



THE GOLDEN FLEECE AND THE VOICE OF THE SHUTTLE

Economy in Literary Theory

"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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1. The complex relationships among *nomos*, *nemesis*, and *oikonomia* (by which political theorists elucidate arguments about the law) are considered by E. LaRoche (*Histoire de la racine nem- en grec ancien* [Paris, 1949], pp. 144 ff.), M. I. Finley (*The Ancient Economy* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973], pp. 17-34), D. R. Bender ("A Refinement of the Concept of Household," *American Anthropologist* 69 [1967]: 493-504), O. Brunner ("Das 'ganze' Haus und die alteuropäische Ökonomik," *Neue Wege der Sozialgeschichte* [Göttingen, 1956], pp. 33-61), and K. Singer ("Oikonomia: An Inquiry into Beginnings of Economic Thought and Language," *Kyklos* 11 [1958]: 29-54).

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. *dikē*), 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 [*oikonomia*], is felt to be the most tragic of the poets.²

Some scholars argue that *oikonomia* 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 Alcidas's sloppy metaphoric misuse of the word *oikonomia* in reference to rhetoric.⁴ In the *Poetics*, Aristotle carefully employs the possibly pre-Aristotelian technical term *oikonomia* 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

2. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a22 ff. Quotations from the *Poetics* are from *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, ed. S. H. Butcher (New York, 1951). Quotations from other works of Aristotle are from *Aristotle*, 23 vols., The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1926-70).

3. On "order," see A. Gudeman, *Aristoteles Poetik* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1934), pp. 248-49. Cf. *katorthōtōsin* (*Poetics* 1453a28). For advocates of "construction" and "general management," see Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 404-5; and Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory*, p. 47, respectively.

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, Alcidas has spoken of 'the dispenser (*oikonomos*) of the pleasures of the hearers'" (*Rhetoric* 1406a). Aristotle does not object to a similar use of *oikonomia* 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 Alcidas's use of *oikonomia*. Alcidas 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 Alcidas'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).

5. Cf. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 404 ff.

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 fear 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 oikeiōn kai mē phanerōn*); 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 (*genē*) 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*).⁶ 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

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 (*chrēmatistikē*) 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 (*poiētēs*) 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"⁷ or the golden fleece. Aristotle suggests that the chrematist desires to earn an unnaturally infinite profit: "Wealth-getting (*chrēmatistikē*) 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 (*oikonomikē*) 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 (*physei*); words are merely conventional symbols (*symbola*) of mental impressions (*pathēmata*) and are heterogeneous with those impressions (*On Interpretation* 16a). The mental impressions themselves, however, are homogeneous likenesses (*homoiomata*) of natural objects, "which are the same for the whole of

7. Fragment from the *Tereus* of Sophocles, recorded by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1454b36).

8. Cf. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory*, p. 124.

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 *sēmeion* 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 (*homoiōmata*). 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, *Monétaire en daarmee verwante metaforen* (Groningen, 1963).

10. A similar confusion informs Ezra Pound's economics. See Richard G. Landini, *A Guide to the Economic Thought in Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1959); and Wayne McIntyre, *Aesthetics and Economics in Ezra Pound* (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1968), esp. pp. 67 ff.

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 (*dikē* and *kerdos*) but also in terms of their circuits of exchange. As Marx suggests, "Aristotle sets forth two circuits of circulation, C[ommodity]₁-M[oney]-C₂, which he calls 'economics,' and M₁-C-M₂, which he calls 'chrematistics.'" ¹² In economics, the "offspring" of trade is qualitatively different from its "parent": C₁ and C₂ are heterogeneous. In chrematistics, the "offspring" of trade is qualitatively identical to its "parent" even if it is quantitatively unequal to it: M₁ and M₂ 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 (*homoioimata*), 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

12. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya (New York, 1970), p. 137n.

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 *poiēsis*.

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

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 *Thesmophoriazousae* (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.

16. In Aeschylus's play, the chorus calls Eteocles *oidipou tokos* (*Seven* 372) and Eteocles speaks of himself as *tokos* (*Seven* 407). On monetary imagery in Sophocles (esp. *Antigone*), see A. A. Lang (*Language and Thought in Sophocles* [London, 1968], esp. pp. 50–51, 151), Robert Goheen (*The Imagery of Sophocles' "Antigone": A Study of Poetic Language and Structure* [Princeton, 1951], Herbert A. Musurillo (*The Light and the Darkness: Studies in the Dramatic Poetry of Sophocles* [Leiden, 1967]), Jan C. Kamerbeek (*The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries* [Leiden, 1967], pt. 4, esp. p. 26), and Seth Benardete ("A Reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*," *Interpretation*, vols. 3/4 [Spring 1975], 5/1 [Summer 1975], 5/2 [Winter 1975]).

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

17. N. O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (New York, 1959), p. 279.

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 Philosophic 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.

19. Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, line 1. Translations are usually from *Oedipus the King*, trans. Thomas Gould (Englewood Cliffs, 1970), unless indicated as my own. Greek quotations are usually from Sophocles, *Ajax—Oedipe Roi—Electre*, ed. Alphonse Dain and trans. Paul Mazon (Paris, 1968).

20. Cf. Seth Benardete, "Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*," in *Sophocles*, ed. Thomas Woodward (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), esp. p. 107.

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 [*tychē*] 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 *tychē* (luck). Aristotle argues that dramatic plots should proceed by *technē* (art) as opposed to *tychē*.²¹ In *Oedipus Tyrannus* the concept of *tychē* 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 Lycēan 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

21. *Eth. Nic.* 1140a, *Poetics* 1454a. Cf. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory*, pp. 180 ff.

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 (*technē* 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 unwilling life, and sits from of old in judgment on the marriage, not a marriage, where the begetter is the begot as well (*tekounta kai teknoumenon*)" (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 (*tekn'ek teknōn 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 *tokos* 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 *tokos* 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

23. Benardete, "Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*," pp. 115–6.

24. Geoffrey Hartman, "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature," in *Beyond Formalism* (New Haven, 1970), p. 348.

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-gonē*).

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 unfamiliar. 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 *mimēsis*. 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 *mimēsis*, 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 parrēsiās*, 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 dispositiona 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 *ökonomie* of French tragedies" (*Sammtliche Schriften*, ed. K. Lachman, 13 vols. [1838-40], 6: 111, letter, February 1760) and about the *ökonomie* 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 (*Portrait 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'oeil à la place de l'oreille, et l'oreille à la place de l'oeil."

26. See, for example, sch. *Eumenides* 47 and sch. *Electra* 1098. Passages in which the scholiasts use the term *oikonomia* are collected in Adolfus Trendelenburg's *Grammaticorum Graecorum de Arte Tragica Iudiciorum 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 (*athroan*).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 [*anoikonomēta*] 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,

27. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, sect. 1. *Oikonomia* in *On the Sublime* has been translated as "arrangement" (Longinus *on the Sublime*, ed. and trans. W. Rhys Roberts [Cambridge, 1899]), as "disposition" (Longinus' "On the Sublime," ed. D. A. Russell [Oxford, 1964]), and as "economy" (Dionysius Longinus *on the Sublime*, trans. William Smith [London, 1752]). The translation of sect. 1 is adapted from Roberts. The following translations are from G. M. A. Grube, *On Great Writing (On the Sublime): Longinus* (New York, 1957).

perhaps, underlies Aristotle's dismissal of Alcidamus's interpretation of *oikonomia* in rhetoric, for Aristotle strongly disapproves of Alcidamus's revolutionary theory of *nomoi*.)²⁸ 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 uncreditable.²⁹ 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 (uncreditable) 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*.

