

STRUCTURAL PARALLELISM IN GREEK TRAGEDY: A PRELIMINARY STUDY*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A number of the extant Greek tragedies display a striking parallelism between their overall movement and the movement of their component parts. This relationship can be diagrammed in the following manner:

Overall Play: A—————B
Component Parts: A—B A—B A—B A—B A—B A—B

Thus in a play in which the overall movement is from A to B (e.g., from the hero's good fortune to his fall, or from his agony to his revenge), one frequently finds that many of the component parts of the play (episodes, choral odes, individual speeches and parts of speeches, etc.) clearly "imitate"¹ or reflect that same movement.

This frequent parallelism between the larger and the smaller rhythms of a play is further evidence of the Attic tragedians' extraordinary concern for unified dramatic structure, a characteristic of Greek tragedy which has become increasingly manifest in the studies of recent years.

* Since it is my hope that this article will be of use not only to the professional classicist but also to the general student of literature, I have chosen to quote all references to the text in translation. The translations throughout are taken from *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. R. Lattimore and D. Grene (Chicago 1959-60). Line references are to the original Greek text (I have used the Oxford Classical Texts throughout); in most cases the line numbers in the Grene-Lattimore translations correspond closely to those in the original text.

¹ The term "imitate" inevitably carries Aristotelian overtones, but so far as I can tell, the phenomenon I am discussing in this paper is *not* what Aristotle refers to when he speaks in the *Poetics* of the imitation of an action. I owe my use of the term, as well as the genesis of this article, to Francis Fergusson's book, *The Idea of Theater* (Princeton 1949), where the author does connect this type of imitation with the *Poetics* (see also Fergusson's introduction to his edition of the *Poetics*).

Perhaps even more significant, this parallelism is a potential critical tool of the first importance: if a critic can identify the basic underlying rhythm of a play, a rhythm characteristic both of the play as a whole and of its smaller components, this identification will obviously be of the greatest use to him in interpreting the play, in understanding the relationship of its parts to each other and to the whole, and in answering a variety of questions about individual scenes and passages.

While scholars have from time to time pointed out this phenomenon in discussing one play or another,² they have not sufficiently emphasized the frequency with which it occurs or its potential importance in interpretation. In this article I shall show that in three widely differing Greek tragedies there is clear evidence of such parallelism between over-all movement and movement within smaller sections. In so doing my intent is less to interpret the individual plays than it is to suggest (a) the nature of such parallelism and some of the ways in which it appears; (b) the degree to which it may be characteristic of Greek tragedy in general; and (c) its potential significance in interpretation. In a future study, which will require both more time and more space than are currently available, I hope to extend this approach to a number of other Greek tragedies and to discuss in some detail its significance in the interpretation of individual plays. The present article is thus more a preliminary report than a complete study; its primary purpose is to present in summary form a somewhat different and, I believe, potentially fruitful critical approach.

In the following section I shall discuss the phenomenon of structural

² In a relatively brief study that cuts across three plays by two of the world's most studied playwrights, it is obviously impossible to give a full bibliography. In the following pages I have tried to keep notes to a minimum, suggesting the studies which in general I have found especially helpful and indicating important points at which I am especially in debt to earlier scholars. These notes are intentionally selective rather than comprehensive; I have deliberately avoided any effort to bolster my argument at every point by impressive lists of supporting authorities. I am aware that at many points my analysis runs parallel to that given by earlier critics, and I am sure that at other points my analysis has been anticipated by earlier studies of which I am not aware. To my knowledge, the basic approach of this article is new, and I hope that what it has to offer will compensate for any unwitting omissions from its bibliography. For the general approach on which this article is based, I am especially in debt to my reading and re-reading of Fergusson's study (above, note 1) and to three other books: H. D. F. Kitto's *Greek Tragedy* (London 1950) and *Form and Meaning in Drama* (London 1956), and R. P. Winnington-Ingram's *Euripides and Dionysus* (Cambridge 1948).

parallelism in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Since my purpose is demonstration rather than interpretation, I shall so far as possible rest my analyses on the plays themselves rather than on potentially controversial interpretations of them. In this preliminary study I shall try to present the basic structural outlines of these three plays and thus to suggest that there are adequate grounds for further, detailed study of the phenomenon of parallelism of movement in Greek tragedy. For the most part this will mean that consideration of the fine points of analysis and interpretation will have to be postponed until a later date in the interest of concentrating here on the broad outlines. Following this analysis of the three plays I shall summarize its results, attempt to anticipate and answer some possible objections, and comment on some of the implications and possible future directions of this sort of approach to Greek tragedy.

II. ANALYSIS

A. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*.³

A basic pattern in this play is that of the *lex talionis*, that inexorable rhythm by which a person commits an act of justice only to find himself in turn cast as criminal upon whom another person must visit justice. This pattern is present at all levels of the play. It appears in the actions of the three major figures in the trilogy, *Agamemnon*, *Clytemnestra*, and *Orestes*, each of whom tries to bring justice for

³ I have found the following works especially useful in my study of Aeschylus: J. H. Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1955); R. F. Goheen, "Aspects of Dramatic Symbolism. Three Studies in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 76 (1955) 113-37; O. Hiltbrunner, *Wiederholungs- und Motivtechnik bei Aischylos* (Strasbourg 1946); Kitto, *Form and Meaning* (above, note 2) 1-86; E. T. Owen, *The Harmony of Aeschylus* (Toronto 1952); W. B. Stanford, *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1939) 137-62, and *Aeschylus in his Style* (Dublin 1942); P. Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (Bloomington 1968) 206-39; and, of course, the editions of Fraenkel, Headlam-Thomson, and Denniston-Page. On the parallelism of movement in the early scenes of *Agamemnon*, cf. the comment of H. Lloyd-Jones, "The Guilt of *Agamemnon*," *CQ* 12 (1962) 192: "Again and again we find this sequence repeated; first, pious moralizings as the working of Zeus' law is traced in the just punishment of Troy; next, gradually increasing realization, both by the audience and by the Chorus, that what is true of Troy may prove true also of Troy's conquerors; lastly, agonized apprehension. This is the pattern of scene after scene and chorus after chorus."

some past deed only to find himself pursued by yet another agent of justice. The same pattern appears also in the background myths of the house of Atreus (the retributive acts of Atreus and Thyestes and their continuation in the role of Aegisthus in the *Oresteia*) and in the divine realm of the trilogy where the actions of Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo, all concerned with winning some sort of justice, succeed at first only in calling forth further acts of justice. This basic theme or movement is stated explicitly on a number of occasions, perhaps most notably at *Agamemnon* 1560 ff.:

Here is anger for anger. Between them
 who shall judge lightly?
 The spoiler is robbed; he killed, he has paid.
 The truth stands ever beside God's throne eternal:
 he who has wrought shall pay; that is law.
 Then who shall tear the curse from their blood?
 The seed is stiffened to ruin.

In the *Agamemnon* as a whole, Clytemnestra goes through this pattern before our eyes. At the start of the play, she clearly sees herself as the agent of justice and of the gods in punishing Agamemnon, and in the larger picture provided by the chorus' and herald's references to past events, we too can see her in this role: not only is she bringing private justice to Agamemnon for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, but also she is working with the gods to bring public justice to him for his other acts of arrogance and impiety—for destroying countless Greeks and Trojans for the sake of a promiscuous woman, for sacking the altars and temples of the gods in Troy, symbolically for treading on the tapestries sacred to the gods. Yet at the end of the *Agamemnon* it is Clytemnestra herself who, along with Aegisthus, is clearly cast in the role of criminal, and there is already talk of punishment to come in the form of Orestes' revenge.

Thus Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon* moves from a role of prosecutor to one of criminal. This same pattern appears also in the actions of Agamemnon and Orestes. In the abundant background to the *Agamemnon* provided by the chorus and the herald, we see Agamemnon go through this same movement: the leader who set out as agent of Zeus against the impious Paris returns heavy with the misdeeds of the criminal and ripe for the justice which awaits him. Similarly, in the

Libation Bearers the same movement is attached to Orestes as he moves from his opening role of just avenger to his closing one of criminal pursued by the Furies. Moreover, there are hints of the same movement in the actions of the Furies themselves, though with the final reconciliation in the *Eumenides* the grip of the *lex talionis* is finally broken and this persistent rhythm of action at last comes to an end.

These larger patterns of the trilogy, patterns characteristic of the individual plays and of the major characters, are reflected to a remarkable degree in the patterns of action of the component parts of the *Agamemnon*. Time after time, a section of the play begins with a figure cast as prosecutor and ends with him cast as criminal. Early in the play, as Agamemnon moves ever closer to his doom, section after section propels him from an opening role of prosecutor to a concluding role of criminal; following the murder, the same movement reappears, now attached to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, the victims of the next round.

The chorus' long parodos (40-257) is the first component section which clearly reflects the play's overall movement. The chorus enters with triumphant anapests, praising Agamemnon as the agent of Zeus in bringing justice to Paris and Troy (40 ff.); but the opening mood is quickly clouded as the chorus recalls the losses and sufferings entailed in a war over a loose woman (62-67). In despondent mood they speak of the inevitability of that which is fated (67-71), of their own weakness (72-82), and of the disquieting presence of Clytemnestra (83-103). The opening anapests themselves have thus suggested the basic movement of the ode and the play in the way they have progressed from praise of Agamemnon and his deed to despair and unwitting dependence on Clytemnestra.

As if to dispel the gloom that has unexpectedly overtaken them, the chorus, shifting to lyric meters (104 ff.), returns to the theme of the fleet's departure for Troy, picking it up with a description of the omen of the eagles and the hare, an account which clearly recalls the simile at 49-54 and suggests their wish to recapture their earlier theme of joy and praise. But again their mood changes gradually as they describe the eagles' feast and Calchas' dire interpretation (126-55) with its clear hints both of the sacrifice of Iphigenia and of the consequent anger of Clytemnestra. Again the chorus tries to break the gloom

that has emerged from what started as celebration; taking a hint from Calchas' appeal to Apollo (146 ff.), they abandon their earlier theme and appeal to Zeus (160 ff.). But even this leads them inevitably back to their previous theme and they suddenly find themselves explicitly describing the sacrifice of Iphigenia, implicitly condemning Agamemnon, and strongly suggesting that justice must strike him for what he did at Aulis (184 ff.). From their opening praise of Agamemnon as agent of Zeus' justice they have moved inexorably and quite against their intentions to a concluding presentation of him as a wrongdoer for whom justice is inevitable. This movement of Agamemnon in the parodos from an opening role of prosecutor to a concluding one of criminal is a clear reflection of the larger movements of the trilogy.

Exactly the same movement characterizes the second choral ode (355-474, taking the epode at 475 ff. as transition to the following scene). The chorus' initial theme is the justice of Zeus on Troy, a justice of which Agamemnon was the agent; it is, of course, much the same theme, and presented again in anapests, as began the parodos (40 ff.). But imperceptibly the chorus moves from condemnation of Paris, the target of Agamemnon's justice, to condemnation of Agamemnon. The very words they use to damn Paris (367 ff.) recall Agamemnon,⁴ until at 399 they bring themselves up short, as if to halt what has turned out to be a disastrous train of thought, with the words, "This was Paris," words which after the ambiguities of 367-98 are as ironic as they are abrupt. But their next line of thought, Helen and Menelaus (403 ff.), proves no better; it too leads them astray and they again find themselves embarked on a subject which can only lead to condemnation of Agamemnon (427 ff.). This time there can be no "This was Paris"; truth will out, and their final antistrophe (456-74)

⁴ Among the many scholars who have commented on the ambiguities of this passage, see Headlam-Thomson, Vol. I.21-22, and commentary *ad loc.*; on the movement of the ode as a whole, see Finley (above, note 3) 255-56. Of the many ambiguities in 367-98 which suggest Agamemnon as well as Paris, the following may be especially noted: 369-72 suggest Agamemnon the sacrificer of his own daughter, the destroyer of the altars of Troy, the walker on sacred tapestries. 374-77 suggest the house of Atreus. 383-84 again suggest Agamemnon's destruction of the altars of Troy, 385-86 look ahead to his yielding to Clytemnestra's persuasions. 387-89 remind us of the beacon which has already signalled his imminent doom, 390-93 may remind us of Agamemnon's "testing" at Aulis, 395 looks ahead to the description of Menelaus at 423-26.

is full of only slightly veiled indictments of Agamemnon and suggestions of his coming punishment. This within the slightly more than one hundred lines of the ode, Agamemnon has moved unmistakably from the role of avenger to that of criminal. It would be difficult to imagine a more precise imitation of the basic movement of the whole play and its major characters.

The movement in the next choral ode (681-781) is analogous. The ode begins with a variation of the same theme that opened the first two odes, i.e., the justice of Zeus and Agamemnon against Paris and Troy. The difference is that in the third ode the emphasis is on the guilt of Helen and Paris rather than on the agents and act of justice. This difference does not, however, obscure the close parallelism to the earlier odes: again we begin with the crime for which Agamemnon was seeking justice, and again, as in the earlier odes, we move imperceptibly to a very different theme, that of the guilt of Agamemnon. The transition here is effected largely through the famous lion cub "parable" of strophe-antistrophe β (717-36), a passage whose ambiguities Bernard Knox has demonstrated in a well-known article.⁵ Just as the reproaches of 367 ff. are ostensibly spoken against Paris but increasingly suggest the guilt of Agamemnon, so the lion cub described in 717 ff. ostensibly refers to the guilty parties mentioned in strophe-antistrophe α (Helen and Paris) but increasingly reminds us of Agamemnon and the whole house of Atreus. The parallel in movement to the previous ode is thus very close, and it is maintained in what follows. In the second ode the intended condemnation of Paris had led the chorus dangerously close to an unintended condemnation of Agamemnon; the chorus, seemingly in realization of how perilous a path they were treading, had tried to make clear that it was Paris of whom they were speaking (399-402) and had changed the subject to Helen (403 ff.). Precisely the same thing happens in the third ode. Having begun with the unambiguous guilt of Helen and Paris, the chorus finds itself suddenly wrapped in ambiguities which suggest their own royal house as much as they do Helen and Paris; and the words which end antistrophe β (735-36),

⁵ B. M. W. Knox, "The Lion in the House (*Agamemnon* 717-36)," *CP* 47 (1952) 17-25.

This thing they raised in their house was blessed
by God to be priest of destruction.

are especially appropriate to Clytemnestra, the self-styled agent of divine justice against Agamemnon (Clytemnestra first appears in the play offering sacrifice to the gods, and she frequently refers to her murder of Agamemnon in the language of religious ritual—e.g., 973–74, 1056–57, 1385–87, 1395–96). As in the second ode, the chorus seemingly realizes where its words are leading, changes the subject abruptly, and chooses Helen's journey to Troy as its next subject (738 ff., cf. 403 ff.). But as in the second ode, the change is to little avail. The description of Helen contains ambiguities which again suggest Clytemnestra and her coming revenge (e.g., 744–45, 749, *νυμφόκλαυτος Ἐρινύς*),⁶ and this is followed by general reflections which are plainly as applicable to the house of Atreus and the guilt of Agamemnon as they are to the house of Priam and the guilt of Paris (750–81). Whereas the concluding words of the first and second odes, though phrased in as general a manner as possible, refer unmistakably to Agamemnon, the concluding words of the third ode remain ambiguous and are not specifically attached to Agamemnon; but the playwright himself emphasizes their clear relevance to Agamemnon by having Agamemnon first come on the stage just as or just after they are spoken.

The parallelism of movement in the three odes we have discussed is remarkable. In each case the chorus starts out with the theme of Agamemnon's justice and/or Paris' guilt but soon finds itself falling into ambiguities which condemn Agamemnon; in each case it tries to check this movement by changing the subject; and in each case it nonetheless concludes with words which either explicitly or implicitly do condemn him.⁷ This inexorable process by which each ode carries

⁶ On the ambiguities at the end of the third ode, see Headlam-Thomson, Vol. 1.24, and their commentary *ad loc.* Many elements in 750–81 seem more appropriate to the house of Atreus than to that of Priam.

⁷ On the parallelism of the first three odes, see Finley (above, note 3) 251 ff., and cf. H. Weil, *Études sur le drame antique* (Paris 1897) 31 ff. Aside from the fact that the third ode suggests Agamemnon only ambiguously at its conclusion while the second refers unmistakably to him at its conclusion, the parallelism of these two odes is almost exact: (1) condemnation of Paris' deeds leads to ambiguities which suggest Agamemnon; (2) the chorus stops short and changes the subject to Helen; (3) this subject in turn leads

Agamemnon from the role of prosecutor at its start to that of criminal at its conclusion corresponds closely to the basic rhythm of the trilogy and its major characters.

There are clear suggestions of the same rhythm also in the earlier episodes of the play. In the first (258–354), the opening lines are filled with the news of Agamemnon's victory: Troy is taken, the Greeks are victorious—a theme which is obviously akin to the opening themes of the first three choral odes. But just as the mood changes in those odes, so too it changes in the first episode. Clytemnestra's beacon speech ends with some disturbing ambiguities,⁸ and her subsequent description of the Greeks triumphant in Troy suggests not so much the justice and glory of their victory as the guilt they have taken upon themselves (see especially 338 ff., and cf. the pathos of 326 ff.). The episode, very much like the odes examined earlier, has moved from an unambiguous statement of Agamemnon's victory to a very

to ambiguities which once more suggest Agamemnon's guilt. The movement of the first ode, while not precisely parallel, is very similar. It too starts with Agamemnon's triumph, falls into a different mood; tries at 104 ff. to reassert the original triumphant mood, only to have it clouded again by Calchas' forebodings; *tries yet another time* (and here is where it differs from the second and third odes) to recapture its earlier mood in an appeal to Zeus, the god who was the divine agent behind Agamemnon's expedition (160 ff.). Only after the Zeus hymn, their last attempt to avoid open condemnation of their king, does the chorus openly describe what happened at Aulis. Just as in the second ode the chorus abruptly changes the subject at 403 when their earlier line of thought (Paris' guilt) seems to be leading them to Agamemnon's guilt, so in the first ode they abruptly abandon the prophecy of Calchas with its implications of Agamemnon's guilt and turn to their hymn to Zeus. The full description of Iphigenia's sacrifice, like the open condemnation of Agamemnon at the end of the second ode, comes only after this last attempt to find a more felicitous subject has failed. These considerations, along with others such as those raised by L. Bergson, "The Hymn to Zeus in Aeschylus' Agamemnon," *Eranos* 65 (1967) 12–24, incline me slightly to oppose the suggestion of R. D. Dawe, "The Place of the Hymn to Zeus in Aeschylus' Agamemnon," *Eranos* 64 (1966) 1–21, that 160–91 are out of place in our text and should instead follow 217.

⁸ See especially 314–16. Symbolically, we may see the fire by which Agamemnon has brought justice to Troy leaping across the sea to bring justice in turn to Agamemnon. The beacon speech itself thus suggests the basic movement of the play, that by which the prosecutor becomes the criminal. In addition, the succession of beacon kindlers in the beacon speech recalls the succession of acts of justice in the trilogy as a whole: just as each successive kindling of the beacon calls forth yet another kindling, so each act of justice in the play calls forth a further act. On the beacon speech and the whole episode, see the excellent comments of Owen (above, note 3) 69–72; cf. W. B. Stanford, *Greek Metaphor* (Oxford 1936) 145–46, and Lloyd-Jones (above, note 3) 193.

menacing, if necessarily veiled, suggestion of his guilt and imminent punishment.

The next two episodes are strikingly parallel to the first. The second episode (489–680) begins, as did the first, with a triumphant announcement of Agamemnon's victory, explicitly hailed as a mission to work divine justice (525–26). But once more the mood gradually changes. The herald's mention of Zeus' justice is followed by his disquieting reference to the destruction of the gods' altars and temples (527), a passage which ominously recalls Clytemnestra's warning at 338 ff.⁹ And his description of the expedition (551 ff.) moves from the opening, "Well: the end has been good," to a description of its many miseries and misfortunes, after which his triumphant close (573–82) has a somewhat hollow ring. His concluding speech (636–80), describing the disastrous voyage home, not only further clouds the mood of triumph but also mentions specifically that on the return voyage the justice of the gods was visited *upon* the Greek fleet (649) and that Agamemnon had been rescued as if by some god (661–63), seemingly an echo of Clytemnestra's words at 603.¹⁰ After his catalogue of misfortunes, his words at 674, "But may it all come well in the end," have much the same pathetic, almost helpless sound as the chorus' repeated refrain in the parodos (121, etc.), and for the same reason: having started with a theme of triumph, he, like the chorus, has unwittingly, even unwillingly moved gradually to words which suggest strongly not the victory but the guilt of the Greek expedition. Finally, Clytemnestra's speech (587–614), certainly the high-point of the episode, reproduces the same rhythm in microcosm. Like the scene as a whole, it begins triumphantly with Troy's capture but from there moves rapidly to Clytemnestra's grim promise of fitting welcome for Agamemnon (600–604) and the sinister ambiguities of her description of herself (606–10). The ironies of 611–12, "With no man else have I known delight, nor any shame of evil speech, more than I know how to temper bronze," suggesting unmistakably the way she will kill Agamemnon, cast Agamemnon as criminal as clearly as her opening words cast him as victor.

⁹ Cf. Kitto, *Form and Meaning* (above, note 2) 15–16, and Owen (above, note 3) 74–77.

¹⁰ Cf. Kitto, *Form and Meaning* (above, note 2) 17.

The third episode (783–974) is closely analogous to the second. It begins with Agamemnon's triumphant entry and his explicit association of the gods with his deed of justice (810 ff.), though again, as in the herald's opening description in the previous episode, there are disquieting notes (e.g., 822–28). The speech of Clytemnestra which follows, very much like her speech in the second episode, begins with Troy and reports from Troy (858 ff.), leads to a series of ironic descriptive phrases, this time of Agamemnon rather than of herself (896 ff., cf. 606 ff.), and concludes with a sinister hint of the welcome she will give her husband (910–13, cf. 612). In the following scene with the robes, Agamemnon literally acts out the basic movement of the play: he begins as triumphant victor who is on the side of the gods and recognizes their special prerogatives (922 ff.), then yields to Clytemnestra's persuasions, even though he knows that he will offend the gods by doing so (931 ff.), and finally walks the path of justice into the house (944 ff.).¹¹ The carpet episode itself, like the whole episode, thus mirrors precisely Agamemnon's larger movement in the play and its background, a movement from prosecutor of Troy to criminal punished by Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra's final words in the episode indicate clearly that the Agamemnon who at the start of the episode entered as triumphant avenger is now the victim upon whom divine and human justice will soon be visited (973–74):

Zeus, Zeus accomplisher, accomplish these my prayers.
Let your mind bring these things to pass. It is your will.

We see then that in the first three choral odes and the first three episodes we have a series of closely analogous variations on one theme or pattern: in each of these six sections there is a clear movement that either explicitly or implicitly carries Agamemnon from the position of just avenger to that of criminal awaiting prosecution. This parallelism, far from being gratuitous, contributes materially to the overall effect of this portion of the play. It emphasizes a theme and a movement which are basic to the whole trilogy, and the momentum generated by Agamemnon's repeated movement from the role of prosecutor

¹¹ In a sense, the actions of Agamemnon in yielding to Clytemnestra in the carpet episode reproduce his actions in the Iphigenia episode as related in the first ode; cf. N. G. L. Hammond, "Personal Freedom and its Limitations in the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 85 (1965) 49; Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (above, note 2) 78; Finley (above, note 3) 260.

to that of criminal is such as to give Clytemnestra's murder of him an aura of inevitability and of dramatic and moral necessity. Moreover, the manner in which this repeated rhythm is handled shows a conscious attempt to avoid the potential danger of monotony. In the three *episodes*, the rhythm moves ever closer to Agamemnon. In the first, the report from Troy deals largely with the Greeks *en masse*—Agamemnon himself is kept in the background and not even mentioned by name (cf. 316), though it is clear Clytemnestra's thoughts are on him. In the second, the herald's news is of the army in general, but on several occasions he focuses his news on Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra's speech centers very much on her husband. In the third episode, Agamemnon himself is central throughout. The first three *odes* precisely reverse this process: the first deals with Agamemnon almost constantly, the second tries, with very incomplete success, to avoid him, the third mentions him only in passing and through the indirections of the lion cub parable and the concluding general comments. But through all these variations runs the one inexorable rhythm that is precipitating Agamemnon to his doom.

Following the murder, the same movement begins again, now with reference *not to Agamemnon but to Clytemnestra*. She has now become what he was—the triumphant victor, the minister of justice; and like him, she will in her turn move inevitably into the new role of criminal awaiting justice. Just as in the overall pattern of the play first Agamemnon, then Clytemnestra moves through this progression, so the smaller imitative rhythms of the play first focus on Agamemnon and then, immediately following his death, shift prophetically to Clytemnestra.

Clytemnestra comes out from the murder full of self-congratulation: justice has been done, the criminal has been punished, the deed is both morally and religiously justifiable (1372 ff.). But her opening mood of assurance soon begins to crack under the repeated attacks of the chorus and their suggestion that not due justice but criminal sacrilege has been committed. She speaks herself, half-regretfully, of the spirit of the house which has brought these woes to pass (1475–80), tries to cast blame from herself as wife to the ancient curse on the house (1497–1504), repeats her justification in Iphigenia (1523–29), and finally expresses her own, pathetic wish that at last there may be an end to deeds of blood in the house (1568–76; cf. the earlier prayers that all

may end well—by the watchman [20], the chorus [121, etc.], Agamemnon [217], the herald [674], Clytemnestra herself [349]). And throughout the episode, the chorus places her clearly in the role not of agent of justice but of criminal, and their outbursts move from general expressions of horror and sorrow over the deed to explicit hints of justice to come (1429–30, 1535–36, 1562–66). By the end of the scene, the Clytemnestra who entered so triumphantly and so self-righteously has in her turn taken on the role of criminal.

With Aegisthus' entrance the rhythm begins once more. The claim that he makes in his opening speech is the same one we have met again and again at the opening of sections: the deed was a just one, attended by the gods (1577–82). But the very account Aegisthus gives of the past acts of retributive revenge in the house of Atreus puts his own deed in proper perspective and suggests that it will follow the same rhythm as the rest. Moreover, in the conversation with the chorus which follows, we find the same movement that we found in the scene with Clytemnestra. The chorus denies Aegisthus' claim to be just avenger, emphasizes the criminality of the deed, and suggests ever more explicitly the punishment that is to come (1615–16, 1646–48, 1667). By the end of the play, the Clytemnestra and Aegisthus who proclaimed the justice of their deed at their entrances are clearly cast by chorus, playwright, and audience as criminals. It is the same rhythm that we found attached to Agamemnon in the early scenes of the play; here at the end of the play it holds new dancers in its grip.

I have not dealt with the watchman speech or the Cassandra scene. In neither of these is the basic rhythm so obvious as it is in the portions of the play I have discussed, though there are clear hints of it in both.¹²

¹² In the watchman's speech, the basic movement of the play is foreshadowed in the way his first mention of the beacon and its meaning (8–10) is quickly darkened by his recollection of Clytemnestra's involvement and the present woes of Agamemnon's house (10 ff.). In the same way, the sighting of the beacon (22 ff.) yields to less joyous thoughts (36 ff.). The main echoes of this movement in the Cassandra scene are her constant references to the chain of retributive acts in the house of Atreus. There is also, however, a veiled foreshadowing of the way in which the basic movement will shift its focus from Agamemnon to Clytemnestra after the murder: for the larger part of the scene, Cassandra dwells mainly on Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' imminent murder of Agamemnon (1100 ff., 1223 ff., 1258 ff.); toward the end she refers several times to the justice that will then overtake Clytemnestra in her turn (1279 ff., 1317 ff., 1323 ff.). In this movement of Clytemnestra from avenger to criminal there is a strong hint of the rhythm that will attach itself clearly to Clytemnestra after the murder.

The reasons for playing it down at these points are not hard to fathom. The Cassandra scene, coming after the climactic entry of Agamemnon into the house, would only be anti-climactic if it focused on Agamemnon the rhythm which in the previous episode has finally led him home to justice. And until his murder is accomplished, it would be inappropriate to focus the rhythm squarely on Clytemnestra. What the Cassandra scene does is to bring before our eyes the whole history of the house, past, present, and future, and to show the dominance in that history of the same rhythm that has gripped Agamemnon and will soon grip Clytemnestra. The watchman scene is a magnificent prelude to the action and the themes of the trilogy, but it has neither the length nor the scope to give the important first statement of the play's basic rhythm. Instead, it foreshadows that rhythm and provides a necessary backdrop of setting, mood, and theme to its first full presentation in the lengthy parodos.

This analysis of the *Agamemnon*, sketchy as it is at several points, should suffice to show how controlled and how pervasive is the parallelism between the larger rhythms of the play on the one hand and the rhythms of its inner components on the other. It would be possible to show many further imitations of the same rhythm in the *Agamemnon*¹³ and to carry the same sort of analysis to the remaining plays of the trilogy,¹⁴ but my purpose here is not to give an exhaustive

¹³ Among the many smaller components which themselves suggest the basic movement of the whole play, the following may be mentioned: the watchman speech (see above, note 12), the individual speeches of the herald in the second episode, the speeches of Clytemnestra at 587 ff. and 855 ff., the carpet scene within the third episode, the lion cub parable itself, and many of the component sections of the first three odes.

¹⁴ There are clear indications of the pattern at all levels of the *Libation Bearers* and the *Eumenides*, though in general they are less obvious and less plentiful than in the *Agamemnon*. Once the rhythm had been established in the first play, it would have been an artistic blunder to overstress it in the later plays, and the same instinct which led Aeschylus to vary his imitations of the basic rhythm in the *Agamemnon* led him to allow that rhythm to be less obvious in the two later plays of his trilogy. But there is clear evidence that Aeschylus has not lost sight of it. The plots of the *Libation Bearers* and the *Eumenides* are strongly shaped by it, and just as the rhythm transfers from Agamemnon to Clytemnestra following the death of Agamemnon in the first play, so in the second it transfers to Orestes immediately following his murder of Clytemnestra. His opening claim of justice triumphant (*Cho.* 973 ff.), in tone and placement similar in several respects to Clytemnestra's first speech after the murder of Agamemnon, yields to indications of his guilt and suggestions of punishment to come, precisely as Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' claims to have accomplished justice are followed by indications that they in turn have become the criminals and that punishment for them will follow.

demonstration but to illustrate an approach and demonstrate its relevance to the *Agamemnon*. To these ends the previous analysis is, I trust, sufficient.

I have dealt at some length with this first example in order to exemplify fully my approach at the start of this study. The two subsequent examples will be handled more briefly.

B. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*.¹⁵

Given the known structural virtuosity of this play, is it scarcely surprising to find that it displays a tightly controlled and highly significant parallelism between its overall movement and the rhythms of its component parts. One of the most basic and most characteristic movements of the play as a whole is the way in which Oedipus' quest for something external, something outside himself, leads him inevitably to something internal, something intimately related to himself. Oedipus' search for the killer of Laius, a search undertaken on behalf of the city, leads unexpectedly to himself as the murderer; and as the play progresses, his public quest for the regicide is transformed into his private quest for his own identity.¹⁶ This overall pattern by which an action originally directed at an external target circles back to Oedipus himself is imitated in all the episodes of the play until the discovery and is suggested in several of the choral odes as well.

In the opening scene, Oedipus learns of the sickness of the state and with characteristic determination and dispatch undertakes to purge it—indeed, we find that he has already sent Creon off to Delphi. The malady that is described is a public one, and it is on behalf of the state that Oedipus undertakes its purgation. But as the scene progresses, there are clear hints that this public quest may recoil on Oedipus. Creon's report from Delphi brings the mission closer to Oedipus than

¹⁵ I have found the following studies especially useful in my work on Sophocles: G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958); Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (above, note 2); B. M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven 1957) and *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964); R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (New York 1966) 81–102; C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles* (Cambridge 1951).

¹⁶ Among the many scholars who have commented on the merging of the first search in the *O.T.* (i.e., for the killer of Laius) into the second search (i.e., for the identity of Oedipus), cf. G. H. Gellie, "The Second Stasimon of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*," *AJP* 85 (1964) 113–23, and Lattimore (above, note 15) 82.

had previously been suspected: it was the murder of Laius, the king whose throne and whose wife Oedipus now holds, which caused the state's present plague. And Oedipus in his famous words at 58-61 and 137-41 unwittingly foreshadows the way in which his public quest will become private revelation:

I pity you, children. You have come full of longing,
but I have known the story before you told it
only too well. I know you are all sick,
yet there is not one of you, sick though you are,
that is as sick as I myself. (58-61)

For when I drive pollution from the land
I will not serve a distant friend's advantage,
but act in my own interest. Whoever
he was that killed the king may readily
wish to dispatch me with his murderous hand;
so helping the dead king I help myself. (137-41)

The placement of the latter passage near the end of the scene is significant: the pattern by which the scene begins with public concerns and ends with Oedipus' concern for himself suggests the overall movement of the plot.

The same is true both of the speech which Oedipus makes on his next appearance and also of the Teiresias scene which follows shortly thereafter. In the speech (216-75), Oedipus begins by stressing that he is a complete stranger to the killing of Laius—he has no knowledge of it and is taking it up as a new king who has but lately come upon the scene (219 ff.). He proceeds to lay his injunctions on the people, again directing his actions away from himself (224 ff.). But as the speech proceeds, his action, as if in obedience to some invisible magnetic force, begins to come back to himself. After invoking a curse on the murderer and anyone who aids him, Oedipus emphasizes his own involvement in the quest (244-45) and prophetically places the same curse on himself (249-51). The passage at 258 ff., in tone, effect, and placement similar to 137 ff., brings the action even closer to Oedipus by its bitter ironies, by the unwitting relevance to Oedipus of the genealogy of Laius which he half-enviously recites,¹⁷ and

¹⁷ See Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (above, note 15) 55-57. Knox's analysis of the reversal patterns in *O.T.* (see especially Chapter 3) runs closely parallel to mine; cf.

by Oedipus' explicit emphasis on his own stake in the quest for the killer:

Since I am now the holder of his office,
and have his bed and wife that once was his,
and had his line not been unfortunate
we would have common children—(fortune leaped
upon his head)—because of all these things,
I fight in his defence as for my father,
and I shall try all means to take the murderer
of Laius the son of Labdacus
the son of Polydorus and before him
of Cadmus and before him of Agenor. (258–68)

The exchange between Oedipus and the chorus (276 ff.) serves as a transition to the Teiresias scene by treating Oedipus plainly as one who is stranger to the crime and who, on behalf of the state, is trying to find the murderer. The basic rhythm can thus begin anew with the entrance of Teiresias.

It is as a seeker on behalf of the public good that Oedipus greets the seer (300 ff.), and it is out of concern for the well-being of the state that Oedipus at first pleads with Teiresias to reveal the information he is withholding (322 ff.). It is only later in the scene, as the relentless recoil rhythm begins to reassert itself, that the action again starts to turn in on Oedipus. The king begins to take the prophet's hesitation as a personal affront as well as a public one (334 ff.); the prophet, finally stung to answer by Oedipus' taunts, unexpectedly implicates Oedipus in the crime (350 ff.); Oedipus begins to suspect a plot not only against Laius, as before (346 ff.), but also against himself and pours forth a lengthy attack on the prophet and a triumphant vindication of himself (380 ff.). Oedipus has now clearly become the focus of the scene, and he holds this focus for the remainder of it. In two speeches (408 ff., 447 ff.), Teiresias directs his probing inner vision on Oedipus, past, present, future; and at one point in the brief dialogue that comes between these speeches, Oedipus himself forgets his public mission, and his anger, as the words of the prophet call to mind his temporarily forgotten private obsession with his own identity (435–38).

The scene which began with inquiries on behalf of the public good and the search for an unknown, external regicide has, like the play as a whole, led inexorably back to Oedipus himself and the mystery of who he is. The ode that follows reflects the basic rhythm of the episode. It too begins with questions directed at the world in general: who is this murderer? (463–82). And it too leads back in the second strophe-antistrophe to Oedipus himself and the doubts about him raised by Teiresias (483 ff.).

The following episode reflects the same pattern so obviously that only the briefest discussion is necessary. In the opening confrontation between Creon and Oedipus, the focus is on Creon, a focus that Oedipus relentlessly directs away from himself and his own possible guilt. In the second half of the episode, the focus, both ours and Oedipus' own, begins to shift back to Oedipus as he concentrates less on Creon than on Teiresias' accusations. This movement, gradual at first, accelerates rapidly as Jocasta's speeches, coupled with Oedipus' revelations, unexpectedly suggest the truth of Teiresias' words. By the end of the scene, Oedipus' gaze and ours is directed not on Creon or some other external culprit but entirely on Oedipus himself.

In the famous choral ode at 863 ff. we again have a clear reflection of the play's basic movement. Just as the play moves from Oedipus' public quest for the murderer of Laius to his private quest for his own identity, so this ode moves from the first three stanzas with their general moral concerns to the final antistrophe with its particular relevance to Oedipus and the oracles concerning him. Similarly, while the first three stanzas call to mind the public figure of Oedipus *tyrannos*, Oedipus *the king*, and his actions in the first half of the play, the final stanza focuses our attention on the personal, non-public quest of Oedipus which will be the central interest in the second half of the play.¹⁸ Thus while the ode deals in general rather than particular terms and does not refer specifically to Oedipus himself, in its overall shape and movement it offers a clear variation on the same movement we have seen in other sections of the play.

The following episode again fits the pattern so obviously that de-

¹⁸ On the general relevance of the ode at 863 ff. and its particular function of providing a transition from the public search of the first half of *O.T.* to the private search of the second half, see Gellie (above, note 16).

tailed commentary is unnecessary. It begins with Jocasta trying to direct guilt away from Oedipus by her prayers and offerings, and the apparent effect of the arrival of the Corinthian messenger is to do just that. The news of the death of Polybus seems to remove guilt from Oedipus in two ways: first, it draws attention away from Oedipus' possible slaying of Laius by focusing on an entirely different subject; second, it suggests the falseness of the oracles surrounding Oedipus' birth. But again, as the scene progresses, the boomerang returns. Just as in the previous episode Jocasta's intended assurances to Oedipus only confirmed Teiresias' accusations, so here the Corinthian's intended assurances to Oedipus (1002 ff.) have the effect of unexpectedly revealing to Jocasta the full, horrible truth. Instead of guilt being removed from Oedipus, as seemed at first to be the case and as Jocasta had prayed, the queen (and, needless to say, the audience) now know that it has come very much closer to him. And Oedipus himself at the end of the scene is absorbed not in the public quest for the killer of Laius, as at the start of the scene, but in the private search for his own identity (1076 ff.).

The short ode that follows serves mainly as a lyrical contrast to what has preceded and to what is to follow, though in its progress from the strophe's focus on Cithaeron to the antistrophe's repeated questions about Oedipus' birth there is a hint of the same rhythm that we found in the two previous odes.

The episode that finally brings the discovery can be quickly dealt with. It begins with Oedipus again stressing his own lack of intimacy with affairs relating to Laius (1110 ff.), and at first the investigation seems impersonal in tone and far removed from Oedipus in its emphasis on distant, half-forgotten events. It is only with the mention of the child (1142-43) and the reference to Oedipus (1145) that the focus begins to return to Oedipus. Oedipus takes an increasingly active role in the investigation, and the scene which began with the tone of a dispassionate inquiry ends with Oedipus' anguished discovery of his deeds and his identity and with his determination to look outward no more (1183-85, cf. 1386-90, 1436-37).

The movement which started as the quest for an unknown killer "out there" has inexorably led Oedipus back to himself. The inexorability of this recoil movement has been constantly suggested

in the play by the way in which the action of each individual episode has similarly led Oedipus from his initial external concern to his concluding concern with himself. Now that this rhythm has reached its destined end in Oedipus' discovery of himself, the clear imitations of it in the smaller components of the play largely cease, though there are echoes of it in the ode that follows the discovery (1186 ff.) and in the messenger speech (1223 ff.).

In this analysis I have dealt in very summary fashion with several major scenes and have scarcely touched on the many minor imitations of the basic rhythm that are found in the play, but I hope that the analysis I have given has shown that a basic, underlying movement of the play is clearly reflected in all the episodes and two of the odes preceding the final revelation. The movement we have been discussing has been widely recognized as of fundamental importance in the play, and its constant imitation within the smaller units of the play, whether unconsciously felt or consciously perceived, obviously contributes to the impact of the play and to its structural cohesiveness.

C. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Sophocles' second Oedipus play can be dealt with more briefly since there is already a familiar study which points the way to an understanding of its parallelism of movement. In *Greek Tragedy*, H. D. F. Kitto writes:

If we stand back and look at the play from a distance, we see that there exists in the whole piece a certain governing movement or rhythm. We can see that Oedipus enters the play a disregarded outcast and leaves it—followed by the King of Attica—to keep a strange appointment with heaven. This rhythm controls the play, and will explain it.¹⁹

Kitto proceeds to show how this basic rhythm of emergence shapes a variety of aspects of the play, and he comments on the way in which it is reflected in the rhythm of some of the earlier scenes. He points out how Oedipus' lowliness and dependence are emphasized early in his first appearance (e.g., 1–13) but how this is followed toward the end of the first scene by the first hints of his unexpected power and stature (72, 92–93) and, we might add, by Oedipus' assurance that

¹⁹ *Greek Tragedy* (above, note 2) 411–12.

his arrival in the grove of the Eumenides is god-attended and god-ordained (84 ff.). Kitto continues:

The revulsion which the chorus feels towards Oedipus brings this rhythm (i.e., the rhythm of the opening scene), if we can call it that, back to its starting-point. Oedipus has to fight to maintain his position, but it is maintained, and at v. 285 there is a slightly more explicit reference to his power.²⁰

This rising movement continues in Oedipus' exchange with the chorus (292-309), though mingled with a hint of his weakness at 299-300 which prepares the way for the movement to begin again with Ismene's arrival.

In the Ismene scene we again have references early in the scene to Oedipus' present lowliness (Kitto mentions 299 and 385; there are many more—e.g., 327, 330-31, 344-52). But as the scene progresses, we move to a still more impressive revelation of Oedipus' unexpected power and a speech in which Oedipus for the first time sounds like the Oedipus of old (421 ff., especially 450 ff.).

We can follow Kitto's lead and see the same pervasive rhythm reflected in later portions of the play as well. The chorus' response (461 ff.) to Oedipus' long speech skilfully effects the transition to the next movement of the basic rhythm. They recognize his potential power but point out that he still deserves pity for his present state; moreover, he *has* violated the ground of the Eumenides, and the first thing he should do is to make expiation for this act. Once again we are plainly back at the lowly, corrupted Oedipus, and what follows continues this mood. Oedipus agrees to do as the chorus suggests, stressing his dependence, his physical limitations, and his helplessness (465 ff.). In the scene that follows Ismene's departure to accomplish the purification, the chorus dwells on the horrors of Oedipus' past (510 ff.), and Theseus' first address to him emphasizes both his present state and his past misfortunes (551 ff.). Only after this series of passages focusing on Oedipus' degradation does he in the dialogue with Theseus begin to rise again, but when he does it is to new heights. He is soon speaking to Theseus as a superior rather than as a subordinate (e.g., 580, 593), and following Oedipus' speech at 607 ff. Theseus

²⁰ *Greek Tragedy* (above, note 2) 412-13.

explicitly recognizes his stature (631 ff.). The scene ends with Theseus promising his defense of Oedipus against all opposition and referring to Oedipus' divinely inspired arrival (656 ff.). Oedipus' winning of sanctuary in Athens is fittingly emphasized by the famous ode on Colonus, marking the end of this major section of the play.²¹

In the scenes with Creon and Polyneices, we find again the same rhythm which dominated the early scenes, with Oedipus each time appearing in a helpless or defiled light at first and emerging triumphant at the end. The Creon scene begins with the anxiety of Antigone and Oedipus over Creon's arrival (720 ff.), and this is followed by the long speech of Creon in which he systematically emphasizes Oedipus' present woes (728 ff.). Oedipus' reply bespeaks his re-emerging sense of assurance, but it is to little avail as Creon proves Oedipus' helplessness by taking his daughters captive. Similarly, the opening portions of the Polyneices episode (here I use the word loosely of that whole section of the play in which Polyneices' petition is the central interest) also dwell on Oedipus' past and present sorrows. Oedipus himself, just after the recovery of Antigone and Ismene (the triumphant conclusion of the Creon episode) and just before the announcement of Polyneices' arrival, prepares the way for the next imitation of the basic pattern by referring to his own defilement (1132 ff.). Antigone's appeal to her father to receive Polyneices gives prominent place to Oedipus' misfortunes (1195 ff.), and the choral ode preceding Polyneices' entrance makes Oedipus the example of its gloomy reflections on human existence (1239 ff.). Polyneices' first speech stresses Oedipus' present misery (1254 ff.), and his second links Oedipus and himself by their common helplessness (1333 ff.).

Against this backdrop of Oedipus' misery which is thus painted at the start of the Creon and Polyneices scenes, his eventual triumphant re-assertion at the end of each scene stands forth the more boldly. Theseus, standing by his promises, prevents Creon from taking Oedipus captive, and Oedipus in one of the great speeches of the play vindicates himself against Creon's renewed vilifications (960 ff.). He ends the speech with his present assurance of divine favor (1010-13):

Now for that profanation I make my prayer,
Calling on the divinities of the grove

²¹ Cf. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (above, note 2) 416.

That they shall give me aid and fight for me;
So you may know what men defend this town.

Not long after this, Oedipus' vindication is completed by the return of his children.

Similarly, in answering Polyneices Oedipus rises to new (and horrible) heights (1348 ff.). Knox characterizes well the tone of his words:

All the years of brooding on the ingratitude of his sons bear their bitter fruit now in this terrible denunciation, which sweeps from accusation through malediction to prophecy in language that seems to transcend the nature of human speech altogether and become the medium of a daemonic, superhuman wrath . . . This is a superhuman anger welling from the outraged sense of justice not of a mortal man and father but of the forces which govern the universe.²²

Thus in both the Creon and the Polyneices scenes, Oedipus rises from early indications of his weakness and his defilement to concluding revelations of his power and his acceptance by the gods. Nor is the same basic rhythm absent in the final scenes of the play. Though the principal function of these scenes is to provide a transcendent conclusion to the rising movement of the play as a whole, nonetheless they contain subtle hints of the rhythm that has dominated the play. The scene where Oedipus is finally called away to his death begins typically with clear hints of his dependence on others and his blindness (1457-58, 1475-76, 1486-87), but these are quickly superseded by Oedipus' ever-increasing sense of his own power. As the scene progresses, he reveals the future blessedness of his grave (1520 ff.) and himself leads the way to the appointed place, guided by the gods themselves.

The messenger speech which follows suggests the same pattern. At first we have the usual (here muted) reminders of degradation and sorrow (e.g., 1583, 1597, 1607 ff.), but again these soon yield to the ever-clearer signs of divine approval and acceptance. The adherence of these two scenes to the play's basic rhythm is clear from the characteristic references at their beginnings to Oedipus' dependence and sorrow; that these opening hints are far outweighed by the transcendent glory that supersedes them should not surprise us: it is the natural

²² *The Heroic Temper* (above, note 15) 159-60.

counterpart to the way in which the degradation of Oedipus outweighed the few hints of his coming power in the opening scenes of the play.

We see, then, that the play is neither one single upward movement nor yet merely a series of smaller upward movements but rather a combination of the two: the overall movement is clearly upward, but within that movement there are constant minor imitations of the basic pattern. Each smaller movement both starts and ends a little higher than did the preceding movement; that Oedipus' lowliness should dominate at first, his elevation at the end, is therefore inevitable and appropriate.

The last scene brings us back to earth—necessarily; the description of Oedipus' death would have been too superhuman, too sublime a note on which to end, and the final scene between his daughters and Theseus returns us to a more familiar, less transcendent world. Even in this final scene the play's dominant rhythm is subtly suggested, now with reference to Antigone and Ismene as much as to Oedipus. From the daughters' opening sorrow over their father's death (1670 ff.) we move to their recognition that he died as he had wished (1705 ff.), to Theseus' assurance of the blessedness of his death (1751 ff.), to Antigone's determination to accept her father's will (1768 ff.), and to Theseus' promise of assistance (1773 ff.). The chorus' final words complete the movement (1777 ff.):

Now let the weeping cease;
Let no one mourn again.
These things are in the hands of God.

III. CONCLUSION

We find, then, that in each of the three plays we have discussed there is a significant degree of parallelism between overall movement and movement within component parts. In conclusion I wish first to anticipate and try to answer some possible objections to my approach and my analyses, second to suggest some of the possible implications and uses of this type of study of dramatic rhythm, and finally to comment briefly on some areas where further study is needed.

One possible objection is that the textual evidence for the sort of movement I have been studying is extremely uneven. The parallelism

we have found has not been equally present or obvious in all three of the plays we have analyzed or even in all the sections of the individual plays. Moreover, there are many places in the plays we have studied where one line or another stands in plain contradiction to the general movement we have suggested. For instance, in the *Agamemnon* the herald mentions the Greek desecration of the gods' altars soon after his arrival (527), thus introducing a jarring note into his description of Agamemnon's divinely inspired victory; in the same way, the chorus interjects into its opening praise of Agamemnon (783 ff.) explicit criticisms which, for the moment, contradict the basic direction or movement of the scene. Similarly, in each play we have studied, one could point to many individual passages which do not cohere to the general movements we have been suggesting.

This last objection can be briefly answered. What we are concerned with in this paper is the general movement, the overall shape of whole plays and large sections of plays. The fact that there are occasional cross-rhythms which momentarily obscure or even oppose the underlying patterns of a play does not negate the fundamental presence or importance of these basic patterns. Perhaps a musical analogy will make the point clearer. The first section of a movement in classical sonata-allegro form frequently moves from tonic to dominant (e.g., in a piece in C major, the first section usually moves from C major to G major); within that section and its basic harmonic movement there may be all manner of harmonic ambiguities, surprises, even apparent contradictions, but in the large view of the work these in no way negate the basic and inevitable harmonic movement of the section as a whole. Similarly, the larger movement in a scene or ode of a play remains despite the occasional jarring or contrapuntal passages which the author may introduce for the sake of irony, foreshadowing, variety, characterization, etc., and it is with these larger movements that we are concerned in this paper.

An equally brief answer is possible to the objection that there are clear discrepancies between the amount and the explicitness of the parallelism in different plays and in different scenes of the same play. Just as basic techniques of structure, imagery, characterization, language change radically within the same play and the same author in response to changing dramatic needs and intents, so the technique of parallelism

is adapted to a variety of situations and takes a variety of forms. In the *Agamemnon*, where the relentless rhythm which is carrying Agamemnon to his doom is a central theme, or in *Oedipus the King*, where the inevitability of the king's discovery is basic, the parallelism of movement is ubiquitous and unmistakable. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, where the form is slightly looser, the momentum less insistent, the play's underlying pattern naturally takes a greater variety of forms and is somewhat less obtrusive than in the other two plays. We find similar variation within single plays. In the *Agamemnon*, for instance, Aeschylus emphasizes his rhythmic parallelism until Agamemnon enters the house, then largely suspends it until after the actual murder, only to attach it again with renewed force to Clytemnestra; and in the last two plays of the trilogy, probably in the interest of avoiding redundancy and monotony, the movement becomes noticeably less explicit than it is in the *Agamemnon*. The technique of structural parallelism, like all dramatic techniques, is used in a great variety of ways; what matters for our purposes is not that in some plays or some scenes it is less explicit than in others but that, again taking the broad view, it is clearly present as a general phenomenon in many, even most sections of the three plays we have studied.

This brings us to another possible objection to this approach—that of the potential monotony and obviousness of the parallelism we have been discussing. If it really is as prevalent as we have suggested, why does it not obtrude more obviously from the texture of the plays? If basic movement and component movement of a play are parallel, why aren't we sick unto death of the movement by the time the play is over? Moreover, if these plays merely repeat the same movement over and over again, wherein lies their overall momentum? They certainly do not *seem* like just a series of backtrackings, of runnings and re-runnings of the same course over and over again.

Here again a musical analogy may be useful, this time not to sonata-form but to the form known as theme and variations. In this common musical type, the composer constructs a series of variations on a given theme. In the classic examples of this form, the composer usually follows the pattern of the theme from start to finish in each variation. As with the similar phenomenon of dramatic parallelism, there is in theme and variations a very real danger that the piece will seem to be

just a monotonous series of varied repetitions of the same material and that it will have no overall sense of shape or direction. In the great sets of variations, these potential liabilities of the form are triumphantly surmounted: the variety of the variations is such that monotony is never present, and the individual variations are so subordinated to an overall structure and movement that the piece as a whole has a clear sense of shape and momentum.

The same potential dangers in the phenomenon of parallelism are similarly overcome in the dramas we have been studying. The parallelism of movement is varied in such a way as to avoid any monotony (and this, of course, is why it is not immediately apparent to the audience or the reader), and the smaller movements of the component parts are clearly subordinated to the basic movement of the play as a whole. In *Oedipus the King*, for instance, each scene reflects the basic self-discovery pattern of the whole, but each has its own characteristic qualities and each moves us further along in the overall action of the play. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' rising movement is characteristic of each scene, but we have seen how these smaller rising movements are subordinated to the overall rising movement of the whole play. In the *Agamemnon*, the explicit recurrence of the same pattern in all the early scenes does produce a kind of hypnotic monotony, but this is clearly dramatic, artistic and thematically effective. Finally, the very fact that the basic parallelism is handled at times more explicitly than at others and that momentary contradictions of it do frequently occur bears witness to the authors' awareness of the danger of monotony and their intention of avoiding it.

Another possible objection concerns my division of plays into their component parts. Whereas in most cases the divisions I suggest follow the natural architecture of the plays (i.e., breaks come between episodes and odes), there are instances, especially in *Oedipus at Colonus*, where my break comes in the middle of an ode or episode and where it might accordingly seem that I am trying to twist the evidence to fit my thesis. I would willingly admit that in analyzing the plays I have been looking for inner components which exhibit movement parallel to the overall movement of the play and that on several occasions my decision to divide a play in a particular fashion has been influenced by my discovery of such parallelism. Such an admission

would not, however, seem necessarily damaging to my argument: one of the advantages of the study of structural parallelism is that it may reveal the natural movements within a play, and in dividing a play on the basis of such parallelism I hope that I am merely indicating its true architecture. Moreover, I believe that all of my divisions can be justified on other grounds as well.

Let us look, for instance, at several divisions I have made which seem to violate or overlook the natural divisions of their play. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, I see (as does Kitto) a new movement beginning with the entrance of Ismene, another beginning with the first news of Polyneices' arrival. Neither break coincides with a natural ode-episode division, but in each case the arrival of a new figure and a very conscious and very apparent change of focus justify the division. In the same way, in the *Agamemnon* the arrival of Aegisthus signals the beginning of a new scene and a new movement (the last) of the play's basic rhythm (here, of course, the change from lyric to iambic meter also helps indicate the start of a new section). Likewise, in *Oedipus the King* I posit separate movements for Oedipus' speech at 216-75 and for the scene with Teiresias (300 ff.) even though these are technically parts of the same episode. But again the arrival of a new figure, Teiresias, and a very clear change of focus are adequate indications that a new section is beginning.

One further point should be made. That the divisions are not always clear and do not always come where we expect them should please rather than alarm us inasmuch as it again reveals the authors' concern for avoiding too obvious, too blatant, too monotonous a use of parallel motion. In fact, the flaw in my divisions may well be not that they are too inexact but that they are too exact: I expect that further refinements of the approach I am suggesting will show that frequently the transitions from one movement to the next are deliberately blurred, that often a new movement is beginning at the same time as the previous one is ending, and that the parallelism of movement in Greek drama is no more remarkable than the authors' skill in contriving deft transitions which keep the parallelism from becoming too obvious.

In this connection it is worth noting that whereas in the *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus the King* each episode and each ode is likely to present a

separate imitation of the basic movement of the play,²³ in *Oedipus at Colonus* the choral odes are without exception *integrated* with the episodes in the basic rhythms of the play. The first ode (118 ff.) introduces the long rising movement which leads up to the entrance of Ismene. The chorus' brief dialogue with Oedipus (461 ff.) and the commos (510 ff.) introduce yet another long rising movement, and their ode on Colonus (668 ff.) provides the conclusion to this movement. The ode at 1044 ff. helps accelerate the upward movement that is to culminate in the return of Oedipus' daughters, and the ode at 1211 ff. underlines by its pessimistic general reflections the theme of Oedipus' lowliness at the start of the long rising movement which will lead to Oedipus' triumphant rejection of Polyneices' pleas. Similarly, the chorus' important role in the final scenes is fully integrated with the actions of the characters. This fuller integration of odes and episodes in Sophocles' final play bears witness to a new skill in handling the potentially obtrusive transitions between different stages of a play's basic rhythm and in avoiding the monotony that could result from the constant repetition of one basic pattern. This seemingly deliberate blurring of structural divisions in the *Oedipus at Colonus* is also, of course, strikingly similar to the fluidity of form and the ease of transition which are common characteristics of the last works of so many great authors and composers (cf. the last plays of Shakespeare or the late quartets and sonatas of Beethoven).

I turn now to a few brief comments on some possible implications and uses of the sort of approach I have been suggesting in this article. Its potential value for the interpretation of plays is, I think, obvious. For one thing, it can offer a ready and useful avenue to the essential unity of a play. In plays whose overall coherence is not immediately apparent, our understanding of their otherwise elusive unity can be materially increased by the realization that a single basic movement underpins their diverse components and binds them part to part and part to whole. (Such an approach to plays like Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Heracles* may go far toward solving the problem of their unity,

²³ In the *Agamemnon*, each of the first three choral odes and all but one of the episodes clearly present a separate imitation of the basic rhythm. In *O.T.* each episode presents a separate movement and this same movement is clearly suggested in two of the odes (463 ff., 863 ff.).

as I hope to show in a subsequent article.²⁴) Moreover, the key to a play's unity may well serve also as a key to its meaning.

The same approach is potentially valuable also in dealing with smaller problems within a play. In the *Agamemnon*, for instance, the elaborate parallelism of the first three odes, a parallelism closely maintained in many details, throws some light on the problem of whether or not the hymn to Zeus (160 ff.) is in its proper place in our text.²⁵ Moreover, it is obvious that perception of the underlying movement of a scene is potentially valuable not only in establishing the text but also in understanding and interpreting the scene itself. Thus it is that a realization of the basic movement which undergirds every section of the *Oedipus at Colonus* provides the key to comprehending the role which the Ismene scene plays in the total structure of the play.

I think that this approach can be useful also in shaping a production of a play. The realization that a certain rhythm is characteristic of all levels of a play can have sweeping implications for a great variety of production details—blocking of scenes, choreography of the odes, costuming, pace, etc. The very emphasis of this approach on dramatic *rhythm* and *movement* suggests its extensive relevance for the director and producer with their necessary concern for these same elements. No production of the *Agamemnon*, for instance, can possibly do justice to the play if it fails to project the remarkable parallelism of movement in the opening episodes and odes and to relate that parallelism to the basic theme of the trilogy; once this parallelism is perceived, it will inevitably shape innumerable details of blocking, choreography, pacing of scenes, etc. Similarly, no production of *Oedipus at Colonus* which overlooks the rising movement of each scene and of the play as a whole can approach the sublimity of Sophocles' conception; again, once this movement is understood, it will immediately provide the director with an invaluable key to the basic rhythm of his production. The same is obviously true in the case of the recoil movement which we found in *Oedipus the King*: an understanding of this pervasive rhythm is of prime importance not only for the critic but also for the producer and the actor.

In emphasizing the importance of this phenomenon of structural

²⁴ Cf. below, note 26.

²⁵ See above, note 7.

parallelism I do not mean to suggest that critics have been blindly overlooking a patently obvious feature of Greek drama or that future productions of Greek plays should make these underlying movements unmistakably apparent to their audiences. The sort of parallelism I have been discussing is and must be a subtle effect; by its very repetitiveness it runs the danger of becoming monotonous, and the classical authors have demonstrated their skill in the way they skirt this danger. Like the structure or harmony of a piece of music, like the significant imagery of a poem, this underlying structural parallelism is a technique whose effect on an audience is largely unconscious or subconscious. An audience does not need to be consciously aware of the contrapuntal or harmonic structure of a Bach fugue in order to respond to it; the imagery of a poem makes its effect on a reader or listener even though he is not totally aware of its presence. In the same way, an audience does not need to be consciously aware of the parallelism of movement within a play in order to respond to it.

One of the critic's jobs is to bring into the open those hidden techniques by which a work of art makes its effect on us. The very act of doing so, however, is in a sense a distortion in that an effect designed to be subtle and indirect is rendered overt and obtrusive and an effect designed to work in conjunction with a variety of other effects is isolated and over-emphasized. In the hope of setting the balance straight, let me emphasize that the parallelism of movement which I have been studying is at best one among many important aspects of Greek tragedy. In this introductory study I have deliberately isolated this one technique in order to identify it and suggest its importance; in so doing I have inevitably distorted both it and the plays in which it appears in that my single-minded concentration on it has made it seem more obtrusive, more overt, more omnipresent than it actually is. It will be the role of future studies to place it more in context and perspective and to study its complex interplay with the multitude of other significant facets of Greek drama. Similarly, any production of Greek drama which builds on the sort of structural effects I have been discussing will need to ensure that those effects remain the subtle undercurrent they are in the text and that they complement rather than obscure the other important characteristics of the play. As to the present study, I can only hope that the identification and preliminary

discussion of this phenomenon has justified whatever distortion has resulted.

I have already indicated a number of areas which future studies of this phenomenon will have to examine. Clearly, the sort of study I have done here on a preliminary basis will need to be extended to other Greek tragedies and carried out in a more intensive and detailed fashion than has been possible here.²⁶ Similarities and differences in the uses of this technique in different plays will have to be charted, discussed, and explained. Significant tendencies of the three tragedians in their use of this technique will need to be analyzed and compared. As I have just mentioned, the use of this technique will need to be related to other aspects of the plays in which it appears.

One further area for future study needs to be mentioned. My preliminary studies suggest, as the above analyses occasionally indicate, that the phenomenon of structural imitation or parallelism not only appears in the major components of a play (episodes, odes, major sections, etc.) but also extends frequently to its smaller components (speeches, parts of speeches, sections of odes, sections within larger sections, etc.).²⁷ There is obviously room here for much over-subtle interpretation, for pressing a useful approach to the point of absurdity, and I am not suggesting that we should hope or expect to find imitations within imitations indiscriminately or ubiquitously. But that there are at many points (often crucial points) imitations of a smaller scope than I have systematically considered is quite apparent even from my preliminary studies, and it is obvious that the general nature and importance of the phenomenon of structural parallelism can be fully appreciated only when its study is extended not only to include other plays but also to involve minute scrutiny of the small as well as the large components in which it is found.

²⁶ The author is currently working on a study of this phenomenon in six plays of Euripides—*Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Heracles*, *Trojan Women*, *Ion*, *Orestes*. In addition, it may be pointed out that Winnington-Ingram's study of the *Bacchae* (above, note 2) suggests the presence of this phenomenon in yet another play of Euripides: he shows that a basic movement in the *Bacchae*, both in the play as a whole and in many of its component parts, is from the initially peaceful and beautiful appearance of Dionysus to a revelation of the violence and horror which are inextricably interwoven with these more attractive elements.

²⁷ For an arresting musical analogue to this structural parallelism of Greek tragedy, see D. H. Porter, "The Structure of Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, *op.* 120," *Music Review* 31 (1970) 298.