Interpreting Greek Tragedy
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Published by Cornell University Press

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Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text.

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Over the past two or three decades, students of Greek tragedy have shown an increasing concern with conceptual patterns, with structures of thought, action, and language. A greater circumspection about the nature of character in ancient drama has lessened the tendency to view the plays in terms of psychological realism. Earlier in the century the Cambridge School of Harrison, Murray, and Cornford stimulated interest in the social and ritual structures reflected in the plays and pointed students to underlying patterns rather than to surface literalism. At about the same time Freud and Jung were setting the foundation for the recovery of underlying patterns of a different nature. From the 1930s on, especially in Germany, scholars devoted special attention to tragedy’s formal and dramatic structure: dialogue and monologue, the patterning of the odes, the messenger’s speech, patterns of intrigue and deception.

In America the New Criticism of the fifties focused on patterns latent in the poetic language of the plays. Such studies as R. F. Goheen’s of the Antigone and Bernard Knox’s of the Oedipus Tyrannus tried to discern the relation between the poetic texture and the intellectual armature of the work.¹ Repeated images, clustered about certain characters or the attitudes embodied by those characters, could

¹ R. F. Goheen, The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone (Princeton 1951); B. M. W. Knox, Oedipus at Thebes (New Haven 1957).
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help articulate the main concerns of the play and relate them to patterns of language and action.

Anthropologically or psychologically oriented scholars, among them Dodds, Adkins, Vernant, Gouldner, and Slater, have also viewed Greek tragedy as the battleground for conflicting value systems and latent tensions within society.\(^2\) J.-P. Vernant especially, concerned with the question of how the social order deals with the antinomies that it contains, has stressed tragedy as the field of the problematical where the familiar institutions are called into question and the moral vocabulary, no longer adequate, becomes ambiguous or self-contradictory.

Society, from this approach, appears not a crystalline, coherent entity inherited by each of its members but rather an ongoing process of constructing, abandoning, and readjusting systems of analogies and interlocking relations. Interaction and continuous development of individual institutions in their relations to one another rather than the unity of a centralized entity emerges as the dominant subject for scrutiny. This view of the ancient Greek city stresses, in the words of A. Momigliano and S. C. Humphreys, “the study of relations of complementarity or conflict between the behavioral norms associated with different contexts of interaction.”\(^3\)

The structuralist’s position has some similarities to that of the sociologist. “Reality” has its existence in its relation to the mental, social, and linguistic constructions of the thinking subject. The social system resembles the literary work in being viewed, as Roland Barthes would say, in the present rather than the perfective tense. Social man is not a being secure in the given nexus of familial, ritual, and political ties that hold his life together but rather a being continually engaged in creating that nexus.\(^4\)

The structuralist emphasis falls not so much upon the dominant, ideal values at the surface of the culture as on the subsurface tensions within the system, the dynamic pulls that the culture has to allow,

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resist, and contain in order to exist. The achievement of classical Athens, then, appears less the crystallization of a marmoreal harmony than the open equilibrium between competing values and unresolvable polarities.

Such a view gives us a tragedy that reflects the anxieties rather than the confident verities of its audience. Robert Browning’s Balaustion may have found “those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty” in “that strangest, saddest, sweetest song” of Euripides, but recent critics find themselves attuned more to the dissonances, contradictions, and harsh archaic residues that the tragic poet’s reworking of myth heaves back to the surface.

The rationality of the form of Greek tragedy only sets off the irrationality that it reveals just below the surface of myth, cult, and other social forms. Literary critics influenced by both the Freudians and the Frazerians have increasingly probed for these latent, often darker, meanings which bear promise of revealing the hidden patterns and unquestioned assumptions of the society or the knowledge that the conscious mind is unwilling or unable to face. In this way the darker side of Greek civilization, as expressed in its creation of tragedy, has enabled modern man in his turn to confront the darker side of existence and explore what lies beneath the surface of his own highly rationalized, desacralized, excessively technologized culture.

From Nietzsche onward, Greek tragedy has appeared to hold the key to that darker vision of existence, the irrational and the violent in man and the world. Tragedy’s rediscovery and popularity since World War II have filled a need for that vision in modern life, a need for an alternative to the Judeo-Christian view of a world order based on divine benignity and love.

II

Because it approaches myth as a system of tensions and oppositions, the methodology of Claude Lévi-Strauss is especially suited to explore the conflictual aspect of tragedy. For Lévi-Strauss, mythic thought operates in terms of bipolar oppositions. The function of myth is to mediate fundamental contradictions in human existence, man’s relation to man in society and to nature in the external world. Recognizing that our perception and representation of experience are
structured by coded patterns of language, gesture, ritual, and so on, structuralism provides a frame in which we can formulate precisely and thoroughly the interrelation between the political, the linguistic, the religious, the psychological—all the many levels of dramatic action.

In a structuralist analysis the details of kinship, dress, architecture, eating, and ritual are not merely isolated data or Realien but elements of a structured message, a “code.” Each code expressed in its own terms—the “languages” of ritual, kinship, diet—a microcosm of the social order. In the analysis of a myth or a literary work it is not the surface details in themselves which are important but the relational patterns, the configurations, of these details in the various codes, the “analogy of functions” rather than the “analogy of substances.”

Whereas the New Criticism tends to isolate a work in a cultural vacuum and to limit itself to the internal coherence of verbal structures, structuralism seeks to relate the value structures of the society to the aesthetic structures of the literary work. Its concern, however, is not so much with the internal logic and coherence of the codes per se as with the cognitive patterns of the culture which they imply and the correspondence between the semantic structures of the literary work and the social structures of the culture as a whole.

When we turn from structures of society to structures of literary texts, however, we encounter a fundamental difficulty. The literary work imposes a secondary structure of language and meanings upon the given structures of the society. Unavoidably, it uses the codes that constitute the mental patterns of the society; and it could be analyzed, at one level, solely in terms of those accepted, normative codes. But at the same time it deliberately manipulates, distorts, or otherwise transforms those patterns in the special self-conscious structures—linguistic, psychological, societal—superimposed by its own internal, aesthetic coherence. To put it differently, the work of literature overlays the codified contiguity of signifiant and signifié with a new internal coding wherein the relationships between sound and sense, between overt and latent meaning, between literal and figurative significance of words, change from the familiar (that is, the precoded) to the unexpected, the novel, and the striking.

Tragedy’s relation to the expression of the social order encoded in myths is particularly complex. As part of a public festival, a ritual in
honor of the god Dionysus, tragedy validates the social order. It demonstrates the dangers of excess, impiety, or overconfidence within a coherent system of symbols representative of the divine, political, and social order. The presence of the gods, the palace of the king, the altars and shrines, the oracles, the house create a microcosm of the totality of that order. At the same time the violence of the action, the radical questioning of justice both human and divine, the searching explorations of the failure or the betrayal of public and private morality take us outside that order. In the magical circle of the orchestra the normal coherence that distinguishes and balances good and evil, love and hate, kin and stranger breaks down. The world order is stretched to its limits; its intelligibility is suspended.

So tragedy, while affirming the interrelatedness of all parts of the human and divine order, also has the peculiarity of calling into question the normative codes themselves. Both in language and in its enacted narrative, tragedy effects a violent derangement of the codes, a deliberate destructuring of the familiar patterns of order. In tragedy, as to some degree in all literature, the “message” of the specific text not only brings to life something that was not in the code but can threaten to destroy the code itself.

The parallels between strained diction, violent metaphors, perverted rituals, and inverted sexual roles in the Oresteia show the violence done to the linguistic, ritual, and familiar codes. The Oedipus Tyrannus develops an elaborate correspondence between the confusion of language in the riddles of the Sphinx and in the oracles of the gods (the two polar forms of utterance have a disconcerting unity), the social inversions of king and scapegoat, the ritual inversions of pollution and purification, and the domestic confusion of father and husband, father and brother, wife and mother. Here, as in the Oresteia, the linguistic, political, ritual, and familial codes are all involved simultaneously in the unstable situation from which tragic suffering arises. Confused intermingling, inversions, troubling identifications replace reassuring demarcation or differentiation. The original structures are suspended, forcing the mind to reach beyond those structures in the painful search for other principles of order or in the even more painful admission that there are no principles of order. Here men must face the chaos that their mental structures—social, linguistic, political, sexual, spatial—deliberately shut out.
A Greek tragedy is a special kind of mythical narration. We cannot approach it exactly as Lévi-Strauss approaches a given myth, reconstructing an underlying pattern by comparing the corresponding terms ("mythemes") in a large number of variants. The structuralist analysis of the coding processes of language can trace the relation between aesthetic patterns and patterns of order in the society as a whole. The literary critic, on the other hand, is concerned not with the core structure of the myth as revealed and realized in its variants but with the particular variant that is the literary work.

To take a specific example, to which we shall return later, Sophocles' *Trachiniae* uses a system of analogies based on an underlying opposition of god and beast, civilization and savagery. The play opens with Deianeira anxious about the long absence of Heracles, her husband. She laments the cares of her life and tells how the monstrous river-god, Achelous, and Heracles fought to win her hand, a battle described in a later choral ode (497–530). A messenger announces Heracles' return. Deianeira sees the young and beautiful Iole in the entourage and soon learns that Iole is destined for Heracles' bed. At first calm and forgiving, she later returns to the stage resolved to try a love charm given to her in another violent wooing, the attempted rape long ago by the Centaur Nessus. Fatally wounded by Heracles' arrow, poisoned with the Hydra's venom, Nessus instructed Deianeira to save the blood clotted around his wound. All these years she has kept it stored in the inner chambers of the house. Now she anoints a robe with it and sends it to Heracles for his sacrificial celebration at Cape Ceneaeum, across the water from Trachis. Her son Hyllus arrives soon after with the news of the robe's effect: Heracles, in the midst of slaughtering bulls at the sacrificial fires, was suddenly seized by terrible agony, and he is now coming to Trachis to exact vengeance from Deianeira. Realizing what she has done, she exits in silence; soon her suicide in the bedchamber is described. Ferocious in his pain, Heracles arrives, ready to kill De-
ianeira with his own hands. When he learns the details of the poison and hears the name of Nessus, he realizes that he is doomed in accordance with an old oracle from Zeus. He forces the reluctant Hyllus to marry Iole and makes him promise to take him to Mount Oeta where he is to be burned on a funeral pyre. In a last speech he checks his cries of pain with heroic endurance and exits with son and followers for Oeta. Hyllus (or the chorus) closes the play with a lament about the remoteness and indifference of the gods.

From this rather complicated action emerges a symmetrical relation between Nessus, the beast-man, and Heracles, the man who stands in a special proximity to the gods. Structurally, the success of Nessus' revenge and the deaths of Heracles and Deianeira can be described as a series of failed mediations between the poles of bestiality and divinity. Heracles acts out the anomalous role of a beast-god insofar as he, the son of Zeus, repeats the violence of the Centaur. Sacrifice in the ritual code, marriage in the sexual code, the safe interior of the house in the spatial and familial codes—all are isomorphic expressions of this basic failure of mediation, the destruction of the mean where civilization is possible. Normal communication between man and god is destroyed, and with it collapse the hierarchical relation between beast, man, and god, the equilibrium between the violent sexual instincts which links man with beast, and the coherent social and cosmic order that links man with gods. The triumph of the "beast" Nessus through his poisoned blood, a specious love charm that reaches back to the destructive monstrosity of the Hydra, the resultant perversion of the sacrificial rite into the killing of the god-man by the beast-man, and the destruction of the house and marriage are not only elements in a causal sequence but also simultaneous manifestations of an underlying structure—or rather, the disintegration of structure. Achelous and Hydra, for example, are agents within a causal series that culminates in Heracles' death, but they are also forces ever present in the action, existing simultaneously with and parallel to Nessus and the bestial aspect of Heracles.

Sacrifice, which plays a central role in this and other tragedies, is the mediating vehicle within the system of relations and communications that link gods and men. Sacrifice validates the world order by affirming the hierarchical relation of god-man-beast. The immortal gods receive the airy smoke that mounts from the durable bones
Mortal men sustain themselves with the roasted meat of the perishable flesh. The human celebrant who offers the victim to the gods is as far above the beast as he is below the god who receives the offering.6 The ritual stylization of killing during the sacrifice and the roasting of the flesh to be consumed by the celebrants after the sacrifice separate the structured world of “culture” from the savagery of wild “nature.” By establishing a system of conjunctions and disjunctions, sacrifice makes manifest the implicit logic of the world order. It separates gods from men and men from beasts, but it also opens a way of access from men to gods. In tragedy that system of logical relations is confused or overthrown, sometimes to be recreated on a new basis. The centrality of sacrifice as a symbolic expression of system explains, in part, why sacrifice and its distortions or perver­sions play such an important role in tragedy: one thinks of the stories of Thyestes, Iphigeneia at Taurus and at Aulis, Medea, Ajax—all recurrent subjects of tragedy and all characterized by perverted sacrifice.7

Kingship, like sacrifice, is not merely a one-dimensional social category, political in the case of kingship, religious in the case of sacrifice. In tragedy, as in early Greek myth and literature more generally, the king occupies the symbolic point where the human and the divine, the natural and supernatural worlds intersect. His suffer­ings represent the efforts of the society to maintain those relations with the cosmic order on which its physical and spiritual life depends. In the Oresteia, by illustration, Aeschylus takes great pains to establish the spatial coordinates of this kingship. The point at which the king suffers and dies is a point of crossing between elemental opposites: sea and fire (Ag. 281ff., 650f., 958), winter and summer (966–72), upper and lower limits (cf. hyper-, hypo-, “above,” “below,” in Ag. 786), divine honor and bestial degradation. It is not just the suffering of Agamemnon as an individual which moves us but the cosmic, religious, and social vibrations in the drastic reversal and fearful col­lapse of polarities that define both the ordered structure of the society and the natural and supernatural order. Hence Agamemnon’s walk-
ing on the carpet is not merely an act of individual pride which 
provokes the "envy" of gods and men (cf. Ag. 921–25, 947) but a 
terrifying confusion of boundaries in the figure who is charged with 
the sacred task of linking human and divine, making visible in his 
mortal person the numinous order of the gods.

The Greek tragic hero, then, is not a "character" quite as the hero 
of a modern fiction is a character, an individual with a three-dimen-
sional, idiosyncratic personality. He is, rather, both an individual 
captured in a moral conflict and a symbolic element within a complex 
socioreligious structure. He carries the linear flow of the action and is 
a constellation of patterns present simultaneously in all parts of the 
action. Alongside the individualized personalities of Aeschylus’ 
Agamemnon, Sophocles’ Oedipus, or Euripides’ Pentheus, that is to 
say, stands the role of sacrificial kingship; and in that role each of these 
figures concentrates in himself the crisis in relations between the 

human, natural, and supernatural worlds which forms the starting 
point for the tragic action.

In the Oedipus Tyrannus, for example, the plague, manifestation of 
a disturbance in the relation between man and god, both reveals and 
engages the hero at the point of maximum exposure to the unknown. 
It forces him to take responsibility for the troubled cosmic order and 
propels him into reversals of power and helplessness, knowledge and 
ignorance, divine and bestial in the ensuing dramatic action. The king 
supplicated with nearly divine honor in the prologue (OT 31–54) 
proves to be the beastlike pollution wandering "in the savage wood-
land, the bull of the rocks" (477ff.). The spatial coordinates of this 
reversal in the ritual and biological codes are clearly demarcated in the 
fall of the "tyrant" from rooftop to ground in the third stasimon 
(863–79). A horizontal axis from palace to wild, city to mountain, 
man to beast, intersects a vertical axis from highest to lowest, king to 
scapegoat. At the point of intersection stands Oedipus, whose identi-
ity consists of this intersection of contradictions, this simultaneous 
presence of polarities.

To describe these structural and spatial coordinates of Oedipus’ 
tragic situation is to supplement, not to deny, our affective reactions 
of pity and fear to the undeserved agonies of a great-souled man as 
they unfold before us. A structuralist approach to Oedipus’ tragedy 
reinforces its connections with the patterns of sacrificial kingship, linking 
him with Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, with Euripides’ Heracles and
Pentheus, or even with Shakespeare’s Lear and Hamlet. Within the limits of the play itself, the approach helps us appreciate the cosmic implications of Oedipus’ ruin and hence the underlying seriousness—spoudaiotēs is Aristotle’s term—of our involvement in that ruin. It is no ordinary individual who undergoes this suffering but a paradigmatic figure. His fate must deeply concern us because it involves a fundamental issue—the order or chaos of our world and the capacity of our social and intellectual constructs to contain that chaos. 

Like psychological analysis, a structuralist reading seeks to uncover latent, subsurface meanings, to reveal implicit rather than explicit structures; and so a structuralist view of sacrifice focuses on the nexus of logical relations described above. From a psychological point of view, however, sacrifice expresses the violence beneath the surface of the social order and the need to expel that violence. René Girard, who has approached tragedy from this point of view, portrays the tragic action as sacralizing violence by the choice of an arbitrary victim, a pharmakos or scapegoat whose death or suffering removes violence from the realm of men and gives it back to the gods. In the sacrificial action of tragedy, the hero doubles with his bestial opposite—Hercules with Nessus in the Trachiniae, Pentheus with Dionysus in the Bacchae—only to be separated from him in the sacrificial death that reestablishes distinctions and gradations and thereby prevents a further collapse into chaos.

The cultural meaning that certain symbols possess does not, of course, preclude their psychological significance. To the cultural historian, for example, the opening of the Oedipus Coloneus reflects the Greeks’ religious concern with pollution and purification and the rites of supplication. To the Freudian critic, Oedipus’ blind entrance to an inviolate grove of hallowed female goddesses is not only the ritual frame for the ensuing drama but also the reenactment of a prior pattern in Oedipus’ life: it recapitulates at a new level the hero’s transgressive entrance into a dark forbidden place of the mother, a place connected with her mysterious power of creating life. Entrance to the grove is a movement from the Bad Mother who cast him into the wild to the nurturing mother who receives and shelters him. The response to cruel expulsion from the womb, from Jocasta’s body to

Cithaeron (symbol of the Bad Mother), is acceptance back into the womblike earth of that generous mother, the pious city of Athens.

In moving from the *Tyrannus* to the *Coloneus*, Sophocles shifts from an infantile world of primary acceptance or rejection to a public realm of civic action. Through the symbolism of the Eumenides and their grove the civic frame of Athens in the *Oedipus Coloneus* seems able, finally, to reconcile the two faces of woman, the generosity and the destructiveness of the mother as perceived by the totally dependent infant to whom her absence or presence means denial or fulfillment.9

From a structuralist perspective, the grove is the point of conjunction between the city and the wild, the place of shelter and the exposed world of the polluted outcast. It is also the focus for a vertical spatial axis between upper and lower worlds, gods and men. It unites the two poles of Oedipus’ status: below the human as the despised, impure, exiled parricide and incestuous criminal and above the human as a hero mysteriously called by divine voices that come from both above and below.

Mother, womb, mother earth, and city are all parts of a single symbolic complex. Oedipus’ acceptance by Athens in the *Oedipus Coloneus* is thus a shift from the unmediated swing of the polluted and exiled king between godhead and bestiality so dangerous in the *Tyrannus* to the king’s restoration to a civic frame. He becomes the mediator between chthonic and Olympian powers and stands in a privileged relation to the goddesses who embody both the destructive and the creative forces of nature. His marginal status thus parallels that of the Eumenides themselves. Like them he is an ambiguous figure whose place is at the fringes of the city, the liminal space at the borders of the land. Like them he dispenses both curses and blessings. Received back into the city, he has a place of honor as a hero, but he is still in a sense outside, for his tomb is unknown to all but Theseus. His end is hidden in mystery, associated with places of mysterious transition between worlds, the “brazen-footed road” with its “bronce steps” into the earth (*OC* 57, 1590ff.).

Lévi-Strauss's view of myth as exploring and validating the opposition between nature and culture, the "raw" and the "cooked," is substantiated by a great deal of Greek tragedy. Here the tension between nomos and physis, culture and nature, often takes the form of a tension between the spheres of confident human authority and divine autonomy. On the one hand lies the polis and its Olympian-sponsored, male-oriented institutions, the area where man imposes structure and the ordering conventions of nomos upon the potentially threatening impulses of physis. On the other hand lies the power of the gods in its elusive, unknown aspects, the chthonic divinities and the areas of human life under their supervision, the stain of impurity, the threatening realm of women, the biological processes of birth and death, the demands of nurture (trophē) and blood ties, and the curses produced or transmitted in the area of such blood ties.

The origins and development of civilization, the emergence of law (nomos) and justice (díke), the mastery over the savagery both in nature and in man himself are important themes in all the surviving tragedians as well as in the thought of their contemporaries, Herodotus, Protagoras, Hippias, Hippocrates, Democritus, and others. Aeschylus’ Prometheus trilogy (of which only the Prometheus Bound survives) deals with the origins of civilized technology. In his Oresteia the juridical resolution of homicide in the city evolves from primitive blood vengeance in the family. Sophocles won his first victory with a play about a culture hero, the Triptolemus of 468 B.C. His lost Palamedes, Nauplius, and probably Daedalus seem to have been based on similar subjects. The first stasimon of the Antigone (332–75) is one of the great texts of the fifth century on man’s conquest of nature; it brings this broad evolutionary perspective to the play’s conflicts between political authority and the ties of blood, between the rationalism and Olympian religion supposedly governing the state and the emotional bonds among kin and the chthonic deities whose sphere is burial and respect for the dead. Sophocles’ Philoctetes, whose hero has been described as an ancient Robinson Crusoe, draws heavily on Sophistic theories about the origins of culture to explore the paradox that the miserable outcast on a desert island may embody a more valid and humane vision of civilized order than the goal-ori-
Aeschylus sets these issues in a religious framework that implicates the entire cosmic order; Sophocles tends to embody them in deeply involving personalities. Sophocles' richness of characterization sometimes distracts attention from questions of social order and justice, but those questions are always strongly present nonetheless. In his *Electra*, for example, the heroine's personal suffering and endurance seem to occupy the foreground. Yet they derive much of their impact and importance from the fact that she is the sole champion of justice in the corrupt land of Mycenae. The king has long ago been murdered by the selfish and licentious queen Clytaemnestra, his death symbolizing the corruption in both the political and the moral order. Rituals too are violated; family ties are turned from love to hate; the natural order is inverted. Orestes, coming from outside, bent on the practical fulfilment of the deed (*ergon*) of revenge in a male world of efficient action and a logically defined background of space and time, stands in stark contrast to an Electra confined to the house, involved in an inner, female realm of static words (*logoi*), uttering Niobe-like lamentations in a petrified timelessness (145–52). Electra's tragedy of sheer spirit, force of will, and feeling turned to hatred and killing, though relieved in part by the joyful reunion with her brother in the moving recognition scene of the play, remains defined by a larger, suprapersonal field of reversals. In that field, life has become death, the king's palace is a locus of corruption rather than order, and justice, recoverable only at the cost of matricide, becomes confused and problematical.

The scale and violence of the Peloponnesian War, with its atrocities of Corcyra, Melos, and Mytilene, made men more keenly aware of how precarious are the ordered forms of civilized life. Euripides depicted the breakdown and disintegration of those forms in such tragedies as the *Medea, Hecuba, Trojan Women, Phoenissae*, and *Bacchae*. The *Medea*, produced in the year that the Peloponnesian War began (431 B.C.), shows the unleashed violence of love turned to hatred, passion to ferocity. In its heroine the traditional passivity of woman is changed to a murderous revenge that destroys maternal love and leaves the male antagonist impotent and shattered. In the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae* too, the potential destructiveness of the emotional life...
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centers on woman as the symbol and the focal point for the irrationality that the polis must suppress. In the Bacchae the destructive power of the irrational annihilates the city itself. Dionysus, god of wine, religious ecstasy, madness, and illusion, retaliates against the Theban king, Pentheus, who has rejected his worship, by maddening the women of the city and driving them to the mountain with the king’s mother, Agave, at their head. The hierarchical separation of god, man, and beast breaks down as the god appears in the form of bull, snake, or lion and is present to his worshipers in the holy thiasos, the ecstatic band of Maenads. Pentheus, the substitute victim of the god, becomes a fearsome human sacrifice, torn apart as a beast-victim in a sacrifice where the mother is the “priestess of the murder” (1114). The king’s death in the Dionysiac sparagmos or ritual “ rending apart” is a symbolic rending of the city itself, no longer able to integrate emotionality and religious ecstasy into the order of civic institution and law. That order collapses with the centrifugal movement that ends the play, the exile of the queen mother Agave after she kills her son and the bestial metamorphosis of the old king, Cadmus, the culture hero who had founded Thebes.

Throughout Greek tragedy, systems of linked polarity—mortal and divine, male and female, man and beast, city and wild—operate within the dense fabric of the language and the plot. They encompass not just the emotional, interior world of the individual character or spectator but the whole of society in its multiple relationships to the natural and supernatural order.

V

The hero of Greek tragedy stands at the point where the boundaries of opposing identities meet, where identity itself becomes the paradoxical conjunction of opposites. To return to the example of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, the king, trying in vain to avoid the doom to which, inexorably, his own nature, his past actions, and the violent passions of his wife are pulling him, asks, “Revere me as a man, not as a god” (λέγω κατ’ ἄνδρα, μὴ θεόν, σέβειν ἐμέ, Ag. 925). By walking upon the carpet, however, he overreaches to a godlike status, only to plummet suddenly, in a dramatic reversal from god to beast, sacrificed like a bull in an unholy and perverted rite.

Heracles in the Trachiniae follows a similar pattern. Son of Zeus
and conqueror of monsters, he fuses with the bestial victims that he sacrifices, burned and devoured by the Hydra's poison. His pyre on Mount Oeta is the place of both his triumph and his defeat. It hints at his immortalization as a god, but it also marks his subjection to the bestiality inside him which is still unconquered and which is symbolized by the monsters of his past. The Hydra and Nessus have, in a sense, vanquished him.

The perverted ritual, a recurrent feature of Greek tragedy, itself indicates the destruction of the mediations between god and beast which the forms of civilized life assert. Civilization separates man from the "beastlike life" (theriōdēs bios) on the one hand and places him in a subordinate but propitious relation to the gods on the other. The tragic hero, however, is polarized at the opposite extremes: either he is involved in bestial actions (incest, matricide, and parricide fall within this category), or else he aspires to some form of godlike power or autonomy.

Tragedy differs from ritual. Tragedy stresses not the orderly process of transition from one stage of life to another but the in-betweenness, the marginality, and the ambiguity in the juxtaposition of the two stages. In the cultic background of the *Trachiniae*, the pyre on Mount Oeta was important in a ritual that rewarded Heracles for his life of labors, which freed the earth of monsters and made it safe for civilized life. A shrine on Oeta where burnt offerings were made from early archaic times attests to this cult of the apotheosized hero. In Sophocles' play, however, the pyre is part of the ambiguity between god and beast which surrounds Heracles. In stressing the pyre in the promises that Heracles exacts from his son Hyllus at the end, Sophocles raises the issue of the hero's apotheosis. Yet he gives no clear, unambiguous reference to Heracles' future immortality on Olympus, only dark and uncertain hints. In cult the pyre and the rituals around it affirm the mediation between god and man; in tragedy that focal point in the ritual becomes the center of the most problematical part of the hero's existence, the mystery of his suspension between the highest and lowest extremes.

In Euripides' *Electra* the death of Aegisthus, though just, is a kind of human sacrifice. In the grim justice of the play that quasi-sacrificial act has a spatial analogue; it is located outside the polis, performed in honor of the Nymphs, divinities of forest and mountain who are also (ironically in the context of the *Electra*), divinities connected with
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marriage. Marriage and sacrifice are here combined, as they are throughout a play whose series of perverted rites weave together familial, sexual, spatial, biological, and political codes in its violated cosmic and social order. Likewise in the Heracles Mad the hero who ostensibly defends the civilized order comes to embody its destruction. After saving his family from the cruel tyrant Lycus, Heracles is afflicted with a homicidal madness in the throes of which he performs a perverted ritual: he sacrifices his children to the accompaniment of an insane inner dancing and song. Coming from the Underworld, he would purify himself from that dark realm and thus reestablish order. But then he plunges into the even darker Hell of his own violence, from ritual purification to the most horrible pollutions.

The order affirmed by ritual is both literal and symbolic. The ritual represented as part of the tragic action is therefore a symbol within a symbol. It is a literal recreation of the cosmic order in the regular succession of stylized acts performed just as they were in illo tempore, to use Mircea Eliade’s terminology—the magical time of creation reenacted by myth, when order emerges from chaos. It is at the same time a symbolic expression of the order that the rite reasserts through the symbolic or metaphorical meaning acquired by these acts in constant repetition over centuries.

The perverted ritual of tragedy can for these reasons serve as the most intense and inclusive focus of the disrupted cosmic order. It enacts the disruptions of that order in one particular code among many, but at the same time the particular code, itself the fullest symbolic expression of the harmonies between man and god and between man and nature, includes all other codes. Ritual’s special symbolic and expressive function in the society, in other words, gives it a privileged status within the secondary, superimposed structure of the literary work. Here it is both a code among codes and the code that expresses the harmonious interlocking of all codes in the order of the whole.

In the literary work, whose medium is words, language has a similarly privileged function. The powerful effect of the Cassandra scene of the Agamemnon derives in part from the close interlocking of ritual and linguistic codes. There is a parallel breakdown of the two most expressive, synoptic focuses of the civilized and aesthetic order; each code functions in the work as a metaphor virtually interchange-
able with the other code, and each functions as a code that sums up all other codes.

To return to Sophocles, the entity “Oedipus” in the *Tyrannus* similarly renders problematical the familiar configurations by which civilized man keeps chaos at bay. There is a reciprocal relation and interaction between Oedipus as individual character and Oedipus as king, the focal point for the cosmic order. On the one hand Oedipus polarizes the universe into unmediated extremes: overdetermination by the gods and utter chaos; gods who are providential and intelligent and gods who “leap” upon their victims like beasts of prey (*OT* 469, 1311; cf. 263); the riddles of the bestial Sphinx and the oracles of Olympian Apollo. On the other hand this ambiguous world order simultaneously polarizes the unstable configuration of personal traits that make up the character we call Oedipus. It leaves him precariously oscillating between the two opposite fields of his identity: quasi-divine power and bestial rage, strength and weakness, self-affirmation and utter helplessness, confident knowledge and abysmal ignorance, proud rationality and uncontrolled passion. As his world splits into two increasingly disparate halves, so Oedipus splits into the antithetical halves of a self that can no longer hold together on the old terms. He can no longer exist (or rather coexist) as both murderer and ruler, both destroyer and savior; he has to confront the identity-in-polarity of himself as both king and scapegoat. Whatever new unity and strength of self Oedipus possesses at the end rests on a new set of balances between authority and weakness, autonomy and subjection.

In the poetry of the plays, metaphor facilitates the interconnection of the codes and the convertibility of one code into another. In the *Bacchae* the wild Maenads who will destroy the king-victim Pentheus, are “foals which have left their yokes” (1056). The king, “in the power of” this ambiguous god, allows himself to be dressed as a bacchant and speaks of “being dedicated” to him (*anakeisthai*, 934). Yet the god is also the beast in bull, serpent, and lion form (1016f.) and the hunter whose “noose” will hurl the prey beneath the “herd” of Maenads that will destroy him (1020–23). This metaphorical interlocking, as in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, is compounded by the ironies of double vision, madness, and ecstatic transport; so there are actually two levels of interlocking codes, one through metaphor and another...
through the ironic interchange of appearance and reality. Through the peculiar nature and powers of Dionysus as god of madness and illusion, the trope becomes the reality. That blurring on the level of language corresponds to analogous blurring on the levels of perception (madness and sanity, illusion and truth) and ritual (celebrant and deity, sacrificer and sacrificed). Pentheus, figuratively savage (agrios) and the offspring of a lioness (cf. 542, 988–90), is seen as an actual lion by the maddened Agave (1174, 1215, 1278, etc.). He himself sees the god in the form of the beast (e.g. 617ff., 922; cf. 1159).

Like the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Bacchae* is in a sense a paradigm of tragedy itself, simultaneously telescoping polarity and identity. The tragic king is the figure who must occupy both extremes at the same time. Kingship is located at the isolated point of exposure to elemental forces and their abrupt reversal, the point where order crosses over into disorder, where apparent chaos harbors a coherence hitherto unseen.

VI

Just as the king, standing at the summit of happiness and power, can suddenly move from highest to lowest through chance event or the “envy of the gods” (Herodotus 1.207), so the tragic hero, through accident or inner nature or some combination, finds his strength turned to weakness, his prosperity to misery. It is through his suffering and integrity of spirit that he creates new definitions of these values.

Sophocles, in particular, depicts tragic figures who are more exposed than other men to the extremes of the human condition as they appear in the world and their own natures. “Such natures,” as Creon says in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, “are justly most difficult for themselves to bear” (674–75). These figures, in their intense reactions to these extremes, become paradigms of the precarious status of honor, power, happiness. They have affinities with the savage world outside the limits of the city, but they also possess qualities indispensable to their societies. Ajax, Antigone, Oedipus, Philoctetes are or become outlaws, and yet they are also champions of values essential to civilized life: personal integrity, devotion to kinship ties, energy, and intelligence. The course of the tragic action takes these heroes
through a sharp reversal of status, thereby requiring a redefinition of basic values. In the *Ajax* the trusty warrior becomes a hated criminal. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the king who has saved the city becomes the source of its pollution. In the *Philoctetes* and the *Oedipus Coloneus*, by contrast, the helpless outcast becomes the true hero, the source of an inner strength invisible to others. Within the boundary situations created by tragedy, truth and illusion undergo paradoxical shifts. Fragility may prove to be the source of another form of power.

Anthropologists, Victor Turner among them, have called attention to the importance of these liminal situations and to the liminal status of such figures as the outcast and the supplicant. These liminal situations threaten and confuse the old order, but they also create a kind of free space in which the old elements can be reshuffled in new combinations, where new alternatives to the old conditions can be imagined. We have already noted how Aeschylus brings together the opposites of sea and fire, upper and lower, man and sacrificial victim for the suffering of Agamemnon. The first ode of the *Trachiniae* brings together death and life, birth and destruction, in a cosmic frame for Heracles’ imminent doom. This universe is characterized by a disturbing violence and a sexual quality in its basic processes (*Trach. 94–96*):

\[
\text{δὲν αἰώλα νῦς ἐναρίζομένα}
\]

\[
τίκτει κατευνάζει τε φλογιζόμενον,
\]

"Ἀλιον, Ἀλιον, αἰτῶ . . ."

You whom shimmering Night, as she is slain, brings to birth and then lays to bed as you blaze in flames, Helios, Helios, I call upon you . . .

The alternation of day and night reflects not a stable, regular natural order (as in *Ajax 672–73*) but the violent death of the mother, the female Night who, as she “is slain” (the verb ἐναρίζειν describes violent death in Homer and the killing of Agamemnon in Aeschylus), “gives birth” to the “blazing” light of the new sun at dawn. We need not go into the elaborate inversions of light and darkness, birth and death, which run beneath the action of the play to realize that the

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heavenly bodies’ involvement through metaphor in the pain of the human life cycle provides a cosmic analogue to the sufferings of the protagonists. Their involvement links the human action to the great rhythms of the universe. Deianira, like Night here, is a *mater dolorosa* whose births are all pain (cf. *Trach.* 28–31, 41–42). Like Night, too, she will be violently “slain” (indeed, ἐναυγασμένα could be read as a reflexive middle, “slaying herself,” as Deianira does); and shortly before, she is closely linked with night and night’s rhythms in her statement of her unhappy life: “For night leads in pain and night in succession drives it away” (28–29). Heracles, the far-wandering hero whose journeys, like those of the sun, span continents (100f.), ends his mortal life ablaze in his fiery death on the pyre where he has been “put to rest” (note the repeated ἐναυάσαι, ἐναυάσσον in 1005–6, 1041) through the agency of a female figure connected with birth and with darkness (cf. 573, 579, 685–92).

Scholars such as Knox and Cedric Whitman have sensitively interpreted this isolated, asocial aspect of the tragic hero. A structuralist approach supplements their reading. It emphasizes not the hero’s affective responses to his world and that world’s rejection or acceptance of him but social and moral structures themselves as they define the hero and are expanded, redefined, or confused by him.

To dwell again on the Heracles of the *Trachiniae*, the issue for a structuralist reading is not the worth or worthlessness of Heracles vis-à-vis Deianira or the assessment of her generosity against his brutality, important as judgments on these matters are for a full evaluation of the play. Rather, the issue is the polarization of values as each figure reaches outside the civilized world to a destructive, bestial violence from his or her past. The play thus appears not just the domestic tragedy of a doomed house, nor the personal tragedy of a man and woman whose lives have carried them in opposite directions, but the tragedy of civilized values disintegrating under the impact of powerful forces which always threaten life from without and within.

The structural paradox of the tragic hero revealed by such an approach runs parallel to the paradox of the performance of which he is

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The social context of the performance presupposes a safe, limited world hedged about by the order of rituals and stable community and communication, but the action of the performance explores what transgresses that order. As a communal act, a part of the Dionysiac or Lenaean festival, tragedy affirms the solidity of social forms and celebrates the gods of the polis. But the content stands in tension with the ritual and social context. The tragedies contain the most terrible pollutions, the most feared crimes, the most puzzling and disturbing cruelties of the gods, the killing of parents by children and of children by parents (Agamemnon, Heracles Mad, Medea), incest (Oedipus Tyrannus), the death or prolonged suffering of the innocent (Hippolytus, Philoctetes), the triumph of the wicked and unscrupulous (Hecuba, Trojan Women).

VII

The ritual and social situation of the drama thus sets up a powerful tension between the fictional and the actual rite and between character and audience. This tension is essential to Greek tragedy, possibly to all tragedy. A festival at the very heart of the city shows the social and ritual order of the city inverted and turned against itself in conflict and division. Yet it is part of the deeper social effect of tragedy that the citizens who behold this negation of their civic and religious order therein experience what that order signifies, what its limitations may be, what stands below or above it in the realm of the incomprehensible, the mysterious, and the irrational.

This heightened sense of the preciousness and precariousness of that order, this intensified cosmological consciousness, is at least as probable a social effect of tragedy as Aristotle’s “cleansing” of violent emotions. Plato, appreciating the subversive implications of Greek tragedy, was in this respect the more sensitive critic. As Brian Vickers has put it recently, “Reading the Oresteia makes one afraid for one’s life.”

The metaphorical and symbolic language of the plays functions as we suggested above, in part to interweave the multiple codes of this

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order. Agamemnon 1384–98 provides a good illustration of the process:

παίω δὲ νῦν δίζ, κἂν δυοῖν οἶμώγμασιν μεθήκεν αὐτοῦ κώλα καὶ πεπτωχότι τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰ χθονὸς Δίὸς νεκρῶν σωτήρος ἐυκταίαν χάριν. οὖτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ὑμαίνει πεσών κάθφυσιῶν ὀξείαν αἵματος σφαγὴν βάλλει μ’ ἐρεμνὴς ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου, χαίροντας οὐδὲν ἡτοσον ἢ διοοδότωι γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασι. ὡς ὅδ’ ἔχοντων, πρέσβος Ἀργεῖων τόδε, χαίροιτ’ ἄν, εἰ χαίροιτ’, ἐγὼ δ’ ἐπεύχομαι· εἰ δ’ ἦν πρεπόντως ἢστ’ ἐπιστένδειν νεκρῶι, τάδ’ ἄν δικαίως ἦν, ὑπερδίκως μὲν οὖν· τοσῶνδε κρατήρ’ ἐν δόμοις κακῶν ὁδε πλήσας ἀραίων αὐτὸς ἔκπινει μολὼν.

I strike him twice; and with two cries there on the spot he let his limbs go slack: and then, when he is down, I add a third stroke, a welcome prayer—offering to the Zeus beneath the earth, the savior of the dead. So he belches out his own life as he lies there, and blowing forth the sharp slaughter of his blood, he strikes me with a darksome shower of gory dew; and I rejoiced no less than the crop rejoices in the rich blessing of the rain of Zeus when the sheath is in labor with the ear.

So stands the case, noble elders of Argus here: be glad, if ye will be glad; for me, I glory in it. And were it possible to pour libations over the dead body in a manner that would suit the circumstances, this [my doing] would be just, yea, more than just: so many are the curseful evils wherewith this man in his house has filled a bowl, a bowl which he now drains himself on his return. (E. Fraenkel's translation, slightly modified)

This passage interconnects the ritual, familial, biological, and sexual codes. The very density of the closely packed metaphors creates a special language in which the various codes of the civilized order can come together to express a synoptic vision of the totality of that order—political, religious, and domestic, natural and supernatural—at a moment of crisis when that order is pushed to its extreme limits and questioned in its most fundamental values. The Oresteia is proba-
bly the richest development of this technique, and it may be that this deliberate interlocking of the various codes through repeated, expanded, and interwoven sequences of metaphor is the creation of Aeschylus, stamped upon Attic tragedy by his genius as one of its basic techniques.

Interlocking metaphor is also important in Sophoclean tragedy. The wound of the Philoctetes, for example, is the focal symbol of an ambiguous divine order, a corrupt social order, and an inward sickness and savagery (agriotēs) that parallels the physical sickness and the savage, beastlike state of Philoctetes’ life. Clytaemnestra’s dream of Agamemnon’s “scepter by the hearth” “blooming” and “shadowing over” the land of the Mycenaeans (Soph., El. 417ff.) interconnects the familial, civic, biological, and cosmic orders. Deianeira’s comparison of Heracles to a farmer plowing an outlying field that he visits only at the time of sowing and the time of harvest (Trach. 31–33) brackets the familial order of the house with the biological order implicit in agriculture. As the Trachiniae continues, an increasingly ironical discrepancy cracks open between fertility and destruction. Sophocles draws on the interweaving of marriage and agriculture as the two basic civilizing acts. In the Athenian marriage ceremony the father bestows the bride on her husband “for the sowing of legitimate children” (ἐπὶ παίδων γνησίων ἀγρότω). What is probably a rather inert metaphor or a vaguely felt parallelism in the social structure becomes active as part of a system of signs, metaphors, and values within the secondary structure of the literary work. By this process the literary work exercises what Roman Jakobson and others term the “metalingual” function of language: language calls attention to its own coding of experience. In the wider, social structure the conscious interweaving of codes by metaphor also calls attention to the unconscious coding processes that are part of society’s unification of the various human activities and roles, to the interdependence of society’s various parts, and to the interaction of various codes in homologous areas.

The tragic force of the Trachiniae lies in the twisting together of the multiple codes of the civilized order to their complete destruction. Both models of the civilized life, the domestic wife who faithfully

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keeps house and hearth and the beast-taming hero, come to embody what their model social roles have most resisted. The faithful wife destroys house and husband with the poison of the Hydra and the blood of the lustful beast-man; the hero famous for his civilizing triumphs reenacts the part of his bestial double, Nessus, sacking a city and annihilating a house (cf. 257, 351–65) for the sake of lust, raging with subhuman cries and carried away by a blind thirst for bloody revenge (1066ff., 1133). The maiden Iole, taken within the house as if in legitimate marriage, is “yoked” (536); this metaphor, which usually indicates the domestication of the “unyoked” virgin who is part of the wild until she is tamed by marriage, points here to the beast world of the mythic background. In the ode immediately preceding, Deianeira is the “heifer” fought over by two “bulls,” Heracles and the river-god Achelous. Everything about the pseudo-marriage with Iole is awry. Coming as a kind of second wife into an established ménage, as Deianeira bitterly complains (543–51), this bride destroys rather than unites the two houses in question. Rather than producing legitimate children in a fruitful marriage, she can only “give birth to a great Fury for this house” (893–95).

The homology between the familial and agricultural codes which Deianeira suggests in the prologue has its negative aspect too, for agricultural images describe the deadly effects of the love charm, effects that Deianeira discovers too late (701–4). The inverted fertility of the agriculture parallels the inverted significance of the love gift. What was intended to unite the house dissolves it; what was meant to bring love brings deadly hate; what should have asserted the unifying bonds of civilized institutions manifests the vengeful power of a monstrous nightmare world of Centaurs and Hydras.

Greek tragedy, while interlocking the various codes of civilization through its metaphorical language, also makes language itself a sufferer, as it were, in the inversions or disintegrations that threaten all civilized norms. The tragic situation distorts normal speech, producing such paradoxes or oxymora as Ajax’s “darkness by light, dimness most brilliant” (Ajax 393–95), or Antigone’s “holy impiety” (Antig. 74, 924, 943), or Oedipus’ “wedless wedlock” (OT 1214; cf. 1256). Like ritual, language is both a code among codes and also the special mode by which the different codes relate to one another. The disintegration of language into ambiguity or paradox, or the celebrated Sophoclean irony, signifies both a loss of coherence in the world and
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a loss of human ability to grasp and communicate coherence. The verbal ironies of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* reflect both the ultimate failure of Oedipus to solve the true riddle of the play—the riddle of the meaning of life in a universe governed by chance or by distant and mysterious gods—and the very incoherence of a universe that *logos*, reason-as-language, cannot make intelligible. The “bridling” of Iphigeneia’s mouth in the human sacrifice at the beginning of the *Oresteia* (Ag. 228–47) likewise couples the literally unspeakable that is being done with the perverted communication between man and god: verbal communication and ritual communication are isomorphic. Heracles’ bestial roaring at Cenaeum in the *Trachiniae* reflects, as we have seen, the distorted communication between man and god in the rite. But it also stems from noncommunication between husband and wife; the deceptive gift of the robe passes between them in lieu of words that, in fact, they never address to each other.

Language itself, therefore, is a major concern of Greek tragedy. Its dissolution parallels the shedding of kindred blood or incest in the familial code and the perversion of man/god communication in the ritual code. All three codes, language, family, and ritual, meet in the sacrifice of Iphigeneia or the misunderstood prophecies of Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*. Indeed, the whole *Oresteia* can be read in terms of a dissolution and gradual reconstruction of language which runs parallel to a destruction and reconstitution of ritual forms. Language is a central theme in Sophocles’ *Electra, Philoctetes,* and two Oedipus plays. Instead of clarity, tragic language creates ambiguity (*Oedipus Tyrannus*). Instead of communication, it enforces deception, even on the part of those whose natures incline to heroic truth and straight speaking (*Electra, Philoctetes*, the “Trugrede” of *Ajax* 646ff.). Instead of separating man from beast, it obscures the boundary between them as the heroes roar, bark, or wail.

VIII

Greek tragedy is remarkable for its ability to face the disintegration of the cosmic, social, or psychological order without losing all sense of coherence. Tragedy in Greece was rooted in mythical paradigms. Those paradigms gave a certain unity and shared intelligibility to experience, but they still remained open to radical questioning and
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undogmatic speculation. Tragedy could thus combine a sense of the sacred, the numinous, and the mysterious entering into human life with a belief in the power of human intelligence to plumb the deepest questions of existence. For this reason, perhaps, it could step beyond conventional morality to confront the unjust suffering of an Oedipus, a Hippolytus, or a Philoctetes without losing touch with its own imaginative abilities to shape new forms of order—the power of the city to create law in the Oresteia; man’s capacity for spiritual strength, compassion, friendship, and loyalty in the midst of chaos and destruction in Sophocles’ Oedipus plays and Philoctetes, Euripides’ Heracles and Hippolytus; the restorative vitality of language and myth in tragedy itself, implicit in Euripides’ Helen and the finales of Sophocles’ Philoctetes and Oedipus Coloneus.

From a structuralist perspective, the complexity of Greek tragedy lies both in its full use of the highly coded structures of the social order and in its dissolution of those structures. For these reasons, any structuralist analysis of tragedy is engaged in the paradoxical activity of elucidating structures that are deliberated, questioned, negated, inverted, or on the verge of dissolving into chaos. The structural analysis of myth can be normative and descriptive, viewing the infrastructure of a society’s values through the relationships composed and varied in the metaphorical and symbolic equivalents of values, in the language of the myths. The structural analysis of tragedy, however, is forced in just the opposite direction. It highlights the infrastructure of a society’s values only to see them strained to the breaking point or beyond.

At some point, therefore, the analytic rigidity of constructing parallel sequences of homologies must pass into the flexibilities of ironic deconstruction. The structuralist literary critic, at least the critic of tragedy, may begin as the reassembler of bricolage (“structural man takes the real, decomposes it and then recomposes it . . .”) but is soon confronted with the systematic disassembling that is going on beneath the logical structures, a basso ostinato moving ever farther away from the dominant. Like the tragic work itself, he is continually forced away from the logic of noncontradiction into the area of paradox and the coexistence of opposites.

Barthes has defined structuralism as an activity as opposed to a subject-matter, concerned with reconstructing the mental processes through which man makes his world intelligible:
Creation or reflection are not, here, an original "impression" of the world, but a veritable fabrication of a world which resembles the first one, not in order to copy it but to render it intelligible. Hence one might say that structuralism is essentially an activity of imitation, which is also why there is, strictly speaking, no technical difference between structuralism as an intellectual activity on the one hand and literature in particular, art in general on the other: both derive from a mimesis, based not on the analogy of substances (as in so-called realist art), but on the analogy of functions (what Lévi-Strauss calls homology).¹⁴

Yet the structuralist study of tragedy must take special account of the structured deconstruction of those patterns, for that process is part of the uniqueness of the tragic form. Tragedy maintains and even intensifies the systems of homologies and the analogies of functions on which the social order, like the aesthetic order of a work of art, depends. But even as it uses and, through its interlocking metaphors, clarifies the codes of normative values, it is always and simultaneously pulling in tension against the normative, the mediated realm of social life, toward the abnormal, and unmediated, the liminal.

¹⁴. Barthes (note 4) 150.