TRAGIC AMBIGUITY

Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone

BY

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Th. C. W. OUDEMANS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Intercultural comparisons

Anyone turning his attention to Sophocles' *Antigone*—part of Europe's cultural heritage as well as a trace of a long vanished culture—will soon realize that he is on slippery ground. On the one hand the text is so familiar that his interpretation is in danger of merely reflecting his own preconceived notions. On the other hand, all attempts at translation and interpretation seem to founder on the rock of unfamiliarity which the tragedy represents. The text oscillates between the familiar and the alien because the *Antigone* is part of a cosmology (the cluster of preconceptions that a culture possesses regarding man's position between nature and the religious sphere, in various social connections, between birth and death, and in the order of being in general) which differs radically from our own. This cosmology is characterized by a logic of ambiguity, of contagious pollution, of insoluble paradox, in a universe governed by maleficent gods, in which human transgressions may cause upheavals of the entire cosmic order.

At the same time the cosmology of the *Antigone* is familiar to us, not merely because this tragedy touches emotional chords in the modern European mind, but primarily because it tries to cope with cosmological problems with which we are confronted as well, although its solutions and ours are mutually exclusive. In this sense, the *Antigone* is a thorn in the flesh of modern European cosmology; small wonder that a range of interpretative efforts have been made either to remove the thorn or to turn it into something beneficial.

First, there are the painstaking reconstructions of text and meaning which try to go upstream to the source, efforts by scholars freeing themselves from as many contemporary prejudices as possible in order to distinguish the original tragedy and separate it from the layers of interpretative history. There is no reason to raise a contemptuous eyebrow at separative philology and history, as has become fashionable: without continuing separative effort there is no remedy against assimilation of the text to the interpreter's prejudices nor hope of clarification of obscure passages. Nevertheless, it is an illusion to believe that interpretative separations will be able to erase every contemporary bias. The interpreter's cosmological preconceptions will inevitably determine his con-

ception not only of the meaning of the text, but even of what makes up that text itself. This is illustrated by one of the most hotly debated cruxes in the *Antigone*: the verses 904-20. Although they belong to the best attested lines of the play (we even have Aristotle's authority for them), the discussion whether the lines should be rejected or not will go on forever because it is the interpreter's conception of the *Antigone* as a whole that determines their incorporation or elision. The arguments that philologists employ with regard to such textual questions are surprising. Jebb for example rejects lines 904-20 stating reasons such as that the composition is unworthy of Sophocles and that the lines embody a morally unacceptable limitation of Antigone's divine law (A 164). This may be an extreme example, but the play abounds with textual questions the answers to which depend on the interpreter's conception of the *Antigone* as a whole.

Reading through the glasses of our time and cosmology, our interpretations inevitably employ our European logical schemes and tools: we use the criteria of clearness and distinctness and the logical principles of identity and non-contradiction. With such implements we approach a cosmology not based on these principles and permeated with the ambiguity and contradictions we have to reject (cf. Vernant MSG 250). This fundamental inconsistency makes it extremely difficult for the modern interpreter to appreciate oxymora such as Antigone's self-description as ὅσια πανουργήσασ' ("having committed a holy crime" - 74). We find it hard, if not impossible, to combine crime with holiness. Therefore many interpreters separate the crime from the holiness or believe that the expression is sarcastic. This example shows that we do not only remain immersed in our own preconceptions, but that our understanding will also inevitably remain at a distance from the *Antigone*: we can point out genuine contradictions, but we cannot share in a culture which has them at its roots.

In his hermeneutic theory Gadamer has tried to counterbalance the impossibility of approaching the original with an unprejudiced mind. He maintains that interpretation should not primarily consist in divesting oneself of one's prejudices in order to confront the purity of an original, but should be the actual application of one's partly unconscious prejudices to texts which are not pure sources, but rather diamonds which are never definitely cut, and which, through the ever renewed questions they are asked, reveal ever new facets, reflected in ever new aspects of the interpreter himself. Gadamer argues that the interpreter should not leave his 'horizon' of questions and preconceptions behind, but confront his own ideas with the horizon of the text, for example the question of whether an individual can rely on a form of justice which is opposed to

the interests of the state, or whether the government should be in control of the burial of corpses. What Gadamer aims at is not a return to the pure source, but a fusion of the horizons of the text and of the interpreter in a higher unity which comprises both (Gadamer WM 360, 364).

The problems with this approach are twofold. First, it should be emphasized that updatings of texts soon become irritatingly strident when they let their perception of the modern age and its discontents prevail over the meaning of the text. The line between revealing hidden depths and *Hineininterpretieren* is hard to draw. It is dangerous to ask contemporary questions of the *Antigone*, because such questions might obscure the issues relevant to ancient Greek cosmology. For example, it is doubtful whether the Greeks would have recognized the essentially romantic problem of the individual in revolt against the state.

A second problem is that it is doubtful whether a fusion of horizons in a higher unity is not bought at a price—the price of the suppression of those aspects of the text which cannot be incorporated into the new unity. The temptation to assimilate the text to one's contemporary prejudices is almost irresistible in the light of the human need to be at home with oneself, and therefore to digest and appropriate all strangeness which texts may offer. Applicative transformations of a text may throw light on aspects of meaning which remain hidden to separative reconstructions, but in order to reach the new harmony they have to be separative in another way: they separate by assimilation. This assimilation may turn out to be a silent expropriation, however. When Jebb compares Antigone to a Christian martyr, for example, or when Böll compares her to Ulrike Meinhof, the danger arises that she loses her tragic character. We shall argue that the differences between ancient Greek cosmology and our own are too great for a fusion of horizons ever to succeed. The recalcitrance of the *Antigone* defies any attempt at harmony.

A third interpretative trend, Derrida's anti-separative and anti-appropriative grammatology, has taught us that it is illusory to believe that there are pure, uncontaminated sources to be found by spirits who have freed themselves from the burden of European cosmology. And Derrida has rightly emphasized that every interpretation is a *greffe*—both an incision and a graft causing unpredictable changes in the meaning of the text, which implies that an appropriative harmony between text and interpreter is precluded *a priori*.

Derrida highlights the insurmountable difficulties in interpreting and translating Greek sources by discussing the various meanings of *pharmakon* in Plato's philosophy. Our mode of thinking has not only been determined by Plato's metaphysics but by the principles of identity and non-contradiction in general, culminating in the philosophy of

Descartes. This makes it almost impossible to retain the variable and internally conflicting range of meanings of the word *pharmakon*, a word referring simultaneously to substances which we distinguish clearly as each other's opposites, such as poisons, drugs, medicines, and even tragedy (Derrida Diss 112). Words like *pharmakon* point to a cosmology of ambiguity which lies at the root of cosmological order, but which at the same time threatens its purity. We believe that this is the fundamental issue of the *Antigone*: the duplicity of human and divine order and the power which both underlies and undermines this order. The problems of interpreting the text of Sophocles are even more onerous than those which emerge in understanding Plato's metaphysics. Whereas Plato tries to use philosophy as a medicine of purity against the powers which threaten to undermine it, Sophocles' tragedies increase the conflicts between order and ambiguity in unpredictable directions. The key word in our interpretation will be the word *deinon*, which does not only indicate a divided unity of what is terrible and what is wonderful, but also the awesome power which permeates the cosmological order.

We agree with Derrida that we are bound hand and foot to separative European cosmology, but not with his conviction that by an insinuating and parasitic mode of interpretation the idea of *episteme*, of knowledge based on identity and non-contradiction (Gr 68, P 49), can be undermined. He tries to employ subversive power to unsettle separative order (ED 46-47), in a transformation of Nietzsche's commitment to Dionysian force. We are convinced that no interpretation trying to account for the conflict between power and order will be able to undermine modern European cosmology. This cosmology's grip is too strong for such an endeavour to have any chance of success. We shall employ the intellectual tools of separative cosmology, not in order to undermine it, but to point out those aspects of the *Antigone* which cannot be incorporated into our own cosmology. Those aspects apparently do not correspond with anything in our cosmology: we find blanks here. These blanks can be understood, but only in a distant way. We are unable to get really in touch with them because they are excluded from our separative cosmology. That we are trying to point out blanks in our cosmology does not imply that we claim the ability to make up an account of profit and loss by comparing our cosmology and that of the *Antigone*. There is no supra-cultural point of view from which such a comparison can be made. Therefore it is impossible either to speak of progress in cosmologies or to mourn the loss of tragedy. We merely hope to be able to assess the radical otherness of the *Antigone*, in offering resistance to some major interpretative trends in philology and philosophy, which time and again tend to exorcize the radical otherness of this tragedy through their separative and assimilative devices.

The awareness of these interpretative traps has not prevented us from trying—like modern Sisyphuses—to avoid the most obvious instances of deceptive familiarity and unnecessary obscurity by making a wide interpretative detour. We have tried to impose upon ourselves a temporary self-alienation, endeavouring to consider the *Antigone* as an expression of a foreign culture, in the hope of avoiding the danger of adjusting the tragic expressions of ancient Greek culture to our preconceptions moulded by Aristotle, Roman culture, Christianity, humanism and romanticism. In our search for the elusive source we have trodden again the path of Fustel de Coulanges:

> In order to assess the truth about these ancient peoples, it is wise to study them without thinking of ourselves, as if they were totally foreign to us, with the same detachment and a spirit as free as if we were studying ancient India or Arabia.
> Looked at in that way, Greece and Rome prove to possess an absolutely inimitable character. There is nothing resembling them in modern times. In the future nothing will be able to resemble them. (Fustel de Coulanges CA 2)

In order to effect a breach in the smooth continuity between our modern European culture and that of classical Greece we imposed upon ourselves the further self-alienation of studying relevant aspects of even remoter cultures than that of ancient Greece, in the hope of reaching the state of anthropological doubt described by Lévi-Strauss:

> This "anthropological doubt" does not only consist of knowing that one knows nothing, but of resolutely exposing what one thought one knew—and one's very ignorance—to buffeting and denials directed at one's most cherished ideas and habits by other ideas and habits best able to rebut them. (Lévi-Strauss SA II 26) (Fr. AS II 37)

We realized from the outset that a random search for the original *Antigone* would be fruitless. At best, the restoration of the original would present us with a silent corpse. A contemporary guide-line structuring the interpretation and confronting us with hidden depths, both of the text and of our own prejudices, was indispensable. It is a fortunate fact that modern anthropology has more than alienating power: in recent years it has developed powerful schemes of intercultural comparison. We have attempted to apply to the *Antigone* some aspects of the structural method developed by Lévi-Strauss, especially in its modified form, as presented by authors like Douglas, Vernant, Vidal-Naquet, Girard, etc., which enabled us to account for the phenomenon of ambiguity.

The method of modified structuralism reveals the direction in which an interpretation should go to be on a par with the import of tragedy: it shows that structures and ambiguities are to be understood in the light

of human cosmology. That is the level on which the *Antigone* has to be approached. It is a document pertaining to the human condition, conceived as a web of cosmological relations (Segal TC 9). In the light of this approach Segal speaks of Sophocles' "philosophical anthropology" (TC vii). We are convinced that this anthropology can only be discovered in confrontation with our own anthropological preconceptions, which are of a cosmological nature. Prejudices of a cosmological nature constitute the conceptual framework of all scholarly effort, and do so tacitly in most cases. Today's most precise philological interpretations are only seemingly 'objective,' in the sense of being devoid of cosmological presuppositions. One example from a famous interpretative effort may suffice. In *The Presocratic Philosophers* Kirk and Raven discuss the meaning of *dike* and *adikia* in the philosophy of Anaximander and call the employment of this terminology with respect to nature an "anthropomorphic metaphor" (PP 119). In this apparently unprejudiced description a world of modern cosmological preconceptions lies concealed. Kirk and Raven presume that there is a distinction between a human sphere, to which a terminology of justice is proper, and a natural sphere, where this terminology is not properly applicable, and they suppose that the proper human meaning is transferred to nature, as a metaphor. This implies that their description is embedded in a tacit metaphysics, in which distinctions between the 'proper' and the 'metaphorical,' nature and the human sphere, human justice and the non-applicability of justice to nature, are presupposed.

By pointing out their specific modern signature philosophical anthropology can sometimes warn us if European metaphysical preconceptions are employed too easily, as in pointing out the possibility that a philosopher like Anaximander did not live in a cosmology based on such oppositions. Thus it may turn out that for Anaximander the application of *dike* to nature was not a metaphor, that to this philosopher nature was not a domain completely separated from the human sphere, and that, as a consequence, *dike* need not mean 'justice' in any contemporary sense. With respect to the *Antigone* too, some major interpretative trends are unconsciously based on European metaphysics and therefore yield only apparently correct interpretations of the tragedy.

From the foregoing, particularly our references to 'philosophical anthropology,' it may seem that we have committed the error of identifying ourselves with that modern scapegoat, the philosophy of man. In past decades this branch of philosophy has been attacked severely by outstanding philosophers. Foucault, for example, has described the discipline as chimerical, because the 'essence' of man is a mere humanistic phantom (MC 15), which cannot and need not be employed

in cultural anthropology (MC 390-91). But in discussing Lévi-Strauss' conception of the unity of mankind and opposing it to Wittgenstein's philosophy of family resemblances, we shall argue that philosophical anthropology is not committed to this essentialism. Lévi-Strauss aims at a reductive unity which, embodied in hidden eternal structures, underlies the variable surface of human cultural expressions. He speaks of a *marche régressive* which eliminates events and reflection in order to reach the finite repertoire of unconscious, unchangeable human possibilities (AS 30). It is true that Lévi-Strauss is not a reductionist in the sense that he tries to substitute simple structures for complex ones (PS 138, Marc-Lipiansky SLS 138), but he *is* a reductionist in the sense that he considers structures as varying combinations of pre-existing elements which are unalterable:

> I am of the opinion[...]that—in their games, dreams or wild imaginings—human societies, like individuals, never create absolutely, but merely choose certain combinations from an ideal repertoire that it should be possible to define. (Lévi-Strauss TT 229) (Fr. TT 203)

In this respect Lévi-Strauss labours under the influence of essentialist metaphysics: the search for an identical hard core underneath the variable appearances. In other words, the Aristotelian scheme of *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*. Such a reductive unity of the 'human mind' underneath the cultural variation (AS 28, 81) only exists in a highly formalized sense. To strip mankind of variability in order to preserve identical ground structures is futile, because the resulting identity is of too general a nature to provide us with substantial information. It is no accident that Lévi-Strauss confesses that anthropology is still hovering in the purgatory of social science, but that it will belong to natural science in the hour of the last judgment (AS II 29). His conception is that of a scientistic metaphysics. This ideal has already proved vain when Lévi-Strauss himself admits that cultural comparisons are made in an irretrievably metaphoric mode, because they designate relations of which we only perceive in a confused way that they have something in common (CC 39). Intercultural comparison seems not to rest on an underlying unity of mankind (Marc-Lipiansky SLS 111-12).

Does this imply, as Foucault's criticism of 'mankind' as something ephemeral suggests, that it is impossible to speak of human nature, that there are only cultural variations, in short, that we have to be cultural relativists? There is one stubborn fact which makes this view untenable: that people from the most distant cultures, both in space and in time, show behaviour that is, up to a certain point, meaningful, and understandable as being human. This *aporia*, that there is no identical essence underlying mankind, but that people are nevertheless able to interpret

each other's behaviour as being meaningful, may be circumvented with the aid of Wittgenstein's anti-essentialist and anti-relativist philosophy. Wittgenstein realized that concepts, e.g. 'game,' 'proposition' and 'language' do not consist of underlying identities and superimposed variations, still less of atomized meanings. These concepts themselves are interconnected bundles of similarities and dissimilarities. They form metaphoric, broken wholes which cannot be further analyzed. Of pivotal importance in this respect is Wittgenstein's metaphoric terminology of kinship. A family is not a collection of individuals, yet is not connected by an underlying unity either. The whole interconnected network of analogies and variations *is* the divided unity of the family. Reduction to identity only leads to obliteration of the richness of the texture. The same is true of the employment of concepts:

> We see that what we call "sentence" and "language" has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related (*verwandt*) to one another (PU 108)

There is only kinship (*Verwandtschaft*) between the uses of a concept—direct and indirect relations of (dis)analogy (PU 65). It is interesting that whereas Wittgenstein compares language to kinship, Lévi-Strauss compares kinship to language (AS 69). The fundamental difference between them is that Lévi-Strauss searches for a common denominator, whereas Wittgenstein has left this paradigm of metaphysics behind.

We now give the notion of family resemblance one more twist by speaking of the family of man. In employing this phrase we want to dissociate ourselves from two obvious connotations: first, the humanistic aura which surrounds the family of man as a harmonious society of agreeing equals. For us, mankind is a normal family, which means that it is full of tension and struggle, mutual incomprehension, indifference, and sometimes hatred. Second, we do not agree with Wittgenstein's image of family resemblances as the fibres in a thread that need not run through its whole length, which implies that fibres a and b, and b and c may resemble each other, but that a and c may be incomparable. This may be true for conceptual resemblances, but not for the family of man. Here every member remains comparable to all other members.

Lévi-Strauss has shown that there is no short cut to the determination of human nature—all cultural variability has to be taken into account. Wittgenstein has shown that the detour must be even wider, and is in fact interminable. The relevant unity of mankind is not that of a reduction of variation, but consists of a picture of innumerable touches of (dis)similarities, of (dis)harmonies, which form the divided unity of a painting. What philosophical anthropology seeks is not a reduced unity,

but the interconnectedness which presents mankind as an ever variable, differentiated whole. It cannot be denied, for example, that in all human cosmologies certain fundamental boundaries recur, such as those between nature and culture, life and death, masculine and feminine. Confining ourselves to the last mentioned opposition, it is clear that a reduction of the distinction between male and female to a hard core (for instance, the biological difference) would imply an impoverishment of meaning which would make the distinction too formal to be informative. For example, masculine and feminine are terms which are not confined to men and women respectively: a man may be effeminate, a woman may have masculine tendencies. Moreover, the distinction derives part of its power from the fact that it is a metaphor. Its connotations, like those of the distinction between hard and soft, giving and receiving, outside and inside, spread across seemingly unbridgeable categorial distinctions, such as those between agriculture, the cosmos, forms of art, forms of clothing. Even the 'hard core' of biological difference is porous. In different cultures the meaning of sexual organs is extremely divergent, and culturally determined modifications of them, like circumcision, are quite common. These transformations should be understood within a network of cosmological connections which have to be considered as family ties.[1] Only through the weaving of these innumerable threads can we realize the nature of our kinship (which includes both familiarity and strangeness) with other cultures.[2]

If the variations of human nature are endless, the nature of our understanding of it will share that characteristic. Intercultural comparisons are

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[1] Wittgenstein himself has applied the idea of family resemblance to intercultural comparison in the following way:
"Das Auffallendste scheint mir ausser den Aehnlichkeiten die Verschiedenheit aller dieser Riten zu sein. Es ist eine Mannigfaltigkeit von Gesichtern mit gemeinsamen Zügen, die da und dort immer wieder auftauchen. Und was man tun möchte ist, Linien ziehen, die die gemeinsamen Bestandteile verbinden. Es fehlt dann noch ein Teil der Betrachtung und es ist der, welcher dieses Bild mit unsern eigenen Gefühlen und Gedanken in Verbindung bringt. Dieser Teil gibt der Betrachtung ihre Tiefe" (BFB 246).

[2] It is gratifying to perceive that a similar criticism of reductive unity, and of atomistic relativism in a notion of the metamorphic unity of mankind, has been defended by the anthropologist Geertz:
"Generalizations [about man as man] are not to be discovered through a Baconian search for cultural universals[...] What, after all, does it avail us to say, with Herkovits, that "morality is a universal, and so is enjoyment of beauty, and some standard for truth," if we are forced in the very next sentence, as he is, to add that "the many forms these concepts take are but products of the particular historical experience of the societies that manifest them"? Once one abandons uniformitarianism[...]relativism is a genuine danger; but it can be warded off only by facing directly and fully the diversities of human culture[...]and embracing them within the body of one's concept of man, not by gliding past them with vague tautologies and forceless banalities" (IC 40-41).

not objective assessments of fact. They are the rivalling speeches of family members during a family reunion. The points of view will inevitably vary according to the position of the speakers in the structure of kinship. The speeches will be disputed and commented upon—they will mirror the variations which constitute the broken unity of the family. The effect of the speeches will not be that mutual understanding or harmony is increased, nor that any speaker will undermine the position of any listener. Perhaps the ineradicable differences between the family branches which are so familiar to each other will be realized, together with the fact that it is impossible to separate familiarity from obscurity. Even if each speaker realizes his partiality, each is convinced of the superiority of his point of view. So are we.

1.2. Premises of our method

Structural anthropology has its roots in phonetic theory (AS 404), which proved that all spoken human languages can be analyzed into particles which the science of phonetics considers devoid of meaning (the phonemes), but by whose differentiation and combination all natural languages can be built up. It is characteristic of structures in both linguistics and anthropology that the meaning of elements is not perceived as being embodied in these elements themselves, but in their relations of inclusion and exclusion within the system. The relations logically precede the relata. As Lévi-Strauss maintains of anthropology: just as in linguistics, its focus is on "écarts différentiels" (AS 358).

Wherever people communicate (and communication is used in a very wide sense by Lévi-Strauss, including the exchange of goods, of words and of women through matrimonial arrangements) the signs they employ may be conventional in themselves, but the systems in which they are used are by no means arbitrary. It is, for example, a matter of convention that one road sign reads 'stop' and another 'go'. But within the system of traffic control the difference has to be marked one way or another. Though it is arbitrary on the level of the terms, the system is coherent when it is taken as a whole (PS 74, cf. AS 105). In Lévi-Strauss' conception, structures do not organize empirical reality directly. They form the systematics of models (comparable to Kantian schemes) which reconstruct empirical reality (AS 305-06). For example, the actual kinship relations in a society are condensed in models. The principles underlying these models form the organizing structure which accounts for their internal cohesion (AS II 28).

The comparison between phonetics and anthropology may easily lead to misunderstandings because it tends to obliterate a fundamental dif-

ference between the two disciplines. Phonetic units are without meaning. Anthropology on the other hand concerns structures on a higher level, that of semantic relevance. The semantic level can be found in language as a system of communication. It is impossible to deduce this system from phonetics and syntax alone. Phonology needs grammar and grammar needs lexical knowledge, which in turn is dependent upon ethnographic observation (AS II 169). In the eyes of Lévi-Strauss all these levels can be studied structurally, which means that, contrary to the opinion of many of his critics, structures need not be, and in anthropology are not, devoid of content. Structural anthropology is a semantic study. Its structures are not reduced to meaningless elements, they are reorganizations of content: "Structures do not possess a distinct content: they themselves are the content, comprehended in a logical organization which is conceived as a property of reality" (AS II 139). Structuralism is not formalism, it is a novel way of conceiving content. It translates content into structure without neglecting or impoverishing it (MC 401). This is to say that structuralism is not reductionism (PS 328), but tries to account for the whole of semantic meaning.[3]

It should be noted that there is a crucial difference between Lévi-Strauss' structures and Wittgenstein's family resemblances. The rules which determine identities as family resemblances are themselves historical and liable to change. This means that Wittgenstein does not view the identity of family members as fixed: the family grows and dies off, which affects the very identity of each member (as he expressed it: not only the water of facts flows, but its conceptual banks change as well - UG 95-99). Lévi-Strauss sometimes tends to describe structures as a-historic, as timeless moulds for change (AS 30-31). This conception means that structural elements themselves are unchangeable. As Derrida argues, this in its turn implies the risk that the metaphorical games of history, affecting the heart of structures, are neglected in favour of timeless geometrical models (ED 29). For example, Lévi-Strauss sometimes seems to assume that there are two distinct levels in human relations: timeless structures and the history of their divergent combinations.

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[3] This implies that we disagree with many forms of hermeneutic criticism of Lévi-Strauss, for example Kirk's objections to the syntactical nature of structuralism (M 43), Burkert's criticism that Lévi-Strauss is not able to distinguish relevant from irrelevant structures (SHM 12-14), Douglas' remarks that structuralism is vulnerable because it employs a "lemon squeezer technique" (IM 166), and Ricœur's difficulty that structuralism expounds "un formalisme absolu" (CI 54), having opted for syntax rather than semantics (CI 44), but nevertheless has to operate with semantic analogies, and therefore needs hermeneutic intelligence (CI 58-59). Lévi-Strauss would not feel threatened by these remarks, because he would agree with his critics' points of view on semantics.

In social relations the fundamental system of kinship, consisting of the relationships father/son, brother/brother, husband/wife would be an unchanging hard core. The family resemblance view on the other hand maintains that such a distinction between the a-historical and change cannot be made. The cultural context asserts that the very structure of the relationship between fathers and sons in Victorian Europe is different from that in the South Sea islands.

This does not mean, however, that structural relations have to be discarded altogether, and that every possibility of intercultural comparison is precluded *a priori* : the transcultural structure father/son exists, *as* a family resemblance. Without the family resemblance between fathers from divergent cultures a cultural relativism—which is in fact a victory for one's own cultural preconceptions—would inevitably ensue.

If language cannot be reduced to syntax, the same is true, with a vengeance, for myth and tragedy. Myth is different from direct use of language. It is a manipulation, in a meta-language, of what is signified in normal language as part of a new significant structure (AS II 170). When a myth tells us about a queen and a shepherd, there is more at stake than a description of such people. They are also vehicles of 'deeper' categorical differentiations, such as that between high and low, male and female. What structuralism maintains is that myths in general have such a surplus of meaning, that they embody more significance than their overt content suggests. Their structure carries concealed information. This implies that the structural elements of myths, the mythemes, are by no means devoid of significance:

> [mythemes] result from a play of binary or ternary oppositions [...] But they do so among elements which are already full of signification at the level of the language [...] and which can be expressed by words of the vocabulary. (Lévi-Strauss SA II 143) (Fr. AS II 171)

It also implies a corollary which is of major significance in our interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*: in a structural interpretation mythical personalities are not primarily individuals interesting from a psychological point of view. Like linguistic elements, they are focuses in which categorial differentiations are reflected:

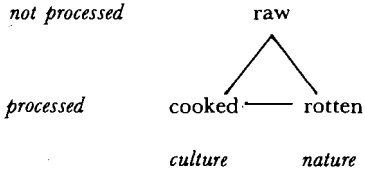
> Thus, a "universe of the tale" will be progressively defined, analyzable in pairs of oppositions, diversely combined within each character who—far from constituting a single entity—is a bundle of different elements, in the manner of the phoneme as conceived by Roman Jakobson. (Lévi-Strauss SA II 135) (Fr. AS II 162)

We will approach Greek tragedy in a similar way, not primarily concerning ourselves with the characters and their psychology, but with the

cosmological relations that the characters stand for, such as those between man, nature and the gods (cf. Segal TC 8).

The final aim of these analyses of deep differentiations is, for Lévi-Strauss as well as for us, to establish hidden similarities within and between myths and tragedies which at first sight have little in common (OMT 164). (See appendix on the relationship between myth and tragedy).We hope to show that the *Antigone* reveals several aspects of meaning if various levels of differentiation, transformation and analogy are studied. It is possible to distinguish the level of imagery, that of different parts of the play (*stasima* and *episodia* among themselves and with respect to each other), the narrative logic which governs the sequence of events (cf. Vernant MSG 246-47), and the relations between the characters.

One of the most common objections to structuralism concerns its rigid preoccupation with binary oppositions which can be expressed in + or −. A good example is the famous culinary triangle: the most obvious changes which occur in food, cooking and rotting, can be structurally opposed in a triangle which expresses two oppositions, that between nature and culture, and that between non-processed and processed. Cooked food may be thought of as raw food processed by cultural means, whereas rotten food is raw or cooked food transformed by natural means. From these binary oppositions the triangle may be constructed as follows:



The work of Lévi-Strauss sometimes gives the impression that all systems of classification proceed along binary lines (cf. PS 287). Such claims have to be taken with several grains of salt. In the first place, as Lévi-Strauss himself is the first to admit, the signs + and − are employed with variable meanings, dependent upon the context, for example: presence/absence, relevance/irrelevance. They may also designate gradual differences (more/less) (MC 74) and even qualitative similarities and dissimilarities. In the second place it is clear that, besides binary coding, Lévi-Strauss employs other ways of structuring, for instance a logic of mediation. Finally, binary systems work better in some contexts than in others (Kirk M 78-80, Leach LS 87-88)—but the success of structuralism does not depend on them. For this kind of interpretation, the information which is concealed in "écarts différentiels," however they are coded, is essential.

Notwithstanding these reservations, binary coding is a powerful heuristic tool which has proved its mettle, not only in the interpretation of 'primitive' cultures but in that of ancient Greek culture as well. The constant Greek preoccupation with contrasted categories like human/divine, male/female, old/young, etc. (Humphreys AG 203, Lloyd PA 7, Austin ADM 90ff, esp. 120) has prompted Vidal-Naquet to remark: "La pensée antique a très largement devancée l'analyse structurale moderne" (CN 192). As we shall see in the following chapters, the *Antigone* is a typical product of Greek culture in that it is permeated with dichotomies (Rosivach TWA 21) and structural polarities (Winnington-Ingram SI 140, 147).

It is a fundamental tenet of the structural approach that people need not be conscious of the meaningful relations which are detected in behaviour or myth. This may sound strange to those accustomed to considering meaning and conscious intention as having an identical field of application. That view can be proved to be untenable, however. Quite often people follow meaningful rules without being able to state them. The grammatical rules of the Greek language, for example, were followed even when there was no explicit grammar. There is no reason to believe that people are more conscious of rules which govern behaviour than of grammatical rules. Chagnon, for example, emphasizes the functional ignorance of the Yąnomamö Indians with respect to their incest taboos and the social meaning of trading and feasting (YFP 124-25, 151).

This is also true of texts like tragedies. Here as elsewhere it is impossible and unnecessary to determine which structural relations were present in the poet's mind and which were not (cf. Segal TC 20). What structuralism aims at, is to detect those structures which are present in the content of the story, and especially in the patterned arrangement of its elements (Leach LOS 71).

As an example we shall outline a possible structural interpretation of two well-known Biblical texts (cf. Leach LOS 68ff.). We must emphasize that we are merely attempting a preliminary sketch of a structural interpretation confined to the stage of the construction of hypotheses: it is a serious problem for structural interpretations of the Bible, such as Leach's, that there is a scarcity of material that might confirm such a structural interpretation (related texts, ethnographic and historical data).

Everyone is familiar with the story of Abraham who was admonished by God to sacrifice his only legitimate son Isaac (Gen. 22: 1-18). Somewhat less familiar is the story of Jephthah (Ju. 11). Jephthah was expelled by his brothers because his mother was a harlot. When Gilead was attacked by the Ammonites, Jephthah was called back, and appointed as

the head of Gilead. He vowed that, if he returned victorious, he would sacrifice the first person to come out of his house. Unexpectedly his only daughter came out, and Jephthah was reluctantly compelled to sacrifice her.

The structuralist will try to look through the surface similarity of the stories. This consists of the fact that both concern a successful leader who has only one or at least only one legitimate child, which he has to sacrifice. But the differences are also important, as the stories end in opposite ways. Abraham expected to sacrifice his son, but was presented with a ram as substitute. Jephthah expected to sacrifice anyone but his daughter, but had to offer her to God. This may be connected with a second opposition. Abraham would have countless descendants, whereas Jephthah would have none (it is specified that his daughter knew no man). This points to a structural analogy which might be phrased thus: animal sacrifice: human sacrifice :: descendants: no descendants. There may be a connection between human sacrifice without substitution and the punishment of remaining without progeny.

In addition, it is a striking point that the sacrificial situations are each other's opposite in another respect. Jephthah had made a vow of his own accord, and was subsequently bound to an oath which suggests hubris: "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back" (Ju. 11: 35). Abraham on the other hand only silently obeyed God, and remained full of confidence: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22: 8). This may be connected with another opposition: Jephthah appointed himself head of the inhabitants of Gilead (Ju. 11: 9), whereas Abraham waited patiently until God made a covenant with him (Gen. 17: 2). We may therefore add a third opposition to our scheme:

patience : self-will

Perhaps the last-mentioned opposition is repeated in another aspect of the story: the pregnant silence of the victim Isaac, which is the opposite of the wailing of Jephthah's daughter. The last difference between the stories which might be relevant is that earlier Abraham had come to terms with his brother Lot, whereas Jephthah was expelled by his brothers as the son of a harlot. These differences are summed up the following list of oppositions:

Abraham	*Jephthah*
expects human sacrifice	does not expect human sacrifice
obtains substitute	does not obtain substitute

does not execute human sacrifice	has to execute human sacrifice
is patient towards God	is not patient towards God
is appointed by God	is a self-appointed leader
the victim is silent	the victim is wailing
has normal family ties	has abnormal family ties

In this series of oppositions a deeper opposition may be hidden, for example that between prudence and hubris. Hubris is punished by eradication from the earth. Of course, all this is mere hypothesis: it needs confirmation by historical and ethnographic sources, and by related Biblical myths surrounding extinction and foundation of families, human sacrifice, patience and hubris.

Lévi-Strauss' most original contribution to the understanding of myth is that he is not satisfied with the detection of oppositions, but subsequently connects them by a process called transformation. Transformation takes place within a myth when its syntagmatic chain (its story line) is broken up into segments embodying contrasts, and when these contrasts are compared with each other as bearing analogous information. The story then appears as a palimpsest of superimposed metaphoric transformations (Leach CC 25). In this way similarities may be found in apparently divergent aspects of a story (AS II 28). The same holds for differences between myths, which appear as variations on a theme—the differentiation of elements concealing deep analogies (cf. PS 72).

> The social group can code the message without any alteration in its context by means of different lexical elements: as a categoric opposition: high/low, or as an elemental one: sky/earth, or again as a specific one: eagle/bear. And equally it has the choice of several syntactic procedures to assure the transmission of the message: nomenclature, emblems, modes of behaviour, prohibitions etc. used either alone or together. (Lévi-Strauss SM 149-50) (Fr. PS 197-98)

For Lévi-Strauss, transformations are of an algebraic nature; they constitute homologies. In his eyes the meaning of categories is unaffected by their transformations into each other. Transformations between systems of natural species and social groups, for example, or between parts of the human body and social stratification, are called "logical or formal equivalences" (PS 138). In the light of our family resemblance conception we are convinced that transformations from one category to another are not merely algebraic, however. They imply variations in meaning in the categories themselves. Transformations undermine the unity of the categories. They consist of homoiologies, which cannot be exhaustively

rendered in algebraic formulas. The idea of transformation may be illustrated by the example of the myths surrounding the Labdacids in Thebes, as analyzed by Lévi-Strauss. His description may go astray in many details, but its fundamental conception is profound and rich, as Vernant's discussion of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* has made clear (MTG 101ff.).

Lévi-Strauss maintains that the Theban cycle of myths centres around two pairs of oppositions, one between "rapports de parenté sur-estimés" and "rapports de parenté sous-estimés," and the other between the idea that man is born from the earth and its denial, viz. the idea that man is born from two parents (AS 236ff.). In order to make clear that we take kinship in a wide sense, including filiation, marriage and consanguinity, we prefer to term the first opposition that of 'extreme fusions' to 'extreme fissions.' Because of the many uncertainties which surround the second opposition (for example, the puns on names which Lévi-Strauss mentions as evidence for the opposition are highly dubious - Bremmer OOC 42) we have replaced it by another opposition which is of crucial importance in the Theban myths, that between extreme 'culturedness' and extreme 'naturalness'. In schematic form the following episodes (mythemes) can be distinguished in the myths connected with the Theban royal house.

fusion	*fission*	*culture*	*nature*
Cadmus marries Harmonia daughter of immortals	Cadmus is exiled by his father	Cadmus is founder of Thebes	Spartoi are born from dragon's teeth
	Cadmus incites Spartoi to kill each other		Cadmus and Harmonia are transformed into snakes
Actaeon courts Artemis	Actaeon refuses normal marriage		Actaeon is killed by his dogs in wild nature
Semele mates with Zeus	Semele is scorned by her sisters	Semele's sisters found thiasoi of Dionysus	Semele's sissisters roam the wild
Semele and Zeus conceive Dionysus			

fusion	*fission*	*culture*	*nature*
	Polydorus insults Dionysus	Polydorus is king of Thebes	Polydorus is exiled to nature
Agave marries the spartos Echion	Her son Pentheus expels his uncle Polydorus	Pentheus is king of Thebes	
	Pentheus insults Semele and Dionysus		
	Pentheus is killed by his mother		Pentheus dies like an animal in wild nature
			Agave is expelled to wild nature
Ino goes off secretly with Athamas	Ino persecutes her step-children		
	Athamas kills his son Learchus		
	Athamas expels Ino and their son Melicertes		Ino and Melicertes die in wild nature
Antiope mates with Zeus and begets the twins Zethus and Amphion	Antiope is persecuted by her father and goes into exile		Zethus and Amphion are exposed in wild nature
			Zethus and Amphion are brought up by a shepherd
Antiope secretly marries the king of Sicyon	Antiope is locked up by her uncle Lycus	Lycus is King of Thebes	Antiope and Dirce roam wild nature
Zethus and Amphion take Lycus' throne and	Zethus and Amphion kill their uncle Lycus and Dirce. They expel Laius	Zethus and Amphion build the walls of	Zethus and Amphion tie Dirce to a wild bull

fusion	*fission*	*culture*	*nature*
reign together		Thebes. Amphion is master of the lyre	
Zethus and Amphion share the same grave			
Amphion's wife Niobe compares her offspring to the gods	Zethus' wife Aedon kills her son	Zethus'wife Thebe gives her name to the city	Niobe is changed into a rock; Aedon is transformed into a bird
Laius abducts the boy Chrysippus	Chrysippus is killed by his mother	Laius introduces ritual pederasty; teaches the charioteer's art to Chrysippus; Laius is king of Thebes	Laius is harrassed by the Sphinx
Iocaste seduces Laius while he is drunk	Laius does not want children		
	Oedipus is rejected by his parents		Oedipus is exposed in wild nature
Oedipus sits on his father's throne	Oedipus kills his father	Oedipus saves Thebes	Oedipus conquers the Sphinx
Oedipus marries his mother	Iocaste commits suicide	Oedipus is king of Thebes	Oedipus brings disease to Thebes
	Oedipus curses his sons		Oedipus is called wild
	Oedipus is expelled from Thebes		Oedipus roams wild nature
Polyneices and Eteocles	Pol. and Et. quarrel over	Pol. and Et. are rulers	

fusion	*fission*	*culture*	*nature*
reign together	kingship	of Thebes	
Pol. marries into a foreign household with a foreigner	Polyneices is exiled by his brother		
Pol. and Et. share a common death	Pol. and Et. kill each other		Pol. and Et. are wild. The body of Pol. is ravaged by wild animals
Antigone joins her father in exile	Antigone refuses to marry		Ant. and Oed. roam wild nature
Antigone buries the body of her brother Polyneices	Ant. disobeys her uncle Creon	Ant. defends the honour of the Labdacids	Ant. is called raw
	Creon leaves Pol. unburied	Creon saves Thebes	Creon becomes wild and brings disease to Thebes; Ant. dies in wild nature
	Creon buries Ant. alive		
Creon tries to save his son Menoeceus against the interest of the city	Menoeceus commits suicide, against the wish of Creon	Menoeceus saves Thebes	Menoeceus dies in the dragon's den
	Antigone commits suicide		
	Eurydice commits suicide		
Haemon secretly mar-	The son of Ant. and Haemon is		The son of Ant. and

fusion	*fission*	*culture*	*nature*
ries Antigone	killed by Creon		Haemon bears the mark of the dragon
	Haemon kills Ant. and himself		
	Ant. and Ism. are killed by the son of Eteocles		

Of course we shall confine ourselves to a few salient points from the immensely complex knot of myths surrounding the Labdacids; the scheme only serves as an illustration of the process of transformation. In order to turn it into a true structural analysis, first of all the dates of the myths have to be taken into account. We have derived the data for this scheme from the works of various authors, ranging from Homer (8th century B.C.) to Pausanias (2nd century A.D.). Naturally, various historical factors may account for differences between the versions of the myths.[4]

Secondly, a serious analysis has to take account of the divergent versions of the myths. When that is done, important sets of transformations may come to light, not within the syntagmatic chain of the story, but within its range of variations. For example, in Sophocles' version Antigone gives up her intended marriage to Haemon in order to bury her brother Polyneices. In Euripides' *Phoenissae* however, she gives up her marriage in order to follow her father Oedipus into exile (Phoen 1673ff., esp. 1684). These versions may be considered analogous: in both, Antigone refuses to sever the ties with her family (fusion), implying that she refuses to join her husband's family (fission).

A third source of information indispensable in creating a true structural interpretation is that of the historical and ethnographic context. Once we know that in classical Greece suicide was considered a form of kinslaying, and kinslaying a form of suicide, it becomes understandable that the various suicides in the Theban myths have deep analogies with the fratricides and parricides which the same myths also abound with.

[4] But the fact that an episode is unknown before a certain author mentions it—for example the fact that we know of no predecessor of Sophocles' where the episode of Antigone trying to bury Polyneices is concerned—does not prove the originality of that author. It is quite possible that the versions of later mythographers like Apollodorus (Bibl. 3.7.1.) or Pausanias (9.25.2), are derived from older sources (Petersmann MGS *passim*).

In any case, one glance at the scheme shows how attractive it is to view the Theban myths as an extended set of transformations of transgressions of normal kinship ties in two directions: connecting what should remain separate, separating what should remain connected. Such a hypothesis may highlight interesting analogies, such as that between Oedipus' fusion with his mother in bed, the fusion of Eteocles and Polyneices in their reign and in the grave, and Antigone's extreme loyalty to members of her family, especially Oedipus and Polyneices. And transformation does not always operate by simple analogy—another important mode is that of inversion. It might be informative to regard extreme social fusions as the counterparts of extreme fissions (for example: Oedipus' marriage to his mother and his slaying of his father). This sort of transformation may also occur between divergent versions of the myth. While in Sophocles' *Antigone* and in Euripides' *Phoenissae* Antigone refuses to marry Haemon (fission), it seems that in Euripides' lost *Antigone* she married him in an abnormal way, in secrecy—an extreme fusion (Schol. Soph Ant 1351). In the opposed versions the same structure of fusion and fission is detectable.

With respect to the second opposition, that between culture and nature, there seems to be a strange connection in the Theban myths between the fact that these myths on the one hand concern culture heroes, people in high places upon whose status society and culture are dependent (kingship, invention of techniques), and the fact that on the other hand they also almost invariably concern themselves with wild, raw and even monstrous qualities and relations of these same heroes. In the final analysis the unorthodox social relations of these kings and princesses may prove to be analogous to the fact that their status is both super-human (god-like) and sub-human (animal-like).

These transformations can be extended in various ways, for instance to the category of insight. One example may suffice. Oedipus fuses social relations which should remain apart: that of father, husband and son. The riddle of the Sphinx consists of a similar fusion (cf. Aristotle: an enigma is a description of a fact by words which cannot be fused ἀδύνατα συνάψαι - Poet. 1458a26f.): that of child, adult and old man. The solving of the riddle is a fission, but ironically this fission is revealed by Oedipus, the fuser of social roles. We shall argue that problems such as social transgressions and paradoxes of culture and nature determine the deep structure of a particular version of a single episode from the Theban myths: Sophocles' *Antigone*.

We agree with Lévi-Strauss when he maintains that myths are centred around contradictions, not in the sense of incompatible propositions, but

in the sense of living paradoxes. They concern questions like 'How could there be a first man and a first woman who were not also brother and sister?,' 'How can one reconcile a desire for immortality with a knowledge of the certainty of impending death?,' 'How is it that human beings are animals (natural) on the one hand and on the other hand not-animals (cultural)?' (Leach LOS 67-68). We also agree with Lévi-Strauss when he states that these contradictions are often unsolvable (AS 254). But Lévi-Strauss believes that myths overcome contradictions by a procedure of 'mediation'. According to this view, mythical thinking leans towards a progressive mediation of oppositions which have become conscious (AS 248), a mediation whose function would be to design a logical model for resolving contradictions (AS 254, OMT 187). Here we disagree. Certainly the strain of contradiction may sometimes be eased by the revelation of a *tertium quid* (Kirk NM 84-88), but that does not happen in all myths, or even in the majority of them. Quite often they just expound a contradiction, without a trace of the typically European need to mitigate living paradox by harmonization. In the Oedipus myth, for example, there is no evidence for Lévi-Strauss' thesis, that it is an attempt to bridge the gap between the thought that man springs from the earth and the fact that he is born from the union of man and woman (AS 239) (cf. de Ruijter SD 99). The classical Oedipus myth is full of contradictions, but totally devoid of harmony. What is often true of myth is almost always the case in Sophoclean tragedies—they contain nothing but the revelation of divided man in a divided cosmos:

> Tragedy stresses less the unifying, synthesizing capacity of a mediator than the problematical and paradoxical status of the figure who stands at the point where opposites converge. Such a figure may assume contradictory attributes simultaneously[...] Tragedy is the form of myth which explores the ultimate impossibility of mediation by accepting the contradiction between the basic polarities that human existence confronts. (Segal TC 21)

Lévi-Strauss' partiality for mediation is connected with a second weakness in his theory. Through his concentration on binary opposition and mediation (he maintains that whatever is not founded on dichotomies is meaningless - PS 228) he omits to account for the spheres outside and between binary oppositions, i.e. the marginal, and for what constitutes both the common ground of oppositions and undermines them at the same time, i.e. the ambiguous.

On the one hand, Lévi-Strauss tends to speak of mediation when in fact only marginality is concerned. Why, for example, should a carrion-eater be a mediator between predators and herbivores, and not simply a marginal animal without mediating function? (AS 248-49). This can be illustrated by the example of the culinary triangle: this system of binary

oppositions is only adequate where the processing of fruit or vegetables is concerned. With respect to a carnivorous diet complications arise as soon as we ask what position should be assigned to raw meat. In the process of butchering, the animal has already lost part of its natural character: flesh has been transformed into meat. But raw meat is not really civilized; to become civilized it has to be cooked. Rawness of meat thus forms a paradigmatic instance of marginality—yet it need not mediate at all between nature and culture.

On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss seems to consider ambiguity something which is merely in the eye of the beholder. This transpires from his treatment of *mana* and related concepts in the work of Mauss. He acknowledges that such notions have to do with indiscriminate power which cannot be enclosed in structural oppositions (IOM xliv). He calls this ambiguous power the "*signifiant flottant*" (IOM xlix) which enslaves human thinking, but is also the point of departure of art, poetry and myth. Where we take issue with Lévi-Strauss is when he maintains that the force of ambiguity only derives from the order of thinking, not from that of reality (IOM xlvii). This is why he reduces it to a "valeur symbolique zéro" (IOM l) which should be disciplined in both science and magical thinking (xlix), but which in reality is superfluous (xl). Here Lévi-Strauss betrays his scientistic metaphysics: he supposes that reality is divided *a priori* into clear-cut structures. We defend the opposite view: the ever present "supplementary ration" of *signifiants* which man possesses (xlix) is made necessary by the ambiguity of reality. We shall defend the idea that the marginality and ambiguity pervading structural order both engender and destroy structures. That is why they form fundamental cosmological problems. As such they constitute a substantial part of the subject matter of myths and tragedy (Girard VS 335). Because myth and tragedy are 'meta-languages' which manipulate the elements of ordinary language, they are able to distort the existing structural oppositions, thus revealing fundamental ambiguities (Segal DP 25).

This implies, however, that structural knowledge itself will inevitably be tinged with the ambiguities it is confronted with. Lévi-Strauss' quasi-mathematical formulas tend to emphasize order at the expense of that ambiguous power that, as we shall argue in the third chapter, both engenders and undermines order (cf. Derrida ED 29, 35-49). Knowledge which tries to account for ambiguous power will, up to a certain point, become ambiguous as well: the order of knowledge is intrinsically incapable of mastering ambiguous power completely.

A serious question concerning structuralist interpretation is: how can its hypotheses be proved wrong? Sometimes structuralism seems to have

developed into something like a self-fulfilling prophecy, incapable of being seriously tested, because *ad hoc* reasoning is added every time an inexplicable case occurs or a piece of counterevidence turns up (Leach LS 117). Most readers will agree that there are no 'crucial experiments' in comparing rival interpretative theories, and that there is no solid basis of independent fact: the 'facts' are partly constituted by and coloured in the light of the preconceived interpretative theory. Nevertheless this does not condemn interpretation to arbitrary *Spielerei*. Serious discussion between rival interpretative schools should not be precluded. Here we should like to establish some guide-lines for such a discussion.

When we say that a basic criterion of a successful interpretation is 'unity of meaning' most interpreters will agree with us—but this criterion does not mean much. Something more is implied in the remark that suppositions concerning the whole (e.g. the myth or body of myths) should hold good for as many parts (e.g. mythemes) as possible. But even then the meaning of 'whole' and of the 'unity of whole and parts' is vague. The notion of unity we are employing here is totally different from, even opposed to, the reductive unity which is the aim of the natural sciences. The unity of an interpretation, like that of its subject, is the unity of a family: a patterned whole of connections, oppositions, harmonies. Perhaps we should call it interconnectedness. The more interconnected the elements of myths and tragedies appear, the better the interpretation. This aim of metaphoric unity has been rendered in a masterly fashion by Cleanth Brooks:

> The structure meant is a structure of meanings, evaluations and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes and meanings. But even here one needs to make important qualifications: the principle is not one which involves the arrangement of various elements into homogeneous groupings, pairing like with like. It unites the like with the unlike. It does not unite them, however, by the simple process of allowing one connotation to cancel out another nor does it reduce the contradictory attitudes to harmony by a process of subtraction. The unity is not a unity of the sort to be achieved by the reduction and simplification appropriate to an algebraic formula. (Cleanth Brooks WWU 178-79)

A similar attitude is taken by Lévi-Strauss, when he rejects the possibility of a 'Cartesian' separation and unification as the final aim of the study of myth, because the themes are endlessly doubled.

> The study of myths raises a methodological problem, in that it cannot be carried out according to the Cartesian principle of breaking down the difficulty into as many parts as may be necessary for finding the solution. There is no real end to mythological analysis, no hidden unity to be grasped once the breaking-down process has been completed. Themes can be split

> up *ad infinitum*. Just when you think you have disentangled and separated them, you realize that they are knitting together again in response to the operation of unexpected affinities.(CC 13)

A major implication of this statement is that structural knowledge never reaches a state of complete clarity and distinctness. It belongs to a history in which both texts and interpretations are involved, which makes this knowledge forever changeable and saturated with opacity, yet unable to take that history into account. But here a second criterion should be brought into the discussion, a criterion which serves as a watchdog against an undue expansion of interconnectedness. The interpreter has to be careful not to impose his own interesting ideas on a text which does not answer to them. One important criterion therefore is: does a presumed opposition or analogy recur in other parts of the text, or in similar texts? This recurrence of a theme need not be literal—it may consist of reversals, metaphors, etc. But a proposed theme should not be unique; it must belong to a pattern. When we read and re-read the *Antigone*, a myriad possible connections and oppositions crossed our minds—but only a few were acceptable because they formed a recurring pattern. It is tempting to think of the culinary triangle if one reads that Antigone is called "raw," whereas the body of her brother is called "rotting". But the hypothesis of a connection between the two passages has to be discarded unless we find further hints of the culinary triangle in the rest of the text.

When, in his interpretation of the meaning of Eurydice in the *Antigone*, Segal compares this character to the goddess Earth (TC 194), he has only one citation to support his claim: that she is called "all-mother" (παμμήτωρ - Ant 1282). Without additional evidence, this is idle speculation. The same holds true for Segal's comparison of Antigone to a perverted Kore (TC 180). The only evidence he adduces is that Antigone is called "bride of Hades"; but that was commonly said of and carved on the graves of Greek women who died before marriage. There should be independent evidence of a connection between Antigone and Kore to make Segal's claims acceptable. On the other hand, the hypothesis that the social fusions and fissions of the Labdacids are connected with their close contact with nature is confirmed so frequently, not only in the *Antigone*, but in related Greek tragedies and myths as well, that we consider it almost beyond doubt. The subsequent application of such a confirmed hypothesis to dark passages, e.g. that passage in which Antigone is called a raw offspring of a raw father, may provide some clarification.

That recurrence can serve as a touchstone of a structural interpretation of myth and tragedy not only points to the fact that the mythical way of thinking is generally repetitive, in that sequences of events recur time

and again. It also points to the fact that repetitiveness must be an indispensable characteristic of myth if structural interpretation is to make any sense. It is only through repetition of similar episodes that the deep structure of a myth, which demands 'vertical reading,' can be unveiled. Only repetition guarantees the "structure feuilletée" of myth (Lévi-Strauss AS 254).

Lévi-Strauss has pointed out the fundamental fact that the 'leaves' of mythical episodes are never strictly identical. He explains this differentiation within the sequence of episodes by suggesting that the aim of myth is to offer a logical model for resolving (partly real) contradictions. According to Lévi-Strauss, this implies that a potentially endless series of 'leaves' will be generated, each slightly different from its predecessor. Again we have to supplement his penetrating remarks by arguing that frequently myths are not supposed to resolve real contradictions, but to put them before our eyes. In these cases the function of differentiation might be quite different. It may confront us with the real contradictions and ambiguities of life and the cosmos by the very process of transformation within repetition. We hope to show that this is what happens in the *Antigone*. It has often been remarked that in this tragedy episodes, choral songs, sequences of action, fates, images, words are repeated endlessly, in intricate variations, reversals and metamorphoses. We are convinced that these differential reiterations reveal the ambiguous meaning of the tragedy. Through the repetition of the fate of Antigone in the fate of Creon, the repeated description of man's place in the cosmos in the sequence of choral songs, and through an amazing number of repetitions of words and images, the non-psychological, non-romantic, non-personal, but cosmological meaning of the Antigone is revealed: the cosmology of ambiguity.

Appendix

Nobody will deny the differences between epic poetry, lyrical poetry and tragedy in ancient Greece. For example, only in tragedy are cosmological conflicts not narrated but acted out on the stage. Another difference is that tragedy is virtually confined to the end of the sixth and the whole of the fifth century, and therefore reflects the specific problems of those times. However, the fact that tragedy emerged and died within a very short space of time and was concerned with the questions of that specific time should not blind us to the almost flawless continuity in Greek cosmology as it manifests itself in the epic poetry of Homer, the lyrical poetry of Theognis, the historical investigations of Herodotus and Thucydides, and the tragedies of Sophocles (Lloyd-Jones JZ 144). Even

if we assume that Sophocles was arguing with philosophers like Protagoras we have to emphasize that he forcefully defends the "inherited conglomerate" (Dodds GI 179; Greene M 138-71). Therefore we do not agree with Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, who maintain that tragedy occupies the marginal space between two cosmologies, the archaic and the modern (MTG 7). They are right in emphasizing that tragedy was concerned with the fifth century problems of jurisdiction in the rising Greek polis and its opposition to older institutions (MTG 15), but in the epic and lyrical poetry we also find reflections of contemporary problems. There is no reason to believe that tragedy occupies an exceptional position in this respect. As Vernant and Vidal-Naquet themselves argue, the cosmology of the tragedians is primarily archaic (MTG 16): they apply ancient cosmological categories to new problems. But with the possible exception of Euripides the rise of philosophy and its new separative thinking had little or no influence on their basic outlook on the cosmos. Sophocles' problems of transgression, pollution, contradiction and ambiguity are similar to Homer's or Hesiod's, who provided the basis of Sophocles' ideas (Knox HT 50-51). Furthermore, epic poetry, lyrical poetry and tragedy all draw on the same mythical corpus. Greek myth does not coincide with any one of the literary genres (Graf GM 8); all belong together as manifestations of Greek mythical thinking (Graf GM 138). The fact that the tragedians take great liberties in their variations on the corpus of myth does not prove their distance from it (Vernant/Vidal-Naquet MTG 16), but proves that they belong to its tradition: all Greek authors wrote variations on the existing themes.

It is more fruitful to point out the continuity in Greek cosmology from Homer to Sophocles than to stress the alleged marginality of tragedy. In all genres the same fundamental cosmological issues are at stake: man's awkward position, divided and ambiguous, in a hard and ruthless world in which no Lévi-Straussian reconciliations are to be expected (cf. Gould SGR 24).