"Economy" has been an important term in literary theory since Aristotle, but it is usually ignored by literary critics and omitted from the dictionaries and histories of poetics. "Economy" refers etymologically to the conventions (nomoi) of and distribution (nemesis) within the household (oikos). 1 Domestic economy concerns production and distribution in the household, and relations between master and slave, husband and wife, and father and son. Political economy concerns production and distribution in the polis, and relations between political groups, such as tyrants and subjects, and citizens and slaves.

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Nemesis refers to "distribution of what is due, but in usage always retribution" (H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon [Oxford, 1940; reprint ed., 1966], s.v. "nemesis." On retributive justice (cf. dīke), see Chapter 1, "Heraclitus and the Money Form." On oikos (house) and oikia (household)—Aristotle and Xenophon suggest the distinction between them can be transcended—see Aristotle (Politics 1278b) and Leo Strauss (Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus [Cornell, 1970], esp. pp. 92 ff.).
Literary economy concerns similar problems of production, distribution, and relations.

The use of the word "economy" in literary theory seems to have begun with Aristotle's Poetics.

A tragedy, then, to be perfect according to the rules of art, should be of this construction [i.e., ending in misfortune, etc.]. Hence they are in error who censure Euripides just because he follows this principle in his plays, many of which end unhappily. It is, as we have said, the right ending. The best proof is that on the stage and in dramatic competitions, such plays, if well worked out, are the most tragic in effect; and Euripides, faulty though he may be in economy [oikonomía], is felt to be the most tragic of the poets.²

Some scholars argue that oikonomía is a synonym of taxis (order) and should be translated as "construction," "general management," or "disposition."³ Aristotle himself, however, criticizes the use of unnecessary synonyms in prose and dislikes Alcidamus's sloppy metaphoric misuse of the word oikonomía in reference to rhetoric.⁴ In the Poetics, Aristotle carefully employs the possibly pre-Aristotelian technical term oikonomía in a way that comprehends esthetic and political philosophy.⁵ He distinguishes between households (oikoi) suitable for depiction in comedy and those suitable for depiction in


4. Aristotle, Rhetoric 1405a. Aristotle writes that "those who employ poetic language [in prose] by their lack of taste make their style ridiculous and frigid, and such idle chatter produces obscurity; for when words are piled upon one who already knows, it destroys perspicuity. For example, Alcidamus has spoken of "the dispenser (oikonomos) of the pleasures of the hearers" (Rhetoric 1406a). Aristotle does not object to a similar use of oikonomía in poetry, but he does argue that it is "too epithetic for prose" and that it is "metaphorical, hence ridiculous and obscure." Perhaps Aristotle also has a political reason for attacking Alcidamus's use of oikonomía. Alcidamus is a champion of nature (physis) against convention (nomos); he asserts that "god has set all men free, that nature has made no man a slave," and that nomoi alone make men slaves (W. K. C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, 4 vols. [Cambridge, 1969], 3: 313). The aristocratic Aristotle, taking another viewpoint, asserts that there is such a thing as a slavish nature. He attacks not only the rhetoric but also the politics of Alcidamus's metaphor that "philosophy is a bulwark against the laws (nomoi)" (Rhetoric 1406b) and his phrase "the laws (nomoi), the ruler of states" (Rhetoric 1406a).

tragedy, such as Oedipus’s household. When Aristotle suggests that Euripides has faulty economy, he means, in part, that Euripides’ tragedies do not always depict families suitable to the genre.

The family depicted in tragedy must also be suited to the supposed family of the audience, from which the tragic hero elicits pity. In the *Rhetoric* (1386a) and the *Ethics* (1155a), Aristotle argues that men experience not pity but fear when they see members of their own household in great danger. In seeing their own families threatened, men are able to feel only for themselves, only for those who are homogeneous with them in danger; and in this case fear drives out pity. Great fear, like indignation (*nemesis*), is to be avoided by the tragedian (*Rhetoric* 1387a). He must manage a household on stage in such a way as to ensure that it is somewhat familiar to that of his audience (hence eliciting fear) but not too familiar (since that would make pity impossible). The poet-economist, then, must be a master of familiarities and unfamiliarities, of similarities and differences. He must be a master of metaphorization between human families and between families of words: “Metaphors should be drawn from objects which are proper to the object, but not too apparently familiar (*apo oikeiôn kai mē phanerôn*); just as, for instance, in philosophy it needs sagacity to see the similarity (*to homoion*) in things that are apart” (*Rhetoric* 1412a). Metaphors should be drawn from objects that are generally homogeneous with each other, that is, of similar families (*gene*) or households (*oikoi*), but not too obviously homogeneous. Only in this way can metaphorization reverse (our perceptions of) familial relations between households and between households of words.

The esthetic theory of *mimēsis* and of the *homoion* is informed by theories of economic and biological production (*poiēsis*). In the *Politics*, for example, Aristotle makes a crucial distinction between nature and convention, or between good and bad production, on which his esthetics depend. He distinguishes between a supposedly natural economics (whose end is just distribution or *dikē*) and a supposedly unnatural chrematistics (whose end is profit or *kerdos*). This distinction informs Aristotle’s political and esthetic writings. The tyrant, for example, is defined as a chrematistical profit-making ruler interested only in selfish ends. On the other hand, the statesman is defined as

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6. Aristotle did not have a separate science of “economics” (as Alfred Marshall called it in 1890, in *Principles of Economics*), nor was he an *économiste*. However, the power of money is one subject of his *Economics*, which chronicles the rise to and fall from power of many wealthy men. Aristotle recommends studies of such men; one example is the interpretative tale about Thales (*Politics* 1259a). (The author of the Aristotelian *Economics* II suggests that such stories can be adapted to tragedy [1346a].)
an economist who dispenses or disposes but does not make a profit. Aristotle defines both domestic and political economy by focusing on these two kinds of production:

And we can also see the answer to the question whether the art of wealth-getting (*chrēmatistikê*) belongs to the householder (*oikonomikou*) and the statesman, or whether on the contrary supplies ought to be provided already, since just as statesmanship does not create (*poiei*) human beings but having received them from nature makes use of them, so also it is the business of nature to bestow food by bestowing land or sea or something else, while the task of the householder is, starting with these supplies given, to dispose of them in the proper way. For it does not belong to the art of weaving to make fleeces, but to use them, and also to know what sort of fleece is good and suitable or bad and unsuitable. (*Politics* 1258a)

The poet (*poietês*) is a maker. Aristotelian poetics considers whether a poem is the product of an economical treatment of objects provided by nature or of a chrematistical attempt to make or provide such objects themselves. It would determine whether a poem is "the voice of the shuttle" or the golden fleece. Aristotle suggests that the chrematist desires to earn an unnaturally infinite profit: "Wealth-getting (*chrēmatistikê*) has no limit in respect of its end, and its end is riches and the acquisition of goods in the commercial sense. But the household branch (*oikonornike*) of wealth-getting has a limit, inasmuch as the acquisition of money [as opposed to goods] is not the function of household management" (*Politics* 1257b). Chrematistics, unlike economics, supports the unnatural illusion that "wealth consists of a quantity of money" (*Politics* 1257b) that can purchase and so seems to be homogeneous with anything in the market. To men such as Midas gold becomes everything, just as to some poets metaphor appears to be all.

In Aristotelian literary theory there is a purposeful ambiguity whether poetry is an economic or a chrematistical production. Indeed, Aristotle argues that a work of art is a homogeneous likeness (*homoion*) of an original, natural thing as it appears to the senses and not a symbolic representation of it.8 Symbolic representations such as words do not represent naturally (*physêi*); words are merely conventional symbols (*symbola*) of mental impressions (*pathêmata*) and are heterogeneous with those impressions (*On Interpretation* 16a). The mental impressions themselves, however, are homogeneous likenesses (*homoiômata*) of natural objects, "which are the same for the whole of

7. Fragment from the *Tereus* of Sophocles, recorded by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1454b36).
mankind," so that these impressions stand in the same relation to natural objects as works of art stand in relation to originals. The metaphor that informs this theory of heterogeneous symbolization and homogeneous imitation is derived in part from the image of the mechanical impression of wax by a seal-ring or of a globule of metal by a stamp. In Aristotle's thought, sealing and minting, or the transformation of a natural object (for example, a metal as commodity) into a supposedly unnatural medium (for example, the same metal as money), is often a metaphor for the impression of the mind by a memory (On Memory and Recollection 450-51).9 On the one hand, an impression on a coin is like art: it is the homogeneous imitation or pathēma of the stamp, as art is homogeneous with the thing it signifies. On the other hand, an impression on a coin is like a word: it is the symbolical and heterogeneous semeion of the natural weight of the coin where it is impressed (Politics 1257a), as a word is a heterogeneous symbol of the thing it signifies. These conflicting aspects of numismatic impressions suggest how the development of minting may have confused an earlier understanding of the relation between sign (for example, verbal art and word) and thing signified, and between natural things (pathēmata) and conventional things (for example, symbola); they also suggest how money itself (of which coins are the tokens) helped to confuse the relation between the (economic and chrematistic) problem of the just price and the (philosophic and rhetorical) problem of the mot juste.10 Minting and money made possible a revolution in art and esthetic theory of which Aristotle is an articulate spokesman and critic.

Money interest, the theory of which is a key to Aristotelian economics, helped to precipitate from archaic Greek thought a new theory of imitation or of like things (homoioimata). In the Greek language after the development of money, words such as tokos came to refer not only to the biological generation of likenesses but also to monetary generation or interest.11 Aristotle objects to this easy metaphor from natural,

9. On this and similar metaphors, see J. Hangard, Monetaire en daarmee verwante metaforen (Groningen, 1963).


11. Monetary interest and offspring are both signified by tokos (offspring of animals), sitos (offspring of plants), and ekgonos (offspring). Cf. Latin faenus, from fecundus. Many peoples accepted the analogy between animate and inanimate generation (see F. M. Heichelheim, An Ancient Economic History [Leyden, 1964], 1: 104-13, 212-22). On the history of the idea of usury, see Benjamin Nelson, The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood (Chicago, 1969).
animate to nomic, inanimate things and writes that it is "natural [kata physin] to all . . . to draw provision [economically] from the fruits of the soil and from animals" but that usury or monetary generation draws not from nature (physis) but from money (nomisma):

Usury is most reasonably hated, because its gain comes from money itself and not from that for the sake of which money was invented. For money was brought into existence for the purpose of exchange, but interest increases the amount of the money itself (and this is the actual origin of the Greek word tokos: offspring resembles parent [homoia ta tiktomena] and interest is money born of money); consequently this form of the business of getting wealth is of all forms the most contrary to nature. (Politics 1258b)

In this consideration of production and reproduction, Aristotle argues that interest does not stand in the same relation to a monetary deposit as a child (for example, a lamb) stands in relation to a parent (for example, a ram or ewe). Natural generation is economic, and monetary generation is chrematistic. In the Politics, Aristotle distinguishes between natural economics and unnatural chrematistics not only in terms of their ends (dike and kerdos) but also in terms of their circuits of exchange. As Marx suggests, "Aristotle sets forth two circuits of circulation, C[ommodity], M[oney]-C, which he calls 'economics,' and M,1-C-M,2, which he calls 'chrematistics.'"12 In economics, the "offspring" of trade is qualitatively different from its "parent": C, and C, are heterogeneous. In chrematistics, the "offspring" of trade is qualitatively identical to its "parent" even if it is quantitatively unequal to it: M,1 and M, are homogeneous. The chrematistic "offspring" resembles its "parent" as interest may be said to resemble principal. As Aristotle argues in the Generation of Animals, it is the nature of some animals and some plants to produce their likenesses (homoioomata),13 but it is not the nature of metallic money to do so.

Aristotle's distinction between natural and unnatural production informs his theory of the poetic production of likenesses of human beings. The nature of human beings, however, is identical neither to that of animals or plants (which do not live in a polis) nor to that of metal (which a polis may transform into money). What kind of generation is natural to human beings? This is one of the questions which

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13. Exceptionally, in the Generation of Animals (71a ff.), Aristotle argues that reproduction resulting in nonidentical offspring is typical of "creatures which come into being not as the result of copulation of living animals, but of putrescent soil and out of residues."
informs Aristotle's favorite play, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the economy of which may help to explain his theory of *poiesis*.

In the works of many writers of classical Greece, *tokos* has a double significance as "offspring" and as "interest." For example, in the *Republic* Socrates is a midwife to philosophy; he is a dispenser of the offspring (*tokos*) of the truth that has been deposited with him and that he pays out to his interlocutors as interest (*tokos kai ekgonos*) homogeneous with its principal.\(^{14}\) In the same dialogue, Gyges the tyrant is depicted as being as keen in the pursuit of monetary profit as Socrates in the pursuit of truth. Both philosopher and tyrant, Oedipus of Thebes also dominated the Greek imagination, and Sophocles tells his tale as if Oedipus were himself an unnatural *tokos*.\(^{15}\) In *Seven against Thebes* and *Antigone*, in which members of Oedipus's family are presented, the word *tokos* and the explicit image of money play important roles.\(^{16}\) The economy of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, directly confronts the problem of unnatural production. Generation, at once biological and monetary, is the informing principle. Norman O. Brown suggests that "the institution of interest presupposes not only cumulative time but also the displacement of the parental complex from the totemic group to the totemic possession money," so that "money in the civilized community comes to have a

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14. *Republic* 507a, cf. 551e. Sophocles' Arcesilaus rebukes a usurer, saying that he is like a bird that heeds the wind only when its offspring (*tokos*) is near (frag. 477). Aristophanes suggests that a banker is a hatcher of owls, the coin-type of Athens (*Birds* 1106 ff.). A similar pun informs much of *Thesmophoriazusae* (esp. 830 ff.) and *Clouds* (esp. 240 ff. on Socrates, and 1970–71 on Thales).

15. Oedipus, like Gyges, comes to power by killing a king and marrying the queen. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, the king is his father and the queen is his mother. The violation of *nomoi* is even greater in Sophocles' drama than in Herodotus's *Histories*. *Oedipus Tyrannus* portrays Oedipus's detection of his political and domestic being, just as Plato's *Republic* delineates the detection of the injustice of the hypothetical Gyges. In *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus ends by blinding himself, but his crime, like the injustice of Gyges in the *Republic*, remains visible to all. Cf. Bernard M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven, 1957), esp. pp. 160, 213.

psychic value it never had in the archaic community.”17 In *Oedipus Tyrannus* a kind of sexual generation as unnatural as usury acts to transform Thebes into a tyranny.18

*Oedipus Tyrannus* presents a human offspring (tokos) who unwittingly violates the laws (nomoi) of household (oikos) and state (polis). As the result of this violation he comes to rule the household as its father and the state as its tyrant. The play opens with a fatherly Oedipus addressing the people of Thebes with the word tekna (“children”).19 He believes that he is heterogeneous with the people, but he addresses them metaphorically as if he were homogeneous, as if he were their father. At the end of the play Oedipus addresses not the people of Thebes but rather his own children-siblings with the same words, as if he were only their father.20

The people of Thebes need Oedipus’s help because their city is plagued with famine and childbirths without issue (tokoisi agonois 26–27). Like children, they suppose that Oedipus correctly answered the riddle of the sphinx by recognizing the familiar (man) in the unfamiliar (riddle) and so saved Thebes from the horrible ransom (36) it had to pay. His answer is believed to be the touchstone (basanos 493, 510) by which Oedipus was tried and found to be no counterfeit. The plot of the touchstone that is *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, will reveal that he who is supposed to have recognized the being of man in the riddle and to have paid the ransom is an unnatural counterfeit, and that the great detective is also the great criminal who does not know his own

18. George Thomson (Marxism and Poetry [New York, 1946], p. 47; Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama [London, 1946], p. 282; and Studies in Ancient Greek Society, 2 vols. [London, 1949–55], 2: 194) and Roland Barthes (On Racine [New York, 1964], p. 41) assert that peripeteia, the “transformation of the action [in drama] into its opposite” in tragedies such as *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Poetics 1452a), is like the historical transformation of the Greek aristocracy after the invention of money. Blind wealth, which can “raise the worst among the highest” (Euripides, frag. 91) and vice versa, is a topos that informs even the Aristotelian *Economics*. Many revolutions in wealth, however, have not produced great tragedy; and as both Aristotle and Marx (*Economic and Philologic Manuscripts* [New York, 1964], pp. 165 ff.) argue, money is merely a medium of exchange and is not itself productive or transformative. Louis Gernet’s suggestion that Greek cultural history must be understood in the context of money as a “homogeneous material” (Anthropologie de la Grèce antique [Paris, 1968], p. 410) better defines the numismatics of Greek tragedy.
being and who must pay a ransom of himself. Oedipus Tyrannus reveals the domestic and political unnaturalness of Oedipus, just as Aristotle's Politics discovers the unnaturalness of monetary interest. This revelation is what can save Thebes.

The revelation of Oedipus's being begins with Creon's announcement that the oracle (to which Oedipus himself had sent Creon) suggested that the city could be ransomed again (101) by punishing the murderer of the previous king, Laius. Demonstrating a mercenary suspicion typical of tyrants, Oedipus suggests that the killers were probably hired assassins, since only money (argyrion 124) could convince men to act so unnaturally as to kill a king. He wishes to find a clue (symbolon 221), and offers a profitable reward (kerdos and charis 232) to the person who provides one. From this point, the movement of the play is from the polis and the problem of who killed Laius to the family and the problem of who generated Oedipus, or who Oedipus is. Oedipus's almost familial self-interest in finding the political killer is manifest. "As it happens, it's I who have the power that he [Laius] had once, and have his bed, and a wife [Jocasta] who shares our seed, and common bond had we had common children (had not his hope of offspring [genos] had bad luck [edystychēsen]—but as it happened, luck [tyche] lunged at his head): because of this, as if for my own father, I'd fight for him" (258 ff.). Oedipus suggests that the events of his life and generation were and are ruled by tyche (luck). Aristotle argues that dramatic plots should proceed by technē (art) as opposed to tyche. In Oedipus Tyrannus the concept of tyche confronts that of its near homonym, technē, and in the course of the play Oedipus learns that his own status as tokos, another near homonym, is the technē that informs the plot of his life.

After hearing of their obligation to detect the criminal, the chorus appeals to "golden Pytho" (152-53) or "golden Hope" (159), "Artemis, whose famous throne is the whole circle of the marketplace" (161), and "Athena, golden goddess, daughter of Zeus" (187). The Lycean Lord, perhaps Apollo (Oedipus's enemy), is called golden (204--5), and the head of Bacchus is said to be bound in gold (209). Hades, another deity of commerce, seeks vengeance on Oedipus because Oedipus's answering the sphinx ended Hades' enrichment (ploutidzein 30) from the bodies of dead Thebans. Such golden and commercial gods are supposed to affect the destiny of Thebes, but the chorus seems not to know their exact technique.

In the interview with Tiresias, Oedipus expresses his distrust of

Tiresias's famous technē (357) and his trust in his own ability to answer riddles. Tiresias the seer accuses the tyrant of a kind of incest (homilia 367, cf. 1185). Oedipus concludes that Tiresias has sold his story for wealth: "Oh, wealth (ploutē) and tyranny (tyranni) and art surpassing art (technē technēs hyperpherousa) in the life that has much admiring envy in it!" (380–81). Oedipus allies wealth and tyranny to technē technēs hyperpherousa, but he does not yet know whose or which artful technique informs all others. He intends merely to accuse the blind Tiresias of being a charlatan and a beggar (agyrtēs 388), with eyes always open for profit (kerdos 388) and always closed to his art (techne 389) of which he believes that he, Oedipus, is the true master. Tiresias warns Oedipus about the criminal he seeks:

A seeming stranger, he shall be shown to be a Theban born...
To his beloved children, he'll be shown a father who is also brother; to the one who bore him, son and husband; to his father his seed-fellow (homosporos) and killer.

(452–60)

Reminding the tyrant that "he who was rich (plousios) will beg" (455), Tiresias leaves the stage. Oedipus, who had guessed that the answer to the riddle of the sphinx was "Man" (in general), does not yet guess or know that the answer to the riddle of the insightful Tiresias is "Oedipus" (in particular).

In the following episode, Oedipus accuses Creon of having conspired with Tiresias. He taunts Creon for not fighting with the aid of wealth (chrēmata 542), which, Oedipus suggests, is necessary to win and to maintain a tyranny. Creon insists that he does not want a tyranny (586) and that he regards tyranny as essentially without profit (kerdos 595).

Oedipus then tells Jocasta that Creon has been plotting against his life with a malignant technē (643). Again opposing technē (which he now appears to fear) to tychē, he describes to Jocasta the events of his life as though they were ruled by chance (tychē 773). Oedipus speaks of a chance event (tychē 776) in the home of King Polybius and Queen Merope of Corinth, whom he believes to be his parents. One day, he says, someone in the court called him plastos (780) (meaning "counterfeit" as well as "bastard").22 Oedipus went to the oracle and received

22. This is the only occurrence of plastos in the extant works of Sophocles. Plastinx is the word for the balance used by a moneychanger. In the Republic, Socrates suggests that a youthful creature "is best moulded and takes the impression that one wishes to
the warning that he would kill his father and marry his mother. He tried to heed the warning by leaving Corinth. At a crossroads he met a supposedly unfamiliar man (Laius, as it turns out) whose arrogance he repaid (810) with death.

Oedipus was and is afraid of killing his father, supposedly Polybius. He is relieved, therefore, when a messenger arrives from Corinth and announces that Polybius is dead. Oedipus believes that he now has only to fear marrying his mother (tekousa 985), supposedly Merope. The messenger from Corinth, however, says that he found the baby Oedipus by chance, that he did not purchase him from another (1025), and that he gave the baby to Polybius as a gift. He even calls Oedipus teknon (1030), as if he were the tyrant's father, and explains the chance (tychē 1036) by which he was named Oedipus. Oedipus quickly detects that the reward-seeking messenger did not actually find him by chance (1039), but rather received him from another. At an earlier crossroads on his way from Thebes to Corinth, the infant Oedipus was given by a Theban freeman (1123) to the Corinthian hireling (1029). Again Oedipus calls himself the son of chance (tychē 1080, cf. 1025), but the doubting chorus now wonders who are the parents of the tyrant who called them tekna (1): "Who was your mother, son (teknon 1098)?" To the chorus, Oedipus is no longer only a tyrant or political father, but also a son.

In the interview with the Theban freeman almost all is revealed. The freeman does not wish to speak freely (charis 1152, cf. 232), but when threatened by Oedipus, he tells of the prediction that a child would kill his parents (tekontes 1176) and of his parents' decision to destroy it. "Poor mother (tekousa 1174)," cries Oedipus. Still ignorant that he is familiar, or homogeneous, with the mother, Oedipus can pity her. Finally, however, the time of the play reveals his generation: "Time, all-seeing, surprised you living an unwilled life, and sits from of old in judgment on the marriage, not a marriage, where the begetter is the begot as well (tekounta kai teknounenon)" (1213–15). The price of all-seeing time (1213) is the rate of interest. Oedipus is the son (teknon 1216) of Laius, revealed as a tokos, both begetter and begot. His mother-wife's suicide is described as if to reinforce that revelation: "She called to Laius, dead so many years, remembering the ancient seed which caused his death, leaving the mother (tiktousan) to the son to breed again an ill-born (dysteknon) progeny. She mourned the bed

stamp (plattetai) on it" (377b). Oedipus was adopted by the Corinthian monarchs. If he were the bastard son of either Polybius or Merope, however, he could conclude either that murdering Laius was not patricide or that sleeping with Jocasta was not incest. Thus, in the later scenes of the play Oedipus hopes that he is a bastard.
where she, alas, bred double—husband by husband, children by her child (*tek'ne tek'no tekoi*) (1245–50). What Oedipus once interpreted as bad luck (*dys-tychia* 262) is now revealed to be bad birth (*dys-teknia* 1248, cf. 423 and 425). *Dysteknia* produced the patricidal and incestuous *toko* in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

The *technē technēs hyperpherousa*, or technique of techniques, that informs Oedipus's tyranny is socially perverse, if not unnatural, human production. Like the product of monetary generation, Oedipus is homogeneous (or, as he calls himself, *ekgonos*) with his progenitors: "I am without god and the son of unholy parents, but I am also of the same kind (*homogenos*) as those from whom I was born" (1360–61). Indeed, he is as much like (or the *homoion* of) Laius as interest is qualitatively equal to its principal. The most general formula for chrematistical usury, $M_1-C-M_2$, represents an unnatural transaction in which there may be some quantitative but no qualitative difference between $M_1$ and $M_2$. Oedipus is often warned about this homogeneity (414–15); words such as *homosporos*, *homilia*, and *homos* dominate the language of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. But what distinguishes Oedipus from other men is not that he is like, but rather that he is qualitatively equal to, his progenitor. Seth Benardete writes that Oedipus "is equally husband and son of Jocasta, father and brother of Antigone, and killer of Laius who gave him life. By killing his father and marrying his mother he has destroyed the triad of father, mother and son. He is not a third one over and beyond his origins, but is at one with them." 23 The tyrant-detective discovers his genus by discovering his crimes of homogeneity: patricide and incest. Geoffrey Hartman writes that "Oedipus is redundant: he is his father, and as his father he is nothing, for he returns to the womb that bore him." 24 Oedipus is his own progenitor. Tiresias says, "This day you will be born and die at the same time" (438). By becoming his father, Oedipus the *toko* makes his own birth impossible and so commits political (and, in Colonus, domestic) suicide.

At the end of the play, Oedipus thinks not of the political "children" he now knows that he has lost, but of his familial children-siblings. He addresses them with the word that opened the play, *tekna* (1375, 1480, 1484, 1501), and tells the tale of a violation both his and theirs: "Your father killed his father, plowed the one who gave him birth (*tekousa*), and from the place where he was sown from there he got you, from that place he too was born" (1496–99). He who is at

one will be atoned at Colonus. In Sophocles' tale of the counterfeit Oedipus's family, Antigone is the incestuous patricide's daughter-sister and his only possible offspring or outcome. Like her father-brother, she will stand finally against generation (anti-gone).

In his discussion of oikonomia, Aristotle demonstrates that the family of Oedipus is suitable for depiction in tragedy. He determines the relation between the family life depicted on stage and the family life of the spectator. If the spectator considers Oedipus to be a little like or homogeneous to himself, he can pity Oedipus. If, however, the spectator identifies wholly with Oedipus (as do some Freudians), fear may drive out pity. Oedipus, who answered the riddle of the sphinx, was unable until the end of Oedipus Tyrannus to recognize his homogeneous familiars and heterogeneous unfami liars. We know probably no better than he who answered the sphinx whether Oedipus is like us. Modern man is puzzled and charmed by Oedipus Tyrannus. He can pity the tyrant or perverse monarch of old despite and because of the appearance that his is another political economy.

The disposition of Sophocles' play focuses on the most vexing social problem of generation in human families, incest, which exists naturally in the state of nature and abhorrently in conventional societies. Oedipus Tyrannus may be interpreted as a study of tyranny in which is discovered not its monetary genesis, as in Plato's Republic, but rather its perverse sexual genesis. Monetary and sexual theory are informed by the same tension between nature and convention that Aristotle writes about in his condemnation of interest and in his partially anti-Platonic defense of poetry. Poetry is a counterfeit human production as vexing as incest. In Aristotelian theory, poetry is a dispensation or offspring (tokos) of the truth, but an ambiguity exists whether it is a natural, economic production or an unnatural, chrematistic production. Aristotle acknowledges the problem of the original thing of which art may be said to be a likeness (homoion) and the problem of what happens to an artistic production when it becomes or is, like Oedipus, identical to its supposedly homogeneous progenitor. Such problems, crucial in the articulation of Platonic esthetic theory, exist only at the marginal extremes of Aristotle's economics and theory of mimesis. His poetic economy depends nevertheless on theories of natural reproduction, and, inevitably, on studying productions such as Oedipus Tyrannus. How much Aristotle depends on a theory of natural dispensation that moderns can adapt or adopt is a problem still to be considered.

Despite Aristotle's integration of esthetic and economic theory, the term "economy" soon came to mean, as if by a bad metaphor, merely
the internal disposition (dispositio) of a literary work. Polybius, Dionysus of Halicarnassus, Philodemus, Quintilian, Racine, Milton, Lessing, Schiller, Dryden, Henriot, and perhaps even Rousseau are among those who use the term in this narrow depoliticized sense of internal organization.\(^{25}\) Indeed, the history (in literary theory) of economy is, like that of mim\(\epsilon\)sis, often little more than the description of why and how fundamental philosophical and political categories were stripped of their explicit philosophical and political implications. In this history there are some exceptional theorists who attempt to integrate disposition with dispensation; among these are the Aristotelian scholiasts, who often consider the poet as an economist (oikonomos) dispensing (tamieuomenos) parts of a drama,\(^{26}\) and Longinus.

Longinus's *Treatise on the Sublime* presents a theory of literary economy that considers more than disposition. Longinus argues that sublimity (hypsos) is the polar opposite of economy and that the effect of

\(^{25}\) Polybius (1.4.3; cf. 1.13.9), Dionysus of Halicarnassus (Epistula ad Pompeium 4.2; cf. Ars Rhetorica 25), and Philodemus of Gadara (Peri parr\(\acute{\epsilon}\)sias, ed. Alexander Olivieri [Leipzig, 1914], p. 47) use oikonomia to refer to the order and rules of literature (LaRoche, *Histoire*, pp. 144, 159). Marcus Fabius Quintilianus ("De dispositione utilitate," in *Institutio Oratoria*, bk. 7) translates oikonomia into Latin as dispositio, and tries to separate problems of disposition from problems of acquisition, production, and dispensation. Although some Latin commentators retain the Greek word in their works (for example, Aelius Donatus's *ad Ter. Eun.* 719; and Marius Servius's *ad Aen.* 1.226), they too do not consider disposition in relation to dispensation.

Racine considers l'économie of his Britannicus (dédicace to Britannicus) and notes that he "changed somewhat l'économie and la fable [the story] of Euripides" (préface to *Iphigénie*). Milton writes of "the economy or disposition of the fable" (introduction to *Samson Agonistes*). G. E. Lessing writes about "the customary oikonomie of French tragedies" (*Sammtliche Schriften*, ed. K. Lachman, 13 vols. [1838–40], 6: 111, letter, February 1760) and about the oikonomie of works of literature in general (letter, June 24, 1759).

In such criticism "economy" usually applies to drama, but it is applicable to any genre. Dryden writes about the economy of an epic (*Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays* [New York, 1964], 2: 225) and argues that in "the economy of a poem Vergil much excells Theocritus" (ibid., 2: 91). Emile Henriot discusses the économie of Balzac's novels (Portait de femmes d'Héloïse à Katherine Mansfield [Paris, 1951], p. 338). Charles Rollin writes about the économie of discourse in Demosthenes' speeches (Traité des études [Avignon, 1808], bk. 4, ch. 4). Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Essai sur l'origine des langues [Paris, 1970], p. 536) considers the internal dispositions of "langages" such as music and painting: "Multiplier les sons entendus à la fois, ou développer les couleurs l'une après l'autre, c'est changer leur économie, c'est mettre l'œil à la place de l'oreille, et l'oreille à la place de l'œil."

\(^{26}\) See, for example, sch. Eumenides 47 and sch. *Electa* 1098. Passages in which the scholiasts use the term oikonomia are collected in Adolhus Trendelenburg's *Grammaticorum Graecorum de Arte Tragica Judiciorum Reliquiae* (Bonn, 1867), esp. pp. 94–105.
sublime language is transport, while the effect of economy is persuasion:

Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer. Similarly, we see skill in invention and economy emerging as the hardwon result not of one thing or two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude (athanos). 27

The sublime dispenses plenitude and precipitates chrematistic production. "Our soul is naturally uplifted by the truly great [sublime]; we receive it as a joyous offering; we are filled with delight and pride as if we had ourselves created what we heard" (7). In order to elicit this possibly false feeling in his reader, the writer or orator is encouraged to employ techniques such as natural high-mindedness, selection and organization of material, and amplification. Amplification includes the economic arrangement or disposition (epoikonomia) of facts or of passions (11). These techniques, however, cannot by themselves produce sublimity: "The orator must remember that [amplification by economy] apart from sublimity does not form a complete whole. . . . If you take away the sublime, you will remove . . . the soul from the body" (11). Sublimity is to the soul as economy is to the body. Economy can form a complete or independent whole only when pity is to be excited or an opponent is to be disparaged. Economy, then, appears to signify mere disposition, but it is a polar opposite of, and is necessarily dependent on, sublimity.

Longinus prefers the dispensing sublime poet (for instance, Archilochus) to his polar opposite, the disposing economic poet (Eratosthenes is an example): "Eratosthenes in the 'Erigone' (a little poem which is altogether free from flaw) [is not] a greater poet than Archilochus with the rich and un-economic [anoikonometa] abundance which follows in his [Archilochus's] train and with that outburst of the divine spirit within him which it is difficult to bring under the rules of law [hypo nomon taxai]" (33.5). Archilochus is a sublime and uneconomic dispenser. His "revolutionary" spirit is difficult, perhaps impossible, to bring under the control of nomoi. (A similar difficulty,
perhaps, underlies Aristotle's dismissal of Alcidamus's interpretation of *oikonomia* in rhetoric, for Aristotle strongly disapproves of Alcidamus's revolutionary theory of *nomoi*.) Longinus's polar opposition of economy to sublimity implies a corresponding opposition of work (resistance) to beauty. The audience, like the writer, may be inventive and skillful, and may work hard at understanding the events that it sees or reads. The audience, however, cannot control its reaction to the sublime (14). As in the philosophy of Kant, moreover, the beautiful is that which can, and indeed must, be comprehended without work. The sublime is that which we feel we ourselves have created or produced effortlessly. It is the *Verschwendung* (dispensation) that Goethe depicts in *Faust* and that, finally, Goethe shows to be uncredible. Without work there is no production; without resistance there is no justifiable feeling of liberation from resistance. The supposedly liberated *Sublime* remains at best a partial study of one aspect of esthetics.

Aristotle suggests that the writer or philosopher is an *oikonomos* who dispenses likenesses (*homoiōmata*) of impressions (*pathēmata*) that he receives from nature. Plato's Socrates suggests that the philosopher is a kind of artful midwife who dispenses to his interlocutors a teaching that he hopes to be the offspring (*tokos*) of the Good, or the interest (*tokos*) on the principal that is the Good, or homogeneous to (*ekgonos*) the Good. The Platonic and Aristotelian theory, that there is something given to or deposited with man (for example, the Good) that it is his duty to dispense to others, generally influenced the art of writing as well as the study of writing and *mimēsis*. In "How to Write History" (50-51), for example, Lucian argues that the historian does not make but rather receives the events of history as the dispensation of God, and that he is required to dispense these events to his readers without misrepresentation. Lucian asserts that the historian is like a sculptor who does not make but rather receives his material (gold, for example) from nature and who works this material into a sculpture: "The sculptor's art [lies] in handling [oikonomesthenai] his material properly. . . . The task of the historian is similar [to that of the sculptor]: to give fine arrangements to events and illuminate them as

28. See above, n. 4.

29. In Goethe's *Faust*, the opposition of disposition to dispensation (Longinus's "economy" and "sublime") creates a tension between real (creditable) and unreal (uncredible) activity. Figures such as Homunculus (a "soul" without a "body") and Knabe-Wagenlenker (who calls himself *Verschwendung*, or dispensation) and his double Euphorion end in a sublime and uneconomic manner. Cf. Goethe's dispensing *Pandora*. 
vividly as possible." Lucian also states that the historian is like a mirror that reflects or dispenses the shape of things and events just as it receives them. Things must be allowed to "speak for themselves," "without false colouring, distortion, and misrepresentation."\(^{30}\) As in Aristotle, the crucial argument is that the economist-poet is not the same kind of maker as is the chrematist-poet of idle tales.

Another example of the influence of the Aristotelian theory of dispensation is the religious and philosophical doctrine that the wise man is an oikonomos (steward) who dispenses the divine teaching. Unlike Lucian's historian but like Plato's philosopher, he alters the mirror economically, that is, according to the spiritual level of his audience. In the parable of the sower, for instance, Jesus suggests that the steward should match his ability to give with his students' ability to receive the truth. In order to dispense truth, it may even be necessary to tell a kind of untruth. This doctrine of the economy of truth, which justifies a kind of lying, is easily misused. It may become a rationalization for lying in order to help not the hearer but rather the liar. Edmund Burke writes that "falsehood and delusion are allowed in no case whatever," but that "there is an economy of truth . . . a sort of temperance, by which a man speaks the truth in order to speak it the longer."\(^{31}\) Saint Paul argues that he is a steward (oikonomos), but often seems to consider in his theory of economy only the good of the steward himself. "In your teaching," he writes, "show gravity and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us. Bid slaves to be submissive to their master..."\(^{32}\) Paul implies that in order not to be censured, one can tell a lie or even seem to become the friend of slavery.

The doctrine of economy may also be misused when the medium (for example, speech or writing) by which the truth should be dispensed is misunderstood. The Reverend F. W. Robertson, for exam-

32. Titus 2.7. Cf. Titus 1.7. Paul would reinterpret the economy of the Old Testament (Genesis 43.16, 43.19, 44.1; 2 Kings 18.3) on a supposedly higher spiritual level. He would give to the gentiles the "grace" that is "the unsearchable wealth of Christ" (Ephesians 3.8): "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good economists of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4.10). In the Christian economy, grace is the plentitudinous source of abundance. It is not the work of man, nor can man alone cause it to be dispensed (2 Corinthians 2, 3); man is only the steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4.1). In the New Testament the word "economy" also refers to God's plan for salvation (Ephesians 3.9, 1.10). Cf. Adhémar d'Ales, "Le Mot oikonomia dans la langue théologique de Saint Irénée," \textit{Revue des études grecques}, 32: 1–9.
ple, speaks of the "economic management of the truth" but errone-
ously believes that words "are the coins of the intellect." 33 Because
men are sometimes morally bad or intellectually mistaken, the doc-
trine of the economy of truth demands that only saintly and wise men
be entitled to employ "the withholding of the full and explicit truth." Jesus is supposed to have been such a man. When asked about taxa-
tion, he answered that "man should render unto Caesar what is
Caesar's and unto God what is God's." This answer is said to illustrate
how "economy" benefits both speaker and hearer.

The attempt to define the difference between falsehood and pious
economy gives rise to theories of metaphor and fiction. Cardinal
Newman, for example, compares economy with the disciplina arcani.
Economy is "setting [the truth] out to advantage," as when "represent-
ing religion, for the purpose of conciliating the heathen, in the
form most attractive to their prejudices," and the disciplina arcani is a
"withholding [of] the truth" in the form of allegory, by which the
same text may express the same truth at different levels to different
people. 34 Economy is necessary to "lead children forward by de-
grees" (p. 72) and may employ similes and metaphors. Newman
maintains, for example, that "the information given to a blind man,
that scarlet was like the sound of a trumpet, is an instance of an
unexceptionable economy, since it was as true as it could be under the
circumstances of the case, conveying a substantially correct impres-
sion as far as it went" (pp. 72-73). All men are children blind to truth,
and, as Newman argues, every poet accommodates to (and some-
times even flatters) the feelings and prejudices of the hearer.

Like metaphors, whole histories and fictions can be economical.
The events of the New Testament are economical versions of the
truth, just as the events of the Old Testament are economical "simula-
tions" of the New Testament. The first chapter of the book of Job and
"the Mosaic Dispensation [were] Econom[ies] simulating (so to say)
unchangeableness, when from the first [they were] destined to be
abolished" (p. 77). This simulation is as economic as the simulation of
sight by sound. Newman, indeed, seems to interpret all good teach-
ing as "Economia of greater truths untold:" "All those so-called
Economies or dispensations, which display His character in action,
are but condescensions to the infirmity and peculiarity of our minds,
shadowy representations of realities which are incomprehensible to
creatures such as ourselves..." (p. 75). The motives of ordinary men

33. Reverend F. W. Robertson, Sermons, 1st ser., no. 1; 4th ser., no. 6.
(for example, fear of saying the truth or desire to profit from saying an untruth) can make economy a mere rationalization for telling self-serving untruths. Thus an evil or ignorant poet-lier may do others more harm than good. Newman argues that "it is plain that [some men, for example] Justin, Gregory or Athanasius, were justifiable or not in their Economy, according as they did or not practically mislead their [hearers]" (p. 73) and that it was by economy that "to the Jews [Paul, wishing to save his life] became as a Jew" (p. 65), since he did not "practically mislead" his judges. He advises, however, that the ordinary man may "lie, or rather utter a lie, as the sophists say" (p. 74), only "as physician, for the good of his patients" (pp. 73-74).

The economy of truth, of course, informs secular as well as religious literature. In "Economies de paroles," Voltaire defines economy merely as "speaking according to the time and place" and cites the passage in the New Testament in which Paul speaks "by economy" before the Pharisees in order to save his life as "a pious artifice." Voltaire catalogues many non-Christian writers who wrote economically. Plato, Theophrastus, Xenophon, Aristotle, and others are said to have said "non quod sentiunt, sed quod necesse est dicunt." Voltaire suggests that not only specific biblical metaphors and fictions but also literature in general may be economic, and, significantly, that proper rules for the economy of the truth can be determined not from theology but rather from domestic and political economy.

Esoteric economic writing hides its deepest message from those to whom a writer does not wish to reveal it. The ones to whom the message is revealed are either those extraordinary good or wise men who can understand without work or those ordinary men who are willing and able to work. As Maimonides argues, the work of interpretation is part of literary production. Without the effort required to interpret his difficult Guide of the Perplexed, it cannot guide. Some modern critics have argued, however, that literature and philosophy should be easy and that the writer should husband the reader's ener-

gies. Herbert Spencer’s “economy of creative effort” emphasizes “the importance of economizing the reader’s or the hearer’s attention. To so present ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort, is the desideratum.” Spencer suggests that “the more simple, . . . the greater will be the effect produced” and that brevity, assuming it does not work against ease, is admirable because it conserves the reader’s energies.

According to Spencer, a writer should be sparing with words because “language is a hindrance to thought.” “This general principle of economy” implies that “the sensitiveness of the faculties of the reader must be continuously husbanded” according to a theory in which words and sentences are supposed to be separate from the ideas they express. “The more time and attention it takes to receive and understand each sentence, the less time and attention can be given to the contained idea; and the less vividly will that idea be conceived.” Spencer even suggests that metaphor is superior to simile because it uses fewer words to express the same idea: “The superiority of the Metaphor to the Simile is . . . the great economy it achieves. . . . When the comparison is an involved one, the greater force of the metaphor, consequent on its greater brevity, becomes much more conspicuous.” Spencer would rule out all abstract or fiduciary words because he supposes that the effort required to conjoin a concrete word with its object is less than the effort needed to conjoin an abstract word with its object. In the English language, he believes, “the economy of the recipient’s mental energy, into which are thus resolvable the several causes of the strength of Saxon English, may equally be traced into the superiority of specific over generic words.” Spencer’s supposition that words and ideas can be separated would make ideas (if they exist at all) inaccessible, and his preference for concrete words would make abstract and universal thinking almost impossible. The feeling of freedom from work that Spencer’s economy might give to the reader would erase from his life that resistance without which beauty (or thought) is impossible. Spencer would flatter the reader or citizen in a way inimical to the philosophy of art and political theory but supportive of the conservative politics he espouses.

The relation between the literary and political aspects of Spencer’s thought is similar to that of a writer like Ben Jonson, who discusses “the economy and disposition” of poems and asserts that the poet is a

39. Ibid., p. 45.
"husbandman" who "should not protect [his] sloth with the patronage of difficulty." Jonson argues that "translation [or metaphor] must serve only necessity ... or commodity." The political implications of "commodity" are manifest in Jonson's assertion that language is uncommodious when "a privy councillor at the table take[s] his metaphor from a dicing house." Metaphorization should not mix social classes (Aristotelian political oikoi) that are unfamiliar to each other. Jonson thus suggests that language should support the regime in the same way as the mint. "A man coins not a new word without some peril," he writes. "Custom is the most certain mistress of language, as the public stamp makes the current money.... We must not be too frequent with the mint, every day coining [new words]... since the chief virtue of a style is perspicuity, and nothing so vicious in it as to need an interpreter." Jonson knows that interpretation sometimes acts as a catalyst to new logical and political organization, and so relegates Mercury or Hermes (whom he calls deorum hominum-que interpres) to a conservative "presiden[cy] of languages," the "letters" of which "are the bank of words."41

The conservative political implications of the argument that literature ought to be easy or commodious for the reader should not be ascribed to the arguments that literature should liberate the reader or that literary organization should not be wasteful. Longinus's wish to give to the reader a feeling of liberation may appear to be like the ease of which Spencer writes, but for Longinus economy is a difficult disposition that makes possible the apparently easy dispensation that is sublimity. The scholiasts' suggestion, that it is "uneconomical" to waste (diatribein) the presence on stage of characters or actions42 may seem to aim at the abbreviation of which Spencer writes. However, the scholiasts would abbreviate not the reader's energies, but rather the play itself, and this abbreviation often makes the play more difficult for the reader or spectator to comprehend. The scholiasts' theory of the economy of plays has been applied to words by some modern critics, who argue that writing is "supremely economical" when "every word is doing a fantastic amount of work."43 Yet in all these cases, economy does not necessitate abbreviating the work of the reader.

41. Ben Jonson, Timber or Discoveries, ed. R. S. Walker (Syracuse, 1953), pp. 41-60.
Many critics do admit that Spencer’s "economy of the recipient’s mental energy" may be a good guide for writing prose but argue that it should not be transferred to poetry. Victor Shklovsky, for example, attacks Spencer directly in his argument that the literary theorist should "speak about the laws of expenditure and economy in poetic language not on the basis of an analogy with prose, but on the basis of poetic language." He attacks theories of literature that would make poetry easy, automatic, or "algebraic" for the reader. Shklovsky draws an analogy between prosaic literature (in which the first letters of words sometimes seem to replace the words) and speech (in which the sounds of words sometimes replace thoughts or objects). The insidious disappearances of words in the first case and of thoughts or objects in the second case are described in terms of algebraic familiarization. "We perceive the object as if it were packaged: we know that it exists from the space which it occupies, but we see only its surface." As Shklovsky suggests, words misunderstood as abstract fiduciary symbols have the same effect on the objects they are supposed to represent that money has on the commodities it is supposed to measure. "The object, perceived thus in the manner of prose perception, fades and does not leave even a first impression; ultimately even the essence of what it was is forgotten." The mind is transformed by modern thrifty language into a homogenized and homogenizing agent. Shklovsky argues that "the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" and that poetry is or should be an agent of defamiliarization in an apparently universally familiar world.

As we have seen, the debate about literary economy can be transposed from the level of words and metaphors (about which Spencer and Shklovsky write) to the political level. Adorno makes such a trans- or re-position when he objects to the apparent homogeneity and one-dimensionality of modern society, and argues that "defiance of society includes defiance of its language." This defiance, which depends on difficult defamiliarization, may inform musical as well as verbal "languages." Adorno argues, for example, that modern com-


45. Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," p. 11.

mmercial music is too familiar. (It is, so to speak, as confident of and blind to itself as was Oedipus in Corinth.) Only the difficulty and “willed ugliness” of its antagonist, modern music, can free its listeners from the “state of pathological hebetude and insensibility” that commercial music encourages. In Adorno’s esthetics, as Fredric Jameson notes, “only the painful remains as a spur to perception.” Pain is the unfamiliarity in sound that will force us to transform the unconscious contents of daily perceptual life. In Adorno’s criticism, “we begin to glimpse what is the profound vocation of the work of art in a commodity society: not to be a commodity, not to be consumed, to be unpleasurable in the commodity sense.” Perhaps the pain of one who listens to modern music, like the pain of Oedipus in Thebes, can reveal to him what is familiar and unfamiliar.

Pain is a spur or gadfly that, like metaphor, helps us to recognize or to remember our own being in the apparently unfamiliar. A modern economy of literature, however, cannot rest with defamiliarizing the apparently familiar, whether it be commercial music or the word “economy.” “Commodity society” can hardly be destroyed or even understood by the merely negative goads of pain.

Like Aristotle, modern theorists must undertake not only to defamiliarize the being of man but also to comprehend in a single vision the social and esthetic problems that arise in the philosophy of art. Aristotle’s theory of economy, which responds to and rises above negative goading, was fractured by subsequent thinkers into theories of disposition and dispensation. Modern literary theorists are beginning to recover from this uncritical and apolitical bifurcation. Unlike Aristotle, however, modern theorists cannot depend on the distinction between nature and convention that made possible the theoretical rigor of the Aristotelian distinction between chrematistics and economy, or between the exchange value of a commodity and the use value of a good. Indeed, modern thinkers can hardly comprehend the idea of a nature that distributes goods to be redistributed by stewards. The tension between Aristotelian economics, in which nature is given to man, and modern economics, in which nature is changed through exploitation, informs much of modern philosophy and literature.

49. Works of Shakespeare, for example, are informed by a conflict between a supposedly unnatural (chrematistic) merchantry and a supposedly natural (economic) mercy. The conflict extends to language. (“An if my word be sterling yet…” [Richard II 4.1.264]; “What he speaks is all in debt; he owes/For every word” [Timon of Athens 1.2.204–5].) In *The Merchant of Venice* (1.3.79–93), Shylock defends usury by using language to conflate the monetary generation of “use” from a principal (which the
the modern era, men argue (as did Locke) that nature must be ex-
loited actively or (as Marx) that there is no nature, but only human
history and work, of which language is a part. We can no longer take
for granted the ontological status of the biological and spiritual things
of which Aristotle contends art and memory offer homogeneous
likenesses.

The theory of Aristotle gives way, but it also points the way toward
a modern and equally political economy of literature. This modern
theory must avoid the post-Aristotelian fracture of economy into dis-
position and dispensation and must overcome the Aristotelian dis-
tinction between chrematistics and economy, between the golden
fleece and the voice of the shuttle.

gentile merchants of Venice believe to be unnatural) with the sexual generation of
lambs from rams and "ewes" (which they believe to be natural). (Cf. tokos.) Sigurd
Burckhardt (Shakespearean Meanings [Princeton, 1968], pp. 214-15) notes that "Shylock
is imaginative not only about money and flesh but also speech." Cf. Edward Hubler
(The Sense of Shakespeare’s Sonnets [Princeton, 1952], pp. 69 ff., 95 ff.), who discusses
"the economy of the closed heart," the concept of stewardship whereby a "man has an
obligation to nature [because] he is the steward and not the owner of his qualities," and
"the association [in the sonnets] of husbanding and begetting."