

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is to throw such light as I can on some aspects of the work and style of Aeschylus and incidentally to correct some common misapprehensions. Even a little light on an author so puzzling to most readers may be welcome to some of them, and 'a little light' is as much as any sane scholar will aspire to throw. This study is based in the first place on style; but the study of style would be of little interest if it did not throw light on the mind and purpose of the writer. Accordingly I have here and there followed up at length some clues to the mind of Aeschylus which were presented by the study of his style.

So much for the purpose of the book. On the methods adopted there is unfortunately more to say. They are based in part on the analysis of lists of words and of other features of style. Less use is made of these lists than in my study of Sophocles, for they are on the whole less instructive. But still they are important, and as I have learnt by experience that many scholars look with mistrust on lists of words as a criterion of style, it is necessary to state beforehand in what ways, and with what limitations, they are useful.

The use of lists of words serves several purposes. In the first place it serves to check personal impression. A critic endowed with infallible memory and judgement could doubtless dispense with lists, but where shall we find him? Aristotle himself in the *Poetics* seems wholly to overlook some important aspects of Tragedy, and few critics will claim to be greater than he, or to have a better memory. Most of us find it all too necessary to check our impressions again and again.

That is one use of lists. A second is that the study of them sometimes suggests new points. Who, for instance, but our infallible critic, would claim to know, or even to suspect, certain points revealed in the study of the lists of 'Heavy Compounds'? A scholar with a good memory might declare, as is the case, that they are found in numbers roughly equal in all the extant plays

of Aeschylus. But would he be able to affirm with equal confidence that he had detected the variations in the character and use of the compounds which inspection of the list reveals? Or who without the list of compounds would discover in the case of Sophocles a change as marked, but in the opposite direction? What the nature of that change in both cases is we shall see when we come to the lists.

The third use of the lists is for evidence. A reader who is prepared to take the writer's statements and conclusions on trust will have no need to study lists, and he will then escape much tedious labour. But few who read the book at all are likely to be so trustful; and if they desire evidence, they must digest the lists, for there is no other way. To write of an author's style and work on the strength of personal impression is easier and pleasanter for reader and writer alike. Much has been written on that basis, and some of it is excellent; but personal impressions vary. Even if a man is convinced that his own impression is right, he cannot reasonably expect to convince others unless he can produce evidence to support his own impression.

Many people, it is true, distrust such evidence as is used here. They feel, quite reasonably, that there are many things in poetry which no dissection can reveal any more than the dissection of corpses can reveal the secret of life. Still, the dissection of corpses does teach us a good deal about the human body, and dissection of poetry teaches us something about poetry. It renders us for one thing more observant of changes of style. And a change of style, however slight, implies, in a good poet, some change of tone and spirit which a reader less sensitive to style might well miss. Many translators of Greek Tragedy, otherwise competent, are apt to miss such things and translate in a uniform style which is misleading, especially in the case of Euripides, who varies his style more than the others.¹ The mechanical tests of lists serve this and other useful, if humble, purposes. They are therefore justified, even if they cannot, as already stated, reveal the whole secret of a great style.

¹ This point is well brought out by Prof. H. O. Meredith in the Introduction to his *Four Plays of Euripides* (George Allen).

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I stress this point the more because a reviewer of my study of the style of Sophocles dug out an incautious statement that it had originated in a personal desire to find out why the style of Sophocles was so good, and then said that I had failed in my purpose because I had not laid bare the final secret. All that I claimed there, or claim here, is to give a little help to readers interested in style.

Yet lists of words can be deceptive, if used without discretion. For instance, to reject a passage or a play as spurious because it differs in some feature of style from the rest of the play, or plays, of the author is unscientific. On that principle we should have to deny that the *Republic* of Plato was written by the same author as the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. Variations of style may be due to many causes, and when we meet them we must try, if we can, to find out the reason. They may be due, as sometimes in Sophocles, to a consistent and deliberate modification of style in course of time. They may be due, as most often in Euripides, to an equally deliberate variation to suit various purposes: one style for Prologues, another for Dialogue—or rather several styles for Dialogue according to its character—and so on. Such things must be allowed for, and I have tried to do so in the case of Aeschylus.

In selecting the materials for the lists I have been guided by the ancient writers on style, and especially by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which for the present purpose is more useful than the *Poetics*. Most of the features of style discussed in the *Rhetoric* are common to prose and poetry, and many of the examples there cited come from the poets. If Aristotle thinks these features of style specially significant, we can safely accept his judgement. The lists of examples given here are longer, but the principle is Aristotle's.

After this preamble we come in successive chapters to the lists themselves, taking them not in the order of importance, but rather so as best to build up the picture by successive strokes. If the reader finds the first strokes insignificant, he will, I hope, find later that they contribute something to the whole.

Of course it is possible to give a few examples of each point of style in turn and to dispense with complete lists. This is often

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done, and if the examples are well chosen it is sufficient for some purposes. But there is always a danger that the choice of examples may consciously or unconsciously be influenced by preconceived theories, or may seem to a suspicious reader to be so. And apart from that, selected examples do not suffice for all purposes. If we are not content with some general knowledge of a writer's style, but wish to trace its variations in different plays or in different parts of the same play, we must sometimes have lists of all the notable instances of this or that feature. No degree of knowledge or memory can dispense with them. Even if one knows a poem by heart, that does not enable one to say off-hand what instances it contains of a given quality. One may be able to cite some, but if one wishes to cite all one must go through the poem and collect them; and that is to make a list.

Lists are therefore necessary in the comparison of plays or passages. They must be made and studied again and again, for the impression based on memory may be deceptive. Experience proves that. A few striking instances of a quality may leave one with the impression that the instances are more frequent than they are, and so on. If we are to compare, we must be sure that the things compared really have the qualities we assume; and without comparison of variations there can be no real understanding of an author's style and mind. For variations send us in search of their reason. The reason may lie in a gradual change of method, as in the case of some of the variations in Sophocles, or it may be due to some particular purpose. When we have ascertained it, it is a valuable clue to the methods and mind of the author.

But after all the chief justification for these unpalatable statistics is that the study of the variations presented and of the reasons for them gradually quickens the apprehension of style. If the reader is merely told that the style of Aeschylus, or of any other author, has such and such characteristics, he has merely acquired so much information. But if he examines the evidence here set out and tests it for himself—and possibly invents new tests of his own—he will find that he is beginning to read with new eyes and discerns many things that he missed before. Small changes

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of style and tone, unnoticed before, stand out clearly, and gradually the misty figure of the writer begins to take shape and his features to stand out. Aeschylus and Sophocles and Euripides are as distinct to the mind as their bodily presence would be. They become three old friends whose little ways we know.

But it is fair to warn the reader that the way up to that viewpoint is long and steep, and that even when one has reached it visibility varies and really clear days are few. But no matter:

τῶν πόνων πωλοῦσιν ἡμῖν πάντα τάγαθ' οἱ θεοί.

CHAPTER I

Compounds

We begin our investigation with some lists of compounds.¹ We start with them not because they are the most significant feature of style, but because they are the easiest to examine, and certainly the most obvious. The first impression made on most readers of Aeschylus is that he employs a multitude of long words; and that impression is correct. Aeschylus constantly builds an iambic trimeter out of four words and not rarely out of three; and of those long words heavy compounds form a large part. Not all compounds are heavy in the sense here meant. Compounds with prepositions are so frequent in all kinds of Greek that they are not characteristic of any particular style; though when the resultant word is very long, it adds some weight to the line. Compounds of nominal stems or of these with verbs are much more felt, and the lists include most of them, omitting only a few words so familiar in Greek that they are hardly felt; e.g. στρατηγός.

TOTALS

<i>Supplices</i>					
Dialogue:	63	in 471 lines	= 1	in 7·6 lines	
Lyric:	128	602	= 1	4·7	
<i>Persae</i>					
Dialogue:	55	543	= 1	9·8	
Lyric:	117	533	= 1	4·6	
<i>Septem</i>					
Dialogue:	95	543	= 1	5·7	
Lyric:	143	541	= 1	3·8	
<i>P.V.</i>					
Dialogue:	117	803	= 1	7·04	
Lyric:	46	290	= 1	6·3	
<i>Agamemnon</i>					
Dialogue:	107	876	= 1	8·2	
Lyric:	171	797	= 1	4·8	

¹ The lists themselves are printed at the end of the chapter.

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<i>Choephoroi</i>				
Dialogue:	64	in 624 lines	= 1	in 10.06 lines
Lyric:	69	452	= 1	6.5
<i>Eumenides</i>				
Dialogue:	85	642	= 1	7.5
Lyric:	59	405	= 1	6.8

In the preceding list of the total number of compounds I have shown their proportion to the total number of lines in the play, for as the plays vary in length, that proportion is more significant than the mere total of numbers.

A comparison of these figures establishes several points. First, it is clear that the proportion of such words is no sure clue to the date of a play. The proportion is highest in the *Septem*, both in dialogue and lyric, and the *Septem* is unquestionably a play of the middle period, much later than the *Supplices* and earlier than the *Oresteia*. Moreover the totals move up and down apparently at random, and the variations show no relation to the date. The proportion of compounds is lowest in the dialogue of the *Choephoroi*, but it is almost as low in the *Persae*, a much earlier play; while in the dialogue of the *Eumenides*, contemporary with the *Choephoroi*, the proportion is virtually identical with that for the *Supplices*. On whatever principle these variations depend, it is clearly not the date. They will not, for instance, help us to determine the vexed question of the *Prometheus Vincetus*. In that play the proportion of these compounds is unexpectedly high. The relative simplicity of style, which most readers feel in this play, clearly does not depend on the absence of big words.

Nor again is there any visible tendency, as there is in Sophocles, to restrict such words in the later plays more and more to the lyrics. The variations in the proportion between dialogue and lyric again are equally unpredictable, and the number in dialogue even in the *Choephoroi*, where it is least, is far greater than in the later plays of Sophocles.

As this list so far yields little but negative results, we must analyse it a little farther. In the lists of figures which follow I give the proportion of our compounds which are either ἀπαξ λεγόμενα or peculiar in classical Greek to Aeschylus. These words, being

unusual, are obviously more significant than those compounds which are part of the poetic stock. They are here shown in two lists. The first gives their proportion to the total number of lines in which they occur, the second their proportion to the total number of compounds in the play.

Totals of words which are either ἀπαξ λεγόμενα (α) or peculiar in classical Greek to Aeschylus (A):

<i>Supplices</i>					
Dialogue:	19α, 6 A = 25	in 471 lines	= 1	in 18·8 lines	
Lyric:	43α, 14 A = 57	602	= 1	10·6	
<i>Persae</i>					
Dialogue:	14α, 4 A = 18	543	= 1	30·2	
Lyric:	37α, 21 A = 58	533	= 1	9·2	
<i>Septem</i>					
Dialogue:	16α, 8 A = 24	543	= 1	22·6	
Lyric:	59α, 12 A = 71	541	= 1	7·6	
<i>P.V.</i>					
Dialogue:	37α, 9 A = 46	803	= 1	17·2	
Lyric:	19α, 10 A = 29	290	= 1	10	
<i>Agamemnon</i>					
Dialogue:	32α, 16 A = 48	876	= 1	18·2	
Lyric:	70α, 38 A = 108	797	= 1	7·4	
<i>Choephoroi</i>					
Dialogue:	14α, 5 A = 19	624	= 1	32·8	
Lyric:	35α, 9 A = 44	452	= 1	10·3	
<i>Eumenides</i>					
Dialogue:	28α, 5 A = 33	642	= 1	19·5	
Lyric:	29α, 10 A = 39	405	= 1	10·4	

This list confirms the conclusions derived from the first. Here too the variations bear no perceptible relation to the date of the play; here too, likewise, the distribution of the words between dialogue and lyric is fairly constant, those in the former being usually about half as numerous in proportion to the number of lines. This coincidence is at least worth noting, because these Aeschylean compounds are more certainly significant than the rest. The latter include a good many words like στρατηλάτης, which may well be used without conscious intention of elevating

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the style, and their number may so far be accidental. The Aeschylean words cannot be accidental, and the coincidence of the two lists is therefore important. We come now to the second list.

Percentage of ἀπαξ λεγόμενα and other Aeschylean words to the total of compounds in each play:

	DIALOGUE	LYRIC
<i>Supplices</i>	40 per cent	42 per cent
<i>Persae</i>	32	42
<i>Septem</i>	25	49
<i>P.V.</i>	40	60
<i>Agamemnon</i>	45	63
<i>Choephoroi</i>	31	64
<i>Eumenides</i>	39	66

This list is interesting in several ways. In the first place we notice that the proportion of Aeschylean words to the total of compounds is high, seldom less than a third even in the dialogue. This confirms the familiar impression that the diction of Aeschylus is bold and novel. Secondly we notice that the proportion of such words in lyric is consistently higher than in dialogue. This we should expect, for the diction of lyric is naturally the bolder of the two. In fact we should expect the difference to be greater than it is, and in the other Greek dramatists we should find it to be so. In the earliest play, the *Supplices*, the ratio is almost identical in dialogue and lyric, and though it rises later, the *Choephoroi* alone shows less than a ratio of a half. It is evident therefore that Aeschylus does not at any period reserve his bolder formations chiefly for the lyrics, as Sophocles, for instance, does in his later plays. There is, it is true, a larger proportion of such words in the lyrics of Aeschylus' later plays, but that is not due to a decrease in the dialogue, but to an increase in the lyric. The total of Aeschylean words in dialogue is actually highest in the *Agamemnon*, but that is balanced in that play and in the rest of the *Oresteia* by a corresponding increase in the lyric. Aeschylus in fact grows bolder in the formation of new compounds, not, like Sophocles, more cautious.

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This conclusion is indubitable, but in one instance surprising. The *Prometheus Vincetus*, as we shall see later, is certainly a late play, and it accordingly yields a proportion of Aeschylean compounds as high as any but the *Agamemnon*. This is a further proof that its simplicity, wherever it lies, does not lie in the diction.

It may be said that these compounds form only one element of the diction, and therefore do not prove that the diction as a whole is not more simple. Whether it is so can only be decided by detailed study, but meantime we can at least say that a poet who uses these bold formations even more freely in his later work can hardly be consciously aiming at simplicity of diction, though his style may be simpler in other ways. That possibility likewise calls for further investigation, but it is probable that the impression of simplicity in the *P.V.* is partly deceptive,¹ at any rate in the case of diction. We feel the *P.V.* to be simpler partly because the proportion of lyric is small, and that is due not to any change of style, but to Aeschylus' conception of dramatic fitness. His subject there did not call for elaborate odes such as we find in the *Agamemnon*.

And fitness of other kinds determines many of the variations of style. No great poet uses words mechanically. Elaborate and grandiose diction occurs most frequently in places which invite it: in Messengers' Speeches and other descriptive passages, or in some forms of impassioned utterance, but less in stichomuthia. Accordingly the proportion falls in the dialogue of the *Choephoroi*, a play with little description and not a little stichomuthia. The proportion is likewise low in the lyrics of that play and of the *Eumenides*, while it is unusually high in the *Agamemnon*; the reason being that the odes in the latter are of a more elaborate type. This is another proof that these variations depend on the dramatic requirements of the play as well as on the date.

We may assume then for the present that the style of Aeschylus, unlike that of Sophocles, grows at least in some respects bolder in course of time. That conclusion, if valid, points to a different course of development. But it is so far tentative: and it must be tested in other ways.

One possible test is to look at the lists from which our figures

¹ See Chapter IV.