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## INTRODUCTION

The origin of this study was a desire to ascertain, if possible, how and why the style of Sophocles is so surpassingly good. That it is a good style is generally admitted—even schoolboys are sometimes vaguely conscious of its beauty—but one day, if we are lucky, it dawns upon us that there is something in the style of Sophocles in his later works which is unique, and which makes the style of nearly all other poets, even the greatest, seem a kind of fumbling. All great poets can rise to the occasion, or they would not be great poets, but the unique quality of Sophocles is that he does not need a great occasion. He can say a simple thing in what seems simple language, and yet somehow contrive to take our breath away, and move us as deeply as we can be moved by poetry. The power to do this is found sometimes in other poets, but while they do it occasionally, Sophocles, in his later work, does it at will. Plato in prose has the same power, but I can think of no other writer who has it in the same degree. Dante, perhaps, but he is not so quiet, or so deceptively simple, and therefore it is easier to see why we are moved.

My first object being to discover the secret of this power, I have only dealt lightly with the other matters which arise incidentally, e.g. with questions of date. It is obvious that the development of the style will help us to fix the date of the plays, but for this purpose style is only one form of evidence, and though the others are sometimes mentioned, they are not discussed as fully as they would be if the dating of the plays were my first aim.

I am not so foolish as to suppose that any analysis, however careful, can reveal the final secret of a great style: the problem is too complicated. We can isolate and analyse most of the elements of which it is composed. The choice and use of words, the sound of them separately and in combination, the order of words, the

structure of clause and sentence, the use of figures of speech and thought; all these can be analysed. But the final secret lies not in them but in the way they are used and blended and related to the thought; and such things cannot be tabulated or analysed.

None the less analysis is not useless, for it clears the mind, quickens the perception, and calls attention to points unnoticed before. This may be questioned; for many of the few who care for style at all feel that it is a kind of sacrilege to analyse it, and fear that the attempt will destroy their spontaneous pleasure. But they are wrong. After all few will deny that a trained musician is better able to enjoy a symphony of Beethoven because he can follow the structure and recognize the elements of which it is built. In the case of music we admit this, but in the case of literature, and of poetry especially, most of us are suspicious of any formal analysis. This is illogical, and *a fortiori* so in the case of Greek poetry, and more especially of Sophocles. For Greek poetry, like a Greek temple, is built on a simple, but definite, plan, which is carried into the minutest details. Nothing is accidental. And in the case of Sophocles we know, if we can trust Plutarch, that he deliberately modified his style, and therefore we can be sure that in looking for development in it we are not chasing a will o' the wisp.

The study of Sophocles has another justification. Any one familiar with editions of his works and with histories of Greek Literature will know that their remarks upon the style of Sophocles are usually somewhat vague. All state in various terms that it is a very good style, possibly that it is a 'finished' style, or that it is intermediate between the styles of Aeschylus and Euripides; but that is about all. On the style of the other two they have more to say, for in them certain characteristics stick out and can hardly be missed; but the qualities of Sophocles are more elusive and we must find some means of tracking them to their lair.

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The process of tracking is inevitably slow and tedious. In reading and re-reading the plays with attention to style some differences between them will probably impress themselves on the reader's mind; but impressions cannot be trusted, still less can they be conveyed to other minds. One must devise some means of testing them and making them clear to others. But the only tests possible in this case are more or less mechanical. I have an impression, say, that the diction of Sophocles in the later plays is simpler than in the earlier. It is possible to test this impression by counting up the proportion of words of various types used in the different plays, and then to see if the count confirms the impression. If it does so, the impression is probably right and may be accepted; though the test is still theoretically incomplete, for it is not humanly possible to analyse all the words in a play. Even if one takes the more significant words only, the process is tedious enough.

The choice of words to examine and of the best method of classifying them is not easy, and I have little doubt that the methods adopted here could be improved. Only when the process is complete can one see clearly just what is or is not significant. Still the process adopted has yielded something.

The other elements of style mentioned above cannot so well be tabulated as the diction. They are so Protean that tabulation, even if possible, would be misleading. It will be better to deal with them in typical examples, which can be discussed at length. But even in those parts of the analysis which can be reduced to statistics the method here followed is not altogether formal or consistent. The lists themselves are as complete as I could make them, but in using the various lists I have not followed any rigid order, e.g. of date, nor have I examined all the lists in exactly the same way. I have followed the order which seemed likely to lead most quickly to the goal. Thus I have sometimes passed directly from the *Ajax* to the *Oedipus Coloneus*, for the difference

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of style between them is clearly marked, and the nature of that difference provides a clue to what we must look for in the intermediate plays.

Then again, I have not taken all the lines of evidence for each play together. They are so complex that such a method would bewilder the reader. Instead of that I have begun by analysing and discussing lists of words peculiar to each play. Their evidence is obviously important and should enable us provisionally to determine roughly the character of the style. The further lists then analysed serve to check the impression derived from the first, and each helps to complete the picture.

This method involves some repetition and overlapping, for some words figure in more lists than one, but it is much less confusing, and it is a safeguard against error. For if two lists seem to conflict, we are pulled up and sent in search of the explanation.

The use of the lists is informal in another respect. When the methods followed have been made clear in the case of two or three plays, and the evidence discussed at some length, I have sometimes dealt with the rest more briefly and have left the reader, if he likes, to verify the statements in detail. This saves some tedious repetition.

It will also save repetition, if I explain here the methods adopted in making the lists and my reasons for adopting them. I begin with an analysis of diction. This in some form is indispensable, for the effect of style depends above all on the exact appreciation of the values and associations of the words used. They may be anything from the frankly poetic and 'elevated' to the colloquial. There are as many different types of language in Greek as in English, but whereas in his own language the educated reader recognizes the different types at a glance, no modern scholar would claim to do the same in Greek with any certainty. The only course open to him in case of doubt is to take his dictionary

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and look up to see how and by whom the word is used. Even this is only a makeshift and cannot give us the sure instinct of an Athenian contemporary of Sophocles, but it is the best we can do and carries us some distance. Of most words we can then be fairly sure, if others elude us. To make the process complete we should of course not only note the authors who use a word, but look up every passage in which it occurs. The brevity of life, however, precludes that course, and I have only adopted it in a few difficult cases.

The various lists here given were based on larger lists in which I had entered all the words in each play except those common in all types of Greek or at least part of the general poetic stock. With each word were entered also the authors in whom it occurred and other particulars; as, for instance, whether it was confined to Sophocles, in what plays it occurred, and, if necessary, anything noteworthy in its nature or form.

Some of the points noted proved in practice unimportant; those which proved significant are the basis of the following lists. In making the lists I have not invariably followed a mechanical rule, when it would be misleading to do so; but departures from the rule are explained in their place.

The excuse for these informalities, and for others which the reader will discover, is that the formal methods of science would here be misleading. Such methods may check impression, they may suggest new points, but in the last resort they must themselves be tested by impression. When we have applied all our mechanical tests and drawn conclusions from them, we must see whether the result agrees with our impression. If it does, well and good; if not, there is something to explain. For our impression, at any rate an impression formed after repeated study, takes account of many things which no formal analysis can include. When it disagrees with the mechanical evidence, we must hark back, and try again, till we reach a result which squares with

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the evidence and 'feels' right, i.e. coincides with our impression. But as impressions are rightly suspect, it seemed the best plan to take the reader, as far as possible, along the same track as the writer. It will not be altogether the same track, for it is not possible to show him more than a small part of the evidence; but even so, if he finds that what he is shown produces a similar impression on his own mind, he will accept the writer's conclusions with less suspicion. And this again involves informality, for the track followed was often devious.

## CHAPTER I

## Words used by Sophocles in one Play only

## INTRODUCTORY

Of the elements of style diction is for obvious reasons the easiest to tabulate and analyse. We will therefore begin with a comparison of the diction in the extant plays, taking first the *Ajax* and *Oedipus Coloneus*, for these plays, being farthest removed in date, should indicate clearly the change of style, if any, and afford a clue for the rest. It does not follow of course that the difference of style will be greatest in these two plays, for a poet does not always develop in a straight line, and style must vary with the subject in hand; but even so these plays should at least furnish a rough indication of the nature of the change in style.

Before we come to them, however, it is necessary, though tedious, to explain the nature of the evidence used, and the use made of it. The lists which follow were based, as already mentioned, on larger lists in which I had entered all the words in each play which were not part of the common stock of poetry, or of poetry and prose alike. These amounted on the average to four or five hundred words in each play. Those words were classified under various heads, of which I will only mention those which proved in experience to be most important. One heading included all words peculiar to the extant plays of Sophocles,<sup>1</sup> whether found in one play only or in more. Under another head were entered all words used by Sophocles in one play only, whether peculiar to him or used by other authors as well. When they were so used, I noted the names of those other writers.

Further, the words were classified according to their nature under various heads derived in part from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

<sup>1</sup> In this list the *Fragments*, though noted, are ignored, for their dates being in most cases doubtful, they cannot furnish evidence for the development of style.

The most important of these were certain types of compound words, of words unusual in form, e.g. with Homeric inflections, and of the rare and exotic words which Aristotle calls γλωτται. Another obvious division was that into 'poetic' and 'prose' words.

We deal first with the lists of words used by Sophocles in one play only. They include many words of two types which proved to be specially important, 'heavy' compounds, and words used exclusively by Sophocles in classical Greek. These two types are discussed later in separate sections and their evidence is only dealt with incidentally here, and they are classified on the same principles as the other words. Of the classification attempted it will be useful to notice some points. The most important of these relates to the division between 'prose' and 'poetic' words. A study such as this brings home the difficulty of deciding which words, if any, are exclusively prosaic. Many words, or forms of words, may safely be classified as poetic and could not be used without absurdity or incongruity in normal prose. But to class a word as 'prose' is by no means so safe or so easy. The difficulty is twofold.

One part of it springs from our relative ignorance of Greek. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the English student, when in doubt about the character of a Greek word, is reduced to consulting his dictionary and seeing by whom it is used. In the case of words definitely poetic this process is often satisfactory enough. When we find, for instance, that a word is used by Homer and Pindar and then figures once in an elaborate ode of Sophocles, we can be fairly sure that the word belongs to the grand or 'elevated' style, and would probably be felt as archaic. And if not only the word itself, but the form used, is Homeric, this inference is strengthened. Again, there is little doubt that many of the characteristic Aeschylean compounds belong to the same style. With them we cannot be quite so sure, for, as we shall see later, some of these compounds crop up in disconcerting contexts; one difficulty is the lack of evidence. We have little or no Attic prose apart from inscriptions which is strictly contemporaneous with Sophocles, and the Ionic writers whom we have are not evidence for this purpose. To begin with, most if not all of them



admit poetic colouring, and even when they are not doing that, an Ionic word, and still more an Ionic form, is felt in Attic as poetical. And if we turn to the prose authors of slightly later date than Sophocles, none of them for this purpose is above suspicion. Thucydides admits some Ionic and poetic words, Xenophon's diction is by no means impeccable Attic and often admits an exotic or poetical word, and Plato, though he can write impeccably, draws on poetical vocabulary when it suits his purpose. The orators are the recognized standard of Attic, and can usually be trusted, but they too occasionally borrow a word from poetry. And the scientific and philosophical writers, who at first sight seem a sound source of evidence, are specially deceptive. Any one who reads the following lists will notice how often a rare and striking word is used perhaps once by Sophocles, and recurs only in Hippocrates, Aristotle, or Theophrastus. As we shall see later, it is often difficult to decide whether such words were technical terms borrowed by the poet, or were borrowed by the later writers from him.

Thus there is no type of prose of which the evidence is quite conclusive, for all types sometimes admit words which are not only appropriate in poetry but belong normally to the 'grand' style. Aristophanes is sometimes useful, for some of his words are clearly colloquial, but his words must always be studied in their context, for he uses words of all types freely.

We are therefore thrown back in many cases on the nature of the word and the contexts in which it is used; and this brings us face to face with the other difficulty, a difficulty due not to our limited knowledge of Greek, but to the nature of language.

In most languages it is in practice difficult to find words which cannot be used in poetry, and especially in drama, without loss of dignity, provided that they are used in the right context. That is the important point. If the term 'prose' is to be useful for our present purpose, it should imply that the word so labelled cannot be used in any context without a lowering of the key, that the diction is approaching that of common life. And words which do this are very rare. Most words in fact are neutral and can be used indifferently in prose and verse; and 'neutral', not 'prose', is the proper label for them, even if they occur more frequently

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in prose. A diction composed wholly or mainly of such neutral words differs no doubt from one which contains many exclusively poetic words, but it is safer to call it poetry in a simpler style, not more prosaic. Some of the most exquisite poetry of the later Sophocles is in fact composed almost wholly of 'neutral' words.

More than this, words which from their normal use and associations may fairly be classed as prose can in certain contexts be used without incongruity in poetic drama, if not in all kinds of poetry. We shall meet instances of this later on. It is only the inappropriate use of such words which produces the effect of bathos and lets the reader down with a thump. Such a misuse we may find in minor poets, and at times in a poet as great as Wordsworth, but we shall hardly find it in Sophocles. Accordingly, if in spite of the difficulties mentioned we venture to class a few words as prose, that in itself does not imply that the passage in which they occur is less poetic than usual. The distribution of such words is one evidence of that, for they do not occur in clusters, but are scattered more or less evenly through the plays. In this they differ from the poetic words, for words characteristic of the formally poetic style do tend to come in clusters and show a definite relation to the character of the passage and the play. They therefore afford a useful clue to style: the prose words do not.

The other lists here used call for less explanation, but the reader should be reminded that for reasons stated in the Introduction, they are not intended to be mechanically accurate; for when the mechanical rule gave a deceptive result, I have freely departed from it. In the lists of Homeric words, for instance, I ignore as a rule those which occur in all the three Attic dramatists, or which are freely used by other poets. Such words have presumably become part of the general poetic stock. On the other hand I have included some words used, for instance, by Pindar, or even by Aeschylus, and, worse still, some which occur in prose, when I was satisfied for one reason or another that they would carry Homeric associations for Sophocles and his public. This is certainly an arbitrary proceeding, but it was necessary. If the lists are to have real value, one must weigh the evidence for and against each word, and strike a balance as best one can.