THE FUNCTION OF
THE CHORUS AND THE ROLE
OF THE AUDIENCE IN
HELLENIC TRAGEDY

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INTRODUCTION

If some kind of time-machine were to make it possible for us to cast a glance on an ancient Athenian audience, we should probably be astonished to discover how different it is from a contemporary group of Broadway spectators watching a twentieth-century show. Most of to-day's theatregoers would be contemplating the performance in polite silence. So absorbed would they be in the spectacle on the stage that they would be in a dreamy trance, completely oblivious of their bodies - utterly suggestible and passive - and totally unaware of the fact that they are resigning to the actors and the stage manager the difficult task of creating a dramatic illusion.

Not so the ancient Athenian spectators, who, sitting on the edges of their seats, reveal their live participation in the performance by the unconscious, but never-ceasing, play of the expression on their countenances. There is absolutely nothing passive about their active interest in the show. Their animation is inspired by the chorus, which is so indispensable an element in the Hellenic drama.

One must study the chorus, if one wishes to understand the nature of the Attic theatre. Particularly is this
true, if one would like to learn something about the more primitive phases in the evolution of the Greek drama. Many students have tried to trace its genesis and have endeavored to discover its early origins by an examination of the rites of the Maenads - these feminine votaries of Dionysus, who have often been regarded as the fountainhead from which later sprang the dramatic inspiration of the Greeks. As Mr. Pohlenz explains:

Aus den rasenden Frauen wurden in der Kunst die tanzenden Mänaden, die auch in wildester Bewegtheit das Ebenmass nicht verleugnen, und das orgiastische Toben ward in den festen Formen hellenischen Kultes gebändigt.1

Our critic thinks that the Greeks, in a large measure, tempered the original savagery of these religious rites. Nevertheless, these rituals continued to reflect something of the ecstatic feeling with which they had been formerly imbued. As our critic explains;

Auch später ist das Dionysosfest von ganz besonderer Art. Auch da verlangt der Gott, dass der Mensch sich ihm ganz hingibt. Er will ihn herausreissen aus seiner Alltäglichkeit in eine andere höhere Welt, und da soll er etwas erleben, innerlich wie äusserlich, was sein ganzes Dasein zu vertiefen wie zu erhöhen vermag.

Und die vollkommenste Gestalt, die diese Dionysosreligion, diese dionysische 'Ekstase' sich geschaffen hat, ist die Tragödie.

Mr. Pohlenz contrasts the original frenzy of the Maenads with

1Pohlenz, Die Griechische Tragödie, p. 9.
the discipline which was later introduced into the worship of Dionysus and which induced the Greeks to express their mystical emotions in more restrained religious rites. Hellenic esthetic feeling inspired the Greeks to elaborate a relatively serene set of well-defined rituals, which Mr. Haigh discusses in the following passage:

The tragic drama, on the other hand, is to be traced back to the spring festivals of Dionysus, when the country people met together to open the casks of the new wine, and to welcome with various rejoicings the renewed fertility of nature. On such occasions they were accustomed to celebrate the praises of their benefactor, the god of wine and vegetation, in a kind of hymn called the dithyramb; and from this hymn Greek tragedy is descended.1

According to Gilbert Murray, these country people celebrated their religious rites by singing of the sufferings of Dionysus. Our critic goes on to explain that Dionysus

...is one of the many forms of the Year-god or vegetation-god, like Osiris, Attis, Adonis, or Thammuz. The story of this Year-god is always the same: he is born a miraculous child, he grows in beauty and strength, he conquers, he wins his bride, he commits the sin of Hubris or excess, he transgresses the law, and thereafter must of necessity dwindle, suffer defeat and die. Thus the ritual of Dionysus sees life in the tragic pattern.2

1Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, pp. 13-14.
2Murray, Aeschylus, p. 6.
These gods had to undergo this melancholy fate as an expiation for some great guilt which Murray explains in the following discussion:

If we ask why they die, the answer, it seemed to the ancients, must be that they die because in some sense or other they have transgressed or sinned: death is the wages of sin.\(^1\)

The peasants would dance while they sang tales of the sufferings of Dionysus. Among the people who celebrated these rites, some revealed more skill than others. Those who were more adept were singled out and permitted to perform before the rest of the country people. The ones who were chosen for this task made up a group which was an early form of a rudimentary chorus.

As this type of religious ritual was refined, its votaries perfected the so-called dithyramb, which Mr. Haigh discusses in the following passage:

The dithyramb belonged to that type of performance which is called a choral dance; in other words, it was a hymn chanted by a chorus, and accompanied by illustrative gestures and motions.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 6.

\(^2\)Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, pp. 14-15. Mr. Haigh attaches here the following footnote:

It is clear that \(\delta \varepsilon \times \kappa \sigma \iota \varsigma\) (mimetic dancing) played a large part in the early dithyramb. Thus Aristotle (Poet. c.4), says that tragedy was originally \(\delta \varepsilon \times \kappa \sigma \tau \iota \omega \tau \varepsilon \rho \varsigma\). The early tragic poets, whose dramas were mainly lyrical, were called: \(\delta \varepsilon \times \kappa \sigma \tau \alpha \iota\) (Athen. p. 22).
Even in these early days, the participants in the ceremony, who revealed a surprising taste for drama, delighted in exciting make-believe because it enabled them to become more vividly aware of their god. As Mr. Haigh points out, they would describe in song various episodes from the life of Dionysus, and at the same time present these episodes in a concrete form by means of expressive mimicry and pantomime.¹ The singers disguised themselves as satyrs, or companions of Dionysos, to make the representation

(I have been unable to determine what the abbreviation "Athen." stands for. It might represent Athenaeus Grammaticus or it might refer to Aristotle's work Πολιτική, τέκνα, which was edited by Sir F. G. Kenyon and published in Oxford.)

¹Mr. Haigh refers the reader here to the following passage from Zenobius, 5.40:

We are also referred to Proclus, Chrestomathia, c. 12:
more lively and picturesque.¹

These seemingly histrionic devices did, in no sense, conflict with an intensely pious faith. On the contrary, they made the worshipers intensely conscious of their god.

Dressed as satyrs,

...they danced in a ring round the smoking altar, changing their recital of the god's adventures, and exhibiting each phase of the story with such passionate realism of gesture, as to make the spectators almost believe that they were present, not at the mere narrative but at the occurrence of the events themselves.²

¹Mr. Haigh appends here the following reference: Etymologicum Magnum (Ed. T. Gaisford, Oxford, 1848)

²Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, p. 15. Mr. Haigh states here that his source is Evanthius de Comoedia, p. 4.
Disguised as satyrs, the performers would sing and dance, while they retold the ancient legend which concerned their god and which was so well known to every one. As they recited the old story, they gave voice to sentiments that everyone cherished and expressed ideas that seemed poised, ready for utterance, on the lips of all who watched the ceremony.

The rites just discussed should not be confused with the wilder behavior of the less inhibited Maenads - the less restrained devotees of Dionysus, who often experienced an emotional exaltation bordering on ecstasy and resulting in hallucinations or visions. Euripides describes some of the marvelous things beheld by these religious votaries in their uprush of mystical feeling. He tells of a Maenad who seems to see the earth flowing with milk and honey and who sings:

Then streams the earth with milk, yea streams
With wine and nectar of the bee,
And through the air dim perfume steams
Of Syrian frankincense; and He,
Our leader, from his thyrsus spray
A torchlight tosses high and higher,
A torchlight like a beacon-fire,
To waken all that faint and stray;
And sets them leaping as he sings,
His tresses rippling to the sky,
And deep beneath the Maenad cry
His proud voice rings:
"Come, O ye Bacchae, come!"

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It was thought that the excited Maenad who caught a glimpse of Dionysus might even be granted the privilege of hearing him talk to her. What would be easier than to fake such a supernatural experience? What would be more natural for the members of the chorus than to counterfeit such a vision? Such a happy thought probably occurs to Thespis, who impersonates a god before a chorus and a crowd of spectators. Understanding the nature of the dramatic illusion, everyone present pretends that he is in the immediate presence of the god. And the spectators are even more delighted by the show when Thespis imparts to it an air of realism by conversing with some of those who watch him.

We have no record of the secret intentions entertained by Thespis. But it is not unreasonable to suppose that he would like to thrill all who are present and that he would like to talk to each spectator individually in order to afford him the unusual pleasure of communing with the divine. But since such a generous plan is not workable, Thespis sees himself constrained to limit his conversation to the interchange of a few words with the members of the chorus, who discuss with him religious themes of interest to the audience. Mention is made of the pious sentiments which are cherished by all the spectators and which are the spiritual heritage of the countryside. The devout thoughts, which every one has on the tip of his tongue, find expression in

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the remarks of the chorus, which embodies the religious conscience of the community. As Mr. Pohlenz says, "...der Chor vertrat die glaubige Gemeinde..."  

Even though there is nothing blasphemous in the innocent duplicity of Thespis, his histrionic devices make him guilty of some dissimulation. According to Mr. Haigh, Solon is supposed to have been present at one of Thespis' performances and is said

...to have expressed his disapproval of the new form of art, and of the custom of counterfeiting the appearance of gods and heroes. When the performance was over he went up to Thespis, ans asked if he was not ashamed to practise such deception. Thespis replied that he saw no great harm in the proceeding, if it was done merely for amusement.  

Trying to entertain by means of an histrionic illusion, Thespis wishes to pretend that the members of the chorus are contemplating the vision of a god. Furthermore, he wants to dramatize their supposed supernatural experience before an audience. Nietzsche explains this innovation of Thespis in language, which may seem rather too rhapsodical for our modern sober taste. In discussing Attic tragedy, our German philosopher says:

...we now realize that the stage with its action was originally conceived as pure vision and that the

1Pohlenz, Die Griechische Tragodie, p. 7.
only reality was the chorus, who created that vision out of itself and proclaimed it through the medium of dance, music, and spoken word. Since, in this vision, the chorus beholds its lord and master Dionysus, it remains forever an attending chorus...

According to Nietzsche, the members of the chorus are pretending immediately to contemplate their god. Their supposed mystical experience is turned into a dramatic spectacle before the eyes of the countless onlookers. As our modern philosopher elaborates his explanation— in slightly hyperbolic phrases—

The satyr chorus is, above all, a vision of the Dionysiac multitude, just as the world of the stage is a vision of that satyr chorus.

Let us translate into more pedestrian language the rather high-flown diction in which the German philosopher expounds his theory. According to him, the chorus watches the divine pageant on the stage, just as the audience, in its turn, studies the entire spectacle.

Nietzsche believes that the members of the chorus behold the conflict of the gods and heroes on the stage, much as the audience contemplates the entire show. The theory of our German philosopher suggests the pattern that is uniquely characteristic of the ancient tragedy. Francis

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1Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VIII.
2Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VIII.
Fergusson advances a similar hypothesis, when he discusses the members of the chorus in *Oedipus Rex* in the following passage:

Their errand before Oedipus' palace is like that of Sophocles' audience in the theatre: they are watching a sacred combat, in the issue of which they have an all-important and official stake.¹

A member of the chorus, therefore, fulfills a double role. On the one hand he behaves as a performer; on the other hand, he comports himself as a spectator.

He is therefore burdened with this dual function, as well as with other tasks which reveal themselves in his interesting relation to the audience. There exists a very close understanding between the spectators and the chorus, which embodies the religious conscience of the general public crowding the seats in the amphitheatre. The utterances of the chorus reveal the moral and religious values over which the spectators are communing with themselves. When it sings its sacred songs, it mentions the pious truths on which everyone is meditating. As Mr. Pohlenz explains, "...der Chor vertrat die gläubige Gemeinde..."² The chorus can be regarded...

...as an organ of a highly selfconscious community; something closer to the "conscience

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thoughts that mirror the spiritual heritage of the entire
countryside are discoverable in the pronouncements of these
performers, who, according to William Schlegel, express
"the national spirit." What they say reveals the point of
view of the people. Their utterances betray an intelligence
and a perception, which, according to Francis Fergusson, are
"at once wider and vaguer" than those "of a single man." The
remarks made by the chorus reflect ideas that everyone
entertains - notions to which every one intuitively subscribes. The utterances of the chorus express the sentiments and feelings which naturally accord with these obvious notions and which rise spontaneously in the souls of the spectators. According to William Schlegel, when it sings, it

...conveys to the actual spectator a lyrical and
musical expression of his own motions.

It lends utterance to the thoughts and feelings
stirring in the souls of the spectators, who do not have the

1 Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater, p. 41.
2 Schlegel, A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art
and Literature, Lecture III.
4 Schlegel, A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art
and Literature, Lecture III.
opportunity of couching their thoughts in immediate words, but who find a vicarious expression for their ideas and sentiments in the pronouncements of the chorus.

The remarks that it makes and the songs that it sings are, therefore, uniquely important and compel it to occupy a conspicuous place near the heart of the audience. As William Schlegel explains,

In the front of the orchestra, opposite to the middle of the scene, there was an elevation of steps, resembling an altar, as high as the stage, which was called the thymele. This was the station of the chorus, when it did not sing, but merely took an interest in the action. The leader of the chorus then took his station on the top of the thymele, to see what was passing on the stage. . . .

Our German critic describes the manner in which the members of the chorus must watch the show. He points out that they must occupy a conspicuous place which is both near the heart of the audience and in the middle of the amphitheatre. As he explains the matter,

The thymele was situated in the very centre of the building; all the measurements were calculated from it, and the semicircle of the amphitheatre was described round that point. It was, therefore, an excellent contrivance to place the chorus, who were the ideal representatives of the spectators, in the very situation where all the radii were concentrated.

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1Schlegel, A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, Lecture III. Our German critic does not mention the sources for his many interesting statements.

2Schlegel, A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, Lecture III. The German critic does not mention the source from which he has learned these interesting facts.
Wishing to foster a certain dramatic illusion, the members of the chorus find it necessary to occupy a conspicuous place near the heart of the audience. What they say must often seem to have been spoken by someone in the vast crowd that has come to see the show. Behaving as if they were a part of the audience, they stand in such a way as to face the spectacle on the proscenium.

While one can affirm that they are the mouthpiece of the audience, such an assertion would not yield a complete description of their function. The statement should be further qualified. As Mr. Fergusson points out, the chorus of Oedipus Rex does not

...speak directly for the Athenian audience; we are asked throughout to make-believe that the theatre is the agora of Thebes; ...It would, I think, be more accurate to say that the chorus represents the point of view and the faith of Thebes as a whole, and by analogy, of the Athenian audience.¹

The chorus in Oedipus Rex pretends to be a group of Thebans who express the sentiments of their Theban fellow citizens, even though it really reflects the ideals of the Athenians. This harmless duplicity compels the Attic spectators to fancy themselves natives of Thebes and burdens the Athenian playgoers with a dual role: They "represent the

The members of the chorus pretend to be Thebans contemplating a tragic conflict - an event of great moment - that is transpiring in their own home town. The spectators act as if they were citizens of Thebes observing the same memorable occurrence. Furthermore, the entire audience often seems to be the Theban populace watching this affair that is of such surpassing significance.

That which Sophocles accomplishes in Oedipus Rex might be likened to the achievement of Ernst Toller in his play The Machine-Wreckers. The opening scene of this drama reveals Lord Byron addressing the House of Lords in the year 1812. The spectators that watch this scene must surely imagine themselves the congregated members of Parliament who over a century ago listened to this distinguished speaker. Toller, who almost compels his spectators to fancy themselves

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1 Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater, p. 41.
2 Ibid., p. 41.
Britishers, is casting them in a definite role, just as Sophocles, who asks his theatre-goers to think of themselves as Thebans, is also inviting them to play a similar part. Each of these two playwrights forces his audience to become "a community of unconscious actors."¹ An ancient dramatic technique is skillfully exploited by Ernst Toller, whose adroitness must be more admired than his philosophy.

The accomplishment of our German playwright is a tour de force, while the achievement of Sophocles is a far simpler matter rendered easy by his skillful use of the invaluable chorus. He treats it as a sensitive instrument which must be always carefully attuned to the mind of the audience. As Nietzsche says,

Audience and chorus were never fundamentally set over against each other.²

In actual fact, the members of the chorus frequently must appear to be a part of the audience. What they say must often seem to emanate from the throng that has come to enjoy the show. What they do must commonly suggest the behavior of the very ordinary, and even lowly, people who make up the great mass of the public watching the performance.

¹Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VIII.
²Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VIII.
Aeschylus often emphasizes the close relationship between the audience and the chorus by including its members among the humblest characters of the cast. As Mr. Haigh points out,

"Aeschylus...relieves and diversifies the sombre majesty of the general tone by the introduction of subordinate personages of a more homely type. This is especially the case in his treatment of the chorus, from which, as being usually composed of ordinary human beings and not of heroes, less dignity of bearing was to be expected." 1

These ordinary people could be common-place mortals - average persons such as one might meet in the street. As Mr. Kitto says,

"The normal chorus then, as later, was surely a group of citizens, senators, captives, or the like..." 2

The members of an Aeschylean chorus are frequently supposed to be ordinary people, whose humility provides a foil contrasting with the importance of the royal or heroic protagonists of the drama, well-known figures that have been long hallowed in ancient myths. This very contrast bestows a certain banal reality upon the chorus and makes it closely akin to the very banal and very real flesh-and-blood spectators in the auditorium.

1 Haigh, *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, pp. 77-78.
2 Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 28.
Sophocles, who also makes some effort to efface the distinction between the audience and the chorus, permits its members to comport themselves after the manner of the respectable little Athenians, who compose the vast majority of the crowd thronging the amphitheatre. As Mr. Haigh points out, the Sophoclean chorus

...exhibits both the foibles and the excellences of an average crowd of respectable citizens.¹

Since the chorus typifies the average man, its pronouncements often approximate closely to the observations that might have been made by nearly any one sitting in the auditorium. As Mr. Haigh explains,

The office of the Sophoclean chorus, when sharing in the dialogue, is to represent the ordinary mass of human beings, as opposed to the heroic figures on the stage.²

When actors on the stage are addressed by the leader of the chorus, his remarks often embody the thoughts entertained by thousands of playgoers and lend quick expression to the ideas poised ready for utterance on the lips of countless people crowding the amphitheatre. He becomes their mouthpiece which enables them, as it were, to communicate with the actor

²Ibid., p. 153.
on the proscenium, and renders it possible for them to fancy
that they are participating in the dialogue.

Hence the active interest of the spectators, who
have not come just to see a show after the manner of many a
twentieth-century playgoer. That they do not wish merely to
stare at the exhibit on the proscenium can be inferred from
Aristotle's contemptuous remarks about the spectacle:

The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional
attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it
is the least artistic, and connected least with
the art of poetry. For the power of Tragedy, we
may be sure, is felt even apart from representa-
tion and actors. Besides, the production of
spectacular effects depends more on the art of
the stage machinist than on that of the poet.¹

The members of the chorus enable the spectator to
imagine that he shares in the dialogue. Helping him to do
his bit in the creation of the dramatic illusion, they
inspire him to make the necessary effort in the exercise of
his imagination. They shield that which his delicate,
poetic fancy brings to birth from the cruel onslaughts of
a heartless, murderous, prosaic reality. That which his
imagination has conjured up is protected by them so effec-
tively and so decisively that they remind one of the wall
of a fortress. They belong to that part of the cast which
Schiller discusses in the following passage:

¹Poetías, Chapter VI.
The antique playwright does not attempt to safeguard the glittering esthetic illusion by means of photographic realism and an accurate portrayal of the literal fact. The chorus is not consonant with "the illusion of reality" which Ibsen and Shaw endeavor to instil in the dreamy minds of their passive and suggestible theatregoers. Indeed, Schiller tells us that he introduces the chorus into Die Braut von Messina in order to wage war on the naturalistic school of writing:

Die Einführung des Chors wäre der letzte, der entscheidende Schritt...dem Naturalismus in der Kunst offen und ehrlich den Krieg zu erklären...  

Greek playwrights do not embrace the philosophy of Zola. An unimaginative admirer of the naturalistic school, who might find something absurd in the tale of Oedipus Rex, might even rebel against the unlikely story of a man who had been so unlucky as to murder his father and marry his mother. Such churlish and frivolous objections to the play occur neither to the modern sensitive reader nor to the

1 Schiller, Preface to Die Braut von Messina, p. 9.
2 Schiller, Preface to Die Braut von Messina, p. 9.
spectator sitting in the amphitheatre. Both the reader and the theatregoer take a serious and sober view of the story unfolded in the drama, because they unconsciously identify themselves with the chorus and adopt its point of view as their own. They contemplate the tragedy through the eyes of the chorus. As Nietzsche explains,

Audience and chorus were never fundamentally set over against each other: all was one grand chorus of dancing singing satyrs, and of those who let themselves be represented by them. This granted, Schlegel's dictum assumes a profounder meaning. The chorus is the "ideal spectator" in as much as it is the only seer - seer of the visionary world of the proscenium. An audience of spectators, such as we know it, was unknown to the Greeks.¹

The dramatic illusion must, therefore, be safeguarded by the members of the chorus. In Schiller's opinion, they frequently perform this task by pouring oil on troubled frequentlyhen the anguish of the hero threatens to disrupt the esthetic mood. As Schiller says.

Wenn die Schläge, womit die Tragödie unser Herz trifft, ohne Unterbrechung auseinander folgten, so würde das Leiden über die Tätigkeit siegen. Wir würden uns mit dem Stoffe vermengen und nicht mehr über demselben schweben. Dadurch, dass der Chor die Teile auseinanderhält und zwischen die Passionen mit seiner beruhigenden Betrachtung tritt, gibt er uns unsere Freiheit zurück, die im Sturm der Affekte verloren gehen würde.²

¹Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VIII.
While the antique spectator takes delight in the contemplation of the fairy world on the proscenium, he does not bother closely to scrutinize its details. One cannot impress him with the realism of the mise-en-scene, because this is often too distant to be carefully inspected in the huge amphitheatre. It is idle to excite him with striking lighting effects, because these would be impracticable under the glare of the Mediterranean sun. Stage managers would not wish to amuse him with the make-up of the actors, because this is concealed by masks. It would even be vain to interest him in the expressions of the performers because these are also hidden from view.

The occupant of a seat in the amphitheatre is not too much excited by that which can be discovered on the stage. What stimulates him is the dialogue, in which he takes an active part by imagining himself a Theban in a Sophoclean drama or by pretending to be an Argive in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus. The antique playgoers seem to have a share in a vast tragedy the plot of which may encompass the lot of an entire city. Their interest in the dramatic action causes them to differ rather markedly from the modern spectator, who is more concerned with the portrayal of character. The modern visitor to a show who analyzes an actor's interpretation of Hamlet by carefully scrutinizing the performer's facial expression is enjoying a pleasure which was rendered
impossible in ancient times by the presence of the tragic mask. Today's spectator who studies a rendition of Hamlet by listening to the delicate modulations of the performer's voice and by examining the places stressed in the recitation of the lines is delighting in a subtle esthetic pleasure, which is made feasible by the good acoustic conditions of modern theatres but which was fairly impossible in the vast open air structures of ancient Greece.

The arrangement of today's theatre makes it easy for an Ibsen to concentrate his energies on the portrayal of character. The antique playwright, who is deprived of these modern conveniences, cannot permit himself to become completely engrossed by the analysis of character. This seeming handicap forces him to rely heavily on the chorus, which obligates him to stress the dramatic action.

The Athenian writer of tragedies thinks the portrayal of character less significant than the selection of an effective plot - an opinion shared by Aristotle who expounds his view in the following lines:

But most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without
action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character.¹

Making it quite clear that the study of character is far less weighty than the presentation of an action, Aristotle does not hesitate to underscore his opinion that the action is uniquely important. It is absolutely essential because it enables the spectators to participate in the drama with the aid of the chorus and helps them to do their bit in quickening the life of the esthetic illusion.

Casual readers of the Poetics may be annoyed with the philosopher's emphasis on the plot. As Bosanquet says,

The view thus ascribed to Aristotle is in startling antagonism with our ideas. Pure plot-interest without character is for us on a level with the interest of a puzzle and its answer, and therefore in art, with the interest of a story whose characters are mere cyphers manoeuvred through strange and intricate combinations.²

Bosanquet is absolutely correct in frowning on so shallow an interpretation of the Stagirite, who has something more profound in mind. But what is his precise meaning?

It might be fruitful to analyze his discussion of the action, which, according to him, must have a beginning, a middle and an end. It is also his belief that the action should not be too vast, for excessive size would rob it of

¹Poetics, Chapter VI; Smith and Parks, p. 34.
²Bosanquet, History of Aesthetic, p. 71.
its beauty.\(^1\) The limitations with which he circumscribes the action seem to be temporal, rather than spatial or geographical.

He does not rule out the notion that the dramatic action might mirror the concerns of an entire city. It is quite compatible with his theories that the play *Agamemnon* should reveal to us something more than the unhappiness of Clytemnestra and that this tragedy should, in some sense, mirror the destiny of all Argos. Nor does it contradict his conceptions that all Thebans should feel themselves immediately concerned in the wretched fate of Oedipus. The ancient dramatist likes to describe the misadventures of a ruler whose plight somehow becomes identified with the lot of an entire city. The tragic action portrayed in a Greek drama, which often concerns far more than the private misfortunes of two or three people, usually comprehends something vaster than anything discoverable in the bourgeois plays of Lillo and Lessing.

The action of an antique tragedy often embraces an immense compass - a fact manifest in the contrast which Aristotle sets up between poetry and history.\(^2\) The contrast which he discovers between these two kinds of writing implies

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\(^1\) *Poetics*, Chapter VII.

\(^2\) *Poetics*, Chapter IX.
a certain point of similarity which provides the basis for the comparison. The philosopher seems to be impressed with the kind of history that reports the rise and fall of cities, peoples and nations. He appears to believe that dramatic poetry should be concerned with similar immense topics and that it should often tell of the fates of cities.

The events outlined by an Attic drama are often supposed to be silhouetted against a huge background - often an entire city, the population of which may be identified with the audience. In order to encourage the phantasy that the spectators are natives of this polis, the antique dramatist usually selects some scene ideally adapted to this purpose - frequently a place of public resort such as the agora in front of the king's residence. The scene in Oedipus Rex is usually supposed to be such a place before the royal palace. The spectator who watches this play may think of a street or a square where many people can congregate in a throng. He is automatically impelled to think of the audience as a multitude loitering before the king's residence.

The proscenium is not set off from the auditorium by footlights. There is no break in the continuum between the auditorium and the scene which reveals the royal palace, palpably
obvious and clearly defined by the bright light and razor-edged shadows cast by the Mediterranean sun. Nothing seems to bar the way of a spectator who would like to walk up to the residence of Oedipus, to step on the very hard stones before the palace and to run his fingertips over the rough-hewn blocks that make up its walls. The theatregoer can easily think of himself as a pedestrian loitering on the pavement before the building that is the home of the Theban king. If the doorway of the palace excites a vague curiosity in the soul of the spectator and inspires in him a scotophilic impulse to explore the interior of the edifice, then such a state of mind can only help to deepen the dramatic illusion desired by Sophocles. The playwright makes it possible for the audience to fancy itself a crowd of native citizens lounging on the streets of the prehistoric city. It is as easy to understand the motives that inspire Sophocles to pick out such a scene for his drama as it is to comprehend the reasons that impel other Greek playwrights to make a similar choice.

While most of the remarks made in this introduction are observations that concern Oedipus Rex, they are equally applicable to other ancient works. While it may seem arbitrary to limit the discussion to comments on this famous Sophoclean tragedy, such a restriction surely entails little loss of generality, while permitting greater conciseness and more concreteness in the treatment of the subject.
CONCEPTION OF TRAGEDY IN
THE FIFTH CENTURY

We moderns often disapprove of a work of art that embodies a moral. It is hard to say what ancient playwrights would think of a poem designed to carry an edifying message; but it is certain that the Greek dramatist is very much preoccupied with ethical problems. In order to study them, he wisely makes them concrete and palpable by placing them in a social and psychological context. He may not be able to define the quality of absolute goodness, but he comprehends the nature of the mental processes that gives birth to the feeling of righteousness. It is well known to him that any deed commanding approval is usually esteemed meritorious. He realizes that any act arousing disapprobation is commonly considered evil. It is also obvious to him that most men wish to be admired for their good qualities.

Any person wants to be praised by his friends and to be honored by all people. He usually exercises considerable effort in the never-ending struggle to make a good impression on his fellow men. Yet this fair image which he is trying to create in the minds of others does not always harmonize with the deeds that he performs and
the thoughts that he harbors. What he spontaneously does and feels is not always consonant with the expectations of others, who watch him from the outside and who pass moral judgment on him. This contradiction between his natural behavior and the verdict of his fellows implies the problem of guilt.

This overly brief outline of the genesis of morality seems to furnish the basic premises from which the early Hellenic dramatist begins his researches into the problems of ethics and from which he starts in his perennial study of the nature of guilt.

The moral problem is most easily studied in the case of a king. It is not too difficult to analyze the discrepancy between his conduct and the critical opinion of him entertained by those who observe him. It is a fairly simple matter to diagnose such a situation for he is a public character, whose most trivial gestures and casual remarks are open to general scrutiny and appraised by everyone. The circumstances in which a ruler finds himself provide an oversimplified context, in which an individual's relation to society can be very conveniently explored and in which his problems of guilt can be most successfully investigated. Ancient playwrights who select a king as an object of their inquiries are impelled to their choice by the fact that he is a public figure. As Schiller says,
Die Handlungen und Schicksale
der Helden und Könige sind schon an sich
selbst öffentlich, und waren es in der
einfachen Urzeit noch mehr.¹

The Greeks know what they are doing when they write about
kings and queens. These dramatic characters are designed
to meet the requirements of the ancient stage. Very
foolish are the opinions of some modern critics who
seem to think that the Athenians are disguised French
royalists.

That is why Aeschylus makes use of Clytemnestra
in his study of the problem of guilt. When she seeks to
vindicate her transgressions and indulges in long impasioned
pleas before the chorus, she sound as if she were
addressing a jury in a court of law. Of course, she is
really defending herself before the Argive people, whose
opinion is mirrored in the verdict of the chorus. Or, to
put the same matter in other words, she is justifying her-
self in front of the Athenian audience, whose feelings
are reflected in the decision of the chorus. Her attempts
to exonerate herself find an echo in Aegisthus' efforts to
whitewash himself. These characters talk as if they were
seeking an acquittal from a chorus authorized to appraise
the measure of guilt.

¹Schiller, Preface to Die Braut von Messina, p. 10.
The Sophoclean chorus also endeavors ceaselessly to assess the guilt that is present in the protagonist of a drama. For a time, Sophocles seems to go along with the conventional belief that sin is inescapably punished by fate and wrongdoing inevitably eventuates in catastrophe. He finds it natural to accede to this theory of his contemporaries, for

the concept of natural cause and effect as a sequence of transgression and penalty appealed very strongly to the Ionian intellect.¹

This ethical philosophy, however, has a painful corollary that torments him. It seems to him right that crimes should be chastised by destiny, but it appears unfair that men should be castigated for an inscrutable and incognizable guilt. Distressed by the thought that men have to suffer without being able to determine what they are expiating, he cannot help wondering why people should have to undergo anguish without being able to discover a reasonable and comprehensible cause of their woe. Hence the pessimism of the playwright, which impels Mr. Whitman to say, "Evil in Sophocles is non-rational."²

Although Oedipus' unwitting transgressions are obvious to everyone, they are, nevertheless, unwilled acts

¹Feldman, The Unconscious in History, p. 255.
²Whitman, Sophocles, p. 41.
which can hardly be called deliberate crimes. The real
guilt that brings on his disaster completely escapes any
intelligent analysis and consistently baffles the efforts
of Oedipus, who struggles desperately to discover the nature
of the hidden poison contaminating his life. His enig­
matic guilt is also constantly studied by the members of
the chorus, who endeavor to formulate their ideas in many
a speech. What they say is usually fairly trite and
obvious, revealing a superficiality and suggesting a want
of insight that seem unwittingly to emphasize the inscruta­
bility of the ultimate problem. They can really diagnose
neither the secret of the guilt nor its connection with
the disaster that inevitably follows. They thus evoke
the typically helpless tragic feeling that it is impos­
sible to anticipate or to escape the onrushing catastrophe.
It seems to them that man must suffer and that his unhappy
plight stems from the limited nature of the intellect, which
is too stupid and too myopic to unriddle the ultimate enigma.
As they complain in Antigone, human beings "walk with fixed
eyes as blind men walk." ¹

During his middle life, Sophocles is tormented by
ideas that seem to bear some resemblance to the notions
entertained by the writer of the Book of Job. Job also
vainly endeavors to learn the precise nature of the

poison that contaminates his life. His researches baffle him, for they uncover only that which is ambiguous, enigmatic and contradictory, as good inexplicably turns into evil. As he explains,

If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.

Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.

...

If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean;

Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. ¹

Job's friends try to help him in his investigation of the moral enigma. Their suggestions which are trite and obvious betray an irrelevance that renders the problem still more incomprehensible. They evince a futility that puts one in mind of the Sophoclean chorus. Job's problem seems all the more unfathomable because he knows himself a righteous man. This moral consciousness of his again brings him close to Oedipus, who, at the opening of the play, is a king well-known for his rectitude and who therefore finds the secret of his guilt all the more incomprehensible.

¹Book of Job, Chapter 9, Verses 20, 21, 30 and 31.
What then is the tragic flaw of Oedipus? His hamartia, according to Aristotle, must be some fairly insignificant imperfection. Mr. Whitman wonders sarcastically whether this paltry mistake "...occurred when Oedipus slew his father and married his mother."¹

Is this crime of the king a mistake that Bywater calls an "error in judgment"? This expression² covers either too little or too much. On the one hand, the assassination of one's father and the matrimonial relation to one's mother surely represent something more than a slip of judgment. On the other hand, Oedipus' blunders - if we are heartless enough to call them "blunders" - were performed in the good faith of any righteous man, and his ignorance - if we are unkind enough to name it ignorance - of what he was doing is the blindness of any finite human being who lacks the omniscience of a god. If we rest content with any such definition of the hero's guilt, we fail

¹Whitman, Sophocles, p. 33.

²Whitman uses the phrase "error in judgment" - an expression which he borrows from Bywater. It can be found in Bywater's Aristotle on the Art of Poetry (Oxford, 1909), p. 215.
to appreciate the real nature of the spice of a Sophoclean
drama and we overlook the peculiar quality of the gusto that
keeps the Athenian audience on the edges of its seats.

Perhaps the trouble can be found in Aristotle's
discussion of the tragic flaw. Greek philosophers feel
that this imperfection of character has something to do with
the moral law. But, as Whitman says,

\[\ldots\text{poetry will not obey the law. Aristotle}
\text{tried, experimentally, to see tragedy within the}
\text{moral law as systematized by the Academy and by}
\text{his own efforts.}\ldots\]

The chorus helps us very little in our search for
a definition of the hamartia. As Mr. Whitman points out,

\[\ldots\text{from the choral criticism Antigone is con-}
\text{victed of harshness and stubbornness, Oedipus of}
\text{rashness of temper, Philoctetes of obstinacy,}
\text{and so on. It is a surprising fact that all of}
\text{these faults, or most of them really come down}
\text{to the same thing - stubbornness, or more specifi-}
\text{cally, that special quality of self-willed independ-}
\text{ence called authadeia by the Greeks, which keeps a}
\text{man from yielding to his fate and makes him talk}
\text{harshly and proudly.}\]

\[\text{It is all one: if we trust the chorus, Sophocles}
\text{wrote about nothing but the evil effects of}
\text{stubbornness.}\]

Such moralizing might make of Oedipus Rex the
ideal type of fiction that parents would like to give to

\[\text{Whitman, Sophocles, p. 36.}\]
\[\text{Whitman in referring here to Ant. 471 p.,}
Oed. Rex, 616 p., Phil. 1045 p.}\]
\[\text{Whitman, Sophocles, p. 31.}\]
their disobedient children. But such criticism is surely not relevant to one of the greatest artists.

No, we must look elsewhere for an examination of Aristotle's doctrine of the hamartia, which the great philosopher considers a trivial imperfection of character and which he supposes to eventuate in a great disaster. The disproportion between the small frailty of character and the resulting catastrophic punishment never seems to bother him and may point to a discrepancy that reveals a contradiction in his theory. The contamination sullying the life of Oedipus is some kind of hidden blight that is in no way commensurate with a trifling weakness of character. Aristotle's doctrine seems a blasphemous caricature of the notions entertained by Sophocles.

The pessimism latent in the thought of Sophocles flatly contradicts the modern idea that the ancient Hellenes are delightful, innocent, amoral children. Mr. Whitman is entirely correct when he rises up in umbrage against the "...popular notion that the Greeks had no conception of sin."1 On the contrary, there is something puritanical in Sophocles' conception of guilt - an austere notion related to his deep and sincere piety and making him a defender of

1 Whitman, Sophocles, p. 38.
"the old time religion" of the Greeks. As Whitman points out,

Max Pohlenz, in his general treatise, Die Griechische Tragodie, tried to show that Sophocles stepped into Aeschylus' shoes as teacher of the people and proved himself a strong religious conservative, even reactionary...¹

Sophocles here once again reveals his surprising kinship to Job, who also protests his traditional and orthodox piety.

Even though the playwright sacrifices none of his religious beliefs, he contrives, with advancing years, to introduce a radical change into his philosophy of guilt and succeeds in elaborating the more cheerful theory that man can forfeit his innocence only through the deliberate perpetration of voluntary transgressions. Sophocles places the emphasis now on the conscious moral intention and on personal human responsibility - a conception that brings guilt within the realm of the reasonable and knowable and mirrors the clear-cut and comprehensible ideas of Socrates.

Sophocles' new intellectual approach to the ethical problem is embodied in Oedipus at Colonus. He now ignores the unintelligible part of evil, thus obtaining a peace of mind suggestive of the later skeptics. Concentrating his attention on that small

¹Whitman, Sophocles, p. 25.
part of the matter which can be easily understood, he contrives to arrive at a rationalization which enables him to water down the traditional notion of guilt - an idea still further diluted by the efforts of Socrates who is prone to look on ignorance as the only real sin.

The new "enlightenment" results in the evaporation of the old religious awareness of guilt - a conception that was elaborately studied by the fifth century dramatic chorus. The evanescence of this idea in the fourth century deprives the chorus of one of its raisons d'être and accounts for the fact that great tragedies are no longer written.

It is not without justice that Nietzsche complains:

...it is clear that the immediate result of the Socratic strategy was the destruction of the Dionysiac drama..."¹

Now one can understand Aristotle's failure to comprehend the meaning of the chorus, which he discusses so sketchily and so superficially in the Poetics. It is also easy to appreciate his inability to fathom the old religious conception of guilt, for which he rather unhappily substitutes the shallower notion of the hamartia. As Sewall points out in his comment on the problem of evil, "Aristotle is singularly silent about it, but it is the essence and the core of tragedy."²

¹Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, Chap. XIV.
²Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy, p. 47.
A far profounder conception of guilt and a much deeper awareness of its enigmatic nature never cease to preoccupy the attention of Sophocles. The evolution of his insights provides a criterion that helps to evaluate his spiritual development. In the play Antigone, which is presented in 441 or 442 B.C., we find Creon blindly attempting to grope his way toward a solution of the moral problem. The drama Oedipus Rex, which is presented at some time not far removed from the opening of the Peloponnesian War, gives us the picture of a king who strives desperately to see the precise nature of his guilt. But Oedipus at Colonus, which is written near the turn of the new century, first suggests a clearcut way of obtaining a well defined view of an answer to the question.  

\[1\] These dates are more or less tentative. They can be found in Whitman's Sophocles, p. 55.
Aeschylus has mastered the art of writing magnificent poetry. He uses this skill of his to cast a hypnotic spell over his theatregoers, who, yielding readily to the dramatic illusion, are only too eager to imagine themselves in the roles assigned to them by the playwright. The ease with which he controls the mood of the audience is readily discernible in the first scene of *Agamemnon*. Before the opening of the play, the restless audience was in continuous motion. Everywhere one could hear the rustling of garments. People were fidgeting, whispering, talking, shouting, laughing. However, after the show begins, everything seems transformed by a strange metamorphosis. A breathless hush descends everywhere. All objects outside of the proscenium are wrapped in a heavy silence. An unexpected stillness seems to impose an unnatural repose on all things. It is as if everything had gone to sleep.

This quiet mood seems to fill the very stage. One imagines that slumber hangs heavy in the streets of Argos. It is no wonder that the spectator is deeply moved by the loneliness of the night scene in the opening of the drama. He appreciates the plight of the solitary sentinel, who stands on the roof of Clytemnestra's palace and who is
peering into the darkness, while he looks for the distant fire signal betokening the fall of Troy. The loneliness of the scene seems ominous. It is as if the very void of the night were pregnant with tragedy.

Presently the chorus begins to sing of the time when Agamemnon and Menelaos sailed away from Greece to make war on Troy:

The tenth year is this from the time Priam's foe, the great adversary, Agamemnon and Prince Menelaos, with honor of scepter and honor of throne, strong men, yoked together and brothers, launched a thousand ships from this Argiveland...

The song tells of their embarkation, which took place ten years before. The poem explains that "this" is "the tenth year" since "the time" of the departure of the two kings. While listening to this chant, the spectator become conscious of the emphasis on the word "this". The chorus pretends to be alluding to this year - the current date - right here in Argos. The playgoer becomes vividly conscious of some distant event that transpired centuries ago, as if it were immediately contemporaneous with him. He feels as if the remote dead past had been magically brought up to the present by a kind of time-machine and had been reawakened into mysterious life before his very eyes.

1Hamilton, Three Greek Plays, p. 164. (The underlining is mine.)
This illusion is intensified, a few lines later, by the chorus which sings of "this Arigive land." The renewal of the stress on the word "this" again suggests to him the phantasy that Argos surrounds this very amphitheatre. The departure of Agamemnon and Menelaos - two legendary kings looming unsteadily through the slowly moving mists of romance and prehistoric even in the days of Homer - seems to be a recent fact as directly obvious as the latest news.

The prehistoric legend undergoes a metamorphosis and seems to be translated into an immediate and tangible fact, so palpable that the spectators begin to fancy themselves Argives. The theatregoers, who imagine themselves in this role, help to create the dramatic illusion and become in Nietzsche's words, "unconscious actors."¹ Their make-believe, which may at first seem somewhat factitious, grows continuously more convincing with the evolution of the drama.

The members of the chorus continue to chant. As they proceed, they become dimly perceptive of some impending doom - perhaps the coming murder of Agamemnon by the queen; but typifying, as they do, the average finite mortal human being, they are helplessly impotent to control the behavior of the almighty royal person sitting on the

¹Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VIII.
throne and can do no more than bide their time. They sing, "We are waiting."¹ They echo the mood of the theatregoer, who sits uneasily in suspense and who, with baited breath, is trying to anticipate the outcome of the story portrayed on the stage. They thus fulfill a double function - on the one hand, they give expression to the suspense of him who is on tenterhooks in the auditorium, while simultaneously they perform the part required by the dramatic action of the plot. They reveal their dual role once again when they ask Clytemnestra:

Tell us of these things what is known
and what may be spoken.
Heal us now of our fear...²

These lines reveal in words the anxiety of the audience, which is tensely speculating on the future evolution of the tale outlined on the stage.

The members of the chorus are addressing the queen, who, however, rudely fails to answer their question and who permits herself a slight discourtesy that points up the wide gulf separating Clytemnestra, the queen, from the humble members of the chorus. She arrogates to herself the right to ignore ordinary people such as the members of the chorus and the spectators in the auditorium. Her faint rebuff produces in the theatregoers a vague sense of frustration, which makes

¹Hamilton, Three Greek Dramas, p. 165.
²Ibid., p. 166.
them conscious of being in immediate contact with someone more palpable than a mere poetic and legendary fiction and which imparts to the queen an added reality, a third dimension.

Aeschylus achieves a similar effect when he permits the leader of the chorus to welcome her with the words:

I come to do you reverence, Clytemnestra, for it is right to give the king's wife honor, a woman on a throne a man left empty.¹

He speaks on behalf of the spectators, whose mouthpiece he is. The theatregoers feel as if they themselves had greeted her. They seem to be in direct touch with Clytemnestra, who ceases to be a mere legendary, shadowy figure and who takes on a very palpable actuality. They seem to be genuine Argives, who might really talk to their queen.

The members of the chorus continue to sing of an omen they once beheld before the departure of the fleet for Troy.

By the house of the king high toward the spear-hand where all could behold them two birds swooping together tore at a pregnant hare and the brood of her young big within her.²

The song goes on to tell how Calchas, the prophet, was summoned to interpret this portent. The seer explained that the two eagles were Agamemnon and Menelaos and that the hare referred to Troy.

¹Ibid., p. 173.
²Ibid., p. 167.
The theatregoers are stirred by the poetic description of the melodramatic portent, which seems to point a finger at Agamemnon, king of Argos. They are excited because they imagine themselves natives of this city and because they are worried about their good king.

The song describes the miracle in a way that perturbs the theatregoers. The report of the omen is given in such circumstantial detail that they know it to be true. They feel convinced, for the news of the supernatural event is not imparted by a god, whose confusing oracular pronouncements never really mean what they seem to imply. The affair is accurately reported by the members of the chorus - mere ordinary human beings, who have seen the unearthly occurrence with their own eyes and who are willing to bear witness to it. Of course, the theatregoers are sufficiently sane not to be really fooled, but the playwright's skill encourages them to give in to the enjoyment of the artistic pretense.

The members of the chorus continue to tell of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Clytemnestra's daughter, to the goddess Artemis. They recount how this barbarous rite was performed by Agamemnon in order to procure a favorable wind for the fleet. Relating this ghastly event that befell the unhappy Iphigenia, they add:
They are willing to testify to the truth of the horrible story because they themselves watched the inhuman occurrence. Their word can be trusted because they are not unreliable supernatural beings, but ordinary mortals like the occupants of the seats in the auditorium. Aeschylus continues to inspire belief in the gruesome tale because he must create a dramatic illusion. He knows how to make his play convincing, even though he is no follower of the school of Ibsen and Shaw - playwrights who render their works plausible by making the dramatic spectacle an accurate and realistic copy of the commonplace, humdrum world outside of the theatre.

Aeschylus, who is able to metamorphose Agamemnon from a shadowy, imaginary, legendary figure into a definite, credible, palpable personality, permits this Argive king to return home from war and allows the members of the chorus to greet him with the following salutation:

Come at last, O my king. Troy town is your spoil, true son of your race. How shall I greet you, how do you homage, not over-exceeding, not falling short of, due measure of praise?  

When they thus welcome the victorious ruler, they seem to be

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1 Ibid., p. 172.
2 Ibid., p. 196.
a committee elected by the audience with the express purpose of doing him honor. When they hail him in this way, the throngs sitting in the auditorium feel as if they themselves had extended courtesy to him and as if they were in the presence of a flesh-and-blood royal personage, far more real and concrete than the spectral wraith of a mythical king.

The crowds packing the amphitheatre think of themselves as Argives, who love their ruler. Their feeling of affection is born of a natural sympathy which one automatically has for the hero of a well presented dramatic tale, but is transformed by the skill of Aeschylus into a sentiment of devotion which all Argives entertain for their good king Agamemnon. This profound feeling of loyalty to him causes everyone to be deeply hurt when people suddenly learn of his unexpected death. Everyone is even more appalled when it is revealed that he has been killed by his wife, Clytemnestra. Nor is the mood improved when it is discovered that his Trojan mistress Cassandra has also been butchered by the queen.

Eternally suspicious of Clytemnestra, the members of the chorus had little confidence in her report of the fall of Troy and placed little trust in her description of the fire-telegraph by which the news of the victory was
relayed to Argos. Even then, it seemed to them that she was a confirmed liar and a bad lot. And now, their suspicion of her seems more than amply confirmed.

The nature of the horrible double crime is only slowly brought home to them. They listen, as they stand outside of the palace, from which emerge the dying cries of Agamemnon and Cassandra. It is easy enough to divine that someone is being put to death within the building. But how can one know what is really going on inside of the royal residence? The only way to ascertain the facts would be to break into the palace and to commit an insolent act which the humble members of the chorus are far too diffident to carry out.

Not knowing what to do, they merely stand around and helplessly speculate about the matter. One of their number says:

We have no witnesses. A groan we heard. We are not seers to know the man is dead.\footnote{Hamilton, Three Greek Plays, p. 224.}

Another one belonging to the same group suggests:

Clear facts first - then grow angry as we will. But guesswork is another thing from knowledge.

The leader of the group replies:

We are agreed on this at least, to know and quickly, what has happened to the king.
The chorus, which wants to know the facts, behaves as a jury, that wishes to find out what has been going on.

Everyone is stunned with amazement when the palace door is opened and Queen Clytemnestra makes her appearance. She seems to be in a mood of braggadocio when she makes a full scale confession of her crime and when she arrogantly adds, "Nothing do I deny." Behaving after the manner of an insolent defendant in a courtroom, she haughtily asks: "Bring me to trial like any silly woman?" The members of the chorus would like to bring in some kind of verdict and, to this end, endeavor to learn the nature of the motive that impelled her to become so ghastly a criminal. They inquire:

What evil thing...
...made you a thing accursed?

After debating the matter, they decide that banishment would be a suitable penalty for her:

...away shall you be cast,
a thing of hate to your people.

She retorts superciliously:

So now do you pass judgment on me? Exile - the people's hate - cursed by men openly.

Presently Clytemnestra begins to plead her case by marshaling the evidence that speaks in her favor. She

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 226.}\]
mentions Cassandra, whom Agamemnon so high-handedly intro-
duced as his mistress into Clytemnestra's own home. The
queen points to the two dead bodies of her victims, which
she brazenly dragged out into the full sight of the public.
Indicating them with her hand, as if they contained the
corpus delicti brought in by the prosecution, she con-
tinues to list the extenuating circumstances of her crime:

Here lies the man who scorned me - me, his wife -
the fool and tool of every shameless woman
beneath Troy's walls. Here she lies too, his slave,
got by his spear, his sibyl bed-fellow,
his paramour - God's words upon her lips,
who rubbed the galley's benches at his side.
They have their due, he thus and she the same,
her swan-song sung. His lover - there she lies.
I in my soft bed lying, shall delight,
thinking of her, still more in its smooth softness.¹

Now the queen brings up another fact that can support
her case. In her plea, she calls attention to the murder
of Iphigenia, her daughter, whom Agamemnon once offered up
as a human sacrifice. Proceeding with her defense, the
queen goes on to say:

From his seed she sprang, that flower I bore
and wept for, Iphigenia slain.

... 

Will he boast in hell of the death he dealt
now the score is paid
and the sword he slew with has slain him?²

¹Ibid., p. 228.
²Ibid., p. 231.
Glytemnestra evidently knows how to plead her case. The irresolute chorus, which acts as if it is confused and as if its uncertainty might impel it to change its verdict, replies to the queen:

As one astray
knows not where to turn him,
so do I wander witless
where path is none.

Aegisthus, Glytemnestra's consort, must also appear before the jury because a deep suspicion of guilt hangs heavy on him and because he helped to plan the murder of Agamemnon. It seems that Aegisthus also knows how to argue his case in a court of law. In defending himself, he points out that Agamemnon was the son of Atreus - a very ugly customer. When Aegisthus' father, Thyestes, once had come as a humble suppliant to the home of Atreus, Atreus had slaughtered the children of Thyestes and served them neatly disguised as a dish before their father. Aegisthus wanted to avenge this impious deed of involuntary cannibalism by arranging the assassination of Atreus' son, Agamemnon.

Aegisthus seems to think this settlement of an ancient score a brilliant vindication that clears him of guilt. But the jury - the chorus - does not concur and expresses its disagreement in the following lines:
Your plan, yours only, so you boast, this murder. This piteous death your work. Justice still lives. Your time will come, be sure, when there shall gather from out the town all men to curse - throw stones -

Aegisthus interprets the last few lines of the verdict as the threat of an attack on his own person. He sees in it the warning of a popular uprising against him, the consort of the queen. Thinking of an insurrection of the masses, he retorts

What! A poor oarsman at his lowly post deep in the ship, dares speak threats to the master. There ensues a quarrel between Aegisthus and the members of the chorus, who go so far as to menace him by drawing their swords. Since they represent the audience, it is obvious that the Attic playgoers look on Aegisthus as a villain. The spectators, who are probably inspired by the memories of Peisistratos and Hippias and by the typically Athenian distaste for autocratic rulers, evince the same hatred of tyrants that seems to be discernible in parts of Antigone as well in some passages of Oedipus Rex. The democratic Athenians, who feel that a ruler should be held morally accountable before the bar of public opinion, seem to possess the very modern motion that he is, in some sense, responsible to his people.

\[1\text{Tbid.}, \text{pp. 234 to 235.}\]
Aeschylus seems prone to think of the members of a chorus as a jury that can evaluate the guilt behind a crime. Since they are, however, the mouthpiece of the spectators, it is the public in the auditorium which really studies the nature of the transgression and which pretends to be a crowd of Argives passing sentence on Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

Does it seem unrealistic to have so huge a multitude of jurors? Does so unnatural a dramatic device disturb the esthetic illusion? A modern reader may be distressed by the artifice, because he is accustomed to small juries; but an ancient Athenian would probably not be bothered, for he is used to the type of trial in which the authorities muster a huge throng of jurors, sometimes numbering in the hundreds.
This excellent drama of Sophocles still seems charged with the same vigor and energy that animated it once long ago. Even though the author touches on themes no longer vitally significant to us, his ideas on religious pollution become momentous for today's readers of the play. The modern reader who attributes so much weight to these ancient themes joins with the chorus in taking them very seriously and accepts its point of view as his own. Through its eyes he contemplates the events portrayed in this work. There subsists between him and the members of the chorus the same understanding that once existed between them and the ancient Athenian audience.

Sophocles understands the role played by the audience which must collaborate with the author in the creation of the esthetic illusion. He knows how to involve the playgoers in the dramatic action. His skill makes it possible for them to think of themselves as subjects of King Creon, who is making known his new edict and who appears to be announcing it to the members of the chorus. However, he does not employ the intimate and informal language that one would naturally use before so small a group of visitors. Creon begins:

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1 Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 192.
I have the honor to inform you that our Ship of State, which recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come safely to harbor at last, guided by the merciful wisdom of Heaven.

As he continues in this pompous vein, the disproportion between the small number of listeners and the sonorousness of the periods that he uses in his speech suggests an inconsistency — an absurdity that one unconsciously seeks to explain by imagining that Creon is talking past the chorus and directing his speech at the vast and impressive throng in the auditorium. He seems to be speaking to the thousands of spectators as if they were his fellow Thebans.

Creon goes on with his oratory in the following ominous vein:

...Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and sword against his native city and the shrines of his fathers' gods, whose one idea was to spill the blood of his blood and sell his own people into slavery - Polyneices, I say, is to have no burial: no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him; he shall lie on the plain, unburied; and the birds and scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like... As long as I am King, no traitor is going to be honored with the loyal man.¹

These blasphemous words which seem hurled into the heart of the audience awake among the great mass of pious little people an uneasy feeling compounded, in part, of superstitious terror. Even though the spectators understand the nature of the dramatic make-believe, they experience a

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 193.
thrill sufficient to keep alive the esthetic illusion. They feel as if they were harassed by a high-handed dictator, who has just trumpeted forth some kind of arbitrary threat into the crowd. They think of themselves as Thebans, who must heed the cruel edict of the new tyrant and who feel an ill-defined resentment inspired by the bossy and arrogant tone of the brutal and unjust proclamation. Creon evokes in them a mood of distaste and rebellion - precisely the state of mind that Sophocles wants to create in them. The playwright seems to be analyzing the concept of the autocratic ruler and presenting his ideas on this head in a form that is at once entertaining and vivid, by subjecting his spectators to a mild and playful shock treatment.

The protest of the spectators remains veiled because one cannot speak one's rebellious thoughts before an intolerant ruler. It finds expression in the answer given by the leader of the chorus, who is the mouthpiece of the spectators and who gives vicarious utterance to the feelings of the playgoers in the following words:

If that is your will, Creon son of Menoikeus, You have the right to enforce it...

The speech implies an unspoken disapproval of the edict and an unenthusiastic willingness to cooperate with it - a half-hearted obedience made necessary by the ruler's determination to enforce the new law. People will grudgingly comply with its requirements because it is unpleasant to be executed.
As the leader of the chorus explains,

Only a crazy man is in love with death.¹

The spectators are becoming steadily more vexed with the oppressive and impious attitude of Creon and watch him with some disquiet, as he becomes enraged by evidence that someone has tried to bury the traitor Polynices. They study Creon's mounting fury fomented by suspicions that rebels are trying to violate his laws and to upset his social order. The spectators nervously listen to him when he exclaims:

...No, from the very beginning
There have been those who have whispered together,
Stiff-necked anarchists, putting their heads together,
Scheming against me in alleys.²

Creon, who seems to be talking to no one in particular, appears, for this very reason, to be addressing all people in the amphitheatre and insolently accusing every one within earshot. Those who crowd the auditorium experience a fear and an irritation that result from the congenital Attic hatred of dictators - an abhorrence characteristic of Athenians who still remember Harmodius and Aristogeiton. The vague anxiety and the ill-defined resentment of the spectators correspond to the mood of the Theban populace, which once suffered under the cruel heel of Creon and which is now being unconsciously

¹Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle*, p. 194.

²Ibid., p. 197.
impersonated by the audience in the Athenian amphitheatre.

The spectators are already prepared to think of Thebes as their native city. The word "anarchist" suggests that their own community is on the brink of dissolution. A feeling somewhat reminiscent of the panic of a mob - though of course far tamer and completely controlled - sends a delightful shudder down the back of every theatregoer when he hears the words telling of these evil men "who have whispered together." He feels as if his "State" were rocking on its foundations, even though he understands that his excitement is part of the dramatic illusion and that this make-believe makes it possible for him to enjoy himself.

The spectator, who has just been overcome by the fear of social chaos, turns, with relief and comfort, to listen to the beautiful ode of the chorus.1 Sophocles betrays his great genius in this wonderful song, which reveals the psychology of the man in the street in times of trouble - the little fellow who knows himself impotent and incapable of anything significant in a period of a national turmoil and who seeks relief from anxiety in the seeming security of glittering generalities. He solaces himself by talking about the dignity of man, just as the chorus does in its first ode.2 This song mirrors the mood of the humble spectator.

1Ibid., p. 199.
2Ibid., p. 199.
The chorus now sings its beautiful song, which begins as follows:

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
More wonderful than man; the storm gray sea
Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high;
Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
With shining furrows, where his plows have gone
Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.¹

The song goes on to recount the achievements of civilized man. It does not list the accomplishments of any one man - least of all, of Creon. Such exaltation of a single individual would smack of hybris - a notion that is anathema to the lowly people in the streets of Athens. No, the song extols the genus homo.

The glittering generalizations to be found in this ode suggest a desire to escape from the troubles besetting Thebes and a frustrated attempt to find an answer to oppressive problems. The chorus is busy with the never-ceasing search that is so characteristic of it.

But poetic as these philosophical reflections are, they are still unavailing, for they fail to dispel the anxiety of the average Theban citizen, whom the theatregoer is now impersonating. He cannot get rid of the unspoken feeling of

¹Ibid., p. 199.
guilt that haunts everyone in times of national turmoil. As the chorus concludes,

Never may the anarchic man find rest
at my hearth,
Never be it said that my thoughts
are his thoughts.

There is something particularly pitiful about these two lines, which reveal the little fellow on the defensive and which show him protesting his innocence almost too loudly, because he feels the unseen omnipresence of the stool pigeon and the informer working for Creon. It is as if the very theatregoer were surrounded by the disguised agents of the secret police of the tyrant.

Presently a spy catches Antigone as she tries to bury her brother Polynoeices. The little people in the audience, who are deeply religious, sympathize with her, because she is performing a pious act inspired by a deep love. She has been arrested and is dragged before the king, who condemns her to death. The leader of the chorus cannot believe that such impious cruelty is possible and asks with worried incredulity:

Then she must die?¹

His unhappy question reechoes the disapproving words that every spectator has on the tip of his tongue. It is as if some bold theatregoer had unexpectedly stood up and uttered a cautious protest, disguised in the form of a question - an

¹Ibid., p. 209.
act betraying the circumspection that is made necessary by
the tyranny of an autocratic ruler.

Creon answers the leader of the chorus with a sting­
ing rejoinder, that reflects the tyrant's intellectual train­
ing. The king's speeches on statecraft prove him to be an
amateur philosopher who has dabbled in the science of
government. When the simple leader of the chorus plaintively
asks if Antigone must die, Creon retorts with bitter irony,
"you dazzle me" - biting words that imply the incredible
stupidity of the plea made by the leader of the chorus on
behalf of Antigone.

Sophocles seems to be thinking of the lawsuits, of
which the Athenians are so very fond. It is as if Creon had
just exposed the complete imbecility of the argument of his
opponent in a court of law. By his sarcastic reply, Creon
not only tries to show his vast mental superiority but
endeavors to prove that the leader of the chorus is a fool
and suggests that a want of intellectual education has made
simpletons of all of the little people in the audience.
Since the leader of the chorus stands between the stage and
the auditorium and since Creon is on the stage, his con­
descending and cruel words which are ostensibly directed at
the leader are actually hurled right into the heart of the
audience.

The thousands of little people among the theatregoers
resent Creon's presumptuous manner and his caustic wit. Furthermore, they hate the arrogance of the highbrow intellectual in general - one must but recollect the enjoyment that welcomes Aristophanes' play *The Clouds* and think of the readiness with which people will vote for the death of Socrates. The audience is completely annoyed by the scholarly Creon and is by now quite willing to lynch the autocratic ruler.

The fear of his persecution makes it impossible to reveal, in unequivocal language, the pity that is felt for Antigone. The mood of commiseration receives ambiguous expression in the song of the chorus lamenting the curse that plagues her family - an evil star born of some ill-comprehended guilt. The ode giving utterance to these thoughts begins with the following lines:

Fortunate is the man who has never tasted God's vengeance! Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is shaken For ever: damnation rises behind each child Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast, When the long darkness under sea roars up And bursts drumming death upon the windwhipped sand.\(^1\)

This ode tells of divine jealousy and of "the rage of the enemy god." The words of this song which also speak of "the

\(^{1}\text{Ibid., p. 209.}\)
wrath of Zeus" seem indirectly to reflect the suppressed fury of the populace and suggest the resentment of the spectators, who still would like to deal out retributive justice to Creon.

As the lamenting chorus continues its melancholy song, it chants:

I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past
Loom upon Oedipus' children:
generation from generation
Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.¹

In this poem the members of the chorus renew their never-ceasing attempt to unriddle the enigma of evil. Endeavoring to determine the nature of the guilt that has brought so much unhappiness on the head of Antigone, they allude darkly to the incest and the hybris of Oedipus whose crimes were supposed to be responsible for her misery. What the singers suggest is well-meant but obvious. Sophocles permits their ideas to sound jejune because he wishes to suggest the limitations of the human mind which is impotent either to fathom the problem of Antigone's guilt or to anticipate the undeviating onrush of disaster. The playwright himself emphasizes this thought in the line which compares men to helpless creatures who

...walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.²

Before her present misfortunes, Antigone had once enjoyed the happiness of becoming engaged to Creon's son, Haimon. He now appears on the scene in not too cheerful a mood. It looks as if he were going to express his displeasure to the king. Creon tries to anticipate his son's protest and embarks on a complicated but ramshackle bit of rationalization,\(^1\) which betrays Sophocles' knowledge of human psychology. The ruler tries to prove that the existence of the state is based on a discipline which requires the punishment of such criminals as Antigone. He demonstrates that the very life of the family depends on the obedience of sons and argues that Haimon should therefore knuckle under in order to be submissive to the royal command. Creon also attempts to establish his point by stressing the social inferiority of women. His reasons seem to be thrown together in the haphazard manner which suggests the incompetent amateur philosopher and which inspires many critics to discover in this passage the speech of a hypocrite and a fool. But Sophocles appears to have a rather different thought in mind. The playwright is trying to show us Creon vacillating in his decision, made uncertain by the sight of his son's evident grief. The tyrant seems to be wondering whether he was morally justified in the cruel verdict that he passed on Antigone. His awkwardness stems from an unconscious

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 211-212.
feeling that he did not do the right thing. His uncertainty reveals the hesitation in his groping attempts to discover the correct line of conduct. It may have been his spiritual myopia that the chorus had in mind, when it sang of human beings who

walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.¹

In his frustrated search for something, he seems remotely reminiscent of Oedipus.

Of course this faint beginning of Creon’s moral change of heart is not too obvious in his conversation with his son. Sophocles is challenging his spectators to unriddle this puzzle for themselves and to make a shrewd guess at the causes that are upsetting Creon’s earlier self-assurance.

Creon’s infirmity of purpose causes him to bungle his speech to his son. The specious reasoning of the king excites the distaste of the humble spectator, who dislikes atheistic intellectuals anyway, even if he is unable to understand them. The theatregoer is muttering to himself ill-natured words, which find utterance in the speech made by the leader of the chorus. The leader betrays a note of sarcasm, which is necessarily heavily disguised by a tone of flattery. He says:

Unless time has rusted my wits,
What you say, King, is said with point and dignity.

When the leader, who recites these lines, professes to be too stupid to understand, he is sincerely revealing a feeling of humility characteristic of the lowly Athenians in the auditorium.

The king’s speech has also displeased Haimon, who points out that citizens are privately expressing their repugnance for the blasphemous acts of the ruler. As the son says,

...I, at any rate, can listen; and I have heard them
Muttering and whispering in the dark
about this girl.
They say no woman has ever, so unreasonably,
Died so shameful a death for a generous act.¹

When the spectator hears this dark allusion to the murmurs of the crowd, he is automatically reminded of the throngs surrounding him in the amphitheatre. Thinking of the annoyance which the king’s speech had excited in him, the theatregoer feels as if he were in the very midst of a multitude of exasperated Thebans.

The audience is in an anti-intellectual mood and listens with sympathy to Haimon, who tries to demonstrate the impotence of the philosophers mistaken in their belief that they enjoy the unique monopoly of reason. Haimon exclaims:

Do not believe that you alone can be right.
The man who thinks that,
The man who maintains that only he has the power

¹Ibid., p. 213.
To reason correctly, the gift to speak, the soul -
A man like that, when you know him, turns out empty.  

Haimon disapproves of such intellectual arrogance and prefers a humbler reliance on the plain man's spontaneous intuition.

The ideal condition
Would be, I admit, that men should be right by instinct.

These words seem to corroborate the opinions of the less sophisticated theatregoers, who are very much in sympathy with the young son.

Creon tries to settle the argument by appealing to his authority:

My voice is the one voice giving orders in this City!  

Haimon retorts:

It is no City if it takes orders from one voice.

By playing on the traditional Athenian contempt of dictators, Haimon insures himself of the sympathy of the spectators. They hate Creon just as if they were real Thebans. They hate him with so much passion that they instinctively identify his city with their own hometown.

The modern reader may feel that the quarrel between father and son is of a very privy nature. It might seem unlikely that thousands would be eavesdropping on so intimate

1Ibid., p. 213.
2Ibid., p. 215.
conversation. Does not this very improbability ruin the dramatic illusion that Sophocles wishes to create? This question does not worry the dramatist. He has the typically antique notion that a king enjoys no really private life and that his most trivial gestures can be scrutinized by the masses. Creon is aware of the gaze of the public when he accuses his son of engaging in "a public brawl"¹ with his father.

Creon's taste for specious exercises in faulty logic reveals itself when he decides to give Antigone a little food and then to lock her up. If she eventually dies of hunger, her death will come of itself and not result from anything that he might have done. In this way he intends to demonstrate his own innocence and "to absolve the State of her death."² He seems rather vain and proud of his shallow sophism because he again calls attention to it with the following words:

...Take her to the vault
And leave her alone there. And if she lives or dies
That's her affair, not ours; our hands are clean.³

Antigone's misfortunes are rendering Haimon's lot very unhappy indeed. The members of the chorus struggle with

¹Ibid., p. 215.
²Ibid., p. 218.
³Scene IV; Sophocles: The Oedipus Cycle, p. 221.
the problem of his wretched plight and come up with a solution that reveals a certain ingenuity rather rare in the utterances of the chorus. They attribute Haimon's troubles to 

\[ \text{Love, unconquerable} \]
\[ \text{Waster of rich men...}^1 \]

These words seem to imply that romance is a toy which only the wealthy can afford — another allusion to the humble status of the chorus and of the less affluent theatregoers who are luckily too poor for such unwholesome amusements.

The third ode\(^2\) is sung in a somewhat sentimental mood inspired by the unhappy love affair. The wistful feelings evinced by the song seem to mirror the broken hearted mood of the spectators, who feel sorry for Antigone and who have a childish impulse to rush down on the proscenium in order to rescue her from the ghastly king. The rebellious thoughts of the theatregoers find expression in the protest of the leader of the chorus who says:

\[ \text{But I can no longer stand in awe of this,} \]
\[ \text{Nor, seeing what I see, keep back my tears.} \]
\[ \text{Here is Antigone, passing to that chamber} \]
\[ \text{Where all find sleep at last.}^3 \]

The Sophoclean chorus, which is often so niggardly in the expression of its admiration, does bestow a kind of muted commendation on Antigone, to whom it says:

\[ ^1\text{Ibid., p. 218.} \]
\[ ^2\text{Ibid., p. 218.} \]
\[ ^3\text{Ibid., p. 219.} \]
Yet not unpraised, not without a kind of honor
You walk at last into the underworld;
Untouched by sickness, broken by no sword.
What woman has ever found your way to death?¹

But after thus extolling the nobility of Antigone's
ethis, the chorus returns to its more natural task of explor­
ing the baffling problem of guilt in the following lines
addressed to Antigone:

You have passed beyond human daring
and come at last
Into a place of stone where justice sits.
I cannot tell
What shape of your father's guilt
appears in this.²

These lines reveal an exploration of the moral taint that
the heroine has inherited. They follow the earlier passage
praising the nobility of her ethos, which, by contrast,
throws into deeper shadow the indiscernible outlines of her
inscrutable guilt.

The fourth ode mirrors the growing despondency of the
audience. The members of the chorus reveal their resignation
to the dawning disaster and betray their hopeless mood by
their inability to think of any helpful solution to the
problems. Their painfully frustrated emotion of compassion
is blended with a deep feeling of piety. When contemplating
the heroism with which Antigone struggles against Creon's
blasphemous edict, they are moved by a feeling profounder

¹Ibid., p. 219.
²Ibid., p. 220.
than the love of which they sang in a previous ode. As Mr. Whitman says,

The ancients may indeed have regarded formal pollution as a fairly serious matter.¹

There is something of the martyr in our heroine. Whitman speaks

...of the harsh-spoken and reckless inward religious fire of Antigone.

He adds that she

...embodies a kind of sainthood, whose intensity and ferocity, perhaps even more than her actual deeds, brought about her martyrdom.²

Mr. Whitman, who elaborates this religious notion in his discussion of the conversation³ between Antigone and the chorus, points out that she seems to be a vessel filled with some kind of spiritual significance. As he says,

...she compares herself to Niobe, who seems to have been a peculiarly significant figure for Sophocles. In the Electra too, the heroine compares herself to Niobe, and says she counts herself a goddess. And here, in answer to Antigone, the chorus says that Niobe was a goddess.⁴

¹Whitman, Sophocles, p. 92.
²Ibid., p. 92.
³Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 219.
⁴Whitman, Sophocles, p. 93. Whitman is referring to El 150.
Most of the spectators, who are prepared to discover a saint in Antigone, hope for a miracle that will induce the gods to intercede in her behalf. When the seer, Teiresias, suddenly emerges and attempts to rescue her, he is doing exactly what was expected of him.

A modern reader might think that the sudden appearance of the seer is completely unmotivated. It is true, this unanticipated introduction of the prophet into the dramatic tale, represents a theatrical device which a modern playwright would try to eschew. But a criticism of Sophocles on this score evinces a misunderstanding of the purposes of the antique stage. The audience is supposed to be the Theban public, which scrutinizes every act of the ruler Creon and which takes it for granted that a king can enjoy no privacy. Whatever Creon does is supposed to be well known to everyone. Since the death sentence which the king has passed is a matter of common knowledge, it is only natural that Teiresias should have been well acquainted with this melancholy affair and that he, as a seer, should wish to intervene in so terrible a miscarriage of justice.

It seems difficult to agree with Whitman, who takes umbrage at the entrance of Teiresias and who formulates his objection in the following words:

At face value, this seems a little melodramatic, an eleventh hour arrival of rescue. The common assumption is that the gods assert themselves in the interest of justice.
Yet if one interprets the Teiresias scene thus, the conclusion inevitably follows that the gods, who are supposed to be justifying their existence, are either malign or hopelessly incompetent. ... If they merely wished to punish Creon, there was no need to send Teiresias, or do anything at all, for the steps in the human action are all perfectly self-sufficient: Creon kills Antigone, Haimon in despair kills himself, and Eurydice, who enters solely to add her drop of gall to Creon's cup, takes her own life in sorrow for her son.

This unhappy criticism reveals an unfortunate application of Aristotle's dicta concerning probability and necessity. Teiresias does fulfill several very important functions, one of which is the vindication of the spectator's feeling that Antigone embodies some kind of spiritual significance. In another respect, Teiresias is the necessary instrument in the achievement of two seemingly contradictory goals - the revelation of the hidden goodness in Creon and the public humiliation of the ruler, whose abasement is demanded by the Attic audience.

When Creon attempted to justify his conduct before his son, the ruler's speech seemed faintly to suggest certain amiable qualities not immediately obvious. The king's pity for the plight of his son made it a little difficult for the ruler to defend his policy of hardness. His half-conscious

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1Whitman, Sophocles, p. 94.
2Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 211.
feeling of guilt rendered clumsy and abortive his usual skill in marshaling his intellectual arguments. The son's grief moved the father with an ill-defined wish to change his decision. The mildness of the ruler's temperament produces in him a certain instability, which enables Teiresias to work on the king's feelings. The ruler is soon persuaded to reverse the death sentence.

Of course, the king's outrageous self-esteem makes it inconceivable that he should betray his change of heart before Teiresias. This vanity is precisely the quality which readers expect to find in Creon, for he is essentially a soft-hearted man posing as a hard-fisted and efficacious ruler. An egregious conceit causes Creon to identify himself too much with the notion of the ruthless executive - a role that is really foreign to his rather gentle nature. Sophocles' appraisal of Creon's shallowness represents a marvelous study of psychology.

The ruler's self-complacency makes it impossible for him to betray his change of heart to Teiresias, who has scolded him in that merciless manner so characteristic of prophets. But the good work begun by the prophet is completed by the leader of the chorus, who says to Creon:
Go quickly: free Antigone from her vault  
And build a tomb for the body of Polyneices.

Creon reveals his vacillating nature when he asks,  
"You would have me do this?" The leader answers with a firmness that contrasts so dramatically with the weakness of the king:

Creon, yes!  
And it must be done at once...

When the leader of the chorus intercedes with Creon on behalf of Antigone, his words represent the voice of the Theban people, who are the spectators in the theatre. She is for them a marvelous vessel filled with great spiritual significance. She is their saint.

Even Creon seems to share some of this sentiment after the metamorphosis worked on his changeable emotions, for he seems to be swept up by the wave of religious feeling that moves the Theban people - the excited crowds in the amphitheatre. He reverses his verdict, explaining his state of uncertainty that impels him to change his mind:

My mind misgives -  
The laws of the gods are mighty, and a man must serve them  
To the last day of his life!

The spectators are exultant because he has been suddenly forced to see the light. The cruel and hated blasphemer has

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1Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 229.

2Ibid., p. 229.
unexpectedly been converted. At last, they have gained a victory over him because he has been compelled to accede to their pious world-view. They have conquered with the help of the leader of the chorus, who revealed the truth to the king. A strange mood, mingled of an exuberant awareness of victory and an overflowing emotion of religious rapture, sweeps like a tidal wave over the excited audience, whose buoyant feelings gush marvelously forth in the ecstatic hymn sounded by the chorus.\footnote{Sophocles, \textit{The Oedipus Cycle}, p. 230.} What magnificent dramaturgy!

A mystical exaltation causes the populace of Thebes—that is to say, the excited throngs that pack the amphitheatre—to break out into a mood of thanksgiving. Believing their Antigone saved, they would like to send up to Dionysus a song expressive of their rejoicing. It is as if they were singing, when the chorus addresses to Dionysus a hymn of praise before the Exodus.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 230.} The leader of the chorus chants:

\begin{quote}
Io Fire! Chorister of the throbbing stars! \\
O purest among the voices of the night! \\
Thou son of God, blaze for us,
\end{quote}

to which the chorus answers:

\begin{quote}
Come with choric rapture of circling Maenads \\
Who cry \textit{Io Iacche!} \\
\textit{God of many names}.
\end{quote}

The modern reader still recaptures something of the thrill of
the ancient Maenads, aimlessly but ecstatically running over the countryside. It is as if an unseen torrent carried the spectator along like a piece of driftwood. The theatregoer seems like one uplifted, as he loses himself in a state of exaltation. In the sudden upsurge of emotion, he seems to have lost his trite, banal, everyday identity and to have been reborn a native of the marvelous fairy city of Thebes. He is "the individual effacing himself through entering a strange body." It seems to him that he is on fire with a glow that he caught from the inspiration of the chorus.

This is the chorus described by Nietzsche in words which seem to appertain to the pre-Aeschylean drama but which are really supposed to be relevant to the entire antique tragedy. As the German philosopher says,

"The dithyrambic chorus... is a chorus of the transformed, who have forgotten their civic past and social rank, who have become timeless servants of their god and live outside all social spheres."

This same impassioned self-forgetfulness not only overcomes the members of the chorus but overwhelms all of the spectators who imagine themselves citizens of a society long hidden in the abysses of time. In this role they become

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1Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Chapter VIII.
2Ibid., Chapter VIII.
a community of unconscious actors all of whom see one another as enchanted.¹

The ecstatic song of the members of the exuberant chorus proves that they believe Antigone to be safe. They are, as it were, blinded by their extravagant joy. Overly happy as they are, they continue, for some time, to be uninformed of Antigone's sad fate. Their ignorance of her melancholy plight can be discerned in the speech uttered by their leader in answer to the announcement made by a messenger who comes to report the suicide of Haimon. The leader of the chorus, who fails to understand the depressing words of the messenger, puts the question: "Your words hint at sorrow: what is your news for us?" When it is made clear that Haimon has killed himself and when it is explained that his death resulted from despondency over the suicide of Antigone, it becomes obvious that the fair hopes of every one have been shattered.

The leader of the chorus becomes very moving, when he acts as if he were unacquainted with the untimely end of the heroine. He seems to prove that he is not one of the performers, who might be cognizant of the plot and who might be in on the secret of her death. It is as if he knew no more of the tragedy than the rest of the spectators. Both he and the spectators are overwhelmed with the same shock and the same surprise, on hearing the appalling news. A

¹Ibid., Chapter VIII.
further bond of sympathy has been forged between the chorus and the audience, who are all Thebans sharing in the identical unhappy fate.

All of the sanguine expectations expressed in the last hymn to Dionysus now lie in the dust. It is with complete justice that Mr. Pohlenz asserts:

Nash Kreons Sinnesanderung singt der Chor, von freudiger Hoffnung bewegt, einen lebhaften Gebetshymnos an Bakchos unmittelbar vor der Katastrophe, für uns voll "tragischer Ironie."

The modern readers may wonder whether Sophocles has not mingled something else with this tragic irony. Remembering the reckless Maenad gaiety which Euripides describes in The Bacchae and reflecting on the insane ecstasy of Agave, who unwittingly helps kill her own son, today's readers may discover vaguely ominous overtones in this religious ode of Antigone.

The times seem indeed pregnant with desaster. Presently Creon's wife puts an end to her own life, deeply discouraged over the death of her son. A feeling of dread seems to hang heavy in the streets of Thebes. There seems to be a universal mood of terror uneasily mixed with an intolerable sorrow. This tragic state of mind dominates the souls of the spectators, who still fancy themselves natives of unhappy Thebes. The people in the auditorium

1Pohlenz, Die Griechische Tragödie, p. 201.
forget their paltry, tedious, everyday identities as they lose themselves in the anguish of the populace of the prehistoric city. A mystical experience seems to widen the field of vision and to afford a glimpse of the lot of writhing humanity. An excitation of feeling broadens the scope of apprehension and unfetters the faculty for compassion. It is a sublime state of mind resulting from the purgation of pity and fear— an esthetic mood discussed by Aristotle in an overly cryptic passage, which Bernays analyzes in the following terms:

"It is only when the actual [material, external] fear operates indirectly through sympathy with a person, that the process of purgation can take place in the spectator's mind, by the individual self being enlarged into the self of all humanity, and so coming face to face with the terribly sublime laws of the universe and their incomprehensible power, which envelops mankind, and being penetrated by that sort of fear which as an ecstatic shudder in presence of the universe ["dem All"] is pleasurable in the highest way and without disturbance."

The Aristotelian katharsis involves something other than the bare pity and fear which some member of the cast inspires in an individual spectator. The purgation of emotions implies more than can be discerned from a casual reading of the Poetics.

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1 Bosanquet quotes these lines in his History of Aesthetic on p. 236. He borrows this passage from Bernays' Zwei Abhandlungen über die Aristotelische Theorie des Dramas, (Berlin: 1880, first published in 1857), p. 74.
Sophocles knows how to bring the series of catastrophes to a magnificent culmination when Creon appears, at the climax, bearing his dead son in his hands. The leader of the chorus exclaims:

But here is the King himself: oh look at him, Bearing his own damnation in his arms.¹

When Creon complains,

Haimon my son, so young, so young to die, I was the fool, not you; and you died for me, the leader answers,

That is the truth; but you were late in learning it. Presently Creon continues,

O God, I am sick with fear. Are there no swords here? Has no one a blow for me.

These sorrowful words of Creon imply his own public humiliation before the crowd of his subjects - the throng of spectators in the auditorium. It is worth while to compare his unhappy plight with the final abasement of Oedipus, who is so helpless that he has to be led away like a sick leper before the eyes of all. The last act of mortification seems to be demanded by the chorus and the spectators, who are always too ready to bring in a verdict of hybris and who want to see spiritual arrogance chastised.

But does such a judgment represent Sophocles' own opinion? Surely not. There is something exceedingly

¹Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle*, p. 235.
pathetic in Creon's last words during the Exodus, which inspire in the modern reader a feeling of compassion rather than a desire for castigation. Such a cruel verdict may be brought in by the chorus, which is unable to penetrate into the arcana of evil. But Sophocles seems to be intimating something else to the more sensitive theatregoers who may be able to appreciate his message and who may understand some of the unspoken ideas contained in the drama. The playwright seems to be suggesting the need for infinite compassion, if we are to resolve ever so little the mysterious enigma of guilt.

Whatever, may be the hidden moral in the words of the chorus, no one can deny that Sophocles uses with superlative skill this part of the cast. The playwright reserves for it the last few lines of the play in order to render less unpleasant and less abrupt the spectator's transition from the lofty, poetic realm of dramatic illusion to the prosaic, distressing every-day world. When the stage has been vacated and the play seems over, the leader of the chorus makes it clear that he is not a member of the magic world conjured up on the proscenium but that he is an ordinary spectator, a mere banal human being, like the thousands of others crowding the auditorium. The leader talks directly to the audience, as if to say:

Now it is time for us theatregoers to relax and to talk to each other in our casual, every-day way, for we are about to return to the trivial commonplace rounds of our daily conventional existence.
An unimaginative person might find something absurd in this ancient tale about a man who murders his father and marries his mother. Yet the modern reader takes this drama as seriously as did the audience in ancient Athens. He takes a sober view of the events described in this play, because he contemplates them through the eyes of the chorus. Even though he may be resting in a chair and poring over the play, there subsists between him and the members of the chorus the same understanding that once existed between them and the Athenian audience more than two thousand years ago.

Sophocles, who is aware of the role of the audience, makes it possible for the people in the auditorium to think of themselves as natives of Thebes. Even at the beginning of the play, the playgoers vaguely imagine that they might be numbered among the host of suppliants thronging the doorway of Oedipus' palace. It is easy to entertain this phantasy because no footlights separate the spectators from the performers on the stage. In so far as the spectator indulges in this conceit, to that extent he already regards himself as a citizen of Thebes and casts himself in the role assigned to him by Sophocles.

The unhappy petitioners that are crowding the portal
of the palace are asking Oedipus to help them in their
predicament - an outbreak of the plague that is laying waste
the countryside. The king had already taken steps to meet
the emergency, for he had sent Creon as an ambassador to
Delphi in order to learn what measures should be taken to
combat the evil. Creon now returns with the information
given him by the oracle. As Creon approaches the palace, he
asks Oedipus: "...should we go in?" The king answers:

...Let them all hear it.
It is for them I suffer, more than for myself.¹

Not only do Oedipus' words allude to the crowd before his
palace, but they also seem to refer to the thousands in the
auditorium, as if the spectators were his countless subjects.
Not only is Sophocles suggesting that his theatregoers look
on themselves as natives of Thebes, but he is also endeavor­
ing to make it seem plausible that such a multitude of
Thebans should be overhearing an interview of so privy a
nature.

Creon reports what he learned at Delphi. The oracle
told him that the visitation had resulted from the murder of
Laios, former ruler of Thebes, and that the disaster would
continue to afflict the people until the time when the
assassin would be caught and duly punished.

The unhappiness of the petitioners finds expression

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 7.
in the melancholy chant\(^1\) of the chorus, which sings of the
despondency of humble people helpless in the clutches of an
overwhelming catastrophe. The chorus complains: "...our
lives like birds take wing."

The chorus grieves over the "pallid children laden
with death," the infants that live no more and lie "unwept
in the stony ways." The tone of pathetic despair seems to
pass into a feeling of general panic when the chorus moans:
"Fear unjoins me, the roots of my heart tremble." These
words sound like a lamentation that the spectators themselves
might have uttered, for they still can remember, with painful
vividness, the plague that recently attacked Attica.\(^2\) Their
lively recollection of the horrible event makes it distress­
ingly easy for them to think of themselves as Thebans pass­
ing through a similar crisis.

Despite their mood of abject misery, the members of
the chorus continue to look for some way out of the predica­
ment. That which occurs to them is trite and banal and
points up the tragic futility of trying to cope with an
overwhelming disaster. As they flounder about helplessly,
they propose invoking the help of Athene, Artemis and Apollo.

\(^1\) Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle*, p. 10.

\(^2\) In the opinion of most scholars, Sophocles' description
of the pestilence was supposed to commemorate the Athenian
plague which broke out in 430. See Whitman, *Sophocles*, p. 49.
Toward the end of the song, the chorus, which seems suddenly able to shake off its depressed feelings, derives unexpected cheer from the thought of gods who might intervene in this time of trouble. It chants:

O scarlet god, O golden-banded brow,
O Theban Bacchus in a storm of Maenads,
Whirl upon Death, that all the Undying hate!
Come with blinding torches, come in joy.¹

During the singing of these last few lines, Oedipus unexpectedly appears and responds to the entreaty of the chorus with the following words: "Is this your prayer? It may be answered." Even the modern reader must stop to admire the skill with which Sophocles weaves the last lines of the choric song into the texture of the dialogue. Oedipus seems to be replying to a petition made by the chorus, as if it were a delegation representing the unhappy people of Thebes.

He proceeds to discuss with the chorus the scheme he has devised to capture the assassin of Laios. Even though his words are addressed to the chorus, he does not use the informal language which so small a group of listeners might expect. His thoughts are couched in long and pompous periods, which suggest an inconsistency - an absurdity, which one unconsciously tries to explain with the inescapable supposition that he is talking past the few members of the chorus and lecturing to the thousands in the amphitheatre. When he says:

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 12.
"I make this proclamation to all Thebans,"¹ he seems to be talking to the audience, as if it were the Theban populace. As he pursues his speech in an ominous vein, he underlines the need for catching this vicious criminal, who is skulking somewhere. The ruler's seemingly stern words, which appear to be directed at the audience, imply some ill-defined accusation, which is aimed at no one in particular. The crowd of spectators stirs uneasily, as if moved by a vague guilty feeling that they should discover the transgressor in their own midst. Their ill-defined anxiety is reflected in the speech presently made by the leader of the chorus, who says:

Since I am under oath, my lord, I swear
I did not do the murder. I can not name the murderer.²

These words express the puzzlement of the audience, which wonders who the criminal might be and which debates with itself this question as nervously as does the reader of a modern detective story. The bafflement of the audience is reflected by the members of the chorus, who cast about for some way of discovering the assassin and who, in their study of the problem, reveal their characteristic obsessive concern with the problem of guilt. They suggest to Oedipus that a prophet might possess the information necessary to trace the killer:

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 12.
A lord clairvoyant to the lord Apollo,
As we all know, is the skilled Teiresias.
One might learn much about this from him, Oedipus.¹

The chorus is voicing the thoughts of the little people in the audience, the Athenian commoners, who, in accordance with their orthodox piety, would be the first to suggest an interview with a helpful seer.

The prophet, Teiresias, is summoned to the palace. He goes to the royal residence but refuses, at first, to divulge what he knows. After prolonged hesitation he finally reveals the secret that seems too horrible to be disclosed. Accusing the king of being the murderer and adding that there is something vile in the royal family, Teiresias causes the king to break out in a violent rage. The king insults Teiresias, and presently both are involved in a heated argument.

The chorus now evinces the typical anxiety of the humble Athenian, who is frightened by vicious quarrels among important people in a high station. Understanding the social anarchy that can result, the little man knows that he himself is the principle victim in a time of chaos. Feeling happiest when things are serene, he desires to secure peace, even when it must be obtained by concessions. The chorus expresses the wishes of the humble Athenian spectator by

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 15.
...its great desire to make things smooth, to effect a compromise, and to reconcile opposing powers; and its favorite maxims are that "there is much to be said on both sides," and that "each may learn a great deal from the other."

The leader of the chorus mirrors the typical pacific mood of the audience when he exhorts Oedipus and Teiresias to patch up their difference of opinion. The leader says:

We can not see that his words or yours Have been spoken except in anger, Oedipus, And of anger we have no need. How can god's will Be accomplished best? That is what most concerns us.

The leader of the chorus urges the two disputants not to lose their tempers, because a display of exasperation interferes with the serene and level-headed search for the truth. The leader's interest in this kind of investigation reveals his characteristic temper in a Sophoclean tragedy.

Even though Oedipus had summoned Teiresias to study the facts, the king cannot face the painful reality. Instead, Oedipus makes angry and unkind references to the unfortunate condition of the prophet, who has been bereft of his sight. Teiresias answers:

Listen to me. You mock my blindness, do you? But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind.²

Teiresias prepares the spectator for the tragic end of the

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¹Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, p. 154. Mr. Haigh borrows his two quotations from El. 369-371 and Ant. 724-725.

²Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 21.
drama, when the king will put out both of his eyes - a
magnificent, even if almost unbearable, symbol of the spiri-
tual blindness that renders man tragically impotent to descry
the nature of evil.

The quarrel between Oedipus and Teiresias seems at
times like an exercise in logic and takes on occasionally the
character of a sharp argument between two heated attorneys.
Gilbert Murray seems to have scenes like this in mind when he
speaks

...of those long scenes of argument which
superficial critics have attributed to the
Athenian taste for litigation.¹

But are these critics really so superficial? Is not their
interpretation in complete consonance with the ideas suggested
in this paper? If the Attic audience has an imagination
endowed with sufficient energy to picture itself as the popu-
lace in prehistoric Thebes, certainly the throng of spectators
is gifted with a fancy powerful enough to think of itself as
a crowd watching the proceedings in a lawsuit. The antique
theatregoer, unlike the modern, is always more or less aware
of the rest of the audience. The ancient spectator -
sociable as he is like all Athenians - enjoys making believe
that he is a member of a gathering that studies the matching
of wits in a court of law. The playwright is endeavoring to
study the paradoxical nature of Oedipus' guilt and wishes to

remind his spectators that they are really jurors trying the case of the hero. In this manner, Sophocles makes sure that his audience takes an even livelier and still more vigorous part in the evolution of the drama.

If Teiresias and Oedipus have contended at times in the manner of two angry attorneys, the chorus reminds one of jurymen confused by the arguments. It says:

Bewildered as a blown bird, my soul hovers and cannot find
Foothold in this debate, or any reason or rest of mind.  

This state of puzzlement is made painful by the devotion which the members of the chorus feel for Oedipus. They ask: "Shall I believe my great lord criminal...?" They are giving utterance to the bewilderment of the spectators, who are trying to identify the assassin but who, nevertheless, hate to see any harm come to their beloved hero. They try to solace themselves with the phantasy that the accusation of Teiresias is baseless. The members of the chorus try to derive comfort from the same thought, when they say: "These evil words are lies."  

It is easy to misconstrue the pensive mood of the members of the chorus. Mr. Whitman says that their thoughtful state of mind serves to interrupt the hurry of the

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1 Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 25.
2 Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 25.
dramatic action. He argues that they are

...a mirror of the normal, non-tragic outlook, always trying to retard or stop the action, but only succeeding in accentuating its superb and fatal rush.¹

While this observation is, on one level, an excellent esthetic appraisal of the emotional effect of a tragic chorus, such a critique is a poor diagnosis of its actual function. It would be more nearly accurate to say that the chorus delays the action in order to stop and think.

After the conclusion of the ode, Creon appears on the scene and commences a speech beginning with the words, "Men of Thebes." A clever ambiguity can be discovered in the expression "Men of Thebes," which may be addressed either to the chorus or to the entire audience. Sophocles is once again suggesting that the theatre-goers are really inhabitants of the historic city of Oedipus.

Presently Oedipus appears on the scene. He accuses Creon of scheming to seize the throne and of planning to assassinate its present incumbent. Oedipus seems to suspect that Creon and Teiresias are in league in a rebellious conspiracy. Creon and the king embark on a dispute which sounds, for all the world, like an argument between the prosecution and the attorney for the defense. Sophocles does not intend this debate for an idle exhibition of wit,

¹Whitman, Sophocles, p. 31.
but is obviously inviting his spectators to think of themselves as jurors at an imaginary trial. He wants them to size up the evidence and to pass a tentative verdict. It is another technique of his for enlisting the collaboration of the spectator in the creation of the dramatic illusion. It is a device that is highly suitable to his purposes, for he is prone to think of tragedy as an exploration of guilt. This artifice may seem a little factitious to us moderns, but it is exceedingly effective in ancient Athens where important trials are often decided by huge juries whose members may number in the hundreds. It is not too difficult for the audience to think of itself as such a big crowd of jurors.

The members of Sophocles' audience are taking a live interest in the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon. The little man knows that an argument between two important people can upset the social equilibrium and he understands that he is the principal victim in times of chaos. The spectators, who feel apprehensive, would like to do something to settle the perilous and vicious dispute. Acting on their behalf, the leader of the chorus speaks a few soothing words, as he very gently urges Oedipus to listen to the good arguments of Creon:

This is well said, and a prudent man would ponder it.
Judgments too quickly formed are dangerous.¹

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 31.
The leader of the chorus is asking the two others to be less ill-tempered and is urging them to think the matter over rationally in a mood of quiet sobriety. He is revealing his usual propensity to seek the intelligent solution of a difficult problem.

He intercedes once again in the quarrel, saying: "Now, my lords, be still." The use of the words "my lords" proves that he regards himself as a commoner, a representative of the great mass of the people occupying seats in the amphitheatre.

Hoping to throw oil on troubled waters, he suggests that Queen Iocaste might be able to settle the argument. He also points out that this great lady is now approaching them.

Iocaste, who now enters, reproaches the disputants for their selfish brawl and explains that such vulgar behavior is especially inconsiderate during the city's great crisis: "...Thebes is sick to death."

The audience identifies the illness of the city with its own unhappy state of mind, distressed by the plight of the king. Is he really guilty of the charges Teiresias brings against him? Could the king be innocent? Is there some way of demonstrating his freedom from culpability? Oedipus would like to answer these questions. Hoping to throw some light on these matters, he cross-examines some people and debates

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1 Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 32.
the painful subject in a long conversation with Iocaste.

These talks, in which the king participates, seem to be very confidential. Does it seem absurd for a huge crowd of Thebans to be eavesdropping on interviews of so privy a nature? The Athenian theatregoer, who does not seem to be distressed by the inconceivability of the situation, thinks of a king as a public character, whose most trivial gesture is open to everyone's scrutiny. Even nowadays there still exist monarchies in which the most insignificant affairs of the sovereign are elaborately discussed by his loyal and loving subjects.

The most intimate troubles of Oedipus are a matter of immediate concern to the Theban people. They are unhappy when he reveals to Iocaste his horrible suspicion that he is guilty of parricide and incest. He explains to her that he may be really infected with this moral contamination, the consequences of which terrify him. He says:

Rather let me vanish from the race of men Than know the abomination destined me!¹

The chorus breaks in with

We too, my lord, have felt dismay at this. But there is hope: you have yet to hear the shepherd.

The term of address, "my lord," proves that the leader of the chorus regards himself as one of the commoners. The rest of

¹Sophocles, Oedipus Cycle, p. 42.
the speech made by him shows the chorus well-acquainted with the king's most personal troubles, which are matters of common knowledge and which are a source of distress to everyone.

As Oedipus and Iocaste go on with their painful discussion, they continue to hope that he is innocent of the two crimes. Up to now little palpable evidence of his guilt has been discovered. The suspicion was based largely on the utterances of Teiresias and seemed, in some obscure way, related to the prediction once made by the priestess at Delphi - the prophecy that Laios would meet with a violent end at the hands of his own son. The king and queen try to comfort themselves with the reflection that the pronouncements of priests and soothsayers are essentially fraudulent. Iocaste says:

...From now on, where oracles are concerned, I would not waste a second thought on any.

After thinking her remark over, Oedipus answers,

You may be right...¹

These skeptical, irreligious observations seem impious and blasphemous to the humble, devout men and women in the auditorium. In order to appreciate their deeply pious temperament, we must recollect that they will ostracize Anaxagoras for his scurrilous remarks attacking the divinity of the planets and we must recall that these orthodox people, in a

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 43.
few decades, will convict Socrates of atheism. The annoyed spectators, who have an involuntary urge to jump up and to remonstrate loudly against the false agnosticism of the king and queen, are almost bursting with an indignant rage, which finds expression in the words of the chorus:

    Let me be reverent in the ways of right,
    Lowly the paths I journey on;
    
    . . .
    The tyrant is a child of pride
    Who drinks from his great sickening cup
    Recklessness and vanity,
    Until from his high crest headlong
    He plummets to the dust of hope.
    
    . . .
    Haughtiness and the high hand of disdain
    Tempt and outrage God's holy law;
    And any mortal who dares hold
    No immortal power in awe
    Will be caught up in a net of pain:
    
    . . .
    Shall we lose faith in Delphi's obscurities,
    We who have heard the world's core
    Discredited, and the sacred wood
    Of Zeus at Elis praised no more?
    
    . . .
    Their hearts no longer know Apollo,
    And reverence for the gods has died away. 1

    It is understandable that the theatregoers should enjoy this denunciation of atheistic intellectuals. But does this unkind verdict touch on the real wrong that poisons the life of the king? Does a profound thinker such as Sophocles really attribute so much weight to a haphazard disrespectful remark about the oracles? Surely, the playwright is trying to suggest that the observations of the chorus are mere conventional criticisms - obvious statements - the very

superficiality of which forcefully implies the inexplicable nature of the actual hidden illness contaminating the life of the ruler.

Oedipus is tormented by the dread that he has been guilty of parricide. Wondering whether he killed his father and asking himself whether his father was Laios, Oedipus casts about for some device that will allay his agonizing fears. He thinks that he can clear himself of blame if he can prove that he is not the son of Laios. In order to verify this hypothesis, he cross-examines a messenger who comes from Corinth and who reveals the fact that Oedipus, while still a baby, had been handed to the messenger by a Theban shepherd.

Oedipus now plays with the phantasy that he was an abandoned peasant child and that he was a foundling discovered by the shepherd. It relieves the king to entertain these ideas, for they suggest that he might be of common stock and they seem to imply that he is not the son of Laios. There is something very pathetic in the way Oedipus fondles the hypothesis of his lowly origin - this soothing supposition which helps temporarily to dispel his terrifying fears.

In the third ode,¹ we find the members of the chorus trying to encourage Oedipus. They seem tentatively to agree

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 56.
with his theory of his humble Theban birth when they con­
gratulate him on being a native of the beautiful country sur­
rounding Thebes. This interpretation of the ode may seem to
contradict the line which tells of Oedipus' infancy and
which calls him a "royal child." But this passage probably
refers to his future royal destiny rather than to his birth
in the house of Laios.

The third ode, which is addressed to Oedipus and
which seems calculated to comfort him, is filled with the joy
inspired by the thought that he was born in the charming
country environing Thebes. The chorus sings:

If ever the coming time were known
To my heart's pondering,
Kithairon, now by Heaven I see the torches
At the festival of the next full moon,
And see the dance, and hear the choir sing
A grace to your gentle shade:
Mountain where Oedipus was found,
O mountain guard of a noble race!
May the god who heals us lend his aid,
And let that glory come to pass,
For our king's cradling-ground.

This song expresses the mood of the spectators, who
are fond of Oedipus and who hope that he is base-born, for
herein lies his one hope of salvation. It is possible that
the commoners in the auditorium enjoy this supposition, for
it seems to make him one of them. Sophocles appears to be
forging one more bond of sympathy for the hero in order to
work more effectively on the feelings of the theatregoers.

The happy song of the chorus puts the spectators

1Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 56.
temporarily in a cheerful state of mind. Their short-lived happiness reveals the skill of Sophocles, who knows how to achieve the effect of tragic irony by a clever use of the chorus. The transitory joy of the audience soon disappears in a painful anticlimax, which shocks everyone into an awareness of the guilt of Oedipus.

The third ode sung by the members of the chorus reveals their pleased frame of mind and evinces their ignorance of the dawning disaster. They are pretending not to be actors, who are supposed to be cognizant of the future evolution of the dramatic action. The members of the chorus are making believe that they are a mere part of the audience, which is still unacquainted with the balance of the plot. Sophocles thus cements the bond between them and the spectators, all of whom share in Thebes’ unhappy destiny.

In the fourth ode, the members of the chorus no longer find it possible to ignore the hideous truth. But their mood of horror is now tempered by a feeling of compassion - a gentle emotion still inspired by their devoted loyalty to Oedipus. They sing to the ruler:

Your splendor is fallen
I who saw your days call no man blest -
Your great days like ghosts gone.
...I weep the world’s outcast.

\[1\text{Ibid., p. 63.}\]
The bleak depression betrayed by this song reflects the commiseration of the spectators - a compassion which is an accurate "imitation" of the tormented pity faithful Theban citizens once did feel for their king in some legendary epoch before the dawn of history. So close is this "imitation" that the audience seems to be reenacting the ancient tragedy in a magical ritual. Imagining themselves natives of this mythical prehistoric city, the spectators are buoyed up in an exalted and mystical mood, which recalls the religious origin of Greek tragedy. In his discussion of *Oedipus Rex*, Francis Fergusson says:

> The nearest thing we have to this ritual sense of theatre is, I suppose, to be found at an Easter performance of the *Mattias Passion*.

Some kind of incantation has produced an enchantment so wonderful that the spectators behold everything transformed. They see the world in this new light, because they contemplate it through the eyes of the inspired chorus. As Nietzsche says,

> ...the audience of Attic tragedy discovered itself in the chorus of the orchestra... The chorus is the "ideal spectator" in as much as it is the only seer - seer of the visionary world of the proscenium.

An unaccustomed uprush of emotion inspires the

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2 Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, Chapter VIII.
spectators to imagine themselves natives of Thebes and causing them to forget their trite, every-day world, makes them oblivious of their ordinary, commonplace personalities. The theatregoers feel themselves one not only with Thebes but with all humanity, for their prosaic, finite identities have melted away in an all-encompassing ocean of pity and fear. An unlimited compassion is discernible in the line of the poem that bewails the fate of Oedipus:

...I weep the world's outcast.¹

Hellenic tragedies imply far more than can be learned from a hasty inspection of that passage in the Poetics which treats of the purgation of pity and fear and which is analyzed by Bernays in the following discussion:

It is only when the actual material, external fear operates indirectly through sympathy with a person, that the process of purgation can take place in the spectator's mind, by the individual self being enlarged into the self of all humanity, and so coming face to face with the terribly sublime laws of the universe and their incomprehensible power, which envelops mankind, and being penetrated by that sort of fear which as an ecstatic shudder in presence of the universe "dem All" is pleasurable in the highest way and without disturbance.²

The feelings of commiseration and apprehension

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 65.

deteriorate into a mood of helpless sorrow in the fourth ode, during which the members of the chorus contemplate the desolation of their king. Disconsolately giving up all attempts to solve the hopeless problem, they reveal a consciousness of defeat, which reveals the inevitability of the coming ruin.

The final catastrophe represents the culmination of Oedipus' continuing efforts to learn the guilty truth. When the scales finally fall from his eyes, that which he beholds is so intolerable that he is irresistibly compelled to blind himself. As he says,

How could I bear to see
When all my sight was horror everywhere?¹

This act of self-mutilation seems to imply that things can be too ugly to contemplate. But it can also be construed as an allegory about the spiritual blindness of man, who is too myopic to scrutinize the incognizable nature of guilt and the undecipherable enigma of evil. This interpretation of the implied moral seems to be corroborated by the line which the chorus sings in *Antigone* and which tells of finite, limited, impotent human beings who

...walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.²

When Oedipus appears eyeless on the stage, theatre-goers experience a sudden shock which slowly dies away into

¹Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle*, p. 70.
a sensation more or less akin to agony. On the one hand, people would like to cry out in horror, but, on second thought, they seem impelled to run up to him and to comfort him. The spectators obtain deliverance from their anguish by permitting the leader of the chorus to express in words their painful thoughts and by allowing him to reproach Oedipus with such infinite gentleness that the very mildness of the criticism reveals a heartbreaking sympathy.

Oedipus!
What madness came upon you, what daemon
Leaped on your life with heavier
Punishment than a mortal man can bear?¹

The spectators are saying to themselves:

This is ghastly! Can I not do something - anything - to relieve the situation?

Their emotions are almost unbearable. The leader of the chorus lessens the pressure of these pent up feelings by giving them a vent and by addressing Oedipus in the same note of remonstrance tempered with unlimited pity - a strange blend of emotions that is as paradoxical as it is moving.

The pain of his anguished compassion turns unconsciously into rage and causes his reproof to sound sterner than was his original intent. He is reminiscent of an unhappy mother who feels so bitterly sorry for her sick child that she unwittingly begins to scold. He says to Oedipus:

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¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 68.
What god was it drove you to rake black
Night across your eyes?

This speech embodies in words the unuttered outcry
of the audience, which sees in the leader of the chorus the
mouthpiece expressing its unspoken emotions. And since the
audience regards him in this light, his words also have
power to suggest and to evoke the tragic mood.

His speeches evince tenderness of feeling not unmixed
with the bitterness of criticism - an accusatory tone natural
to him, for he sees himself constantly impelled to search out
the element of guilt. The sting of the implied censure
annoys Creon who protests:

I have not come to mock you, Oedipus,
Or to reproach you, either.¹

The modern reader wonders why the members of the
chorus should upbraid Oedipus. Even though their suggested
criticism seems to be inspired by some supposed hybris,
their unkind thoughts are softened by a deep tenderness
resulting from the belief that his hybris has been expiated
with tribulation and humiliation. His public abasement is
not only reflected in the abjectness with which the blinded
Oedipus allows himself to be led on the stage but is also
mirrored in the lines in which he exclaims:

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 73.
...For the love of God, conceal me
Somewhere far from Thebes; or kill me; or hurl me.
Into the sea, away from men's eyes for ever.
Come, lead me. You need not fear to touch me.
Of all men, I alone can bear this guilt.\(^1\)

The plight of Oedipus, can be compared to the humiliation of
Creon, who, at the end of Antigone, humbly permits himself to be led away, prostrate with grief.

The end of the drama seems to reveal the hard-heartedness of the chorus, which draws the following moral:

Men of Thebes: look upon Oedipus.
This is the king who solved the famous riddle
And towered up, most powerful of men.
No mortal eyes but looked on him with envy,
Yet in the end ruin swept over him.
Let every man in mankind's frailty
Consider his last day: and let none
Presume on his good fortune until he find
Life, at his death, a memory without pain.\(^2\)

Do these lines, which are undeniably effective, provide a really good picture of Oedipus' guilt? Does this verdict, which surely seems a bit too pat, agree with Sophocles' own conception of the inscrutability of evil?

His true message may be appreciated by a few of the sensitive playgoers, even though the obvious moral is sufficient to satisfy the great majority of the spectators.

It is interesting to watch the leader of the chorus, who waits until the stage is vacated and who then addresses the final speech to the audience, as if to say:

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 72.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 78.
I am not an actor, but a mere theatregoer like you people. It is time for us spectators to talk to each other now that the play is over.
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

This last great work of Sophocles reflects the dazzling light of the Socratic era. It is astounding to observe how the rigid philosophic concepts are rendered pliable and how they are easily moulded by the skill of the dramatist.

The peculiar charm of this play stems, in part, from the very paradoxical nature of the synthesis with which the new rational insights are blended with the poetry of the traditional religion. The events described in this work are supposed to transpire in a holy place not far from Athens. Sophocles seems to wish to create the dramatic illusion that this sacred region is identical with the resort crowded by the spectators. In his stage directions, he asserts: "The scene, like the theater, is in the open air." In other words, the very character of the amphitheatre, which is built on a mountainside and which permits a view of surrounding hills, instils in the spectator an awareness of being out-of-doors and makes him seem conscious of being immediately in the open country where lies the holy scene of this play.

If the spectator is supposed to fancy himself a visitor to this scene, a difficulty at once obtrudes itself. It might seem to him that these mundane spectators, by
their very numbers, were profaning this region near the grove of the Furies. The audience might seem to him to be desecrating this place so sequestered that foreign travelers are not permitted to trespass here.

Two possible solutions suggest themselves to any one trying to resolve this dilemma. On the one hand, the spectator can think of himself as a lonely Athenian idly passing the time in this sacred neighborhood. Such a hypothesis is made plausible by the random visitors who do make their occasional appearance here, either singly or in small groups. If the spectator imagines himself an unaccompanied visitor to this secluded spot, he would overlook the crowd of theatre-goers, who by their very number would disturb the mystical solitude of the place. It would be natural for him to forget the throng, as he sinks into a lonely, though pious, reverie. Not thinking of himself as a member of the populace of some such city as Argos or Thebes, he would enjoy a state of mind unlike anything he experienced in some other dramas.

It is also conceivable that Sophocles does not always wish to evoke this lonely mood during the performance of Oedipus at Colonus. In some parts of this work, it seems that the playgoer is supposed to imagine himself a member of a huge congregation, which has gathered for a religious ceremony. He would then have to regard the audience as a vast throng of worshipers, who have come together to attend
a beautiful out-of-door service. In one place, Sophocles most certainly appears to cast the multitude of theatregoers in this pious role, for he permits the members of the chorus to turn to the audience and he allows them to sing to it a song extolling the sanctity of the place and hymning the praises of Dionysus.

The thoughts entertained by the playgoers find expression, as usual, in the utterances made by the members of the chorus, when they betray the horror evoked in them by the idea of parricide. When they accuse Oedipus of having wickedly murdered his father, the hero of the play answers:

...God in Heaven!
You strike again where I am hurt.

Then adding that there is "a just extenuation," he supplies the following words of explanation:

I did not know him: and he wished to murder me.
Before the law - before God - I am innocent.

The point which he is trying to make is further elucidated in the speech in which he explains to Creon:

"...I met my father in fight,
And knocked him down not knowing that I killed him."

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1Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, pp. 118 and 119.
2Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 111.
3Ibid., p. 134.
He then goes on to declare that he had not consciously intended to enter a matrimonial relationship with his mother. As he says, "...I would not have married her willingly."

These reflections of his make him feel that he has the right to pass on himself the verdict of "not guilty": "No: I shall not be judged an evil man..."

According to Oedipus, a man should be held responsible only for the acts that he has intentionally decided to perform. No one should be accountable for a guilt that he has not personally and consciously incurred. A person should not be held to blame for a guilt inherited from his parents; nor should he be censured for the evil deeds resulting from a curse that has been thrust upon him by someone else.

The point that Sophocles is emphasizing becomes very clear in the conversation between Antigone and Polynéices, who complains of the curse imposed on him by Oedipus. Polynéices moans that this malediction will cause him to die on the field of battle in the coming war with Thebes:

The dark road is before me; I must take it; ¹
Doomed by my father and his avenging Furies.

Antigone points out to Polynéices the folly of voluntarily undertaking an enterprise that will irrevocably turn out fatal. Even though she urges him to refrain from going to war, she fails to dissuade him from his purpose, for his

¹Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, p. 153.
vanity makes him afraid of appearing a coward in the eyes of his soldiers and his fellow generals. Antigone then pleads with him, "Then you have made up your mind to this, my brother?" Arguing her point by introducing the notion of choice and decision - a conception which philosophers will be slow to exploit - she continues to reason with him as follows: "...You go with open eyes to death!" She is pointing out to him that he is making a deliberate, though unnecessary, decision. Emphasizing the fact that he is making this choice knowingly, she is trying to make it clear that the moral problem can be studied rationally.

Polyneices, however, is too stupid to follow her line of reasoning. In his sluggish mind, he is obsessed with the foolish notion that he must enter the fated battle and that he must meet with a foredoomed death. An unavoidable catastrophe will destroy him - an ineluctable disaster will come to him in the wake of a curse thrust upon him by his father. Polyneices fails to understand that he can escape the irrational punishment of a blind fate by a conscious exercise of free will.

Sophocles is studying the type of moral responsibility which is associated with a rational, intelligent decision and which is not unrelated to the doctrine of free will. He now rejects the notion of a guilt which is inherited or which results from another's curse - an ethical
conception which leads immediately to baffling and unsolvable problems.

Arriving at new philosophic insights in regard to the problem of guilt, he now understands that its nature is immediately revealed to anyone examining his own soul. Anyone can determine the culpability or innocence of his acts by investigating the intention that preceded them. The simplest kind of introspection helps one to ascertain whether a decision had been made voluntarily and knowingly. No intelligent person would ask others to assess the measure of his guilt.

It now seems absurd to let the chorus estimate the nature of the hero's guilt, the quality of which can be discovered only by the hero himself. He is best suited to make the desired appraisal by a scrutiny of his own thoughts and motives, for he is the autonomous moral agent - an ethical concept with which Athens now becomes acquainted, after having graduated from a tribal morality.

The external judgment which the members of the chorus can pass now becomes irrelevant. Their evaluation of right and wrong, which had been based on their intuitive and traditional folkwisdom, is no longer interesting in the newly dawning age, which stresses intellectual understanding and rational insight. No one takes seriously the pronouncements uttered by the members of the chorus on the problem of guilt.
Since they fail to fulfill their characteristic and essential function, an incomprehension of their deeper significance makes it difficult to write fine dramas in the old-fashioned manner. A wonderful art-form is entering an eclipse as a result of the enlightenment, that is mirrored in this crowning work of Sophocles' old age.
CONCLUSION

Classicists are wont to declare that the chorus embodies the conscience of Attic people. But are these scholars aware of all that is implied by this assertion?

The utterances of the chorus mirror the ethical sentiments and the pious beliefs cherished by the Greek spectator. Its pronouncements reveal the moral notions and the religious ideas that present themselves to his mind when he tries to unriddle the problems posed by the drama and when he endeavors to resolve the contradictions suggested by the tragic action.

The spectator's speculations imply the ancient belief that unhappiness results from the expiation of some transgression. This ethical theory may seem an anachronistic superstition in the enlightened twentieth century. But the truth of the matter is that we moderns still betray an unconscious tendency to embrace this ancient theory. To verify this statement one need but eavesdrop on a knot of people heatedly engaged in gossip. The conversation may turn on the misconduct of someone. All those taking part in the discussion may hope in their hearts that poetic justice will be done and that the scoundrel will eventually meet with that which is coming to him.
The fifth-century Greek audience attributes the hero's predicament to some guilt. The relation between the misery and the guilt becomes the core of a difficult question, which the spectators bravely try to answer. They look stubbornly for a solution because they wish to see the transgressor chastised and because they believe that the discovery of the exact nature of the guilt might provide a medicine against the resulting misery. In fact, they hope that a precise understanding of its cause might, in the future, prevent the recurrence of this misfortune.

The Attic theatregoers ponder over the problems suggested by the hero's guilt. The pronouncements of the chorus couch in words the unspoken ethical speculations of the theatregoers. When the members of the chorus pass judgment on the tragic hero, they reflect the tortured thoughts of the audience. When the members of the chorus in *Agamemnon* behave after the manner of a jury, they are echoing the thoughts of the playgoer, who is assessing the guilt of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. When the members of a Sophoclean chorus are hopelessly bewildered by the incomprehensible nature of the hero's guilt, they reflect the perplexed state of mind of the spectator.

In general, the utterances of the chorus give expression to the streams of thought agitating the minds of the playgoers. The chorus is well-attuned to them,
because the Greek playwright intuitively understands the temper of his audience.

When the leader of the chorus addresses performers on the proscenium, he gives expression to words hanging poised, ready for utterance, on the lips of the spectators. The theatregoers unconsciously regard him as their mouth-piece. They think of him as their spokesman, through whom they seem vicariously to talk to the hero of the play. The leader of the chorus is the representative of the spectators, who make their thoughts known through him. When he talks to the protagonist of the drama, the excitement of the play may even inspire in spectators the feeling that they are in immediate contact with this important member of the cast. The spectators, in a sense, appear to participate in the dialogue. This phantasy of the theatregoers' becomes all the more vivid because the choric songs put into words the hidden movement of their feelings and because, in Nietzsche's words,

those choric portions with which the tragedy is interlaced constitute, as it were, the matrix of the dialogue...¹

The leader of the chorus gives expression to the ideas and the sentiments of the spectators, who are prone to equate their feelings with his. This bond of sympathy

¹Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, ch. VIII.
in so great that they feel as if they share with him some part of the dramatic action. They enter at his side into the intrigue of the play. It seems to them that they actively participate in the performance. In the Agamemnon of Aeschylus they think of themselves as Argives, who are deeply shocked by the melancholy fate of their good king. In the drama Oedipus Rex the spectators pretend to be Thebans, who desperately try to unravel the secret of their ruler's unhappy destiny. The imagination of the Greek theatregoers is so busily engaged that they almost feel as if they had a hand in putting on the play. Nietzsche does not exaggerate when he asserts that the Greek audience is "a community of unconscious actors."¹ The Attic spectators do not come merely to see a show after the manner of many a passive, tired twentieth-century theatregoer. The members of a Greek audience collaborate, as it were, in the creation of their own esthetic illusion, which is far more vivid and much more exciting than the make-believe in the theatres of today.

There subsists between the chorus and the Greek spectators an understanding so close that they share its point of view. They survey the stream of tragic events through the eyes of the chorus. As Nietzsche puts the matter,

¹Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, ch. VIII.
Schlegel's dictum assumes a profounder meaning. The chorus is the "ideal spectator" in as much as it is the only seer - seer of the visionary world of the proscenium.

It is rendered easy for the spectators to identify themselves with the leader of the chorus. As Nietzsche puts the matter,

...each spectator could quite literally...imagine himself in the fullness of seeing, as a chorist.

The relation between the chorus and the audience reveals an intuitive but profound understanding of psychology. In this paper an effort has been made to explore the nature of this relationship. This investigation has led to some conclusions which seem to throw a little light on some of the overly succinct passages in Aristotle's Poetics. This research has suggested some ideas that appear instructive in the interpretation of the ancient tragedies. Furthermore, the study undertaken here yields some unexpected insights into the causes that precipitated the decline in the artistic quality of the classical Greek tragedy near the end of the fifth century. The nature of this decadence is touched on in the first chapter of this thesis and in the chapter on Oedipus at Colonus.

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1Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, ch. VIII.
2Ibid., ch. VIII.
The ideas proposed in this paper are an elaboration of fruitful notions discussed by Friedrich Nietzsche and Francis Fergusson - two critics who seem to reveal an unusual understanding of the drama of the ancient Greeks.
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