσει 46), and Teucer of Ajax' suicide as 'bitter rashness' (τόλμης πικρᾶς 1004). Neoptolemos, his patience ebbing, tells Philoctetes not to 'grow overbold' in his misfortunes (μὴ θρασύνεσθαι κακοῖς 1387). "You will not escape the consequences of this rash insolence" (θράσους/ τοῦδ' 626), says Clytemnestra to her daughter, and Chrysothemis asks her sister how she can "arm herself with such rash daring" (τοιοῦτον θράσος 995). Aegisthus, thinking he has won the day, gloats over Electra's defeat: "You who were so insolent and rash before this" (τὴν ἐν τῷ πάρος χρόνῳ θρασεῖαν 1446). Even stronger terms are used: ἄγριος, 'wild' like a beast; ὠμός, 'raw, savage'; σκληρός, 'hard' like metal.[53] "You have turned savage," says Neoptolemos to Philoctetes (σὺ δ' ἠγρίωσαι 1321), and Tiresias challenges Oedipus to rage 'in the wildest anger' (ἥτις ἀγριωτάτη 344) he can muster. Antigone's retort to Creon calls from the chorus the comment that she is "savage by birth as her father was" (ὠμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρὸς 471), and Ajax is repeatedly described with this word (205, 885, 930) and proudly adopts it for himself (548). Polynices speaks of the 'hard' (σκληρά 1406) curses of his father; and Creon, with Antigone in mind, speaks of "tempers that are too hard" (σκλήρ' ἄγαν 473).

There is one word that is applied to them all, to describe their character and their action; δεινός, 'strange, dreadful, terrible.' "Dreadful to see, dreadful to hear" (δεινὸς μὲν ὁρᾶν,

δεινὸς δὲ κλύειν 141), sings the chorus at their first sight of blind Oedipus in the grove of the Eumenides, and Philoctetes is described by the chorus as the 'strange and dreadful wayfarer' (δεινὸς ὁδίτης 147).[54] Antigone knows that Creon considers her attempt to bury her brother 'strange and dreadful daring' (δεινὰ τολμᾶν 915), and Creon, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* speaks of the 'dreadful' words of accusation leveled at him by Oedipus (δειν' ἔπη 512), and tells Jocasta that Oedipus assumes the right to do 'dreadful things' (δεινὰ . . ./ δρᾶσαι 639) to him. "In strange and terrible circumstances," says Electra to the chorus, "I am constrained to strange and dreadful expedients" (δεῖν' ἐν δεινοῖς ἠναγκάσθην 221). Ajax is called by the chorus the 'dreadful, great, raw-powered Ajax' (δεινὸς μέγας ὠμοκρατὴς 205), and his speech to Athena is described as a 'dreadful word' (δεινὸν . . . ἔπος 773).[55]

They are δεινοί, strange, terrifying, because they have no sense of proportion, no capacity for moderation. "Your mourning," says the chorus to Electra, "abandons moderation for the impossible" (ἀπὸ τῶν μετρίων ἐπ' ἀμήχανον 140), and she answers them later with a cognate word, justifying herself with the claim that there is no measure, no proportion in the evil which surrounds her (τί μέτρον κακότατος ἔφυ; 236). The chorus sympathizes with Philoctetes, a man whose life is 'ill-proportioned' (οἷς μὴ μέτριος αἰὼν 179), but later, appalled at his stubbornness, they say to him sharply: "Show some moderation" (μετρίαζ' 1183). But this is what the heroes cannot do. They and their actions are 'outsized, extraordinary, prodigious'—περισσός.[56] "Outsized and mindless bodies" (περισσὰ κἀνόητα σώματα 758) is the phrase of the prophet Calchas for Ajax, and the chorus, trying to calm Electra, tells her that she is not the only human being to suffer loss. "You are not unique, singled out from your sisters in the house" (πρὸς ὅ τι σὺ τῶν ἔνδον εἶ περισσά 155). "Extraordinary action," says Ismene to Antigone (περισσὰ πράσσειν 68), "is senseless," and Creon uses the same word in a slightly extended sense when he condemns Antigone to a prison tomb: "Let her

learn there that reverence paid to Death's kingdom is labor lost" (πόνος περισσός 780).

There is no dealing with such incorrigible natures. All that can be hoped for is that in time they will realize what is good for them. And this too is a formula which appears in every confrontation of the hero with his advisers, a hope or threat that the hero will be taught by time, and change his stubborn mind, that he will 'realize' the truth—an idea frequently conveyed by the future or aorist dependent forms of γιγνώσκω (γνώσομαι, γνῷ, etc.)—forms which have this special sense of 'realize that one is wrong, recognize the unwelcome truth.'[57] Creon at Colonus is amazed that the blind beggar has apparently learned nothing in all the long years since he ruled Thebes in power: "Not even time, it seems, has grown brains in your head" (οὐδὲ τῷ χρόνῳ φύσας . . . φρένας 804). But later he appeals to time: "In time, I know, you will realize this" (χρόνῳ γὰρ . . . γνώσῃ τάδε 852). Antigone too speaks to him in these same terms, when he refuses to listen to Polynices: "You will realize what the final result of evil wrath is" (γνώσῃ 1197). In the earlier play Creon appeals to the *tyrannos* with the same formula: "But in time you will realize this surely" (ἐν χρόνῳ γνώσῃ 613). And when Creon condemns Antigone to imprisonment he foresees that she will either die in the tomb or "realize, at last though late, that reverence for the realm of Hades is labor lost" (γνώσεται γοῦν ἀλλὰ τηνικαῦθ' 779). "Realize, realize your situation well" (γνῶθ' εὖ γνῶθ' 1165), the chorus sings to Philoctetes, and when Neoptolemes leaves him he too hopes that time will change him. "Wait," he says to the chorus, "so long a time as is needed for us to prepare the ship for sea . . . and perhaps this man will meanwhile find a better attitude towards us" (χρόνον τοσοῦτον . . . φρόνησιν . . . λῷω 1076ff). "You refuse to be taught by the passing of time," says Chrysothemis to her sister (ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ διδαχθῆναι 330), and much later she tells her: "Get some sense even though the time is late" (ἀλλὰ τῷ χρόνῳ ποτέ 1013). "Long time," she says in the argument against her sister's plan to attack

Aegisthus, "is left to judge between us" (χὠ λοιπὸς χρόνος 1030). But time is on Electra's side. And in her moment of victory she lures Aegisthus to his death with an ironic repetition of this phrase: "For in time I have got sense, so as to accommodate myself to my superiors" (τῷ γὰρ χρόνῳ 1464). When Ajax states the case for retreat and submission, he begins with the famous lines: "All things long uncounted time brings forth from darkness and hides again from light" (ὁ μακρὸς . . . χρόνος 646). "How shall we not realize that we must observe discipline?" he says later (πῶς οὐ γνωσόμεσθα σωφρονεῖν; 677). And the chorus, misled by his words, later echoes them. "All things the long expanse of time withers . . . Ajax has repented of his passion" (ὁ μέγας χρόνος . . . Αἴας μετανεγνώσθη θυμοῦ 717).

But the hope that time will teach the hero is never fulfilled; he remains unchanged. Oedipus *tyrannos*, it is true, does come to realize that he has been unjust to Creon (1420–1421), but by the end of the play he is the same imperious figure as he was at the beginning, issuing requests to Creon that are phrased like commands, rejecting persuasion, insisting on his own way; he even has to be reminded, in the last line of the play, that he is no longer *tyrannos* in Thebes.[58] Ajax, who states the case for time's dominance over man's life with such force and beauty, defies it; he goes passionately to his death to perpetuate a timeless hatred which will not be changed even in death's kingdom. Antigone, far from realizing in her dark prison that she was wrong to show reverence for the dead, hangs herself and thus brings about the utter ruin of Creon her enemy. Electra, triumphant in victory, can even mock the prophecy that time will teach her. Philoctetes, who was granted time by Neoptolemos so that he could 'come to a better frame of mind,' turns the tables and ends by persuading Neoptolemos to abandon his own dream of glory as the sacker of Troy and take him home to Oeta instead. And Oedipus at Colonus who in the first scene is a resigned, humble, feeble, old man, taught, as he says, by time (7), ends by condemning his enemies to defeat

and his sons to death at each other's hand before he transcends human stature and time alike in his mysterious god-directed death.

Time and its imperative of change are in fact precisely what the Sophoclean hero defies; here is his real adversary, all-powerful Time, the master of us all, which, as Oedipus tells Theseus, dissolves all human things, man's body, his intellect, the work of his hands, the creations of his brain. Time is the condition and frame of our human existence, and to reject it is 'to be in love with the impossible.' But in Sophocles it is through this refusal to accept human limitations that humanity achieves its true greatness. It is a greatness achieved not with the help and encouragement of the gods, but through the hero's loyalty to his nature in trial, suffering, and death; a triumph purely human then, but one which the gods, in time, recognize and in which they surely, in their own far-off mysterious way, rejoice.

THE HEROIC TEMPER

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BY BERNARD M. W. KNOX

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY AND LOS ANGELES
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, LONDON

1964