BLINDNESS AND LIMITS: SOPHOKLES AND THE LOGIC OF MYTH

To generalize about Aischylos is difficult; to generalize about Euripides is almost impossible; but to generalize about Sophokles is both possible and potentially rewarding. With Sophokles—or, rather, with the Sophokles of the seven fully extant tragedies—we can sense a mood, a use of language, and a style of play-making ('dramatic technique') which are largely shared by all seven works. Of these characteristics it is surely the mood which contains the quintessence of Sophoklean tragedy. My aim in the first section of this paper will be to open the way to an appreciation of that mood by following up one of the most important motifs in Sophokles: blindness. In the second section the scope of the enquiry will be widened: I shall show that, in using the blindness motif, Sophokles was drawing on a theme which was fundamental to a large number of mythical narratives told by Greeks from the time of Homer to that of Pausanias, and beyond. In the final section we shall return to Sophokles, placing him this time not against the background of the whole Greek mythical tradition but rather within the specific context of the fifth century B.C., and attempting to overhear the individual dramatic 'voice' used by him as he explored the implications of blindness.

I. Sophokles

As *Ajax* begins, Odysseus is attempting to track down the play's eponymous hero, who is suspected of having done to death some beasts, together with their drovers, in the Greek camp near Troy. But the first words of the drama are spoken not by Odysseus but by Athene: 'Son of Laertes, I am always seeing you seeking to snatch some means of attacking your foes; and now again, at Ajax' tent, by the ships . . . I see you tracking his footsteps . . .' (1 ff.). Athene sees Odysseus. But Odysseus does not see Athene: 'Voice of Athene, dearest to me of the gods, how clearly I hear your voice, even though you are invisible[1] to me . . .' (14–16).[2] Exactly how this lack of visual reciprocity was enacted on stage is not relevant to us here;[3] what is relevant is that from the outset the goddess is presented as having the advantage over the mortal in respect of sight.

Soon the blindness motif is developed further. In his anger at being deprived of the arms of Achilles, says Athene, Ajax plotted murderous revenge on the Greek commanders; but

ἐγώ σφ' ἀπείργω, δυσφόρους ἐπ' ὄμμασι
γνώμας βαλοῦσα, τῆς ἀνηκέστου χαρᾶς . . .

'I kept him from his fatal gloating revenge, by

[1] ἄποπτος can mean either 'seen afar off, only dimly visible' or else 'invisible'; see the commentaries of Jebb (Cambridge 1896) and Stanford (London 1963) *ad loc.* But here the context seems to require the meaning 'invisible', to provide a stronger contrast with the words of 'hearing' (φθέγμα, φώνημα, ἀκούω). Kamerbeek (Leiden 1953) *ad loc.* opts unambiguously for 'hidden from view'.

[2] O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 116 n. 1, has recently argued that lines 14–17 'say that Odysseus knows Athena so well that he can recognize her by her voice alone even when she is not visible—unlike the present occasion'. However, Jebb's comment (Appendix, on 15) on a similar suggestion by A. Müller surely remains valid: '. . . it is surely inconveivable that, if Odysseus *saw* Athena standing near him, he should say to her, "How clearly I hear thy voice, even when thou art unseen".' κἂν ἄποπτος ᾖς ὅμως does indeed become weak if Sophokles intends the audience to regard Odysseus as being already able to see Athene.

[3] Discussions in Stanford (on 15) and in W. M. Calder's note, 'The Entrance of Athena in Ajax', *CPh* lx (1965) 114–16. The very existence of a fifth-century *theologeion*—the platform on which many scholars have put Athene during this scene—has been persuasively challenged by Taplin (n. 2) esp. 440–1. Perhaps the least implausible view of the staging is Stanford's: Odysseus is at first unable to see Athene, who is, however, on the scene just as he is. But gradually, presumably by moving uncertainly in her direction, he becomes able to see her, in time for the dialogue at 36 ff. There is no difficulty about the theatricality of this ('Characters in a play see what the playwright has them see, regardless of the realities of optics', Taplin [n. 2] 116 n. 1), nor about a mortal hearing but not seeing a divinity (*cf.* E. *Hipp.* 86). The problem is, rather, that the progress from invisibility to visibility is not charted in the text. This raises fundamental questions about the relation between text and staging, which we cannot go into here. (For an extreme but extraordinarily well-argued view, see Taplin [n. 2] 28 ff.) What is certain is that the last word on the staging of the opening of *Ajax* has not yet been said.

casting oppressive fancies upon his eyes . . .' (51–2)

In fact, Athene interfered with Ajax' sight so that he mistook animals for men, slaughtering and tormenting them instead of the Greek leaders. 'I will *show* you this madness of his,' she says; 'but do not be afraid . . .

ἐγὼ γὰρ ὀμμάτων ἀποστρόφους
αὐγὰς ἀπείρξω σὴν πρόσοψιν εἰσιδεῖν.

'I shall prevent the gleams of his eyes—which shall
be turned away—from seeing your face.' (69–70)

That is, she will disorient his vision. Later in the dialogue she repeats her promise in slightly different terms:

ἐγὼ σκοτώσω βλέφαρα καὶ δεδορκότα.

'I shall darken his eyes, (keen-) sighted though they are.' (85)

A god can do anything, comments Odysseus in reply. And Athene does indeed bring Ajax onto the scene, a deluded victim, convinced that he has Odysseus in his power to do with as he likes—whereas in fact all he has in his tent is a captive animal. For in reality Odysseus is standing here before Ajax, though invisible to him. As Athene is to Odysseus, so Odysseus is to Ajax: superior, and sighted.

Having momentarily been able to view a mortal from a vantage-point of godlike superiority, Odysseus is in a position to generalize about the whole human condition:

ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν
εἴδωλ' ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν.

'I see that all we mortals are nothing but phantoms
and insubstantial shadow.' (125–6)

It is the same insight as Kassandra's, just before she walks to her death in *Agamemnon*: not only are mortals limited in comparison with gods; they are even, in a way, less real.

After the first scene in *Ajax* blindness hardly recurs as a prominent theme, and it would be misleading to exaggerate its significance in this play. Nevertheless, its presence in that first scene serves to emphasize a crucial and recurring feature of the Sophoklean dramatic universe: namely, the feeling that human sight and insight are *limited* when compared with the sight and insight of the gods.

The play in which the metaphor of blindness is used to the most devastating effect in order to explore the limits of human insight is, of course, *Oedipus Tyrannos*. It will be sensible if we remind ourselves of two famous episodes: the confrontation between Teiresias and Oedipus, and the self-blinding of Oedipus.

At *O.T.* 284–5 the chorus introduces the possibility of consulting Teiresias with these words:

ἄνακτ' ἄνακτι ταὔθ' ὁρῶντ' ἐπίσταμαι
μάλιστα Φοίβῳ Τειρεσίαν, . . .

'I know that the vision of our lord Teiresias is
most like that of our lord Apollo . . .'

Although blind, Teiresias has insight greater than that of a man. He is thus at once less than, and greater than, a man. By contrast, Oedipus is no more than, and no less than, a man. As the priest said at 31 ff., Oedipus was not regarded as the equal of the gods, but only as 'first of men'. Oedipus is sighted, as men are; yet he lacks insight into the truth about himself and the world, as all mortals are liable to lack such insight.[4] Oedipus is a paradigm of humanity (1193 ff.). Superficially, his fate

[4] A word about the odd heresy which has Oedipus knowing the truth from the outset of the play (argued at book-length by P. Vellacott, *Sophocles and Oedipus* [London 1971]; N.B. the detailed refutation by B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* [London 1973] ch. 9, esp. 501 ff., with 547–8 n. 9): (i) if Oedipus knows already, the imagery of blindness is wholly without point, and the self-blinding is as gratuitous an irrelevance as it is in Seneca's *Oed.*; (ii) if Oedipus knows already, the play becomes a grubby and *unrepresentative* 'cover-up'.

is extraordinary; in reality, it is the distillation of common experience. The heroism and fragility of Oedipus' life are examples of what the heroism and fragility of *any* mortal life might be like.

Out of the contrast between Teiresias and Oedipus Sophokles creates a complex web of ambiguity and paradox. The pattern of the web has been analysed by numerous critics, and we may content ourselves with a look at one or two relevant strands.

Τε.	λεληθέναι σε φημὶ σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις αἴσχισθ' ὁμιλοῦντ', οὐδ' ὁρᾶν ἵν' εἶ κακοῦ.
Teir.	'I say that, unbeknown to yourself, you are in obscene commerce with those closest to you, yet you do not *see* what wretchedness you are in.' (366–7)

A little later the mutual accusations between the king and the seer draw heavily on the imagery of blindness.

Οι.	σοὶ δὲ τοῦτ' οὐκ ἔστ', ἐπεὶ τυφλὸς τά τ' ὦτα τόν τε νοῦν τά τ' ὄμματ' εἶ.
Τε.	σὺ δ' ἄθλιός γε ταῦτ' ὀνειδίζων, ἃ σοὶ οὐδεὶς ὃς οὐχὶ τῶνδ' ὀνειδιεῖ τάχα.
Οι.	μιᾶς τρέφει πρὸς νυκτός, ὥστε μήτ' ἐμὲ μήτ' ἄλλον, ὅστις φῶς ὁρᾷ, βλάψαι ποτ' ἄν.
Oed.	'You do not have [that strength of truth], since you are blind in ears, in mind, in eyes.'
Teir.	'You are a poor wretch to be hurling that reproach at me, since soon everyone will be reproaching *you* in just the same terms.'
Oed.	'Endless night is your element—you could harm[5] neither me nor anyone else who sees the light.' (370–5)

Soon Oedipus flies off at a tangent. It is, he imagines, *Kreon* who is behind Teiresias' allegations; Kreon wants the throne, and has suborned this magician,

. . . ὅστις ἐν τοῖς κέρδεσιν
μόνον δέδορκε, τὴν τέχνην δ' ἔφυ τυφλός.

'. . . who only has eyes for gain—he is blind in respect of prophecy'. (388–9)

Really stung now, Teiresias delivers one of the great speeches of ancient tragedy (408–28). Paradoxes and dark allusions come thick and fast:

σὺ καὶ δέδορκας κοὐ βλέπεις ἵν' εἶ κακοῦ . . .

'You are sighted, yet cannot see the calamity you are in . . .' (413)

But in time things will be different: 'Now you see clearly; but afterwards you will see only darkness' (419). Like Gloucester in *King Lear*, Oedipus will gain insight but lose his eyes.

And so to the self-blinding. How is it to be interpreted? 'Wir wissen aber heute', says Albert Esser, a medical doctor who has written about blindness in antiquity, 'dass die Selbstblendung im Erregungszustand eine Tat nur von Geisteskranken ist.'[6] The chorus would seem to confirm this at 1299–1300, when they ask, 'What madness (*μανία*) came upon you?' Yet the overall picture drawn by Sophokles of Oedipus before and after the self-blinding is emphatically *not* that of a deranged man. The reasons given by Oedipus for putting out his own eyes have, indeed, an inexorable logic. At 1271 ff. the messenger from the palace reports that, as Oedipus was doing the deed, he cried out that his eyes should no longer be able to look upon his crimes; before, his eyes

[5] The reading *βλάψαι* is to be preferred in 375, against the papyrus. So, rightly, e.g. Dawe in the recent Teubner edn (Leipzig 1975). In view of the dominant imagery of blindness and sight, it is easy to see how the error *βλέψαι* could creep in.

[6] *Das Antlitz der Blindheit in der Antike*[2] (Leiden 1961) 67.

had seen those they should not have seen, and failed to recognize those they ought to have recognized.[7] At 1371 ff. Oedipus fills this out. Without eyes, he will not have to look upon his father and mother in Hades, nor to endure the intolerable sight of his children, nor to look at the places in Thebes from which he banished himself. In fact, the ideal for him would be to be deprived of *all* perception of the external world (1386 ff.), a world which can only remind him of the pain which his relationships with others have produced.

In an article published a few years ago[8] G. Devereux argued that Oedipus' own explanations of his self-blinding are unconvincing rationalizations: the deed is really to be interpreted as a symbolic castration. Now psychoanalysis is at its weakest when it is made to explain everything, but at its strongest when it is used to explain only the unusual—and Oedipus' self-blinding is certainly unusual. Devereux cites an impressive number of stories from antiquity in which a person guilty of a sexual misdemeanour is punished with blinding.[9] In view of this evidence we cannot, I think, rule out the possibility that Oedipus' self-blinding might have been regarded as *appropriate* by reason of his having committed incest. However, the question to ask is not, 'Why did Oedipus blind himself?' but, 'Why did Sophokles represent Oedipus as blinding himself?' And a large part of the answer to that question is that it forms the culmination of the image-pattern of sight and blindness, with the implications of that pattern for the opposition insight/lack of insight.

Let us turn briefly to the other five plays. In *Antigone* Teiresias appears once more, but his importance is confined to the episode near the end of the play where he warns of the consequences entailed by Kreon's condemnation of Antigone. There is no all-pervasive use of the blindness motif comparable with that in *O.T.*; although in some of the verbal imagery there emerges a contrast between a matter-of-fact, practical ability to see, which Kreon possesses, and the power of insight, which he lacks.[10]

But it is in *Oedipus at Kolonos* that the relationship between blindness and insight is again examined in detail. At first, the audience is confronted with a helpless, blind old man. Soon it becomes plain that he has insight, greater than that of other mortals, into his own fate. And eventually, with a final, paradoxical turn of the screw, Sophokles has Oedipus behave as if he were physically sighted:

> *ὦ παῖδες, ὧδ' ἕπεσθ'· ἐγὼ γὰρ ἡγεμὼν*
> *σφῷν αὖ πέφασμαι καινός, ὥσπερ σφὼ πατρί.*
>
> 'Follow me, children: for now I have appeared anew as the one who leads you, just as you led me.' (1542–3)

We must beware of turning what Sophokles is saying into an absurd philosophy of self-mutilation. He is not claiming that *only* the blind have insight—Antigone, Ajax, Herakles, Philoktetes and Neoptolemos all achieve knowledge of 'how the world is', and none of them is blind. (No more is Lear.) Rather is it the case that, in some of his works, blindness is a powerful verbal and visual *metaphor* for the limits of humanity, limits of which the dramatist wants his audience to be aware.

From *Women of Trachis, Philoktetes* and *Elektra* the motif of blindness is as good as absent. But the opposition between insight and ignorance, and the related gap between reality and appearance, are powerfully present. A good example is *Women of Trachis*. Deianeira, Hyllos and Herakles all advance from partial to fuller knowledge during the course of the action, yet in each case their greater insight comes too late to avert calamity. It is worth noticing the exclamation uttered by Herakles as the mention of Nessos tears away the veil obscuring the past: *ἰοὺ ἰού* (1043). The same exclamation is uttered by Jokasta (*O.T.* 1071) and Oedipus (*O.T.* 1182) when they see 'how the pattern fits'. *ἰοὺ ἰού* marks a sudden release of energy, when the irony of partial knowledge is instantaneously discharged. It denotes the transition from blindness to insight.

[7] As is very common in references to incest in *O.T.*, the language is difficult and contorted. In these cases scholars have too often sought to reduce the language to normality by altering the text.

[8] 'The Self-Blinding of Oidipous in Sophokles: *Oidipous Tyrannos*', *JHS* xciii (1973) 36–49.

[9] *Art. cit.* (n. 8) 41. See also p. 32 below.

[10] See R. F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' 'Antigone'* (Princeton 1951) 84–6.

II. Myth

1. *Myth, language and limits*

Just as no utterance in Greek can be understood without reference to the grammar and syntax of Greek, so no Greek mythical narrative makes proper sense unless it is seen as an element of an interrelated—i.e. not just random—whole. Accordingly, the next step in the argument will be to place Sophokles' treatment of blindness within the wider context of Greek myth. But before that I want briefly to develop the analogy made in the opening sentence of this paragraph.

Greek mythology is like a language—a set of conventions enabling meaning to be created and communicated. In order to comprehend how this language worked, we should like to be able to reconstruct its state at a whole series of different dates, and then describe in detail how one state changed into another over time. Unfortunately, the paucity of the evidence puts these objectives quite beyond our reach. So we are faced with a dilemma. If we try to recover the state of the language of myth as it was in (say) 400 B.C., and if we refuse to include stories which are known to us only from sources dating from *after* 400 B.C., then we shall have the satisfaction of being philologically impeccable, but we shall not get very far in compiling a vocabulary—let alone in writing a grammar—of Greek myth. On the other hand, if we welcome into one, undifferentiated, quasi-synchronic picture mythical items from early epic to Oppian, then we run the risk (though, of course, some structuralists see it rather as an opportunity) of producing an account of a language which exists only in the mind of its grammarian.

I have stated this methodological division in a grossly 'ideal' way. In practice, the matter does not present itself as a cut-and-dried choice between 'chronology' and 'structure'; it is rather a question of *how much* to privilege chronological considerations at the expense of structural ones, or vice versa. In this paper I follow the by no means original procedure of steering a middle course between the two extremes. The feasibility of this approach depends upon the fact that there are a lot of regularities in Greek mythical narratives, regularities which occur in authors of widely differing dates. (Whether we call these regularities 'patterns' or 'structures' does not, perhaps, make a lot of difference; but, while 'pattern' might tend to imply a superficial ordering, 'structure' conveys a sense of something more fundamental. For reasons shortly to be given, 'structure' will therefore be the more suitable term.) If we build up our grammar by gathering together the most prominent of these structures—without pretending that we shall be able to accommodate *every* version, since our knowledge will certainly be inadequate to cope with many local 'idioms'—then we may hope to make headway. In discovering the structures, we are revealing part of (in Saussurian terminology) *la langue*: in order to discover them, we have first to collect and scrutinize many specific mythical utterances, i.e. examples of (in the same terminology) *la parole*.

In the first section we looked at some 'utterances' about blindness. We turn now from *parole* to *langue*: that is, we attempt to reconstruct some of the mythical structures to which the utterances correspond, and in relation to which they have meaning.

In *Ajax* gods and mortals are strongly distinguished in respect of their powers of sight. The distinction goes far beyond fifth-century Athens. Aristotle affirms that 'we allow to the gods the power to see all things' (*Poet.* 1454b), and the point is made by numerous other writers.[11] While we should not interpret such statements as ascribing *infinite* powers of sight to the gods—infinity is not a concept relevant to the classical Greek pantheon, where 'each god found his limits in another god'[12]—the gap between god and man is, in this as in every sphere, a large one. The gods can lighten or darken human vision at will: Poseidon casts a mist over Achilles' eyes, and removes it when the danger to his favourite Aeneas is over (*Il.* xx 321, 341). Usually mortals are limited in their vision, and may fail to perceive the difference between gods and men; but in exceptional circumstances they may be granted a temporary heightening of their powers of sight, as Athene enables Diomedes clearly to distinguish mortals from immortals on the battlefield (*Il.* v 127–8). However, this is the exception which proves the rule: 'I gave them (*sc.* mortals) *blind* hopes', says Aischylos' Prometheus (*PV* 250).

Any attempt to infringe, or call into question, or render ambiguous the boundary between

[11] See W. Deonna, *Le symbolisme de l'œil* (Paris 1965) 102 ff.

[12] D. Sabbatucci, *Saggio sul misticismo greco* (Rome 1965) 207. Sabbatucci argues persuasively that it is only the *megáloi theoí* whose 'size' is infinite.

gods and men is potentially dangerous, as it puts in jeopardy one of the most fundamental category-distinctions in terms of which Greek culture is organized. A large number of Greek myths explore such dangerous situations, and a significant number of them involve blindness or blinding. It will be convenient to concentrate on two main types of myth: (a) those dealing with a character who, by virtue of his extraordinary power or insight, threatens to blur the distinction between god and man; (b) those narrating a specific infringement of the boundary between god and man, e.g. stories of mortals who see immortals when they ought not to do so.

2. *Poets, seers and insight*

Two sorts of person are repeatedly presented as blind in Greek myths: poets and prophets. Before considering possible explanations of this fact,[13] we shall review the main features of the evidence.

Firstly, poets. 'All these poets are blind,' a character in Dio Chrysostom's thirty-sixth oration (10–11) is reported as saying, 'and they do not think it possible for anyone to become a poet otherwise.' 'That they have got from Homer,' replies Dio, 'as though from ophthalmia.' The text is odd here,[14] but the sense is clear enough: the blind poet is a 'type' who goes back to Homer. In addition to Homer's own legendary blindness[15] there is of course that of the Phaeacian bard whom Homer describes, Demodokos (*Od.* viii 62 ff.). The pair of hexameters in which the origins of his blindness are alluded to convey a strong sense of the 'equivalence' of blindness and the power of song:

> τὸν πέρι Μοῦσ' ἐφίλησε, δίδου δ' ἀγαθόν τε κακόν τε·
> ὀφθαλμῶν μὲν ἄμερσε, δίδου δ' ἡδεῖαν ἀοιδήν.
>
> '. . . whom the Muse loved exceedingly, yet gave him both good and evil: she deprived him of eyesight, but bestowed upon him the gift of sweet song.' (63–4)

According to this account, blindness and song are 'contemporaneous' attributes: neither precedes the other, both are basic to the singer's character. However, a late source (schol. Ov. *Ibis* 272) states that Demodokos was blinded after being defeated in a contest with the Muses. This is one of countless instances where we cannot be sure how old a particular version is: did Homer know of this story but prefer to ignore it, so as not to interfere with his idealized portrait; or is the scholiast's version a post-Homeric one, produced by either a 'correct' memory of a 'genuine' variant, or an 'erroneous' confusion of Demodokos with other poets who had legendary musical contests with divinities? The question is insoluble. Fortunately, it is not very interesting either. What is much more interesting is that two variants of the Demodokos myth preserve a connection between poetry and blindness *although this connection is expressed in different ways at the level of narrative.* In one case the power of song precedes blindness, in the other there is no such priority. This is the first of several cases we shall meet in which motive, causality and temporal priority appear to be variable in a way that more basic ('structural') associations are not.[16]

A few more myths linking blindness with poetry may be mentioned. The 'mythical' Thamyris and the 'historical' Stesichoros were both blinded because they overstepped particular limits (more on this below). By contrast, the early Lokrian poet Xenokritos was said to have been

[13] It *is* a fact, *pace* ch. 1 of H. M. Mahoney, *The Blind Man in Greek Legend and Literature* (Diss. Fordham 1940).

[14] I follow Arnim's reading, without conviction.

[15] *h. Ap.* 172, Paus. iv 33.7, etc. See Esser (n. 6) 10.

[16] See Luc Brisson, *Le mythe de Tirésias* (Leiden 1976) 33, who mentions the 'mécanisme propre à tout récit, qui projette la simultanéité dans la succession, et qui transforme la relation en causalité'. Compare already V. Propp, *Morphologiya skazki*² (Moscow 1969) 69=75 in Eng. tr. *Morphology of the Folktale* (American Folklore Soc. 1968) who noted that 'functionally identical' actions were coupled with extremely various motivations. The story of Daphnis exemplifies the same point. He was a fine singer, a follower of Artemis, and loved by a nymph (D.S. iv 84). As a punishment for being unfaithful to her, Daphnis was blinded and then turned to stone (Serv. in Verg. *Buc.* viii 68)—that is (by implication) he stopped singing immediately. Yet, according to another version, Daphnis went blind *and consoled his blindness with song*, although he did not live long afterwards (Philarg. in Verg. *Buc.* v. 20). Narrative details vary, more fundamental relationships remain stable.

blind from birth.[17] (Once more, it is the fact of the association of blindness with poetry, rather than the narrative order in which this association is expressed, which we should be noticing.) Lastly, we ought not to pass over the fate of the tragedian Achaios who, it was said, lost his sight after being stung by bees.[18] This is a perfect example of the logic of myth. Bees are traditionally associated with the Muses (Ar. *Ekkl.* 974), and are often linked with poets and others with power over words.[19] In being blinded by bees, a poet is being weakened by the very agency which represents his strength.

It goes without saying that not all Greek poets, real or imagined, were blind. Nevertheless, the frequency with which poetry and blindness are linked in traditional stories is too great to be attributable to chance. Exactly the same goes for prophecy and blindness. The most famous instance of the conjunction of the two is Teiresias.[20] The causal and chronological relationship between prophecy and blindness, and the reason for Teiresias' blinding, vary according to different versions current in antiquity. Kallimachos' fifth hymn told how Teiresias lost his eyesight because he saw Athene bathing, but then, at the intercession of his mother Chariklo, was granted the compensating gift of bird-prophecy. Another variant retained the same narrative order—first blindness, then the gift of prophecy—but altered the motive: Teiresias was blinded by Hera because he asserted that women gain more pleasure from the sexual act than men; but, as compensation, Zeus gave him the power to know the future (Ov. *Met.* iii 316 ff; *cf.* Hyg. *fab.* 75). A third version altered both narrative order and motive: Teiresias was blinded by the gods because he revealed (ἐμήνυε, sc. as a prophet) divine secrets (Apollod. iii 6.7). Yet, in spite of all the narrative variations, the association between blindness and prophecy remains constant.

We get the same sort of result if we look at the stories told about some lesser-known seers. Phormion, a fisherman from Erythrai, lost his eyesight but possessed the ability to dream prophetic dreams (Paus. vii 5.7). Ophioneus, a Messenian seer, was blind from birth (Paus. iv 10.6); then he regained his sight, but subsequently lost it again (Paus. iv 12.10, 13.3). Euenios lived at Apollonia on the Adriatic (Hdt. ix 93–4). While keeping watch over the sacred sheep of Helios, he fell asleep. Wolves killed many of the animals, and the angry citizens of Apollonia condemned the unfortunate watchman to be blinded. But then infertility came upon the land. On consulting oracles, the people learned that they had acted wrongly in blinding Euenios: the gods themselves had sent the wolves. The Apolloniats made their own (deceitfully meagre) reparations, while the gods compensated Euenios *by giving him the gift of prophecy*. In the stories about Phormion, Ophioneus and Euenios the details of the narrative are individual in each case, but the structural relationship between prophecy and blindness is the same.

As a final instance of a blind seer we may take Phineus.[21] The various versions of the myth offer several different reasons for his blinding, and locate his receipt of the gift of prophecy at different points in the narrative. In Hesiod's *Megalai Eoiai* the story went that Phineus was blinded for showing Phrixos the way to Kolchis; while in the same poet's *Catalogue* Phineus himself chooses a long life in preference to a sighted one (Hes. *frr.* 157, 254 MW). Another variant, preserved by a scholiast on Ap. Rhod. ii 178–82b (Wendel), attributes the blinding to Helios, on the ground that Phineus 'had preferred to be long-lived rather than sighted'. The Atthidographer Istros brought both Phrixos and Helios into the picture: Aietes, king of Kolchis, cursed Phineus for helping by his prophecies (μαντείαις) his foes the sons of Phrixos; and Helios, Aietes' father, fulfilled the curse by blinding Phineus (*FGrH* 334 F 67). In this variant, therefore, Phineus is explicitly stated already to possess the gift of prophecy *before* he is blinded. But the narrative order is not always like that. We know of one version (*Et. Gen.* s.v. ὀπίζεσθαι)[22] according to which Phineus had the choice of either blindness with prophetic powers or a normally sighted but short

[17] Müller, *FHG* ii 221; *cf.* Plut. *de mus.* 9 (*Mor.* 1134b).

[18] Snell, *TrGF* i 20 Achaeus I, T 3a+b.

[19] See *RE* iii s.v. 'Biene', 431–50 (Olck), esp. 447–8; also J. H. Waszink, *Biene und Honig als Symbol des Dichters und der Dichtung in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (*Rhein.-Westfäl. Akad. Wiss.* Vorträge G 196: 1974).

[20] See Brisson (n. 16). The rigour with which the structuralist approach is applied by B. strikes me as positively algebraic in its formality, but there are many good things to be found in the book.

[21] See *RE* xx.1 s.v. 'Phineus', 215–46 (Ziegler), esp. 225 ff; H. Grégoire (with R. Goossens and M. Mathieu), *Asklèpios, Apollon Smintheus et Rudra: Études sur le dieu à la taupe et le dieu au rat dans la Grèce et dans l'Inde* (Acad. Roy. de Belg., Cl. des Lettr. mor. et pol., Mémoires xlv.1: 1949) 78 ff; Brisson (n. 16) 101–4.

[22] See Wendel's note (*Scholia in Ap. Rhod. vetera*²: Berlin 1958) on Ap. Rhod. ii 178–82b, 13; S. Radt, *TrGF* iv on Soph. *ΦΙΝΕΥΣ* F 704–5.

life; in other words, neither blindness nor prophecy has priority.[23] However, with the most extensive surviving version of the Phineus myth, that recounted by Apollonios Rhodios at ii 178 ff., we are back with a narrative in which prophetic powers precede blindness. Out of kindness (257) Apollo taught Phineus prophecy; but he abused the gift and, in a Prometheus-like gesture, disregarded Zeus by unerringly reporting the gods' 'sacred intention' to men (181–2). (The similarity with Apollodoros' version of the Teiresias myth is striking.) In return, Zeus blinded him and sent him a wearyingly long life.

All these variants—and there are several more which introduce still other motives for Phineus' blinding, e.g. that it was a punishment for having wrongly blinded his own children (D.S. iv 44.4)—show an unmistakable connection between blindness and prophecy. (No wonder that Oppian reports 'an incredible tale which has spread amongst men' to the effect that moles are descended from Phineus; and moles, as Aristotle wrote, 'cannot see' and have 'no eyes which can be detected externally'.)[24] Moreover, just as with poetry, the connection between prophecy and blindness exists at a deeper level than the surface detail of narrative. Not *all* seers are sightless, of course, as may readily be gathered from Hopfner's list in his Pauly–Wissowa article on '*Mantikê*'.[25] But, again as with poetry, the connection is too marked to be random. What is the explanation for it?

Let us consider first what we may call 'natural logic'. As the Greeks were well aware, a person bereft of external sight may naturally develop mental perceptiveness as a compensation. Thus Aristotle affirms that 'the blind remember better, being released from having their faculty of memory engaged with objects of sight' (*Eth. Eud.* 1248b).[26] The attribution of insight, a 'sixth sense', to a blind person is therefore perfectly comprehensible.[27] But why the specific links with poetry and prophecy? Once more there are sound 'practical' reasons. The number of ways in which a blind man can earn his living in a society such as the ancient Greek one is extremely limited, but the profession of 'oral' bard is one which *is* available. (Many other cultures also know of the 'blind singer'.)[28] As for the blind seer, the closing of the eyes during trances may have played a part in the development of the type.[29]

But a more profound 'cultural logic' is also at work. Poets and seers have in common the power to see and know more than ordinary men. Dodds puts it well: 'Just as the truth about the future would be attained only if man were in touch with a knowledge wider than his own, so the truth about the past could be preserved only on a like condition. Its human repositories, the poets, had (like the seers) their technical resources, their professional training; but vision of the past, like insight into the future, remained a mysterious faculty, only partially under its owner's control, and dependent in the last resort on divine grace. By that grace poet and seer alike enjoyed a knowledge denied to other men.'[30] Indeed for Hesiod the link between poetry and prophecy was closer even than is implied in Dodds' words: the Muses inspired him with a divine voice in order that he might celebrate not only the past but also 'that which is to be' (*Th.* 31–2). Poets and seers stand in an especially close relationship to the gods.[31] But, precisely for that reason, they blur the distinction between god and man. In order to preserve the distinction intact, special powers possessed by mortals are, in the logic of myth, balanced by special defects.[32]

[23] The continuation of the story in *Et. Gen.* is very odd—Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles* (Cambridge 1917) ii 312 n. 3, calls it 'absurd'—for, when Phineus had opted for blindness with prophecy, 'for this reason Apollo was angry and blinded him'. For an attempt to explain this mythical *il*logic, see Ziegler's painstaking article (n. 21) 226.

[24] Opp. *Cyn.* ii 612 ff., with Mair's n., Loeb edn (London 1928); Arist. *H.A.* 491b27 ff., tr. A. L. Peck, Loeb edn (London 1965). See Grégoire and Brisson (n. 21).

[25] *RE* xiv.1, 1258–88, at 1267–8.

[26] Tr. H. Rackham, Loeb edn (London 1952). See also Plut. *de defectu oraculorum* 39 (*Mor.* 432b).

[27] For parallels from other cultures see S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Copenhagen 1955–) D1820.1.1, F655.

[28] See C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London 1952) 421 f; W. Grimm, *Die deutsche Heldensage*⁴ (Darmstadt 1957) 426; P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London 1978) 99 f.

[29] Esser (n. 6) 101; Deonna (n. 11) 50–2. During initiation, the eyes of a Samoyed shaman were changed by a divine blacksmith: 'and that is why, when he shamanizes, he does not see with his bodily eyes but with these mystical eyes' (M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, Eng. tr. [London 1964] 42). N.B. also P. Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi* (U. Wales Press 1977) 94: '. . . even down to the seventeenth or eighteenth century Irish and Scottish poets continued to simulate the practice of the seer by composing their verse while lying on their beds in utter darkness'.

[30] E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (U. Calif. 1951) 81.

[31] See J.-P. Vernant in *Divination et rationalité*, by Vernant and others (Paris 1974) 12.

[32] Brisson (n. 16) 32. At 244 ff. of his fascinating book

This complementary co-existence of power and defect recurs often in Greek myth. To recall that Herakleitos was said to have had dropsy and to have lost his eyesight as a result (D.L. ix 4), or to note that Demokritos was supposed by some to have blinded himself in order to retain the greatest possible capacity for reflection (Plut. *de curios.* 12=521d),[33] ought to cause no surprise, since the philosopher too is a man with greater than normal insight. But there is no need for us to restrict ourselves to insight, on the positive side of the equation, or to blindness, on the negative. Kassandra foresaw the future—but was not believed.[34] Tithonos' immortality set him above other men—but his extreme senility redressed the balance (*cf.* esp. *h. Ven.* 218 ff.). Asklepios' raising of the dead threatened the fundamental distinction between gods and men—so Zeus' thunderbolt achieved the necessary restitution of order (e.g. E. *Alk.* 1 ff., 123 ff.). Philoktetes' unfailing bow approximated him to the gods—but his wound made him little better than an animal.[35] Hephaistos, too, combined a physical defect with an exceptional power, being a superb smith, yet lame. His case is anomalous, for he, unlike the other defective figures just mentioned, is a full Olympian deity. But, bearing in mind that he has been described as 'un magicien qui a payé sa science de son intégrité corporelle',[36] and as a god with markedly *heroic* traits,[37] it is surely feasible to regard Hephaistos too as exemplifying the mythical structure in which we are interested.

3. *Boundaries and transgressions*

In Greek myths certain sorts of act typically result in the blinding of the agent. Such acts involve the over-stepping of limits. Consequently they are central to our theme.

(i) *Visual infringements against divinities.* 'The gods', says Hera, 'are hard to look upon in their full brightness' (*Il.* xx 131). Several myths take this further: not only is it 'hard' to look on gods, it is dangerous to do so. Epizelos, an Athenian, went blind after encountering an apparition (*φάσμα*) at the battle of Marathon (Hdt. vi 117). Philip of Macedon lost the eye with which he spied on his wife Olympias as she shared her bed with the god Ammon, who had taken the form of a serpent (Plut. *Alex.* 3). Erymanthos, a son of Apollo, saw Aphrodite bathing after her union with Adonis, and was blinded.[38] More famous is the case of Teiresias, who lost his eyesight as a consequence of seeing Athene bathing.[39] Sometimes it is not the seeing of a divinity but the seeing of a particularly numinous statuette which leads to the blinding of the transgressor. Thus Ilos seized the Palladion from Athene's shrine in Troy. The image 'might not be looked upon by a man', and Ilos was blinded. Exactly the same fate befell Antylus (or Metellus), who took the Palladion from the temple of Vesta at Rome.[40] Sometimes, again, it is not a question of seeing a divinity or a divine image but of entering a sanctuary which should not be entered. Soldiers of Alexander's army, bursting into the temple of Demeter at Miletos with the object of plundering it, were blinded there and then.[41] A certain Aipytos entered the temple of Poseidon Hippios at Mantineia. The sanctuary was one which no mortal had ever been allowed to penetrate. Aipytos was blinded, and died immediately, or soon afterwards (Paus. viii 5.4–5, 10.3).

Gli eroi greci (Rome 1958) A. Brelich discusses mythical mutilations of the feet and eyes.

[33] See also Cic. *de fin.* v 87, *Tusc.* v 114; A. Gell. *Noct. Att.* x 17.

[34] The *loc. class.* is A. *Ag.* 1202 ff. Notice how, here too, the *motive* for the gift of prophecy to Kassandra, and the *moment* in the narrative at which the gift is given, vary according to different versions. In Apollodoros (iii 12.5) the gift is a bribe offered by Apollo for her favours; but, in a version recorded in schol. *Il.* vii 44 (quoting Antikleides, *FGrH* 140 F 17), Kassandra and her twin brother Helenos both receive the gift *as children* when their 'organs of sense' are licked by serpents in a temple of Apollo. See Frazer's n. on Apollod. iii 12.5, Loeb edn (London 1921) 48–9.

[35] *Cf.* Edmund Wilson's essay, 'Philoctetes: the Wound and the Bow', ch. 7 of *The Wound and the Bow* (Cambridge 1929).

[36] Marie Delcourt, *Héphaistos, ou la légende du magicien* (Paris 1957) 11.

[37] Brelich (n. 32) 354 ff.

[38] Ptol. Heph. in Phot. *Bibl. cod.* 190 pp. 146–7.

[39] The *loc. class.* and indeed the reason for the fame of this myth, is Kallimachos' fifth hymn. N.B. the commentary on this by Anthony Bulloch (Diss. Cambridge 1971). For variants see Roscher v s.v. 'Teiresias', 178–207 (Buslepp). There is a full discussion of the hymn in H. Kleinknecht's article '*ΛΟΥΤΡΑ ΤΗΣ ΠΑΛΛΑΔΟΣ*', *Hermes* lxxiv (1939) 301–50; repr. in *Wege der Forschung: Kallimachos*, ed. A. D. Skiadas (Darmstadt 1975) 207–75.

[40] Both stories in Plut. *Parall. Graec. et Rom.* 17 (*Mor.* 309f–310a).

[41] Val. Max., ed. Kempf (Leipzig 1888) p. 13, 10.

One or two comments are in order about the myths adumbrated in the preceding paragraph. First, and importantly, it is not the case that blinding always follows an *intentional* infringement of the sphere of the divine. In Kallimachos' hymn, Teiresias 'saw *unwillingly* that which it is not permitted to see' (78); but, nevertheless, there was nothing that could be done to restore his sight: 'The laws of Kronos', says Athene, 'say this: whoever sees one of the immortals when the god himself does not choose—at a heavy cost shall he see what he sees' (100–2). The mere fact of transgressing a boundary which must not be transgressed is sufficient to entail punishment.

Secondly, it is plain that a number of the myths involve a sexual boundary in addition to the boundary between gods and mortals. Stories about mortals seeing immortals bathing—and there are many such stories, some culminating in blinding, some in other forms of punishment (see below)—are normally of the form: male mortal sees female immortal. Furthermore, the goddesses about whom these narratives cluster are the virgin divinities Athene and Artemis.[42] Presumably the logic here is that, since these two goddesses have certain 'masculine' characteristics, represented by the trappings of war[43] on the one hand and the trappings of hunting on the other, then the penetration of this external masculinity through to the latent femininity beyond it amounts to a more radical infringement of divine identity than would be the case with the 'transparently' feminine Aphrodite.[44] It is, then, appropriate that the distinctions between the respective provinces of Athene and Aphrodite are clearly marked in Kallimachos' hymn: no unguents or mirror for *Athene* (13 ff.).

Thirdly, it should be noted that the over-stepping of visual limits in myth is closely paralleled in certain ritual prohibitions. The danger associated with seeing gods and their images finds expression in prescriptions such as these reported by Pausanias: the image of Hera at Aigion in Achaia might be seen by no one but her priestess (Paus. vii 23.9); and similarly the image of Soteria in the same locality might be seen only by her priests (vii 24.3). As for the infringement of sexual boundaries, numerous Greek cults involved the exclusion of either males or females from all or part of the proceedings; and it may not be a coincidence that the majority of cults requiring the exclusion of men are for a female divinity (usually Demeter), while the majority of cults which exclude women are for male divinities.[45] That which is expressed in the language of myth by narratives of transgression and consequent mutilation is expressed in the language of ritual by prohibitions on behaviour. Both languages are rich, powerful and vivid, so both can be made to say an enormous variety of things about the world. But both come back again and again to category-distinctions vital to the cultural world as the classical Greeks assembled it: distinctions like those between god and man, male and female.

(ii) *Other infringements against divinities.*[46] We have already discussed the myth in which Teiresias was blinded for revealing the gods' secrets to men, and that in which Phineus suffered a comparable fate for divulging the gods' 'sacred intention'. A similar story was told about Anchises, who boasted of his union with Aphrodite: he was 'touched' by a thunderbolt, and so blinded.[47] Lykurgos, the mythical persecutor of Dionysos, was blinded by Zeus as a punishment for his transgression (*Il.* vi 130 ff.).[48] To offend minor divinities was no safer. The Egyptian king

[42] It is revealing that Eustathios' memory plays him false when he speaks of Kallimachos' story about Teiresias' having seen *Artemis* naked (*Comm. ad Hom. Od.* x 492 ff., 1665.47–8); see Brisson (n. 6) 52.

[43] Notice Prop. iv 9.57–8: Teiresias saw Pallas bathing 'when she had put aside the Gorgon'—which would have rendered the punishment of blinding superfluous by *petrifying* the mortal gazing upon it.

[44] *Cf.* Brisson (n. 6) 34. That Aphrodite, too, figures occasionally in these narratives (e.g. Erymanthos) is no cause for dismay. Dare one risk the heresy that Greek myths would be duller if *every* one of them could be fitted into a neatly organized scheme?

[45] See the catalogues by Th. Wächter, *Reinheitsvorschriften im griechischen Kult* (Religionsgesch. Versuche u. Vorarbeiten ix 1: Giessen 1910) 125–34. *Cf.* also the remarks on 'Solidarisierung im Spiel und Widerspiel der Rollen' in W. Burkert, *Gr. Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977) 382 ff., esp. 388 on the sexual differentiation of roles in cult.

[46] See O. Gruppe, *Gr. Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte* (Munich 1906) 1002 n. 3.

[47] This version came in a poem of Theokritos, referred to by Serv. on *Aen.* ii 35, ii 687; *cf.* on i 617. For the 'modes of action' of the thunderbolt, see Serv. on *Aen.* ii 649. Both *h. Ven.* 286–8 and Hyg. *fab.* 94 refer to the thunderbolt in connection with the punishment of Anchises; but neither mentions blindness explicitly. For Anchises' *lameness* (a variant 'paradigmatic' with blindness—see p. 33) *cf.* R. G. Austin's n., in his edn of *Aen.* ii (Oxford 1964), on 649.

[48] Even other divinities, of course, might incur the wrath of Zeus. Ploutos transgressed against Zeus' order in wanting to favour the just amongst mortals. For this quasi-Promethean attitude he was requited with blindness (Ar. *Plut.* 87 ff.).

Pheros lost his sight after he had hurled his spear into the Nile, which was flooding (Hdt. ii 111, *cf.* D.S. i 59). Thamyris' challenge to the gods was of a different and more common type: he competed with them.[49] Specifically, he sought to defeat the Muses in a musical contest (e.g. *Il.* ii 594 ff.). Different accounts report different punishments for this recklessness;[50] but according to one common variant (e.g. Hes. *fr.* 65 MW) he was blinded.

Lastly, we must not omit the famous case of Stesichoros, who was said to have lost his sight because he slandered Helen, but to have regained it when he composed a palinode of recantation and apology.[51] What is the mythical logic here? Helen was worshipped as a goddess at a number of places in the Greek world; she was the daughter of Zeus; and she was the sister of the divine twins, Kastor and Polydeukes. Thus to offend her might be seen as equivalent to infringing the honour of other, more august deities in the pantheon. So Stesichoros, like Anchises, was guilty of broadcasting information detrimental to the reputation of a goddess; information, moreover, which in both instances involved a sexual indiscretion by the character concerned. This broadcasting may, in turn, be seen as a metaphorical extension of the literal voyeurism for which Teiresias and others were punished. There is more to the Stesichoros–Helen story than this, of course: for one thing, it represents an extremely interesting, 'reflexive' use of myth—myth itself being used to explore the ambiguous truth-status (from a certain point of view) of myth. But what matters for our present purposes is that, while retaining a marked narrative individuality—indeed uniqueness—the essentials of the infringement-and-punishment sequence in the Stesichoros–Helen myth show strong similarities to the structures already familiar to us.

(iii) *Transgressions not directly involving divinities.* The myths reported in (i) and (ii) use blindness to stress the importance of the distinction between gods and men. While this is a major function of the blindness motif, it is not its only function. Several myths depict mortals *guilty of sexual transgressions against other mortals* being punished by blinding. A glance at Devereux's list[52] reveals that the transgressions are extremely various: incest, adultery, rape and seduction figure prominently. In so far as the gods are guarantors of human morality, such crimes are, at one remove, infringements of the divine order; but it would be misleading for us to classify them with narratives of *direct* infringements of the honour and power of the gods. Perhaps a connection between 'sexual' and 'overstepping mortality' blindness (if I may use this shorthand) may be seen in the light of the following consideration: namely that, in ignoring the restrictions placed on human sexual conduct, the transgressor is occupying a territory of greater freedom of sexual relationships normally available only to the gods. However, I put this suggestion forward with diffidence; and my principal concern remains those cases which seem to me to deal unambiguously with the limits of humanity, and the gap between men and gods.[53]

[49] See I. Weiler, *Der Agon im Mythos* (Darmstadt 1974) *passim*. Thamyris is discussed at 66 ff.

[50] See *RE* VA.1 s.v. 'Thamyris', 1236–45 (Gebhard), at 1241 f; L. Woodbury, 'Helen and the Palinode', *Phoenix* xxi (1967) 157–76, at 173 n. 33.

[51] This is not the place to go into the hotly disputed questions of how many palinodes (one or two) there were, and, if two, what relation obtained between them. The relevant primary sources and testimonia are at Page, *PMG frr.* 192–3.

[52] *Art. cit.* (n. 8) 41. D's analysis groups together indiscriminately—I use the word without pejorative overtones—transgressions against immortals and mortals alike. From *his* point of view, this classification makes sense.

[53] On first reading Esser at 24–5 I was convinced that he had noticed another group of stories dealing with the overstepping of limits: namely, stories in which someone grieves or weeps too much and goes blind as a result. The mythical logic is plausible, and can be paralleled in other cultures: Thompson (n. 27) F1041.3. Unfortunately, a closer examination of Esser's supposedly supporting evidence leaves one sadder but wiser.
(i) E. asserts (24) that Aietes of Kolchis went blind through grief at the abduction of his daughter Medea by Jason. Yet the passage cited in support of this interpretation, Cic. *Tusc.* iii 26 (=E's 3.XII), merely reports Aietes as saying 'refugere oculi', i.e. 'my eyes are sunken' (Dougan/Henry), 'mes yeux se sont enfoncés' (Humbert); or, less plausibly, 'my eyes are dim' (King), 'oculorum splendor quasi se recepit, oculi hebescunt' (Kühner).
(ii) E. discusses a passage from Hellanikos of Lesbos (*FGrH* 4 F 19) about the daughters of Atlas. Of these seven girls, Merope was the only one who did not have an immortal husband. She had to make do with Sisyphos, and, according to E., 'aus Scham und Gram hierüber erblindete sie' (25). But all Hellanikos says is διὸ καὶ ἀμαυρὰν εἶναι: of the seven Pleiades, here identified with the daughters of Atlas, only six are readily visible, the seventh being *dimmer* than the rest. The *dimness* of the seventh star corresponds to its eponymous maiden's dimmer reputation. Blindness does not come into it.
(iii) The possibility that E. misunderstood ἀμαυρός ('dim') receives confirmation from another of his comments. He says, 'Ja sogar Götter können aus Trauer erblinden, wie es der Mondgöttin Selene begegnete' (25).

4. *Paradigms*

One of the useful things about a grammar is that it gives rules about the 'substitutability' of words in a language. Given ἔλυσα, we can form ἔπαυσα; given a sentence in which ἔλυσα is grammatically correct, we can, by substitution, form a new sentence in which ἔπαυσα is grammatically correct. Following the usage of structural linguistics, we may conveniently call this relationship of substitutability 'paradigmatic'; while the relationship between the individual items in any one utterance is called, in the same terminology, 'syntagmatic'. Thus, in the well-formed sentence 'I called John', the relationship between 'I' and 'called' and 'John' is syntagmatic, while that between 'called' and (say) 'killed' is paradigmatic.

Myth, it was suggested earlier, may be thought of as a language; and the analogy can, without forcing, be extended to include paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships.[54] A myth is a chain of narrative items, and each item exists in a relationship of potential substitutability with other items. To take an example:

(i) Man sees goddess naked {
(ii)a man is blinded
(ii)b man goes mad
(ii)c man becomes woman.

The relationship between (i) and (ii) is syntagmatic, that between (ii)a and (ii)b and (ii)c paradigmatic.

The last stage in this enquiry into blindness in Greek myths will be to look at motifs which are structurally equivalent to—stand in a paradigmatic relationship with—blindness in certain types of narrative.

One such equivalent motif is madness. We found a clear case of this in *Ajax*, where the hero's temporary departure from his senses manifests itself as an inability to see properly: his shameful deed is, in fact, the result of his mistaking one thing for another. Euripides gives us evidence for the same equivalence in *Herakles* and *Bakchai*, since the awakenings of Herakles and Agaue from their respective bouts of madness are likened to a recovery of 'normal' vision (*Her.* 1089) and to a 'clearer' seeing (*Ba.* 1267).[55] Then there are several myths about men who see a divinity (or the image of a divinity) which they ought not to see, and go, not blind, but mad. Skamandros saw Rhea during the performance of her mysteries, and went mad (Ps.-Plut. *de fluv.* xiii 1). Similarly, Haliakmon unwittingly observed the sacred union of Zeus with Rhea, and lost his senses forthwith (Ps.-Plut. *de fluv.* xviii 1). When Astrabakos and Alopekos found the wooden image of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, they too went mad (Paus. iii 16.9). Equally unlucky was Eurypylos, who found an image of Dionysos in a chest at Troy. Pausanias—exemplifying the inexhaustible inventiveness of surface detail characteristic of Greek myth—tells us that Eurypylos became mad, and continued in that condition '*with a few lucid intervals*' (vii 19.7, tr. Frazer). That such myths had a counterpart in ritual is as certain as these things can be: at Patrai there was a wooden statue of Dionysos which maddened anyone who saw it, and which might only be handled on one sacred night during the year.[56]

One last story should be mentioned as an illustration of the equivalence between madness and

Yet the poem referred to (*A.P.* vii 241 [Antipater of Sidon] = Gow–Page *Hell. Ep.* 338 ff.) refers to the *dimming*, i.e. eclipse, of the moon, ἀμαυρωθεῖσα Σελάνα. With these three pieces of evidence out of the way, not a lot remains. Aelian (*N.A.* x 17) tells us that some elephants lose their sight because of the quantities of tears they shed; Apollonides wrote a poem about a man called Poseidippos who went blind after losing all his four children on four successive days (*A.P.* vii 389 = Gow–Page *Garland of Philip* 1153 ff.); and the Greeks, as we do, evidently had a saying about 'crying one's eyes out' (e.g. *A.P.* ix 432 [Theokritos] = *Hell. Ep.* 3498 ff; Ar. *Ach.* 1027). This does not seem to be enough to build a case on, especially as the three mythical examples all amount to nothing. (Of course, if a variant were to turn up—and at the moment such a variant does not seem to exist—in which *Niobe*'s great grief culminated not in petrifaction but in blindness, then Esser's conclusion, though not his arguments, would look much more robust.)

[54] For a syntagmatic/paradigmatic distinction applied to the analysis of myth, see e.g. C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Eng. tr. of *La pensée sauvage* (London 1966) index s.v. 'syntagmatic'; E. R. Leach, *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge 1976) 15, 25–7.

[55] See J. Mattes, *Der Wahnsinn im gr. Mythos und in der Dichtung bis zum Drama des fünften Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg 1970) 110.

[56] Paus. vii 19–20; see Burkert (n. 45) 340, also *ibid.* 348–9 on the role of the *kíste*, a sacred basket which might not be opened, in the myth-and-ritual of the Arrephoria at Athens.

blindness. It concerns Dionysos' foe Lykurgos. According to Homer, as we saw above, Lykurgos' effrontery led to his being blinded. But another variant gave the punishment as madness.[57] After going out of his mind, Lykurgos mutilated his son by chopping off his limbs because he took him for a vine-stock—that is, he mistook one thing for another.

Other forms of diminution of the faculties function as paradigmatic equivalents of blindness. Dumbness is an example. Aelian (*NA* xi 17) illustrates the Homeric tag that 'the gods are hard to look upon in their full brightness' (*Il.* xx 131) with a story about a sacred snake which lived at Metelis in Egypt. An old and inquisitive servant conceived a desire to see the beast. He did so, suffering predictably dire consequences: he went mad, lost the power of speech, and dropped dead. This would seem to be a case of structural overkill.[58]

For a male, to be changed into a female represents a departure from normality which is the equivalent of being blinded, maddened or struck dumb. The Cretan Siproites was changed into a woman after he had seen Artemis bathing (Ant. Lib. 17);[59] while 'some say that [Teiresias], having seen Athene naked, became a woman' (Tzetzes *schol. in Lyk. Alex.* 683).

Some other equivalents of blindness are more drastic still. Iodama was priestess of Athene Itonia in Boeotia. She went into the sanctuary at night, and the goddess appeared before her: Iodama saw (met the eyes of)[60] the Gorgon's head which was worked on to Athene's robe, and immediately turned to stone (Paus. ix 34.1).[61] Aktaion's end was just as abrupt, but more violent. He saw Artemis bathing in a spring, was changed by her into a stag, and was torn to pieces by his own hounds.[62] Semele saw Zeus in all his glory, but expired on the spot. (As so often, narrative details vary: Apollodoros (iii 4.3) says she died of fright; others, e.g. E. *Hipp.* 555 ff., Hyg. *fab.* 179, put her death down directly to the scorching of Zeus' lightning and thunderbolt.) Then there are several myths, parallel with that of Thamyris, about characters whose reckless challenges to divinities brought them either a total or a partial loss of their humanity. Marsyas dared to compete with Apollo in a musical contest: the god flayed him for his presumption.[63] The nine daughters of Pieros were changed into birds after they had challenged the Muses to a contest of song (e.g. Ant. Lib. 9).[64] Equally unwise was the attempt of some Messapian shepherds to dance better than the Nymphs. Their clod-hopping performance (ἄμουσος, Ant. Lib. 31) resulted, with no little irony, in their metamorphosis into trees.[65] Arachne overstepped the limits of humanity by seeking to out-weave Athene; for her pains she became that less-than-human weaver, the spider.[66] The 'grammatical' rule that an attempt to exceed human competence is followed by—or, in structural terms, is balanced by—a compensating and usually appropriate reduction in humanity is surely proved by an apparent exception: the Sirens.[67] These half-birdlike, half-human creatures competed with the Muses at singing. As a consequence they lost their feathers (Paus. ix 34.3), so becoming less-than-normal birds.

What conclusions are we to draw from these paradigmatic motifs? Three points may be made.

First, it is worth noticing that the same structural relationship which we observed in myths about people with special powers and special defects is also found in myths about people whose acts of transgression take them momentarily 'above' the limits of humanity and who are then reduced to a condition 'below' that of normal humanity. Both sorts of narrative mark the crucial significance of the boundary between god and man.

Secondly, we can use our findings to contribute towards an evaluation of a characteristically psychoanalytical approach to myth. In particular, what do we make of the equation, favoured by psychoanalytical critics, between blindness and castration? Writers who are unsympathetic to psychoanalysis tend to ignore this equation, while those who *are* so sympathetic usually assume

[57] E.g. Apollod. iii 5.1; other refs at Mattes (n. 55) 21.

[58] *Cf.* Daphnis (n. 16) who was blinded *and* turned to stone.

[59] The best edn of the *Metamorphoses* of Antoninus Liberalis is that by M. Papathomopoulos, Budé 1968 (with extremely good commentary).

[60] The glance of *all* divinities, not just Gorgo, is fearsome and powerful; *cf.* L. Malten, *Die Sprache des menschlichen Antlitzes im frühen Griechentum* (Berlin 1961) 12 (*re* Homer).

[61] For petrifaction see *RE* vii s.v. 'Gorgo', 1630–55 (Ziegler), esp. 1638–9 ('Versteinerung'); also J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris 1971) ii 73 ff.

[62] The myth was very popular in antiquity; see the *RE* and Roscher entries s.v. 'Aktaion'.

[63] See index to Weiler (n. 49) s.v. 'Marsyas'.

[64] Other refs, with discussion, at Weiler 72 ff.

[65] Weiler 90–1.

[66] Weiler 100 ff.

[67] Weiler 77 ff.

the validity of the equation without argument. I think our analysis may help to clarify what is at stake in this polarization of methods. It is demonstrable that in some myths blinding is equivalent to metamorphosis from male to female. But a lot of other motifs are equivalent to blinding as well. In the logic of Greek myth as we have tried to uncover it, there is nothing *privileged* about the male/female metamorphosis *vis-à-vis* all the other equivalents. To regard blindness as merely 'standing for' castration is quite as arbitrary as to regard dumbness as 'standing for' madness. The *priority* of castration over blindness cannot be demonstrated from the Greek evidence.

Thirdly—and this is a conclusion which the reader will certainly have formed already for himself—it must be emphasized that we have very far from exhausted the richness of the corpus even of the blindness myths, let alone that of the paradigmatic equivalents. We have only intermittently raised the issue of why, in a given case, blindness is preferred to one of the other motifs. In order to answer this question properly we should need to devote to the equivalents as detailed a study as we gave to blindness. Again, we omitted to examine *where* blindings, maddenings, contests with gods, etc., take place.[68] That they usually happen in areas separate from the normal social space of the city, either in wild as opposed to civilized parts (mountain tops, glens, remote springs), or in special areas like sanctuaries, is an observation which needs to be set in the context of a wider study of the places in which mythical relations (e.g. sex) between gods and mortals occur. Such an undertaking, though it would definitely repay attention, is beyond our scope here.

III. Sophokles: Fifth-century Athens and the Limits of Knowledge

In using blindness as an image to represent the limits of humanity, Sophokles was making explicit something already implicit in the logic of Greek myth. But to say that tells us nothing about the 'tone of voice' used by the dramatist in developing this theme. In order to catch the particular quality of that voice, we must stop treating mythical variants as of equal worth irrespective of date and provenance, and focus once more on the time and place at which Sophokles was writing.

In fifth-century Athens the problem of human limits, like many other questions of profound intellectual significance, was subjected to a fresh and intelligent scrutiny. One sort of approach is exemplified by thinkers who observed and analysed the regularities in experience in order to be able to deal better with similar phenomena if ever they occurred again. The clearest instances of this are Thukydides, who consciously produced a κτῆμα ἐς ἀεί, a possession for all time (i 22.4); and the Hippokratic writers, whose meticulous classification of symptoms was designed to help subsequent doctors recognize comparable τεκμήρια (signs) should they recur in the future. At bottom, the methods of Thukydides and the medical writers offered intellectual hope—hope that the boundaries of one man's or one generation's understanding might be exceeded thanks to the recording of accumulated experience for the use of posterity.

A contrasting attitude was adopted by certain philosophers. Gorgias affirmed that the foundations of human knowledge were shaky. Protagoras insisted on the ἀδηλότης, lack of clarity, which affected men's knowledge of one major aspect of the world—divinity: 'Concerning the gods, I have no way of knowing either that they exist, or that they do not exist, or what form they have: for there are many things which prevent knowledge, (namely) the unclarity (*sc.* of that which is to be known) and the fact that human life is short' (*fr.* 4 DK).[69] Man might be the measure of all things, but his insight was, at least in one respect, severely limited.

In so far as he, too, stressed the limitations of humanity, Sophokles might at first glance seem

[68] I am indebted to my pupil Rachel Morris for stressing to me the importance of this point.

[69] See C. W. Müller, 'Protagoras über die Götter', *Hermes* xcv (1967) 140–59. Only with Plato was the unclarity of everyday experience reconciled with the notion of an eternal and unchanging truth, a truth to be approached through the trained mind of the philosopher. In the simile of the Cave in the *Republic*, the identity between ignorance and blindness and between knowledge and sight was used to affirm, not the weakness, but the transcendent power of man's vision. On philosophical aspects of visibility/invisibility see P. M. Schuhl, '"Ἄδηλα', *Ann. Fac. Lettr. de Toulouse (Homo)* (1953) 85–93; L. Gernet, 'Choses visibles et choses invisibles', *RPhilos* cxlvi (1956) 79–86, repr. in *Anthropologie de la grèce antique* (Paris 1968) 405–14.

to exhibit an affinity with Protagoras; but nothing could be further from Protagorean scepticism about the gods than the world of Sophoklean drama. In fact, if we want a closer parallel to the Sophoklean attitude to limits, it can be found, not in the developments of speculative thought at Athens, but in the utterances of the oracle at Delphi. The characteristic Delphic response—a good instance is the reply given to Kroisos about crossing the river Halys (Hdt. i 53, 91)—was ambiguous, turning the questioner back upon himself, beguiling his aspiration towards clear vision, denying him salvation.[70] The oracle σημαίνει, gives signs (Herakleit. *fr.* 93 DK), but offers no guarantee that fallible humanity will interpret the signs correctly. (It is Zeus' will, says Phineus at Ap. Rhod. ii 314–16, that the clues offered to mankind by divination shall be *imperfect*.) Delphi starkly confronts man with his frailty. The plays of Sophokles and the pronouncements of Delphi alike convey a sense of the inscrutability of the gods, and of man's inability fully to grasp their will in time to avert disaster.

In a way, then, Sophokles is merely filling out the implications of the mythical structures which we examined earlier, structures which express the importance of the gulf between men and gods. Yet that 'merely' already feels uneasy, and it certainly glosses over much that is essentially Sophoklean. For, at the same time as making his audience aware of human limits, Sophokles makes them aware also of what humans can achieve within and in spite of those limits. Just because the gods are remote, human character and human choices acquire greater significance.

This point is rather important, and it may be worth illustrating it briefly[71] with reference to some of the plays. The first scene in *Ajax* leaves us in no doubt of man's inferiority to the gods in respect of power—Athene spells this out with brutal clarity at 127–33; but the rest of the play shows us that, in spite of the limitations of our mortality, we do have the power to make fundamental moral choices. We can aspire to be fair and just, like Odysseus, or loyal, like Teukros; or we can be mean-spirited, like Menelaos and Agamemnon. And such choices *matter*. In *Elektra* we have, early on, a reference to the (much-debated) Delphic injunction upon Orestes to commit matricide; yet thereafter it is the *human* aspects of the action, such as the conflicts between Elektra and Chrysothemis and Elektra and Klytaimestra, and the impact upon Elektra of Orestes' 'death', which occupy the centre of the drama. *Philoktetes*, too, is played out against a matrix of divine oracles; yet the main significance of the play is created by the complex and shifting pattern of human choices, hesitations and decisions enacted by Neoptolemos, Odysseus and Philoktetes. *Oedipus at Kolonos* might at first glance seem to be an exception, in that Oedipus' passing apparently suggests that the limits of humanity are not as inflexible as all that. But we must beware of convincing ourselves that the play ends in a glorious apotheosis. After all, the voice which summons Oedipus is strange, allusive and enigmatic, and gives no inkling of a majestic or godlike existence for him after his death.[72] In fact, as is usual with Sophokles, what is more to the point than the reaction of the gods is the reaction of the humans: and it is upon the behaviour of Oedipus towards his sons and daughters, their behaviour towards him, and the contrasting postures of Kreon and Theseus, that the dramatic weight falls.

Once we recognize that it is the *individual moral consequences* of the limitations of our common humanity which Sophokles invites his audience to ponder, we can see that he is not 'merely' reproducing a theme offered to him by the mythical tradition. Certainly, the basic nature of the relation between men and gods was built into the structures of Greek myth; but the delineation of character and the ascription of motive—in a word, the placing of the moral accent—all this lay with the dramatist.

And so we are back where we began this essay: with the mood of Sophoklean tragedy. It would be wrong to see him as an unrelievedly pessimistic writer. Suicides may be frequent in his plays, but the context in which they occur is neither godless nor meaningless. The gods' will may be hard for mortals to fathom, and it may not match human notions of what is just; but the gods are indisputably *there*,[73] as ever-present, yet as distant, as the ἄρκτου στροφάδες κέλευθοι,

[70] Sabbatucci (n. 12) 187–8.

[71] 'Briefly' is, I fear, an understatement: I am well aware of the sketchiness of my discussion here. This will to some extent be made good in the ch. on Sophokles in a book (about persuasion in Greek tragedy) which should soon be completed.

[72] See I. M. Linforth, 'Religion and Drama in *Oedipus at Colonus*' (U. Calif. Publ. in Cl. Phil. xiv 4: 1951) 75–192, at 180–4.

[73] *Cf.* R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (Baltimore 1958) 102.

'wheeling paths of the Bear' (*Trach.* 130–1). However, it is not the gods who are the principal source of meaning in Sophokles: it is man. In the Sophoklean dramatic universe man does not passively accept his limitations: he demands, affirms, strives. With one or two exceptions (Deianeira, perhaps Philoktetes) his characters are not warm or lovable, but they do act with passionate and memorable intensity; and it is this intensity (which Knox has christened 'the heroic temper'), together with a feeling that there *is* a divine will if only we could see it, that counterbalances the impression of man's limitations and produces the mood, poised somewhere between hope and despair, which we associate with Sophokles.[74]

R. G. A. Buxton

University of Bristol

[74] An early version of this paper was read at a meeting of the Class. Soc. of King's College, Cambridge. I am most grateful to those who participated in the discussion, above all to Dr G. E. R. Lloyd. Later drafts were put before research seminars in the Sociology and Classics departments at Bristol, and before the Oxford Philological Society. My thanks go to all who offered comments on these various occasions (in particular to my colleagues Prof. John Gould and Dr C. J. Rowe). Finally, I am indebted to J. N. Bremmer (Utrecht) and Fritz Graf (Zürich), who were responsible for suggesting that I work up my ideas into a paper, and whose criticisms have been most valuable.