# *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear*:
Classical and Early Modern Intersections

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi

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S K E N È   Theatre and Drama Studies

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Part 4 – Revisiting Oedipus and Lear

Introduction

Silvia Bigliazzi

1. Where to Start

Let us start from the story of Oedipus. Son of Laius and Jocasta, King and Queen of Thebes, Oedipus is expelled from the kingdom when he is born because of a prophecy predicting his murder of his own father and his incest with his mother. Although exposed on Mount Cithaeron, he escapes death thanks to a shepherd who takes pity on him and brings him to the King of Corinth, Polybus, who, with his wife Merope, adopts the child and raises him. When Oedipus learns from the oracle at Delphi that he is fated to kill his father and marry his mother he decides to leave Corinth never to return. On his way to Phocis, he meets Laius at a crossroads and, provoked by the King, kills him unaware that he is thus fulfilling the prophecy. Once in Thebes, he solves the Sphinx's riddle about the three ages of man (who is the animal who first crawls on all fours, then walks on two legs, and finally on three?), and is acclaimed King and offered Jocasta's hand, hence fulfilling the second part of the prophecy. He has two sons (Eteocles and Polyneices) and two daughters (Antigone and Ismene). But then Thebes becomes afflicted by the plague, and Oedipus orders Creon to interrogate the oracle. When Creon brings back the Pythian response that Laius must be revenged, Oedipus investigates who the assassin is only to discover that he himself is the very one he is looking for. As a result, Jocasta commits suicide and Oedipus punishes himself with blindness. This is what we find in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*OT*), yet not in Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (*Phoe.*), where Jocasta is still alive when Polyneices wages war against his brother Eteocles. At this point in the narrative the three main tragic versions we have, which all comprise slightly different fragments of the whole story, start diverging. Aeschylus'

Seven Against Thebes (*Sept.*) and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (*OC*; the last of the survived tragedies written by the major dramatists in the fifth century) agree in making Eteocles and Polyneices responsible for the ban of their father, although in Aeschylus this can only be evinced from Eteocles' mention of Oedipus' curse,[1] while in *OC* we hear Oedipus himself launch a curse against his sons for failing to help him when he was banished by "the city" (i.e. by Creon, brother of Jocasta and regent of Thebes; *OC* 421-60).[2] In Euripides' *Phoe.*, written slightly before Sophocles' *OC*, the two sons are already dead when Creon banishes Oedipus,[3] so his curse has a different origin: Eteocles and Polyneices lock him within the royal palace for shame (they deny him the exodos, *Phoe.* 875: "allowing him no freedom") with the intent of making the people forget about him. Thus, while in *OC* they are co-responsible for sending him into exile, in *Phoe.* they are guilty of keeping him inside the palace, concealing him from the Thebans' sight. In *Phoe.* they publicly reject Oedipus, rather than generat-

1 *Sept.* 695: "True, my own beloved father's hateful, ruinous curse hovers before my dry, unweeping eyes, and informs me of benefit preceding subsequent death": trans. Herbert Weir Smyth in Aeschylus 1926.

2 *OC* 434-44: ". . . on that first day, when my heart seethed, [435] and my sweetest wish was for death – indeed, death by stoning – no one was found to help me in that desire. But after a time, when all my anguish was now softened, and when I began to feel that my heart had been excessive in punishing those past errors, [440] then it was that the city set about to drive me by force from the land, after all that time. And my sons, when they had the strength to bring help – sons to their own father – they would not do it. For lack of one little word from them, I was left to wander, an outcast and a beggar forever": text and translation are by Hugh Lloyd-Jones in Sophocles 1994b. On Oedipus' curses see Seth L. Schein's essay in this volume.

3 In the event of his death, Eteocles asks Creon's support and arranges for Antigone's rule over Thebes as wife to Creon's son; Eur. *Phoe.*756-66: "Eteocles: But if I suffer any misfortune, you must see to the marriage between Antigone, my sister and Haemon, your son; and now, as I take my leave, [760] I ratify their previous betrothal. You are my mother's brother, no need to speak at length. Take care of her as she deserves, both for your own sake and mine. As for my father, he has been guilty of folly against himself in putting out his eyes; I have small praise for him; [765] by his curses it may be that he will slay us too." All translations are by E.P. Coleridge in Euripides 1938; for the Greek original see Euripides 1994.

ing public forgetfulness; they cause his expulsion instead of hiding him, they order communal 'purgation' instead of private 'burial' within the family's confines. Might these opposite choices elicit a different reaction in Oedipus? Might Oedipus' final show of pity for his son's death in *Phoe.*,[4] which is entirely absent from his bitterly caustic words in *OC*, not be due to this different treatment of the story? Does this imply that expulsion is a worse form of disaffection than imprisonment within the palace?

Euripides' insistence on Oedipus' unfortunate story and his curse on his two sons is almost obsessive, and this affects his final expression of compassion for them.[5] Differently from Sophocles, Euripides tells us what happens soon after Oedipus' self-blinding.[6] Tiresias' tale at 865-96 inscribes Oedipus' physical self-punish-

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4 *Phoe.* 1560-5: "Oedipus [1560] Ah me! / Antigone Why do you groan? / Oedipus My sons! / Antigone You are in pain; but if you could look towards the sun-god's four-horse chariot and turn the light of your eyes on these corpses – / Oedipus [1565] The evil fate of my sons is clear; but she, my poor wife, tell me, daughter, by what fate did she die?".

5 The narrative is presented several times in the course of *Phoe.* – in full at the outset in Jocasta's prologic speech: "Now when Oedipus, who endured so much, [60] learned that he was married to his mother, he inflicted a dreadful slaughter upon his eyes, making the pupils bloody with a golden brooch. But when my sons grew to bearded men, they hid their father behind bars, so that his misfortune, [65] needing as it did much skill to hide it, might be forgotten. He is still living in the house. Afflicted by his fate, he makes the most unholy curses against his sons, praying that they may divide this house with a sharp sword." See also 327-36: "While in the house the old blind man, always possessed by his tearful longing for the pair of brothers estranged from the home, [330] rushed to kill himself with the sword or by the noose suspended over his chamber-roof, moaning his curses on his sons; [335] and now he hides himself in darkness, always weeping and lamenting." Reference to the curse is also made by Polyneices at 472-5; Jocasta at 623; Eteocles at 764-6; Creon at 1355; the Chorus Leader at 1425-6; Antigone at 1555-9.

6 See Mastronarde's commentary on 757-65 (in Euripides 1994: 364): "Oedipus has not been kyrios of the household since the discovery of incest and the incapacitation caused by self-blinding. The sons became kyrioi on coming of age (63), and Eteocles is solely kyrios since the departure of Polyneices. Eteocles here provisionally passes responsibility for his household to Creon, who, as twice in the past [after Laius' death and Oedipus' self-blinding], would take over as the senior male next-of-kin".

ment within a superior design of godly retribution and points out his two sons' own blind subversion of that design "by robbing their father of his due honor (γέρα)" and foolish attempting to overturn the gods' will.[7] What remains constant in all three versions is that the division of the kingdom between the two sons is independent of Oedipus' own will, although deriving from his loss of status of *kyrios* (lord or master). This division compounded with Oedipus' curse will bring about the end of Oedipus' dynasty. This is a question that has some relevance in a comparison with *King Lear*.

OC is the only play showing Oedipus outside Thebes, an errant exile, accompanied by his daughter Antigone, and at a later stage rejoined by Ismene. By then a 'no-man', a blind and poor vagrant in the liminal space of the outskirts of Athens, he is searched for by his brother-in-law Creon, sent to talk to him by Eteocles, then King of Thebes. The oracle has said that the one of the two sons who will have Oedipus' support will win the war, which suddenly gives back to Oedipus his status of 'man'. Both Eteocles and Polyneices want him on their side because they know that the winner needs him. But Oedipus-the-no-man claims his freedom from them and rejects the call. The play ends on Oedipus' finally accomplishing the prophecy by trespassing in the sacred grove at Colonus, unreconciled with both his past and his sons, yet obedient to the divine call. Seneca's fragmentary *Thebais* (or *Phoenissae*) will convey the same sense of Oedipus' essential irreconcilability with his fate whose significance he can hardly grasp (139: "fati tardus interpres mei"; "myne owne heauy destenie I scarcely can assoyle").[8] It will also communicate Oedipus' identical fury against

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7 *Phoe.* 865-96, esp. 870-80: "TIRESIAS: . . . [870] That bloody destruction of his eyes was planned by the gods as an example to Hellas; and the sons of Oedipus went foolishly astray in wishing to throw over it the veil of time – as if they could outrun the gods! For by robbing their father of his due honor [875] and allowing him no freedom, they enraged the luckless man; so he, suffering and disgraced as well, breathed dreadful curses against them. And I, because I left nothing undone or unsaid, incurred the hatred of the sons of Oedipus. [880]".

8 Text by Peiper and Richter in Seneca 1911, translation by Newton in Seneca 1581: 44*r*.

his sons (cf. esp. 350-5), however modulated as yet another form of self-punishment aimed at the horrendous erasure of his own cursed race and the whole of Thebes (see esp. 272-87, 295-306, 328-48, 355-62). Seneca does not tell us whether he was banished or self-banished, although at the end of his *Oedipus* we hear him proclaim his own intent of abandoning Thebes (1042-61). Significantly, the "Argument" appended by Thomas Newton to his 1581 English translation says that after gouging out his own eyes he "hid himself in corners and solitary places" (40*v*), apparently of his own will.

This very brief summary suggests that Oedipus' expulsion from the kingdom is a constant episode traversing his whole life experience, from his infancy to his maturity. It is related to family conflicts, with his father first, then with his sons, who in turn are engaged in a mortal combat. It also suggests that the division of the kingdom ensuing from this combat is the cause of the end of Oedipus' lineage. It underlines Oedipus' experience of liminality between two cities, Thebes and Athens, but above all, between the condition of being 'somebody' and its negation, as well as his experience of being on the verge of life's end. It foregrounds Oedipus' overall story as of a search for knowledge of human responsibility, bringing to the fore the ultimate questions of what a man is vis-à-vis the gods, and of man's tragic experience in relation to mundane time vis-à-vis divine time. Furthermore, the question of what a man is connects the Sphinx's riddle with Oedipus' own later discovery of the meaning of the word 'man' when no-longer-a-man at Colonus, providing an internal link that brings together the beginning of his heroic ascent and the lowest point of his decline. Major divergences in the tragic treatments of the story we know concern Oedipus' own sense of responsibility, the effects of his 'crime' on his dynasty, but also the different reactions on the part of Eteocles and Polyneices, and of Jocasta as well.

Oedipus' story following the discovery of his crime constitutes a turning point relevant here because that is the the point at which the subtext of *OC* originates. Although crucial, that part is curiously left undramatised, at least in the plays that have survived, and in *OC* we are shown Oedipus already on the verge of death and still furious with his sons. The kingdom has been divid-

ed and filial disaffection has produced its effects. The story of King Lear, as Beltrametti suggests in this volume, seems to narratise precisely the portion of the story dividing the end of *OT* and the beginning of *OC*. In both *OC* and the latter part of *King Lear* we are presented with the story of an old man who was a King and, following his expulsion from his kingdom on account of a crime or of an error, is turned into a 'no-man', in the time of the division of the kingdom, which is also the time of the genesis of intraspecific conflict and, consequently, of the end of the dynasty. Apart from all other possible connections (and differences), this minimal line is what brings together these two plays; it tells us why *OC* is likely to be more interesting in relation to *King Lear* than *Phoe.*, although this play was better known in England, chiefly through the Italian and English mediations of Lodovico Dolce and of George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh.[9] It also tells us that if we are to consider archetypal models, such as "the folk-tales, in which the motif of a father submitting three daughters to a love test" is cognate to the story of Lear (Foakes in Shakespeare 2017: 93), *OC* offers a version of a mythical narrative of filial disaffection and family dismemberment which dialogues with *King Lear* in ways that neither *Phoe.* nor Seneca's fragmentary *Thebais* do. In many respects, *King Lear* presents an early modern reinterpretation of an archetypal story already scripted in Oedipus'; one which allows us to discover the different ways in which an understanding of the meaning of 'man' is strictly intertwined with the tragic experience of an old man looking back at his own past from death's threshold. Reflecting on both plays may help us understand that meaning.

2. A Game of Mirrors

In his Introduction to his edition of *King Lear* Foakes remarks that "the word 'source' is too specific and too narrow in relation to most echoes of other works" in this play (2017: 93). In fact,

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9 Reference is to Dolce's *Giocasta* (1549) and Gascoigne's and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta* (1566); see Cunliffe 1906; see also Miola 2002, Dewar-Watson 2010, Bigliazzi 2014.

> What we know of Shakespeare's wide reading and powers of assim-
> ilation seems to show that he made use of all kinds of material, ab-
> sorbing contradictory viewpoints, positive and negative, religious
> and secular, as if to ensure that *King Lear* would offer no single con-
> trolling perspective, but be open to, indeed demand, multiple inter-
> pretations. (Foakes 2017: 107)

The major sources have long been identified with versions of the sto-
ry, or fragments thereof, contained in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1.446-
8; 1587), John Higgins' additions to *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1574),
Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (2.10; 1596), Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*
(2.10; 1590), and especially *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and
his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* (1605). Further ca-
nonical references are contained in Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration
of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) and John Florio's translation of
Montaigne's *Essays* (1603). If none of these testifies to a classical leg-
acy,[10] yet a number of different forays into classical connections have
also been made. Miola has suggested echoes from Seneca's *Hercules
Furens* in Lear's *furor* (Miola 1992: 143-74) and Poole has laid empha-
sis on the tragic experience of extremities, rage and contentment, as
well as of life vis-à-vis death (Poole 1987: 210). Poole's comment that
OC "is a play about the last hours of a man's life, about the last things
a man does before he dies, and about the difference that his deeds
and his death make to those who are left behind in this harsh world
to draw their breath in pain" (1987: 210) opens a chapter devoted to
that play's discussion in parallel with *Bacchae* and *King Lear*. In these
three tragedies, he argues, "[the] extreme verge puts to an extreme
test our beliefs and feelings about justice, because of the difference
we feel between the justice of death as a general sentence common to
all, and the injustice of particular deaths, above all the deaths of those
who are dearest to us. These three plays rouse and weigh difficult, dif-
ferent questions about death and justice" (234). A few years earlier,
John Harvey had noticed other similarities between Sophocles' trag-
edies and Shakespeare's, pointing out comparable passages and sug-
gesting a sort of Shakespearean effect upon modern English transla-

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10 Besides Foakes 2017: 89-110, see Bullough 1973, Muir 1977, Gillespie 2004.

tions of Sophocles −[11] an effect that, as Sheila Murnaghan shows in this volume, also invests *OC* through *King Lear*. And yet, for all the resemblances one can perceive,[12] Harvey also pointed out that

> not possessing Shakespeare's copy of Sophocles, we have no way of knowing whether they are more than coincidences. And it might be argued that the coincidences are not surprising, when we consider how similar the contexts are in which they arise – if Othello some-times sounds like Ajax, this is hardly surprising when their situations have so much in common. This argument, however, gives no force to the fact that in Shakespeare's major tragedies, and in Sophocles, the situations *are* so similar: a fact that bears also on the question of whether Shakespeare knew the play as wholes, or only the odd Sophoclean adage. (1977: 261)

Harvey's concluding argument was that Shakespeare's Sophocles "worked as a cohesive, selective and recommending power in the convergent interweaving of the multiple sources and experiences" (267). Whether that is demonstrable remains uncertain – and

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11 Harvey mentions Storr's (Loeb 1913) and Watling's (Penguin 1953) trans-lations of a line of the choric lament in *Ajax* that makes it closely resemble Macbeth's "what's done cannot be undone" (5.1.64) (1977: 260). Another ex-ample comes from the same two plays when Storr borrows Macbeth's famous "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" line in Ajax' monolgue at 473-6: "Base were it that a man should want long life / When all he gets is long un-changing trouble. / Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow − [475: παρ᾽ ἦμαρ ἡμέρα ("from day following day": Sophocles 1994a)] / What pleasure comes of that? 'Tis but a move / Forward or backward and the end − is death!" (Harvey 1977: 268).

12 He lists the following: the double plot allows us to "combine Oedipus in his tyranny with Oedipus blind and led by his child"; special affinities can be de-tected "in the scenes where the impetuous king throws out both the taciturn, and the blunt, truthtellers"; both are trapped by Fate, although in different ways and both grieve over the dead Jocasta and the dead Cordelia, respectively – to which Creon's entrance with the dead body of Antigone in Antigone should al-so be added. Gloucester is assimilated to the aged Oedipus for his dignity and roughness but also self-control which does not allow him to go mad. His blind-ness too and his being guided by his son also resembles Oedipus at Colonus. Further similarities include the reciprocal killing of Oedipus' two sons and Lear's two daughters; see Harvey 1977: 264-5.

Stuart Gillespie considers Harvey's "an engrossing but . . . ultimately inconclusive case" (2004: 469). However, following recent reassessments of the relevance and circulation of Greek and Latin books in early modern England, as well as of knowledge of classical culture in general,[13] more recently John Kerrigan has defended the idea that "[a]mong the origins of *King Lear*, and among the origins that interest the play, are . . . the tragedies of Greek antiquity" (2018: 65). Relying on Pollard 2012 (1064) and 2013 (110-11), Kerrigan maintains that "Greek tragedy was 'widely recognized' as being the genre of tragedy's 'origin'" (66), and reassures doubters "that Shakespeare had read some Sophocles" (73). Reference is to the two lines from *OT* he could find in Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius*,[14] which indeed amounts to very little. But Kerrigan's focus is rather on ideas of origin, edges, division and knowledge in a comparison between the two stories of Oedipus and Lear. Although he brings *OC* and *Phoe.* into the discussion, as well as Seneca's *Thebais*, it is *OC* that, he suggests, is especially concerned with questions of liminality and of being 'on the edge', in the sense in which Lear is even more 'on the edge' than the Oedipus of *Thebais* physically on the edge of Mount Cithaeron or Gloucester on the imaginary edge of Dover Cliffs (67).

These different views testify to a need to investigate more thoroughly into the connections between these two plays, both genetically and comparatively, reconsidering conjectures about Sophocles as a possible catalyst in Shakespeare's uses of a variety of different sources (Harvey 1977), as well as diverse linguistic, thematic, and conceptual parallels (Poole 1987, Miola 1992, Kerrigan 2018). This is a need

13 See e.g. Jones 1977, Schleiner 1990, Martindale and Taylor 2004, Burrow 2004 and 2013, Maguire 2007, Lazarus 2015 and 2016, Pollard 2012, 2013 and 2017, Demetriou and Pollard 2017.

14 ". . . euery one gaue them selues to riot and excesse, when they saw he delighted in it: and all Asia was like to the citie *Sophocles* speaketh of in one of his tragedies: *Was full of sweete perfumes, and pleasant songs, / With woeful weping mingled there among. . . .* This tells us almost everything that we still know about what Nietzsche calls the birth of tragedy: the feasts, the sacrifices, the satyrs. But if Plutarch is setting out what Aristotle says in the *archē*, or 'origin', of tragedy, this quotation from *Oedipus Tyrannus* represents the origin of a tragic plot, the articulation of a *mutos* is also for Aristotle an archē": Kerrigan 2018: 73.

confirmed by the strange phenomenon of Shakespeare's 'backwards influence' upon Sophocles identified by Harvey and developed by Murnaghan in this volume – an influence that more or less unconsciously affects our own perception of both plays today, so that to some extent we are led to read Sophocles through Shakespeare even when we consider some of their modern and contemporary rewritings, as this book will show.

Raising questions on the intersections between *OC* and *King Lear*, which are at the same time very close thematically and deeply different conceptually, and which are neither demonstrably nor categorically linked in any intrinsic manner, in fact opens an array of different research paths. The material circulation of Sophocles in early modern England remains a fertile area of investigation, as well as the actual processes of transmission, selection and appropriation of Sophoclean plots and topics, down to individual textual portions or images elaborated on, either entirely or in fragments. But another, more fundamental question raised by this comparison is the reason itself why we should look at these two plays together.

Broadened present-day interpretations of intertextuality in Shakespeare source study tend to ask new questions about authorial processes against preoccupations for the potential loss of authorial agency through diffused forms of interdiscursivity and intertextuality. In this respect, Catherine Belsey's argument in favour of the detection of deviations from, rather than resemblances to, other texts safeguards 'authoriality' by contrasting individual choices with mere imitation (2015). Shifting the attention more to the creative process, Colin Burrow has proposed the category of 'inspired misremembering' as a source of creativity for Shakespeare, as a way "to reinvent what he has read" (2004: 24; see also 2013). Smith and Maguire (2015) have taken up similar views, including Stuart Gillespie's identification of 'spectral' intertextuality (identifiable in terms of 'echoes', 'manner' and 'atmosphere', 2004: 324-4, 327), and have suggested explorations of how a text may be perceived as a 'haunting' presence while not allowing itself to be pinned down through exact citations (see also Maguire 2008). In turn, Drakakis (2018b) has replaced the word 'source' with 'resource' to suggest "a complexity that defies hierarchi-

cal organization" and genetic linearity (2018a: 74), underlining how Shakespeare's memory might have functioned differently from ours within a context which was not primarily characterised by book literacy (2018a), and which also included theatrical culture (Clare 2014).[15] Could *OC* be a 'haunting' presence of this type for Shakespeare or is it we who perceive that 'hauntingness' by projecting onto *King Lear* our memories of *OC* and reading *OC* through our memories of *King Lear*? Should we perhaps treat these two plays as examples of paralogues as illustrated by Miola in his seventh type of intertextuality?

> Paralogues are texts that illuminate the intellectual, social, theological, or political meanings in other texts. Unlike texts or even traditions, paralogues move horizontally and analogically in discourses rather than in vertical lineation through the author's mind or intention. Today, critics can adduce any contemporary text in conjunction with another, without bothering at all about verbal echo, or even imprecise lines of filiation. In some ways the discussion of paralogues departs from past critical practices, bringing new freedom; but, of course, new perils threaten: rampant and irresponsible association, facile cultural generalization, and anecdotal, impressionistic historicizing. (Miola 204: 23)

This book does not aspire to offer a definitive response, but to raise questions. It will interrogate the relation between 'source' and 'reception' and will play around with the possible exchangeability of perspectives in a game of mirrors that examines but also challenges ideas of origin.

3. The Book

The volume is divided into four main Parts: 1 "Being Classical", 2 "Oedipus", 3 "Oedipus and Lear", 4 "Revisiting Oedipus and Lear". Part 1 takes its title from the opening essay by Stephen Orgel ("How to Be Classical") who asks the fundamental question of what in six-

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15 For a reappraisal of Shakespeare source study after Greenblatt's famous 1985 detraction, see also Serpieri 1988, Lynch 1998, Britton and Walter 2018, Walter and Klann 2018, Bigliazzi 2018.

teenth-century England was considered to be 'traditional' and what in vernacular literature or drama or art could make a work perceivable as being classical. Through an exploration of the theoretical debate as well as of poetical and artistic examples and antiquarian practices, Orgel discusses the 'infinite variety' of early modern conceptions of the classical style "based not on a set of rules, but on a repertory of infinitely adaptable models". The essay casts light on the dynamics behind the recreation of the past in relation to a semiotics of the present, bestowing meaning upon anachronisms in a continuous dialogue with the past which defines both sense of identity and otherness. The following essay by Carlo Maria Bajetta, "Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Ralegh's Classics: The Case of Sophocles", approaches the question of early modern English knowledge of Sophocles by shifting the attention from the study of textual similarities to the material circulation of books. Bajetta takes as test cases the examples of Queen Elizabeth and Sir Walter Ralegh, examining lists of gifts, courtly connections, library catalogues. Ralegh's knowledge of classical writers, including Sextus Empiricus, is well known,[16] as is well known the fact that Essex, also a favourite of Elizabeth until his arrest, established the first chair of Greek at Cambridge where Andreas Dunaeus (Andrew Downey) was appointed Professor and published the first partial edition of Lysias in England, with a substantial commentary. But Bajetta is more interested in drawing the possible ways in which the Sophocles then circulating could have reached both the Queen and the courtier. In either case, Bajetta discusses the role of acquaintances and friends versed in Greek or owning Greek books or Latin translations and concludes that compendia and Seneca's own versions of Greek myths remained more easily available and therefore more influential than Greek originals or their Latin translations.

Part 2, "Oedipus", includes five essays on Sophocles' *OC* by Laura Slatkin, Gherardo Ugolini, Guido Avezzù, Francesco Lupi, and Anton Bierl, respectively. The main topics dealt with bear on questions relevant to *King Lear* in so far as they concern the protagonist's revision

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16 On the fortune of Sextus Empiricus see e.g. Floridi 1995; on Ralegh and scepticism in early modern England see also Sprott 1963, Greenblatt 1988 (esp. 21-8), Hamlin 2005, Caldwell 2017.

of the past, his irascibility, and his liminality – all issues that in differ-
ent ways can also be found in Shakespeare's tragedy. Building on pre-
vious research she conducted on *OC,* interpreted as an investigation
into Athenian acceptance of Oedipus as proof of the polis' hospital-
ity, in "Revisiting *Oedipus at Colonus*" Slatkin explores how the play
reconsiders what happened in the past by reopening Oedipus' case
and laying claims on his meaning beyond his later transformation in-
to a cult figure. In this sense, Slatkin argues, his case offers "an aeti-
ology of democratic strife" because in representing Oedipus' coming
to terms with his past and his process of self-examination the play at-
tributes to the citizen-chorus of Athens a role assimilable to that of
the jury in the *Oresteia.* This poses a substantial challenge to the city
as Oedipus has no fixed position, located as he is between the delib-
erate and the involuntary. The sense of continuity with the past and
Oedipus' impossible reconcilability with it is also a major focus in
Gherardo Ugolini's essay on the contradictions of an old and wise
man who has not lost his impetuous temperament and has failed to
achieve the serenity of a reassured hero ("A Wise and Irascible Hero:
Oedipus from Thebes to Colonus"). Ugolini discusses the ways in
which the play denies Oedipus traditional forms of heroisation as a
reward for unmerited suffering. The essay contends that in this trag-
edy Sophocles presents a deeply ambivalent character, combining dif-
ferent human weaknesses, from anxiety to anger, thus making prob-
lematic his traditional interpretation as a cultic and protective hero.
Guido Avezzù's "Some Notes on Oedipus and Time" considers the
(de)construction of Oedipus in both his individual relation to time
and the time of his *genos* or dynasty. Moving from an exploration of
the temporality of the *homo faber*, as can be found in the Oedipus of
OT, a distinct trait that differentiates him from his subjects, Avezzù
discusses Oedipus' deconstruction of genealogy by referring the or-
igin of his *genos* to himself, the inaugural starting-point of his own
dynastic temporality. His victory over the Sphinx begins a new age,
delusively marking a new time that will shortly be nullified by the
disclosure of the essential circularity within which a superior de-
sign has entrapped him – a time which has him dead even before be-
ing born, and criminal before committing the crime. The delusion of

agency unveiled at the end of *OT* will translate into Oedipus' aware-
ness of his unescapable passivity, which will only momentarily be re-
jected in his cursing his sons and his decision to remain for them the
'no-man' he has been turned into outside Thebes, before entering the
timelessness of his death announced by the divine call. Francesco
Lupi in "Liminality, (In)Accessibility, and Negative Characterization
in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*" argues that the condition of lim-
inality typical of the grove of the Eumenides is consistent with the
condition of Oedipus at the extreme verge of his life and that this
condition is linguistically characterised by an extensive use of priva-
tive and negative lexical items or more complex negative syntactical
structures. Lupi shows how this accurate rhetorical use of 'negatives'
contributes to the presentation of Oedipus' progressive dissolution
in a liminal space located between the Olympian and chtonian di-
vinities. Finally, Anton Bierl in "*Oedipus at Colonus* as a Reflection of
the *Oresteia*: The Abomination from Thebes as an Athenian Hero in
the Making", shows how Sophocles articulated in this liminal space,
characterised by divine ambivalence – where Demeter is both god-
dess of fertility and an Erinys – a sort of response to *Eumenides*. The
concluding play of *Oresteia*, and the last of Aeschylus' whole career,
is assumed by Sophocles as the canonical master-model for the ma-
nipulation of ritual and religion for specific political purposes. By
gradually disclosing the prophecy, the sightless Oedipus proves to be
in full command of the situation at Colonus. His unveiling the frag-
ments of his future makes plausible what is denied to the audience's
view: as different from *Eumenides*, *OC* does not allow the audience di-
rect access to the mimetic performance of the final ceremony involv-
ing Oedipus. In this way, by bringing the resolution of the action out-
side theatre, Bierl argues, *OC* is not only, or mainly, an apotheosis
of Oedipus' life, but also, and especially, an extreme metatheatrical
experiment.

Part 3, "Oedipus and Lear", moves on to a closer compari-
son between the two tragedies. Robert Miola's "Lost and Found in
Translation: Early Modern Receptions of *Oedipus at Colonus*" trac-
es the many ways in which Sophocles' play circulated in early mod-
ern culture first in fragmented forms, then through Latin commen-

taries and gradually through massive processes of Christianisation. From its circulation through *sententiae* and proverbs by Marliani and Erasmus and then the editions and commentaries by Camerarius and Melanchthon, eventually *OC* reached Milton and shaped *Samson Agonistes* in ways that comparatively cast light on the much bleaker tragic vision of *King Lear*. With Sheila Murnaghan's "'More sinned against than sinning': Acting and Suffering in *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear*" the discussion approaches more closely the relation between source and reception broached above. Starting from English modern translations of a line in *OC* by way of a line in *King Lear* ("I am a man / More sinned against than sinning", 3.2.59-69), Murnaghan demonstrates the mediating function of Shakespeare in our perception of Sophocles. At the same time, the essay points out a different interpretation of the concept of passivity in the two tragedies by relating Oedipus' to the ancient Greek heroisation of the one who has undeservedly suffered, and Lear's to a Christian interpretation of acceptance and patience. In either case, though, Murnaghan shows the centrality of the conception of passivity to a definition of the tragic experience. In "Fathers Cursing Children: Anger and Justice in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*" Seth L. Schein shifts the attention to resemblances and differences between Oedipus and Lear onto the topic of cursing, exploring how this action redefines their position within the family. Schein shows opposite functions and values in the cursing: by condemning his sons, Oedipus re-establishes his role as a father dispensing intrafamilial justice, and by rejecting their power logic he regains honour and will become a benefactor of Athens. By condemning his daughters, Lear will instead mark his own fatherly failure and will prefigure the destruction of his own lineage, which in fact will ensue. Assuming Shakespeare's possible knowledge of *OC* through Camerarius and Melanchthon and what she calls the "Wittenberg effect", Anna Beltrametti in "Oedipus' εἴδωλον, 'Lear's shadow' (*OC* 110, *King Lear* 1.4.222)" discusses the many points of intersection between the two plays, in fact extending the connection to all the Theban plays, including *Antigone*. In particular, Beltrametti reads *King Lear* as the Elizabethan dramatisation of the action left undramatised by Sophocles between the end of *OT* and

the beginning of *OC*, that is, "the time of transformation, spent in the *locus horridus* of the tempest-torn heath". The essay explores the parallel, yet different, processes of acquisition of knowledge by Oedipus and Lear, but also Gloucester, as well as the phases of inception of self-awareness and psychological resilience in their reaction and adaptation to circumstances. The following article by Silvia Bigliazzi, "Time and Nothingness: *King Lear*", forms a dyptich with Guido Avezzù's essay in Part 2 in taking up the connection between time and nothingness as fundamental components of the tragic dramatised by the two plays. Like Oedipus, Lear divides time: but, as Bigliazzi argues, his division of the kingdom, which is also a division of "the time of his two daughters' reign and the no-time of the two 'nothings' to which he reduces Cordelia and himself", marks the beginning of the tragic temporality of Lear's self-destruction, as well as of that of his own lineage. Bigliazzi discusses various interpretations of the lexical uses of 'nothing', both predicative and absolute, and relates them to the experience of time and its subjective representation on the stage. The essay also compares the paradigms of linear and circular time in the stories of Oedipus and Lear, finding points of contact between *King Lear* and both *OC* and Seneca's *Thebais*. This essay also forms a dyptich with the last one by David Lucking, "'More than two tens to a score'. Disquantification in *King Lear*", in so far as Lucking too engages with the topic of cutting and measuring, although from a different angle. Lucking takes up the question of division in terms of measurement and numbers, showing that they operate both destructively and constructively. *King Lear* famously opens on a partition of power and space depending on a love contest based on rhetorical quantification. This triggers a symbolic use of numbers reflecting the progressive deconstruction of Lear's power and identity, symbolically equated to 'zero' by the Fool early on in the play, before Lear declines into madness and 'nothingness'. And yet, Lucking shows how the language of division and measurement at some point acquires opposite connotations and becomes the language of unification. It loses its destructive function and restores to the play at least some positive sense of human affection, somewhat lessening the pessimism of its doubtlessly hopeless conclusion.

Part 4, "Revisiting Oedipus and Lear", considers relevant examples of appropriation, adaptation, and rewriting of both plays, showing significant points of intersection from a perspective that includes a rethinking of reception studies through creative responses. In particular this Part shows how modern receptions of the two plays tend to combine them ideally, further suggesting an anomalous 'Lear effect' upon Oedipus. This is further indication of the centrality of the early modern Oedipus-Lear nexus and of its persistence in our reception of both stories. With Nicola Pasqualicchio's "Happy Endings for Old Kings: Jean-François Ducis' *Œdipe* and *Léar*" we jump to the late eighteenth-century and to Jean-François Ducis' double exploration of the two tragedies in his *Œdipe chez Admète* (1778), *Œdipe à Colone* (1797) and *Le Roi Léar* (1783). Ducis' treatment of both plays according to neoclassical standards and with a necessary happy ending imbues the two stories with similar values of generosity and forgiveness, inviting speculation about the author's choice of those two plays in a short span of time. In both, Ducis focuses on the relation between fathers and daughters as well as on the role of Providence, adding a distinct Christian veneer that elicits prospects of final redemption that smooth away the complexities and sense of absurdity conveyed by Shakespeare and, to a lesser degree, by Sophocles as well. Barry A. Spence's "Shades of *King Lear* in Beckett's Theatre and Late Work" and Tamas Dobozy's "Sam Shepard's 'Body' of Tragedy" shift the attention to more recent revisions of the two plays across different media and genres, autonomously, yet consistently, suggesting a need to reflect upon the disabled body due to age and infirmity. Looked at together, these two essays bring our attention to why, and how, the intersections between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear* explored in the first two Parts of the book, also invest a field especially dear to modern and contemporary theatre: disability and infirmity. Spence explores in several Beckettian works for the theatre, the radio, the cinema and prose what he calls the 'Lear poetics', which is both formal and thematic, and includes the role and limits of language, of sights and vision, as well as the progressive worsening of life due to old age and infirmity. In this respect, Spence shows the sense of a 'spectral' or 'haunting' presence of *King Lear* in Beckett through suggestions

of infirmity that invoke comparison with the 'spectrality' of the old Oedipus that can be perceived in the drama of the disabled body produced by Sam Shepard in his 2013 *A Particle of Dread*. As Dobozy argues with regard to this play, "the body's treatment as metaphor – for either the moral order or the state – is continually questioned". Consequently, Shepard concentrates on the role and meaning of blood, procreation, dismemberment while destructuring the plot and undoing the major topics of Sophocles' *OT* and *OC*, including knowledge and revelation, and suggesting a feeling of widespread pathology symbolised by the figure of Oedipus in a wheelchair. Performance here becomes the locus and medium of "both self-expression and loss of the self", a question which is further explored in the concluding essay by Eric Nicholson and Avra Sidiropoulou, "Opening Up Discoveries Through Promised Endings: An Experimental Work in Progress On *Oedipus at Colonus* And *King Lear*". The essay records and reflects upon an experiment of Performance as Research through a bilingual production of the two plays carried out in Verona in 2018. Nicholson and Sidiropoulou offer an intriguing account of the actual possibilities of making the two plays interact rhizomatically on the stage in a fluid process of contemporary encounters within a heterotopic and heterochronic dimension.

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Part 1
Being Classical

1

How to Be Classical

STEPHEN ORGEL

Abstract

Modern notions of the classical were essentially invented in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with the writings of Winckelmann in Enlightenment Germany and the installation of the Elgin Marbles in Regency London. But 16th-century England consciously undertook to develop classical models for English literature and the visual arts, and those looked quite different from anything we recognize as classical. What did 'classical' sound like and look like to Sidney and Spenser? A good deal of energy in the period went into the devising of appropriately classical models for vernacular verse. The Earl of Surrey, in the 1530s, translated two books of the *Aeneid* in a style designed to be classical, a poetic meter intended to serve as an English equivalent to Virgilian hexameters. The meter was what became known as blank verse, and strictly speaking, all that was Virgilian about it was that it was unrhymed. Surrey presumably considered pentameter 'natural' to English, as hexameter was to Latin. The assumption was shrewdly prophetic, but in the 1530s, it would have seemed very surprising.

KEYWORDS: Classical; Sidney; Spenser; Earl of Surrey

1.

Humanism came to England relatively late, and even then much classical scholarship was devoted to biblical exegesis and the study of theology, rather than to the revival of what we think of as the classics. John Colet, Thomas More and the visiting Erasmus were superb Latinists, but their Latin was a living language, the language of modern literature and philosophy. Nevertheless, Christian Humanism emphasized the continuity of ancient wis-

dom with Christian doctrine, and Erasmus duly compared John Colet to Plato. But though Colet was thoroughly familiar with the modern Platonists Ficino and Pico, he devoted much of his critical energy to interpreting the Epistles of St Paul; and Erasmus's Greek for over two decades was put at the service of establishing a correct text of the New Testament, not of reviving ancient philosophy. Greek was introduced into the English school curriculum after Colet re-founded St Paul's School in 1512; by the mid-century it was being regularly taught in the grammar schools, but even by the end of the century, though it was a tremendously prestigious subject, few scholars were sufficiently at home with it to work without a translation at hand – Sir Thomas North's Plutarch was based on the French version of Jacques Amyot, and even the famously scholarly George Chapman used a Latin trot for his Homer. There was unquestionably a good deal of Greek in circulation – rhetorical terms, scientific names, aphorisms – and Cambridge students were required to attend weekly lectures on Greek. Nevertheless the expression "it's all Greek to me" as a trope of incomprehensibility was already proverbial in Shakespeare's time – it appears in *Julius Caesar* (1599), and in Dekker's *Patient Grissel* (1603).

Recent scholarship has shown that England was heavily invested in classical translation, even in Anglo-Saxon times, though there was obviously no settled notion of what a classical style for English would be. But the larger question was the really elusive one: what would it mean for the principles of Humanism to inform literature in the vernacular – how could English literature become 'classical', not only classical in imitating the ancients, but classical in the sense subsequently applied to music, classical as opposed to popular, classical as formal, serious, and therefore good.[1] The literary forbears, Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, continued to be admired, but they lacked 'correctness'. Nor do the excep-

1 'Classic' and 'classical' applied to literature, denoting both Greek and Roman writings and standards of excellence, had come into English by the mid-16th century. The *OED*'s first citation for "classical" in relation to music is from 1829, but in a context that clearly implies that the term was already in use.

tions rescue the English past: Sidney praises Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, but wonders at his ability to produce it – "I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age walk so stumblingly after him" (Sidney 1595: sig. I4r).[2] What should English literature sound like, what rules should it follow – how can we, in this clear age, not stumble? In short, how can we produce a vernacular literature that is recognizably classical, whether ancient works in translation or modern works on the classical model; make the classics our own; make our own classics? The problem for Sidney is epitomized in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, which is praised, but also criticised because it does things that Theocritus and Virgil did not do. Similarly, English drama for Sidney is defective in so far as it does not emulate classical drama. The models, the tradition, are essential.

And originality? This critic was himself surely one of the two most daringly original poets of his age (the other was Marlowe, who was also probably, among vernacular writers, the best classicist of his generation), but an adequate defence of poetry required of it stringent constraints on the new, continual deference to the old. There is, however, an element of question-begging in Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*: what in the English sixteenth century would constitute being traditional, adhering to tradition? If the tradition is classical, what should classical imply? What elements could stamp a work of vernacular literature or drama or art as classical? What does English classical look like, or sound like? Sidney's own sense of the classical in the *Defence* appears to us absurdly limited – English plays that do not observe the unities of time and place are said to be not simply incorrect, but incomprehensible; audiences are assumed to be radically unimaginative (so much for *Antony and Cleopatra*). And yet Sidney's critique of English sonnets – that as love poems they are for the most part failures because they would not persuade a mistress of the reality of the lover's passion – makes the success of the poetry dependent entirely on its effect on the listener or reader. Though the model is clearly Petrarch, the originals here produce no set of rules for sonnets; and Sidney's

2 The quotation has been modernized.

own sonnet sequence, though it admirably responds to the critique in the *Defence*, departs significantly from any Petrarchan model, and indeed, explicitly rejects "poor Petrarch's long-deceasèd woes" (*Astrophil and Stella*, 15).

But of course, the rejection of a model is also a way of deferring to it – Sidney, rejecting Petrarch, acknowledges the priority of the Italian model, how essential the Italian model is. He substitutes his own woes for Petrarch's; the result, one could say, is a new Petrarchan sonnet sequence – Sidney becomes a new Petrarch. A good deal of energy in the period went into the devising of strategies for becoming the new ancients in this way, strategies of translation and adaptation, and the invention of appropriately classical-sounding models for vernacular verse, the domestication of the classic. The locus classicus, so to speak, was provided by the Earl of Surrey, who in the 1530s translated two books of the *Aeneid* in a style designed to be 'classical', a poetic meter intended to serve as an English equivalent to Virgilian hexameters. The meter was what became known as blank verse, and strictly speaking, all that was Virgilian about it was that it was unrhymed. Surrey presumably considered pentameter 'natural' to English, as hexameter was to Latin (though the Latin hexameter was not native, but based on the Greek). The assumption was shrewdly prophetic, but in the 1530s, it would have seemed very surprising, and the translations remained unpublished until long after Surrey's death.[3]

3 Recent claims for Surrey's influence on Marlowe and Milton are surely overstated. When Marlowe translates non-dramatic poetry he almost invariably uses couplets (the one exception is his Lucan, cited below); the blank verse of his drama is for him an innovation, and judging from *Hero and Leander*, if the Virgilian *Dido Queen of Carthage* had been conceived as a little epic, it would not have been in blank verse. It is arguable that Surrey is somewhere behind Milton's blank verse, but the chief source is surely Shakespeare. I have suggested elsewhere that Milton's model for the ten-book 1667 *Paradise Lost* is the ten-book revolutionary epic *Pharsalia*, but there is no evidence that Milton was aware of Marlowe's translation of Book 1, which was published in 1600 and not reissued. Arthur Gorges's and Thomas May's translations of *Pharsalia* (1614, 1629) are in couplets. For the counter-arguments, see Gillespie 2011: 30, Cummings 2010. Cummings, oddly, asserts that "somebody, possibly Marlowe" first introduced blank verse

In 1554, seventeen years after Surrey's execution for treason, the printer John Day issued Surrey's translation of Book 4, with the following explanation on the title page:

> The fourth book of Virgil, intreating of the love between Aeneas and Dido, translated into English, and drawn into a strange meter by Henry, late Earl of Surrey, worthy to be embraced. (Surrey 1554)

Blank verse in 1554 is "a strange (that is, foreign) meter . . . worthy to be embraced" (ibid.). Historians of prosody explain that the meter was foreign in that it was influenced by the Italian *verso sciolto* – unrhymed hendecasyllables; literally 'free (or open) verse' – which by the sixteenth century was being used as an Italian equivalent to classical hexameters. But how "strange" it also was is clear from the bafflement registered by such contemporary critics as Roger Ascham, Gabriel Harvey and William Webbe as late as the 1590s – Webbe says that Surrey "translated . . . some part of Virgil into verse indeed, but without regard of true quantity of syllables" (1586: 122). Such critics assumed Surrey was attempting to write quantitatively, and therefore, naturally, found all sorts of mistakes.[4] For such readers, the only verse that sounded classical was quantitative verse, which did seem to have a real future in the English 1590s – Sidney in the *Defence* argues for both the ancient and the modern systems; asserting that "Truly the English, before any other vulgar language I know, is fit for both sorts" (sig. L2r).

To those for whom only quantitative verse was properly poetic, blank verse would certainly be "strange", but in fact, there was nothing foreign about it. Surrey may have been imitating *versi sciolti*, but he was writing in Chaucer's meter, simply without the rhyme. Possibly it was not recognized as Chaucer's meter because

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onto the stage in the 1580s (42-3). *Gorboduc* (1561) is in blank verse; so is Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta* (1566); and there are of course numerous lost plays from the period of which we can say nothing. Marlowe in the prologue to *Tamburlaine* (1) does say he has rescued drama from the verse of "rhyming mother-wits" (Marlowe 1973), but what that implies is that he is either unaware of earlier blank-verse drama, or ignoring it.

4 See Derek Attridge's excellent account in 1974: 109-11.

by the sixteenth century the culture had forgotten how to read Chaucer – Chaucer was perfectly regular in middle English, but sounded rough as pronunciation changed, and, especially, as the final e's were no longer sounded.

In 1557, three years after John Day's edition of Surrey's *Aeneid* IV, Richard Tottel issued, in the space of less than two months, what was essentially Surrey's complete works: both the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid* in blank verse, and two separate editions of *Songes and Sonettes Written By the Ryght Honorable Lord Henry Howard, late Earle of Surrey, and other* – the volume that has become known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. The principal "other" was Thomas Wyatt; Wyatt and Surrey were thereby all at once major poets, but Surrey was the benchmark. Wyatt's irregular metrics were therefore duly revised to accord with Surrey's style – Tottel, that is, understood that Surrey's verse was 'regular', and was not a bungled attempt at quantitative metrics.

Tottel clearly expected some resistance. In a brief and acerbic preface, he writes "If perhaps some mislike the stateliness of style removed from the rude skill of common ears, I ask help of the learned to defend their learned friends the authors of this work. And I exhort the unlearned, by reading to learn to be more skillfull, and to purge that swinelike grossness that maketh the sweet marjoram not to smell to their delight" (Surrey 1557: sig. A1v)[5] pigs were said to hate the smell of marjoram; unlearned readers are pigs. Surrey's "stateliness of style" is something unfamiliar, but also learned and aristocratic – it is what English poetry should aspire to, as John Day had said, it is "worthy to be embraced". Interestingly, Tottel's edition of the *Aeneid* translation makes no special claims. The title page says only *Certain Bokes of Virgiles Aeneis turned into English meter* – Tottel, unlike Day, markets blank verse not as "strange", but as English. And unlike the *Songes and Sonettes*, there is no apology or justification, no critical harangue, not even the usual dedicatory and commendatory verses. The poem begins at once, on the next leaf: this is, quite simply, English Virgil.

But English classicists, even those who were not attempt-

5 The passage has been modernized.

ing quantitative verse, were without exception unpersuaded – Surrey's blank verse seems, in the history of English prosody, revolutionary; but it did not start a revolution, and blank verse was re-invented several times before it became the norm. In 1558, the year after Tottel published Surrey's Virgil, the first seven books of Thomas Phaer's *Aeneid* were published. Phaer's English classical verse was fourteener couplets (the translation was eventually completed by Thomas Twine in 1584). In 1565 Arthur Golding's first four books of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* "*Translated Oute of Latin into Englishe Meter*" appeared. Golding's English meter was again rhyming fourteeners. The complete translation appeared in 1567, and was continuously in print for half a century – the Elizabethan Ovidian meter was essentially a ballad measure. By 1595 the verse could already be parodied by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Bottom suddenly breaks into a bit of old-fashioned classicism:

> The raging rocks
> And shivering shocks
> Shall break the locks
> Of prison gates;
> And Phibbus' car
> Shall shine from far,
> And make and mar
> The foolish fates.
> (Shakespeare 2000a: 1.2.27-34)

In 1621 Golding's Ovidian fourteeners were finally superseded not by blank verse, but by pentameter couplets, with the publication of the first five books of George Sandys's translation, completed in 1626. This set the standard for the next two centuries: Sandys is Ovid in a style that looks to us recognizably neo-classical. As for the *Aeneid*, after Phaer, Richard Stanyhurst's version in "English heroical verse" was first published in Leiden in 1582. English heroical verse in this case was quantitative hexameters – genuinely classical, though finally not English enough. A second edition was published in London in the next year, but there was no subsequent edition until the nineteenth century.

And then finally the tradition develops a norm. When Ben

Jonson, near the end of his play *Poetaster* (1601), has Virgil recite a passage from the *Aeneid*, his prosody was pentameter couplets – although Phaer and Twine's *Aeneid* continued to be the standard translation (the last edition was 1612), the pentameter couplet had become the norm.

Consider some samples. Here is a bit of Surrey, Dido preparing for death:

> Sweet spoils, whiles God and destinies it would,
> Receive this sprite, and rid me of these cares:
> I lived and ran the course fortune did grant;
> And under earth my great ghost now shall wend:
> A goodly town I built, and saw my walls;
> Happy, alas, too happy, if these coasts
> The Troyan ships had never touchèd aye.
> (Surrey 1554: sig. G1v)

In the 1550s this would have sounded strange, though it retains some bits of traditional alliterative verse ("sweet spoils", "great ghost").

Now here is the opening of Thomas Phaer's *Aeneid*:

> Of arms, and of the man of Troy, that first by fatal flight
> Did thence arrive to Lavine land that now Italia hight,
> But shaken sore with many a storm by seas and land ytost
> And all for Juno's endless wrath that wrought to have had him lost,
> And sorrows great in wars he bode ere he the walls could frame
> Of mighty Rome . . .
> (Phaer 1562: sig. A1)

Today Phaer has disappeared from the literary histories, but this really reads quite impressively, a supple verse rhythm with real momentum. This is what English Virgil sounded like for Elizabethan readers.

Here is the same passage from Richard Stanyhurst's quantitative *Aeneid*, 1582:

> I blaze the captain first from Troy city repairing,
> Like wand'ring pilgrim to famoused Italy trudging,
> And coast of Lavin': soused with tempestuous hurlwind,
> On land and sailing, by God's predestinate order:

But chief through Juno's long fost'red deadly revengement.
(Stanyhurst 1582: sig. B3)

If you count it out in the original orthography you can see that it really is quantitative, though there was some fiddling with the spelling to make it work. Read aloud it has undeniable awkwardnesses ("soused with tempestuous hurlwind"); rhythmically, however, it is natural enough, though the end-stopped lines slow it down.

But here, finally, in 1601 is Ben Jonson in *Poetaster*. The emperor Augustus asks Virgil to recite a bit of the *Aeneid*, his work in progress. Dido and Aeneas take shelter in the storm:

. . . fire and air did shine,
As guilty of the match; and from the hill
The nymphs with shriekings do the region fill.
Here first began their bane; this day was ground
Of all their ills; for now, nor rumour's sound,
Nor nice respect of state, moves Dido ought;
Her love no longer now by stealth is sought.
(Jonson 2012: 5.2.65-71)

This is a Virgil we can recognize as classical. Not that one would mistake it for Dryden or Pope – there is no playfulness; it has a formality and stiffness that are part of the Jonsonian sense of authority. But in 1601, on Jonson's stage, Virgil no longer sounds early-modern.

Jonson himself reveals that he was not the catalyst. In the first act of *Poetaster*, Ovid recites one of his *Amores*. The lines Jonson gives him are the translation done a decade earlier by Marlowe. Marlowe's *Ovids Elegies* – the first translation into English – had been published surreptitiously in 1599, in a volume with Davies's epigrams. The book had been banned and burnt by the Bishop of London, though the objections may have been to the libelous Davies, not the scurrilous Marlowe. But Marlowe – notorious atheist, sodomite, counterfeiter – was already the classical benchmark. His Ovid was in pentameter couplets: for Jonson in 1601, that was the prosody of classical poetry, not Phaer's hexameters, Golding's heptameters; least of all Surrey's blank verse. What Surrey had provided for Jonson was a model not for classical ep-

ic, but for the play itself, dramatic dialogue – poetry comes in couplets, but speech on the English stage, starting in the 1560s, and from the 1580s on, is predominantly blank verse.

Here, for comparison with the *Aeneid* samples, is Golding's *Metamorphoses*. In Book 10, Venus learns of the death of Adonis:

> Dame Venus in her chariot drawn with swans was scarce arrived
> At Cyprus, when she knew afar the sigh of him deprived
> Of life. She turned her cygnets back, and when she from the sky
> Beheld him dead, and in his blood beweltred for to lie:
> She leapèd down, . . .
> (Golding 1584: 146)

Rhythmically secure, it reads aloud impressively (Ezra Pound called it the most beautiful book in English), and though it seems to speak with the voice of a much earlier era, it was in fact written within Marlowe's lifetime.

2.

The refiguring of the classics into English was not a novelty, and it did not begin with Surrey. The enduring prestige of translation in England may be gaged by Chaucer's claim that his *Troilus and Criseyde* is not original, but derives from the work of a mythical Lollius. The fictitious Roman author provides a degree of authority that would be missing from the citation of Chaucer's real source, Boccaccio's *Filostrato* – contemporary, not ancient; Italian, not Latin. A more puzzling example may indicate the prestige of specifically English translation: Marie de France claimed to have translated Aesop not from the Greek, but from a version in Old English by Alfred the Great – no trace of this work, nor any other reference to it, survives (see Gillespie 2011: 6).

But pervasive as the translation of the classics was, it was neither systematic nor comprehensive. Here are the highlights up to 1600, including a few surprises. The sole surviving Anglo-Saxon example is a Boethius from the ninth or tenth century. Boethius is also the only classical author Chaucer translated, if we except

the mysterious Lollius, though Chaucer was obviously thoroughly familiar with Ovid. The only English Cicero before the sixteenth century is Caxton's translation of *De Senectute* from a French version, and the only Ovid Caxton's *Metamorphoses*, a prose translation also based on a French prose version, which survives in a single ms and was never published – did Caxton not consider it marketable? A selection from Horace in fourteener couplets appeared in 1567; up to that point there was only a single Horace poem in English. The ten tragedies ascribed to Seneca were translated in the 1560s and 1570s; most of these, like the Horace, were in fourteener couplets. The first bits of Tacitus did not appear until 1591. Marlowe's translation of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* appeared in 1600, seven years after his death and the year after his Ovid's *Amores* – the Lucan alone of all the English classics was in Surrey's blank verse. Often translation was in the service of the teaching of Latin. Abraham Fleming's version of Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* was published in 1575 and again in 1589, as he says in a preface, "for the profit and furtherance of English youths desirous to learne, and delighted in poetrie . . . , not in foolish rime . . . but in due proportion and measure . . . that yoong Grammar boyes, may euen without a schoolemaister teach themselves by the help thereof" (1589: sig. A4v). Fleming's "due proportion and measure" is unrhymed fourteeners. It is quite literal, and scrupulously places in brackets words that have been included either to satisfy the demands of English grammar or to fill out the meter. And although Terence was part of the academic curriculum both in the classroom and in performance, the only translation of the plays was Nicholas Udall's *Floures for Latine spekynge selected and gathered oute of Terence, and the same translated in to Englysshe, together with the exposition and settynge forthe as welle of suche latyne wordes, as were thought nedefull to be annoted, as also of dyuers grammatical rules, very profytable [and] necessarye for the expedite knowledge in the latine tongue*, published in 1534, and in editions throughout the century – the Flowers are taken from three plays, *Andria*, *Eunuchus*, and *Heautontimorumenos*; and as the title indicates, the volume offers only renderings of exemplary bits of dialogue. Terence here was a model not for comedy, but for Latin conversation.

Figure 1 is one of the surprises: in 1588, William Byrd published a setting of a bit of Ovid's *Heroides*, the opening eight lines of Penelope's epistle to Ulysses, translated by an anonymous poet into English quantitative measures. Byrd understood the scansion perfectly, setting long syllables to minims and short syllables to crochets. The music even corrects three errors in the metrics.[6]

Figure 1: "Constant Penelope," from William Byrd, *Psalms, Sonnets and Songs of Sadness and Piety*, 1588. The metrical corrections are outlined. Photo courtesy of Professor Philip Brett.

And another surprise: a single epigram of Martial's, translated into English and Welsh, appeared in 1571 on a broadsheet, presumably to be sold as ballads were. The next Martial in English was not published till 1629. There was no Catullus until Jonson's *Volpone* attempted to seduce Celia with a translation of *Vivamus mea Lesbia* in 1606; no Lucretius until the 1650s, no Tibullus until 1694,

6 For a full discussion, see Orgel 2015.

and not even a Latin text of Propertius until 1697. The first British *Aeneid*, translated by Gavin Douglas into Scots dialect in 1513 (not published till 1553) had been in loose pentameter couplets, a striking premonition; but as anomalous for the English tradition for most of the century as it was for the Scots.

The Greek classics, not surprisingly, got a later start. Of the major prose works, the first English Thucydides appeared in 1550, Herodotus in 1584; the only prose translation popular enough to appear in multiple editions was the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, which was first published in 1569, and reissued six times by 1627. Of verse, the first Theocritus translation, published anonymously in 1588, is, like most of the Latin translations, in either hexameter or fourteener couplets, with the last of the idylls in trimeter couplets. The only attempt at dramatic translation, aside from Gascoigne's Euripidean *Jocasta* (of which more presently), was Jane, Lady Lumley's prose version of Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis* in the 1550s – this was, of course, unpublished. Thomas Watson's Latin *Antigone* appeared in 1581. Chapman's *Iliad*, published beginning in 1598, is in the usual fourteener couplets; by 1616, for the *Odyssey*, he had switched to pentameter couplets. The standard had again been set by Marlowe, with his superb version of Musaeus's *Hero and Leander*, pentameter couplets like his Ovid – by the turn of the century this was the voice of English classicism; though it has to be added that Marlowe's little epic is not very much like Musaeus's, even with Chapman's dutiful continuation. Nevertheless Chapman, returning to the poem in 1616 to produce a proper translation (the title page declares it "*Translated* According to the Ori*ginall*"), casts it in pentameter couplets.

In short, the only poets interested in Surrey's blank verse were the dramatists, starting in the 1560s, but (judging from what survives) not regularly till late in the century – the mid-century academic plays based on Plautus and Terence, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, *Ralph Roister Doister*, *Jack Juggler*, make no attempt to be stylistically classical. Subsequently, with the single exception of Marlowe's Lucan, blank verse was useful only for dramatic dialogue: as a version of classical verse it served for Seneca in *Gorboduc* (the first English play in blank verse); for Euripides in *Jocasta*, Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh's version of *The*

Phoenician Women; for Plautus in *The Comedy of Errors*, Terence in *The Taming of the Shrew* (in both cases liberally interspersed with couplets, and in *Errors* at one point with old-fashioned hexameters); and for English drama of the period generally, for Kyd, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, producing an English classic theatre. But never for English Virgil, Ovid, Homer – that required another kind of 'classical'.

English epics, moreover, significantly, were nothing like any of these: the stanzaic verse of Spenser, Harington's Ariosto, Drayton, Daniel, derived from the Chaucer of *Troilus*, from Rhyme Royal, and from Ariosto, Boiardo, Tasso. The classics they recalled were those of the romance tradition; and even those had started to sound unnatural by the late seventeenth century. In 1687 an anonymous "Person of Quality" (now presumed to be Edward Howard; see Bradner 1938) brought *The Fairy Queen* up to date, as the title page advertised, with Spenser's "Essential Design preserv'd, but his obsolete Language and manner of Verse totally laid aside. Deliver'd in Heroick Numbers" (An. 1687). The heroic numbers were, by now inevitably, pentameter couplets. Milton, a century after Surrey, was still bucking the tide in declaring blank verse to be the natural language of English epic poetry.

3.

If these examples give us some sense of what the classical sounded like in Elizabethan and Stuart England, what did the classical look like? To us, the classical looks like the Venus de Milo or the Apollo Belvedere – these are real ancient statues, but the idea of the classical they embody is the one that Michelangelo's Renaissance created, which only reached England two centuries later in the era of William Kent and Robert Adam, subsequently filtered through the aesthetic theories of Winckelmann and enshrined in the Elgin Marbles: white, pure, thoroughly idealized. But even the Elgin Marbles, if you look closely, give the show away: they have traces of pigment on them. In their original state, they were painted to look lifelike, and recent reconstructions of ancient sculpture show

them looking more like waxworks than like art.[7]

I think most of us would agree that such reconstructions look awful – from our standpoint, the ancients paid a heavy price for authenticity. And though the Italians knew that the statues they were digging up had once been coloured, nobody ever proposed painting the David to look lifelike – the rebirth of the classical was always profoundly revisionary. Still, a pediment of the Philadelphia Art Museum, completed in 1928, has its deities in full color, an attempt at how the Parthenon really looked.[8] The gods are a little stiff – Philadelphia had no Phidias – but from afar, the group is elegant and convincing enough. This is certainly classical in spirit; it suggests to us, however, not the Parthenon but a much less animated version of Raphael in the Farnesina, or Giulio Romano in the Palazzo Te – that is, not at all classical, entirely of the Renaissance.

The seventeenth-century's classical was, moreover, far more capacious than this. The greatest collection of classical remains in Stuart England was the Arundel Marbles – the Earl and Countess, over three decades, formed a magnificent art collection, including both ancient and modern works. Their collection, however, was really not what we would call an art gallery. The Arundel Marbles seem to us the forerunners of the Elgin Marbles; but they looked quite different to contemporary observers. Arundel's protégé Henry Peacham in *The Complete Gentleman* (1634) praises the statues in terms that are indicative: there is nothing about ideal Greek bodies or perfect proportion or *contrapposto*; they bring the past to life – what they give the observer, he says, is "the pleasure of seeing and conversing with these old heroes . . ."; moreover, "the profit of knowing them redounds to all poets, painters, architects, . . . and by consequent, to all gentlemen" (1634: 110-12). As for Arundel House, Peacham calls it "the chief English scene of ancient inscriptions . . ." (ibid.). It is rather startling to us to take up John Selden's book entitled *Marmora Arundelliana* and to find in it not depictions of sculptures but pages like the one in *figure 2*

7 For a plethora of examples, google 'Classical statues painted'.

8 A colour photo of the pediment is at https://www.philamuseum.org/collections. (Accessed 23 November 2018).

(1629: 53). Peacham continues, "You shall find all the walls of the house inlaid with them and speaking Greek and Latin to you. The garden especially will afford you the pleasure of a world of learned

Figure 2: An illustration from John Selden, Marmora Arundelliana, 1629.

lectures in this kind" (112). A world of learned lectures: the classical languages have become an aristocratic touchstone, and the collecting passion was not simply aesthetic. It also involved a profound interest in recovering and preserving the past, an education in history; and classical connoisseurship has become the mark of a gentleman, who is here identified with the artist, marked as much by his taste as by his lineage. Such a claim involves quite a new notion of both gentleman and artist. In 1629, the year in which Selden published the *Marmora Arundelliana*, Rubens wrote from London to a friend in Paris of "the incredible quantity of excellent pictures, statues, and ancient inscriptions which are to be found in this Court" – the inscriptions are mentioned in the same breath as the works of art. His highest praise was reserved for one of Arundel's sculptures: "I confess that I have never seen anything in

the world more rare, from the point of view of antiquity" (Magurn

Figure 3: The Arundel Marbles: a tomb sculpture, from Humphrey Prideaux, *Marmora Oxoniensia, ex Arundellianis...*, 1676, p. 77.

1955: 320-1). As the last bit suggests, to collectors like Arundel and artists like Rubens, a primary value of the visual and plastic arts was their memorializing quality, their link to the past and the vision of permanence they implied. This is why Peacham emphasizes the importance and rarity not only of the statues but of the inscriptions: they were an essential element of the artistic power of the past. The word established the significance, the authority, of classical imagery; and modern masterpieces, the work of Giambologna, Michelangelo, Rubens, existed in a direct continuum with the arts of Greece and Rome.

They would not have seemed so to our eyes: look at some of the Arundel sculptures. Many of the figural works are tomb effigies, like the one in *figure 3*, or votive images like those in *figure 4*, from the illustrated catalogue of the marbles after they had passed from the Arundels to the University of Oxford – for us, these are archeology, not art (Prideaux 1676: 77, 82-3). But to an England in search of the classical world, they were a real link with the life of the past, especially through its death.
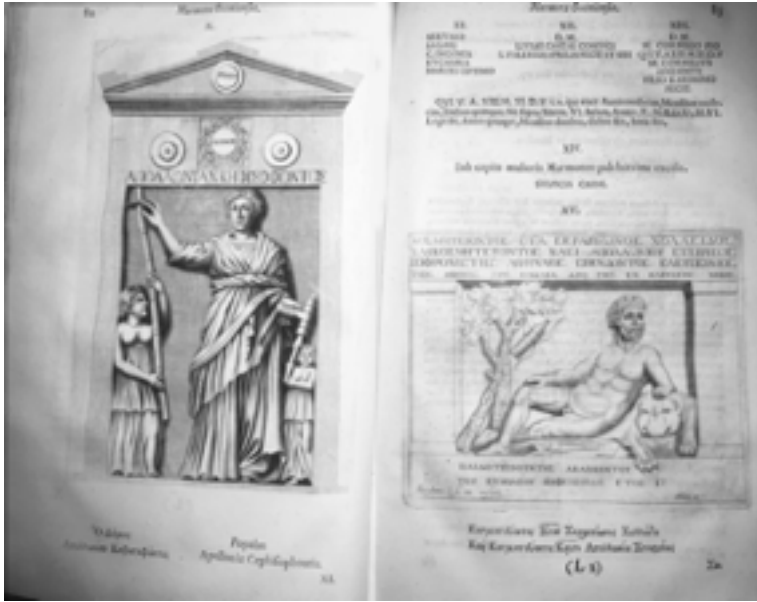
Figure 4: Votive images, from Prideaux, *Marmora*, pp. 82-3.

Moreover, the mythographers and iconographers admitted in-
to the classical pantheon a host of hybrid figures who appear to
us not at all classical, but merely grotesque. Vincenzo Cartari's
Imagini de i Dei de gli Antichi, a standard handbook for artists, in-
cludes many images like that in *figure 5*, of a hawk-headed Apollo
as the Sun with a three-headed Hecate as the moon (the heads are
a dog, a boar and a horse). In fact, classical religion was far more
strange and multifarious than classical poetry acknowledged, and
was never defined by the fixed pantheon found in literary texts,
to say nothing of purified mythology after Winckelmann, the my-
thology of Bullfinch and Robert Graves. The Olympian gods in
Virgil and Ovid are essentially engaged in domestic comedy; but
even for Ovid, the divine is a history of animal transformations
– Jove as a bull, a swan, an eagle – and even the Apollo myth be-
gins with the hero's defeat of a gigantic serpent, a divine python,
the remnant of an earlier cult which remained incorporated in-
to the worship of this most rational of the gods. This is the classi-
cal that Roberto Calasso (1988) describes, frightening, grotesque.

In late antiquity the Roman cults also imported the Egyptian gods, the dog-headed Anubis, the hawk-headed Horus and Ra, the ram-headed Khnum. The Renaissance felt no need to purge these as alien or inappropriate: the ancient gods to the sixteenth century constituted an endlessly malleable symbolic repertory. The classical was a mode of expression enabled by a pantheon of meaning.

Figure 5: Bolognino Zaltieri, Diana and Apollo as moon and sun, from Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagini dei Dei de gli Antichi*, 1571.

The meaning could be infinitely adjustable. Thus, Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, the most scholarly of the sixteenth-century mythogra-

phers, explains the figure of Saturn as variously a legendary king of Italy, a personification of heaven or of time, and a fertility figure – he sees no need to choose among these interpretations. Natalis Comes (or Conti), the most broadly influential of the mythographers after Boccaccio's pioneering *Genealogiae Deorum*, sees contradictions as of the essence in the ancient stories, not to be adjudicated or resolved. Comes, in fact, remains one of the most genuinely useful of the mythographers, precisely because of this – for Comes (as several centuries later for Lévi-Strauss) mythology is an expression of the irresolvable contradictions in culture.

4.

Let us return now to our literary texts. For most English readers, the classics were filtered through translation – necessarily in the case of Greek, which was less widely taught, but also in the case of Latin, despite the fact that Latin was taught throughout the school system, and that in so far as literature was taught, it consisted of the Latin classics. Nevertheless, there was an increasing market for translation: Latin literacy, and the refined taste it implied, did not descend very far down the social scale (remember Tottel deploring "the rude skill of common ears" – those ears belonged to a substantial proportion of the readers he was undertaking to attract). Sir Thomas More notoriously said he would rather burn his works than see them translated into English: they could then be read by the wrong people – both the uneducated, and those people who required vernacular translations of the Vulgate, Protestants. The wrong people, whether heretical or merely ignorant, were defined by their inadequate knowledge of Latin. But apparently even the literate classes needed help: the first translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Caesar's *Gallic Wars* were done from French versions, and the Greek classics posed even greater problems. I have already cited North's Plutarch, based on a French translation, and Chapman's Homer on a Latin one; but a more striking case is George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta*, a version of Euripides's *Phoenician Women*, the first Greek play to be translated into English and published. The authors do certainly purport

to be translating Euripides – their title reads, "Iocasta: A Tragedie writtein in Greeke by Euripides. Translated and digested into Acte, by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh . . . ", though in fact they are working quite faithfully from a recent Italian version by Lodovico Dolce.

Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh do not follow Dolce in one respect: Dolce says nothing whatever about Euripides – his *Giocasta* purports to be his own, though he acknowledges in a dedication that he has taken "le inventioni, le sentenze, e la testura" (the texture, the general feel) from the ancients, "dagli antichi" (1566: sig. A2r.). In fact, Dolce's indebtedness is far more complex than the English translators', and Euripides comes to him through several intermediaries. Dolce's Latin was fluent, but he knew little Greek. He used a recent Latin translation of *The Phoenician Women*, and his *Giocasta* is a free version of the play, omitting scenes and adding others, heavily reliant on Seneca's *Phoenissae*.[9] And while a fulsome dedication praises his patron's knowledge of Greek and Latin, there is no suggestion that he will recognize in *Giocasta* Euripides's (or Seneca's) *Phoenician Women*.

Perhaps all this implies is that Italian humanism felt more at home with the ancients than the British latecomers did, they saw themselves as part of a continuous tradition, and therefore more free to adapt and appropriate the classics. But by the end of the century, English writers like Marlowe, Chapman and Jonson (to say nothing of such programmatic classicists as William Gager and Thomas Watson) were quite at home with the ancient models, and not at all constrained by them – think of *Hero and Leander*. There probably were people as good at ancient Greek as Marlowe, but surely nobody had so much fun with it. But most Renaissance classicists worked the way Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh did, making use of translations and modern paraphrases to gain access to the ancient texts.

Our attitude towards that freedom has been on the whole condescending – we prize originality, and plagiarism has been a favourite charge of modern scholars against Renaissance classicism. Modern critics are usually willing to allow Renaissance

9 I have paraphrased the account by Papadopoulou 2008: 118.

authors their sources provided they are sufficiently ancient. If Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh had gone to Seneca for *Jocasta*, rather than to Lodovico Dolce, the fact probably wouldn't have been a strike against them. Even with classical sources, however, the idea of intermediate texts disturbs us. Here is a single example: E.W. Talbert, a scholar of Renaissance reference works, discovered that Ben Jonson's learned marginal annotations, such as those to *The Masque of Queens* and *Sejanus*, are often copied directly from dictionaries and encyclopedias. Talbert felt that Jonson's learning was thereby impugned. He accused the poet of lying when he claims, in the dedicatory epistle to the masque, that he wrote the work "out of the fullness and memory of my former readings".[10] To anyone who knew anything about Jonson, the accusation was nonsense – dozens of Greek and Latin texts from Jonson's library survive, with copious annotations in Jonson's hand; but as a poet constantly short of cash, he repeatedly sold off his books. When necessary, he used whatever reference works were available, including dictionaries and encyclopedias. Every age has its reference books, and a more scrupulous generation than ours may criticize us for failing to acknowledge our use of bibliographies and periodical indexes –to say nothing of Google and Wikipedia – as if we were thereby pretending to carry all the relevant scholarship in our heads.

England at the turn of the century, the England of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, was increasingly imbued with the classics – even visually, as aristocrats began adding colonnades to their houses (not always very effectively, as in the lumpish example at Hardwick Hall in *figure 6*, built in the 1590s for the formidable Bess of Shrewsbury), and churches began to look like Roman temples – *figure 7* is Wenceslas Hollar's view of St Paul's Covent Garden, designed by Inigo Jones. Books adopted the typography of Roman inscriptions for their dedications, as in *figures 8 and 9*. But the classical model was endlessly various: in the

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10 Talbert 1947: 622n52; see also the earlier article (1943). The argument was called to account by Percy Simpson in *Ben Jonson* 1925-52: 640. Talbert implicitly recants in Starnes and Talbert 1955: 212; but see the amusingly self-defensive piece of scholarly gobbledygook in note 69, p. 432.

Figure 6: Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire. Public domain photo.

Figure 7: Wenceslaus Hollar, Saint Paul's Covent Garden designed by Inigo Jones, c. 1647. Private Collection.

space of four or five years Shakespeare's version of Rome moved from "a wilderness of tigers" in *Titus Andronicus* (3.1.54) to the controlled rhetoric of *Julius Caesar*; his version of the *Menaechmi*

moved from the slapstick of *The Comedy of Errors* to the poetic
passion of *Twelfth Night*. Just as Renaissance Latin was a vernacu-
lar, the classical style was a mode of expression, based not on a set
of rules, but on a repertory of infinitely adaptable models.
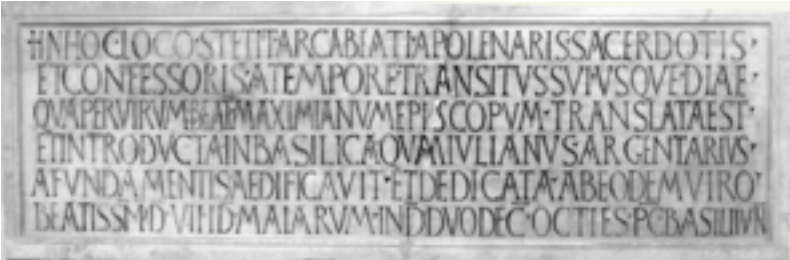
Figure 8: Late Roman inscription. Author's photograph.
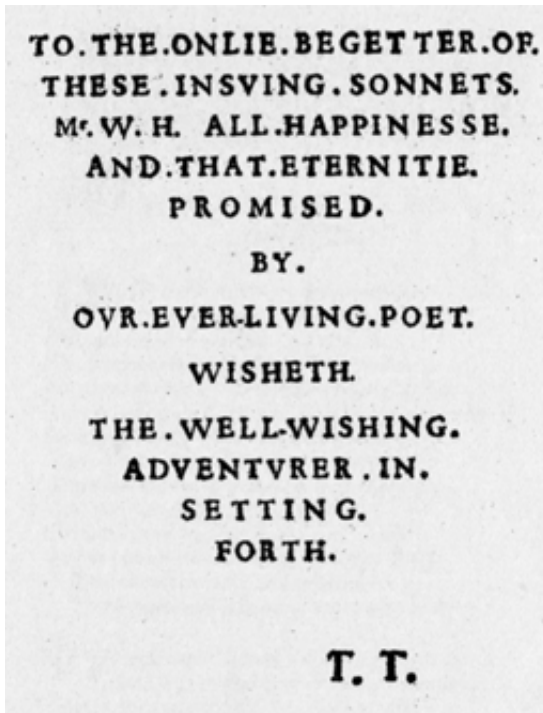
Figure 9: Dedication page of *Shake-Spears Sonnets*, 1609.

Let us look, in conclusion, at the astonishing remnant in *figure 10*, the only surviving drawing of a Shakespeare play from Shakespeare's lifetime. It looks like a scene from *Titus Andronicus*, but in fact it combines a number of actions, and gives a conspectus or epitome of the play as a whole – it is accompanied by a text that combines material from acts 1 and 5. This drawing is not an eye-witness sketch of Shakespeare on the stage; but it shows how a contemporary imagined Shakespeare in action, and is certainly informed by a theatregoer's experience. The costumes seem to us a hodgepodge, but they indicate the characters' roles, their relation to each other, and most important, their relation to us. A few elements are included to suggest the classical setting, but there is no attempt to mirror a world or recreate a historical moment. There is a Roman general at the centre, a medieval queen, two prisoners and their guard in outfits that are a mixture of Roman and Elizabethan; and the soldiers on the left are entirely modern.

Figure 10: Henry Peacham (?), a composite scene from Titus Andronicus, 1614. ©Reproduced by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire, Great Britain.

The anachronistic details serve as our guides, accounting for the figures and locating them in relation to our world. We are always told that the Renaissance stage performed history as if it

were contemporary, but an image such as this renders the claim untenable. On the contrary, the drawing provides a good index to the limitations on the imagination of otherness. Our sense of the other depends on our sense of its relation to ourselves; we understand it in so far as it differs from us, and conversely, we know ourselves through comparison and contrast, through a knowledge of what we are not – we construct the other as a way of affirming the self. The anachronisms here (and, indeed, throughout Shakespeare's drama), far from being incidental or inept, are essential; they are what locate us in history. The meaningful re-creation of the past requires the semiotics of the present. Anachronism is essential to the very notion of historical relevance itself, which assumes that the past speaks to, and is in some way a version of, the present. Sometimes it was a threatening version: hence Jonson's arrest over *Sejanus*, the suppression of the deposition scene in *Richard II*, the banning of John Hayward's *History of Henry the Fourth*. Nothing in the past is safely in the past, and the dark side of how productive classical models were was how dangerously pertinent they could also be.

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2

Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Ralegh's Classics: The Case of Sophocles

Carlo M. Bajetta

Abstract

Studies of influence are frequently based on source identification, and ultimately on the recognition of segments of text within the work of a given author. While this is perfectly legitimate in many cases, in a number of other occasions this may engender confusion and, possibly, error. This is particularly true of a period such as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which it is frequently difficult to understand whether a text was materially available to readers or not. This paper will focus on extra-textual elements and examine two test cases, that of Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Ralegh, which may prompt some useful considerations on the circulation of Sophocles during the period in which a large part of the members of Shakespeare's public were educated.

Keywords: Queen Elizabeth I; Sir Walter Ralegh; William Shakespeare; Sophocles; influence; sources; allusion; material texts; book history

When discussing books and readers in the early modern period it is hard to resist referring to *King Lear*, Shakespeare's bookless drama. The play, in fact, features the reading of a map and several letters. However, with the exception of the reference to the prognostications which Edmund pretends to have read (Shakespeare 2017: F 1.2; Scene 2.115-16) and of the naming of some lenders' records (Shakespeare 2017: F 3.4; Scene 11.4.77), no real book is ever mentioned.[1] The "Lear Universe" – to borrow G. Wilson Knight's ex-

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1 As Charlotte Scott has observed, the word 'book' occurs in thirty-six of Shakespeare's thirty-eight plays. Although it does not appear in *The Comedy*

pression – presents us with a philosophy "firmly planted in the soil of earth" (1978: 179), and with a world which has very little interest in printed or handwritten volumes. Onstage, after all, what matters is the verbal element. "What do you read my lord?"; Hamlet's famous answer in 2.2 to this is less elusive that we might think. Hamlet is indeed reading 'words': what counts is the text, not the book.

In many respects, this is not unlike the assumptions of much traditional scholarly practice: in order to understand what authors read, researchers look at their "words", their texts, and compare them to other sets of "words". Whether starting from Bakhtinian ideas of "dialogism" (or "heteroglossia"; cf. Bakhtin 1981) or from Julia Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality" (or her later concept of "transposition"; cf. Kristeva 1984), no matter how they rely on authorial intention as the trigger for the dynamics of use and recognition of a work (see e.g. Irwin 2001; Ricks 2002: 157), most studies of influence and allusion are ultimately dependant on the recognition of textual segments within the oeuvre of an author.[2] While in many cases this is perfectly legitimate, in a number of other occasions this may engender confusion and, possibly, error (sometimes magnified today by an inconsiderate use of digital resources). This is particularly true of a period such as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which indirect quotation and mediated references were common, and in which it is often difficult to understand whether a text was materially available to readers or not. Be as it may, the myth of the 'Renaissance Man' – a phrase, signif-

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of Errors and All's Well that End's Well, Scott claims that in these works "we still find traces of the semiotic affecting and emblazoning the book, upon the action" (2007: 5, 6). One may want to note that by "book" Scott means "a number of written articles, including a single page, a tablet, a manuscript, lettering, and the printed volume" (6).

2 On the convenience of using 'allusion' as a term (as opposed to terms such as 'echo', as in Hollander 1981; 'reference', and many others illustrated in Marrapodi 2007: 1-12) especially when applied to the Renaissance see Hamlin 2013: 77-124. See, however, also Miola 1988 and 1992. On adaptive imitation in the sixteenth century (and especially in Ben Jonson) see Burrow 2019. Burrow also provides what is probably the best definition of imitation to date: see esp. 33-4.

icantly, still in use today as a compliment – is hard to die. Even a cursory look at the modern scholarship on Shakespeare's allusions makes one feel the Bard of Stratford read many more books than an avid reader can dream of perusing in a lifetime.

This rather long reading-list always seems to be in the making. John Kerrigan (2018: 63-82) has recently added classical tragedies by Seneca, Euripides, and Sophocles – most noticeably *Oedipus at Colonus* via its Latin translation and adaptations – to the list of possible sources for *King Lear*.[3] Kerrigan's book certainly shows us the importance of considering the polyphony of the variations on a theme; but what about the reception of this play? Could an audience – at least, an educated audience – perceive such specific resonances of classical antiquity?

Rather than focusing on the circulation of ideas, this paper will focus on extra-textual elements. It will examine two test cases relating to the reception of Sophocles which can illustrate the circulation of printed and manuscript books at Court during the period in which a large part of Shakespeare's public was educated. The two figures in question, Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Ralegh, are, in a way, representative of the two ends of the Elizabethan (and, partly, Jacobean) courtly cultural milieu. One is the highly read, culturally sophisticated monarch, educated by the best intellectuals of the Tudor period; the other, the prototype of the parvenu courtier, the Oxford student who never took a degree, the inns of Court attendee who spent more time privateering at sea than studying law – who, nevertheless, amassed a substantial library and almost became the epitome of the learned historian.

1. "Greek every day": Elizabeth's Reading

Roger Ascham had little doubt: his pupil was better than most of her contemporaries:

> beside her perfect readiness, in Latin, Italian, French, & Spanish,

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3 For a recent survey of Shakespeare's attitude to the classics (and a useful critique of earlier studies on the topic, such as Baldwin 1944) see Burrow 2013. This volume also provides a very useful annotated bibliography (270-5).

she readeth here now at Windsor more Greek every day, than
some Prebendary of this Church doth read Latin in a whole week.
(1967: 56)

Ascham was not alone in his praise of Elizabeth. As Queen, she
was frequently complimented on her knowledge of the classical
languages, in England as well as on the continent, as witnessed
by texts as diverse as William Latimer's praise in his biography of
Anne Boleyn (cf. Latimer 1990), Celio Magno's 1558 letter and vers-
es (Bajetta and Coatalen 2018), and John Florio's remarks in his
Firste Fruites (1578: sig. C3v), as well as many others.

Under Ascham's tutorship, Elizabeth translated Demosthenes
and Isocrates from Greek into English and then back into Greek,
"for the space of a year of two", something that was done every
morning, while the afternoon was generally reserved to Cicero
(cf. Ascham 1967: 87). In one of his letters, Ascham claims she
also worked on Sophocles. "She has always begun the day",
Ascham claimed in a letter to Johan Sturm of 1550, "with the New
Testament in Greek, and then read selected orations of Isocrates
and the tragedies of Sophocles" (Ascham 1989: 167).

As a conclusion to their analysis of Elizabeth's translations of
the Greek sections of Boethius, which the Queen appears to have
translated with little help from the Latin versions, Janel Mueller
and Joshua Scodel conclude that "her youthful studies under
Ascham had equipped her . . . with a limited but genuine knowl-
edge" of Greek (Elizabeth I 2009: 25). This is certainly plausible;
still, there are no quotations from Isocrates listed in the 2000 edi-
tion of Elizabeth's *Collected Works*, which includes only one pos-
sible (and quite vague) allusion to Demosthenes (88). Textual ev-
idence shows that when she translated Plutarch she made use of
Erasmus's Latin version (Elizabeth I 2009: 10-12, 16). The editors
of the *Collected Works* identify a possible allusion to Sophocles
in a sentence from a speech of 1586: "I am so far from desiring to
live as that I think that person to be most happy which is already
dead" (Elizabeth I 2000: 187). This, however, is much more like-
ly to be a moralistic statement inspired by standard Christian pi-
ety rather than a learned quotation, which would probably have
been lost on her audience, the "committees of both Houses" of

Parliament (ibid.). As a matter of fact, the situation at the time – the discussion of the Petition urging the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots – was far too dramatic for allusions to drama.

One may want to look elsewhere to find concrete signals, if any, of Elizabeth's delight in Greek authors, and turn to material evidence. This is certainly no easy task. No contemporary list of the books and manuscripts preserved in the various Royal palaces between 1558 and 1603 is known to survive, even if Sir Thomas Knyvett had probably started a catalogue of "the New Librarie" (at Whitehall) in 1581 (Royal MS 17. B. XXVIII, fol. 128v; cf. also Jayne and Johnson 1956: 292). When the Old Royal Library was presented to the nation by King George II in 1757, and later hosted at the British Museum Library, it had already gone through many unfortunate vicissitudes. During the Commonwealth, books and manuscripts from several royal repositories were transferred to the chapel of St. James's Palace; it was at this stage that several books were lost, stolen or donated (and not sold, as at first decreed by the new government; see Birrell 1987: 1-2; Warner and Gilson 1921: 1.xx; Esdaile 1946: 243-6). In addition to this, sales of duplicates took place at various stages in the life of the library, the first occurring just after Prince Henry's death (1612), when Patrick Young, then Royal Librarian, eliminated numerous spare copies, which were mostly books from the Lumley collection (Jayne and Johnson 1956: xxii, 19). A significant loss for the library's holdings took place between 1769 and 1832 when, due to underfunding, a large proportion of duplicates were sold (Birrell 1987: 3).

Various rearrangements, some of which related the cataloguing process in the early nineteenth century, dispersed what must have been a part of Elizabeth's collection of printed books among the many volumes that are now located at the British Library. As Thomas Birrell – the last scholar to carry out a vast-scale investigation on this topic – observed, what is left of Elizabeth's books amounts to about 300 titles (1987: 25-6). Birrell found the contents of the non-English section rather predictable and dull. Quite intriguingly, though, practically none of the extant manuscript volumes known to have belonged to Elizabeth appear in the series of inventories that the librarians of the Old Royal library, John Durie and his successor Thomas Ross, drew up between 1661 and 1666

(Royal MS Appendix 86, on which see Esdaile 1946: 180), a significant exception being Royal MS 1 A IX, a Greek version of the Book of Daniel by Hugh Broughton. This may point to the fact that most of these volumes were stored separately and re-joined the collection later, something which may, at a later time, have occurred with the Royal maps (many of which, however, did appear in this list and suffered a very different fate: they were probably transferred back to the Whitehall 'private' library of the King at some stage, and probably perished in the fire of 1689 which destroyed almost the entire palace; cf. Wallis 1980: 466). Various books once in the possession of the Queen, in fact, have been identified as copies hosted by other libraries and archives scattered around the globe (cf. e.g., for some Greek, Latin and Italian materials, Bajetta 2001 and Petrina 2014: 100-1). What happened to the beautiful collection of books "well stored with Greek, Latin, Italian and French books . . . bound in velvet in different colours, though chiefly red" that Paul Hentzer (1757: 30-1) saw at Whitehall in 1598? The original extent and subsequent fate of Elizabeth's library will probably never be convincingly described. Indeed, both the contents and the *iter* of the collection of these books appear to be, as Birrell noted, "as elusive as the rest of her personality" (1987: 26).

While information on the real contents of Elizabeth's bookshelves is scarce indeed, we can form an idea of the nature of the books she owned via the various dedications we find in the manuscripts and printed volumes that were presented to her, as well as through the extant lists of the presents the Queen received on New Year's Day. The manuscripts offered to her on occasions such as her visits to Westminster, Eton or the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, for example, do feature a number of Greek texts (cf. Bajetta 2001). In 1566, to quote but an instance, upon entering the church of St Mary's at Oxford, Elizabeth saw "dyvers sheetes of verses in Lattyn, Greeke, & Ebrewe sett vppon the doores & walles", later to be copied into a collection as Cambridge had done two years earlier (cf. Cambridge University Library Add. MS 8915; Bajetta 2020). As Sarah Knight and Elizabeth Archer have observed, "if the University panegyrists continually praised Elizabeth's learning, they also showcased their own, and bombarded the Queen with words in various material and linguistic me-

dia" (Archer and Knight 2007: 14; see also Knight 2015: 21-40, in particular 24-5). These texts had decidedly self-celebratory overtones; for all their intention to impress with their learning, however, the manuscripts that the Schools and Universities donated to the Queen included more Latin than Greek. Granted that, as J.W. Binns observed, the latter language "was taught both at school and University throughout the period . . . sometimes in a patchy and intermittent fashion" (1978: 132), one wonders if these scholars were less naive than it may seem, and if their gifts were not tailored to their learned (but, all in all, not 'that' Greek-loving) recipient. After all, the Chancellors of the Universities of the Elizabethan period were influential courtiers such as The Earl of Leicester (Oxford) and William Cecil (Cambridge). The latter, in 1564, had sent a detailed letter of instructions to the University authorities concerning the Queen's visit (Nichols 2014: 1.380-1; for more on the state of Greek academic studies in this period see also below, note 18).

A source that has not received sufficient attention yet is the official lists of the presents that the Queen exchanged with her courtiers on New Year's day. As Steven May and Jane Lawson have demonstrated, the givers of these presents were persons who, with a few exceptions, were personally known to the Queen; many of them, in fact, enjoyed real courtier status, that is, had access to the Privy Chamber (cf. May 1999: 1-40, esp. 22; Lawson 2013: 1-2). Of the about ninety books given to her as New Year's gifts (Lawson 2013: 535-6), only two are in Greek ('Josephus in Greek', no. 59.199, and 'a Greek book', no. 64.98). These, interestingly enough, are early gifts, and no Greek text appears to have been donated by any courtier after the mid-1560s. If one compares this with the seventeen (or, possibly twenty) books in Italian she received, the difference is striking indeed.

As the New Year's gift lists show, Elizabeth's courtiers had a penchant for lavish and extravagant gifts. They would not be deterred by any difficulties in identifying (after all, most of their secretaries were university-educated men) and purchasing Greek books to donate to their Queen.[4] Her courtiers knew her: she did

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4 Christopher Hatton, to quote but an instance, once donated "a Coller of

not – by any means – favour Greek over Latin or the vernacular.

One may want to observe that if the *Sententiae* which are sometimes, based on rather tenuous evidence, attributed to Elizabeth are at all by her, they would just confirm such preference. Here, in fact, the Greek authors are practically all mediated via Latin translations (cf. Elizabeth I 2009: 331). Furthermore, the *Sententiae* draw freely from two well-known florilegia, Domenico Nani Mirabelli's *Polyanthea* (1503) and Thomas Hibernicus's *Manipulus Flores* (1306, printed twice in the 1490s, and later almost annually on the continent in the 1550s and the mid-1560s).[5] One hesitates to employ such evidence, however. In using this sort of ready-made commonplace books so liberally, Elizabeth would have been, in fact, utterly disregarding Ascham's precepts. Her former tutor had clear views on these: one should not "dwell in epitomes" (Ascham 1967: 107; cf. Elizabeth I 2009: 339). The fact that a Latin Demosthenes is used as a source in these texts, anyway, is yet another hint that these may not be by the Queen, who would have possessed, as seen before, at least a reasonable knowledge of this author, having translated it into English and back into Greek in her youth.

Be as it may, the evidence we have is that, at least after the mid-1560s, Elizabeth was not an avid reader of Greek.[6] As ob-

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gold Conteyninge xj peeces" so elaborate that its description runs for about eleven lines in the 1589 list (Lawson 2013: 386, no. 89.1). In fact, it seems at least one Greek scholar presented his work to the Queen. Edward Grant's presentation copy of his *Græcæ Linguæ Spicilegium* (1575), which features a beautiful gold-tooled binding and includes a letter to Elizabeth I offering her "this simple booke", is now in the British Library (shelfmark: C.80.a.20). William and Robert Cecil's secretariat provides a good example of the quality of their collaborators; cf. Barnett 1969; Smith 1968 and 1977. Another interesting instance is that of Walter Devereux, Earl of Essex, relating which see Hammer 1994 and 1999.

5 See the relevant entries in the *Universal Short Title Catalogue*. While the early editions were printed in Venice, these reprints appeared chiefly in Lyon and Antwerp. Ralegh owned a copy of Mirabelli's book; see below.

6 Interestingly, when Elizabeth visited Cambridge in 1564 "great preparacions . . . were imployed / and spent about the Tragedie of Sopohcles entytuled Aiax flagellifer in laten to be . . . played before her". The Queen, however, declined to attend the performance. This, however, might have been due

served above, had she appreciated it so much, her closest collaborators, such as, for example, Lord Burghley (who is known to have been a regular purchaser of books from the continent) and her chief favourites Leicester, Hatton, Ralegh or Essex, all men with good ties with the scholarly world, and some of them inveterate bibliophiles (cf. e.g. Beckingsale 1967: 250-1; Doran 2015: 331n5 and below) would have no doubt found a way to present their Queen with something worthy of her. While there was evidently no shortage of texts, however, none of the almost thirteen editions of Sophocles's tragedies in Greek printed in Europe between 1502 and 1603, seems to have ever reached the Queen's shelves.[7]

2. Sir Walter Ralegh's (Ivory) Tower

Sir Walter Ralegh certainly fits the description of a favourite and of a man with an interest in the classics. While introducing

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to her being "tyred with going about to see the colledges / and hearing of disputacions" and related to the fact that the show might have been declaredly long. A performance of a similar, though not identical, Latin text in 1605 prepared in honour of King James I lasted about four hours, which apparently irritated the King considerably; Nichols 2014: 1.432; see also Knight 2009. It should be added that the Greek manuscripts in the Royal collection dating from about this period are mostly copies of works presented by their authors or translators, who did not enjoy courtier status and who had no real knowledge of the Queen's preferences (e.g. her penchant for velvet bindings; see e.g. Royal MS 1 A XII, presented to the Queen by her chaplain John Bridges, Dean of Salisbury and later Bishop of Oxford). A good case in point is Royal MS 15 A III, a short 26-pages Latin translation of Plutarch's famous essay on how to profit by one's enemies (*De capienda ex inimicis utilitate*, as it is commonly known as through the Latin version in the *Moralia*) with a dedicatory letter, together with Greek and Latin epigrams by the Oxford scholar John Raynolds. In his preface, the latter states that he had addressed verses to the Queen on her visit to Oxford University eight years before (probably in 1566), and thanks the Queen for restoring his shipwrecked fortunes.

7 To these one should add about fifteen Latin editions; cf. the entries in the *Universal Short Title Catalogue*. No edition bound with Elizabeth's arms is listed in Morris and Oldfield 2012 or in the British Library database of bookbindings. No Sophocles was among the books dedicated to Elizabeth listed in Williams 1962 or Wilson 1966.

Edmund Spenser and his book to the Queen, however, he does not appear to have been the donor of any volumes to the English Gloriana himself. He was, nevertheless, a book lover: we are lucky to have a list of the contents of his library which he compiled in about 1607 (included in British Library Add. MS 57555; see Oakeshott 1968). Nicholas Popper has justly observed, this "should not be taken as a comprehensive catalog of his sources" (2012: 29n39; see also Oakeshott 1968: 292); in fact, we have evidence that Ralegh continued to collect items for his library in the following years. Some books which are not mentioned in this list were certainly in Ralegh's possession for a while: he owned, for example, the copy of Tasso's *Rime e prose* (2 vols, Ferrara, 1583), which is now at Yale, and one of Nicolas Vignier's *Theatre de L'Antechrist* ([La Rochelle], 1610).[8]

Ralegh was no doubt a gifted translator from the Latin poets and prose writers, but his Greek, if he knew any (see e.g. Popper 2012: 29), must have been very limited. While there are quotations from Greek writers in his works, he almost invariably made use of Latin versions. To quote but a few examples, Thucydides is quoted in Latin in Ralegh's *War with Spain* tract (1829: 8.305; interestingly, some small differences in comparison with the contemporary versions of this short passage suggest that this might have been quoted by heart). In a section of his *History of the World*, quite amusingly, Ralegh mentions Sophocles, but then goes on to quote from Horace (1614: 424; vol. 1, part 2, chap. 13, par. 4).

In his famous conversation with William Drummond, Ben Jonson observed that "the best wits of England were employed for making of his [Ralegh's] History" (Jonson 2012: 5.370). Some people could, in fact, have provided some precious help. Jonson himself claimed he had written "a piece to him on the Punic wars, which he altered and set in his book" (ibid.). John Aubrey once

8 Tasso's *Rime e prose* is in the Beinecke Library (shelfmark: 1975 380, with Ralegh's signature); Vignier's *Theatre* was sold at Sotheby's US on 12 April 2015, bought by Robert S. Pirie (1934-2015) of New York (Beal 2013: RaW 1037 and 1038), and later included in Magg's catalogue of September 2017. On the possible subsequent fortunes of Ralegh's library (which Sir Thomas Wilson tried to seize, allegedly, for the King) see Kew, National Archives, State Papers 14/103 fol. 126 and Beer 2015: loc. 4113-22.

remarked that Dr Robert Burhill, rector of Northwold, Norfolk, whom, he believed, had been Ralegh's "chaplayne", took on a great part of the "the drudgery of his Booke, for criticismes, chronology and reading of greeke and . . . Hebrew authors", while Serjeant John Hoskins (himself at least a part-time Greek scholar) played Ralegh's "Aristarchus" while he was a prisoner in the Tower in 1614, helping "to reviewe and polish Sir Walters stile" (Aubrey 2018: 2.1067). Such remarks, however, need to be taken *cum grano salis*. In fact, they all seem to point to the fact that some people provided the author with transcripts, notes and/or practical help, but not that they acted as his ghost-writers. To provide but an example, Ralegh's friend Thomas Harriot, the mathematician, produced some studies of population growth, which were certainly consulted, and some notes on the postdiluvian settlement of the world which, if consulted at all, were evidently 'not' used to compile the relevant section of the *History* (cf. Sokol 1974; Popper 2012: 32). The extent of Ralegh's reading and notetaking can be surmised from the copious number of holograph entries on historical places in his Tower notebook (British Library MS Add. 57555), many of which can be linked to the sources listed in the same manuscript. To this, one should add the important role vested by chronology in his *magnum opus*, which constituted, among other things, Ralegh's opportunity to vindicate his own orthodoxy after the accusations of atheism he was compelled to face in the 1590s (see Popper 2012: 77-122, esp. 94-100 and 130-4).

Ralegh could use some help, but this certainly came primarily from some of the books he used. He "repeatedly referred to a core of modern authors" including Abraham Ortelius and Joseph Scaliger "to substantiate his points" (cf. Popper 2012: 31-2). In addition to this, however, he seems to have favoured precisely what Elizabeth was told to avoid: compendia. In his 1607 list we find, in fact, a number of florilegia, including Mirabelli's *Polyanthea* and the *Mythologiae* of Natale Conti, or Natalis Comes as he was known internationally (Venice 1568, reprinted various times in the sixteenth century; Oakeshott 1968: 304, no. 141).

Interestingly, the latter was acknowledged as a source by Ralegh on two occasions in his *History of the World*. Michael Rudick, however, has singled out at least thirteen other plac-

es where Comes provides the source text for the verse transla-
tions we find in the History. To quote but two instances, Ralegh's
Callimachus, as well as what may otherwise seem to be a terri-
bly learned quotation from Athenaeus of Naucratis come from
this source (cf. Ralegh 1999b: no. 36.24 and 36.5). Incidentally,
one could note that Comes provided a rather substantial amount
of excerpts from Sophocles: the *Mythologiae* feature ten quota-
tions from this author, two of which are from *Oedipus at Colonus*
(Comes 1568: 2.1, sig. G1v and 3.10, sig. R3v).

3. Borrowing and Book Swapping

Both Elizabeth and Ralegh were known to be avid readers since
youth; still, the information we can gather on their libraries can
hardly be reconciled to their reputation as appreciators of lit-
erature (and in particular of poetry, which appears to be hard-
ly present on their bookshelves),[9] or the frequent erudite quota-
tions we find in their writings.[10] Certainly, access via other, now
untraceable, printed or manuscript sources or the use of compen-
dia may account for a number of such citations, and the probable
disappearance of a large portion of the volumes they once owned
should be taken into account. There is, however, another possible
and very simple way to access a text. One may want to remember
that in the Renaissance, just like now, people frequently borrowed
books.

9 Interestingly, a copy of Petrarch was, quite probably, owned by both; cf.
Popper 2012: 31 and below.

10 On Elizabeth see Ascham's (and his contemporaries') remarks, quoted
above, and Shenk 2010. John Aubrey's account of Ralegh's life clearly depicts
Ralegh as scholarly: "He studied most in his Sea-voyages, where he carryed
always a Trunke of Bookes along with him, and had nothing to divert him"
(Aubrey 2018: 1.231). It is Thomas Fuller's *History of the Worthies of England*,
however, that seems to sum up Ralegh's reputation in the seventeenth cen-
tury: "So we may say to the *memory* of this *worthy knight, repose your self
in this our Catalogue under what topick you please, of States-man, Sea-man,
Souldier, Learned Writer*, and what not? His worth *unlocks* our *closest cabinets*
and provides both *room* and *wellcome* to entertain him" (Fuller 1662: sig. 2M;
italics from this source).

Ralegh is certainly a good example of a man who, especially during his Tower years, obtained many items from other people's libraries and, as we would say today, swapped book with friends and relatives. As witnessed by a holograph letter written about 1610 (British Library, Cotton MS Julius C III, fol. 311; see also Ralegh 1999a: 319), he asked Sir Robert Cotton for thirteen, mostly historical, volumes (see Edwards 1868: 2.322-3). In turn, Sir Walter almost certainly lent Cotton a Portuguese manuscript, a copy of Roteiro de Dom Joham de Castro's *Da viagee que os Portugueses fizeram desa India*, now among the Cotton Manuscripts (MS Tiberius D. IX) as well as other texts.[11] He also lent books to some members of his family. A copy of Bernardino Rocca's *De' discorsi di guerra* (Venice, 1582) is listed among Ralegh's books (Oakeshott 1968, no. 507). The copy is now located at the Royal College of Physicians (Dorchester Library D 32 b/5); the title-page bears the signature of both Ralegh and his cousin, George Carew (1555-1629), Baron Carew of Clopton (cf. Beal 2013: RaW 1035). We have no evidence that this was a gift (Ralegh added his motto at the bottom of the same page), and Carew is not known to have obtained Ralegh's books after the latter's execution. It seems most probable, then, that he borrowed the *Discorsi*, which was never returned. Given such exchanges (and others which may have taken place; see Popper 2012: 29n39), there is every reason to suggest that Ralegh borrowed freely from his old friend and fellow prisoner in the Tower, Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, whose library featured works on topics which were certainly of great interest to the author of the *History of the World*: "architecture and

11 Samuel Purchas quite probably referred to this manuscript volume when mentioning one "reported to have beene bought by Sir Walter Raleigh, at sixtie pounds, and by him caused to be done into English, out of the Portugall"; see Beal 2013: RaW 1036l. As Beal notes, "Ralegh himself refers in The History of the World (II.iii.8) to 'the report of Castro, a principal Commander under Gama (which Discourse I gave Mr. Hacluit to publish)'". The possibility that Ralegh's friend, Sir Robert Cotton, could have owned a second (and obviously very expensive) contemporary Portuguese copy of this rare work is perhaps remote, whereas, on the contrary, some of Ralegh's MSS (e.g. RaW 692 and RaW 726) are known to have passed into Cotton's collection (Beal 2013: RaW 1036).

the art of war, philosophy and religion, geography and history, classical authors" as well as many standard "works of reference" (Batho 1960: 257).

These links are intriguing, and one may want to know more about these people's bookshelves. Percy, who had studied his classics, advised his son – notoriously – not to waste his time reading Greek (Percy 1930: 67); one has, therefore, little hope of finding many books in this language here: only one edition of Aristotle in Greek and Latin is listed in Batho (1960: 259). We cannot know which printed volumes were part of Cotton's library, since that part of the collection was dispersed. No Sophocles (apart from some 'verses' once included in a commonplace book; Tite 2003: 229), however, appears to have been part of the manuscript collection before the 1731 fire which destroyed part of it, as one can see from Thomas Smith's *Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecæ Cottonianæ* (1696).

At least one Greek manuscript, however, may not have been far from Ralegh's circle. Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.31 is a composite volume made up of sections copied in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, containing some of Sophocles's works: *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Turyn 1952: 150-1). The last leaf of this volume bears the name "Tho*mas* Throckmorton" in a sixteenth-century hand; while probably not Thomas the Elizabethan conspirator, this was almost certainly a relative of Sir Walter's spouse, Elizabeth Throckmorton. [12]

Moving back to the 'other' Elizabeth in Ralegh's life, the Queen, one may note that we have no incontrovertible evidence that she had access to the volumes in the Royal library in her youth. Later in life, however, she had at her disposal the large collection of books once belonging to Henry VII, which was hosted at Richmond until 1602, and to that of her father, hosted in the Jewel

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12 Possibly Sir Thomas Throckmorton (1539-1607); cf. Rowse 1962: 9, 190, and Broadway 2004. Rowse (190) points out that Arthur Throckmorton was a relative of the Underhills, and that it was from one of the Underhills that Shakespeare purchased New Place in 1597. Of course, speaking of any possible 'perusal' of this book on Shakespeare's part, however, would be pushing a distant relation too much.

Tower of Westminster Palace at least until 1600.[13] She quite clear-ly had a good relationship with Katherine Parr, and it seems rea-sonable to maintain that she could borrow books from her step-mother on several occasions. There were very important books in Henry VII, Henry VIII and Parr's collections (such as Alessandro Vellutello's edition of Petrarch) but not many Greek books were part of their libraries (cf. Birrell 1987; Carley 2004; Elizabeth I 2017: 2, 6-7n9).

Another very learned woman, however, was near Elizabeth in the early days of her reign. William Cecil's second wife, Mildred Cooke, was the daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, Edward VI's tutor. Not only could she read, translate and write Greek (as witnessed by a holograph letter she wrote to the fellows of St John's College, Cambridge and her version from Basil the Great's works) but she also cared about the diffusion of Greek language and culture. In 1587 she gave Christ Church, Oxford, eight volumes of Galen's works, and, on another occasion, a copy of the eight-volumes Polyglot Bible to St. John's in Cambridge.[14] Consulting the *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* database now available through the Folger Shakespeare Library website, one finds that Mildred, who served for a while as Lady of the Bedchamber to Elizabeth, owned a copy of Sophocles's tragedies in Latin and Greek, which she later donated to Westminster School (*PLRE*, Ad77.43; Allen 2013: 53n20).

It really seems Elizabeth read Greek when she had the com-pany of individuals she could share her reading experience with, people such as Roger Ascham and Mildred Cooke. Both, howev-er, were not with her by the late 1560s: Ascham, who had been in-termittently ill since 1560, died in 1568; Mildred had moved back to her husband's house soon after Elizabeth's coronation.[15] Her cour-

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13 Carley 2004: 21, 25. Elizabeth donated some books from Henry VIII's collection to Burghley (55), and to other people including Sir John Fortescue, her former tutor and cousin (145).

14 Mildred Cooke-Cecil's translation of a sermon of Basil the Great from the Greek (1550) is now British Library, Royal MS 17. B. XVIII, and her let-ter in Lansdowne MS 104, fol. 158. On her books see Bowden 2005. See also Allen 2013: 39-40.

15 Cf. Ryan 1963: 222-40. Mildred served as Gentlewoman of the Privy

tiers possibly knew this, and avoided presenting her with Greek books after the end of the decade.

Ralegh had people around him (much closer to him than a distant relative of his wife's) who possessed at least a particular Latin version, or better, re-working, of Sophocles: Seneca's *Oedipus*. One was Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644), a man whose career seemed to mirror (with better fortune) that of Ralegh himself, having been educated at Oxford and the Middle Temple and later appointed an esquire of the body to Queen Elizabeth I in 1601. Just like Ralegh, he had befriended poets and intellectuals, including John Donne (cf. Parfitt 1989: 47, 115; Strachan 2004). Ralegh and Roe, incidentally, had an acquaintance in common: the dramatist Ben Jonson – whose library, though, did not include any Sophocles, at least before 1626.[16] Jonson belonged to the happy few: the *PLRE* database lists only thirteen copies of Sophocles (in both Latin and/or Greek) in English booklists before this date.

The existence of a copy of Seneca's works in Roe's library is only partially relevant to the fortunes of Sophocles in this period: Seneca's *Oedipus* and his *Thebais*, in fact, had been translated by Alexander Neville and Thomas Newton respectively in 1563 and 1581 (see Kerrigan 2018: 65). "By the time of *Hamlet*", moreover, "there existed over fifty printings of the collected tragedies in various editions" (Miola 1992: 1). Roe's entourage, nevertheless, is worth exploring. In 1610 he led an expedition to Guyana, which he financed in partnership with Ralegh and Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton (Lorimer 1989; Strachan 1989: 25-6; see al-

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Chamber Extraordinary in 1558 – that is, being one of the Queen's close associates she served as unpaid Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber "sharing the same responsibilities and duties as the paid Gentlewoman, but without a salary" (Kinney and Lawson 2014: 25, 205).

16 Roe owned a copy of Seneca's *Opera Omnia*, cf. *PLRE*: 274.4. On Jonson's books see McPherson 1974; Evans 1987 and 1989; Duroselle-Melish, 2016 which lists two new books at the Sorbonne University Library, Paris, including Jonson's copy of a Parisian edition of Latin and Greek tragedies published in 1626. The twenty-seven Greek manuscripts that Roe donated to the Bodleian Library c.1628 (which he probably acquired during his two embassies in India and Turkey starting from 1617/8) are all theological or related to the scriptures; cf. Madan and Craster 1922: 10.

so Strachan 2004). Southampton had met Ralegh earlier, during the Azores expedition of 1597,[17] and had later occasion to see him again in early 1598, when Ralegh and Essex were both enjoying the friendship of Sir Robert Cecil and were feasting him with plays and dinners on repeated occasions before his departure for France (cf. Rowse 1962: 210; Lacey 1970: 206-7; Strachan 1989: 25). The fact that Southampton had been part of Essex's rebellion did not impede his participation in the 1610 venture with Ralegh. The past mattered relatively little at this stage: after all, the three noblemen evidently had an interest (in all senses) in exploration. Roe and Southampton, in fact, were both actively involved in the East India Company, and both sat in the Royal Council for Virginia (Strachan 1989: 15-18).

Southampton, Ralegh and Roe had all been courtiers of Elizabeth (even if Roe may have started frequenting the Court much later; Strachan 1989: 4-5). They were known for their cultural interests, and were or had all been, patrons of writers: Ben Jonson was a common acquaintance and John Donne may have been one (cf. Strachan 1989: 3 and 2004; Donaldson 2012: 120-1, 139-40 and note 17 here). Did they ever discuss the books they were reading? Was there a circulation of texts which may have been extended to their mutual connections? There is, unfortunately, no way of knowing this. In fact, instead of jumping to any conclusions (especially concerning Shakespeare; cf. Burrow 2013: 246-7) what has been seen so far may prompt some considerations on the topic of influence and 'source hunting'.

4. (Almost) A Conclusion

This paper has suggested that Elizabeth's enjoyment of Sophocles, and possibly of Greek in general, may have been linked to the company of some individuals who had a good knowledge of this language, and that, consequently, her appreciation of Greek literature may have dwindled after the first decade of her reign. Some

17 One may want to remember, incidentally, that John Donne had joined both the Cadiz and the Azores (or 'Islands') voyages and had written poems and epigrams related to these; see Bald 1970: 82-3, 91.

members of her Court, instead, may have had access to Sophocles in the original only through relatives, friends or acquaintances. In general, however, copies of his works in Greek, and even Latin translations 'proper' were demonstrably quite rare in these milieus, while various compendia and Seneca's reworkings were certainly more readily available to them (the latter both in the original and in translation).[18] While one should not make too much of this *per se*, it seems clear that, when combined with more bibliographical research and detailed studies of contemporary allusions (in a far more exhaustive way than the limited space of these few pages can allow), evidence of this kind could be of great help to ascertain the concrete extent of the circulation of Sophocles in this period.

As a matter of fact, bibliography and influence studies can be powerful allies: they can become the tools for a philology of culture which can help critics to form a realistic attitude regarding the dynamics of allusion and reception. Possibly, the reference with which this paper started could be a memento for all of those who 'go hunting' for sources. *King Lear* is a bookless play, but it is a play of ideas. Just as ideas circulate, books circulate, and the mapping of such circulation can be crucial. When we can trace how ideas and books circulate together there is no division of the kingdom, but rather concordance of evidence – and the map we can draw from this is the much more cheerful map of our discoveries.

18 No matter what Ascham told his former fellow student Richard Brandisby in 1542 ("Sophocles and Euripides are now better known here [at Cambridge] than Plautus was when you were here", Ascham 1989: 32), Sophocles was quite certainly known in the original to a limited number of university students in this period, and the situation did not change for well over a decade. The same seems to be true for Westminster and St. Paul's schools, where "The study of Greek . . . between 1530 and 1560 was probably more of an aspiration, rather than fact" (Adams 2015: 62). Greek acquired more prestige and was taught more consistently by the 1570s (see e.g. Adams [n.d.] and 2015: 115-20; Lazarus 2015: 453-4; Brockliss 2016: 122-3; 236-40), which in fact corresponds roughly with the revival of the printing of classical texts at the University presses and in England in general; see McKitterick 1992: 44, 58-72; and Demetriou and Pollard's detailed survey relating to Greek drama in particular (2017: 1-35, esp. 16-18).

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Part 2
Oedipus

3

Revisiting *Oedipus at Colonus*

Laura Slatkin

Abstract

This essay pursues the perennial question raised by *Oedipus at Colonus*: what to do about and with Oedipus. In previous work I explored the play as navigating the possible assimilation of the past by the *polis*; this essay offers a different consideration: the play's enactment of active revisiting, and revising, of the past (including Oedipus's status as parricide), not least through a kind of juridical inquiry undertaken by both Oedipus and the chorus. I conclude by suggesting that in *OC*, Oedipus appears ultimately not as a challenge to the political but as the a priori of.

KEYWORDS: benefit; chorus; polis; metic; Eumenides; anger; political

Many years ago I wrote a short article on *Oedipus at Colonus*, at the invitation of the political theorist Peter Euben, for a collection of papers in a volume entitled, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Slatkin 1986).[1] My contribution was written in the context of the principal scholarly concerns of that moment, which had primarily to do with the ending of the play – specifically the heroization of Oedipus and the establishment of his cult.[2] In the pages that follow, I would like to sketch, in a preliminary way, some additional questions the play raises.

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1 My thinking about the play was originally launched by Pat Easterling's article, "Oedipus and Polynices" (1967), and has been indebted to her illuminating scholarship ever since. This essay is for her.

2 See, among others, Edmunds 1981, and Birge 1984. For a discussion of earlier researches on Oedipus as cult hero, including Festugière 1975, Winnington-Ingram 1954, see Lardinois 1992.

My earlier discussion focused on the question of how to understand the unspecified benefit that Oedipus announces he will provide to Athens, before Ismene ever arrives to tell him that the oracle has prophesied that his tomb will have cult power (ἥκω γὰρ ἱερὸς εὐσεβής τε καὶ φέρων / ὄνησιν ἀστοῖς τοῖσδ᾽. . .).[3] In that essay, I suggested that the benefit Oedipus will confer is that which he offers the Athenians while he is alive – not after he is dead: namely, the opportunity, by rescuing him, to live up to their reputation as *xenodokoi* and protectors of the vulnerable, hospitable to the beleaguered stranger:

> . . . ἱκνοῦμαι πρὸς θεῶν ὑμᾶς, ξένοι,
> ὥσπερ με κἀνεστήσαθ᾽, ὧδε σώσατε,
> καὶ μὴ θεοὺς τιμῶντες εἶτα τοὺς θεοὺς
> μοίρας ποιεῖσθε μηδαμῶς: ἡγεῖσθε δὲ
> βλέπειν μὲν αὐτοὺς πρὸς τὸν εὐσεβῆ βροτῶν,
> βλέπειν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς δυσσεβεῖς, φυγὴν δέ του
> μήπω γενέσθαι φωτὸς ἀνοσίου βροτῶν.
> ξὺν οἷς σὺ μὴ κάλυπτε τὰς εὐδαίμονας
> ἔργοις Ἀθήνας ἀνοσίοις ὑπηρετῶν.
> (275-83)

> [. . . I implore you by the gods, strangers; just as you raised me up, even so preserve me, and in no wise honour the gods, but then consign them to darkness! But believe that they look upon the mortal who shows reverence, and look upon the impious, and that no unholy fellow has ever yet escaped! With their aid do not cloud the fame of fortunate Athens by lending aid to unholy actions]

That essay tried to think about what it meant to dramatize the *polis* accepting the living Oedipus: for the play to represent the crucial dialogue, *qua* dialogue, as the exchange between Oedipus and the chorus (the demesmen of Colonus as representing Athens); that is, for Oedipus to need to make his case to the citizens first of all – rather than, first of all, to the leader.

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3 *Oedipus Coloneus* 287-88 ("I come sacred and reverent, and I bring advantage to the citizens here"). Text and translations are by Lloyd-Jones (Sophocles 1994a).

ἀλλ᾽ ὥσπερ ἔλαβες τὸν ἱκέτην ἐχέγγυον,
ῥύου με κἀκφύλασσε: μηδέ μου κάρα
τὸ δυσπρόσοπτον εἰσορῶν ἀτιμάσῃς,
ἥκω γὰρ ἱερὸς εὐσεβής τε καὶ φέρων
ὄνησιν ἀστοῖς τοῖσδ᾽: ὅταν δ᾽ ὁ κύριος
παρῇ τις, ὑμῶν ὅστις ἐστὶν ἡγεμών,
τότ᾽ εἰσακούων πάντ᾽ ἐπιστήσει: τὰ δὲ
μεταξὺ τούτου μηδαμῶς γίγνου κακός.
(284-91)

[. . . as you received the suppliant under a pledge, so protect and
guard me, and do not dishonour me when you behold my unsight-
ly face! For I come sacred and reverent, and I bring advantage to
the citizens here; and when the man with power comes, whoever
is your leader, then he shall hear and know all; but until then do
you by no means be cruel!]

Among the first of his many questions about the place to which
he has come, Oedipus asks his first interlocutor, identified as
the *xenos*,[4] "Does someone rule the people, or do the people (the
plêthos) have the say?"[5] (66: ἄρχει τις αὐτῶν, ἢ 'πὶ τῷ πλήθει
λόγος;); to which the *xenos* replies, "This place is ruled by the
king in the city" (67: ἐκ τοῦ κατ᾽ ἄστυ βασιλέως τάδ᾽ ἄρχεται).
Oedipus's question raises the question of political form, and im-
plicitly establishes a horizon, so to speak, for the chorus to func-
tion as the *plêthos* or *dêmos* over the course of the play.

Oedipus challenges the chorus's conventional piety and asks
them to reconsider their assumptions about him, which are based
on his reputation. Proud of their name and frightened by his
name, the Athenians are asked to come to terms with the dispar-
ity between what is said about them (their noble reputation) and
who they show themselves to be – based on the mirror image
(or inverse symmetry) of coming to terms with the disparity be-
tween what is said about him and who he in fact is. Consider how
Oedipus addresses the chorus regarding the discrepancy between
their reputation and their hostile reception of him:

4 Notably, the local citizen is the *xenos*, rather than Oedipus, as we might
have expected.
5 Slightly modified by the author.

τί δῆτα δόξης ἢ τί κληδόνος καλῆς
μάτην ῥεούσης ὠφέλημα γίγνεται,
εἰ τάς γ᾽ Ἀθήνας φασὶ θεοσεβεστάτας
εἶναι, μόνας δὲ τὸν κακούμενον ξένον
σῴζειν οἴας τε καὶ μόνας ἀρκεῖν ἔχειν;
κἄμοιγε ποῦ τοῦτ᾽ ἐστίν, οἵτινες βάθρων
ἐκ τῶνδέ μ᾽ ἐξάραντες εἶτ᾽ ἐλαύνετε,
ὄνομα μόνον δείσαντες; οὐ γὰρ δὴ τό γε
σῶμ᾽ οὐδὲ τἄργα τἄμ᾽· ἐπεὶ τά γ᾽ ἔργα μου
πεπονθότ᾽ ἐστὶ μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα.
(259-67)

[What help comes from fame, or from a fine reputation that flows
away in vain, seeing that Athens, they say, has most reverence for
the gods, and alone can protect the afflicted stranger, and alone
can give him aid? How is this the case with me, when you have
made me rise up from these ledges and are driving me away, sim-
ply from fear of my name?]

In this sense they can recover and make good on what is said
about them by refusing (to accept) what is said about him (that
he is a polluted criminal) – instead, they are invited to see him
for what he is, as Oedipus himself strenuously presents himself.
Here we have Oedipus stringently and passionately accounting for
himself:

            . . . οὐ γὰρ δὴ τό γε
σῶμ᾽ οὐδὲ τἄργα τἄμ᾽· ἐπεὶ τά γ᾽ ἔργα με
πεπονθότ᾽ ἴσθι μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα,
εἴ σοι τὰ μητρὸς καὶ πατρὸς χρείη λέγειν,
ὧν οὕνεκ᾽ ἐκφοβῇ με· . . .
        . . . καίτοι πῶς ἐγὼ κακὸς φύσιν,
ὅστις παθὼν μὲν ἀντέδρων, ὥστ᾽ εἰ φρονῶν
ἔπρασσον, οὐδ᾽ ἂν ὧδ᾽ ἐγιγνόμην κακός;
νῦν δ᾽ οὐδὲν εἰδὼς ἱκόμην ἵν᾽ ἱκόμην,
ὑφ᾽ ὧν δ᾽ ἔπασχον, εἰδότων ἀπωλλύμην.
(265-74)

[For it is not my person or my actions that you fear; why, know
that my actions consisted in suffering rather than in doing, if I
must speak of the matter of my mother and my father, on account
of which you are afraid of me! This I know for sure! Yet in my na-

ture how am I evil, I who struck back when I had been struck, so
that if I had acted knowingly, not even then would I have been
evil? But as it is I got to where I came to in all ignorance; but
those who have ill used me knowingly destroyed me.]

In my earlier discussion of the play, I took this problem – what to
do about and with Oedipus – to be in part a question of how to
assimilate the past. But I would suggest now that especially sig-
nificant in this play is the element of revisiting the past – rein-
terpreting what took place years ago: revisiting the past so as to
reconsider the meaning of "what happened". Sophocles makes a
polemical choice to use Oedipus – to return to Oedipus, the man
whose name is always already known. One strong imaginative
wager of the play is to reopen the case of Oedipus: Oedipus is al-
ways already Oedipus, but what does that mean? Oedipus will
never not have killed his father, married his mother, fathered his
grandchildren; but the meaning of Oedipus cannot be deduced
from these 'facts' – indeed the whole play is a negotiation of this,
so that the meaning of Oedipus for and at Colonus is perhaps not
to be found solely in his posthumous transformation into a cult
benefit.

Oedipus's self-accountings present him as a self-reviser, one
who has been through cognitive, emotional, and ultimately ethi-
cal arcs, reinterpreting the meaning of past individual (and collec-
tive) actions and reactions, and individual (and collective) traumas.
The play, that is, represents Oedipus both as having undergone
that process of reassessing himself and as making this reassess-
ment central to his challenge to the Athenians to align their past
with their future. In this sense, Oedipus in his self-representation
– as thinking again, living through emotional intensities and eth-
ical judgments in time – is modelling a trajectory for the chorus.

In "Getting to grips with the oracles: *Oedipus at Colonus*", Pat
Easterling writes:

It is through putting together what Ismene has told him of new
prophecies (385-420), and reflecting on the meaning of his arrival
at the grove of the Semnai Theai in relation to what Apollo proph-
esied to him in the past, that he is able to understand the present
situation and know how he must react. His stress on 'reflecting',

συννοῶν, is important, emphasising the fact that Oedipus does
not understand everything in advance, but is actively interpreting
the meaning of fresh news in relation to what he knows already.
(2012: n.p.)

We may see this process of reevaluating as parallel to, and indeed
a powerful reminder of, the trial that is the *telos* of the *Oresteia* –
in the sense that what the jury of citizens formed by Athena (and
every jury) is asked to do is to look back at, and reassess, the cir-
cumstances and import of a transgressive act and its meaning for
and within a community. The end of Aeschylus' trilogy must be
moved to Athens and specifically to the Hill of Ares, because on-
ly there can Orestes get a fair hearing and revaluation – unbi-
ased and community-minded. In its function as a homicide court,
the authority of the Areopagus lasted through the fifth centu-
ry, and into the fourth;[6] Sophocles and his contemporaries saw it
become a defining institution (however vexed) of the Athenian
democracy.[7]

But *Oedipus at Colonus* gives the Athenian citizen-chorus a role
that both evokes the Oresteian jury and confounds its operating
principles. As is well known, Athenian law viewed some kinds of
killing in self-defence as justifiable, if the defendant could prove
that the person he killed had struck the first blow.[8] There is a cru-
cial distinction in Athenian law regarding 'unlawful' homicide
cases, however, which is the distinction between intentional and
unintentional action. Douglas MacDowell in his work on Athenian
homicide law notes,

In other areas of law (and of religion too) it often strikes a mod-

6 See, for example, Lycurgus 1.12; Aeschines 1.92.
7 For a discussion of the reforms of the Areopagus (and ancient and
modern debates about them), see Fornara and Samons (1991), esp. ch. 2, and
Raaflaub (2007); on responses to them in the *Oresteia*, see Podlecki (1966),
Braun (1998).
8 In a discussion of "the three basic categories of homicide in Athenian
law: intentional, unintentional, and lawful", Michael Gagarin writes: "the
evidence (such as it is) supports the view that a killer who pleaded self-de-
fense argued his case in a regular trial for (intentional) homicide before the
Areopagus" (1978: 112).

ern reader that the Athenians seem to take notice only of actions, disregarding the intentions that gave rise to them. This makes it all the more interesting that intention plays such a crucial part in their law on homicide . . . There is also some evidence that an act was counted as intentional homicide if the offender intended to harm his victim and death resulted, even if he did not intend to kill. (1978: 115)

Unlike the unambiguous case of Orestes, then, the Athenians are confronted with Oedipus, whose actions, as he himself argues, fall somewhere in between deliberate and involuntary.[9] This in-between condition is one way to describe how the play positions Oedipus across several domains. Such a perspective differs from, but is perhaps not incompatible with, readings that are principally interested in the structure of reversal, by which the preeminent man becomes a *pharmakos*,[10] the "pollution" becomes a blessing – and as Jacques Derrida points out in his essay on hospitality, the guest, as it were, holds the host hostage (2000: 107). But the both/and of such a reading is also a neither/nor: Oedipus is neither initiate nor hierophant; so that it may be useful to think of his story as showing the limits of any fixed positioning or locating.

Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1988), in a discussion of the ways in which the play raises and complicates the question of Oedipus's political status, considers the problem of the meaning of ἔμπολιν (637) and views him as neither excluded nor fully included. Vidal-Naquet makes the point that tragedy uses juridical language in a (so to speak) mobile way: "One of the constant features of Greek tragedy is its ambiguous play upon juridical categories in its exploration of the bounds of impossibility" (348). He writes: "It is hard to say just what Oedipus does become in Athens" (ibid.) – but that is the question those representatives of Athens, the demesmen of Colonus (and subsequent to them, Theseus), are put in a position to decide. Is Oedipus in fact assimilable, and if so, how?

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9 Here we might think of his explanation of his self-blinding in *Oedipus Tyrannos*: "It was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, / who accomplished these cruel, cruel sufferings of mine! / . . . But the hand that struck was my own" (1329-33; trans. Lloyd-Jones in Sophocles 1994b, slightly modified by the author).

10 See, for example, Vernant 1988.

Some scholars have viewed the chorus and Theseus, especially in their defence of Oedipus against Creon, as incorporating him as a full-fledged member of the citizenry (and this was my earlier assumption). Vidal-Naquet, on the other hand, suggests that the play represents Oedipus as ultimately belonging in the in-between category of *metoikos* – belonging as an in-between presence, a *metic*: not a *xenos* or outsider/foreigner, but not an insider – not fully a member of the citizenry and so not endowed with full citizen rights, but entitled to certain privileges and summoned to duties on behalf the *polis*.[11] There is always a problem of where Oedipus belongs (as *Oedipus Tyrannos* earlier made clear). As Vidal-Naquet writes, "He is not Οἰδίπους Κολωνῆθεν or ἐκ Κολωνοῦ, Oedipus *of* Colonus, but Οἰδίπους ἐπὶ Κολωνῷ, Oedipus *at* Colonus" (353).

This adds a further dimension of appropriateness to Oedipus's recognition of affinity with those unnamed divinities to whose grove he has finally made his way when the play opens. In having Oedipus come to the place where his wanderings will cease at the grove of the Eumenides, Sophocles reminds us that those divinities are the metics par excellence, as the *Oresteia* had established, dramatising their incorporation into Athens and even dressing those transformed figures in the official red robes worn by metics in the Panathenaic procession. The appropriateness of the conjunction of Oedipus and these chthonic deities has of course not only to do with their shared civic status and the benefits they offer the *polis* as *euergeteis* – and Theseus refers at line 631 to the *eumeneia* of Oedipus – but also with their relation to the irreducible, inescapable power of blood bonds, and with the latent but ever-ready wrath that the violation of those bonds calls forth. In this sense, we might say that in the *Oedipus Tyrannos*, Oedipus was his own fury, but that in *Oedipus Coloneus* he revisits that role and visits it on others.

On the position of these figures as metics, however, it is useful to be reminded that, as Paul Cartledge has written,

Athenian ideology as regards the *metoikoi* remained ambivalent,

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11 On the complexities of *metoikia*, see now Kasimis 2018.

in spite of – and doubtless in part owing to – their economic and military significance. The expectations of Athenians in respect to *metoikoi* are clarified by an extract from the *Hiketides* of Euripides; here it is said of the Arcadian Parthenopaeus, who had lived in Argos as a *metoikos*, that he was never resentful or quarrelsome, that he had fought in the army and defended the country like an Argive, always rejoiced at the victories of Argos and lamented its defeats (Eur. *Suppl.* 889-900). This portrayal describes the behavioural norm for *metoikoi*: the *metoikos* must above all cause no strife in the community and be loyal to the *polis*. (2006: n.p.)

The anger of Oedipus, his retaliatory power, will be immanent in his tomb after his life is over and will protect the community as heroes' tombs do. But the tragedy also represents him as wielding it – in life – in such a way as to display the tensions between, or incompatibility of, the demands of the *polis* and the demands of the family – the divisions between which cannot be resolved in the court or the *ekklêsia*. In punishing his sons for their abuse of their father, he unleashes catastrophic strife for Thebes; his legacy is the destruction of family – and although we may read this as a lesson for the Athenians, rather than a direct blow to them, it is not entirely clear how they are to apply it. As Danielle Allen has forcefully argued in her book, *The World of Prometheus*, Athenian tragedy (in part drawing on and reconfiguring Homeric concerns) is everywhere an investigation of what to do with anger in the *polis*. Anger may be the political emotion *par excellence* but is also the most difficult to re-channel (Allen 2000).

How then can Oedipus be integrated into the *polis*, as the *polis* looks to what it is and could become? If the *Oresteia* offers an aetiology of the Athenian court, might we take *Oedipus at Colonus* as offering an aetiology of democratic strife and its aspiration toward integration? There will always be a tension between kinship structures (of affinity) and democratic part-taking.[12]

In this sense, it is not simply that Oedipus is bi-valent, or both/ and, in and out: it is that he represents the ongoing challenge which is the political itself: how to assess, take part. Here Oedipus

12 See Nicole Loraux's far-reaching study of civic discord, *La Cité Divisée* (1997).

appears ultimately not as a challenge to the political but as the a priori of: the agonistic testing of who shall count and how.[13]

This matter of parts and provisional or persisting wholes is saluted by Pindar's *Pythian* 4, which enjoins the audience to "Learn now the *sophia* of Oedipus":

> γνῶθι νῦν τὰν Οἰδιπόδα σοφίαν·
>   εἰ γάρ τις ὄζους ὀξυτόμῳ πελέκει
> ἐξερείψειεν μεγάλας δρυός, αἰσχύ-
>   νοι δέ οἱ θαητὸν εἶδος,
> καὶ φθινόκαρπος ἐοῖσα διδοῖ ψᾶφον περ' αὐτᾶς,
> εἴ ποτε χειμέριον πῦρ ἐξίκηται λοίσθιον,
> ἢ σὺν ὀρθαῖς κιόνεσσιν
>   δεσποσύναισιν ἐρειδομένα
> μόχθον ἄλλοις ἀμφέπει δύστανον ἐν τείχεσιν,
> ἐὸν ἐρημώσαισα χῶρον.
> (Pindarus 1971: 263-9)

> [Now come to know the wisdom of Oedipus: if someone
> with a sharp-bladed axe
> should strip the boughs from a great oak tree
> and ruin its splendid appearance,
> although it cannot bear foliage, it gives an account of itself,
> if ever it comes at last to a winter's fire,
> or if, supported by upright columns
> belonging to a master,
> it performs a wretched labor within alien walls, having left its
> own place desolate.
> (trans. Race, see Pindar 1997)]

I had previously thought of Oedipus as Pindar's oak, and had read this passage as dwelling on the cost of integrity: the oak displays its power and value, but is consumed or enslaved (Slatkin 1986: 221). Revisiting the political challenge and opportunity that Oedipus presents has led me to consider that Oedipus might be understood as both the axeman and the tree: he who cuts into the body politic (even as he gouged himself). He asks us to consider just how integral the body politic is, and for whom: whether the

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13 Here I find my reading aligns with some aspects of Jacques Rancière's thinking about the political as an agonistic part-taking (2001).

political is the *dêmos* yet giving witness of itself, or might also be a doing of sad labour in a stranger's house. The arbitration of these futurities, the question of incorporation, is precisely what the *Oedipus at Colonus* invited the community to undertake.[14]

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4

A Wise and Irascible Hero:
Oedipus from Thebes to Colonus

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Abstract

The essay aims at foregrounding the opposite yet complementary dimensions which typify Oedipus' character in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. On the one hand, he is introduced as a wise man, the old blind one – both blindness and old age being traditionally associated with wisdom – who has learnt from experience and is now able to grasp life's deepest meaning. This wisdom is based upon religious piety, the awareness of fate's superior and unfathomable power, but also of time as well as of the oracles' truthful validity. Such a model of wisdom is radically different from the one young Oedipus exhibited in *Oedipus the King*, where he sported a knowledge through which he wished to measure and dominate time in contrast with the word of oracles and prophecies. On the other hand, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is often prone to uncontrollable outbursts of anger, in that he retains a tendency towards ὀργή (anger, wrath, irritation), which, in the previous drama, was an essential component of his character and whose most manifest expression dwells here in his repeated curses against his two sons. Wisdom and impulsiveness are therefore the two main aspects which characterise Oedipus' identity in Sophocles' last play. They intertwine continually and set the rhythm of the play by creating a tension between two identities: a more human one, dominated by impulsiveness and connected with the protagonist's familial history and his own past crimes (i.e. parricide and incest) of which he cannot get rid, even though he pleads innocent, and one that tends towards divinity, eventually transforming him into a cult hero and the protector of the Attic land.

Keywords: Sophocles; Oedipus; Antigone; Colonus

The initial lines of *Oedipus at Colonus*, pronounced by the protagonist, contain a sort of self-representation that offers extremely in-

teresting points to analyse. Here is the old king of Thebes' first
speech upon entering the stage (*OC* 1-8):[1]

> Τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος Ἀντιγόνη, τίνας
> χώρους ἀφίγμεθ᾽ ἢ τίνων ἀνδρῶν πόλιν;
> τίς τὸν πλανήτην Οἰδίπουν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν
> τὴν νῦν σπανιστοῖς δέξεται δωρήμασιν,
> σμικρὸν μὲν ἐξαιτοῦντα, τοῦ σμικροῦ δ᾽ ἔτι
> μεῖον φέροντα, καὶ τόδ᾽ ἐξαρκοῦν ἐμοί·
> στέργειν γὰρ αἱ πάθαι με χὠ χρόνος ξυνὼν
> μακρὸς διδάσκει, καὶ τὸ γενναῖον τρίτον.

> [Child of a blind old man, Antigone, to what region have we
> come, or to what city of men? Who will entertain the wandering
> Oedipus today with scanty gifts? Little do I crave, and obtain still
> less than that little, and with that I am content. For patience is the
> lesson of suffering, and of the long years upon me, and lastly of a
> noble mind.]

The spectators who sat in the seats at the theatre of Dionysus,
who years before had witnessed the first performance of *Oedipus
the King*[2] or some of the subsequent revivals, or were familiar with
the plots of Sophocles' earlier tragedies, would have been amazed
to see the enormous changes endured by the character. In addition
to underlining his old age (1: γέροντος) and blindness (1: τυφλοῦ),

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1 All Greek passages from *Oedipus at Colonus* are cited from the edition
of Guido Avezzù (Sophocles 2008); translation of Richard Claverhouse Jebb
(Sophocles 1889) with some slight modifications.

2 All Greek passages from *Oedipus the King* are cited from the edition of
Patrick J. Finglass (Sophocles 2018); translation of Richard Claverhouse Jebb
(Sophocles 1887) with some slight modifications. If the first representation of
Oedipus at Colonus is dated with certainty at the end of the 5th century BC,
shortly after the death of Sophocles (406 BC), there is no agreement among
scholars on the dating of *Oedipus the King*. Datation oscillates between an
earlier date (433) proposed by Müller (1984) and a later one, proposed by
Perrotta (1935: 257-68) and then confirmed by Diano (1952: 81-9). The prevail-
ing opinion is that the scourge that hits Thebes at the beginning of the drama
is a reference to the Athenian epidemic that broke out in 430 BC, which plac-
es the tragedy around this time. See, among others, Bates 1933; Knox 1956;
Lesky 1972: 217-19. On the whole issue see the recent overview by Finglass
(Sophocles 2018: 1-6).

Oedipus' words highlight his condition of being a "vagabond" (3: πλανήτην) and of absolute destitution to the point that his physical existence is made possible only upon his acceptance of donations. Along with these material dimensions, the moral values of moderation, resignation, and humility immediately emerge, and also "knowing how to make do" (7: στέργειν) with the little that he has. These three values "teach" (8: διδάσκει) Oedipus in this new way of life. He lists them one after the other in 7-8, arranging them in a sequence that seems to reproduce a climactic structure. He speaks of:

1) the "sufferings endured" (αἰ πάθαι) according to the traditional Aeschilean formula of learning through pain (πάθει μάθος);[3]
2) the "long time spent" (χρόνος ξυνὼν μακρὸς), and in this case an archaic form of traditional wisdom is brought back into use, for which the inexorable passing of time discovers the truth and modifies men's attitudes with a consequent educative efficacy (cf. *OT* 613-15);
3) finally, the third (τρίτον) and most important element of the series, the "noble nature" that is intrinsically a part of him, indicated by the neuter syntagm τὸ γενναῖον, understood as the equivalent of γενναιότης, and referred not so much to the nobility of birth (which also for Oedipus is an indisputable fact since it belongs to the royal family of the Labdacids), but to the nobility of mind. This last feature will be recognised by Oedipus and also King Theseus (569), and it is precisely the recognition of their common noble nature that represents the starting point of the welcoming process in the Attic territories.

The Oedipus found at the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus* is depicted with great emphasis as an individual who has fallen into the lowest sphere of social, political, and economical exclusion, who is uprooted, "one without a homeland" (207: ἀπόπτολις). He is practically without a physical body of his own, he is only a "phantom" (110: εἴδωλον) unable to survive without the atten-

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3 See Aesch. *Ag.* 177. Πάθαι indicates the facts of life in general that we undergo, and here it prefigures a tension between acting and undergoing (παθεῖν / δρᾶν) which constitutes a fundamental thematic axis of Oedipus' repeated self-defences during the drama.

tive assistance of his daughter, Antigone. At first glance, it appears that he is a completely different figure from the Oedipus depicted in *Oedipus the King*. At least this is the sensation that the first lines of the text suggest, which Oedipus himself intends to convey by celebrating his own self-representation. In his explanation of his painful apprenticeship to the public, he points out the obvious change between who he is now and who he was before. *Quantum mutatus ab illo!*, we could say. The Oedipus we see at the end of *Oedipus the King* is a lonely and blind sovereign, completely annihilated by misfortunes and the suicide of his mother-wife, and denied political power and intellectual prestige after having been "renowned by all" (*OT* 8: πᾶσι κλεινὸς), "the first among men" (33: ἀνδρῶν δέ πρῶτον), "the best of the mortals" (46: βροτῶν ἄριστ᾽), "almost equal to a god" (31: θεοῖσι μέν νυν οὐκ ἰσούμενόν), "the most powerful of all" (40: κράτιστον πᾶσιν). After he blinds himself in the exodus, he is a man "disliked by the gods" (1345-6: θεοῖς ἐχθρότατον βροτῶν; 1519: θεοῖς γ᾽ ἔχθιστος), abandoned by them (1360: ἄθεος, "forsaken by the gods"), as he himself recognises, banished from the city (1378ff.), and left alone to bear an unsurpassable pain (1365-6: εἰ δέ τι πρεσβύτερον ἔτι κακοῦ κακόν / τοῦτ᾽ ἔλαχ᾽ Οἰδίπους; 1414-15: τἀμὰ γὰρ κακὰ / οὐδεὶς οἷός τε πλὴν ἐμοῦ φέρειν βροτῶν),[4] dominated by the desire to sever the ties connecting himself to the outside world. His goal of blinding himself is never to see the world again (1334-5: τί γὰρ ἔδει μ᾽ ὁρᾶν, / ὅτῳ γ᾽ ὁρῶντι μηδὲν ἦν ἰδεῖν γλυκύ; 1337-9: τί δῆτ᾽ ἐμοὶ βλεπτὸν ἢ / στερκτόν, ἢ προσήγορον / ἔτ᾽ ἔστ᾽ ἀκούειν ἡδονᾷ, φίλοι;),[5] so that he does not have to look into the eyes of other men (1384-5: τοιάνδ᾽ ἐγὼ κηλῖδα μηνύσας ἐμὴν / ὀρθοῖς ἔμελλον ὄμμασιν τούτους ὁρᾶν;),[6] with the regret of not having destroyed all the physical channels of sensory perception, including his hearing (1386-90: ἥκιστά γ᾽· ἀλλ᾽ εἰ τῆς ἀκουούσης ἔτ᾽ ἦν / πηγῆς δι᾽

4 "If there is a woe surpassing all woes, it has become Oedipus' lot" and "my plague can rest on no other mortal".

5 "Why should I see, when sight showed me nothing sweet?" and "What, my friends, can I behold anymore, what can I love, what greeting can touch my ear with joy?".

6 "After bearing such a stain upon myself, was I to look with steady eyes on this folk?".

ὤτων φαργμός, οὐκ ἂν ἐσχόμην / τὸ μὴ ἀποκλῆσαι τοὐμὸν ἄθλιον δέμας, / ἵν' ἦ τυφλός τε καὶ κλύων μηδέν· τὸ γὰρ / τὴν φροντίδ' ἔξω τῶν κακῶν οἰκεῖν γλυκύ).[7]

In the final lines of *Oedipus the King*, the sovereign, having committed parricide and incest, recognises that Apollo is the architect of his destiny (1329-30: Ἀπόλλων τάδ' ἦν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι, / ὁ κακὰ κακὰ τελῶν ἐμὰ τάδ' ἐμὰ πάθεα),[8] and even though at this point he is deprived of all power, Oedipus continues proudly to show that he at least decides his own destiny. He insistently requests to be killed (1410-11) or sent into exile from Thebes (cf. 1436-7: Ῥῖψόν με γῆς ἐκ τῆσδ' ὅσον τάχισθ', ὅπου / θνητῶν φανοῦμαι μηδενὸς προσήγορος, "Cast me out of this land with all speed, to a place where no mortal shall be found to greet me"; 1518: γῆς μ' ὅπως πέμψεις ἄποικον, "See that you send me to dwell outside this land") in agreement with the Delphic oracle and its own proclamation promulgated in the first part of the tragedy. But in the face of this request, peremptory and even arrogant, the ruler Creon replies by challenging Oedipus' power to make decisions by himself, and proposing that all of his choices be subjected to the will of the gods (1438-9: ἔδρασ' ἂν εὖ τοῦτ' ἴσθ' ἄν, εἰ μὴ τοῦ θεοῦ / πρώτιστ' ἔχρῃζον ἐκμαθεῖν τί πρακτέον, "This I could have done, to be sure, except I craved first to learn from the god all my duty").

There is no trace anymore of the arrogance and self-centredness that could be seen in the initial scene of *Oedipus at Colonus*. As mentioned above, Oedipus confesses that he has learned the resignation and the art of making do. But is this really true? Is the old Oedipus, blind and a beggar, exiled and poor, who arrives at Colonus, truly different from the Oedipus who had reigned over Thebes and then had blinded himself after the discovery of his crimes? From a methodological point of view, it can be considered inappropriate or even unwise to compare two tragedies written decades apart by the same author. They belong to completely

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7 "No indeed: were there a way to choke the source of hearing, I would not have hesitated to make a fast prison of this wretched frame, so that I should have known neither sight nor sound. It is sweet for our thought to dwell beyond the sphere of grief".

8 "It was Apollo, friends, Apollo who brought these troubles to pass, these terrible, terrible troubles".

different circumstances from various points of view and are certainly not connected to each other within a unitary theatrical tetralogy. Yet ancient criticism had already established a connection between the two Sophoclean tragedies (cf. *Hypothesis* I of *Oedipus at Colonus*: Ὁ ἐπὶ Κολωνῷ Οἰδίπους συνημμένος πώς ἐστι τῷ Τυράννῳ, "*Oedipus at Colonus* is connected to *Oedipus the King* in a certain sense"), and a vast hermeneutical tradition has tried to read the two texts as a continuation of each other, if not as a completion and a realisation of the first in the second, as if Sophocles, from the beginning, had imagined the myth of Oedipus to be articulated in two separate moments. It is not my intention to resume this perspective, let alone bring back the old theory arguing that the old Sophocles intended to offer the reconciliation of Oedipus with himself, the world and the gods. This idea has been argued in the past, albeit with different emphases, by Goethe, Wilhelm August Schlegel, Hegel, Nietzsche and even by the philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (in the chapter on *Oedipus at Colonus* included in the book of his son Tycho on Sophocles' dramatic technique, where he claims that, "The poet settles down thus; he is old and wants to complete his drama, to placate his Oedipus, before he himself finds peace").[9] But nowadays this view is completely unacceptable. However, the fact that *Oedipus at Colonus* is peppered with clues (explicit references and allusions) that consciously refer to the previous *Oedipus the King*,[10] undoubtedly facilitates a conscious re-examination of the old tragedian's

[9] "Der Dichter beruhigt sich dabei; er ist alt und will sein Drama noch vollenden, seinem Oedipus den Frieden geben, ehe er ihn selbts findet". (1917: 368; my translation) A detailed overview of the main philosophical and philological interpretations of *Oedipus at Colonus* can be found in Bernard 2001: 12-38.

[10] Fundamental to this is Seidensticker 1972, which highlights numerous structural and thematic parallels. On a similar line is also Lanza 1984, which insists on the 'revisitation' of the character of Oedipus by Sophocles. With Winnington-Ingram (1980: 256) it can be said that "The Coloneus is a sequel to the Tyrannus in the sense that it is not the events of the earlier play, but in some measure, the characteristics of the earlier Oedipus are taken for granted". For Thévenet (2015) the continuity between the two dramas is given by the fact that Oedipus acts as an emblem of 'dangerous knowledge' in both.

characterisation of Oedipus, forcing us to compare the similarities and differences.

  We do not know what happens to Oedipus in the period of time that separates the end of *Oedipus the King* and the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus*, nor do we know which events in that time period contributed to characterising and maybe even modifying the protagonist's nature. We do not know this for the simple reason that neither Sophocles nor other tragedians, as far as we know, have ever dramatised the segment of the mythic saga that we could name 'The adventures of Oedipus in exile before arriving at Colonus'. Because of certain passages in *Oedipus at Colonus*, it can be safely said that Oedipus, contrary to what he asks for, is not driven into exile immediately after he finds out that he committed parricide and incest, but is kept segregated in the palace as if he were impure and contaminated. Only many years later did his two sons sanction his expulsion from Thebes against his will. In particular, the *rhesis* Ismene pronounces at 361-84 informs us that for a certain period Eteocles and Polynices ceded the government of the city of Thebes to Creon, but then an "evil strife" (372: ἔρις κακὴ) broke out between the brothers which set them against each other and started the consequent rupture of the city's *stasis* and Polynices' exile. These are tiny fragments that emerge from a past of extreme suffering and loneliness for Oedipus. If we then look at how Sophocles' previous dramas foreshadow the end of Oedipus, we will see that in *Antigone*, at 50, Ismene complains that her father "had fallen into hated ruin and without glory" (ἀπεχθὴς δυσκλεής τ' ἀπώλετο). In *Oedipus the King*, Tiresias concluded his obscure and threatening prophecy with the prediction that no one would know a ruin worse than that of Oedipus (427-8: σοῦ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν βροτῶν / κάκιον ὅστις ἐκτριβήσεταί ποτε).[11] The same Oedipus, in *Oedipus the King*, blinds himself knowing well that his fate is destined to be worse than death by illness (1455-7: καίτοι τοσοῦτόν γ' οἶδα, μήτε μ' ἂν νόσον / μήτ' ἄλλο πέρσαι μηδέν· οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε / θνῇσκων ἐσώθην, μὴ 'πί τῳ δεινῷ κακῷ).[12] All of

11 ". . . for no man will ever be crushed more miserably than you".

12 "And yet I know this much, that neither sickness nor anything else can destroy me; for I would never have been snatched from death, except in or-

these signs point to the fact that the tragedian, when composing *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*, did not have any idea about the plot development of *Oedipus at Colonus*, nor the idea of transforming his character into a culture hero protector of Attica.

Now I would like to concentrate, in particular, on two aspects of Oedipus' personality that seem to be relevant and characteristic. Sophocles' emphasis on them highlights the continuity and discontinuity between the earlier and the more recent tragedy: wisdom and irascibility. These two significant traits mark a strongly contradictory dimension of Oedipus' character, and are both present in the first and in the second drama, even if the approach to knowledge appears to be radically changed. The Oedipus of *Oedipus the King* was presented as a champion of γνώμη ("thought", "judgement"), an investigator endowed with a method and proud of the successes achieved (solving the riddle of the Sphynx), eager to learn, able to gather clues and link them together according to logical procedures; he was the emblem of a knowledge both secular and rational similar in many respects to that of the most advanced *téchnai* of the time such as the *iatrikè tèchne*, medicine (and in fact he was summoned to cure Thebes from the epidemic). He is the hero who wants to know the truth at any cost (1065: οὐκ ἂν πιθοίμην μὴ οὐ τάδ᾽ ἐκμαθεῖν σαφῶς),[13] unwilling to stop, who wants to discover his origins in spite of dangerous threats (1076-7: ὁποῖα χρῄζει ῥηγνύτω· τοὐμὸν δ᾽ ἐγώ, / κεἰ σμικρόν ἐστι, σπέρμ᾽ ἰδεῖν βουλήσομαι).[14] And even when he comes to intuit all the circumstances that predict his catastrophic future, his will is never weakened. Even though he knows that he will come to conclusions that will destroy him, he continues his search until the end, remaining faithful to the imperative of discovering the truth.[15] This form of knowledge built over time, accumulating information, and linking clues, certainly reflects cultural trends of the time, as studies have long indicated, such as the

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der to suffer some strange doom".

13 "I will not hear of not discovering the whole truth".

14 "Break forth what will! Be my race ever so lowly, I crave to learn it".

15 On the paradigm of Oedipus, the champion of knowledge and research, and on the reference models that inspire it, see especially Knox 1957, Newton 1975, Di Benedetto 1983: 85-104, Ugolini 2000: 157-84.

aforementioned medical science or the historiographical research model. And in some ways the *zétesis* of Oedipus focused on ascertaining his own identity would seem to be the starting point of the research model in the Platonic dialogue.[16]

But in that first drama on Oedipus, all the deficits of such a model of inquisitive knowledge were highlighted during the unfolding of the action. What Oedipus thought he knew reveals in fact to be vain and illusory. His reasoning, his reconstructing hypotheses, his logical deductions, are defeated in the face of the truth about his past. His self-inflicted blindness is the obvious symbol of his defeat, but the condition of blindness also marks a radical turning point whose effects are perceivable in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Also in this drama, Oedipus seems to be profiled as a figure of great wisdom, but his wisdom is now completely different: he has learned to be satisfied, just as he has learned the values of humility and resignation. His curiosity is still alive (in the opening scene, for example, he quivers from the desire to know where he has arrived and insists on his daughter Antigone's getting information),[17] but in some ways he has learned to dominate it and channel it in the right direction. For example, now he knows how to recognize the signs forewarned by Apollo regarding the place where he is destined to end up, those *semeia* of the oracle's predictions[18] that the earlier Oedipus could not decipher, whether it was the Delphic oracle that pronounced them or the *mantis* Tiresias on the stage at the theatre of Dionysus. Now he is determined to fulfil the oracle as much as he had desperately tried to avoid it as a young man. His self-blinding becomes retrospec-

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16 This suggestive hypothesis has been advanced by Flashar 1977: 135.

17 *OC* 23: ἔχεις διδάξαι δή μ' ὅποι καθέσταμεν; ("Can you tell me, now, where we have arrived?"); 26-7: Αν. ἀλλ' ὅστις ὁ τόπος ἢ μάθω μολοῦσά ποι; Οι. ναί, τέκνον, εἴπερ ἐστί γ' ἐξοικήσιμος ("ΑΝΤ. Well, shall I go and learn what the spot is called? ΟΕD. Yes, child, if indeed it is inhabited").

18 *OC* 94-7: σημεῖα δ' ἥξειν τῶνδέ μοι παρηγγύα, / ἢ σεισμὸν ἢ βροντήν τιν' ἢ Διὸς σέλας. / ἔγνωκα μέν νυν ὥς με τήνδε τὴν ὁδὸν / οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως οὐ πιστὸν ἐξ ὑμῶν πτερὸν / ἐξήγαγ' εἰς τόδ' ἄλσος· ("And he went on to warn me that signs of these things would come, in earthquake, or in thunder, or in the lightning of Zeus. Now I perceive that in this journey some trusty omen from you has surely led me home to this grove").

tively the paradoxical symbol of his access to a higher form of knowledge. His wisdom is no longer based on rational research, but on the recognition and acceptance of the established values of the ethical-religious tradition. Now that he is blind, Oedipus sees and understands better than before, manifesting a sort of inspired knowledge, or "visionary energy" (Giulio Guidorizzi in Sophocles 2008: 220), that in certain aspects makes him resemble the Tiresias of the previous drama.[19] The condition of physical blindness has profoundly changed his approach to knowledge. In the ancient world, the nexus of blindness and prophecy was widespread in the sense that it tended to identify, in the deprivation of physical sight, the sign of a second, even deeper inner vision (just think of the cases of Tiresias, of Evenius from Apollonia, of Phineus).[20] In place of perception, that is external knowledge, the internal vision takes over. If on the one hand his disability destroys the possibility for Oedipus to have intersubjective relations, on the other it is necessary for its own survival. Antigone, who supports and guides him, must see for two people,[21] and it is not by chance that Oedipus calls his daughter his "eye" (866: ὄμμ'), and in this same way he calls Ismene his "sticks" (1109: σκῆπτρα).

The long and heartfelt prayer that Oedipus addresses to the Eumenides (84-110) is symptomatic of the status of superior wisdom that the protagonist has reached, or at least this was supposed to appear to the public who kept the memory of a sceptical Oedipus towards oracular knowledge to the point of impiety (*OT*

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19 Reinhardt (1947: 227-8) had already highlighted the character affinity between Tiresias of *Oedipus the King* and Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus*: the same contradictoriness between human nature and divine-prophetic knowledge.

20 On Tiresias see Ugolini 1995. The connection between blindness and vision concerns not only seers, but also poets and singers (Homer, Demodocus): see Tatti-Gartziou 2010. On the topic of blindness in *Oedipus at Colonus*, see in particular Bernidaki-Aldous 1990. The 'clairvoyance' of Oedipus is a trait that appears from the beginning of the drama and intensifies gradually towards the finale: see Shields 1961.

21 *OC* 33-6: ὦ ξεῖν', ἀκούων τῆσδε τῆς ὑπέρ τ' ἐμοῦ / αὐτῆς θ' ὁρώσης οὕνεχ' ἡμὶν αἴσιος / σκοπὸς προσήκεις τῶν ἀδηλοῦμεν φράσαι ("Stranger, hearing from this maiden, who has sight both for herself and for me, that you have arrived as a scout of good fortune for the solving of our doubt").

380-98, 702-25). Now he seems to be endowed with a strong intellectually inspired ability accompanied by a profound religious piety and a total acceptance of the destiny that was prophesied to him, in particular with the readiness to tread to the end of the path that Apollo has prepared for him. He proclaims himself "sacred and pious" (*OC* 288: ἱερὸς εὐσεβής τε), despite being aware of his own status of impurity.[22]

In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus' indomitable desire to investigate and discover the truth is intertwined with an immoderate passion, with a tendency towards irony and impulsivity that in Sophocles' text is systematically qualified as ὀργή.[23] It is difficult to establish whether this inclination was a typical feature of Oedipus' character even before Sophocles made him the protagonist of his tragedy. There is no trace of this in the very few attestations available, but there are too few instances to be sure.[24] Certainly, the Athenian tragedian has greatly emphasised this characteristic. His insults directed at Tiresias, his exaggerated and absurd slanders against Creon, his scornful doubts about the veracity of the oracles, his impulsive and violent reaction during his confrontation with Laius (807: παίω δι᾽ ὀργῆς, "I hit for anger"), and his escort at the fateful crossing of three roads, are concrete examples of how this uncontrollable inclination of ὀργή translates within the design of the drama. And this irascibility is consistent with the one we find in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The stages of life change (from adulthood to old age), the places change (from Thebes to Colonus), his

22 As Knox rightly observes (1964: 147-8), here Oedipus seems to possess all of those characteristics of divinity (knowledge, security, a sense of justice) which in *Oedipus the King* he attributed to himself arrogantly without really having them.

23 The term ὀργή is a keyword that occurs with unusual frequency in *Oedipus the King*: there are seven occurrences, almost all of which refer to the character of Oedipus (*OT* 337, 344, 345, 405, 524, 807, 1241). In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the lemma records three occurrences (*OC* 411, 806, 905), two of which (411 and 806) explicitly concern the protagonist's character.

24 On the myth of Oedipus before Sophocles' re-elaboration, see Robert 1915, Dirlmeier 1948, Wehrli 1957, De Kock 1961, Edmunds 1981, March 1987: 121-48, Cingano 1992 and 2003, Bona 2005, Markantonatos 2007: 41-60, Finglass in Sophocles 2018: 13-27.

status changes (from ruler of the *polis* to beggar without a home-land), the forms of knowledge change (from the impetus of rational inquiry to the peaceful contemplation of superior wisdom), but the character of Oedipus remains the same: a restless, impulsive and resentful figure, prone to rage, to irascibility, and violence.[25] It is Theseus himself who points out that a beggar cannot afford to have such outrageous θυμός outbursts, since it is unreasonable to show hatred towards enemies when one is not in a position to defend oneself (592: ὦ μῶρε, θυμὸς δ' ἐν κακοῖς οὐ ξύμφορον, "Foolish man, anger amidst woes is not suitable").[26]

Therefore his calm and moderate senile wisdom, achieved over time through suffering, does not correspond at all to the imperturbable character of a reassured hero, but to a restless one, greedy for vengeance, obstinate and selfish, not at all softened by misfortunes, but feral, full of envy, of an unshakeable anger facing his destiny. There are various elements that contribute to his outburst of anger, including Oedipus' awareness that they do not want to make him king of Thebes again. The resentment of Oedipus towards the Thebans who hunted him is a *fil rouge* that accompanies the whole drama, a constant retro-thought that guides his feelings with an uncontrollable force. Already in the aforementioned prayer to the Eumenides (84-110) a rancorous indication of hate emerges in line 92, when he alludes, next to the "benefits" (κέρδη) that in the future he may grant the country that will welcome him,

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25 Erwin Rohde was the first to reject the traditional hermeneutical model that saw in the old Oedipus who arrived at Colonus a heroic transfiguration with ethical and religious overtones; for him, Oedipus is a man "hardened in his bitter excitement, greedy, stubborn, and selfish, not refined by his misfortune but turned wild", "a man, savage, angry, ruthless, who horribly curses his children, who relishes, thirsty for revenge, the misfortunes of his country". See Rohde 1903: 2, 574 (my translation).

26 The concept of ὀργή defined by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* seems to adapt quite well in the case of the old Oedipus who arrives at Colonus: Ἔστω δὴ ὀργὴ ὄρεξις μετὰ λύπης τιμωρίας [φαινομένης] διὰ φαινομένην ὀλιγωρίαν εἰς αὐτὸν ἤ <τι> τῶν αὐτοῦ, τοῦ ὀλιγωρεῖν μὴ προσήκοντος ("Let us then define anger as a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent revenge for a real or apparent slight, affecting a man himself or one of his friends, when such a slight is undeserved"). Text: William David Ross (Aristotle 1959); translation: John Henry Freese (Aristotle 1926).

also the "ruin" (ἄτην) that he will procure "for those who sent me forth, who drove me away" (τοῖς πέμψασιν, οἵ μ' ἀπήλασαν).[1] It is the first trace of a theme – posthumous revenge – that traverses the whole play with both vampire-like and crude images (620-1: the body of Oedipus in the tomb drinking the warm blood of his enemies; 788: Oedipus as χώρας ἀλάστωρ, "vengeful spirit on the land").

His angry impetus is constantly connected to the painful memories of his past (parricide, incest, exile), which far from having taught him moderation and self-control are unhealed wounds imprinted in his soul, wounds that shake him to his core and produce choleric reactions. Thus, we see his anger explode in front of Creon in a progressive crescendo when Oedipus does not hesitate to curse him for his lies, his deceit, and his lack of morality (761-99). Even the way he treats his son Polynices, building a wall of chilling silence and coldness between them, takes the shape of the most exasperated anger, to the point that Antigone and Theseus reproach Oedipus for his excessive insensitivity towards his son.[2] Oedipus' indignation towards both of his sons then results in his curse of their mutual killing (1380-93), a traditional theme of the Labdacid saga, already attested in the *Thebaid* part of the epic cycle, and in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, but amplified here to testify, in fact, to the impulsive and violent character of Oedipus. Regarding the cursing of Oedipus, it should be noted that in this drama it only sanctions the dispute between the two brothers that has already happened, but does not provoke it (as in the *Seven Against Thebes* and the *Cyclic Thebaid*).

1 At 411 Oedipus' daughter Ismene mentions the ὀργή of her father in relation to his vengeance against the Thebans *post mortem*: τῆς σῆς ὑπ' ὀργῆς, σοῖς ὅτ' αντῶσιν τάφοις ("Under the power of your anger, when they stand at your tomb").

2 See the dialogue between Oedipus and Theseus at 175-80 and Antigone's *rhesis* at 1181-203. The way in which the scene of Polynices is constructed as well as his characterisation as a suppliant and repentant serve to emphasise the hardness and the violence of Oedipus' anger and have no "superhuman" trait (as Knox would have it, 1964: 159-60). See Easterling 1967 and Di Benedetto 1983: 225-7. For Burian that of Oedipus in front of his son Polynices is "an explosion of wrath and hatred without parallel" (1974: 425).

Wisdom and moderation are indissolubly intertwined with his constant irascibility. For example, think about his words of resignation because of the inconstancy of all that is temporal in 607ff. On the one hand, they seal Oedipus' judicious acceptance of mundane temporality and its constant variability (609: συγχεῖ πάνθ' ὁ παγκρατὴς χρόνος, "but everything else sinks into chaos from time which overpowers all"), as well as the need to understand the reasons for the changes due to time passing; but, on the other hand, they must be framed in the context of his angry refusal to adapt to the political interests of his sons and his distressing fear of being kidnapped. Oedipus is only apparently an old, pacified and serene man, as he says upon his arrival at Colonus. His inclination towards ὀργή is always lurking and cannot be reduced to a simple character trait of a tyrannos and not even to a device that attenuates and reduces Oedipus' guilt. This inclination undermines the stability and superiority of the wisdom he has gained.[3] At a certain point, when Ismene affirms with consolatory intent that the gods who have overthrown Oedipus will now raise him again (394: νῦν γὰρ θεοί σ' ὀρθοῦσι, πρόσθε δ' ὤλλυσαν, "the gods now raise you up; but before they worked your ruin"), Oedipus replies with a fulminating joke (395: γέροντα δ' ὀρθοῦν φλαῦρον ὃς νέος πέσῃ, "It is a paltry thing to raise up age, when youth was ruined"). At first sight, this is an uncomfortable judgment for many modern interpreters (Perrotta considered him openly blasphemous, 1935: 563). It is an aggressive joke towards the divinity that clashes with a drama focused on the acceptance of destiny. Oedipus firmly rejects the traditional conception of heroisation as being a divine reward in exchange for undeserved suffering. In fact, it is a joke that reveals the ambivalence of the old Oedipus, who evidently remains quite sceptical of his own expectations, despite what was predicted by the oracles, and so embittered to the point that he asks his daughter if she ever really believed that the gods took care of him (385-6: ἤδη γὰρ ἔσχες ἐλπίδ' ὡς ἐμοῦ θεοὺς / ὤραν τιν' ἕξειν, ὥστε σωθῆναί ποτε, "What, had you come to

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3 On the contrary, Rosenmeyer (1952) believes that Oedipus' anger, with the curses against his children it produces, is a trait that leads him back to the divine sphere.

hope that the gods would ever have concern enough for me to give me rescue?"). This impulse leads him to express doubts about the role of the gods, and Sophocles uses this situation to problematize the contradictions of divine justice.

In conclusion, this ambiguity of Oedipus' character, his wisdom accompanied by a lack of self-control, seems to be the constant theme that connects the young Oedipus of *Oedipus the King* with the old Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus*. He changes his way of thinking, and he modifies the paradigm of his wisdom, but the same impulsive, precipitous, rabid temperament remains. Once the similarities and differences of Oedipus' character traits are found and documented from the first drama to the second one, the question remains why Sophocles insisted on such a portrayal of his character. The answer that I venture to suggest is this: Sophocles intended to present a tense and ambiguous character hardly in line not only with the paradigms of the archaic tradition, but also with other famous heroic figures of Sophoclean drama. Oedipus is a hero with obvious traits of humanity and weakness (think, for example, of the anxiety which at the end he has about Theseus not arriving in time to assist him in the moment of disappearance: 1457-8, 1461, 1465-6, 1486-7). His anger and the curses he launches eventually underline his condition of isolation and exceptionality. This ambivalence seems to be dictated by motivations fundamentally linked to the dramatic structure of the tragedy. A wise Oedipus, who continually trips over his own limits, creates a certain tension that makes the journey towards the final outcome of his death and his consequent transformation into a cultic and protective hero more problematic. It is this internal conflict of the protagonist, on which the tragedian insists, and which produces a continuous slowing down of the dramaturgical progression, that makes it impossible to reach a final conciliation or reassuring conclusion.

Translation by Carina Fernandes

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5

Some Notes on Oedipus and Time

Guido Avezzù

Abstract

By solving the Sphinx's famous riddle, Oedipus unveils man's fundamental bond with time, whose essence lies in the sequence of infancy, adulthood, and old age. Oedipus is acknowledged to be a master of this kind of temporality as illustrated in the prologue. And yet, Oedipus does not know himself, and even becomes enmeshed in the ambiguities of *tyche* when speaking about himself as the "child of the event" (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 1083), first marked as being 'small' and then 'great' (i.e. mighty) by the passing of time, beyond a biologically-bound definition of birth, growth, and decay. This suggests a problematic interpretation of 'being in time' either through 'doing' (in the case of the Theban Oedipus) or through 'being made to do' (as in the apologia often repeated by Oedipus at Colonus). This idea of *tyche* leaves the question of agency undecidable. In the liminal position of the exile about to die, Oedipus at Colonus eventually solves this ambiguity. On the threshold of non-being (death), while 'being no-one' socially – an exile doomed to wander away from Thebes – Oedipus eventually refuses to be brought back to his homeland, raising a challenging question about man: only once socially reduced to 'nothing' does Thebes acknowledge him to be 'something'. Is man a man only when reduced to nothing? Is perhaps his nullification the precondition of his use/valorisation in a political key? What does being a man mean at that point? This essay investigates the idea of 'man in time' by looking at the dimensions and perception of time characterising first the Theban Oedipus and then the Coloneus on both the social plane and with regard to the role of transcendence in the later play.

Keywords: Sophocles; *Oedipus Tyrannus*; *Oedipus at Colonus*; time

PREACHER   Welcome, brothers and sisters.
                    I take as my text this evening the *Book of Oedipu*s.
                    Lee Breuer, *The Gospel at Colonus*

An epilogue may entail a kind of retrospective apologia: "why, know that my actions consisted in suffering rather than in doing", exclaims Oedipus addressing the citizens of Colonus, before repeating the same concept with a juridical formulation.[1] All prologues, instead, open up a double temporal perspective: towards the past and towards the future. In the long Book of Oedipus, *Oedipus tyrannus* (*OT*) somehow represents the prologue, and *Oedipus at Colonus* (*OC*) the epilogue of the chapter represented by Sophocles.[2] When the 'Epilogue' comes, as in Giotto's *Revelation* fresco in the Scrovegni chapel and in the fresco, slightly later in time, in the Constantinopolitan church of Holy Saviour *in Chora*, the Messengers rewind Time's bookroll. On the contrary, when the tragic prologue of *OT*, like any tragic prologue, unwinds the bookroll it offers an 'archeology' of the past. It discloses the sequence of actions the past is disseminated with as well as the prefigurations of the future it incapsulates. It lays open the dynamic present unfolding on stage to the increasingly astonished gaze of the protagonist who strives to penetrate the past and grasp what is needed to make the right choices. But it also reveals it to the audience who know the story already and enjoy losing themselves in the labyrinthine meandering of the tragic hero. Thus dramatised by the playwright, the time lived, or re-lived,

1 Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 266-7 (τά γ᾽ ἔργα με / πεπονθότ᾽ ἴσθι μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα) and 547-8, respectively (on the latter lines see Giulio Guidorizzi's commentary in Sophocles 2008: 271-2). All Greek passages from *OT* are from Sophocles 2018; those from *OC* are from my critical edition in Sophocles 2008; translations of both plays by Hugh Lloyd-Jones are respectively from Sophocles 1994a and 1994b; I have sometimes slightly modified the translations.

2 It goes without saying that Sophocles' privileged position is due to the lack of Aeschylus' Oedipus plays, as well as of Euripides' and the 'minor' playwrights's of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, besides the historic and mythographic sources and nearly all pre-dramatic treatments.

by the characters does not necessarily coincide with the entire sequence of the *mythos*; nor are the events in their temporal sequence perceived in the same way by all the characters and the collective Chorus – at least, their perception does not coincide 'literally' with the timeline of the Book of Oedipus as known to the audience. I recalled *The Book of Oedipus* mentioned in Lee Breuer's *Gospel at Colonus* to suggest a comparison between the omnicomprehensive linear temporality of the mythical tale – an especially apparent feature once it is given the status of the Book par excellence – and that of tragedy, which is selective and open to increasingly different possible diversions or beginnings. The following notes will offer a first inquiry into a field which requires a necessarily broader and more complex research. They will provide a few considerations on the dimension and perception of time in *OT* and *OC* by focusing on the different aspects they assume in the two tragedies.[3]

1. Men's Seasons and Oedipus' Narrative (*OT* 8, 16-17, 31-50)

At *OT* 771-813 Oedipus will tell Iocasta what he knows about his own life, from his childhood, as the son of Polybus and Merope, to the eve of his unsuspecting return to "to the city of [his] father" (1450).[4] At 31-50 we instead hear the Priest tell about Oedipus' victory over the Sphinx and the rest of his life to the eve of the fatal day ('up to now, hitherto': πάρος, 48). The Priest's tale has a different tonality from the supplication which he pronounces on behalf of the citizens (16-30 and 50-57), since, as we will see, it responds to a solicitation expressed by the sovereign himself.

As is well known, although structurally and functionally different in many respects, the prologue of *OT* shares many aspects with that of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (*Se.*): from Eteocles' and Oedipus' addresses to the citizen to the emphasis on the 'king who does not sleep' and the pervasive presence of the city/ship allegory. Yet, forced to face an emergency, the two protagonists

3 This study is indebted to many suggestions contained in Nicolai 2014.
4 Patrick Finglass proposes *OT* both as a "Nostos-Play", and a "Suppliant Drama" (Sophocles 2018: 57-62 and 41-57, respectively).

show opposite temporal inclinations: one towards the future, the other towards the past.

It could be asked whether, and to what extent, this choice is instrumental to their individual political rhetoric or, instead, symptomatic of precise characterial connotations. It might also be argued that it could suggest opposite views about destiny. However, this is a question that goes beyond the scope of these pages. The hypothesis that in the two tragedies a group of Theban males appear against the backdrop when the *orchestra* is still empty, raises questions on the distinction made by both Eteocles and the Priest between the represented generations, as well as on the scenic collocation and, more radically, the actual presence of the recipients of the illocutionary act – unless these were the audience itself.[5] Yet, whether or not the Thebans are present at the beginning of *Se.* and actually surround, in variable number, the Priest in *OT* – where traces of their presence are not lacking –[6] is not relevant to the issue I will be dealing with shortly: all allocutions are oriented within the stage boundaries, that is, towards the Thebans, regardless that the addressees are a dynamic *tableau*[7] or are only evoked;

5 With regard to *The Seven*, "whether the Athenian audience is addressed directly as 'surrogate Thebans'" is an "old question" (Edmunds 2017: 92) strictly connected with our idea of tragic dramaturgy as opposed to the comic one. On *Se.*, see Taplin 1989: 128-36; Wiles 1997: 115 and 213; Hutchinson (Aeschylus 1987: 41-4). An alternative solution about *OT* is offered by Calder 1959: 129 ("just before verse one a priest and two boys enter from the right parodos. Oedipus, possibly with an attendant, then enters from the palace and addresses the audience as his children"); but cf. Dawe (Sophocles 2006: 73), Seale 1982: 215-6, Paduano (Sophocles 1982: 426n1), Finglass (Sophocles 2018: 166-7). Budelmann (2000: 206-9) instead seems to identify arbitrarily the "large group" facing Oedipus with the Chorus, but the positions of the latter and of the "large group" are to be considered with regard to what differentiates or define them. Whatever dramaturgical solution is chosen, the addressees of the two allocutions in both plays cannot possibly be identified with the Chorus.

6 See 18 and 78 (οἵδε: "these", the Priest) and 91-2 (τῶνδε . . . πλησιαζόν-των: "in these people's presence", Creon). At 700, "I have more respect for you, lady, than I have for these", τῶνδ[ε] will refer to the Chorus instead.

7 See Taplin 1989: 134. But as David Seale remarks, "*Oedipus the King* opens with a movement, not a *tableau*" (1982: 215). Walking out of the royal palace, the two sovereigns address the civic space on stage and off stage, en-

from this angle, *opsis* is the least necessary of all. Both the epithets in Oedipus' address and the description of the suppliants in the Priest's words set the coordinates of the temporal dimension in which the rest of the prologue and the whole dramatic action will be situated:

(a) at *OT* 1 the "new" descendants (νέα τροφή) of the ancient progenitor are for Oedipus "'my' children (τέκνα)"; this is how Jebb, Paduano, and Condello fittingly translate the Greek, making explicit the sympathetic emphasis conveyed by the minor pause after the noun, in respect of which the rest of the line is an addition typical of the beginning of prologues.[8] Undoubtedly this privileges "the political relationship between subject and object",[9] but it should be considered that the motif of paternity is questioned throughout the whole tragedy: first in this address, where Oedipus implicitly says that he is alien to the Cadmean genealogy and the city, but claims a metaphorical paternity over 'new' Cadmeians (see Condello, Sophocles 2009: 135), as later in the hyperbolic irony of 258-60 and 264 (κυρῶ τ' ἐγὼ / ἔχων μὲν ἀρχὰς, ἃς ἐκεῖνος εἶχε πρίν / ἔχων δὲ λέκτρα καὶ γυναίχ' ὁμοσπόρον /. . . / . . . ὡσπερεὶ τοὐμοῦ πατρός / ὑπερμαχοῦμαι ["since I chance to hold the power which once he held / and to have a marriage and a wife in common with [Laius] . . . I shall fight for him as though he had been my father"]); then again, definitively, albeit *in absentia*, at 1076–82, where the inquiry into his own ancestry (1077: σπέρμα)

closed within the double circle of the siege and the walls that of *Se.*, articulated in multiple public spaces that of *OT* ("marketplace", "the two temples of Pallas", and "the sanctuary of Ismenos", at 20-1).

8 Besides the local and genealogical information provided by Κάδμου, the compementarity here configured by πάλαι . . . νέα, is typically prologic; cf. *Ai.* 1, 3 e 5 (ἀεὶ . . . καὶ νῦν . . . πάλαι), *El.* 2-3 (νῦν . . . ἀεί); Eur. *Cy.* 2-5 (νῦν χὦτ' ἐν ἥβῃ . . . πρῶτον . . . ἔπειτα κτλ.); *Med.* 3 and 16 (ποτε . . . νῦν); *Hcld.* 1 and 9 (πάλαι . . . νῦν), etc. When Oedipus addresses the young suppliants only (58: ὦ παῖδες οἰκτροί), his address will contain a pragmatic implication nocited by Jebb (cf. Sophocles 2018: 185) which, to some extent, will veil the more inclusive paternal relation declared at the outset.

9 Sophocles 1982: 426n1. As regards the "special bond" generally established by τέκνα in the absence of an actual parental relation cf. Dickey 1996: 69.

leads him to identify a mother, although impersonal (Τύχη), not a father;[10] this occurs right before the *anagnorisis* which will make him aware that "[I] engender[ed] with the person from whom I was sprung" (1361, trans. Finglass, in Sophocles 2018).[11]

(b) It is then for the Priest to introduce the suppliants by distinguishing them according to age (16-17): those who "[are] not yet able to fly far" (οἱ μὲν οὐδέπω μακρὰν / πτέσθαι σθένοντες) and those who "[are] weighed down with age" (οἱ δὲ σύν γήρᾳ βαρεῖς); he himself, the sole representative of this latter class (18), leads a selected group of adolescents towards whom he gestures (18-19: οἵδε τ' ἠθέων / λεκτοί, "and these are chosen from the unmarried young"). The classification by age was also present in *Se.* 10-13, but there it was tripartite; although the text is controversial here, it is clear that to (1) "those who have not yet reached the peak of young manhood" (10-11)[12] were opposed to (2) the "men of military age" (11-13).[13] The question remains open whether the polarity proposed in *OT* is totalising,[14] or instead is meant to represent "two groups . . . that especially need . . . protection",[15] both excluded from an active role beneficial to Thebes.[16]

In sum: the definition of age classes, which was totalising in *Se.*, in the polarisation of *OT* entails the Priest's acknowledgment of Oedipus as a 'middle factor', the sole subject who fully owns the

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10 Cf. the Chorus's stereotypical question (τίνος εἶ σπέρματος πατρόθεν;) at *OC* 214.

11 For the interpretation of *OT* 1361 cf. Sophocles 2018: 582.

12 Greek passages and translations from *Se.* are from Aeschylus 2008.

13 This is Hutchinson's apposite synthesis (Aeschylus 1987: 44).

14 Finglass (Sophocles 2018: 172): "His polar expression . . . suggests the universality of the city's appeal to its leader". But see my following discussion of the tripartition/bipartition of male population.

15 Longo (Sophocles 2007: 105), echoed by Finglass (Sophocles 2018), who presents both interpretations.

16 The intent of this distinction will be reverted in Lysias' *Funeral Oration* with regard to the War of Megara (458-457 BCE), waged and won τοῖς ἤδη ἀπειρηκόσι καὶ τοῖς οὔπω δυναμένοις (52: "with troops whose strength was already failing or not yet capable"), in the absence of the age class tasked with the use of weapons (τῆς ἡλικίας ἀπούσης, 49: "as . . . [Athenian] men of serviceable age were absent") (trans. Lamb, in Lysias 1930).

vigour of maturity and is therefore the only one entitled to rescue the city.[17] Correspondingly, the sovereign's exordium includes the generative potential that makes him a father both privately and, especially, publicly: in contrast with the suppliants, Oedipus invests himself, and is invested, with the power of ruling over seasons and men, in sync with the riddle of the Sphinx, that traditionally concerns 'man in his time'.

If we consider time not only as the course of the events variously structured by the tragic playwright, but also, and especially, as what the protagonist's intelligence and his action are mapped onto, Oedipus' self-presentation constitutes an essential starting point. The similarities with Eteocles' own self-presentation emphasise its peculiarities: both start with the definition of the place, implicit in their allusions to Cadmus,[18] both inform that the city is in a state of emergency,[19] and eventually declare their own names (at 6 and 8, respectively). According to the prologic conventions, the final recipient of the information is the audience, yet addressing the Thebans entails further levels of signification: in order to emphasise his own responsibility Etelocles prefigures the effect of a possible defeat;[20] on the contrary, Oedipus defines himself ὁ πᾶσι κλεινός (first hemistich of 8: "renowned to all"), which is only seemingly pleonastic in respect to Οἰδίπους καλούμενος (second hemistich of 8: "I who am called Oedipus"), but in fact with the function of "encourag[ing] his people by reminding them of his fame, and by implication the resourceful-

17 The age will be indirectly defined by Iocasta's words on his similarity with Laius (742: μέλας, χνοάζων ἄρτι λεθκανθὲς κάρα, "he was dark, but just beginning to have grizzled hair"; cf. Sophocles 2018: 401).

18 On the dual civic and/or ethnic designation of the addressees, see again, for *Se.*, Aeschylus 1987: 41-4, and, for *OT*, Sophocles 2018: 167-8.

19 Eteocles implicitly at 1-5, and then explicitly at 27-9; only indirectly Oedipus at 2-5, and the symptomatology of the pestilence will be presented by the Priest at 25-30 – confirming Sophocles' propensity for the dialogic prologues (cf. Schmidt 1971: 4-6, 8).

20 6-8: Ἐτεοκλέης ἂν εἷς πολὺς κατὰ πτόλιν / ὑμνοῖθ' ὑπ' ἀστῶν φροοιμίοις πολυρρόθοις / οἰμώγμασίν τε ("Eteocles' name alone would be repeatedly harped on by citizens throughout the town amid a noisy surge of terrified wailing") – the modern reader grasps a sort of anticipation of "Upon the King . . ." of Shakespeare's *Henry V* 4.1.218-20 (Shakespeare 1982).

ness that lies behind it".[21] Eteocles describes his action in view of
the desirable result: a sleepless helmsman (2-3), he explains that
he is facing the state of necessity in a responsible way with regard
to both the words dictated by necessity (1: χρὴ λέγειν τὰ καίρια),
and the rule (2: φυλάσσει); he underlines (5) what an unhappy re-
sult would reserve to the people, that is, the experience that would
cause the lamentations prefigured at 7-8,[22] and to himself – that is,
the citizen's execration: we could call it 'bad fame', a negative *kle-
os*. Oedipus, instead, offers his subjects full availability and the re-
assurance of his own reputation grounded in his past, the *kle-
os* of he who is *kleinos*; with regard to the future, he only alludes
to it with the indefinite promise to προσαρκεῖν πᾶν (12: "render
every kind of aid"). His commitment will remain undefined also
in the imminence of Creon's arrival, when the sovereign will reit-
erate his commitment to "take any action" (77: δρῶν . . . πάν[τα]).
Differently from Eteocles', Oedipus' is not a real 'King' speech':
he foreshadows neither success nor failure because his knowledge
of the state of emergence is limited to the visible signs of his sub-
jects' suffering and, soon afterwards, to the description the Priest
gives of it. His medical semeiotics does not allow either to "ren-
der . . . aid" (13) or to "take . . . action" (77) until he gains the anam-
nestic knowledge that only the god may grant. We are authorised
to believe that that "renowned to all" (πᾶσι κλεινός) with which
he wishes to inspire faith in the people is also to some extent "ex-
pressive of his self-confidence".[23] However, there is no doubt that
Eteocles' gaze is fixed on the future precisely as Oedipus' is on the
past, on the actions that have bestowed fame upon him and con-
stitute his own 'epic'. And yet, not on his entire past, because he
privileges the reputation that he has built after his pilgrimage to
Delphi and his encounter with Laius. "This is I, the man called
Oedipus, renowned to all": it is a proclamation destined to reas-

21 Sophocles 2018: 169. This self-presentation is traditionally compared
with Odysseus' (*Od.* 9.19-20: εἴμ' Ὀδυσσεὺς Λαερτιάδης, ὃς πᾶσι δόλοισιν
/ ἀνθρώποισι μέλω, καί μευ κλέος οὐρανὸν ἵκει: "I am Odysseus, son of
Laertes, who am on the minds of all men for my tricks; my reputation reach-
es the sky", trans. Dawe 1993).

22 For an analysis of *Se.* 6-7 see Aeschylus 1987: 43-4.

23 Kamerbeek 1967: 33.

sure the Thebans, and at the same time it prompts them to sing an *epos* concerning his merits – this is what the Priest will do at 31-53 on behalf of all. This epic, which however does not possess genealogical connotations,[24] looks like a first sign of his resistance towards entering a tragic dimension, as well as of his choice of narratising himself first as the son of Polybus and Merope (openly only from 774), and saviour of Thebes (47-8), then as the son of the events which "have determined [his] smallness and [his] greatness" (1082-3). The *kleos* which gives shape to his pride of *kleinos* comes from a recent past which originates in the killing of the Sphinx. Albeit still engrossed in the memory of his excellent condition in Corinth (775-6), Oedipus produces a radical *epoché* in respect to the past preceding that enterprise: every narrative about him and his own existence seems to originate, in his eyes, in the event that has marked his arrival at Thebes, actually a kind of 'epiphany'.[25] And it is indeed that memorable experience, not yet an *archaiologia*, that dictates the agenda of his necessary interventions in the present, inspiring his feverish scansion of time into discrete, measurable intervals, which, as will be seen, counterpoint his action.

2. Operating with Time, and in Time, at Thebes

On that memorable day the present is geared to the 'long time' of the prophecy: (1) Apollo's response to Laius; (2a) Apollo's reponse to Oedipus, whose content Oedipus will reveal to Iocasta at 787-93: "Phoebus . . . [said] that I was destined to lie with my mother . . . and I should be the murderer of [my] father" (ὁ Φοῖβος . . . [ἔλεγε] / ὡς μητρὶ μὲν χρείη με μειχθῆναι, / . . . / φονεὺς δ᾽ ἐσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός); (2b) Oedipus silence about his own death in the sanctuary of the Eumenides (a detail contained in *The Phoenician Women*, 1703-7, if the passage is authentic, and in *OC*);

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24 As instead, in its blunt conciseness, Hamlet's "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane" (*Hamlet* 5.1.219-20). On the non-genealogical temporality of *OT* I will return later.

25 Sophocles 2007: 108, note to line 35.

and, finally, (3) the present day's oracular response, which triggers the action at the end of the prologue of *OT*.

Through the Priest we apprehend that to date ("now", 31: νῦν) Oedipus' exploit with the Sphinx has earned him the reputation of "[the] mightiest . . . , [the] best of living men" (40: κράτιστος, 46 βροτῶν ἄριστος). Today (40: again νῦν) this reputation, that drives the Thebans to beg their sovereign for help, is rooted in the memory of a past carefully divided into a 'before' and an 'after', a 'then' and a 'now': 49-50: "never be it our memory of thy reign that we were [first, yet this is only implicit here] restored (*stantes*) and afterwards (*hysteron*) cast down (*pesontes*)" (Jebb): ἀρχῆς δὲ τῆς σῆς μηδαμῶς μεμνήμεθα / στάντες τ' ἐς ὀρθὸν καὶ πεσόντες ὕστερον. This pattern is soon restated in the Thebans' wish (52-3) that "the good fortune you gave us before (τότε) . . . be the same now (τανῦν)": ὄρνιθι γὰρ καὶ τὴν τότ' αἰσίῳ τύχην / παρέσχες ἡμῖν, καὶ τανῦν ἴσος γενοῦ. But in the meantime time has stopped at Thebes; the natural cycles have ceased (fruits no longer grow: 25; there are no more births: 26-7) and there is only an incessant and undifferentiated suffering. The present tense (25 and 26 φθίνουσα, 28 ἐλαύνει, 29 κενοῦται; 30 πλουτίζεται) underlines this "imperfective situation" (Hutchinson 1999: 47-8). Pain does not suffice to demarcate time; the events, albeit iterated, are not single points on a directional line, but a suffering shared in a panchronic, abysmal temporality: the "depths [24: βυθοί] of the killing angry sea" (φοινίου σάλου) into which, one after another, Thebes sinks like a ship at the mercy of a tempestuous sea, metaphorise this experience of time.

The sovereign – *tyrannos* until his discovery of the truth; *basileus* only from 1201 (Knox 1979: 89; but cf. Nicolai 2018: esp. 251-5) – is the subject of an ironic contrast between different temporal scansions: on the one hand, he is active protagonist of what I called his *epos*; on the other, he is the patient of events characterised by a long temporality transcending him: the time actualised by the Pythic anamnesis, a sort of panchronia in which time past – even the remotest past – time present, and time future are solidly connected. However, despite the fact that Creon has told him that μακροὶ παλαιοί τ' ἂν μετρηθεῖεν χρόνοι ("the count of years

[from the killing of Laius] would run far back", 561),[26] Oedipus locates himself outside the imploring collectivity. He "feels compassion" (13: κατοικτίρων), is not indifferent to other people's suffering (12-13: δυσάλγητος γὰρ ἂν / εἴην τοιάνδε μὴ οὐ κατοικτίρων ἕδραν), and has wept copiously for them (66: ἴστε πολλὰ μέν με δακρύσαντα δή, "know that I have shed many a tear"). Albeit afflicted, Oedipus "[has] travelled many roads in the wandering of reflection (*phrontis*)": (67: [ἴστε] πολλὰς δ᾽ ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις). Although uncertain (*planois*), or better, engrossed in the search for the right path, he relies upon reason (*phrontis*, also signifying 'care'), taking a course that once again directs the time necessary for the investigation, and, subsequently, for a decision.

Oedipus' inquiry, which he will end up turning against himself, will finally offer an intelligible and definitive meaning for the relation between 'before' and 'after'. At any rate, for Oedipus, who relies upon reason, time is a measurable dimension:

καί μ᾽ ἦμαρ ἤδη ξυμμετρούμενον χρόνῳ
λυπεῖ τί πράσσει· τοῦ γὰρ εἰκότος πέρα
ἄπεστι, πλείω τοῦ καθήκοντος χρόνου.
(*OT* 73-5)

[When I compute the passage of the days, I am troubled, wondering how [Creon] fares", since Creon "has been away longer than is natural, beyond the proper time.]

It is a time made up of days (73) which rule rational expectations. It is not an abysm, nor a sequence of ruinous waves, but a dimension in which planning is vigilant, drawing the course (*hodoi*) of Oedipus' reflection (*phrontis*):

ὅταν δ᾽ ἵκηται, τηνικαῦτ᾽ ἐγὼ κακὸς
μὴ δρῶν ἂν εἴην πάνθ᾽ ὅσ᾽ ἂν δηλοῖ θεός.
(*OT* 76-7)

[But when (*hotan*) he (Creon) comes, then (*tenikauta*) I shall be a wretch if I fail to take any action that the god may indicate.]

26 As Finglass remarks, "the combination of μακρός . . . with παλαιός . . . conveys how remote the event now seems" (Sophocles 2018: 350).

Clearly, this also involves Oedipus' impatience of all delay, pos-
sibly worried about the tardiness of the oracle or because he sus-
pects "that Creon hesitates to come, as also Teiresias will do"
(Sophocles 2007: 114). However, it should be underlined that we
are dealing with a measurable time (*emar . . . xymmetroumenon
chrono*) in which the events and the decision are mutually relat-
ed (*hotan . . . tenikauta . . .* : "when . . . then . . . [I will] take any
action").

The time of Oedipus-sovereign-of-Thebes is therefore open to
new beginnings: at the end of his short inquest on the killing of
Laius (the nervous question-and-answer exchange with Creon
at 108-31), Oedipus reacts to the inertia which has paralysed the
Thebans despite the enormity of the crime – "such violent out-
rage" –[27] and the lethargy for which he will reprimand them al-
so at a later stage (255-8). It is up to him to start the inquiry that
has not been carried out yet and that he must accomplish (cf. 258
ἐξερευνᾶν): (132) "Well, I shall begin (ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς) again (αὖθις)
and light up (φανῶ) the obscurity". Importantly, Oedipus now us-
es the future tense, often almost obsessively in clausular position:
132 φανῶ, "I shall light up", 135 ὄψεσθε, "you shall see", 138 τοῦτ'
ἀποσκεδῶ μύσος, "I shall drive away this pollution", 145 πᾶν ἐμοῦ
δράσοντος, "[you know] that I shall take every measure", with the
alternative (145-6) "either we shall succeed . . . or we shall perish"
(once more φανούμεθα: "for our health . . . shall be made certain
– or our ruin"; thus Jebb's translation, here the best). Hutchinson
rightly pointed out that this use of tenses connotes the perspective
of "(im)perfective solutions" (1999: 47). Not coincidentally, when
Oedipus reappears in the first *epeisodion* (216), he will once again
use the future tense: 219 ἐξερῶ, "I shall speak". This further demar-
cates his scansion of the timeline into discrete units: the present
(the actual occasion when the people "make a demand" – αἰτεῖς
repeated at 216); the simple past, referring to the time before the
Sphinx's arrival; the present perfect, which begins with the killing
of the Sphinx ("I shall speak these words as a stranger to the sto-

27 Cf. Shakespeare, *King Lear* 2.4.22-3 ("They could not, would not do't.
'Tis worse than murder / To do upon respect such violent outrage") – as sug-
gested by Lewis Campbell (Sophocles 1879: 149n).

ry and a stranger to the deed . . . since it was only after the time of the deed [Laius' murder] that I have become a citizen", 219-22);[28] and the future: the realisation of Oedipus' project publicly announced in his proclamation that he will commit himself to finding out and punishing the murderer and his accomplices (226). Once again, the past is demarcated by two events: (1) the killing of Laius, (2) the Sphinx and the arrival of Oedipus. Paradoxically, scanning time through actions entails a peculiar 'squint' which obscures or deforms the relations between the events. But this is all man is granted.

The succession of actions, as drawn in the first scene of the Prologue (1-77), situates the arrival of the Sphinx before the present plague, yet it is soon denied by Creon's report: the plague is the direct consequence of the event that the Sphinx has induced them to neglect. This is why Oedipus is asked to investigate that original event. Differently from what had happened in his conflict with the Sphinx, now his *phrontis'* power will not be directed towards coping with the riddling voice of a lethal interlocutor, but will have to measure itself against the several, unpredicted and unpredictable, phases of ever new revelations that will confirm what Tiresias had anticipated. Even after the discovery that he is not the son of Polybus and Merope, and despite Iocasta's exit "in bitter pain" (1073-4), Oedipus will show that he still belongs to that linear temporality: a succession of discrete events among which he had already oriented his search. In fact, after learning about his own "low birth" (1079: *dysgeneia*), Oedipus will have to renounce genealogical temporality punctuated by a sequence of male ancestors, and instead avow that he is the child of Τύχη, something that the Greeks indicated by the feminine aoristic noun: 'Fortune', if personified, but strictly speaking 'whatever occurs' (*ho ti etyche*).[29]

28 I have modified Lloyd-Jones' translation following Jebb's, in Sophocles 1902.

29 Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Sophocles 1994a) translates Τύχη, deverbative from ἔτυχον, aorist of τυγχάνω ('happen to be at' and 'happen to one') as "event" (the 3rd person of the aorist, ἔτυχε = Lat. *evenit*), and not as 'Fortune' (Jebb, Sophocles 1902) or 'Chance' (Finglass, Sophocles 2018: 491); yet he prefers to emphasise "*She*", because of the feminine *tyche*. Lloyd-Jones' translation of *tyche* as "event" is clearly suggested by Diano 1968.

Although he aims at 'learning all' (1085: ἐκμαθεῖν) about his own birth, Oedipus will entrust his 'honour' (the *time* he alludes to at 1081) to the events following that birth, ordered in a measurable temporal sequence. He displays polemic indifference towards the point of origin – the 'event' of his birth – leaving its decodification to the elaborate mythography of the choral ode immediately following his words:

> ἐγὼ δ᾽ ἐμαυτὸν παῖδα τῆς Τύχης νέμων
> τῆς εὖ διδούσης οὐκ ἀτιμασθήσομαι.
> τῆς γὰρ πέφυκα μητρός· οἱ δὲ συγγενεῖς
> μῆνές με μικρὸν καὶ μέγαν διώρισαν.
> τοιόσδε δ᾽ ἐκφὺς οὐκ ἂν ἐξέλθοιμ᾽ ἔτι
> ποτ᾽ ἄλλος, ὥστε μὴ 'κμαθεῖν τοὐμὸν γένος.
> (*OT* 1080-5)

> [But I regard myself as child of the event / that brought good fortune, and shall not be dishonoured. / *She* is my mother; and the months that are my kin / have determined my smallness and my greatness. / With such a parent, I could never turn out / another kind of person, so as not to learn what was my birth. (Translator's emphasis)]

The months (*menes*), that is, "the time scanned according to the social measure" (Sophocles 2007: 263-4), have accompanied him since his birth. That first 'event', however, is a mark laid on his entire life, which is made up of a sequence of favourable events he was granted with "good fortune": one event was his own 'epiphany' when Thebes was besieged by the Sphinx; another event was his acquisition of a throne, which incorporated him into a dynasty; yet another event is, prospectively, the success he means to achieve now. The months have determined his being "small" and "great" according to age and the measure of fortune allowed by *Tyche* – with capital letter, but the small 't' better suggests the idea of *tyche* as the origin of a chain of events and portions of time. Those months can in turn be defined and measured. Oedipus is inscribed – or thinks himself to be inscribed – within the measurable sequence of days and events in which his success unfolds. Doing in time is the constitutive feature of his personality, which no genealogical inquiry may ever disclaim, turning him into "an-

other kind of person" (1085: ἄλλος). Oedipus' victory over the Sphinx defines the temporal series of the events according to a 'before' and an 'after' which Oedipus proves to be able to control. The remote past, which precedes Oedipus' epiphany, is a temporal continuum marked by events – the last ones being the Sphinx's crimes – whose causes the Thebans, little and overwhelmed just like "children" (*OT* 1, 6, 32, 58, 142, 147), have failed to grasp. They could say nothing about them to the one who was to save them, precisely as they are unable this very day to say anything about the murder of Laius (116-32). It is a time in which the events (*xymphorai*) seem to have neither cause nor remedy and therefore may have meaning only for people experienced (44: τοῖσιν ἐμπείροισι) in making decisions (45: τῶν βουλευμάτων), intellectually equipped to postulate causal relations between events.

Gregory Hutchinson opened his 1999 essay on *Sophocles and Time* on the premise that he would not deal with Sophocles' conception of time, but that through an analysis of the different temporalities that can be structured in the play thanks to Greek grammar, he would instead study the "contrast between (roughly) single, decisive, final events, and continuous states and/or repeated attempts, which fall short of, or look forward, to completion and fulfilment", moving from the "grammar of drama" to the "drama of grammar" (1999: 47). Hutchinson explained that this approach did not aim at connecting grammar and cognitive structures.[30] However, this "grammar", used by both the playwright and his audience, although in different ways, undeniably allows the former to direct the latter's perception of the events integrated within subjective perspectives. It unveils temporal and causal relations sometimes 'ironically' unknown to the characters. If we consider that perhaps these relations are not only deliberately concealed, but could also be unintentionally obliterated by the playwright, in turn reticent, analysing Sophocles is no less relevant than analysing Oedipus. If we return to our topic, we notice that Oedipus' experience at Thebes is, so to speak, compressed between that initial point in time (what we called Oedipus' epipha-

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30 "[W]hat is envisaged is not . . . at all a matter of linking the grammar of a language to the frame of mind of its users" (Hutchinson 1999: 47).

ny) and the present event, the new *xymphora*. A broader time span
will be disclosed to him as the only 'true' temporality only when
he feels himself "abandoned by the gods" (*atheos*, 1360). However,
until that moment of revelation, which will occur during his di-
alogue with the Messenger and the Shepherd (1110-85), Oedipus'
time maintains a peculiar dimension that differentiates it from that
of the Thebans. His days scan the rational expectations and sub-
stantiate the perspective of a 'non-tragic' action quite different
from the frequent "what shall I do?" (τί δράσω;) of the typically
disoriented tragic hero.

3. A Non-Genealogical Epic: Backward Time

His 'epic' is unrooted in a genealogy: as Paduano has remarked,
the similarity with Odysseus' self-presentation in *Odyssey* 9, re-
called above, allows one to grasp the main features of Oedipus'
own (Sophocles 1982: 427n2). First of all, the omission of the pat-
ronymic: while the former's "I am Odysseus, son of Laertes" fol-
lows a conventional pattern, Oedipus declares his name – an *uni-
cum* among the Sophoclean *prologizontes* (with te specific mean-
ing of 'first speakers') – with no further addition. This silence can-
not be attributed to his father's identity having been contested in
Corinth, the event that provoked his inquiry at Delphi (775-8). Nor
can this be interpreted as a hint to the audience, whose mythologi-
cal competence would have instead enjoyed an ironically tragic al-
lusion to Polybus pronounced by Oedipus at the peak of his power
as sovereign-saviour. On the contrary, as Paduano rightly com-
mented on Oedipus' "confiding" in Iocasta (771-833), it should be
assigned to "the particular relation Oedipus has with his own past.
. . . he himself has forgotten or, perhaps better, removed his own
past and only provided this may the king be wise and charismatic"
(Sophocles 1982: 476n45). A last remark before leaving the Theban
Oedipus for the Athenian one: the reflective ability (*phrontis*) of
Oedipus *tyrannos* entails a vision of linear time characterised by
an origin close in time and orientation. As anticipated above, this
vision is not genealogical: even when he seems to incline towards
the past – if only by dreaming of it – Oedipus paradoxically lo-

cates himself at its origin. In a passage whose extreme ironic import was well-known to the ancients, he redraws the Theban dynasty. Yet, the very moment he decides to avenge Laius "as though he had been my father" (263-5: ὡσπερεὶ τοὐμοῦ πατρός), he redraws it by implicitly starting from himself:

> κἀπὶ πάντ᾽ ἀφίξομαι
> ζητῶν τὸν αὐτόχειρα τοῦ φόνου λαβεῖν
> τῷ Λαβδακείῳ παιδὶ Πολυδώρου τε καὶ
> τοῦ πρόσθε Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαι τ᾽ Ἀγήνορος.
> (*OT* 265-8)

[(I) shall go to every length in searching for the author of the murder done upon the son of Labdacus (*scil.* Laius), sprung from Polydorus and from Cadmus before him and from Agenor long ago.]

Differently from the one which, spoken by Iocasta, opens Euripides' *Phoenician Women*,[31] this genealogy is not oriented towards a descending but an ascending line (as also in Herodotus 5.59, where however it is used only to date an epigraph). The genealogy sketched in *The Phoenician Women* presents the Cadmus-Polydorus-Labdacus-Laius sequence, and leaves out Agenor, the Egyptian father of the first Theban king, Cadmus. Pronounced by the Queen Mother, rather than a genealogy it seems aimed at sketching the royal dynasty in a phase in which the succession is being discussed. On the contrary, the Corinthian Oedipus, in spite of having the "power" (259: ἀρχαί)[32] once possessed by Laius, also includes in the genealogy its founder who never was king in Thebes, thus producing a peculiar symmetry between the actual sovereign, who is stranger to the Theban dynasty, and the foreign progenitor, who was never king of Thebes. He is confident that he belongs to a royal race, Polybus', and has not yet discovered his own "low birth" (*dysgeneia*: 1079). Nonetheless, he in-

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31 *Phoe.* 5-9: Κάδμος ἡνίκ᾽ ἦλθε γῆν / τήνδ᾽, ἐκλιπὼν Φοίνισσαν ἐναλίαν χθόνα· / ὃς παῖδα γήμας Κύπριδος Ἁρμονίαν ποτὲ / Πολύδωρον ἐξέφυσε, τοῦ δὲ Λάβδακον / φῦναι λέγουσιν, ἐκ δὲ τοῦδε Λάιον.

32 As he says *archai*, and not *kratos*, it would be more correct to translate as 'sovereignty'. See Diano 1968 and 1994.

cludes himself within a virtual gallery of progenitors, arrogating to himself the right to acknowledge the whole ancestry, not starting with the dynasty's founder but with himself – with the only one who, ironically, has not been recognised as a descendant. On a first level, we can observe that the way he presents the genealogy confirms that he feels alien to this *genos*: he may redraw the genealogical line only because he is outside it. If however we move to a deeper level, we cannot but see that he not only considers himself as the vantage point from which to survey the whole dynasty, with the effect of producing a backwardly perspectival vertigo, but he also quite unconsciously formulates his own actual genealogy, and chooses to begin it from the moment of his own acquisition of sovereignty thanks to the exploits that have endowed him with κλέος. Although projected towards the past, this genealogy is grounded in a segment of time on which the Theban Oedipus maps his action, refounding the past on the present. The origin of that segment is oriented by the same Oedipus who is also its ending point: no-one can follow Oedipus after he eventually manages to master the genealogical time with this incorrect orientation. At 1201 the Chorus will recognise for the first time "[his] king" with words that echo line 8, where instead Oedipus proclaimed himself "renowned" for his deeds and called himself with no patronymic, thus excluding himself – as we have already seen – from all genealogy: "[o]nce you were called Oedipus, famous among all men [cf. 8: ὁ πᾶσι κλεινὸς Οἰδίπους καλούμενος] and now 'you are called my king' [βασιλεὺς καλῇ ἐμός]" (Knox 1979: 89). In the following lines of this *stasimon*, the "famous and beloved Oedipus" (1207: ἰὼ κλεινὸν Οἰδίπου κάρα) will be called to all effects the "son of Laius" (1216: ἰὼ Λάϊειον <ὦ> τέκνον). Significantly, these two lyrical lines are in response (1207/1216: *dochmiac + iambus*). For Oedipus "the proof of his legitimacy is at the same time the exposure of his unspeakable pollution" (ibid.); yet we can go so far as to oppose the claustrophobic and incestuous introversion of *genos* to the apparent extroversion of walking in time.

4. Time in *Oedipus at Colonus*

Gregory Hutchinson has rightly observed that "the experience . . . of Oedipus' life of exile [is that of] a wandering beggar" (1999: 58). Yet we know nothing of the places where he has been, and in his first words, "Oedipus sees in 'this day' (3-4: καθ᾽ ἡμέραν / τὴν νῦν) mere repetition of a routine" (62). This routine, in which Antigone has accompanied her father, stands out against the backdrop of an irretrievable past, and is especially connoted in Oedipus' description of his daughter's life (345-52: ἐξ ὅτου . . . ἀεὶ . . . πολλά: "ever since . . . often"). Also Creon's reproach for the poor living conditions which Oedipus ever and ever reserves for his daughter (746 and 750: ἀεὶ . . . ἀεὶ) contributes to delineating this long duration, that Oedipus synthesises in the few concise words with which he describes, in the exordium, his own existence: "my sufferings, and the time that has long been my companion (χὠ χρόνος ξυνὼν / μακρός), and thirdly my nobility teach me to be content with it" (7-8). Yet, his discovery of being in a place sacred to the Eumenides and, therefore, of having an unequivocal "token of [his] destiny" (46: ξυμφορᾶς ξύνθημ᾽ ἐμῆς), contained in the Prologue, draws the contours of the long temporality that, oriented by higher powers, frames Oedipus' experience as a beggar against the background of the routine of his daily life. Again, Hutchinson points out that "most fundamentally, the play sets the supreme event of the play, Oedipus' death, against the long time which has preceded it" (1999: 60). We could imagine that this long duration coincides with the "earlier happiness" Oedipus and Iocasta had enjoyed, and whose distance in time the Second Messenger insistently underlined in *OT*: ὁ πρὶν ('earlier') παλαιὸς ('of yore') δ᾽ ὄλβος ἦν πάροιθε ('formerly') μὲν / ὄλβος δικαίως (1282).[33] However, it is Oedipus himself who expresses the idea of this "long time" (*chronos makros*) – not a merely predictable sucession of days, but of a life-span corresponding to a superior design

33 Jebb (Sophocles 1902) tries to render this sequence as follows: "the *old* happiness of their *ancestral* fortune was *aforetime* happiness indeed" (my emphasis).

– as soon as the Peasant of Colonus leaves (82), as if it were a se-
cret truth not to be shared with strangers. The usual translation
here is "long years":

> ὅς μοι, τὰ πόλλ’ ἐκεῖν’ ὅτ’ ἐξέχρη κακά,
> ταύτην ἔλεξε παῦλαν ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ,
> ἐλθόντι χώραν τερμίαν,
> (*OC* 87-9)

> [He (Phoebus) told me, when he predicted all that evil, that it
> should be my respite after long years, when I came to the land
> that was my final bourne (*chora termia*).]

And yet, rather than a mere succession of discrete temporal units,
this is the time drawn by the prophecy, precisely as this "coun-
try" is the "last" one (trans. Fitzgerald: Sophocles 2013), not on-
ly because this is the place of Oedipus' last day (*termia hemera*, as
the Greeks called it), but because it is the day 'appointed by desti-
ny', *eimarmene*, as the acient *scholium* explains.[34] It fulfils Apollo's
prophecy, that part of it which Oedipus has not revealed to any-
one yet (he has told it only to Antigone in Euripides' *Phoenician
Women* 1703-7; see above, p. 123). He had told Iocasta about the
parricide and the incest (*OT* 787-93), but he had left this detail un-
told. The two parts of the prophecy entail two different reactions
on the part of Oedipus, involving two different temporalities:
the former, concerning the parricide and the incest, has required
Oedipus' desperate use of every available means to prevent its
happening. He stayed away from Corinth both before becoming
sovereign of Thebes and after the arrival of the Messenger and his
announcement of Polybus' death (*OT* 1007-13). The latter part has
brought about blind Oedipus' acceptance of being guided by some-
body who, like him, relies on the information she may obtain from
other wanderers (25). Today Oedipus can only proceed one step at
a time (πρὸς ποσί) like the Thebans after the *xymphorai* that had
afflicted them (*OT* 130-1), in the dark as to his next destination.
Yet now he can rely on the fact that the last part of that prediction

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34 Τερμίαν: αὐτῷ εἱμαρμένην, ἐφ’ ἧς ἔμελλε τὸ τέλος τοῦ βίου εὑρήσειν
(de Marco 1952): "*termian*: the appointed day, on which he would have found
his end". εἱμαρμένη is etymologically connected with *moira*, 'destiny'.

will eventually be fullfilled, and this perhaps represents for him the greatest support after Antigone.

In *OC* the long duration (*makros chronos*) is inextricably inter-twined with Oedipus' "sufferings" (7: *pathai*) and with his own sense of guilt for "all that evil" predicted by the god (87: τὰ πολλ' ἐκεῖν[α] κακὰ). The exordium moves well beyond the self-rep-resentation of a noble and high-minded man (*gennaios*, see 8) who has learned endurance from old age and "sufferings" (7: πάθαι). At odds with Oedipus, in *OT* Creon affirms that

> ἐν χρόνῳ γνώσῃ τάδ' ἀσφαλῶς, ἐπεὶ
> χρόνος δίκαιον ἄνδρα δείκνυσιν μόνος,
> κακὸν δὲ κἂν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ γνοίης μιᾷ.
> (613-15)

> [in course of time (*en chrono*) you (Oedipus) will learn this with certainty, since time (*chronos*) alone reveals the just man, but the traitor you can learn to know in a single day.]

In turn, Oedipus, whose impetuous mind opposes the cautious re-flection suggested by Creon, retorts: ταχὺν δεῖ κἀμὲ βουλεύειν πάλιν (*OT* 619: "I also must plan quickly [against the secret con-spirator, of whose existence he is convinced). Yet, the time Oedipus finds himself to belong to, once close to the χαλκόπους ὁδός ("brazen-footed threshold": *OC* 57), is qualitatively different from both the mere succession of years, and the suggested caution with which Creon opposed the urgency and intolerance that goad-ed Oedipus during the plague. Both temporal dimensions are for-eign to him. In his tirade against Creon (*OC* 969-73), he will prove to be fully aware of the whole sequence in which his own exist-ence is inscribed now:

> ἐπεὶ δίδαξον, εἴ τι θέσφατον πατρὶ
> χρησμοῖσιν ἱκνεῖθ' ὥστε πρὸς παίδων θανεῖν,
> πῶς ἂν δικαίως τοῦτ' ὀνειδίζοις ἐμοί,
> ὃς οὔτε βλάστας πω γενεθλίους πατρός,
> οὐ μητρὸς εἶχον, ἀλλ' ἀγέννητος τότ' ἦ;
> (*OC* 969-73)

> [Why, tell me, if a prophecy (*thesphaton*) came to my father from the oracle that he should die at his children's hands, how could

you justly make that a reproach to me, who no father had begot, no mother conceived, but who was still (*tote*) unborn?]

"All that evil", as Oedipus says in *OC* 87, was already 'spoken by God' (*thesphatos*) when Oedipus was still unconceived. It is not only a question of defining juridical responsibility, as is often repeated; what is involved here is the immeasurability of human experience against the temporal design of "the higher powers" (*daimones*), even when they delude us into believing that we may have intercourse (*synallagai*) with them (*OT* 34: the Thebans evaluate Oedipus πρῶτον . . . ἐν δαιμόνων συναλλαγαῖς: "the first of men . . . in dealing with the higher powers").

Oedipus' towering over Thesesus when he explains to him the effects of time on men (*OC* 607-23) is already inscribed in this perspective. The analogy between these lines and the beginning of Ajax's 'deception speech' has been noticed by Seaford (1994: 136-7) and underlined by Easterling (1999: 101):[35]

ὦ φίλτατ' Αἰγέως παῖ, μόνοις οὐ γίγνεται
θεοῖσι γῆρας οὐδὲ κατθανεῖν ποτε,
τὰ δ' ἄλλα συγχεῖ πάνθ' ὁ παγκρατὴς χρόνος.
φθίνει μὲν ἰσχὺς γῆς, φθίνει δὲ σώματος,
θνήσκει δὲ πίστις, βλαστάνει δ' ἀπιστία,
. . .
καὶ ταῖσι Θήβαις εἰ τανῦν εὐημερεῖ
καλῶς τὰ πρὸς σέ, μυρίας ὁ μυρίος
χρόνος τεκνοῦται νύκτας ἡμέρας τ' ἰών,
ἐν αἷς τὰ νῦν ξύμφωνα δεξιώματα
δόρει διασκεδῶσιν ἐκ σμικροῦ λόγου.
(*OC* 607-11, 616-20)

[Dearest son of Aegeus, for the gods alone there is no old age and no death ever, but all other things are submerged by all-powerful time! The strength of the country perishes, so does the strength of the body, loyalty dies and disloyalty comes into being. . . . And if now all is sunny weather between Thebes and you, time as it passes brings forth countless nights and days in which they shall shatter with the spear the present harmonious pledges of a petty reason.]

35 Sophocles, *Aj.* 646-92, and especially 646-7. See also Guidorizzi (Sophocles 2008: 277-80) and Sophocles 2018: 350.

Oedipus relies on the gods' promise that he will not be "useless" (627: ἀχρεῖος) to Athens (628: εἴπερ μὴ θεοὶ ψεύδουσί με, "if the gods do not deceive me!"). Also the Chorus of Old Men of Colonus are aware of this: if the Old Thebans in *OT* express their regret at having met him, for the disorder he has produced in their lives and the compassion he has forced them to feel,[36] the Chorus of *OC* defines Oedipus' mundane experience from the edifying perspective of a fully realised life: ὀλβίως ἔλυ-/σεν τέλος, ὦ φίλαι, βίου ("he resolved the end of life in happiness [ὀλβίως]", 1720-1). Yet *olbos*, it should be recalled, denotes a worldly happiness, and in fact it was meant as such in the words of the Second Messenger in *OT* 1282, when, as we have seen, he remembers the "earlier happiness" of Oedipus and Iocasta. But what *olbos* may await a hero who has deluded himself into believing in his own agency, and then, accused of parricide and incest, must reply that he has 'suffered the deed', not actively been responsible for it? An easy answer would refer to his political role: after failing as "preserver" (*soter*) of Thebes (as the Thebans had asked him to be for the second time, *OT* 48), now Oedipus – in accordance with his destiny – has become preserver of the city whose citizens are attending the theatrical celebration of Oedipus' own death. In this view, the eschatological perspective is one with Athens' ideology, a city torn by "civil strife" (*staseis*: 1234). It is probably an apology of Sophocles himself, appointed *proboulos* after the Sicilian defeat in 413 and promoter of the first tyranny of the Four Hundred, as well as an experiment in political theology. Although this may be argued, it may be more productive to adopt the paradoxical view suggested by archaic wisdom, the same that resounds in the third *stasimon* of *OC*:

> μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νι-
> κᾷ λόγον· τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φανῇ,
> βῆναι κεῖθεν ὅθεν περ ἥ-
> κει πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα.
> (1224-7)

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36 See e.g. *OT* 1216-17: ἰὼ Λάϊειον <ὦ> τέκνον, εἴθε σ' εἴθε σε μήποτ' εἰδόμαν ("Ah, son of Laius, would that I had never set eyes on you!"), and then, slightly differently, at 1348.

[Not to be born comes first by every reckoning, and once one has appeared, to go back to where one came from as soon as possible is the next best thing.]

Soon after the thunder announces his forthcoming end, Oedipus prepares his daughters for it:

ὦ παῖδες, ἥκει τῷδ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θέσφατος
βίου τελευτή, κοὐκέτ' ἔστ' ἀποστροφή.
(1472-3)

[Children, the end of life that was prophesied has come upon this man, and there is no way of putting it off.]

His time has come full circle (ἥκει). *Ouketi* (κ[αὶ]οὐκέτ[ι]) the awesomeness of this temporal adverb consists in expressing an awareness that human time is over, in fact implying that there is a time transcending human time, from which one comes (1226-7: ὅθεν περ ἥκει) and to which one then returns. If compared with this occurrence, the other famous use of *ouketi* in *OC* inescapably sounds limited and ironical: at 389-90 Ismene had referred that, according to the "latest prophecies" (387: τοῖς νῦν . . . μαντεύμασιν), σὲ τοῖς ἐκεῖ ζητητὸν ἀνθρώποις ποτὲ / θανόντ' ἔσεσθαι ζῶντά τ' εὐσοίας χάριν ("you shall one day be sought by the people [of Thebes] in death and in life for their preservation's sake"). The oracle contemplates the possibility that he may have this function in his lifetime, and slyly plays upon the memory of his past power (392: ἐν σοὶ τὰ κείνων φασὶ γίγνεσθαι κράτη, "they say that their power will depend on you"). Oedipus' reply at 391 and 393,

τίς δ' ἂν τοιοῦδ' ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς εὖ πράξειεν ἄν;
. . .
ὅτ' οὐκέτ' εἰμί, τηνικαῦτ' ἄρ' εἴμ' ἀνήρ;

[And who could obtain success through such a man? / . . . / When (*hote*) I no longer (*ouketi*) exist, am I then a man?"]

establishes a relation between different temporalities and not, as *hote . . . tenikauta* at *OT* 76, between overlapping stages of the same temporality. Here he does not consider his own physical death, but his own symbolic death and the irony of suddenly be-

ing recognised once again as symbolically 'alive' after Apollo's recent prophecy (411-15) about his 'usefulness' for the city. This is at the same time cynical and ironical: cynical, in view of the contrast between his exalted *epos* in *OT* and his present condition of 'no-more-a-man'; tragically ironical with regard to his role as "preserver" he will actually fulfil only when dead and for a different city: Athens. It is especially ironical that the oracle prophesises the need of this no-more-a-man for settling the brotherly contest over Thebes. His statement is a rejection of the acceptance of Apollo's prophecy and of re-entering a temporality he had belonged to with a foundational function in *OT*, precisely as is required of him now, on the threshold of his physical death. Going back to Thebes would also include the burial of his body within the city and his symbolic reintegration into its temporality. But Oedipus is beyond it. No longer 'existent', he is finally ready to move outside time altogether: to the timeless temporality of divine transcendence beyond doing and suffering.

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6

Liminality, (In)Accessibility, and Negative Characterization in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

Francesco Lupi

Abstract

The essay argues that Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus* established a deliberate interplay between the privative features that mark Oedipus' (self-)description and those of the land of his future heroisation. This is shown by the recurrent employment of privative lexical items and negative phrases variously applied to both the hero and the place where the dramatic action of the play takes place, the sacred grove of the Eumenides, at Colonus. Instances of such interplay are disseminated throughout the play and even apply to ritual-performative aspects. Through a detailed linguistic analysis, it is argued that Sophocles strove to provide a coherent and congruent characterisation of Oedipus, the 'liminal' hero deprived of his social status, and the sacred, inaccessible grove of Colonus.

KEYWORDS: Sophocles; *Oedipus at Colonus*; liminality

This paper argues that in *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles provides a parallel negative characterisation of both the hero, Oedipus, and the place where Oedipus is bound to station in the play, the sacred grove of the Eumenides at Colonus. The assumption mainly rests on linguistic evidence that appears to have been intentionally disseminated by Sophocles throughout the play in order to provide such a parallel characterisation. This linguistic evidence, which I shall focus on in the first part of the paper, projects a coherent image of man, Oedipus, and place, the grove of Colonus. One may argue that the connection between the hero and the land bound to receive him was strengthened by Sophocles for a specific aim.

I suggest that the poet intended to highlight that the only viable way to end Oedipus' toilsome dramatic journey was to associate him to the land that shares most similarities with him, at least in terms of how the sacred grove of the Eumenides is represented in *Oedipus at Colonus*. As I shall argue, in fact, in the play the sacred grove undergoes a negative characterisation that is akin to that of Oedipus.

Before I proceed any further, however, I should clarify that by 'negative characterisation' I refer to the sort of characterisation that employs any form of negative lexical item, such as nouns and adjectives implying the deprivation of something, or negative adverbs, but also more complex syntactical structures that affirm by negating. In the present analysis, therefore, the phrase 'negative characterisation' does not carry any demeaning undertone, let alone any moral connotation of *Oedipus at Colonus*' namesake hero; rather, it is employed throughout the article merely to refer to linguistic-rhetorical phaenomena.

1. Liminality and Inaccessibility

In this part of the essay I will analyse how the sacred grove of Colonus is characterised in the play; in particular, I will do so by focusing on two specific features, the grove's liminality and its inaccessibility.

1.1 Liminality

The sacred grove of Colonus as a liminal place is a feature of Sophocles' play long noted and widely commented upon. In recent years, for instance, Andreas Markantonatos has emphasized that "the sacred grove as a conspicuously liminal place that is intersected by the realm of the Olympian gods and the realm of the underworld divinities is a standard trait of mystic geography" (2007: 136). The concept of liminality is introduced early in the play: not only does the liminal nature of the grove apply to its being an 'in-between' area, "poised as it is between the upper and nether worlds" – as Markantonatos points out (112) – that is, in terms of "mystic geography" (136), but it is also liminal in sheer

'topographical' terms. This is already made clear in the opening lines of the play's prologue. At lines 14-16 Antigone tells her father Oedipus what his eyes cannot see, thus providing essential spatial information:

> ΑΝΤΙΓΟΝΗ πάτερ ταλαίπωρ' Οἰδίπους, πύργοι μὲν οἳ
> πόλιν στέφουσιν, ὡς ἀπ' ὀμμάτων, πρόσω·
> χῶρος δ' ὅδ' ἱερός, ὡς σάφ' εἰκάσαι, . . .

> [ΑΝΤΙΓΟΝΕ Unhappy father, Oedipus, the walls that surround the city look to be far off; and this place is sacred, one can easily guess, . . .][1]

The city (Athens) is far away and is only visible through its towers, which stand in the distance. The dramatic action, then, is immediately placed on the outskirts of the urban world of Athens; the grove of Colonus, prior to being labelled by Antigone as a χῶρος . . . ἱερός, 'a sacred place', receives its very first definition as a place that is 'not' a city. Further in the text, at line 24, Antigone states that she does indeed recognise Athens, but does not know the χῶρος, the 'place', to which they have come:

> ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ ἔχεις διδάξαι δή μ' ὅποι καθέσταμεν;
> ΑΝΤ.   τὰς γοῦν Ἀθήνας οἶδα, τὸν δὲ χῶρον οὔ.
>   (23-4)

> [ΟΕDIPUS Can you explain to me where it is we are? / ΑΝΤΙGONE I know that it is Athens, but I do not know what place.]

Moreover, it has been argued that the play's setting itself may have incorporated visual elements stressing the dramatic space's liminality. In particular, as Markantonatos drawing on previous scholarship states, "a low ridge of natural rock must have indicated the boundaries of the holy meadow . . ." (2007: 73).

Liminality, however, also applies to the sacred grove in tem-

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1 All English translations of quotations from Sophocles (except for *Oedipus Rex*) are by Hugh Lloyd-Jones in Sophocles 1994 (slightly modified in one case). For *Oedipus at Colonus* I print the text established by Guido Avezzù in Sophocles 2008. Unless otherwise stated, basic meanings for single Greek words are taken from *GE*. All translations from secondary sources are mine.

poral terms. It is Oedipus himself to tell us so. Further in the text, in his "passionate prayer to the Eumenides" (Van Nortwick 2015: 85), Oedipus reveals that Apollo had prophesised that the hero would end his wretched existence at the goddesses' grove, which Oedipus aptly calls χώραν τερμίαν (89), namely, the land 'where one is destined to end life' (*LSJ*⁹, 1777). The topography of the grove, I suggest, then corresponds to the chronology of Oedipus' life; in other words, according to Apollo's prophecy Oedipus will find the τέρμα ('goal', but also 'end', 'limit', 'termination'), of his ταλαίπωρος βίος, "long-suffering life" (91)[2] in a place that is both at the threshold of the urban world and is 'itself' a threshold, as the old man of Colonus soon makes clear at lines 56-8:

> (ΞΕΝΟΣ)   . . . ὃν δ᾽ ἐπιστείβεις τόπον
>   χθονὸς καλεῖται τῆσδε χαλκόπους ὁδός,
>   ἔρεισμ᾽ Ἀθηνῶν· . . .

> [(Stranger) . . . and the spot that you are treading is called the Brazen-footed threshold of this land, the bulwark of Athens; . . .]

The grove is an ὁδός, a threshold, but liminality also applies to Oedipus. First, Oedipus is 'liminal' in a metaphorical sense – he is an outcast, an exile bound to live the meagre life of the πτωχός (just like his attendant, Antigone), the debased 'beggar'[3] deprived of a political status. It may be worthwhile to note that in the play Oedipus either describes himself or is referred to as ἀλήτης or πλανήτης, 'wanderer', eight times in total,[4] more often than any

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2 For the representation of one's life's end as a τέρμα, one may compare the (admittedly problematic) closing lines of *Oedipus Rex*, where the Chorus issue the warning that one should refrain from calling anybody fortunate, "before he passes the limit of his life without suffering anything painful" (. . . πρὶν ἂν / τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεινὸν παθών, 1529-30; text and translation by Patrick J. Finglass in Sophocles 2018, where lines 1524-30 are deemed to be spurious and thus expunged). On the issues raised by the closing lines of *OT*, which were first athetized in the eighteenth century, see Finglass' comment *ad* [1524-30] (615-19; on lines [1529-30] specifically, see comment *ad l.* at 618-19).

3 Cf. Soph. *OC* 444, 751, 1335.

4 ἀλήτης: 50, 165 (*lyr.*), 746, 949, 1096 (*lyr.*); πλανήτης: 3, 122+123 (*lyr.*) (immediate repetition). I discuss the use of the verb ἀλάομαι., 'to wander'

other hero among the corpus of extant fifth-century tragedies.[5] Oedipus' liminality, however, goes beyond his current status, as it also applies to the 'biographical' stage he has reached at the dramatic time of the play. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, in fact, he is nearing the limit of his earthly life, as we see, again, in the character's prayer to the Eumenides:

> (ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ)   . . . ἀλλά μοι, θεαί,
>   βίου κατ' ὀμφὰς τὰς Ἀπόλλωνος δότε
>   πέρασιν ἤδη καὶ καταστροφήν τινα,
>   . . .
>   (101-3)

> [(OEDIPUS) Come goddesses, in accordance with Apollo's sacred word, grant to me a passage and a conclusion to my life, . . .]

As the passages discussed above make clear, then, the concepts of spatial and temporal liminality are closely associated from the beginning and so are the play's setting and its 'liminal' hero; thus, a mutual relationship and thematic overlap between man and place, space and time are established early in the play.

1.2 Inaccessibility

Another feature is closely related to the grove's (spatial) liminality,

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(sharing the same stem of ἀλήτης), in the next footnote.

5 The two features that best define the exilic condition of Oedipus, – that is, begging and wandering – are tightly combined together, in Oedipus' own words, in two instances: φυγάς σφιν ἔξω πτωχὸς ἠλώμην ἀεί (444, "I went off into exile, a begging wanderer for ever"; translation slightly modified); . . . ἐκ σέθεν δ' ἀλώμενος / ἄλλους ἐπαιτῶ τὸν καθ' ἡμέραν βίον (1364-5, "[for it was . . .] you who caused me to wander begging others of my daily sustenance"). Begging and wandering also feature in Creon's insincerely piteous first *rhēsis* (728-60). In enumerating the former Theban king's misfortunes, Creon (falsely) acknowledges his own pain at seeing Oedipus ἀεὶ δ' ἀλήτην κἀπὶ προσπόλου μιᾶς / βιοστερῆ χωροῦντα, τὴν ἐγὼ τάλας / οὐκ ἄν ποτ' ἐς τοσοῦτον αἰκίας πεσεῖν / ἔδοξ', ὅσον πέπτωκεν ἥδε δύσμορος, / ἀεί σε κηδεύουσα καὶ τὸ σὸν κάρα / πτωχῷ διαίτῃ . . . (745-51, "[seeing that in your misery you are an exile], and ever wander in indigence with but one attendant. Never would I have thought that this poor girl could fall to such a depth of misery as that to which she has fallen, always caring for you and for your person, living like a beggar, . . .").

that of its inaccessibility. The place where Oedipus and Antigone have come to is identified by the old man of Colonus by stressing the 'privative' features of the place. The sacred grove is successively and repeatedly described by both Antigone and the locals – the old man first and then the Chorus – as inaccessible: already in the prologue, Antigone defines it χῶρον οὐκ ἁγνὸν πατεῖν (37), "ground [that] cannot be trodden without pollution"; the old man of Colonus describes it as a (χῶρος) ἄθικτος οὐδ' οἰκητός (39), "inviolable, and not inhabited"; then, in the *parodos*, the Chorus calls it ἀστιβές ἄλσος (126), "inviolable grove". With regard to ἀστιβές, one may call attention to the fact that the same adjective, in the form ἄστιπτος, is used by Sophocles to describe the land where another tragic limping hero has his abode, Philoctetes, the protagonist of Sophocles' namesake tragedy, staged only a few years earlier than *Oedipus at Colonus*. The ἀκτή, 'shore', where the reject Philoctetes was abandoned by Odisseus prior to the dramatic action of the play is βροτοῖς ἄστιπτος οὐδ' οἰκουμένη, "untrodden by mortals, not inhabited" (2). All in all, in *Oedipus at Colonus* the grove is an *abaton*,[6] a space that no-one can trespass on.

The grove's inaccessible nature is evoked, in more concrete terms, by the description of the rock on which Oedipus sits at line 21. The rock is successively defined "unhewn rock" (ἄξεστου πέτρου, 19) and "venerable unhewn pedestal" (σεμνὸν . . . / βάθρον . . . ἀσκέπαρνον, 100-1), by Antigone and Oedipus respectively. As Andrea Rodighiero notes, in the latter instance "the *hapax*, with the privative prefix (*alpha-*), defines the inviolability of this space" (Sophocles 1998: 187, *ad l.*; my translation). The connection between the grove's inviolability/inaccessibility and the depiction of such feature by means of privative *hapax legomena* (or rarely attested words), as I shall endeavour to show in the third part of the

6 This is made clear in the *parodos*, where the Chorus order Oedipus to speak only after leaving the sacred space he is occupying: λόγον εἴ τιν' οἴσεις / πρὸς ἐμὰν λέσχαν, ἀβάτων ἀποβάς, / ἵνα πᾶσι νόμος / φώνει (165-9, "If you have any word to say in converse with me, stand away from the forbidden ground and speak where it is lawful for all!"). The characterization of the grove as inaccessible is further and eloquently stressed by the *figura etymologica* (ἄβατος ~ ἀποβαίνω), which is virtually doomed to be lost in modern translations.

article, is a conspicuous aspect in the play, one which invites further reflection.

The liminal and inaccessible nature of the sacred grove is once again stressed, this time through Oedipus' negative characterisation, also in the opening strophe of the play's *parodos*. As they enter the orchestra, the Chorus label Oedipus as ὁ πάντων ἀκορέστατος (120), "the man most impudent of all", thus implying the concept of κόρος, 'satiety', and Oedipus' failure to 'satiate' himself and his being "reckless of due limit, shameless", to quote from Jebb's commentary *ad l.* (Sophocles 1890: 31). If ἀκόρεστος is he who metaphorically trespasses the limits imposed to men, then Oedipus, by literally stepping inside a no-go area, has culpably gone beyond the metaphor.

The inaccessible characterisation of the grove pervades the text: *alpha*-privative adjectives describing the grove itself or religious and ritual aspects associated with it are remarkably frequent in the play. Inaccessibility is initially evoked in prescriptive terms, as we saw above. Then, as the dramatic action unfolds, the grove is portrayed in more descriptive terms, though still with predominantly privative/negative vocabulary. To show this, I will focus, if briefly, on the play's first *stasimon* especially. In the first strophe of this famous ode, the sacred grove of Colonus is celebrated as a darkly peaceful space, pervaded by godly and chthonic elements and evocative of Oedipus' future death. As Giulio Guidorizzi in his 2008 commentary on the play points out, "the ode . . . marks . . . the boundary between splendour and decay and between the flourishing of a nature that keeps reproducing itself and the frailty of a man who, after a short-lived splendour, is soon to fade and die" (Sophocles 2008: 284, *ad* Soph. *OC* 668-719; my translation). The sacred grove of Colonus – Guidorizzi argues –, rather than a simple *locus amoenus*, emerges as a space of death, thus foretelling the end of Oedipus' life. Appropriate word choice contributes to such characterisation, especially the 'cluster' of privative terms[7] at lines 675-7. This 'cluster', which is partly prescriptive and part-

7 The phrase is borrowed from Villari (2013: 144), who, in her analysis of the play's first *stasimon* (see esp. 140-6), highlights the recurrence of such 'clusters' in the lyric sections of *OC* (145).

ly descriptive, at once draws attention to the grove's inaccessibility (ἄβατον, 675) and its being at the threshold between life and death:

Χο.   εὐίππου, ξένε, τᾶσδε χώρας
         ἵκου τὰ κράτιστα γᾶς ἔπαυλα,
         τὸν ἀργῆτα Κολωνόν,   670
         ἔνθ' ἁ λίγεια μινύρεται
         θαμίζουσα μάλιστ' ἀηδὼν
         χλωραῖς ὑπὸ βάσσαις,
         τὸν οἰνωπὸν ἔχουσα κισσὸν
         καὶ τὰν <u>ἄβατον</u> θεοῦ   675
         φυλλάδα μυριόκαρπον <u>ἀνήλιον</u>
         <u>ἀνήνεμόν</u> τε πάντων
         χειμώνων· ἵν' ὁ βακχιώτας ἀεὶ
            Διόνυσος ἐμβατεύει
           θείαις ἀμφιπολῶν τιθήναις.   680

[Cho(rus) In this country of fine horses, stranger, you have come to the choicest rural dwellings, to white Colonus, where the melodious nightingale most likes to stay and sing her song beneath the green glades, living amid the wine-dark ivy and the inviolable leafage of the goddess, rich in fruit, never vexed by the sun or by the wind of many winters, where the reveller Dionysus ever treads the ground, in company with his divine nurses.]

2. Further 'Negative' Features in Oedipus' Characterisation

I shall now focus on some other instances of negative characterisation, in particular those applying to the play's main character, Oedipus.

Expectedly, part of the negative characterisation that Oedipus undergoes in the play is dictated by his status as a blind man. However, one may deem it significant that instead of τυφλός, 'blind', Oedipus' impairment is at times referred to in negative terms: for instance, in the prologue, Oedipus is defined as "a man who cannot see" (ἀνδρὸς μὴ βλέποντος, 73); likewise, much further in the text (1200), his eyes are called, still in a privative way, *aderkta*, 'not seeing' (ἀδέρκτων ὀμμάτων).

Again in the prologue, the last two lines of Oedipus' prayer to the Eumenides, a few lines before the Chorus' entrance, are strikingly remarkable in that they describe the present status – and the physical state – of Oedipus (109-10) in negative terms:

> ΟΙ.   οἰκτίρατ' ἀνδρὸς Οἰδίπου τόδ' ἄθλιον
> εἴδωλον· οὐ γὰρ δὴ τό γ' ἀρχαῖον δέμας.

[Οε. Take pity on this miserable ghost of the man Oedipus, for this is not the form that once was mine!]

Oedipus, as he asserts himself, is reduced to a mere εἴδωλον, a 'phantom' without any resemblance to his old body (*demas*).[8] The contrast between the almost vanishing figure of the 'aged' Oedipus and the sturdy physicality[9] of 'old' Oedipus is brought to the fore by the position of εἴδωλον and δέμας, which emphatically frame line 110, and with the former further emphasised by the *enjambement* (τόδ' ἄθλιον / εἴδωλον). It is significant that Oedipus ends his prayer to the Eumenides by stating what he is 'not' anymore.[10]

In a similar way, the second line uttered by Oedipus upon the Chorus' arrival also provides a negative self-description. Oedipus begs the Chorus not to look at him as an ἄνομος, a 'lawless' man (142). Immediately after the Chorus' dazed reply – "Zeus our protector, who is the old man?" (143) –, Oedipus further elaborates on his own identity, and he does so by resorting to an extensive negative characterization of himself (144-9):

> ΟΙ.   οὐ πάνυ μοίρας εὐδαιμονίσαι
> πρώτης, ὦ τῆσδ' ἔφοροι χώρας.
> δηλῶ δ'· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ὧδ' ἀλλοτρίοις

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8 Cf. 576-7 (Oedipus to Theseus) δώσων ἱκάνω τοὐμὸν ἄθλιον δέμας / σοί, δῶρον οὐ σπουδαῖον εἰς ὄψιν· κτλ. ("I come to offer you the gift of my miserable body, not much to look at, . . .").

9 Such sturdiness is implied by the term δέμας (cf. the verb δέμω, 'to build', 'to construct').

10 Oedipus' awareness of his own (physical) 'inconsistency' will return in the first episode. Upon being informed that the Thebans place "their power" (τὰ κείνων κράτη, 392) in him, Oedipus ironically asks Ismene ὅτ' οὐκέτ' εἰμί, τηνικαῦτ' ἄρ' εἴμ' ἀνήρ; ("When I no longer exist, am I then a man?", 393).

ὄμμασιν εἶρπον,
κἀπὶ σμικροῖς μέγας ὤρμουν.

[Oe. Not one with a fortune you can envy him, guardians of this
land! And I will prove it; for else I should not be moving with an-
other's eyes and be anchored, great as I am, upon a small person.]

Another prominent feature of Oedipus, that of his knowledge or,
better, that of his 'lack' thereof, is also recurrently thematised in
privative terms: Oedipus is, in his own words, οὐδὲν εἰδὼς ("in all
ignorance", 273; cf. 983, οὐκ εἰδότ[α]), and ἄϊδρις ("in ignorance",
548).[11]

3. Negative Characterisation and *Hapax Legomena*

As the passages discussed above show, it may be argued that
Sophocles intentionally aimed to provide the play with a recurrent
negative characterisation of both its main character and the place
of his death. That this was of particular concern to the playwright
may be shown by the significant number of *hapax legomena* that
are found in the text. In particular, *hapax legomena* are remarka-
bly frequent – nine in total – among privative adjectives and ad-
verbs either referring to Oedipus or to the grove. This seems to
be indicating, with all due caution,[12] that the (relative) abundance
of *alpha*-privative words is part of a subtle yet coherent rhetori-

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11 A further instance of the theme of Oedipus' ignorance may underlie
lines 525-6 (*lyr.*), ΟΙ. κακᾷ μ᾽ εὐνᾷ πόλις οὐδὲν ἴδρις / γάμων ἐνέδησεν ἄτᾳ.
At line 525 the *paradosis* reads ἴδρις, emended to ἴδριν – and thus taken to
refer to Oedipus (μ᾽) rather than to the city – by Zachary Mudge in the eight-
eenth century (Lloyd-Jones' translation presupposes this change: "By an evil
wedlock the city bound me, in all ignorance, to the ruin caused by my mar-
riage."). On this issue, see Guidorizzi's commentary in Sophocles 2008: 270,
where Mudge's correction is slightly favoured over the transmitted reading.

12 I should like to stress that great caution is due when making assump-
tions on the base of *hapax legomena*, as any word's status as *hapax* may sole-
ly be the result of the vagaries of textual transmission. However, the (rela-
tively) large number of privative *hapax legomena* found in *OC*, and the fact
that they all contribute to characterizing either Oedipus or the grove, seem
to me significant enough to propose my argument below.

cal strategy which Sophocles deliberately adopted in the play. All such (*hapax*) *alpha*-privative words (adjectives and adverbs) that feature in the play are grouped in the table below, where they are also classified according to whether they are absolute *hapax* (i.e. found only once in extant Greek literature)[13] or tragic *hapax*[14] (i.e. found only once in extant Greek tragedy, both in plays surviving in their entirety and in fragmentary plays):[15]

Greek term[16]	Meaning[17]	Type of hapax
ἀσκέπαρνος (101)	unhewn	absolute
ἀκορέστατος (120) (superlative form of ἀκορής)	most impudent	tragic
ἀδέρκτως (130)	without looking	absolute
ἀφώνως (131)	without sound	tragic
ἀλόγως (131)	without speech	tragic
ἀνήνεμος (677)	never vexed . . . by the wind	tragic
ἄδερκτος (1200)	blind	absolute
ἀπροσόμιλος (1236)	unsociable	absolute
ἀκτένιστος (1261)	uncombed	absolute

Besides the *hapax legomena* – either 'absolute' or 'tragic' –, other *alpha*-privative terms in the play are also very rare.[18] Among these, a few adjectives may be singled out. ἄξεστος, "unhewn" (19), is only found in Sophocles among the tragedians: besides *Oedipus at Colonus*, the term is also attested to have occurred in

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13 Occurrences in the scholiographic and lexicographic traditions are not taken into account.

14 The distinction is based on the results yielded by a search in the *TLG* database.

15 For statistical and chronological considerations on Sophocles' employment of *alpha*-privative compounds, see Nuchelmans 1949: 58-61; based on Nuchelmans' statistics, Villari (2013: 152n85) remarks that "one can observe a strong increase in [their] frequency in [Sophocles'] last tragedies and especially in *Oedipus at Colonus*" (my translation).

16 For the context in which these *hapax legomena* occur, I refer the reader to the table following the conclusion ('Privative lexical items and negative characterization'). The table also lists passages that are not commented upon in the paper.

17 Except for ἄδερκτος, I reproduce Lloyd-Jones' translation for all terms.

18 For these terms too, I refer the reader to the table after the conclusion.

a fragmentary play by Sophocles himself, either *Ion* or *Sinon* (see fr. *322 R.²).[19] ἄφθεγκτος, occurring at lines 155-6 where it describes the sacred grove as a place "where no word must be spoken", in tragedy is only found in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (245); however, in the *Oedipus at Colonus* passage we have the only poetic instance of the adjective used to describe a place. ἀκήρατος, "untainted" (471; cf. 690), not a rare word in itself, is rare, though, in Sophocles, as it only occurs in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The same goes for ἀνήλιος, "never vexed by the sun" (676), which is attested altogether ten times in tragedy, but only once in Sophocles. In the *parodos* ἀμαιμάκετος (127), which Lloyd-Jones translates as "awful", deserves a comment of its own. Not an *alpha*-privative word *per se*, and possibly etymologically connected with the verb μαιμάω ('to shake with desire', 'to long for'), according to Pierre Chantraine ἀμαιμάκετος is a "traditional poetical and expressive term whose original meaning is ignored by those [authors] who employ it. Poets seem to assimilate it with μάχομαι ['to fight'] and they interpret it as 'invincible' . . .".[20] This seems to be the case in *Oedipus at Colonus* too: the presence of several *alpha*-privative words in the same strophe where ἀμαιμάκετος occurs – words such as ἀστιβές (126) and the adverbial privative *tricolon* ἀδέρκτως, / ἀφώνως ἀλόγως (129-30)[21] – suggests that ἀμαιμάκετος was probably associated with ἄμαχος, 'invincible', here as well. In other words, ἀμαιμάκετος was likely to be perceived by the poet himself as an *alpha*-privative word; at any rate, this is how the ancient scholiast understood the word.[22] In

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19 The fragment's source, Hsch. α 5617 Cunningham, does not provide any indication as to the dramatic context in which the word occurred. On the fragment's ascription, see Pearson 1917: vol. 2, 3, *ad l.*

20 *DELG* 69 (my translation); see also Jebb 1890: 32. Among recent editors, Rodighiero translates ἀμαιμακετᾶν with "invincibili" (Sophocles 1998: 57); along the same lines also Eamon Grennan and Rachel Kitzinger in Sophocles 2005: 42 ("implacable").

21 On the rhetorical device of the privative *tricolon*, see von der Brelie 1911: 17-23 (on *OC* specifically, see 21); Fraenkel 1950: vol. 2, 217, *ad* Aesch. *Ag.* 412; Kannicht 1969: vol. 2, 299, *ad* Eur. *Hel.* 1148.

22 Indeed, the scholiast's interpretation is twofold: *schol. vet.* Soph. *OC* 127 (Xenis 2018): (ἀμαιμακετᾶν): ἀκαταμαχήτων ἢ ἀπροσπελάστων.

tragedy overall, ἀμαιμάκετος is a rare word, attested only in the two Sophoclean Oedipus-plays, the other occurrence being in the *parodos* of *OT*.[23]

It is yet another privative *tricolon* that probably best summarises Oedipus' status in the play. This *tricolon* occurs in the antistrophe of the third *stasimon*, where the Chorus reflect on "much-dispraised" old age (κατάμεμπτον, 1234). Old age (γῆρας), in turn, is described as "powerless, unsociable, friendless" (ἀκρατὲς ἀπροσόμιλον / . . . ἄφιλον);[24] the tone pervading the first two strophes of the *stasimon* is clearly sententious, but in the epode the Chorus are quick to remark that such is the condition in which Oedipus finds himself:

> (Χο.)   . . . τό τε κατάμεμπτον ἐπιλέλογχε   1235
> πύματον ἀκρατὲς ἀπροσόμιλον
> γῆρας ἄφιλον, ἵνα πρόπαντα
> κακὰ κακῶν ξυνοικεῖ.
> ἐν ᾧ τλάμων ὅδ', οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος
> πάντοθεν βόρειος ὥς τις ἀκτὰ   1240
> κυματοπλὴξ χειμερία κλονεῖται,
> ὡς καὶ τόνδε κατ' ἄκρας
> δειναὶ κυματοαγεῖς
> ἆται κλονέουσιν ἀεὶ ξυνοῦσαι,
> αἱ μὲν ἀπ' ἀελίου   1245
> δυσμᾶν, αἱ δ' ἀνατέλ-
>   λοντος, αἱ δ' ἀνὰ μέσσαν
> ἀκτῖν', αἱ δ' ἐννυχιᾶν ἀπὸ Ῥιπᾶν.
> (1234-9)

23 Cf. Soph. *OT* 176 (*lyr.*), where the adjective is employed to describe fire: ἄλλον δ' ἂν ἄλλῳ προσίδοις ἅπερ εὔπτερον ὄρνιν / κρεῖσσον ἀμαιμακέτου πυρὸς ὄρμενον / ἀκτὰν πρὸς ἑσπέρου θεοῦ· (175/6-177/8, "And you could see one after the other hastening faster than irresistible fire like a fine-winged bird to the bank of the western god"; text and translation by Patrick J. Finglass in Sophocles 2018).

24 Remarkably, a privative *tricolon* also features in the strophe, at lines 1221-2, where the Chorus describe "the doom of Hades, with no wedding song, no lyre, no dances" (Ἄϊδος . . . μοῖρ' ἀνυμέναιος / ἄλυρος ἄχορος . . .). Note ἀνυμέναιος (1221) and ἄχορος (1222) in the same metrical position as, respectively, ἀπροσόμιλον (1236) and ἄφιλον (1237) in the antistrophe.

[Cho. And the next place, at the end, belongs to much-dispraised old age, powerless, unsociable, friendless, where all evils of evils are our neighbours. / In this the unhappy man here – not I alone – is battered from all sides, like a cape facing north, in storms buffeted by the winds. Even so is this man also battered over the head by grim waves of ruin breaking over him that never leave him, some from where the sun goes down, some from where it rises, some from the region of the noontide ray, and others from the mountains of the north, shrouded in night.]

4. Conclusion

In this essay I have endeavoured to show that Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus* provided a coherent, yet ambiguous and dramatically effective characterisation of both the play's hero and the place of his death and heroisation. In doing so, the playwright made abundant use of linguistic strategies and lexical items – some of which even possibly created *ex novo* by Sophocles, as we saw in the discussion of some of the play's *hapax legomena* – aiming to characterise both Oedipus and the sacred grove *per viam negationis*. I argue that this choice served a specific purpose: it symbolically showed the audience – and it did so 'through language' – a hero in the making, or, in other words, a man that progressively dissolves.

Oedipus, by means of a nuanced and recurrent negative characterisation, is shown to share some of the qualities that help identify the grove as a liminal space between life and death. By stepping inside the grove, Oedipus moves beyond the human boundaries on his way to the final dissolution. Only through a process of dissolution, in fact, can Oedipus the man – yet already an *eidōlon* in his own words – attain the status of a hero.

Privative lexical items and negative characterization[25]

denoting the grove and/or **religious/ritual aspects** associated with it	denoting Oedipus and/or **religious/ritual aspects** associated with/expected of him

Prologue

• 19 (AN.) ... <u>ἀξέστου</u> πέτρου	• 73 . . . ἀνδρὸς μὴ βλέποντος . .
• 37 (AN.) ... χῶρον οὐκ <u>ἁγνὸν</u> πατεῖν	(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
• 39 (ΞΕ.) <u>ἄθικτος</u> οὐδ᾽ οἰκητός ...	• 109-10 οἰκτίρατ᾽ ἀνδρὸς Οἰδίπου
• 99-100 (ΟΙ.) ... ὑμῖν ... / ... **<u>ἀοίνοις</u>** ...	τόδ᾽ <u>ἄθλιον</u> / εἴδωλον· οὐ γὰρ δὴ
(Oedipus praying to the Eum.)	τό γ᾽ ἀρχαῖον δέμας
101 (ΟΙ.) βάθρον ... <u>ἀσκέπαρνον</u>	(Oedipus praying to the Eum. and
	Athens/Athena)

Parodos

• 125-32 (str. 1)	• 118-20 (str. 1)
... προσέβα γὰρ οὐκ	ὅρα· τίς ἄρ᾽ ἦν; ποῦ ναίει; ποῦ
ἄν ποτ᾽ <u>ἀστιβές</u> ἄλσος ἐς	κυρεῖ / ἐκτόπιος συθείς, ὁ πάντων,
τᾶνδ᾽ ἀμαιμακετᾶν κορᾶν,	ὁ πάντων <u>ἀκορέστατος</u>
ἃς τρέμομεν λέγειν,	(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
καὶ παραμειβόμεσθ᾽ **<u>ἀδέρκτως</u>**,	• 124-5 ... οὐδ᾽ / ἔγχωρος ...
<u>ἀφώνως</u>, **<u>ἀλόγως</u>** τὸ τᾶς	(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
εὐφήμου στόμα φροντίδος	141 δεινὸς μὲν ὁρᾶν, ...[26]
ἱέντες ...	(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
• 155-7 (ant. 1)	• 142 ΟΙ. μή μ᾽, ἱκετεύω, προσίδητ᾽
... ἀλλ᾽ ἵνα τῷδ᾽ ἐν **<u>ἀ-</u>**	<u>ἄνομον</u>.
<u>φθέγκτῳ</u> μὴ προπέσῃς νάπει	• 208 ... <u>ἀπόπτολις</u> ...
ποιάεντι, ...	(Oedipus referring to himself)
• 167 (ep.) ... <u>ἀβάτων</u> ἀποβάς,	

First episode

• 471 (ΟΙ.) ... χεῦμ᾽ **<u>ἀκήρατον</u>** ...	• 273 (ΟΙ.) ... οὐδὲν εἰδὼς ἱκόμην ἵν᾽
	ἱκόμην,
	• 348-9 ... πολλὰ μὲν κατ᾽ ἀγρίαν /
	ὕλην <u>ἄσιτος νηλίπους</u> τ᾽ ἀλωμένη,
	(Oedipus referring to Antigone,
	who shares her father's exilic
	condition)
	• 489-90 **<u>ἄπυστα</u>** φωνῶν ... / ...
	<u>ἄστροφος</u> ...
	(the Chorus instructing Oedipus)
	• 495-6 ... λείπομαι γὰρ ἐν / τῷ μὴ
	δύνασθαι μηδ᾽ ὁρᾶν, δυοῖν κακοῖν·

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25 Privative lexical items in the table are underlined.
26 Cf. *schol. vet. OC* 141b (Xenis 2018): (δεινός): ἀντὶ τοῦ <u>ἀσεβής</u>. L^(s.l.).

(Oedipus to his daughters)
• 513 τᾶς δειλαίας <u>ἀπόρου</u> φανείσας
/ ἀλγηδόνος, ᾇ ξυνέστας.
(the Chorus inquiring into Oedipus'
suffering)
• 547-8 (ΟΙ.) καὶ γὰρ <u>ἄνους</u>[27]
ἐφόνευσα καὶ ὤλεσα· / νόμῳ δὲ
καθαρός <u>ἄϊδρις</u> ἐς τόδ' ἦλθον.
(cf. 273 οὐδὲν εἰδὼς)
• 576-7 δώσων ἱκάνω τοὐμὸν ἄθλιον
δέμας / σοί, δῶρον οὐ σπουδαῖον
εἰς ὄψιν·... (Oedipus to Theseus)

First *stasimon*

• 675-8 (str. 1)
καὶ τὰν <u>ἄβατον</u> θεοῦ
φυλλάδα μυριόκαρπον <u>ἀνήλιον</u>
<u>ἀνήνεμόν</u> τε πάντων
χειμώνων . . .

Second episode

• 944-5 ... ἄνδρα ... / <u>κἄναγνον</u> ....
(Creon referring to Oedipus)
• 973 ... <u>ἀγέννητος</u> ...
(Oedipus referring to himself)

Third episode

• 1200 τῶν σῶν <u>ἀδέρκτων</u> ὀμμάτων
τητώμενος.
(Antigone to Oedipus)

Third *stasimon*

• 1234-9 (ant.)
... τό τε κατάμεμπτον ἐπιλέλογχε /
πύματον <u>ἀκρατὲς ἀπροσόμιλον</u>
γήρας <u>ἄφιλον</u>, ἵνα πρόπαντα
κακὰ κακῶν ξυνοικεῖ.

Fourth episode

• 1261 κόμη ... <u>ἀκτένιστος</u> ...
(Polynices referring to Oedipus)
• 1277 τὸ δυσπρόσοιστον <u>κἀπροσή-
γορον</u> στόμα, (Polynices referring
to Oedipus)

27 ἄνους Porson : ἄλλους codd.

• 1357 … <u>ἄπολιν</u> …
(Oedipus referring to himself)
• 1483 … <u>ἄλαστον</u> ἄνδρ(α) …
(the Chorus referring to Oedipus;
cf. 1671-2: (AN.) … πατρὸς ἔμφυτον
/ <u>ἄλαστον</u> αἷμα …)
• 1521 <u>ἄθικτος</u> ἡγητῆρος …
(Oedipus referring to himself)

Exodos

• 1672 <u>ἄλαστον</u> αἷμα …
• 1702 οὐδὲ γερῶν <u>ἀφίλητος</u> ἐμοί
ποτε / καὶ τᾷδε μὴ κυρήσῃς.
(Antigone referring to her dead
father)
• 1732 **ἄταφος** ἔπιτνε δίχα τε παντός.
(Ismene referring to Oedipus'
death)

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Oedipus at Colonus as a Reflection of the *Oresteia*: The Abomination from Thebes as an Athenian Hero in the Making

Anton Bierl

Abstract

Sophocles bases his posthumous *Oedipus at Colonus* on the famous treatment of the transformation of the Furies to the Kindly Ones in *Eumenides*, the last play of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* that has gained the status of a master-play. Accordingly Sophocles shapes the plot and its main character on a cultic reality and on the ritual concept of chthonic heroes and gods. The Erinyes/Eumenides, to whose grove Oedipus arrives, function as the model for Sophocles' most questionable hero. Their quintessential polarity between the dreadful dimension of death and euphemistic names to veil it, between mythic scenarios of anger, curse, hate as well as cultic blessing and plenty is the basic pattern of a play that stages Oedipus as a chthonic hero in the making. He acts right from the beginning as the hero he is going to become. Sophocles makes Oedipus oscillate between staging a real mystic miracle and a problematic manipulation of religious facts in order to take revenge on his Theban homeland by finding support from his new city of Athens. This open perspective involves the audience in thinking about what really happened and reflecting about the relation between ritual, religion, politics, and their manipulations by men for their own purposes. In this way it comes quite close to Euripides' *Bacchae* written about the same time. *OC* is thus in many respects like a metatheatrical exploration of the constitutive gap of signifier and signified to be gradually closed by the blind director who gathers, like the blind and unwitting audience, the piecemeal information divulged as the play progresses.

Introduction

Oedipus at Colonus is a very special play. The oneiric and almost musical quality of the episodic sequence about the old, blind vagrant, the banished *miasma*, and his mysterious end on Attic soil makes the play a choral oratorio with little tragic action or suspense, an example of a pre-dramatic poetics (see Bierl 2010). This dreamlike atmosphere has led to many influential interpretations in the 19th century, when the play was regarded as the culmination of tragedy, transcending the tragic. Hegel and many followers read *OC* as a solemn reconciliation of tragic tensions or even an almost Christian transfiguration as the debased hero in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is slowly raised to a heroic status that ends in an apotheosis (summary in Bernard 2001: 11-21; Lefèvre 2001: 217-18; Billings 2013; on the intertextual model Seidensticker 1972; Van Nortwick 1998; Bernard 2001: 58-83; Kelly 2009: 45-50). Even Nietzsche regarded Oedipus in *OC* both as a serene, still almost romantic transfiguration and even more as an embodiment of the heroic superhuman, the *Übermensch*, enduring all the evils of humanity and standing above them (1972 [1872]: 62 = KSA 1.66). Some saw in the tired old man a second Lear defeated by sufferings and human ingratitude since both fall from the pinnacle of power to a very low status (e.g. Pratt 1965; Shatro 2014; Lucking 2017: 103-24). Oedipus in *OT* has been long seen as a man in the maw of destiny, the emblem of human existence, the embodiment of human endeavour to know or the emblem of a man driven by his instincts in Freudian terms. He then served as a model for structural analysis. Finally critics detected his *hamartiai* in an Aristotelian sense: he is unable to recognize himself (Flashar 2000: 108-9; Lefèvre 2001: 119-22; Bernard 2001: 21-38). His negative traits are increasingly more emphasized culminating in the characterization of an egocentric *tyrannos* in a political and psychological sense (Flaig 1998). This pejorative characterization has, of course, also some bearing on his image in the second play in which Sophocles, shortly before his own death, takes up the theme after a quarter of a century. After this Wolfgang Bernard (2001) represents the extreme position, arguing that Oedipus is driven by totally negative forc-

es; nothing remains from the picture of a final transfiguration and heroization. The protagonist is simply a negative character who finally leads his campaign of hatred against his Theban family. Even the oracles seem to be dubious. Men have their free will, the gods do not order him to die in Colonus this way, but only predict this end in a neutral form. Therefore his motives, enforced by the sophistic means of rhetoric, would have to be judged as entirely negative. So, for this reason, he manipulated the oracles for his own evil purposes (Bernard 2001: esp. 83-103).

Although this harsh judgment is too extreme, the most ambivalent features of Oedipus' character are rather obvious (on *OT*, see Vernant 1990; on the in-between status in *OC*, see Vidal-Naquet 1990).

1. Oedipus' Heroization in Colonus

Be that as it may, neither humanist nor psychological readings in positive or negative keys seem to be appropriate to do justice to this late play. In the following I wish to focus on the religious and cultic as well as on the political background and the narrative realisation by Sophocles. Heroization is a dominant theme of *OC* acknowledged by many critics.[1] As Bruno Currie says: "*OC* is forthcoming on 'thick' description of Oedipus' heroization (what it meant to the parties concerned), but reticent on 'thin' description (the external trappings of the cult)" (2012: 339). There is a veil of mysterious secrecy about betraying too many details. Sophocles is not interested in staging a sacred play about a hero comparable to a Christian saints' play (Currie 2012: 343), but in showing how cultic and ritual elements have political underpinnings and consequences. He departs from the fact that Colonus, his home deme located three km north of the centre of Athens, on the outskirts close to the Academia, hosts a cult of Oedipus. He shares the sacred space with Poseidon Hippios, Athena, Adrastus, and the heroes Peirithous and Theseus (Paus. 1.30.4). Oedipus has also a cul-

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1 See e.g. Rohde 1898: 2.244-5; Vidal-Naquet 1990: 350 and 490n69; Edmunds 1996: 95-100; Currie 2012: 337-42; Calame 1998; Kowalzig 2006: 82; Kelly 2009: 79-85; Nagy 2013: 497-524.

tic dwelling on the famous Areopagus in the centre of Athens together with the Semnai (The Revered Ones), the positive side of the Erinyes (Paus. 1.28.5-6).[2] We know about the Erinyes as Semnai Theai from Aeschylus' famous treatment in *Eumenides*. In the Sophoclean scenario, Colonus, the Hill of Horses (Hippeios Kolonos), is a holy grove, the entrance of the Underworld where most importantly the Semnai/Eumenides possess a cult. The connection with the Erinyes, here called Eumenides, the Benevolent or Kindly Ones – the conflation of the Semnai with the Erinyes turned to Eumenides, which were not explicitly named in the last play of the *Oresteia*, is Aeschylus' ritual construct based on Greek religious thought (Sommerstein 1989: 11; Henrichs 1994: 46-54) – seems not fictitious or invented by the author (Scullion 1999-2000: 231-2), but is based on the cultic reality of the deme as well. The cult in the deme mirrors the constellation of the cult on the Areopagus in the city. Perhaps the cult on the Hill of Colonus was imported from the Areopagus. Nonetheless, Sophocles makes use of the religious idea that chthonian demons are working on the principle of polarity and are thus highly ambiguous. This was also the basis of Aeschylus' dramatic construct (Henrichs 1983; Lloyd-Jones 1990; Henrichs 1991; Henrichs 1994: esp. 46-58; Geisser 2002: 381-90; see also Brown 1984, however neatly and artificially he separates the Erinyes from the Eumenides/Semnai). Oedipus is notoriously associated with wrath and Erinys (Aesch. *Sept.* 914, 1004; Soph. *Ant.* 899-902), which, particularly in the plural form Erinyes, also originally functioned as the personification of the abstract concept of revenge. Moreover, Herodotus reports that the Spartan Aegeidai dedicated a sanctuary to the Erinyes of Laius and Oedipus as ordered by the priests of Delphi (4.149.2). The Eumenides share their sacred grove in Colonus not only with Demeter and Poseidon, but also with Prometheus, Dionysus, the Muses, and Aphrodite (39-63, 668-719).

Sophocles displays Oedipus arriving at his final destination of Colonus and stage-managing his own heroization. After the expulsion from Thebes the blind and vagrant beggar, the emblem

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2 Henrichs 1994: 39-46; on the parallelism between Oedipus and the Erinys, see Edmunds 1981: 225-9.

of abomination, continues to act in the way he did in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, like an egocentric and polluted tyrant. *Kolonos*, having the meaning of 'tumulus', is the ideal place of his burial. As shining White Rock (cf. 670) and 'landmark', the 'tumulus' Kolonos is personified by the eponymous hero Kolonos (59). It also becomes a deme (Nagy 2013: 497-506). The Bronze-Step Threshold (χαλκόπους ὁδός, 57) is another landmark, the entrance, foundation, support, and bulwark (*ereisma*) of Athens (ἔρεισμ' Ἀθηνῶν, 58) and, in extension, of all Attica. Theseus, the idealized king, unified the different demes into a political entity in the so-called *synoikismos*. It is evident that Colonus is a utopian sacred space (Rodighiero 2012; Saïd 2012; Reitzammer 2018: 113-19 [as a 'theoric' space]) to reflect upon Athens and Attica in their mythical past in an ideal manner. It combines different cults and opposing religious powers. Chthonic gods of the Earth – all having to do with vitality, power, death, and renewal in vegetation – possess a common dwelling with Olympian gods. In particular, Poseidon and Athena share the sanctuary, their rivalry for the control of the city being resolved in harmony on the Acropolis. Colonus is mostly a place of galloping horses (Nagy 2013: 502-5), the animals of death and cosmic power (Malten 1914). Poseidon and Athena who are associated with them (Burkert 1985: 138, 221) also personify the military strength of Athens, its cavalry, fleet, and standing army.

In the period of *OC*'s composition shortly before 406 BCE, Athens was in a desperate situation at the end of the Peloponnesian war. After the successes in the aftermath of Alcibiades' return (411-408), especially in Cyzicus (410), followed by the defeat of the fleet in Notion (407), which led to his second exile, and the problematic victory at the Arginousae (406) Athens was exasperated. Only miracles could help.

One inspiration for the topographical scenario and the conflict with Thebes was a miraculous victory by the Athenians over the Theban cavalry at Colonus in 407. Moreover, in this case autobiographical facts could also have influenced the choice of Colonus. At the close of his life, Sophocles, himself associated with a hero cult of Dexion (*Bios* 17; Currie 2012: 343), probably identified and conflated himself notionally with Oedipus, the emblem of his career since *Oedipus Tyrannus*, ending his life in the sacred

soil of his deme of birth. Moreover, as many scholars, among others William Calder III (1985) (see Rodighiero 2012: 74-5; Ugolini 2000: 65-82, esp. 216-20) attempt to argue, he perhaps alludes to the events of 411 when Sophocles as *proboulos* convened a decisive meeting at Colonus in which important decisions were made that led to the oligarchic rule of the Four Hundred. Perhaps feeling guilty and defending himself against the charges of having helped abolish democracy between 413 and 411, he partially reflects these events and his upcoming end on this mythical scenario at a very sublimated level. Somehow, as is argued, he could be of service for his country even after his death. However, this would be more a cynical hope. The atmosphere of the "absurdity of violence" (Burkert 1974) was dominant in the last years of tragic representation on the stage of the Theatre of Dionysus. Sophocles staged a similar scenario of the outcast recalled in service of society in *Philoctetes* (409). The cynical violence came even more to the fore in Euripides' *Phoenissae* (411-409) where at the very end Oedipus' death at Colonus is announced (1705-7),[3] and in *Orestes*, where the fusion of the Eumenides with the Erinyes is vital. Therefore a total idealization in *OC* is barely conceivable and so a biographical reading is rather unlikely. Sophocles, on the contrary, seems to stage Oedipus' heroization by associating him and his Theban opponents with scenarios of evil manipulations, rhetoric sophism, and violence. To some degree, Oedipus' self-declaration of his magic powers appears as if Athens fell prey to a vain last hope.

It becomes evident that Sophocles is not staging a tragedy about heroization in the faithful manner comparable to that obtaining in saints' plays (Currie 2012: 343) but rather as a possibility of triggering reflections about the larger political and social situation in the audience on the level of myth and ritual. Sophocles uses a familiar pattern – supplication and asylum combined with final heroization – to display tensions, ambivalent intentions, questionable motivations, and their dire consequences. *OC* is thus not a tragedy which intends to stage heroization for its own sake,

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3 The authenticity of Eur. *Phoe.* 1703-7 is not secure at all; see Kamerbeek 1984: 2; Mastronarde 1994: 626; Edmunds 1996: 98; Ugolini 2000: 217; Kelly 2009: 144n16.

to idealize and stylize Oedipus, or, in an allegorical manner, perhaps its author Sophocles or Athens. The tragedian clearly displays Oedipus in his progress towards heroization after death. However, the hero in the making is showcased in a rather controversial manner, since he becomes the chthonic hero of dual forces, that is to say blame and blessing (Hester 1977: esp. 32-3; Blundell 1989: 226-59). Moreover, to reach this goal of harming his enemies and becoming a saviour, he needs Theseus, the saviour and he too uses manipulation.

Sophocles, in addition, uses the quintessential dichotomy between Thebes and Athens. Thebes as the Other is the tragic location par excellence, whereas Athens serves as the Self and is rarely used as the scenario (Zeitlin 1990). One exception is Aeschylus' famous *Eumenides*, the last part of his *Oresteia*. This trilogy has become something like the founding and master-play of later Greek tragedy. There is evidence for a re-staging of the trilogy in the 420s (e.g. Newiger 1961: 427-9), a unique exception in the competitions where a tragedy was only performed for a single occasion in a specific year. These re-performances may possibly have inspired Euripides to write his *Orestes* (408 BCE), exactly half a century after the *Oresteia*. In this vain, I argue that the transformation of the Erinyes to the Semnai and their integration into the clefts of the Areopagus, where Oedipus too has a cultic dwelling, serves as the principal model for Sophocles. Aeschylus' Athena makes use of the polarity of the dual chthonic forces and manipulates them to use their benevolent aspect for the blessing of Athens, and their malignant capacity to curse and harm to deter enemies. Aeschylus thus neatly splits their ambivalent effect along the friend-foe axis, using the benevolent aspect for the well-being of Athens in association, the malevolent for defence against the enemy in dissociation (Meier 1980: 207-22). Oedipus as Erinys and the power to curse suits the Erinyes perfectly. Scholarship has appreciated Sophocles' metapoetic awareness and intertextual play with the tragic tradition in *OC* (Ringer 1998: 90-9; Dunn 2012). It is as if the mastermind of tragedy plays with and alludes to many tragedies: to mention only a few, Aeschylus' *Septem* and the *Oedipodeia*, the *Oresteia*, his own *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Antigone*, and *Aias*, and Euripides' *Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*;

moreover, we should not forget the suppliant plays, in particular Aeschylus' and Euripides' *Suppliants*.

Sophocles thus uses local religious traditions, cult reality, and the inherent polarity of any chthonic god, here especially of the Semnai Theai (The Revered or August Goddesses) situated on the Areopagus (Henrichs 1994: esp. 46-50; Kelly 2009: 71-4). At the same time he departs from Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and the short allusion to Apollo's announcement of Oedipus' end in *Phoenissae* (1703-7). The presence of Semnai Theai in Colonus, not mentioned in Pausanias (1.30.4), is not an invention of Sophocles either, as new epigraphical evidence demonstrates. The missing link is a terracotta roof-tile (*SEG* 38, 1988: no. 265) found at Colonus with the inscribed letters ΣΕΜΝΩΝ ΘΕΩΝ (Catling 1989: 13).

The decisive marker for an intertextual allusion to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* is the fact that the Goddesses in the grove will be addressed as the Benevolents (Eumenides, 42-3), perhaps an unofficial designation both in Colonus and on the Areopagus for the Semnai. Actually this cult name does not appear anywhere in *Eumenides* – although many critics believe the explicit renaming of the Erinyes to Eumenides took place in the lacuna of Athena's final words (after *Eum.* 1028; see now West 1998: 396, after the hypothesis, ibid.: 341, and Harpocration 140.13 Dindorf) – and is introduced only in the title and additional information through the manuscripts. The title thus does not seem to be Aeschylean (Sommerstein 1989: 11-12; *pace* Lloyd-Jones 1990: 209). I assume that it was introduced in the 420s, when the re-performance took place, influencing the reception through Sophocles and Euripides. However, it is obvious that Aeschylus himself had the polarity of Erinyes/Eumenides already in mind (Henrichs 1991: 167n13; Henrichs 1994: 52 with n. 124; see also note 4).

2. The Use of Chthonic Polarity in *OC*: A Reading of the Play

Let us take a glance at the beginning of *OC*: Sophocles, using the polarities of the Furies in *Oresteia*, conceives his Oedipus as if he has stumbled on this great idea of becoming a chthonic hero himself, on the model of the Furies/Benevolent Ladies-dichotomy

(see Lardinois 1992).[4] I argue that at first Oedipus is not following a plan Apollo made previously and then ordered him to carry out. Yet as Lowell Edmunds (1981: 229) with many others has seen rightly – and it must be emphasized even more – we can detect a "proleptic" tendency in regard to Oedipus future status as a hero. "Oedipus is already the chthonic hero he will become". From the very beginning he assumes traits of the cult which he cannot possibly know. Somehow this comes close to a metatragic reflection about Oedipus' obsession with knowing. He is a blind, vagrant beggar, a *planatas* (πλανάτας, 124) and *aletes* (ἀλήτην, 50; cf. 949), without orientation. No information is given to him or to the audience in advance, e.g. in the form of a prologue by a god. Yet Oedipus already asks Antigone, who leads her old father, about a seat either in profane territory (βεβήλοις from *baino*, "allowable to be trodden" [LSJ, s.v.], that is, it is appropriate for uninitiated persons [Burkert 1985: 86, 269]) or in sacred groves of Gods (ἄλσεσιν θεῶν) (9-10). It is, as Francis Dunn (2012: 368-74, esp. 371) rightly argues, like a metatheatrical exploration of how space can gradually assume meaning. The sacred space is later defined as an *alsos* of Goddesses (θεῶν), that is to say the Eumenides, and therefore it is *astibes* (ἀστιβές, 126) and *abaton* (675), not to be trodden. Antigone answers that she sees a sacred location nearby (χῶρος δ' ὅδ' ἱερός, 16). She realizes this from its appearance, laurel, oil, wine, and from the sound of the nightingales (16-18) – the bird of lamentation, death, of the Athenian Procne, associated with tragic murder due to sexual offence against her sister. Indeed, there is a seat of rock where he can rest. Antigone recognizes Athens from afar, but she does not know the specific place where they

4 See also Kelly 2009: 72 citing Winnington-Ingram 1980: 275: "is it too much to say that Oedipus earns his status as a chthonian power by acting like the unpersuaded Furies of the *Oresteia*?". As a 'separationist' – the Eumenides/Semnai are not identical with the Erinyes (Brown 1984: 276-81; *pace* Lloyd-Jones 1990: esp. 203-4, 208-9, 211; Henrichs 1991: 167n13; Henrichs 1994: 52 with n. 124) – Brown (1984: 276) denies the influence. See also Sommerstein 1989: 12. On the relation Erinyes-Eumenides in *OC*, see Winnington-Ingram 1980: 264-8; Edmunds 1996: 139-40. On an intertextual relation of *OC* with the *Oresteia* in general, see Markantonatos 2007: 201-2 and Haselswerdt 2019: 633, on differences: 634-5.

have stopped (24). Oedipus is in fact trespassing on a sacred space without observing the ritual prohibitions. After his expulsion from Thebes, the blind, vagrant beggar, emblem of abomination, continues to act like a self-centred and polluted tyrant full of *hybris*. Just as he is in *OT* he is eager to know: in this case the name of the place that he had entered. He calls the Stranger "a scout of what we are in doubt to solve and speak . . ." (σκοπὸς προσήκεις ὧν ἀδηλοῦμεν φράσαι, 35). The Stranger interrupts him: "Now, before you question me at length, leave this seat. You occupy ground which is unholy to tread upon (χῶρον οὐχ ἁγνὸν πατεῖν)" (36-7). It is a sacred place of purity, an *alsos agnon*, as it is in Sappho fr. 2 V. (Bierl 2019: 41-55, esp. 45). It is thus ritually forbidden to trespass on it, as a taboo boundary is drawn around the pure. *Hagnon* is the opposite of *miaron*, defiled and abominable. It implies the inviolate boundary of a "field of forces" or "a protective cloak which no indignity can penetrate", thus an inner psychic attitude against sexuality, blood, and death (Burkert 1985: 271). *Agos*, the defiled, is the opposite of *hagnon.* To exclude and drive out *agos*, the abominable murder, means to be *hagnon* (Burkert 1985: 81).

Oedipus continues questioning (38-43):

> ΟΙ. τίς δ' ἔσθ' ὁ χῶρος; τοῦ θεῶν νομίζεται;
> ΞΕ. ἄθικτος οὐδ' οἰκητός. αἱ γὰρ ἔμφοβοι
>   θεαί σφ' ἔχουσι, Γῆς τε καὶ Σκότου κόραι.   40
> ΟΙ. τίνων τὸ σεμνὸν ὄνομ' ἂν εὐξαίμην κλυών;
> ΞΕ. τὰς πάνθ' ὁρώσας Εὐμενίδας ὅ γ' ἐνθάδ' ἂν
>   εἴποι λεώς νιν· ἄλλα δ' ἀλλαχοῦ καλά.

[OEDIPUS And what is this ground? To which of the gods is it sacred? STRANGER Ground inviolable, on which no one may dwell. The dread (40) goddesses hold it, the daughters of Earth and Darkness. OEDIPUS Who are they? Whose awful name might I hear and invoke in prayer? STRANGER The all-seeing Eumenides the people here would call them: but other names please elsewhere.][5]

Oedipus, eager to know and to rest, does not obey. The answer

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5 All translations are after Jebb 1889, the Sophoclean text is cited after Lloyd Jones and Wilson 1990.

repeats the taboo; one should neither violate nor dwell on this ground. Oedipus will soon dwell on it, i.e. in a cultic union with the Goddesses. They are called ἔμφοβοι (39), frightful, and they are daughters of Earth, Night, and Darkness. These attributes re-call the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. First the Stranger leaves them as anonymous beings. Out of caution of their chthonic dark aspect people avoid addressing them with any name. In Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (944) Orestes speaks about the Erinyes indeed as ἀνώνυμοι θεαί. As such they cannot receive any cult (Henrichs 1994: esp. 37-8). Anonymity will be an issue as well, having to do to with awe, silence, and secrecy. However, anoth-er strategy is to address the dreadful divine beings with euphe-mistic names so that the negative dimension cannot affect one. Sophocles plays out the intrinsic polarity of these chthonian god-desses who can be worshipped in their positive aspect (Lloyd-Jones 1990: esp. 209; Henrichs 1991: esp. 176-8; Henrichs 1994: esp. 36-9). Thus Oedipus demands to know "the revered name" (τὸ σεμνὸν ὄνομ', 41). By doing so he again implicitly alludes to their name Semnai (Henrichs 1994: 48-50). At this point, as a surprise, the Stranger calls them Eumenides, as the people here do (42). The use of this name is a clear reference to Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. It is the euphemistic side of the dual polarity. Sophocles under-stands the religious principle of chthonic gods. They are dread-ful, but for the purpose of euphemism one addresses them in pos-itive terms (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 207, 209; Henrichs 1991: 176-8). In other places they have other good, euphemistic names, especial-ly on the Areopagus, as they are usually called the Semnai. By al-luding so directly to the *Oresteia*, I contend, the dual nature of the Furies comes to the fore. Athena's strategy consisted in placating and appeasing the negative chthonic forces by making them aware of their positive side: it is the famous shift from curse to bless-ing, from anger to benevolence, from ruin to growth, from hun-ger to plenty. Moreover, I argue that – at least the opposite is not otherwise explicitly stated – this polarity between the dreadful Furies and the Benevolent Ladies taken from the *Oresteia* provides Oedipus with the idea of becoming a chthonian hero just like the Semnai and sharing with them a common cult. Trespassing on the sacred space of the Eumenides, he experiences their other

side as terrible Furies against the intruder from outside. Realizing this ambivalence, in my opinion, Oedipus does everything to install himself as a similar power in Athens. Antigone's mentioning Athens (24) serves as a signal for him to stop his long period as wanderer. It is like stumbling onto the right path. He perhaps remembers Apollo's long-ago prophecy that he would die in Athens (Eur. *Phoe.* 1703-7, esp. 1705), although it is debated whether it had been added on the basis of Sophocles (Kamerbeek 1984: 2). In this case Sophocles would perhaps have Oedipus make up the oracle.[6] Antigone's reference to πύργοι (14) perhaps alludes to *pyrgos Atthidos*, the Attic citadel (Eur. *Phoe.* 1706), or, if the passage in Euripides' *Phoenissae* is added later, it is taken from *OC* (14). In *Phoenissae* Oedipus then vaguely mentions holy Colonus, the dwelling of the horse god (Eur. *Phoe.* 1707) as the endpoint of his wanderings without saying anything about his cult. We can only speculate about who would be able to recognize this allusion in the audience. Be that as it may, in *OC* Oedipus feels his end approaching, perhaps having somehow Athens and Colonus in mind. Or the idea may simply have come to him spontaneously. Hearing about the holy nature and the cultic owners of the sanctuary he could have suddenly been inspired to become a chthonic hero and to join forces with the Erinyes/Eumenides. Unconsciously penetrating their sacred space, he is already, to some extent, part of them. Therefore he decides not to leave the place, his future cultic seat (*hedra*), anymore, but to supplicate them to grant him asylum by integrating him into their cult (44-6):

OI. ἀλλ' ἴλεῳ μὲν τὸν ἱκέτην δεξαίατο·
ὡς οὐχ ἕδρας γε τῆσδ' ἂν ἐξέλθοιμ' ἔτι.   45
ΞΕ. τί δ' ἐστὶ τοῦτο; ΟΙ. ξυμφορᾶς ξύνθημ' ἐμῆς.

[OEDIPUS Then graciously may they receive their suppliant! (45) Nevermore will I depart from my seat in this land. STRANGER What does this mean? OEDIPUS The watchword of my fate.]

6 However, I would not subscribe to Scullion's thesis that Sophocles even invented the existence of the sanctuary of Oedipus in Colonus, "linking Sophokles' greatest tragic hero with his home town" (1999-2000: 232). Bernard (2001: 83-97) believes in the existence of the oracle, but argues that Oedipus manipulates it against Apollo's good intentions.

Oedipus stylizes this auditory information as the *synthema* (ξύνθημ᾽, 46; cf. 1594), the mystic password to end his misery (see also Haselswerdt 2019: 617-20). He has discovered the ticket to his new cultic status as hero. The pious stranger knows that he cannot oppose this without consent of the polis (47-8). And finally Oedipus receives a more detailed introduction to the place (53-63). He learns the place is called Colonus (59) after his eponymous horse-rider. And he wishes to see the king of the land, promising a benefit for the small service (72). His speech becomes increasingly riddling. To the question what gain could come from a blind man, Oedipus replies: "All that I speak I will speak as all-seeing" (ὅσ᾽ ἂν λέγωμεν πάνθ᾽ ὁρῶντα λέξομεν, 74), taking up the attribute "all-seeing" of the Eumenides (42) that the Stranger had used. He is like them: seeing everything, they can punish all crimes and bestow blessing as positive justice. Alone on stage, he finally addresses a prayer to the "Ladies of dread aspect" (πότνιαι δεινῶπες, 84) (84-110). Now we finally hear for the first time about Apollo's oracle of Oedipus' end at Colonus (87-95).[7] But we cannot be definitely sure that Apollo had really predicted his cultic integration into the cult of the Semnai. *Hedran labein* (cf. 90) is an ambivalent expression, since it refers to a seat in his final destination, but also, in a mystic sense, to a cult common with the Goddesses. Oedipus starts addressing them as follows (84-95):

> ὦ πότνιαι δεινῶπες, εὖτε νῦν ἕδρας
> πρώτων ἐφ᾽ ὑμῶν τῆσδε γῆς ἔκαμψ᾽ ἐγώ,   85
> Φοίβῳ τε κἀμοὶ μὴ γένησθ᾽ ἀγνώμονες,
> ὅς μοι, τὰ πόλλ᾽ ἐκεῖν᾽ ὅτ᾽ ἐξέχρη κακά,
> ταύτην ἔλεξε παῦλαν ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ,
> ἐλθόντι χώραν τερμίαν, ὅπου θεῶν
> σεμνῶν ἕδραν λάβοιμι καὶ ξενόστασιν,   90
> ἐνταῦθα κάμψειν τὸν ταλαίπωρον βίον,
> κέρδη μὲν οἰκήσαντα τοῖς δεδεγμένοις,
> ἄτην δὲ τοῖς πέμψασιν, οἵ μ᾽ ἀπήλασαν·
> σημεῖα δ᾽ ἥξειν τῶνδέ μοι παρηγγύα,
> ἢ σεισμόν, ἢ βροντήν τιν᾽, ἢ Διὸς σέλας.   95

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7 On the oracle in a narratological, proleptic perspective, see Markantonatos 2012: 118-19.

[Ladies of dread aspect, since your seat is (85) the first in this land
at which I have bent my knee, show yourselves not ungracious
to Phoebus or to myself; who, when he proclaimed that doom of
many woes, spoke to me of this rest after long years: on reach-
ing my goal in a land where I should find a seat of the Awful
Goddesses (90) and a shelter for foreigners, there I should close
my weary life, with profit, through my having fixed my abode
there, for those who received me, but ruin for those who sent me
forth, who drove me away. And he went on to warn me that signs
of these things would come, (95) in earthquake, or in thunder, or
in the lightning of Zeus.]

It seems as if Oedipus draws on the first introduction about the
goddesses' dichotomy (39-43), but he bends the argument in a new
direction. He redirects the friend-foe relation, according to Carl
Schmitt (1932), in respect to how people receive him (Meier 1980:
207-22). With the prayer based on Apollo's word Oedipus under-
lines his supplication with the typical promise of profit and the
threats in case the *hiketeia* were unsuccessful. He is already al-
most certain that Athens will incorporate him. But in his du-
al chthonic power he recognizes now a means for a late revenge
against his Theban family who drove him as a *miasma* out of
Thebes many years ago. He starts organizing and manipulating the
double-edged potential along the Thebes-Athens axis. Therefore
he will not only be a power in family matters but a factor of polit-
ical and military significance. The exiled Theban will harm his for-
mer motherland and his enemies and bestow blessing on his new
home and friends who gives him asylum (Hester 1977; Blundell
1989: 226-59). Oedipus adds that Apollo predicted signs of earth-
quakes, thunder, and lightning to indicate the heroization (94-6).
As perfect rhetorician Oedipus knows how to impress the audi-
ence – the chorus is approaching – with religious miracles. After
all it remains ambiguous whether the entire progressive heroiza-
tion is a divine plan from the beginning or whether he spontane-
ously fabricates the oracle in order to make his voluntary integra-
tion really happen. He praises the Ladies as if they led him into
their *alsos* on his dream-like walk. Assimilating himself with the
marginality of the Eumenides/Erinyes, Oedipus highlights how he

could find them almost automatically, coming in sobriety to the Wineless Goddesses (100);[8] again the poor beggar who cannot afford to drink wine anticipates his status of cult hero who will receive wineless libations (Guidorizzi 2008: 223-4). Thus he reinterprets all he did as divine providence.

The entering chorus judge Oedipus, whom they cannot yet see, as a sacrilegious intruder from abroad, a "wanderer, not a dweller in the land" (πλανάτας . . . οὐδ' / ἔγχωρος, 124-5), into a "grove not to be trodden" (ἀστιβὲς ἄλσος, 126). The choral members of Colonus highlight the opposite view of the polarity: Oedipus is a criminal, and the chthonic Goddesses are dreadful, terrible, "maidens with whom none may strive" (127).

Accordingly they stress their fear to get in direct contact with them. They are afraid to call them by their chthonic name as Erinyes (ἃς τρέμομεν λέγειν, 128). They pass by without looking at them (παραμειβόμεσθ' ἀδέρκτως, 129-30), "moving their lips, without sound or word (ἀφώνως, ἀλόγως, 131),[9] emitting a sound that utters good-sounding thought (τὸ τᾶς εὐφήμου στόμα φροντίδος ἱέντες, 132-3)" (translation changed). This expression also implies both the appropriate attitude towards them and the avoidance of calling them by their dangerous names as well as the potential utterance of their names in euphemistic tones as Eumenides (128-33) (Gödde 2011: 203-34, esp. 208-9).

When Oedipus comes out of his hiding place to have his epiphany, they are terrified of the man "*deinos*, fearful, to see and hear" (δεινὸς μὲν ὁρᾶν, δεινὸς δὲ κλύειν, 141). The chorus view him as the emblem of terror and fear, not a man to be blessed (εὐδαιμονίσαι, 144). He should not add *arai*, curses, to his suffering (154-5).[10] They warn against intruding further into the holy, silent landscape (Rodighiero 2012; Saïd 2012) that is a *krater*, a mixing

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8 On this correlation, see Henrichs 1983. On the wineless libations for the Erinyes, see Aesch. *Eum.* 107.

9 For the peril that lies in simply uttering the names of dangerous chthonian forces, see Guidorizzi 2008: 230; therefore they are addressed with euphemistic names, see Henrichs 1991; Henrichs 1994.

10 The Erinyes are personified Curses, *Arai*, see Aesch. *Eum.* 417; as "embodied curse of the wrong parent", see *Il.* 9.454, 571, and Sommerstein 1989: 7; Geisser 2002: 242-52; Zerhoch 2015; Dorati 2018: 107n4, in general 103-14.

bowl, not of wine, but water and honey (κρατὴρ μειλιχίων ποτῶν, 159) (155-60).[11] The sacred space, so to speak, is identical with the cultic offering, the libation to the chthonic goddesses. Oedipus should leave the place that is forbidden to enter (ἀβάτων ἀποβάς, 167).

The intruder must retreat from the sacred space: only at this point Oedipus starts to obey, but not very willingly. When he has been led out by Antigone to the edge of the grove (170-202) the chorus, who are also outside the sacred place, question him further (203-36). Once he reveals his identity – his story is well-known all over Greece – his *hiketeia* seems to have come to an unsuccessful end. They vehemently order him to step further away and leave, ἔξω πόρσω βαίνετε χώρας (226): still from the standpoint they would have had in *OT* they banish him from the country as a source of *miasma* (233-6): just as would have been the case in the negative scenario that happened to him much earlier in Thebes (93).

At this critical point Antigone, his guide, tries to mediate, pleading for mercy. But the chorus cannot be moved, fearing the anger of the gods (256). Only his abominable name implies danger and should be substituted by *euphemia*, just as it happens in the case of the Eumenides to whose grove he had arrived. Oedipus, still not obeying, intervenes (258-65):

> τί δῆτα δόξης, ἢ τί κληδόνος καλῆς
> μάτην ῥεούσης ὠφέλημα γίγνεται,
> εἰ τάς γ᾽ Ἀθήνας φασὶ θεοσεβεστάτας   260
> εἶναι, μόνας δὲ τὸν κακούμενον ξένον
> σῴζειν οἵας τε καὶ μόνας ἀρκεῖν ἔχειν
> κἄμοιγε ποῦ ταῦτ᾽ ἐστίν, οἵτινες βάθρων
> ἐκ τῶνδέ μ᾽ ἐξάραντες εἶτ᾽ ἐλαύνετε,
> ὄνομα μόνον δείσαντες;   265

[What help comes, then, of repute or fair fame, if it ends in idle breath; (260) seeing that Athens, as men say, is god-fearing be-

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11 On the performance of the libation as *nephalia* (without wine, cf. 481 resuming 100) as part of a detailed ritual purification on stage, see 466-92, esp. 469-81; see also Graf 1980; on the *krateres*, see 472; on the landmark called Mixing Bowl (*Krater*), see 1593.

yond all, and alone has the power to shelter the outraged stranger, and alone the power to help him? And where are these things for me, when, after making me rise up from this rocky seat, you then drive me from the land, (265) afraid of my name alone?]

It is now gradually becoming clear: when Antigone mentioned the fact that they were in the vicinity of Athens, Oedipus was visited by a sudden inspiration. Renowned for being a liberal city well-known for granting asylum to strangers, Athens served as the key-word to put his spontaneous plan in practice. The fact that he should end his life had perhaps also been announced by Apollo long ago, probably nothing more. Oedipus, however, must realize that his bad fame of being a *deinon* throughout the Hellenic world could prevent the people to give him asylum in this case. Therefore he starts performing the ritual of supplication (Burian 1974; Kelly 2009: 75-9) against the fear of *miasma* (275-83) and opens his apologetic campaign using oratory, repeated with variations several times in the play (258-74; 510-48; 960-1013; Kelly 2009: 53-9); over and over again he argues that he is not guilty, the murder was in self-defence, the incest happened unwittingly, and the murder of his father was not premeditated, as he could not know. By exonerating himself of any guilt (270-4) and as *hiketes*, who must be under the protection of the gods, he stylizes himself as *hieros* and *eusebes* (287), sacred and pious.

In respect of the ritual duality between *miasma* and saviour he aligns the forces on the Thebes-Athens axis. The *miasma* expelled from Thebes as *pharmakos* has a cathartic effect as something *katharsion* (Burkert 1985: 82-4) that he transfers to Athens now. Therefore, based on the polarity of the chthonian model that mediates between the abominable and the benign, he promises to bring profit, benefit (ὄνησιν, 288), and comfort for the people of Athens (287-8), if they receive him as suppliant, rescue, and protect him. The time-gap until Theseus, as saviour, arrives to integrate the new saviour (Kelly 2009: 79-85) as chthonic hero in the making is bridged by the scene of Ismene bringing news from Thebes.

Sophocles dramatically condenses the situation through a new oracle of Apollo (Kelly 2009: 39-40, 65-8; Easterling 2012; Markantonatos 2012: 120-1; Dorati 2018: 114-20): due to his chthonic

power the Thebans will once again wish to lay hands on Oedipus living or dead, εὐσοίας χάριν (390), for their safety's sake (389-90). Oedipus has long wished to return to his home. Now the news is surprising even to him (391). Ismene makes clear that the political power in Thebes is now in his hands (392). He thus becomes aware again of the great power of his body since the oracle echoes his own enigmatic promises of a benefit (ὄνησιν, 288) (Slatkin 1986: 212). Ismene, moreover, announces that Creon will soon come "to plant [Oedipus] near the Cadmean land, so that they may have [him] in their power, while [he] may not set foot within their borders" (ὥς σ' ἄγχι γῆς στήσωσι Καδμείας, ὅπως / κρατῶσι μὲν σοῦ, γῆς δὲ μὴ 'μβαίνῃς ὅρων, 399-400).

Thebes must make sure to secure Oedipus as an apotropaic *sema* under her control. The Thebans mainly see the negative potential of his body. Because of the capacity he retains as the source of anathema and harm they are still not ready to integrate him totally, installing him at the centre of Thebes. Despite all negative chthonic potential Oedipus' body is of vital importance for Thebes to maintain her political power and to ward off foes. Oedipus is outraged about becoming an instrument for his personal enemies without receiving honours in his homeland. Therefore he refuses to comply with these plans: The consequence for Thebes is told through a reworking of the second oracle. Envoys from Delphi reported that this would mean grief for the Cadmeians, since Oedipus' anger will strike them from afar (408-15). Although his sons know about it, they have not yet managed to bring him back to Thebes (416-19). While these facts are disclosed, Oedipus becomes increasingly aware of his dual force. Listening to the voices from Delphi he feels himself empowered: he thus recognizes that his tomb at Colonus could safeguard the existence of Athens, especially against Theban attacks. The future gain of his body that Oedipus had invented for rhetorical reasons materializes and now becomes his trump card in the *hiketeia*.

The transfer of Oedipus from Thebes to Athens means that the latter would receive in him the magical instrument that helps preserve power and avert military defeat. Through this measure he could simultaneously take revenge on his own Theban people. Oedipus, as chthonian power of curse – the Erinyes are *Arai*

(Aesch. *Eum.* 417) –,[12] can put now the loathing execration of his sons on stage.[13] He foresees the struggle over his body. Combining all the Apollonian allusions Oedipus recognizes that, if Athens in alliance with the Semnai as deme goddesses will defend him, the inhabitants will exalt him as a saviour for themselves and cause grief for their and his enemies, his own people in Thebes (457-60). It becomes clear that Oedipus is about to use circulating Delphic voices regarding his dual potential in order to finally take revenge on Thebes and his own family for having expelled him as *miasma*.[14] At the same time he will return to the defence of Athens that can profit from him in military terms. It is a win-win situation: the Athenians will be secure against Thebes, perhaps possessing a magic joker in all future wars – a utopian promise in the desperate situation of 406 BCE –, while he will gain the necessary protection and support to become the angel of revenge, the Erinys himself, against his family and his polis of birth. It all looks to be the same cynical play of power as the audience had witnessed in other contemporary tragedies, especially in Euripides' *Orestes* in 408 BCE.

With these arguments Oedipus achieves a change of attitude in the chorus towards him: from being determined to expel him out of fear of pollution their feelings alter to pity for him (461). In the end the rhetoric of supplication, its immanent threat and promise of profit, was successful. But the chorus leader now advises Oedipus to appease the *daimones* with a complex chthonic ritual of wineless libations and almost silent prayer (466-502) "to make atonement to these divinities (cf. θοῦ νῦν καθαρμὸν τῶνδε δαιμόνων, 'to whom [he has] come first, and on whose ground [he has] trespassed', 466-7)". We remember that he had trespassed on their sacred *alsos* as Oedipus constantly breaches taboos. In Sappho fr. 2 V. the sacred space of a grove symbolizes the female body (Bierl 2019: 45-52). In the same way as Oedipus, famous for his "foot" (*-pous*), violated the prohibition of incest – he is still

12 On the Erinyes' quintessential association with *arai*, see Dorati 2018: 107n4 with further secondary literature.

13 On the logic of curse, see Edmunds 1996: 138-42; Dorati 2018: 103-14; on the reciprocal link with destiny, see ibid. 120-38.

14 On different premises, but partially similar results, see Bernard 2001: 83-97.

too close to Antigone – so he intruded into the goddesses' territory. The polluted *pharmakos* should now perform a purification ritual to placate the demons (θοῦ νῦν καθαρμόν τῶνδε δαιμόνων, 466). It anticipates his own cult as heroic hero as well. The chorus leader orders Oedipus to pray to the goddesses as they are called the Eumenides, the Benevolents, so that "from benevolent breasts (ἐξ εὐμενῶν στέρνων) they may receive the suppliant as his saviours (δέχεσθαι τὸν ἱκέτην σωτηρίους)" (486-8) (Gödde 2011: 211). The marked signal of the etymologically applied name Eumenides highlights again the reference to the *Oresteia*. In clearly alluding to Eumenides, a name that was probably attributed only later to the last part of the trilogy, Sophocles can stress the famous transformation of the dreadful Erinyes into the Semnai/Eumenides. By performing the ritual in the right attitude Oedipus should practically become equal with his hosts in the sacred grove, changing from his negative to his positive aspect.

However, Oedipus as hero in the making is not yet at this point. He receives the possibility to delegate the prayer to another person (488), but not the entire practice (490-2). Yet Oedipus, the person we witnessed as the most skeptical about religious practices in *OT*, who failed to observe any ritual taboos, still does not seem to care much about the necessary *katharmoi*, the prerequisite to become the chthonic hero. Excusing himself he orders again that one of his daughters should carry out the libation for him (495-502) (Henrichs 2004: 195-6). The polluted man feels that he is not yet an *eunous psyche* (cf. 499) – a "benevolent soul" departed from the body (Nagy 2013: 235-54). Thus Ismene accepts the task of performing the rite for him (503-7). But the execution of this will be delayed since she will be abducted by Creon. Only close to the mystic end, at line 1598, Oedipus will send the girls out to bring the *choai* of water, for him to pour libations into the ground, less for the Eumenides than for himself, for his own purification (1598-602) (see Nagy 2013: 509). In the meanwhile, he is still only on the way to his progressive heroization, still acting mainly focused on the negative, cursing side and within the myth (also in the Aristotelian sense of *mythos* as tragic action, *Po.* 1450a4-5), and not yet in his positive cultic aspect. Accordingly, the first choral ode, an *amoibaion* between the chorus and Oedipus (510-48), re-

volves around his crimes.

At this point Theseus arrives. Oedipus does not even perform the supplication in front of the Athenian king, but presents his body as a gift whose gain will materialize after his death (576-85). But Oedipus also makes clear that from this decision a great struggle (*agon*, 587) will arise, an *agon* for life and death, since his sons wish to bring him to Thebes (587-9). Theseus cannot understand Oedipus' excessive hatred and anger toward them – from his humanistic perspective he states that too much of it is not good (592). Oedipus explains that he is so angry with them since they expelled him, the murderer, forbidding him to return (599-601). Theseus asks why they should come to get him then (602). Oedipus explains the reason with another oracle from Apollo that seems almost as if it were an invention on his part: they do it out of fear because otherwise they are destined to be defeated in Athens (604-5). Thus Oedipus seems to make up an oracle that we at least have never heard of: by constructing and recombining, thus "dealing with" (Easterling 2012: ch. d) Ismene's oracular information in selective bits, he only focuses on a war with Athens, reinterpreting the utility of his body, alive or dead, in respect to and along the Athens-Thebes axis. It is well known that in the myth of the Seven Athens does not play any role. Theseus is also quite surprised that the war between the brothers Polyneices and Eteocles, Oedipus' sons, should be considered his and Athens' business (606) (Kelly 2009: 67). The reason lies in Oedipus' body politics, i.e. in his strategic plan to take revenge on Thebes, since it is simply because of him that a great war will start. Furthermore, the remark about the necessity of a Theban defeat probably alludes to and is drawn from Athens' actual victory over the Theban cavalry in 407 BCE. To Theseus' indignation Oedipus can only reply with a general reflection on the eternal change between polar extremes (607-15). Also Thebes will witness a transformation from a peaceful accord to a dreadful war (616-20). Then "his sleeping and buried corpse (εὕδων καὶ κεκρυμμένος νέκυς), cold in death (ψυχρός ποτ᾽), will drink the [Thebans'] warm blood (θερμὸν αἷμα πίεται)" (621-2). By switching his alliance Oedipus will do extreme harm to his enemies, his own family and people, and help his new friends in Athens, and in this case the Olympian gods, especial-

ly Apollo, will not deceive him (cf. Hester 1977; Blundell 1989: 226-
59). Oedipus thus manipulates Theseus with an imaginary will of
the Olympian gods, promising his blessing for Athens as a chtho-
nian hero who drinks the enemies' blood. The announcement to
drink the Thebans' blood is identical with the Erinyes' vampire be-
haviour as they threaten to suck blood from their victim Orestes
in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (184-5, 230, 254, 264-6, 302, 365) (Geisser
2002: 394n50). On the cultic side it corresponds to the special
blood *choai* that chthonic heroes and gods can receive. Pouring
blood into a pit (*bothros*) and downward into the earth implies
the idea of satiating heroes and the souls of dead men (*haimakou-
ria*) in order to revitalize them and to gain some profit from them
(Burkert 1985: 60). After all, Theseus soon recognizes the strate-
gic benefit for Athens by giving him asylum. Theseus' benevolence
(εὐμένεια), characteristic of Athens, cannot "expel", that is, re-
ject, Oedipus' benevolence (εὐμένειαν ἐκβάλοι, 631), typical of the
transformed Eumenides (cf. Guidorizzi 2008: 281), especially since
as *hiketes* he is under the special protection of the Goddesses,
addressed as chthonic *daimones* (634). At this point Oedipus'
mechane to have a new secure basis for revenge on his own city
has been put into practice very effectively. The rest of the play will
mostly focus on the staging of the war over his body and Oedipus'
curse of his enemies as a new Erinys/*Ara*.

After the new ally Theseus has left the stage and before the
battle is enacted, the chorus sings its first stasimon, the famous
praise of idyllic Attica (668-719). Behind the positive utopia lies
a chthonic subtext. In the following songs we witness a symbol-
ic and concrete reflection about Oedipus' progress towards death,
the goal of the action also in the dialogic parts of the play (Del
Corno 1998: 59-85; Rodighiero 2000: 115-41). The grove of Colonus,
in its meaning as tumulus, the future burial place, is again praised
as *abaton* (τὰν ἄβατον θεοῦ / φυλλάδα, 675-6). Remarkable is the
presence of Dionysus, the god of mystery and afterlife as well as
of the tragic performance (Bierl 1991: 100-3), and of Aphrodite.
The reason for this is that the paradisiacal garden has also a sym-
bolic meaning in regard to sexuality, alluding to the female body.
Oedipus trespasses on the grove, as he tends to violate the taboo
of incest. He had married his mother and he is still transgressing

the norms and cultural codes in being too close to his daughter Antigone. Poseidon then anticipates the war with horses.

Creon arrives and appeals to Oedipus to return with him to Thebes. Oedipus, already warned, is outraged and makes clear that Creon does not intend "to bring him home but to plant him near the borders (ἀλλ᾽ ὡς πάραυλον οἰκίσῃς), so that [Thebes] might be relieved uninjured from evils that come from Athens" (784-6). Oedipus again, now from the complementary perspective, only focuses on the military gain for Thebes against Athens, but Thebes plans the apotropaic measure as a general defence against all possible attackers. He should serve as a vengeful *sema* against external enemies. Yet in Thebes he would live only as his *alastor* (ἀλάστωρ, 788) (Geisser 2002: 132-6, 152), the vengeful spirit and Erinys against his native soil, revenging the crimes done to him. As such he predicts the fatal end of his sons (789-90), pretending to know it from Apollo and Zeus (793).

The parallel with the Eteonus cult at the border of Boeotia, reported by Lysimachus of Alexandria (*FGH* 382 F 2), has been accepted for a long time (Robert 1915: esp. 1.8-9; Edmunds 1981: esp. 221, 223-4, 232-3; Lardinois 1992: 325-6; Edmunds 1996: 95-100; Kelly 2009: 43, 82; Nagy 2013: 512). The Thebans regarded the burial of the polluted Oedipus as a source of danger. His own family thus could not entomb him in Theban soil, but went to Keos. They were then forced to remove the body again and buried it secretly in Eteonus, a sacred place of Demeter and located at the frontier far from Thebes, later named Oidipodeion. When people found out, they did not want him either and consulted an oracle. But it ordained they must not disturb, that is, "move" him, since he was the suppliant of the goddess (μὴ κινεῖν τὸν ἱκέτην τῆς θεοῦ).

In *OC* we witness, as anticipated by Oedipus, a war about moving and transferring Oedipus' body towards the borders of Theban territory, before his death (815), because of the positive, blessing effects as predicted by the oracles. Ismene has already been kidnapped and Antigone is being seized as well. At this point the conflict is being acted out before the audience and the war will then be waged behind the scene. Kidnapping is a most cynical mode, reminding us of Euripides' famous *Orestes* (408 BCE). By capturing the old king's daughters Creon intends to force Oedipus

to come to Thebes with them. Yet, determined not to comply and to call Theseus for help, Oedipus becomes, as a quintessential curser, the personified *Ara* on stage. He appeals to the demons of the place, the Arai, to let him utter a curse against his enemy and his family (864-5) expressing his desire that they too suffer a wretched old age just as he himself had to endure (868-70). Of course, on the other hand, Theseus comes to his new friend's aid. At Theseus' indignant question how Creon could dare to kidnap Oedipus and his daughters in the land of Law, Creon replies (939-50):

> ἐγὼ οὔτ' ἄνανδρον τήνδε τὴν πόλιν λέγω,
> ὦ τέκνον Αἰγέως, οὔτ' ἄβουλον, ὡς σὺ φής,   940
> τοὔργον τόδ' ἐξέπραξα, γιγνώσκων δ' ὅτι
> οὐδείς ποτ' αὐτοῖς τῶν ἐμῶν ἂν ἐμπέσοι
> ζῆλος ξυναίμων, ὥστ' ἐμοῦ τρέφειν βίᾳ.
> ἤδη δ' ὁθούνεκ' ἄνδρα καὶ πατροκτόνον
> κἄναγνον οὐ δεξοίατ', οὐδ' ὅτῳ γάμοι   945
> ξυνόντες ηὑρέθησαν ἀνοσιώτατοι.
> τοιοῦτον αὐτοῖς Ἄρεος εὔβουλον πάγον
> ἐγὼ ξυνῄδη χθόνιον ὄνθ', ὃς οὐκ ἐᾷ
> τοιούσδ' ἀλήτας τῇδ' ὁμοῦ ναίειν πόλει·
> ᾧ πίστιν ἴσχων τήνδ' ἐχειρούμην ἄγραν.   950

[It is not because I thought this city void of men, (940) son of Aegeus, or of counsel, as you say, that I have done this deed; but because I judged that its people could never be so zealous for my relatives as to support them against my will. And I knew that this people would not receive a parricide and a polluted man, (945) a man whose unholy marriage – a marriage with children – had been found out. Such wisdom, I knew, was immemorial on the Areopagus, which does not allow such wanderers to dwell within this city. (950) Trusting in that, I sought to take this prize.]

This passage is very significant in the argument of the immanent functioning of chthonic polarity which Sophocles uses so aptly for his dramatic purposes. Creon cannot imagine that Athens would be so eager to feed a criminal from Thebes. *Trephein* (943) also implies the cultic nourishment of libation. Ironically Sophocles makes Creon argue that he was certain that the Areopagus, the Athenian court for homicide, as chthonic institution (χθόνιον ὄνθ', 948) – perhaps also in the meaning of "autochthonous" (Guidorizzi

2008: 322) –, would not permit such vagrant beggars (*aletas*, 949, cf. 50) (and murderers) to become inhabitants in the city of Athens. As we have learnt, the Areopagus, however, so well-known from the *Oresteia*, hosted the chthonic Erinyes as Semnai (= Eumenides) and indeed integrated Oedipus as a chthonic hero in the making with his own *mnema* in a common precinct (Paus. 1.28.6-7).

Again and again we detect that specific words allude to a deeper meaning, the truth, in a riddling form. Athens thus will indeed give the hero in the making a cult in a sanctuary that he will share with the Semnai. On the one hand, one fears the dreadful, on the other hand, it can become benevolent and positive by deterring the external enemy. Creon argues that he has acted on legitimate claims to hunt Oedipus (950), since Oedipus had cursed him and the entire city of Thebes (951-3). Creon argues there is no limit to danger until death puts an end to it (954-5) – yet, indeed, Oedipus will act as a cursing force, that is as Erinys, even after death, from his grave. Moreover, Oedipus reacts with fierce curses again, providing a new apology (960-1013) – the third after the one given in lines 258-74 and 510-48, both addressed to the chorus. In this defence Oedipus does all he can to diminish his status of *miasma* before cultic heroization, while praising Athens (esp. 1006-7) (Kelly 2009: 52-9, esp. 56-9). To tear him, the suppliant, away from Athens also means an outrage against his new home famed for its worship of the gods (1006-9). Finally, Oedipus supplicates the Goddesses, the Eumenides in the grove, to come as helpers and allies (ἐλθεῖν ἀρωγοὺς ξυμμάχους θ', 1012) (1010-13). They will indeed become military allies of the chthonic hero to support his case after his death, helping defend the sacred territory full of chthonic landmarks against external enemies, particularly Thebes.

In the second stasimon (1044-95) the chorus project themselves on to the battlefield, making the war, the pursuit, and the fierce battle fought to free the girls present before the inner eyes of the audience. Theseus as king of a pious land (1125-7) has saved them (cf. 1103, 1117, 1123), while Oedipus progressively acts as cultic saviour from beneath the earth. On his way back Theseus heard that a relative, not from Thebes – Polyneices – came as suppliant still sitting on the altars of Poseidon, where he himself prayed when he

was called by Oedipus (1156-9). Polyneices' position thus mirrors his father's who now vehemently rejects the ritual duty. Oedipus, as emblem of anger, hates his son so much that he even refuses to listen to him (1173-4). Theseus, as incarnation of humanistic and pious values, reminds Oedipus of the seat of the gods that obliges him to grant them respect (1179-80) and do his son this favour. His guide Antigone pleads as well that he should give in (1181, 1184, 1201) as a father. Bad anger can only result in a bad end (1197-8). Thus Oedipus must yield and also slowly move toward his benign dimension, but he will later burst out in uttering curses again.

The third stasimon (1211-48) with its famous "Not to be born is, beyond all estimation, best" (μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νι-/κᾷ λόγον, 1224-5) moves the perspective towards Oedipus' end. In full repentance of his errors Polyneices asks for help. The reason for the *stasis* with his brother, so he argues on the basis of another instance of an oracle, is Oedipus' nature as an Erinys, the personification of Curse (1298-300). The son begs his father to forgo his fierce anger and to help him against Eteocles who has driven him out of the country. Oracles say again that whomever Oedipus joins in alliance will win the war and the power in Thebes (1331-2). Polyneices could then make his father return again to his city (1342). But Oedipus refuses to help and renews his fierce curse (1354-96). He even styles his son, since he had expelled him, as his murderer (1361) on whom he must take revenge now as a sort of Erinys. The *daimon* of revenge looks upon Polyneices (1370), it is actually Oedipus in alliance with the Erinyes, the δεινῶπες, the dreadful looking (84), who are all-seeing (42; cf. 74, for Oedipus). He adds *arai* to old ones (1375), and he invokes the curses that stand emblematically for him and the Erinyes to come as allies (1376; cf. 1013). The curses should have the power over his seat and throne (1380-1), if Justice stands side by side with the ancient law of Zeus (1381-2). This means that he has finally reached a cultic dwelling where curse, *dike*, and the archaic rule of law of Zeus in the sense of the first two plays of the *Oresteia* will be united. After all, he will become an Erinys in the grove of the Eumenides.

In the *amoibaion* (1447-504) the chorus finally resume the situation: "Behold, new ills of heavy fate have newly come from the blind stranger, unless, perhaps, fate is finding its goal" (νέα τάδε

νεόθεν ἦλθέ μοι / <νέα> βαρύποτμα κακὰ παρ' ἀλαοῦ ξένου, / εἴ τι μοῖρα μὴ κιγχάνει, 1447-50). The play assumes a more serene and celebratory tone in the finale when the progressive heroization comes to its end in his miraculous death enriched with associations full of mystery (Calame 1998). The frightful signs, thunder, and lightning announce his death (cf. Easterling 2006). The chorus as transmitter of emotions expresses fear, or better, terror: "The hair of my head stands up for fear, my soul is dismayed (δεῖμ' ὑπῆλθε κρατὸς φόβαν; / ἔπταξα θυμόν, 1465-6); for again the lightning flashes in the sky" (1464-7). They ask the *daimon* of the locality, the Erinyes, to be merciful (1480). Repeatedly alluding to the secrecy of the Eleusinian Mysteries he will finally show his burial place only to King Theseus.[15] Secrecy will prevent others from further attempts to secure him. Despite the plethora of topographical names there is also the feature of anonymity and indeterminacy characteristic of chthonian places. Oedipus' *sema* will provide Athens with protection and security (1518-38). Oedipus' union with the earth and the local Semnai are stylized as the secret of mysteries, the *aporrheton* (cf. Gödde 2011: 226-32; Nagy 2013: 514-18). It is all a *thauma*, a wondrous miracle, reported by the messenger. The heroization has finally materialized. He is a man, "beyond all mortals wondrous" (ἀλλ' εἴ τις βροτῶν / θαυμαστός, 1664-5). The report ends with a strangely ambiguous tone as if people in the audience could have doubts of the story that Oedipus might have made up the circumstances to execute his own agenda: "And if in anyone's eyes I seem to speak senselessly, I would not try to win his belief when he counts me senseless" (εἰ δὲ μὴ δοκῶ φρονῶν λέγειν, / οὐκ ἂν παρείμην οἷσι μὴ δοκῶ φρονεῖν, 1665-6). The *thauma* is so great that it sounds almost unbelievable. Like Euripides in the *Bacchae*, Sophocles leaves the question open as to whether he adheres to the religious content or whether he reveals its cynical mechanism (Dunn 2012: esp. 360-1 with other literature).

The rest of the play (1670-759) focuses on the dreadful consequences for Oedipus' family; his daughters are left behind and

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15 Calame 1998: 349-51 and Markantonatos 2002: 201-8 discuss the relation of the topographical names in Colonus with Eleusis.

abandoned. Although everything is focused on matters of ritual, they cannot perform the burial rites and lament at a grave. In their wild *goos* as *kommos* (1670-750) both desire to join their father in death. Theseus, responsible for the welfare of his city, keeps to his promise not to reveal the site where Oedipus disappeared. In doing so he can avoid all dangers to his city (1751-67). In resignation Antigone finally begs Theseus to send them to Thebes to stop their brothers from bloodshed (1768-72).

Conclusion

We have seen that neither humanist nor psychological readings in positive or negative keys seem to be appropriate to do justice to this late play. Sophocles builds his tragic plot on a cultic reality and on the ritual concept of chthonic heroes and gods. Their quintessential polarity between the dreadful dimension of death and euphemistic names to veil it, between mythic scenarios of anger, curse, hate as well as cultic blessing and plenty is the basic pattern of a play that stages Oedipus as a chthonic hero in the making. He acts right from the beginning as the hero he is going to become. Due to his self-centred and tyrannical behaviour he trespasses on sacred ground where he learns about the dual forces of its cultic and demonic inhabitants, the Erinyes-Eumenides. Sophocles makes Oedipus oscillate between staging a real mystic miracle and the problematic manipulation of religious facts in order to take revenge on his Theban homeland by finding support from his new city of Athens. This open perspective involves the audience in thinking about what really happened and reflecting about the relation between ritual, religion, politics, and their manipulations by men for their own purposes. In this way it comes quite close to Euripides' *Bacchae* written at about the same time. *OC* is thus in many respects like a metatheatrical exploration of the constitutive gap of signifier and signified to be gradually closed by the blind director who gathers, like the blind, and unwitting audience, the piecemeal information gradually being disclosed to reach his goal: to reach a safe haven, from where he can harm the enemy and help his new friends. This is achieved by

assuming the status of a chthonic hero and elevating his existence though ritual and mythic discourses. Playing out the indeterminacy of signs and experimenting on the process of meaning, he can perform his new role within the polarity constitutive of chthonic heroes and thus gradually gain control over his situation (cf. Dunn 2012: 368-74). This indeterminacy achieves an atmosphere of religious mystery, while the author and the audience share a complicity with the internal actor in construing sense. Sophocles goes hand in hand with his theatrical hero, feeding him with narrative information in scattered oracular elements of indeterminate prediction at the right moments. Thus Oedipus on the basis of his drive for knowledge can gradually perform the role that he is going to become, while the audience must take the supplemented religious sense at face value and accept that Oedipus is somehow associated with this. The role he takes on as a chthonic cult hero in the making in whose reality Oedipus himself and the audience increasingly believe is gradually enacted qua mimesis. The mimetic process coincides with its final religious result when Oedipus reaches his death by disappearing in the chthonic sacred space beneath the earth and being engulfed by the Earth, since, as a matter of the fact, men can turn to heroes only after their death. The effect is increased by mystifying their tombs as *semata* (Nagy 2013: 32-3, 514-24) and even associating it with the sublime (Haselswerdt 2019: esp. 626-30). However, the mimetic performance at the same time remains incomplete since it can be reported only through messenger-speech (1586-665). The once again widening gap of disbelief is supplemented by an overdose of mysterious and religious signs that hint at the actual transformation of a human beggar, murderer, and *miasma* to a chthonic cultic hero, and thus the suspension of disbelief.

Whereas Thebes as the tragic place of the Other wants to regain Oedipus in order to use his dead body as an apotropaic *sema* on its borders without granting him a burial place inside the city, his tomb in the Attic deme of Colonus, the emblematic 'tumulus', will have this dual force, to help his friends, Athens, and harm his enemies, Thebes. *OC* showcases Oedipus as a hero in the making on his way toward death, ending with Oedipus' mystical disappearance in this sacred landscape of Attica, assimilating with its

main agents, Demeter as Erinys (Demeter Erinys at Thelpousa in Arcadia as mentioned by Paus. 8.25.4-7) as well as goddess of fertility, prosperity, and blessing mysteries, Poseidon Hippios, the tremendous shaker of the earth and power of the horse, and, most of all, the Semnai Theai, the Eumenides who act as Erinyes against enemies. In this regard the last surviving tragedy of the fifth century reflects Aeschylus' *Oresteia* that has become a canonical master-model, playing with and alluding to its political and religious themes and subtexts as well as zooming-in on Athens in the actual *hic* and *nunc*.

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Part 3
Oedipus and Lear

Lost and Found in Translation: Early Modern Receptions of *Oedipus at Colonus*

Robert S. Miola

Abstract

I here survey some early modern receptions of *Oedipus at Colonus* to discover what especially struck early modern readers of the play, and how their excerpts, commentaries, and translations transformed the Greek text to serve later political and moral ends. I begin with the fragmentation of the play into *sententiae* and proverbs by Bartolomeo Marliani and Desiderius Erasmus. Then I examine the influential reception of Joachim Camerarius, who sought to read Greek tragedy in light of contemporary understanding of Aristotle and the *Poetics*. Philipp Melanchthon offered a translation and commentary that advanced a polemically Christian reading of Greek tragedy. Heir to these traditions, John Milton created the period's most brilliant reimagining of Greek tragedy and *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Samson Agonistes* (1671). Milton's reception illuminates by contrast Shakespeare's outright denial of moralizing *sententia* traditions and the Christian hermeneutic in *King Lear*.

Keywords: *Oedipus at Colonus*; sententiae; Bartolomeo Marliani; Desiderius Erasmus; Joachim Camerarius; Philipp Melanchthon; Aristiotle's *Poetics*; *King Lear*: John Milton

What certainly seems to be missing from early modern receptions of *Oedipus at Colonus* is any modern sense of its originality, its stunning volte-face from *Oedipus Tyrannos*, wherein the gods torment Oedipus, polluted by guilt and shame; here he thrice asserts his moral innocence and assumes the just treatment of the gods, basing his belief and actions in a new oracle. Divinely favoured, Oedipus rises to moral authority and heroic stature in death (see, e.g., Knox 1964: 143-62; Edmunds 2006: 26-30, 50-3). This transformation seems not to be noted either by ancients like Longinus,

who commented on the superb visualization of the ending but not its significance (*On the Sublime*, 15.7); and it appears to be rejected by Seneca, who portrayed in *Phoenissae* the aged Oedipus as guilty and longing for death as release. Mesmerized by Aristotle's discussion of *Oedipus Tyrannos*, early modern Italian and English theorists tend to ignore this play altogether except for passing comments. I have found only Castelvetro's notice that, like Euripides' *Iphigenia* plays, Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays differ in "plots, complications, and resolutions" (Castelvetro 1984: 136); and Denores' mention of the play among those works that feature a change in fortune but not a true reversal or recognition (Denores 1972: 393).

Like much of Sophoclean drama, *Oedipus at Colonus* reached many early modern readers not as drama at all but as wise or memorable sayings, usually translated into Latin. The urge to mine ancient texts for *sententiae* arose from belief in the wisdom of the ancients, the universality of human experience, and the compatibility of at least some pagan and Christian teachings. In 1545 Bartolomeo Marliani published a Greek and Latin life of Sophocles along with *sententiae pulcherrimae* in Greek with Latin translation. As he explains in the Dedicatory Epistle, "simul & nonnullas, quas Graeci γνώμας vocant, eiusdem Poetae sententias, in vnum congessi, interpretatione Latina, ad eorum vsum, qui Graecas literas ignorant, praeterea apposita" (1545: sig. Aiiv), "at the same time from this poet, I gathered together in one place some wise sayings, which the Greeks call *gnomai*, with Latin translation placed beside, for the benefit of those who do not understand Greek". Marliani arranges the entries according to play rather than theme or subject and prints 23 excerpts, ranging from one to seven lines, from *Oedipus at Colonus* in chronological order. The collection begins with Oedipus's opening declaration and Marliani's acceptable rendering:

> στέργειν γὰρ αἱ πάθαι με χὠ χρόνος ξυνὼν
> μακρὸς διδάσκει καὶ τὸ γενναῖον τρίτον (7-8)[1]

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1 I quote all Greek from Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (eds.), 1990, with modernized sigmas. All translations from Greek and Latin are mine. For general accounts of the play and its reception see Scharffenberger (2017) and Finglass (2018).

Calamitates primum, deinde longum tempus,
nouissime genus, docent me paruis contentum esse.
(sig. Cii)

[First sufferings, then time long my companion, and third, my no-
bility, teach me to be content with few things.]

But the passage is wholly removed from its dramatic context:
there is no rural setting on the outskirts of Athens, no sacred
grove of the Eumenides, rock ridge, or statue of Colonus. The lines
are not spoken to Antigone by Oedipus, blind wanderer, mythical
and colossal figure of suffering, who here, surprisingly and prolep-
tically, presents himself in some sense, as post-traumatic. In time
he has learned στέργειν, to feel affection, to accept suffering, to
be content. Instead no identifiable person speaks the lines in no
specific place or time and for no specific reason. Oedipus's reve-
lation of hard-won knowledge functions here as a detached, gen-
eral, vaguely Stoic exhortation to be content with less rather than
more.

Such anonymity and decontextualization facilitate the compil-
er's didactic purpose, his presentation of excerpted passages as
timeless, universally applicable *sententiae*. Oedipus's argument to
Theseus that Athens may someday need protection from Thebes
since change is inevitable becomes similarly dislocated into an iso-
lated set piece on that favourite early modern theme, mutability,
here broken into two separate entries for easier apprehension and
remembrance.

Soli Dii
Non senescunt, nec moriuntur:
caetera omnia confundit, & superat tempus.
Perit enim terrae vis, perit & corporis:
perit & fides, pullulat perfidia.
Nec eadem voluntas
amicis est semper, neque ciuitatibus.
(sig. Cii)

[Only the gods do not grow old, nor die; time confounds and con-
quers all other things. Even strength of earth and of the body dies,
faith also dies, treachery springs up. Good will does not endure
among friends forever, and not among cities.]

Aliis nunc, alias aliis iocunda
amara fiunt, & rursus grata.
(sig. Ciiv)

[For some now and others at another time, joyful things become
bitter and pleasing back again.]

Theseus's reminder to himself to listen first before a decision (594,
ἄνευ γνώμης γὰρ οὔ με χρὴ ψέγειν, "For I must not blame with-
out judgement") becomes elevated into a general principle, "Nihil
est vt umquam temere loquamur" (sig. Cii, "We must never speak
rashly"). The movement to the first-person plural subjunctive sub-
stitutes the reader for the Sophoclean speaker and transforms
the meaning. Later, Oedipus's anguished defense of his actions,
done unwittingly, culminates in this bitter accusatory question to
Creon: πῶς ἂν τό γ' ἆκον πρᾶγμ' ἂν εἰκότως ψέγοις; (977, "how
could you reasonably blame an involuntary action?"). Again us-
ing the first-person subjunctive, Marliani turns the climactic mo-
ment into this bland general axiom: "Non est vt rem non sponte
peractam merito vituperemus" (sig. Ciiv, "It is not fair that we find
fault with an action done involuntarily").

Sometimes Marliani's Latin translations travel an even greater
distance from their Sophoclean originals. Creon's assertion about
anger knowing no old age until death (954-5) becomes a confused
commonplace about old age and fear of death without any men-
tion of anger: "Senectus nihil est aliud, quam timor mortis: / sed
mortuos nullos attingit dolor" (sig. Ciiv, "Old age is nothing oth-
er than fear of death; but sorrow touches none of the dead").
Occasionally, the compiler misconstrues alien Greek ideas and be-
liefs. Not wishing to spread his pollution by touch, Oedipus recoils
from Theseus and says,

τοῖς γὰρ ἐμπείροις βροτῶν
μόνοις οἷόν τε συνταλαιπωρεῖν τάδε.
(1135-6)

[Only those mortals experienced in these things are fit to share in
the misery.]

Here, Jebb notes (in Sophocles 2004: 181), Oedipus asserts that the
κηλὶς κακῶν (1134, "the stain of evils") that defiles him despite

his protestations of moral innocence cannot be contracted anew by his daughters as they are already involved in the family misfortunes. Wholly missing the Greek subtext about pollution and physical contact, Marliani translates to make a very different general observation about suffering and pity:

> Qui non ignari malorum sunt,
> Facile est aliorum miseriis commoueri.
> (sig. Ciii)

> [Those who are not ignorant of woes themselves are easily moved by the woes of others.]

After Oedipus's   triumphant death, moreover, Theseus tells his daughters to stop grieving:

> ἐν οἷς γὰρ
> χάρις ἡ χθονία νὺξ ἀπόκειται,
> πενθεῖν οὐ χρή· νέμεσις γάρ.
> (1751-3)

> [In cases where the favour of the underworld is stored up as the night, it is not right to mourn; that will bring nemesis, or retribution.]

Theseus here imagines death as χάρις ἡ χθονία, "the kindness of the Dark Powers" (1900: 269) in Jebb's fine phrase, and warns against νέμεσις, the mysterious process of divine anger and punishment. Marliani renders the passage as follows:

> Cum mors pro beneficio data est,
> non est cur lugeas,
> ne deos ad iram prouoces.
> (sig. Ciiii)

> [When death is given as a benefit there is no reason you should mourn, lest you provoke the gods to wrath.]

The dark powers of the underworld disappear into the neutral passive construction and the terrifying nemesis dwindles into a paraphrase.

The humanist project of reception by fragmentation culminates in Erasmus' great collection of proverbs, first published as

Adagiorum Collectanea (1500, 953 entries) and finally as *Adagiorum Chiliades* (1536, 4151 entries). To improve and adorn writing and speaking Erasmus collects brief *sententiae* that are witty and popular, adagia or paroemiae, or in other words, proverbs: "Paroemia est celebre dictum scita quapiam nouitate insigne" (1536: 3, "the proverb is a famous saying, remarkable for some shrewd novelty"). Under each proverb Erasmus provides explanations, illustrations, parallel passages from antiquity, and at times commentary on contemporary issues such as the vanity of princes, the corruption of the church, and the new humanism. The main organizational principle of this collection is not source or author but the proverb or proverbial phrase, under which Erasmus gathers an astonishing range of classical examplars, including, according to Margaret Mann Phillips' analysis of sources, 115 references to Sophocles (1964: 401). Among these I count 8 quotations from *Oedipus at Colonus*.[2] The lines Marliani botched about anger lasting until death appear here correctly under the heading "Ira omnium tardissime senescit" (1.7.13, "Anger grows old most tardily"), as does the passage on change under "Omnium rerum vicissitudo est" (1.7.63, "There is change in all things"), and the grim choral reflection on the futility and pain of human life (*OC* 1225-6) under "Optimum non nasci" (2.3.49, "It is best not to be born"). Though Erasmus is a better reader of classical texts than Marliani, he too parcels out the play into memorable snippets, and thus subscribes to the same decontextualizing, rhetoricizing, and moralizing hermeneutic.

Like Marliani, Erasmus sometimes distorts the text of *Oedipus at Colonus* by decontextualized quotation. The entry for "Gratia gratiam parit" (1.1.34, "One favour begets another"), for example, quotes *OC* 779, χάρις χάριν φέροι, "his kindness would bring kindness". But the quotation omits the all-important adverbial οὐδὲν, "not at all". In context the original passage depicts Oedipus as rejecting Creon's offer of fake hospitality and turns on a double meaning of χάρις both as a benefit and as something perceived as such. It actually says, "this kindness would bring no real kindness at all". The citation under "Senem erigere" (3.4.20, "To raise

2 I have used the indices provided by the Erasmus of Rotterdam Society and the Toronto *Collected Works* edition, vol. 30.

up an old man") travels an even further distance from the origi-
nating play. Erasmus quotes *OC* 395, γέροντα δ᾽ ὀρθοῦν φλαῦρον
ὃς νέος πέσῃ ("It is a poor thing to raise up an old man who fell
as a youth"). This is Oedipus's bitter reply to Ismene's excited rev-
elation of the prophecy that his body will protect the land where
it is buried; it is a direct riposte to her comment, νῦν γὰρ θεοί σ᾽
ὀρθοῦσι, πρόσθε δ᾽ ὤλλυσαν (394, "Now indeed the gods raise you
up, though before they destroyed you"). In context Oedipus's line
is a bitter reflection on the gods' late generosity, a complaint about
the prospect of being raised up after a lifetime of being fallen
down. Erasmus, however, translates, "Erigere durum est, qui cadat
iuuenis, senem" (1536: 721, "It is a hard thing to raise up (straight-
en out) an old man who has fallen as a youth"), and the change
from φλαῦρον ("poor, petty, trivial") to "durum" ("hard, difficult")
changes the absent subject of the infinitive from the gods to the
old man, and initiates an entirely different reading of the rais-
ing and falling. "Haud facile dediscuntur a senibus uitia, quae pu-
eri didicerint, & in omnem inhaeserint uitam. Et tamen in senec-
ta quoque conandum, ut uitiis careamus, quantumuis inhaeserint"
(1536: 721, "Not easily do old men unlearn those vices which they
learned as youths and which have become ingrained throughout
their lives. But nevertheless in old age too we must attempt to be
without vices, howsoever ingrained"). This reading entirely miss-
es the point of Oedipus's reply, his rueful protest at the powers
above who destroy humans and then capriciously prop them up
just before death. Instead we hear a little sermon on the difficulty
old people have in breaking bad habits and becoming free of long
practiced sins.[3]

The *sententiae* tradition continues in Latin translations of
Sophocles by Gabia (1543), Lalamant (1557), Naogeorg (1558), and
Rataller (1570), wherein marginal quotation marks identify wise
sayings and memorable passages. Naogeorg (1558: 308) even tags
OC 1225-6 ("Optimum non nasci") as "Celebrata multis senten-
tia" ("a wise saying celebrated by many"), before ascribing it to

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3 Erasmus rarely goes so far astray, and since this quotation is one of the
very few that lacks identification of author and play, let alone any explana-
tion of dramatic context, it may well derive from an intermediary source.

Silenus on the testimony of Cicero and Lactantius, and referencing Erasmus' *Chiliades*. The fragmentation of Sophoclean tragedy into Greek phrases adorned with Latin explication and paraphrase reaches an entirely different level of complexity and importance in Joachim Camerarius' *Commentarii interpretationum argumenti thebaidos fabularum Sophoclis* (1534). As the title indicates Camerarius published a running commentary on *OC* in the context of Sophocles' three Theban plays, situating it logically in the middle of the action that begins in *OT* and ends in *Antigone*. He glosses over two hundred Greek words, phrases and lines with philological, rhetorical, and moralistic commentary. The passages on the vicissitudes of time, anger never growing old, and on not being born are all duly noted as *sententiae* but placed in the context of the developing action. Camerarius seriously engages with the play as drama, making comments on the characters and stage action, including the climactic thunder at the end (1534: sig. H6) that signals Oedipus's imminent death and the fulfillment of the oracle. The commentary, furthermore, belongs to a fully articulated theory of interpretation, what Michael Lurie has well called the "Aristotelization of Greek tragedy" (2012: 441), the viewing of the plays through the lens of the *Poetics*, as then understood. For Camerarius Sophoclean tragedy presents the spectacle of a good person suffering an undeserved fate that arouses pity and fear:

> At ubi uir bonus & honestatis uirtutisque amans, indignum in malum impellitur quasi fatali ui, aut peccata vel non voluntate, vel ignoratione quoque commissa, poenas extremas sustinent, tum & metus & misericordia talibus ab exemplis homines inuadit, et lamenta horroresque excitantur. (1534: sig. B3)

> [But when a good man, loving honesty and virtue, is driven to an undeserved end as by the force of fate or by sins committed involuntarily or ignorantly, and these sustain extreme punishments, then both fear and pity by such examples seize men and laments and dread are aroused.]

The auditors, themselves "extra pericula, tamen horrescant representatione eorum quae diximus" (1534: sig B2v, "outside of danger, nevertheless shudder at the representation of those things we mentioned"). Camerarius says that by common consent the first

among such works are Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Oedipus at Colonu*s, "Oedipus duplex" (sig. B2v), according to a witty marginal manuscript note, the second play being a continuation and culmination of the first, both presenting a good man driven to an undeserved, and therefore tragic, end.

Others perceived "Oedipus duplex" differently and reached different conclusions about the protagonist, his fate, and the nature of Greek tragedy. Philipp Melanchthon advanced a Christian interpretation and argued that Greek tragedies depicted just punishments for "depraved passions" (1555: sig. a2v, "prauis cupiditatibus").[4] Spectators of Sophocles and the others learned to turn themselves "towards moderation and control of desires" (1555: sig. a2, "ad moderationem, et frenandas cupiditates"). Melanchthon declared further that all Greek tragedy taught one universal truth, "quam Vergilius reddidit: Discite iustitiam, monui, et non spernere divos" [*Aen.* 6. 620] (1555: sig. a2v, "as Vergil rendered it, 'Learn Justice,' I advised, 'and do not scorn the gods'"). The plays pointed upward to reveal the guiding presence of "aliquam mentem eternam" (1555: sig. a2v, "some eternal mind") that always dispenses deserved punishments and rewards, not Zeus, Poseidon or any of the Olympian deities, that is, but the just Judaeo-Christian God.

Melanchthon's Christian interpretation, advanced as early as 1545, became the dominant hermeneutic of reception, evident in the Latin translations of Lalamant (1557), Naogeorg (1558), Rataller (1570), and others. In time even Camerarius got on board, echoing these ideas in his later published commentary on all seven Sophoclean tragedies, *Commentatio explicationum omnium tragoediarum Sophocli*s (Basel, 1556). Here Camerarius argues that Sophoclean tragedy teaches two things: 1) "When things turn out contrarily to men's hope and expectation, there is some greater

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4 Melanchthon, of course, develops a tradition of Christian interpretation that Edmunds (2006: 62-78) traces variously through Statius' *Thebaid*, the *Roman de Thèbes*, Boccaccio, Lydgate, the anonymous 12th-century *Planctus Oedipi*, and medieval stories of Judas and Pope Gregory. In the later exemplars, "the common theme in these medieval recastings of the figure of Oedipus is repentance and redemption" (ibid.: 77). Dramatizing Boccaccio, Hans Sachs's tragedy *Jocasta* (1550) refigures the Erinys as Satan and the blinding as "failure to bear one's cross" (ibid.: 88-9).

power than human, a moderator and controller of all things in this world" (1556: sig. a4v, "cum plurima eueniant contra spem & expectationem hominum, esse aliquam uim maiorem, quam humana esse possit, moderatricem & gubernatricem rerum omnium in hoc mundo"); 2) "It must be understood that changes are inherent in all human life, as well as a variety of fortune, and that this indicates the necessity of prudence" (1556: sig. a4v, "Secundum, cognoscendam esse humanae naturae conditionem, & rerum vices, atque fortunae varietatem; & hac consideratione comparandam prudentiam"). Furthermore, in a change from his earlier view, Camerarius declared that Sophocles' tragedies displayed providential justice in action, punishing the wicked person for "culpa impietatis, audaciae, superbiae, peruicaciae suae" (1556: sig. a4v, "for his fault of impiety, boldness, pride, obstinacy"). "Human wisdom cannot understand" the will of the eternal (1556: sig. a4v, "humana sapientia perspicere nequit"), but nevertheless it can distinguish between virtue and vice and follow one and avoid the other (1556: sig. a4v-a5, "tamen omnes sciunt sensu naturae infinitio, esse aliquid honestum (quod uocamus uirtutem) & huic contrarium turpe in uita (cui nomen est uitium), & illud sequendum, hoc fugiendum"). In this interpretation the plays take place in a rational, humanly comprehensible and just universe, wherein the gods reward virtue and punish vice.

Melanchthon's student, Veit Winshemius, produced a Latin edition of his teacher's lectures on Sophocles (1546) and gave these ideas specific application and wider circulation. The tragedies present "many outstanding examples of human misfortune" (1546: sig A3, "imagines multae illustres humanarum calamitatum"), which serve sometimes for warning, sometimes for consolation (1546: sig. A3, "tum ad commonefactionem, tum ad consolationem"). The disasters that befall the house of Laius and Oedipus originate in "tetra libido Laii" (1546: sig A4v, "the foul lust of Laius"), who raped Chrysippus and begot Oedipus in defiance of a warning oracle. The disasters deter audiences from vice, teach them to control wicked passions, and show that evil deeds will always be divinely punished ("sed statuebat vere diuinitus puniri scelera", 1546: sig A4v). *Oedipus at Colonus* features specifically another moral lesson: "Honora parentes" (1546: sig. R4v, "Honour

parents"), an echo of the Decalogue. And Oedipus's advice to Theseus not to trust in present concords also carries sage political advice grounded in universal wisdom, "quod nihil firmi aut fidi sit in foederibus & societatibus hominum" (1546: sig. R5, "because there is nothing firm or trustworthy in the treaties and unions of men").

In Winshemius and Melanchthon's edition of the play marginalia gloss the Latinized text to point these morals and adorn the tale. Oedipus's opening remarks about the lessons of his past exile (7, στέργειν) get the predictable gloss about "patientiam" (1546: sig. R8, "patience"). Theseus's kind reception of his fellow mortal Oedipus (568-9) occasions a general recommendation of mercy and hospitality, "aliorum calamitates debent nobis esse doctrina modestiae, & misericordiae" (1546: sigs. T3r-v, "the calamities of others should teach us the doctrine of humility and compassion"). Creon's assertion that Oedipus must endure his insolence (883) draws this censure, "Vox tyrranica, fatetur iniuriam esse sed tamen ferre eos oportere" (1546: sig. V1v, "the tyrant's voice confesses something to be an injury but nevertheless believes that others should bear it"). Speeches are marked according to rhetorical kind (precatio, deprecatio, oratio, querela, metalepsis, occupatio, encomion, insinuatio, apostrophe, petitio, narratio, antithesis, amplificatio); the wise saying gets glossed as "locus communis" (1546: sig. V8), or "sententia" (1546: sig V8v, "optimum non nasci", again). Significantly, Oedipus's defence of himself to the Chorus (*OC* 258ff.) gets twice marked as "excusatio": "Excusatio, feci non volens, feci ignarus" (1546: sig. S5. "Excuse, I did it unwillingly; unknowing, I did it") and "Excusatio de nece paterna" ("Excuse, concerning the killing of the father"). This same label also marks Creon's specious defence of himself and Oedipus's answer, his self-defence because of ignorance and divine compulsion (*OC* 939ff., 1546: sigs V3r-v). The term "excusatio" reduces the complex moral issues to a rhetorical form that suggests the very guilt Oedipus would deny. *Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.* We will not long be troubled in this translation by Oedipus's eloquent voice of protest and suffering.

Instead, the *consolatio* promised in the preface for Greek tragedy in general will three times appear duly marked to comfort the

reader in the conclusion of this play: the first "consolation" gloss-es the choral counsel of acceptance (1694, τὸ θεοῦ καλῶς φέρειν, "bear courageously what comes from God"): "Consolatio pri-ma: Quod Deus ita destinauit, id patienter ferendum esse" (1546: sig Y1, "First Consolation: What God has so decreed must be pa-tiently borne"). The second glosses 1720-3: ἀλλ᾿ ἐπεὶ ὀλβίως ἔλυ-/ σεν τέλος, ὦ φίλαι, βίου, / λήγετε τοῦδ᾿ ἄχους· κακῶν / γὰρ δυσάλωτος οὐδείς, "But since he has completed well his end, stop grieving: for no one is hard for evils to capture". The margin-al note reads, "II Consolatio: haec est communis sors hominum" (1546: sig. Y1v-Y2, "Second Consolation: this is the common fate of men"). The third consolation glosses Theseus's lines (1751-3), here given to the Chorus: παύετε θρῆνον, παῖδες· ἐν οἷς γὰρ / χάρις ἡ χθονία νὺξ ἀπόκειται, / πενθεῖν οὐ χρή· νέμεσις γάρ, "Cease to lament, children. In cases where the favour of the underworld is stored up as the night, it is not right to mourn; that will bring nemesis, or retribution". Here the translation of the text wanders a bit: "Desinite lugere filiae: Nam quibus / Mors exoptata contig-it / Eos deplorare non decet, neque fas est" (1546: sig Y2v, "Cease to mourn, daughters. For those whom a longed-for death comes it is not fitting to mourn, nor is it right"). As in Marliani's rendering, χάρις ἡ χθονία (175), "the favour of the underworld" disappears, this time becoming simply "mors exoptata" ("longed-for death"); nemesis makes just a token appearance, unexplained, in an aster-isked marginal note ("vel prohibit Nemesis", "or Nemesis prohib-its it"). The marginal note hastens to offer the promised comfort: "III Consolatio: Cum eo bene actum est qui decessit sicut optauit" (1546: sig. Y2v, "Third Consolation: his lot is a happy one when one has died as he has wished"). Here again, all is as it should be. The reader of this Greek tragedy is thrice consoled.

In this Christianizing tradition stands *Samson Agonistes*, John Milton's Hebraic re-imagining of Greek tragedy and *Oedipus at Colonus*. In the preface Milton himself praises ancient tragedy as "the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems" and then invokes Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Citing Paul's putative quotation of Euripides, Pareus' classification of the Book of Revelation as a tragedy, and Gregory Nazianzen's supposed au-thorship of the play *Christ Suffering*, Milton insists on the com-

patibility of Christianity and classical tragedy. Studies have long recognized the impress of ancient drama and provided a detailed analysis of Milton's indebtedness to Greek tragedy and *Oedipus at Colonus*, noting many parallels in plot, character, and rhetoric, though most prudently stop short of claiming Sophocles' play as a direct source.[5] Both *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Samson Agonistes* begin with the hero as a blind beggar in rags, who bears the burden of his past and receives a Chorus as well as a series of challenging visitors. Each experiences a prompting that leads directly to the catastrophe, the thunder that summons Oedipus to his end, the "rouzing motions" (1382) that prompt Samson to go to the festival. Both die offstage, astonished messengers report, and both deaths get represented in the plays as a kind of expiation and reconciliation with the divine. Both deaths have national as well as personal dimensions, guaranteeing variously the futures of Athens and Israel.

It has not been as well noted that Milton's Greek tragedy dramatizes and culminates the traditions of early modern reception represented by Marliani, Erasmus, Camerarius, and Melanchthon. Not meant for staging, the play is constructed as a long dramatic poem (the 1671 edition appeared with through line numbering), replete with rhetorical figures and devices (see Moss 1965). The play features many memorable and excerptable *sententiae*, often, for better and for worse, voiced by the Chorus. "Apt words have power to swage / The tumors of a troubl'd mind" (184-5), they solemnly intone. Consoling Samson, they offer a general observation on human nature: "wisest Men / Have err'd, and by bad Women been deceiv'd; / And shall again" (210-12). Reflections often appear as a familiar type of admonition: "Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange power, / After offence returning, to regain / Love once possest" (1003-5). There is sententious preaching: "Just are the ways of God, / And justifiable to Men; / Unless there be who think not God at all" (293-5). And there are plenty of those commonplaces so attractive to later compilers and writers of marginalia: "Fathers are wont to lay up for thir Sons" (1485); "Sons wont to

5 See Parker 1963: 168-76; Mueller (1980: 193-212) offers extended analysis of *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Samson Agonistes* as tragedies of "Deliverance".

nurse thir Parents in old age" (1487). Samson believes that he has become an adage himself, his story having been reduced to a negative exemplar, a cautionary tale about sin and punishment: "Am I not sung and proverbd for a Fool / In every street, do they not say, how well / Are come upon him his deserts?" (203-5).

At one point in the play the Chorus explicitly refers to the *sententiae* traditions in order to commend the very virtue commentators found in *Oedipus at Colonus*: "Many are the sayings of the wise / In antient and in modern books enroll'd; / Extolling Patience as the truest fortitude" (652-4). Milton's commendation of this virtue here is entirely consistent with the praise of "the better fortitude / Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" in *Paradise Lost* (9.32-3) and the commendation of Job's patience in *Paradise Regained* (1.426). And this commendation significantly echoes later in *Samson Agonistes* as the Chorus lauds patience as the acceptance of suffering and reliance in God that enable triumph over all adversity and misfortune:

> But patience is more oft the exercise
> Of Saints, the trial of thir fortitude,
> Making them each his own Deliverer,
> And Victor over all
> That tyrannie or fortune can inflict,
> Either of these is in thy lot,
> Samson, with might endu'd
> Above the Sons of men; but sight bereav'd
> May chance to number thee with those
> Whom Patience finally must crown.
> (1287-96)

These articulated and integrated traditions of reception advance a reading of Samson as the suffering hero of the play who learns to practice patience after accepting responsibility for his sins. Many voices, including Samson's own, echo Winshemius and Melanchthon to moralize his tragedy. Their condemnation of "depraved passions" echoes in his pained recognition of the "foul effeminacy" that held him "yok't" to Dalilah (410). Blinded, in rags, bereft of his strength, he laments his betrayal of his divinely appointed mission, "Who like a foolish Pilot have shipwrack't, / My

Vessel trusted to me from above" (198-9), and sees himself, "ad commonefactionem", "to Ages an example" (765).

These voices sound strongly at the end to portray Samson finally as God's chosen instrument, as the hero who regains his lost virtue and identity. After hearing of his destruction of the temple and death, Manoa declares "Samson hath quit himself / Like Samson, and heroicly hath finish'd / A life Heroic, on his Enemies / Fully reveng'd" (1709-12). The Chorus fully moralizes the spectacle, first condemning the Philistines for their sinfulness, "Drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine / And fat regorg'd of Bulls and Goats, / Chaunting thir Idol" (1670-2). They go on to sermonize about the foolishness of mortals who invite their own destruction and the just wrath of the Almighty:

> So fond are mortal men
> Fall'n into wrath divine,
> As thir own ruin on themselves to invite,
> Insensate left, or to sense reprobate,
> And with blindness internal struck.
> (1682-86)

Finally, the Chorus affirms the unsearchable wisdom of divine Providence, and summarizes the tragedy, "ad consolationem":

> CHOR. All is best, though we oft doubt,
> What th' unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close.
> Oft he seems to hide his face,
> But unexpectedly returns
> And to his faithful Champion hath in place
> Bore witness gloriously,
> (1745-52)

These lines reference the catharsis promised in the preface, the purgation of pity and fear and terror and like passions: the Chorus claims that righteous viewers of "this great event" gain "peace and consolation . . . And calm of mind, all passion spent" (1756-8).

But not all readers have been duly consoled as instructed and some have thought that the Chorus of consolation, like

its many classical counterparts, doth protest too much.[6] For one thing, Samson is far more articulate and persuasive on what he did wrong than on what he does right, which, after all, happens off stage. Readers must infer regeneration and restoration from an absent and silent protagonist. Those "rouzing motions" (1382) that move him to go to the Gaza festival, moreover, may be the promptings of divine grace, but a previous "intimate impulse" (223) Samson believed to be "motion'd" (222) of God moved him to his first ill-fated marriage with "the daughter of an infidel". There is no prayer to God, as in the Biblical source, Judges, and no assurance of any heavenly reward in the afterlife. The destruction of the temple results in his own death and that of many others, and while the post 9/11 sensibility that brands his actions as religious terrorism is surely anachronistic, the ending certainly sorts oddly and unexpectedly with the depiction of repentance and patience. The Chorus, after all, may be right, and our doubt may be simply the necessary condition for our faith, but the play has left many with disquieting uncertainty.

All this is to say that the full expression of pity, terror and the darker energies of Greek tragedy had to wait for another day and another play. That play, I submit, is *King Lear*, which stages and cancels the early modern hermeneutics of reception. The Fool's rhymed advice (arranged as verse in F) evokes the moralizing sententiae tradition:

> . . . more than thou showest,
> Speak less than thou knowest,
> Lend less than thou owest,
> Ride more than thou goest,
> Learn more than thou trowest,
> Set less than thou throwest,
> Leave thy drink and thy whore,
> And keep in-a-door,
> And thou shalt have more
> Than two tens to a score.
> (1.4.116-25)

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6 See, e.g., Wittreich 2002, Mohamed 2005, and the spirited refutation of Gregory 2010.

The recitation of these "wise sayings", "ad commonefactionem", concludes in nonsense arithmetic; in the Quarto Lear aptly observes, "This is nothing, fool" (Q 126).[7] Edgar as Poor Tom similarly evokes the *sententiae* tradition, even echoing the Decalogue: "Take heed o' the foul fiend; obey thy parents, keep thy word justly, swear not, commit not with man's sworn spouse, set not thy sweet-heart on proud array" (3.4.78-80); "Keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend" (94-6). Here the precepts of conventional morality and proverbial wisdom, voiced by a beggar pretending to be a madman, are manifestly inadequate to the situation. Such familiar injunctions provide little protection against the rising storm of evil in the play. Edgar's choric commentary later fully dilates upon the familiar proverb "It is good to have company in trouble (misery)" (Dent 1981: C571):

> When we our betters see bearing our woes,
> We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
> Who alone suffers, suffers most i'the mind,
> Leaving free things and happy shows behind.
> But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip,
> When grief hath mates and bearing fellowship.
> (3.6.99-104)

Later he expands upon another proverb, "When things are at the worse they will mend" (Dent 1981: T216):

> To be worst,
> The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,
> Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.
> The lamentable change is from the best,
> The worst returns to laughter.
> (4.1.2-6)

But company in misery in this play means more not less suffering, Edgar painfully learns when he meets his blinded father a few moments later. He then precisely contradicts the second proverb:

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7 For references to *Lear* I have used Foakes' Arden edition (1997) but sometimes departed from it to quote the Quarto reading; in such case I have prefaced the citation with "Q".

> O gods! Who is't can say "I am at the worst"?
> I am worse than e'er I was
> . . .
> And worse I may be yet; the worst is not
> So long as we can say "This is the worst".
> (4.1.27-30)

Familiar commonplaces offer no solace in a world where suffering has no limits.

Many voices in the play speak "ad consolationem", declaring that the gods above are just and that they reward the good and punish the wicked. Edmund, for example, tells Gloucester of his warning to Edgar: "I told him the revenging gods / 'Gainst parricides did all their thunders bend" (2.1.45-6). But the reported conversation is a fiction, part of Edmund's plot to disinherit his brother, and Edmund, ironically, will be responsible for his father's blinding and death later. Brother Edgar similarly assures Gloucester of the gods' providential care when he reports their intervention against the horned demon: "Think that the clearest gods, who made them honours / Of men's impossibilities have preserved thee" (4.6.73-4). The comfort gains additional authority by allusion to Matthew 19: 26 ("With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"). But this is another fiction, a lie told to free Gloucester from suicidal despair: there is no demon, no cliff, and no miraculous preservation. These two direct assertions of divine order appear as blatant falsehoods.

When Regan plucks his beard, the bound Gloucester himself significantly protests, "By the kind gods 'tis most ignobly done" (3.7.35). After Cornwall puts out one of his eyes, he cries, "O cruel! O you gods!" (69). But these invocations, like the Servant's "Now heaven help him!" (106) get no thunder in response and merely echo in a dark void. Later Gloucester prays to the heavens that the "superfluous and lust-dieted man / That slaves your ordinance . . . feel your power quickly" and that "distribution should undo excess / And each man have enough" (4.1.70-2, 74-5). But the heavens do not punish the wicked in this play and the vision of a universal distribution of wealth remains a fantasy. Kneeling in the Quarto, Gloucester voices a moving prayer before attempting suicide:

> O you mighty gods,
> This world I do renounce and in your sights
> Shake patiently my great affliction off.
> (4.6.34-6)

But Edgar's imposture and manipulation undercut the invocation and prevent the renunciation. There are no mighty gods witnessing or justly ordering human affairs. Glimpsing this dark truth earlier, Gloucester famously rejects both classical and Christian notions of theodicy: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport" (4.1.38-9). This vision of divine cruelty and pleasure in human suffering annuls all possibility of consolation. But equally terrifying, perhaps, is the vision of divine justice that Edgar proposes when reporting his father's blinding to Edmund:

> The gods are just and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got
> Cost him his eyes.
> (5.3.168-71)

Here, according to Edgar's callow moralization, the justice of the gods manifests itself in his father's horrific blinding, deserved punishment for begetting the illegitimate Edmund.

Like Edgar, Albany at times sees the workings of divine justice in the action of the play. Hearing about the servant who slew Cornwall after the blinding, he proclaims, "This shows you are above, / You justicers, that these our nether crimes / So speedily can venge" (4.2.79-81). Asking for the bodies of Goneril and Regan to be brought on stage, he says similarly, "This justice of the heavens that makes us tremble, / Touches us not with pity" (Q 5.3.230-1). In his view the spectacle of divine justice, though terrifying, cancels the pity that tragedy would normally evoke in the spectator. As in Winshemius and Melanchthon's edition, all is as it should be. But the ending of the play shatters this comforting vision of divine order. Upon hearing of the plot to hang Cordelia, Albany calls upon heaven to protect her, "The gods defend her" (5.3.254); this cry is answered immediately as Lear then enters with Cordelia dead in his arms. The tableau vividly and finally

contradicts the previous assertions of providential justice. At this point Albany's earlier words echo hauntingly:

> If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> It will come:
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself
> Like monsters of the deep.
> (4.2.47-51)

Heaven sends no angels to prevent and punish the vile offences on display; humans prey upon each other like sea monsters.

The rhythms of supplication and denial, assertion and contradiction, comfort and cancellation, and consolation and despair play out most powerfully in the tragedy of King Lear himself. The mad, impatient king repeatedly prays bootless prayers: "O let me not be mad, sweet heaven! I would not be mad. / Keep me in temper. I would not be mad" (Q 1.5.44-5). "You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need" (2.2.460). He curses Goneril ineffectually: "All the stored vengeances of heaven fall / On her ungrateful top! Strike her young bones, / You taking airs, with lameness!" (2.2.351-3). Like Gloucester, he dreams about a day of reckoning for the wealthy and a universal distribution of riches: "Take physic, pomp. / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them / And show the heavens more just" (3.4.33-6). Like Edgar, he sees a supernatural order and purpose in the events of the play, reading the storm as an agency of divine punishment for the wicked:

> Let the great gods
> That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads
> Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
> Unwhipped of justice.
> (3.2.49-53)

But this hope for heavenly justice is as hollow and empty as the mock-trial he stages in the Quarto with the help of the fool, madman, and beggar. Like Albany, and with the same results, Lear begs the heavens to send down spirits to aid and protect him.

> O heavens!
> If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
> Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old,
> Make it your cause. Send down, and take my part!
> (2.2.378-81)

And like Albany he suffers a devastating final blow to his faith in providential order.

Lear's reunion with Cordelia occasions a brief belief in divine approval and harmony: he dreams of a future wherein and they take upon themselves "the mystery of things" like "God's spies", and wherein "The gods themselves throw incense" upon their sacrifices (5.3.16-17, 21). But the death of Cordelia destroys this vision:

> Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones!
> Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
> That heaven's vault should crack: she's gone for ever.
> I know when one is dead and when one lives.
> (5.3.255-8)

No divine incense can ratify this sacrifice but, contrarily, it should disjoint the firmament, crack heaven's vault. "Is this the promised end?" No consoling word can be said and only the Folio Lear dies in the spurious comfort of delusion. The ending of Shakespeare's play pointedly contrasts with the happy restoration of Lear in all other versions of the story, those by Geoffrey of Monmouth, John Higgins, Raphael Holinshed, Edmund Spenser, and the chronicle play *King Leir*. The last words of Shakespeare's play spoken by Albany in Q, Edgar in F, pointedly reject the usual choral comforts of solace, explanation, and generalizing reflection.

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest have borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (*Exeunt with a dead march, bearing the bodies.*)
> (5.3.322-5)

Authorizing grief, insisting on unblinking confrontation with the tragedy on stage, *King Lear* precisely and devastatingly contradicts the prevailing Christian hermeneutic, "tum ad commonefactionem, et tum ad consolationem".

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"More sinned against than sinning": Acting and Suffering in *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear*

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Abstract

This paper takes two strikingly similar lines in *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear* as the starting point for a consideration first of the two plays' complicated interactions in the history of reception, and then of some key similarities and differences between them. In both, the outcast protagonist offers a pithy claim to sympathy marked by wordplay, paradox, qualified acknowledgement of wrongdoing, and self-identification as passive rather active. Oedipus assures the elders of Colonus that they should not fear him with the rather strained expression ἐπεὶ τά γ᾽ ἔργα μου / πεπονθότ᾽ ἐστὶ μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα, "For my deeds have suffered rather than acted" (266-7). Lear on the heath admonishes the guilty to "tremble" and beg for mercy, then sets himself apart from them with the ringing declaration, "I am a man / More sinned against than sinning" (3.2.60). In Oedipus' case, his passivity (in relation to gods who have imposed on him experiences more conventionally described as activity) has to be understood in relation to ancient Greek hero cult, in which an exceptional figure is drawn into acts that are destructive and transgressive but that also lead to a special quasi-divine status. Lear's passivity (in relation to other people who have harmed him more than he has harmed them) has to be related to the mutedly Christian context of the play, in which the acceptance of suffering, or 'patience', is a virtue that is open to all who embrace it and tied to the renunciation of any sense of special distinction. Yet, despite these vital differences, both plays share a conviction that is often seen as essentially tragic: that suffering is the precondition of the most meaningful action.

KEYWORDS: Oedipus; Lear; suffering; passivity; patience; reception

Oedipus and Lear, two old men in need of shelter, displaced by children who misjudge their worth, both seek to justify themselves in strikingly similar terms: each makes a claim to sympathy with a pithy statement that is marked by wordplay, paradox, qualified acknowledgement of wrongdoing, and self-identification as passive rather active. These resonant declarations epitomize some of the significant similarities and differences between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear*, while also revealing the mutual entanglement of the two plays within the history of reception.

In the first, Oedipus tries to reassure the elders of Colonus, who have responded in horror at the sound of his name and rescinded their initial welcome. Oedipus insists that their fear is a reaction only to his name, not to his body or his past deeds, and then goes on to make a crucial point about those past deeds, with a highly strained expression: ἐπεὶ τά γ᾽ ἔργα μου / πεπονθότ᾽ ἐστὶ μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα, for which a literal translation would be "For my deeds have suffered rather than acted" (266-7).[1] What Oedipus means by this is generally assumed to be something like, 'For my deeds have consisted of suffering rather than acting'. Later in the play, Oedipus makes this same point – that he did not act when he committed his notorious crimes but was acted upon – when the chorus tries to tell him that he acted when he married Jocasta and he insists that he did not act: he only received a gift (*OC* 537-41).

ΧΟΡΟΣ   ἔπαθες –
ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ   ἔπαθον ἄλαστ᾽ ἔχειν.
ΧΟΡΟΣ   ἔρεξας –
ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ   οὐκ ἔρεξα.
ΧΟΡΟΣ   τί γάρ;
ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ   ἐδεξάμην
         δῶρον, ὃ μήποτ᾽ ἐγὼ ταλακάρδιος
         ἐπωφελήσας πόλεος ἐξελέσθαι.

[CHORUS You suffered . . .
OEDIPUS   I suffered unforgettable grief.
CHORUS You did . . .
OEDIPUS   I did nothing.
CHORUS   What do you mean?
OEDIPUS   I received
          a gift which I – miserable I –
          should never have taken, from the city for my service.]

Here too, the horrific events of Oedipus' past acquire a different significance through a denial of agency that involves the replacement of activity by passivity (although in both instances this is accomplished through sense rather than morphology, without actually using the passive voice).

The second of these declarations is made by Lear when he is on the heath, battered by the elements and watched over by Kent. Construing the raging storm as divine punishment, he admonishes the guilty to tremble and beg for mercy:

> Let the great gods
> That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads
> Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
> Unwhipped of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
> Thou perjured, and thou simular of virtue
> That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
> That under covert and convenient seeming
> Has practised on man's life. Close pent-up guilts
> Rive your concealing continents and cry
> These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
> More sinned against than sinning.
> (3.2.49-60)[1]

When he sets himself apart from those guilty wretches with his concluding claim to be "[m]ore sinned against than sinning" (3.2.60), Lear seems especially to echo Oedipus at that particular moment in *Oedipus at Colonus* when he commends himself to the elders of Colonus by redescribing his past actions as passive rather than active. Yet, as a quick google search reveals, Lear's phrase

1 Quotations from *King Lear* are from Shakespeare 2017.

is also often applied to Oedipus in general, without any particular reference to that passage. This occurs in a wide range of contexts, from the scholarly article to the theatrical review to the online study aid; it is possible, for example, to find the following prompt for a practice timed essay: "In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the king declares, 'I am a man / More sinned against than sinning.' In a well-organized essay, discuss whether or not Oedipus would be justified in making the same claim about himself".[2] In many cases, "[m]ore sinned against than sinning" is evoked simply as a familiar phrase that seems to fit Oedipus as a sympathetic figure who, whatever his shortcomings, hardly deserves his punishing downfall, without any intended reference to *King Lear* or even awareness that the phrase comes from Shakespeare.

At the same time, the close identification of those two specific passages has a long history and has played a significant role in the reception and even the transmission of *Oedipus at Colonu*s. [3] Oedipus' words strain so much against normal sense that many editors have adopted an emended version of the text: ἐπεὶ τά γ' ἔργα με / πεπονθότ' ἴσθι μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα, "Know that I / have suffered my deeds rather than done them". This version, which is printed in several important contemporary editions, including the Fondazione Valla edition of Guido Avezzù (2008), the Oxford Classical Text of Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Nigel Wilson (1990), and the Teubner edition of Roger D. Dawe (1985), produces a more straightforward statement that undoes the transmitted text's challenging shift of agency from the doer to his deeds: Oedipus himself, rather than his past deeds, is the first person subject of the suffering and (non)acting that he is reflecting on.

By a notable coincidence, this emendation was suggested independently by two late nineteenth century classicists, both of whom cite Lear's line in support of their proposal. The German scholar, Theodor Hertel, who published his emendation in 1876,

3 In a note on *OC* 266 in his 1871 commentary, Lewis Campbell observes that "The words of Lear (3.2) have often been compared, 'I am a man more sinned against than sinning'" (271).

begins from the premise that the transmitted text is simply too bold. He then brings up Shakespeare's line – "I am / More sinned against than sinning" – on the grounds that it represents the only possible parallel from an author notably given to bold expressions.

> Aus dem an kühnen Redewendungen so reichen Shakespeare hat man nur das eine Beispiel beigebracht: "I am a man more sinned against than sinning." Dieses würde nur passen, wenn Sophokles geschrieben hätte: "Ich habe meine Taten mehr gelitten als getan." Und das Sophokles so gechrieben habe, is nach meiner Ansicht wahrscheinlich. Deshalb möchte ich ändern. (Hertel 1876: 14)

> [From Shakespeare, so rich in bold expressions, only one example has been adduced: "I am a man more sinned against than sinning". This would only be acceptable if Sophocles had written: "I have more suffered my deeds than done them". And that Sophocles did write thus is, in my opinion, likely. Therefore, I would like to emend. (My translation)]

For Hertel, Shakespeare's English represents the outer limit of boldness in the expression of what he assumes to be the same idea; it therefore provides a self-evident check on Sophocles' Greek, which Hertel remodels so that Oedipus' words more closely resemble Lear's.

In a much longer and more contentious note, first published in 1892 but making no reference to Hertel, the English scholar A.E. Housman also finds the transmitted text untenable. Stating outright what Hertel assumes, Housman declares "The sense is to be Shakespeare's 'I am a man more sinned against than sinning'" (1972: 181) before launching into an extensive demolition of other scholars' attempts to argue that the transmitted text can have that sense. He then goes on to propose the exact same emendation as Hertel had. For these scholars, Shakespeare clarifies what Sophocles meant to say and dictates how he must have expressed it. Assuming the transmitted text is correct, those who read the *Oedipus at Colonu*s in an edition that adopts this emendation are encountering a version of Oedipus who has been reworked to sound more like Lear: a version who shares Lear's focus on himself as the subject of his doings and sufferings rather than one who pointedly substitutes his deeds for himself in order to erase

his own agency and distance himself from those deeds.[4] This, then, is a literal instance of a phenomenon that is both the basis of a joke about the absurdity of literary scholarship and, when construed less literally, a serious point made by reception studies: the influence of a later author on an earlier one.[5]

That same time-bending influence is detectable in what was once a widely-read English translation of *Oedipus at Colonus*, the version by Francis Storr that appeared in the first Loeb Classical Library edition of Sophocles, published in 1912. Storr's Greek-speaking Oedipus, on the left-hand page, follows the text transmitted in the manuscripts, but his English-speaking counterpart on the facing page actually does fulfill the suggestion of that essay prompt by "making the same claim about himself" as Lear does. Storr's Oedipus appeals to the chorus by pointing out, in iambic pentameter, "For me you surely dread not, nor my deeds, / Deeds of a man more sinned against than sinning".

Storr's translation encapsulates one model for thinking about these two plays together, which was arguably at its peak when he was writing. This model relies on an essentialized concept of tragedy as a dramatic form that expresses unchanging truths about human nature, appearing especially at cultural high points like classical Athens and Elizabethan/Jacobean England, of which Sophocles and Shakespeare are the supreme practitioners. In an essay on the art of translation, Storr addressed the question of how literal a translation should be by rejecting the scrupulously literal in favour of an approach that captures the spirit of the original: "There is a plain issue between the literalist and the spiritualist schools, and I unhesitatingly take my stand on the text: 'The

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4 For a compelling defence of the transmitted text on the grounds that "the separation of the acts from the doer is exactly Oedipus' strategy", see Budelmann 1999: 173-4. The unamended text is printed in the editions of Campbell, Jebb, and Pearson, and in the forthcoming edition by Pat Easterling in the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series.

5 The most famous version of this joke comes in David Lodge's campus novel *Small World* (1984: 51-2), where an ambitious student has written an MA thesis on "The Influence of T.S. Eliot on Shakespeare", although he also explains himself in terms that are compatible with serious discussions of reception theory (in which Lodge's joke is often invoked).

letter killeth, but the spirit givith life'" (1909: 367). He then goes on to make his case by comparing the King James version of the Bible, from which he has just quoted, to the more literal, and to his mind inferior, Revised Standard Version. In using Shakespeare's words to convey Oedipus' thought, Storr is making the same use of a timelessly applicable formulation as he does with his quotation from the New Testament. He is also employing what he saw, in common with many of his contemporaries, as the natural English meter and poetic register for tragedy and the best available English expression of a shared spirit.[6] Storr's sense of the spiritual equivalence of Sophocles and Shakespeare is registered in another way in the Introduction to his Loeb edition, where he explains that the epitaph "His life was gentle" that Ben Jonson "applies . . . to Shakespeare himself . . . fits even more aptly the sweet singer of Colonus" (1912: ix).

The apparently self-evident suitability of the phrase "[m]ore sinned against than sinning" as equally applicable to Lear and Oedipus is no doubt partly due to the way that Lear claims only a relative innocence, allowing that he is sinning as well as sinned

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6 For another instance of Storr translating Sophocles into Shakespeare, see Harvey 1977: 260. On borrowings from Shakespeare in English translations of Greek tragedy in general, which underwent a shift from unmarked uses of Shakespeare as a self-evident analogue (such as Storr's) to more pointed quotation in later twentieth and twenty-first century examples, see Roberts 2010: 306-11. That shift is reflected in an unpublished translation from the 1960's or 1970's of Aristophanes' comedy *Thesmophoriazusae* by William Arrowsmith, in which the same line from Shakespeare is adapted in order to evoke a tragic register and to give "modern audiences a frame for understanding, in terms of both artistic form and cultural significance, the ancient and potentially alien drama of Euripides" (Scharffenberger 2002: 448). A speaker quotes from a (now lost) play of Euripides to make the point that the women who are attacking Euripides in Aristophanes' own play are not entirely innocent: κᾆτ' Εὐριπίδῃ θυμούμεθα/ οὐδὲν παθοῦσαι μεῖζον ἢ δεδράκαμεν; ("Then why should we be angry with Euripides, when we have suffered [harm] no more than we have done it?", *Thesm.* 518-19 = Eur. fragment 711 Nauck). Signalling the quotation as Aristophanes does not, Arrowsmith translates: "So why, ladies, should we be so furious with Euripides / since, to adapt his words from another context, / we women 'sin more than we are sinned against'".

against. This wording succinctly identifies him as fully deserving of sympathy but also imperfect, a combination of qualities that make him and Oedipus at once spiritual brothers and quintessential examples of the tragic hero, a great man who is also flawed. Storr's translation appeared less than a decade after A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* of 1904, the most influential account of the so-called 'tragic flaw' or, to use Bradley's own term, "the tragic trait" as a definitive feature of the genre. In keeping with the emphasis on character that he inherited from 19th-century criticism, Bradley reworked Aristotle's concept of *hamartia*, an error or misunderstanding that belongs to the circumstances of the tragic plot, into a "fatal imperfection or error" (21-2) within the hero's character that coincides with his greatness and drives him towards disaster (Holderness 1989: 54-5).

Storr's sense of Shakespeare as the natural route through which Anglophone readers can reach Sophocles is widely echoed in the way that a comparison to *King Lear* is used well into the late twentieth century to make Oedipus at Colonus more accessible via a familiar analogue; this can be found in works such as Gilbert Norwood's *Greek Tragedy* from 1920 (171-2) or Peter Levi's *A History of Greek Literature* from as recently as 1985 (196), to mention two fairly random examples. Before saying anything about Sophocles, the influential British classicist Gilbert Murray begins the preface to his 1948 translation of *Oedipus at Colonus* with the statement that "The Oedipus at Colonus has often been compared to *King Lear*". He goes on to cite a series of spiritual and formal affinities that echo Bradley's vision of the tragic hero's flawed or uneven greatness: the two protagonists, each "breathing a strange atmosphere of kingly pride alternating with helplessness, or towering passion with profound peace", the two plays' similar trajectories towards the hero's redemption, their similar demands on the producer for "tempests and thunderstorms," and the fact that, "while neither can quite be called a 'well-made play,' each nevertheless contains some of the author's very greatest work" (5). On Murray's assumption (which would no longer be made), any student or interested general reader who might pick up an English translation of Sophocles would certainly be familiar with Shakespeare's major works: in the kind of reversal of-

ten brought about by literary history and highlighted in David Lodge's joke about the influence of T.S. Eliot on Shakespeare, *King Lear* takes priority and anticipates *Oedipus at Colonus* in the reader's experience.

This model of an essential affinity between two tragic heroes and the plays that present them requires no influence of one on the other, and it flourished alongside the belief that Shakespeare had virtually no knowledge of Greek tragedy, so that the similarities between these two plays were understood as manifestations of a "strange" (Silk 2004), uncanny kinship. But more recent scholarship has shown that Shakespeare and his contemporaries had many opportunities to encounter Greek tragedy, which they recognized as the point of origin for the emerging contemporary genre of tragedy, and that the figure of Oedipus and the mythology surrounding him were widely known from both dramatic and non-dramatic sources.[7] These findings give us reason to adopt a literal rather than a spiritual model for the relationship between these plays, and it becomes possible to go back to Lear's speech and to see that Shakespeare has constructed him as someone who does in certain respects anticipate Oedipus.

The figures in Lear's catalogue of evildoers who should be trembling in the face of divine justice are strikingly reminiscent of Oedipus, especially as he appears in *Oedipus Tyrannus.* The two specific crimes that Lear mentions are Oedipus' crimes of incest and murder and, beyond that, he especially stresses that these crimes are "undivulged" (3.2.52): the perpetrator of incest is a "simular man of virtue" (3.2.54); the murderer hides under "covert and convenient seeming" (3.2.56); collectively, they hold "pent-up guilts" (3.2.57). These criminals do differ from Oedipus in that they are "perjured" (3.2.54), well aware of their crimes and know-

7 On the availability of Greek tragedy, see especially Pollard 2017: 1-88; Demetriou and Pollard 2017; Lazarus 2020 (including discussion of why the presence of tragedy in early modern Europe has been invisible to scholarship). On the currency of the Oedipus myth, see Miola 2014 and, for its contribution to *King Lear*, Kerrigan 2018: 63-82. For indications of the influence of Sophocles on Shakespeare in the wording of particular passages, in the conception of his characters, and in the plots of his plays, including *King Lear*, see the brief but suggestive discussion in Harvey 1977.

ingly duplicitous as Oedipus is not; Oedipus' ignorance has been replaced with deceit in keeping with Shakespeare's pervasive interest in dissimulation and bad faith. Nonetheless, Lear's appeal to the gods to "find out their enemies now" (3.2.51) sounds as if he is trying to conjure up – to will into being – the plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, where at a moment of civic crisis, Oedipus, the perpetrator of both incest and murder, is found out by an omniscient divine power. As the play's chorus puts it to him, ἐφηῦρέ σ' ἄκονθ' ὁ πάνθ' ὁρῶν χρόνος . . . ("All-seeing time found you out, without you willing that . . .", *OT* 1214). Cordelia predicts a similar plot trajectory for *King Lear* itself when she warns her sisters at the end of Act 1 that "Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides / Who covert faults at last with shame derides" (1.1.282-3). With his impassioned call for a general version of the same scenario, Lear – the protagonist of a work set in primeval times and preoccupied with the question of origins (Kerrigan 2018: 76-7) – wishfully anticipates the action of one of the great original tragedies.

In a rather different sense, Lear also anticipates the Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus* through his claim to be set apart from the imagined criminals he addresses, and on whom he calls down divine punishment, because he is "[m]ore sinned against than sinning". It is impossible to know for certain whether Shakespeare's formulation here was influenced by the words of Sophocles' Oedipus, but the likelihood of that is increased by the fact that at least one of the Latin translations of *Oedipus at Colonus* in circulation by Shakespeare's time already reworks Oedipus' words to locate agency with Oedipus himself rather than his deeds. In the 1547 translation of Winshemius, we find Oedipus asserting that the elders of Colonus rightly fear neither his body nor his "facta", "nam quod ad facta attinet / passus sum verius quam feci quidquam," ("for as regards my deeds / I more truly suffered than I did anything").[8] Here the plot thickens and the reception histo-

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8 In the 1543 translation by Giovanni Gabia, the text preserves the more challenging Sophoclean formulation, "quoniam certe opera mea / passa sunt magis, quam operata", ("since surely my works / suffered rather than performed") but is accompanied by a marginal gloss on "passa" that introduces the more normalized first-person subject: "passus sum ego magis, inuriam quam effecerim" ("I suffered rather than enacted injustice"; my translations).

ry of Sophocles' lines acquires another layer: it may be that the Shakespearean phraseology that inspired Hertel's and Housman's rewriting of Sophocles' words in the medium of the scholarly emendation was itself inspired by a prior rewriting of those same words in the medium of Latin translation.

When Lear concludes his speech by sounding like Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he effectively leaves the first of Sophocles' two Oedipus plays behind and projects himself into the second, identifying himself with the later Oedipus, who finds similarly apt language with which to acknowledge his crimes but also to subordinate them to a forceful disavowal. At this point in his story, however, Lear is making this disavowal prematurely. His wits are only beginning to turn, he has not yet had his moral horizons expanded by the sight of poor Tom, and he has not yet solicited and received Cordelia's absolving "No cause, no cause" (4.7.75). He is still the figure identified by Regan, who "hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.294-5). More has to happen to him before he catches up to the final instantiation of Sophocles' Oedipus.

This discrepancy points to one of the most salient differences between the two plays. *Oedipus at Colonus* presents from the outset a figure who is already at the end of a long period of travel and reflection. His response to his own criminality has evolved over time from a sharp impulse to harsh self-punishment to his present position that he deserves no punishment (*OC* 431-44); he has arrived at an understanding of himself that is stable, if challenging to others, which he repeatedly articulates as he distances himself from his past actions and elaborates (in various registers, including the legal as well as the religious) on his conviction that those actions should be seen as suffered rather than performed. In *King Lear*, the protagonist undergoes the full trajectory from oblivious confidence to extremes of shame and deprivation to self-acceptance within a single play.

But even in this moment, in which Lear appears to be presenting himself as an avatar of Oedipus, is he really saying the same thing as his Sophoclean predecessor? With their shared insistence on a relative innocence formulated as passivity rather than activity, Oedipus and Lear have seemed so clearly to be making the same point that, as we have seen, editors and translators have

gladly allowed Shakespeare to speak for Sophocles: as Housman puts it, Sophocles' sense "is to be Shakespeare's" (1972: 181). But in terms of the experiences that they are talking about, the two heroes are actually saying something quite different. Oedipus is referring to a single set of events – τἄργα τἄμα, "my deeds" – for which he is substituting one description for another, a description that allows him to disavow any agency where those deeds are concerned, even though he does not deny ownership of them. Lear, on the other hand, is toting up and weighing against each other two sets of actions, those performed by himself towards other people and those performed by other people towards himself, and finding his own actions less reprehensible than those of others.

It is true that Oedipus at other times makes similar calculations and draws similar conclusions in his own favour, arguing that his own actions, however horrific, were less reprehensible than things that were done to him by others. In the rest of his speech to the elders of Colonus, he presents himself as less culpable in two ways than Laius, the father he himself killed. First, Laius was the aggressor during their fatal meeting at the crossroads, so that Oedipus acted only in self-defence. Secondly, and more importantly, Oedipus acted in ignorance of his victim's identity, while Laius had tried to kill him when he was a baby, in full awareness of what he was doing.

> καίτοι πῶς ἐγὼ κακὸς φύσιν,
> ὅστις παθὼν μὲν ἀντέδρων, ὥστ' εἰ φρονῶν
> ἔπρασσον, οὐδ' ἂν ὧδ' ἐγιγνόμην κακός;
> νῦν δ' οὐδὲν εἰδὼς ἱκόμην ἵν' ἱκόμην,
> ὑφ' ὧν δ' ἔπασχον, εἰδότων ἀπωλλύμην.
> (*OC* 270-4)

> [For how can I be evil in nature?
> I responded to what I had suffered, so that even if
> I had acted with awareness, I would not have been evil.
> But in fact I arrived where I arrived knowing nothing,
> while those at whose hands I suffered knowingly tried to kill me.]

Oedipus' ignorance is the overriding factor that shifts the meaning of his actions and guides his comparative rankings, sometimes in surprising ways. Somewhat later, in his long speech of self-de-

fence against Creon's suggestion that Oedipus should be liable to conviction for murder by the Areopagus, Oedipus claims that Creon is more to blame for intentionally bringing up and speaking about Oedipus' incest than he himself was for engaging in it.

ἀλλ᾽ ἓν γὰρ οὖν ἔξοιδα, σὲ μὲν ἑκόντ᾽ ἐμὲ
κείνην τε ταῦτα δυσστομεῖν· ἐγὼ δέ νιν
ἄκων ἔγημα φθέγγομαί τ᾽ ἄκων τάδε.
(*OC* 985-7)

[One thing I know for sure: you willingly
speak ill of me and of her, while I
married her unwillingly and speak of these things unwillingly.]

These, then, are strong and provocative claims to be "[m]ore sinned against than sinning", in terms that are comparable to Lear's and they substantiate the widespread view that Lear's words can aptly be applied to Oedipus. But it is nonetheless the case that, when he equates suffering with his own acts, as distinct from the things that other people have done to him, Oedipus is making a very different point than Lear, and this difference bears on the broader question of what it means for each of these figures to identify themselves as passive.

Passivity is equally essential to the religious visions of the two plays, but those are very different visions, in which each protagonist plays a different role and assumes a different status. This difference is falsified or obscured by an assumption like that of Francis Storr that they are expressing themselves in the same, implicitly Christian spirit. Oedipus, as several essays in this collection discuss, is being singled out for the distinct and singular status of the supernaturally empowered cult hero.[9] Cult heroism is one of the distinctive features of Greek religion that has been increasingly studied and acknowledged as a vital constituent of Greek tragedy in the century-long period since Storr's translation – with the result that scholars and translators are now much more wary of using the language of sin, with its Christian connotations, to describe the transgressive actions of ancient tragic actors.

9 For the sometimes muted but significant role of cult heroism in Sophocles' plays, see Currie 2012, Henrichs 1993.

An important element of the process by which a human individual becomes a cult hero is the experience of being drawn against his will and in ways that defy his understanding into a plot in which he is the perpetrator of transgressive criminal acts and the victim of aggressive forms of divinely orchestrated retribution. This is a bewildering and demeaning experience which those heroes often articulate by using the passive voice. Two related examples of such uses of the passive are provided by figures whose future in cult is more implicitly signalled than that of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, both of whom experience their disorienting shift in outward status and internal disposition in terms of gender reversal. The first is Ajax in *Ajax* in the riddling so-called 'deception speech', who finds himself undergoing an unexpected change that involves most immediately a greater sympathy for his partner Tecmessa and he declares that he has been made female in his way of speaking: ἐθηλύνθην ("I have been feminized", *Ai.* 651). The other is Heracles in *Trachiniae*, who under the pressure of great physical pain confronts the emergence of a side of himself – one given to involuntary cries of pain – that he and no one else had ever seen before. He declares, and here we find that same idea of being unmasked or found out that describes the experience of Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, θῆλυς ηὕρημαι ("I have been found to be female", *Tr.* 1075). In a somewhat different register, at the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus looks back to the time of his birth and exposure and describes his entire life's course having begun with himself as the select object of a particular form of passivity: οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε/ θνῄσκων ἐσώθην, μὴ 'πί τῳ δεινῷ κακῷ ("For I would not have been saved from dying, if not for some strange doom", *OT* 1456-7).

Passivity is also central to the mutedly but appreciably Christian context of *King Lear*, highlighted in the repeated calls for "patience" that occur throughout the play.[10] A Christian conception of patience is implicated in Lear's characterization of himself as "sinned against", as Winshemius' Latin translation of Sophocles' πεπονθότ' ("suffered") as "passus sum" makes clear.

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10 On the theme of patience in King Lear and, in particular, its relationship to the biblical story of Job, see Hamlin 2011.

Lear knows that he needs patience ("You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!", 2.2.460) and eventually undertakes (somewhat prematurely) to model it ("I will be the pattern of all patience", 3.2.37); echoing the advice he receives sincerely from Albany (1.4.254) and self-servingly from Regan (2.2.327), he goes on to recommend patience to Gloucester ("Thou must be patient", 4.6.174), as does Edgar ("Bear free and patient thoughts", 4.6.80); in Cordelia, patience competes with sorrow at her father's mistreatment (4.3.16).

The very fact that we hear so many characters in *King Lear* recommending "patience" to one another or commending it in others indicates that this is a different form of passivity than that which is forced upon Heracles, Ajax, and Oedipus. Both involve a loss of control and a new awareness that the world is ruled by mysterious forces, something that does not come easily to someone like Lear. But those Sophoclean heroes are exceptional figures – destined for a special "strange doom" that sets them apart from ordinary people, while patience in *King Lear* is a universal virtue tied to humility and the renunciation of a sense of apartness or of extraordinary power. Acceptance of humanity's shared subjection to the gods is, of course, the basis of an ethic of equality in the Greek tradition, beginning with Achilles' speech to Priam in *Iliad* 24 (525-33) about the jar from which Zeus gives bad fortune to everyone. But for the hero destined for cult, charged with a superhuman power, suffering at the hands of the gods has a further, distinguishing significance: it means being drawn against his will and against his seeming nature into deeds that are tantamount to sufferings but are also the prelude to a powerful permanent status. In contrast, at the end of *King Lear*, Lear has come to earn and fully inhabit his own self-designation as "[m]ore sinned against than sinning" because he no longer thinks of himself as different from other people or better than ordinary sinners. When Lear withdraws his hand from Gloucester's kiss, it is because it "smells of mortality" (4.6.129); Oedipus, by contrast, will not let Theseus touch him because he is uniquely and permanently contaminated by his singular crimes (*OC* 1130-5).

At the same time, to mention another important distinction, Lear is sinned against, not through the strange contingencies of

fortune, which leave Oedipus blind to what he is really doing, but through the sinfulness of hard-hearted human beings. The agency Lear elevates above his own is that of the people around him, not of divinities. While that human hard-heartedness may be as ultimately unfathomable as the purposes of the Greek gods, the play also foregrounds the skewed and faulty nature of human values, which makes the virtuous especially vulnerable to being sinned against, as in the verse from the Sermon on the Mount which proclaims "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5.10). In the world of *King Lear*, finding oneself in a position of passivity is a sign of distinction in this rather different sense, and again one that is open to any good person.

Within that play's broader range of intertwined plots, we find several of the most virtuous characters described as victims of mistreatment – that is to say, as sinned against – in the passive voice. Their persecutor, the one doing the sinning, is Lear himself, as we meet him at the beginning of the play, very much in the active voice, or as Kent forcefully puts it to him: "From my throat / I'll tell thee thou dost evil" (1.1.166-7). Kent himself is one of those victims, and he assumes his passive victimhood as a badge of identity and basis for his future actions when he apostrophizes himself as "banished Kent":

> . . . Now, banished Kent,
> If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemned
> So may it come thy master whom thou lov'st
> Shall find thee full of labours.
> (1.4.4-7)

Cordelia also is markedly identified with her mistreatment, again in the passive voice, when she is embraced by France, taking on a new identity as his wife as "most choice forsaken and most loved despised":

> Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,
> Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised,
> Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon. . .
> (1.1.252-4)

In her case too, the passive reception of unfair blows is the springboard to action, labour, and loving service.

There is a kind of symbiosis, and a convertibility, between suffering and doing that is captured by both of the statements with which this discussion began, however differently their underlying conceptualizations. This points back to the undeniable similarities between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear* and to the transcendent tragic vision that they seem to share. Whether their similarities are fortuitous or the result of actual influence, and however much we may recognize the idea of an essential tragic spirit as a construct, both plays testify to painful connections between suffering and wisdom, and between suffering and beneficial action, that seem to lie at the heart of the genre, finding definitive expression in Aeschylus' terse and enigmatic πάθει μάθος ("in suffering learning", Aesch. *Ag.* 177). So, to end with one of the many points of alignment that justify thinking about these two plays together, we can return, with *King Lear*'s wronged good actors in mind, to Oedipus' statement at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* that he was saved (ἐσώθεν, *OT* 1457) at the beginning of his life for some strange fate.

At that point, Oedipus has not yet fully grasped the meaning of this fate, but given the acuteness of his shame and anguish and his participation in a worldview in which not to be born is understood to be the best thing that can happen (memorably expressed at *OC* 1224-5), it is clear that for him to be saved means to have had great suffering imposed on him. Pat Easterling has made the suggestive observation that at the end of a play by Sophocles one often feels that the story is not really over, that "there *is* a future . . . but this would have to be the subject of a different play" (1981: 69, elipses original). In the case of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that other play was ultimately written, in the form of *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which we find Oedipus in a position to contemplate his own entire history and so to understand what he himself said at that earlier point. There through the mysterious equatability of passive and active, the one who had been subjected at the beginning of his life to a mysterious salvation with painful consequences becomes at the end of it himself an active saviour – once again a σώτηρ – bringing a permanent form of protection to Athens through a

death that he enacts with his confident departure from the stage. However different the spiritual universes in which they are set, in both *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear* – with their shared emphasis on the ever-cycling reversals brought by time and fortune – it is the one who suffers who takes the most weighty action.

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10

Fathers Cursing Children: Anger and Justice in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*

Seth L. Schein

Abstract

This paper elucidates the dramatic and ethical significance of verbal assaults by fathers against their children in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, especially of the angry, hateful curses they hurl at them (e.g. *OC* 421-7, 789-90, 1372-82, *KL* 1.1.109-21, 1.4.267-81). It moves from close, comparative study of the language of the curses, the dramatic contexts in which they are delivered, and the ways in which they are motivated, to a broader discussion of the family dynamics that the fathers' discourses are part of, the institutions and values they both exemplify and pervert, and the fathers' changing understanding of their own responsibility for what they do and suffer. On the one hand, such discussion throws light on the essentially positive achievement of Oedipus, who dies successfully and gains honour posthumously as, in effect, one of the Eumenides, with the power to dispense intrafamilial, retaliatory justice and to benefit Athens. On the other, it illuminates the horrifically destructive and self-destructive failure of Lear, who unleashes suffering on an individual, social, and cosmic scale that the play challenges readers and viewers to consider meaningful

Keywords: *Oedipus at Colonus*; *King Lear*; curse

In this essay I reflect comparatively on the passages in *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear* in which Oedipus angrily curses his sons, Eteocles and Polynices (*OC* 421-7, 785-90, 1372-88), and Lear his daughters, Cordelia and Goneril (*KL* 1.1.109-21, 1.4.267-81; cf. 2.2.335).[1] I am not concerned with the possible influence, direct or

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1 For *King Lea*r, I refer to Foakes 1997; for *Oedipus at Colonus*, to Avezzù

indirect, of Sophocles' play on Shakespeare's, as argued recently by John Kerrigan, but with thematic and emotional affinities (2018: 63-82, 127-32). In both works, the protagonist's angry curses are retaliatory responses to what each father considers a fundamental injustice, a disturbance of natural order consisting of filial ingratitude. The curses serve as windows into their speakers' minds: they show Oedipus and Lear in psychological extremity, and their loss of control in the grip of anger makes their inner worlds especially visible as they shatter the bonds that naturally link fathers and children (Kerrigan 2016: 351-6). In this way the curses draw a reader or viewer into the distinctive themes and interpretative challenges of each play. Oedipus' curses mark stages in his essentially positive dramatic journey towards death and posthumous honour and power as a 'hero', a chthonic divinity resembling the Erinyes/Eumenides in his ability to dispense intrafamilial, retaliatory justice and to benefit Athens. Lear's curses, on the other hand, are early expressions of his mental disintegration and destructive and self-destructive behaviour as father and king, of his (and the play's) negative dramatic trajectory in fulfilment of a "darker purpose" (1.1.35) that goes well beyond "the division of the kingdom" (1.1.14).

Oedipus at Colonus affirms the existence of justice in its dramatic universe, a justice that features a special intimacy and ultimate harmony between the human and the divine. In *King Lear*, on the other hand, although some characters invoke or assert the existence of divine justice,[2] the play as a whole shows these assertions to be at best partial or superficial and affirms neither divine justice nor any emotionally satisfying or intellectually meaningful relationship between divinity and humanity. Unlike Oedipus' curses, which culminate in his divinely assisted progress towards death and apotheosis and illustrate his power to help friends, harm enemies, and protect Athens, Lear's curses benefit neither

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et al. 2008. All translations of Greek texts are my own.

2 E.g. Albany at 4.2.79-81, "This shows you are above, / You justicers, that these our nether crimes / So speedily can venge"; Edgar at 5.3.168-71, "The gods are just and of our pleasant vices / Make instruments to plague us: / The dark and vicious place where thee he got / Cost him his eyes".

himself nor his community.

For Oedipus, his sons' ingratitude consists in their unjust failure over many years to live up to the obligations of φιλία ("kinship"): he accuses Eteocles and Polynices of violating this natural, intrafamilial bond and causing his sufferings as an impoverished exile and wanderer. His accusation would have resonated strongly with a late fifth-century Athenian audience, whose legal responsibilities as citizens included caring for their parents.[3] Lear's curses on his daughters, however, go beyond questions of natural or legal obligations and express both his fundamental insecurity regarding his masculinity and his shame at the possible exposure of this insecurity.[4]

The word 'curse', at least for purposes of this essay, has two main meanings, both associated with vengeance for a (supposed) offence against moral or religious standards: first, "an utterance consigning, or supposed or intended to consign, (a person or thing) to spiritual and temporal evil, the vengeance of the deity, the blasting of malignant fate, etc." (*OED s.v.* curse, n. 1.a); second, "the evil inflicted by divine (or supernatural) power in response to an imprecation or in the way of retributive punishment" (*OED*

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3 A law attributed to Solon in Diogenes Laertius 1.55 states, ἐάν τις μὴ τρέφῃ τοὺς γονέας, ἄτιμος ἔστω ("if someone does not care for his parents, let him be deprived of public rights"). Though the attribution to Solon has been called into question (Ruschenbusch 1966: 42-3, 55; Leão and Rhodes 2016: 97), it seems clear that such a law and others having to do with the care of elderly parents existed in classical Athens (Harrison 1968: 78 with n1; Leão and Rhodes 2016: 92-7). They would have been among the traditional laws examined by a legal commission between 410/9 and 403/2 and officially reaffirmed by the restored democracy in 403/2, and would, therefore, have been in the public consciousness at the time *OC* was composed (c. 407-405) and shortly before its first production in 401 (Easterling 1967: 7n1). Apart from legal responsibility, Athenians, like all Greeks, had a generally acknowledged moral responsibility to treat elderly parents well, in return for the parents having taken care of them as children (τροφεῖα); of importance for the interpretation of Sophocles' play, this responsibility included giving them a proper burial and taking care of their graves in the future (see Cameron 1971: 85-95).

4 On shame as Lear's principle motivation throughout the play, see Cavell 1987: 58-61, 67-72.

s.v. curse, n. 4.a).[5] At its weakest, a curse may be no more than a wish, expressed by the optative in Greek and by the subjunctive in English. Stronger curses can employ the present or future indicative and be prophetic. Because curses often call upon the gods, they frequently resemble prayers in both diction and intent. Typically, a prayer requests something desired by and beneficial to the speaker, but when this "something" involves seeing one's enemies "perish" (ὀλέσθαι) or meet with "justice" (δίκη) in the form of "payback" (τίσις), the prayer becomes a curse. Curses are often strengthened by oaths invoking a god or the gods generally, especially the Furies, as constituting or guaranteeing the just and natural order, and sometimes what is called a curse is actually an oath, or, as in the case of Lear's furious words to Cordelia at 1.1.109-17, what John Kerrigan calls "an oath that wants to be a curse" (2016: 351). Curses with oaths are often emotionally heightened appeals for justice and for the restoration of what the speaker sees as naturally right.

In Attic tragedy, the two main meanings of 'curse' sometimes combine or overlap. For example, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Aegisthus recalls how Thyestes kicked over the dining table, cursing Atreus for serving him the hideous feast: "thus perish all the race of Pleisthenes" (οὕτως ὀλέσθαι πᾶν τὸ Πλεισθένους γένος, *Ag.* 1602).[6] Thyestes' words give rise to the 'curse' henceforth dwelling in the house, which manifests itself elsewhere in the play as the "abiding, terrible, treacherous / housekeeper, rising again in response, / a mindful, child-avenger wrath" (μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος / οἰκονόμος δολία, μνάμων μῆνις τεκνόποινος, *Ag.* 154-5); the "revel of kindred Furies, drunk on mortal blood, / remaining in the house, hard to send away" (βροτεῖον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει, / δύσπεμπτος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων, *Ag.* 1189-90), whom Cassandra sees "sitting on the house . . . , and they sing a song / of the delusion that was the first origin of ruin, and in turn spit out revulsion / against the brother's bed [that became an] enemy to the man trampling on it" (ὑμνοῦσι ὕμνον δώμασι

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5 Quoted by Watson 1991: 1-2.
6 For Aeschylus, I cite Murray 1957 (sometimes modified). All translations are my own.

προσήμεναι / πρώταρχον ἄτης· ἐν μέρει δ' ἀπέπτυσαν / εὐνὰς ἀδελφοῦ τῶι πατοῦντι δυσμενεῖς, Aesch. *Ag.* 1191-3); and "the ancient, harsh spirit of vengeance" (ὁ παλαιὸς δριμὺς ἀλάστωρ) that Clytemnestra sings of as visible in her own form (*Ag.* 1500-1).[7] Both meanings of 'curse' are also present in Aesch. *Seven against Thebes* 832-3 ὦ μέλαινα καὶ τελεία / γένεος Οἰδίπου τ' ἀρά ("O dark and conclusive / curse of Oedipus and his family"), ambiguous words in which γένεος and Οἰδίπου can be understood as either subjective or objective genitives, so that different members of Aeschylus' audience would probably have taken them in different ways, as have his readers.[8]

Similarly, in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (785-91), the chorus sing that Oedipus,

> τέκνοις ἀθλίας ἐφῆκεν   785
> ἐπίκοτος τροφᾶς, αἰαῖ,
> πικρογλώσσους ἀράς,
> καί σφε σιδαρονόμῳ
> διὰ χερί ποτε λαχεῖν
> κτήματα· νῦν δὲ τρέω   790
> μὴ τελέσῃ καμψίπους Ἐρινύς

> [angered with his sons for their wretched   785
> care for him, aiai, let loose
> bitter-tongued curses
> that those two would actually,
> with iron-wielding hand, one day divide
> his possessions. And now I tremble   790
> lest the Fury bending her fleet foot bring this to pass.][9]

7 See Fraenkel 1962: 3.710-12, Medda 2017: 3.379-82.

8 For example, the scholiast on 832-4 (Smith 1982: 352) apparently understands them as a kind of objective genitive hendiadys and is followed by Lupaş and Petre (1981: 256), while Wilamowitz (1914: 83) opposes Οἰδίπου as subjective genitive to γένεος as objective genitive (cf. Hutchinson 1985: 186). However interpreted, γένεος Οἰδίπου τ' ἀρά aligns the curse spoken by Oedipus with that already present in the family, ever since Laios' transgression against Apollo's oracular warning not to father a child (and perhaps ever since his kidnapping and rape of Chrysippus, if this version of the story was known to Aeschylus and mentioned in Laius, earlier in the trilogy; see Mastronarde 1994: 35-7, Kannicht 2004: 2.878).

9 Here and elsewhere I borrow several phrases from Hecht and Bacon

This happens when the two brothers, meeting in combat (816-19),

> διέλαχον σφυρηλάτῳ
> Σκύθη σιδήρῳ κτημάτων παμπησίαν·
> ἕξουσι δ᾽ ἣν λάβωσιν ἐν τάφῳ χθονός,
> πατρὸς κατ᾽ εὐχὰς δυσπότμως φορούμενοι

[divided with hammered-out
Scythian iron their full inheritance of possessions;
and they will have (only) the land which they take in burial,
ill-fatedly swept away on (the wind of) their father's prayers.][10]

It is not always easy to decide whether the word "curse" re-fers mainly to a spoken imprecation or to the condition caused by it, especially when the 'condition' consists of the evils called for in the imprecation (Watson 1991: 1-2). The Greek words ἀραί and κατάραι can refer equally to "imprecations" and to continuing states of divine displeasure; personified as the "Curses", the Ἀραί are another name for the Ἐρινύες, the "Furies" (e.g. Aesch. *Eum.* 417), or implicitly or explicitly associated with them (e.g. Soph. *OT* 418, *El.* 111).[11] In *Oedipus at Colonu*s, both senses of 'curse' are in play: Oedipus, constantly full of anger (θυμός), curses his sons in the three passages mentioned at the beginning of this essay, con-signing them to mutual destruction. In so doing he creates a fam-ily curse, like the curse created by Thyestes in the *Agamemnon*, which echoes the prophetic curse traditionally attributed to Oedipus (e.g. *Thebais* frs. 2.7-10, 3.3 Bernabé; Aesch. *Sept.* 720-5, 785-91, 818-19), that Eteocles and Polynices would divide their in-

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1973.

10 διαλαγχάνω is similarly used of the brothers, "cursed" to "divide this house by lot with iron", at Eur. *Phoe.* 67-8, probably a reminiscence of this passage. For the literal and figurative use of φορέω in the passive to de-scribe ships carried away or storm-tossed, see Alcaeus fr. 326.4, Eur. *Suppl.* 144. Here, 819 πατρὸς κατ᾽ εὐχὰς δυσπότμως φορούμενοι transfers the play's nautical imagery from the "ship of state" (e.g. 3, 62-4, 208-10) to the accurs-ed family. Cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 690-1 ἴτω κατ᾽ οὖρον, κῦμα Κωκυτοῦ λαχόν, / Φοίβῳ στυγηθὲν πᾶν τὸ Λαΐου γένος ("Let the whole race of Laius, hated by Phoebus, / go, blown by the wind along the wave of Cocytos, as is their lot"); see Thalmann 1978: 35.

11 On the terminology for curses, see Kakridis 1929: 5-9.

heritance and kill one another in war.[12] The words τοὔμφυλον αἷμα (407) associate this curse with the pollution arising from Oedipus' killing of his father and mating with his mother, even though elsewhere in the play Oedipus insists that he was the victim rather than the agent of these deeds (ἐπεὶ τά γ' ἔργα με / πεπονθότ' ἴσθι μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα, 266-7; "for know that I suffered / more than I did these deeds"), and that he is innocent because he acted in ignorance and they were unintended (270-4, 962-90).

In *King Lear*, there is no trace of such a family curse. The angry imprecations that Lear lets loose on his daughters are self-generated and idiosyncratic; they stem from his thwarted will and frustrated need for gratification. Similarly, while the curse of Oedipus on his sons was part of the traditional myth, there is no evidence that this kind of curse was traditional in the story of Lear, who does not formally curse his daughters in *The Moste Famous Chronicle Historye of Leir King of England and His Three Daughters*, generally considered to be the main 'source' of Shakespeare's play (Anonymous 1605; Michie 1991), or in other versions of the story that Shakespeare could have known.

Oedipus and Lear curse their children as a way of trying to control them. For example, the first of the three paternal curses in *Oedipus at Colonus* is really no more than Oedipus' angry wish for mastery over his sons' destiny in the coming battle, because they did nothing to prevent him from being forced into exile against his will and are now eager to control him, in order to further their own political ambitions (421-7):

> ἀλλ' οἱ θεοί σφιν μήτε τὴν πεπρωμένην
> ἔριν κατασβέσειαν, ἐν δ' ἐμοὶ τέλος
> αἰτοῖν γένοιτο τῆσδε τῆς μάχης πέρι,
> ἧς νῦν ἔχονται κἀπαναίρονται δόρυ·
> ὡς οὔτ' ἂν ὃς νῦν σκῆπτρα καὶ θρόνους ἔχει   425
> μείνειεν, οὔτ' ἂν οὐξεληλυθὼς πάλιν
> ἔλθοι ποτ' αὖθις·

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12 Oedipus' curse may also resonate with a curse supposedly pronounced by Pelops on Laius and his family, after Laius kidnapped and raped Pelops's son Chrysippus (above, n8).

[May the gods not quench their fated
strife, and may the fulfillment be in my hands
concerning this battle of theirs on which
those two are now set, and they are raising their spears;
so that neither he who now holds the sceptre and the throne   425
would remain, nor he who has gone into exile
would ever come back.]

The second passage (787-90) also springs from anger and is stronger and more vivid than the first. Oedipus tells Creon, who has come as Eteocles' agent to force him back to Thebes:

οὐκ ἔστι σοι ταῦτ᾽, ἀλλά σοι τάδ᾽ ἔστ᾽, ἐκεῖ
χώρας ἀλάστωρ οὑμὸς ἐνναίων ἀεί·
ἔστιν δὲ παισὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖσι τῆς ἐμῆς
χθονὸς λαχεῖν τοσοῦτον, ἐνθανεῖν μόνον.   790

[That is impossible for you, but this is possible: my
vengeful spirit dwelling there, always in place,
and for my children, to obtain as their share so much
of my land as (suffices) only to die in.   790]

In this passage, echoing *Seven against Thebes* (818-9), Oedipus no longer wishes, but forcefully asserts, in the indicative, what will happen, from his own certain knowledge of what is and is not possible. The word ἀλάστωρ ("vengeful spirit") names the curse on the house, the malignant destiny that is here unleashed, or at least enhanced, by Oedipus' words.

In the third, more developed passage (1372-88), Oedipus angrily tells Polynices, a suppliant for his support in the expedition against Thebes,

οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ᾽ ὅπως πόλιν
κείνην ἐρείψεις, ἀλλὰ πρόσθεν αἵματι
πεσῇ μιανθεὶς χὠ ξύναιμος ἐξ ἴσου.
τοιάσδ᾽ ἀρὰς σφῷν πρόσθε τ᾽ ἐξανῆκ᾽ ἐγώ,   1375
νῦν τ᾽ ἀνακαλοῦμαι ξυμμάχους ἐλθεῖν ἐμοί,
ἵν᾽ ἀξιῶτον τοὺς φυτεύσαντας σέβειν,
καὶ μὴ ᾽ξατιμάζητον, εἰ τυφλοῦ πατρὸς
τοιῶδ᾽ ἔφυτον· αἵδε γὰρ τάδ᾽ οὐκ ἔδρων.
τοιγὰρ τὸ σὸν θάκημα καὶ τοὺς σοὺς θρόνους   1380
κρατοῦσιν, εἴπερ ἐστὶν ἡ παλαίφατος

Δίκη ξύνεδρος Ζηνὸς ἀρχαίοις νόμοις.
σὺ δ' ἔρρ' ἀπόπτυστός τε κἀπάτωρ ἐμοῦ,
κακῶν κάκιστε, τάσδε συλλαβὼν ἀράς,
ἅς σοι καλοῦμαι, μήτε γῆς ἐμφυλίου   1385
δόρει κρατῆσαι μήτε νοστῆσαί ποτε
τὸ κοῖλον Ἄργος, ἀλλὰ συγγενεῖ χερὶ
θανεῖν κτανεῖν θ' ὑφ' οὗπερ ἐξελήλασαι.

[There is no way
you will destroy that city, but before (that) you will fall
polluted with blood, (you) and your blood brother equally.
Such curses I let loose against the two of you previously,   1375
and now I call on them to come as my allies,
so that you two may think it right to revere those who begat you,
and not utterly dishonor them, (even) if the father is blind from whom
you two, such as you are, were born. For these two girls did not do this.
Therefore (these curses) shall overwhelm your suppliant posture   1380
and your throne, if Justice, revealed of old,
sits beside Zeus by (right of) ancient laws.
Away with you, whom I spit upon and un-father,
you vilest of the vile; take with you these curses,
which I call down on you, neither to dominate with the spear   1385
your native land nor ever to return home to hill-ringed
Argos, but to die by a kindred hand
and kill him by whom you have been driven out.]

Here Oedipus repeatedly uses the word ἀράς ("curses") and re-
lies on Zeus and Justice for support, pointedly specifying that it is
Justice who sits beside Zeus (ξύνεδρος, 1382), though Polyneices,
when supplicating his father, had opportunistically spoken of
Shame (Αἰδώς), which Jebb glosses as "Compassion" (Jebb 1900:
199 on 1267-8), as the "partner of Zeus' throne" (σύνθακος
θρόνων).[13] Oedipus retaliates against his sons for their failure to

13 Easterling (1967: 7) points out that σύνθακος is a Sophoclean *hapax
legomenon* and that Polynices' language here meaningfully brings togeth-
er Oedipus' references to his sons as preferring τὴν τυραννίδα over his own
desire to be recalled (418) with Eteocles' currently holding σκῆπτρα καὶ
θρόνους ("the sceptre and the throne", 425), both sons' choice of θρόνους
/ καὶ σκῆπτρα ("the throne and the sceptre", 449) over their father, and
Polynices' "suppliant state". Polynices' appeal and Oedipus' curses, which
"shall overwhelm your suppliant posture and your 'throne'" (1480-1), invite a

respect him; he assumes full power to control his and their fate and thus confirms the authority and power attributed to him by the oracles. It is, of course, appropriate by Greek ethical standards to harm someone who has harmed you, but Antigone had pleaded with Oedipus that it would not be right for him (μηδέ . . . θέμις . . . εἶναι) to retaliate against a son whom he had sired, even if that son committed the most impious wrongs against him (1189-91), and she had reminded him of his own sufferings at the hands of his parents. Although she convinces her father to hear what Polynices has to say, Oedipus' anger and confidence in his own sense of right and wrong are too strong for Polynices' persuasion. Oedipus cannot know, as the audience or reader knows, that his curse on his sons will eventually result in the destruction of Antigone too, who has, out of love, shared his harsh existence and done more than anyone to help him – though it is unclear that he would act differently, if he did know. Oedipus concludes by calling on "the hateful, paternal darkness of Tartarus" (τὸ Ταρτάρου / στυγνὸν πατρῷον ἔρεβος, 1389-90), implying not only "his own affinity, as the father of his sons, to the chthonian deities of whom he will soon be one" (Blundell 1989: 256), but also the affinity of his curse on these sons to the ancestral curse on the family of the Labdacids.

Lear's curses against his daughters, like those of Oedipus against his sons, are made in sudden bursts of anger at what he considers his unfilial and unjust treatment at their hands. When Cordelia refuses to play her prescribed role in the so-called love test by outbidding her sisters in professing love for their father, firmly insisting on her adherence to the reciprocal bond between them, even when he threatens and disinherits her (Foakes 1997: 165, Kerrigan 2016: 350-1), Lear first asks with incredulity, "So young and so untender?" (1.1.107). Then, in response to her direct and understated reply, "So young, my lord, and true" (1.1.108), he explodes in a grandiloquent curse, intensified by an oath (1.1.109-21):

> Well, let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower.
> For by the sacred radiance of the sun,   110

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complex response on the part of a viewer or reader.

The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,   115
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this forever. The barbarous Scythian
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighboured, pitied and relieved   120
As thou, my sometime daughter.

It is unclear to what "from this" (117) refers. Does Lear simply mean "from this time on"? Does he gesture towards his heart, the map or the coronet (Foakes 1997: 165-6 on 117)? In any case, his radical attack on Cordelia stems from his frustrated need to control her as both a child and a female and from his inability to do so. His emphatic claim in lines 117-21, that he shall have more sympathy and pity for a cannibalistic parent who devours his offspring than for Cordelia, reveals the extremity of both his conscious hatred of his daughter and his unconscious identification with the most selfishly destructive of parents. In swearing by Hecate and the heavenly bodies "from whom we do exist and cease to be" (113), Lear, like Gloucester in his assertion of astrological influence on Edmund's bastardy (1.2), elides his own parental role and responsibility for Cordelia's life and well-being; at the same time, he tries to punish her perceived lack of filial respect by denying her the possibility of a marriage that would provide her with the opportunity for lawful procreation. Lear's frustration and his curse stem not only from his hatred but from his love of Cordelia, which, as he says explicitly, was greater than that he felt for Goneril and Regan. He is ashamed of having been prepared, in effect, to make her his mother and of having failed to do so, in both ways compromising his own masculine authority: "I loved her most, and thought to set my rest / On her kind nursery" (1.1.123-4). Lear had been ready to give her "a third more opulent than your sisters" (1.1.86), if she were to satisfy his need for a more fulsome assertion of her love. When, however, she insists that she loves him "According to my bond, no more, no less"

(1.1.93) and goes on to explain her words with reference to the love she will bear her future husband, Lear cannot contain his fury and instantly un-fathers her. While Oedipus nurses for many years the anger at his sons' desire for power and unwillingness to care for him, which leads him to conclude, "You two are born from another, and not from me" (ὑμεῖς δ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου κοὐκ ἐμοῦ πεφύκατον, 1369; see Easterling 1967: 9), Lear's furious rejection of Cordelia and of his own paternity is an irrational, sudden response to a perceived thwarting of his desire on a single occasion by the person he loves most in the world, an expression of his desperate and pathetic need for personal control at the moment when he is surrendering his political authority.

Lear later disowns his paternity in a different way, when a daughter does not live up to his fantasy of appropriate filial behavior. When Regan tells him she is glad to see him, he replies (2.2.318-21),

> Regan, I think you are. I know what reason
> I have to think so. If thou shouldst not be glad,
> I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
> Sepulchring an adultress.[14]

In other words, if Regan were not glad to see Lear, that is, if she were not living up to the image and expectation he has of her as his daughter, she would, in Lear's fantasy, be her mother's daughter – the mother whom Lear would disown for her infidelity.

The strongest link between Lear's emotionally charged effort to control a supposedly disobedient daughter and his sense that such a daughter is not really his child can be seen in 1.4. When Goneril urges him "A little to disquantity your train" of one hundred knights (1.4.240), he exclaims, "Darkness and devils!" and "Degenerate bastard!" (1.4.243, 245), as if her refusal to accommodate the hundred knights were evidence that she is aligned with the powers of evil, that she is not really his child biologically, and that (paradoxically) she has declined from his standard of

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14 These lines are equivalent to 2.4.130-3 in the conventional numbering, standard since the eighteenth century; 2.2 in Foakes 1997 is usually divided into three separate scenes.

nobility. Here again Lear disclaims responsibility for a daughter who thwarts his will, and when he cannot control her, he bemonsters her: "Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend, / More hideous when thou shows't thee in a child / Than the sea-monster" (1.4.251-3). Then his anger at Goneril's perceived lack of sympathy and filial love leads him to strike at her procreativity in a horrific, sweeping curse that is even more powerful than his earlier curse against Cordelia (1.4.267-81):

> Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear:
> Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
> To make this creature fruitful:
> Into her womb convey sterility,   270
> Dry up in her the organs of increase,
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honour her. If she must teem,
> Create her child of spleen, that it may live
> And be a thwart, disnatured torment to her.   275
> Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
> With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
> Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
> To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
> How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is   280
> To have a thankless child.

Lear's address to "Nature" as "dear goddess" recalls Edmund's "Thou, Nature, art my goddess" in 1.2, and Lear's curse, which undoes his invocation of "Nature as a creative force", virtually makes nature unnatural (cf. "denatured torment," 275) and "almost aligns him with Edmund" (Foakes 1997: 208 on 1.4.267). As in the case of Cordelia, Lear tries to control a daughter by controlling her procreativity, this time by cursing her with sterility rather than by trying to block her marriage; in this way Goneril will pay the penalty for what he considers to be his own condition of not having a child to honour him. Then, as if allowing for the possibility that she may in fact give birth, he calls on the goddess to make her child "of spleen", that is, violent and ill-tempered, which is how he experiences his own daughters.

The language in which Lear curses Goneril is fundamental to his sense of his own gender identity (1.4.288-93):

Life and death, I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus,
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,   290
Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!
Th'untented woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee!

Lear's "hot tears" are grounded in the realization and shame that Goneril has the power "to shake my manhood" and anticipate his later calling on the heavens to "touch me with noble anger / And let not women's weapons, water-drops, / Stain my man's cheeks" (2.2.465-7). As Janet Adelman argues, "Shakespeare's heroes not only struggle against signs of femininity in themselves, but detect these signs especially in their powerlessness", particularly, as Madelon Gohlke observes, their powerlessness "in relation to a controlling or powerful woman" (Adelman 1992: 298n17; Gohlke 1980: 175).

Lear understands his own tears as dangerously feminine. A reader or viewer might understand them as one step on Lear's way to his even more terrifying "identification with his daughters and . . . fear of the mother within" (Adelman 1992: 298n17, citing Kahn 1982: 37-9, 1986: 36, 43-4), which are most clearly expressed in his exclamation at 2.2.246-8: "O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! / Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow, / Thy element's below." In these lines Lear tries to repress what he sees as the threat to his male identity by the archetypal female condition of the suffocating, wandering womb, known as "the mother". Elsewhere he virtually identifies "the mother" whose "element's below" with female sexuality generally, which he locates similarly in a violently obscene outburst (4.6.120-5):

The fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to't with a more riotous appetite. Down from the waist they are centaurs, though women all above. But to the girdle do the gods inherit, beneath is all the fiend's: there's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption. Fie, fie, fie! Pah, pah![15]

15 Most editions print 120-3 as irregular verse, which may be correct. Lear's lines from 110 on become metrically uneven, as "his disgust with his daughters leads to his misogynistic outburst against all women" (Foakes

Lear's repression becomes ineffective when he is forced, in the course of his madness in 3.4 and 4.6, to recognize both his own "origin in the suffocating maternal womb" and the presence of the female within him, which complements his recognition of his "complicity in the making of his daughters" (Adelman 1992: 114). Lear realizes not only that he cannot control his children – is not their "author" – but that he has lost all the authority he thought he had over "his family, his kingdom and subjects, his very own being" (Poole 1987: 232).[16]

I hope, even in this brief essay, to have shown how careful attention to the angry curses that Oedipus and Lear unleash against their children can open privileged pathways into the main themes and interpretative challenges of *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear.* This is because the curses work in much the same way as figurative language does, allowing audiences and readers to gain an intimate sense of Oedipus and Lear in emotional extremity. Both fathers experience intergenerational conflict as an assault on patriarchal authority and, in the case of Lear, on gender identity, and they respond in language that itself breaks the bonds of natural kinship. Lear's curses signal, relatively early in the play, the catastrophic impotence with which he struggles against understanding that he has given away not only his kingship but all of what he considered his paternal power and authority. On the other hand, Oedipus' final, "terrifying curse", which angrily and hatefully condemns his sons to certain death, is "the culminating revelation of [his] power . . . to impose destiny" (Seale 1982: 135); it anticipates his ability to die on his own terms, leading the way to the

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1997: 336 on 4.6.120-7). It is interesting to contrast Lear's negative revulsion from "darkness" here and at 1.4.243 ("Darkness and devils!") with Oedipus' embrace of darkness in his invocation of the "dread goddesses . . . Daughters of Earth and Darkness" (39-40), whose grove he has entered, as γλυκεῖαι παῖδες ἀρχαίου σκότου ("sweet daughters of primeval darkness", 106), and his calling on "the hateful, paternal darkness of Tartaros" (1389-90) to enforce his curse on Eteocles and Polynices.

16 Poole (1987: 231-2) cites Strindberg's remarkable insight into the devastating effect of Lear's realization of the power within him of his dead wife, the mother of his children, whom in effect he identifies with "the mother" (Strindberg 1967: 97-8).

site of his eventual tomb (1544-8), and the power that he will wield posthumously as a hero. The curses with which both fathers respond to perceived violations of justice and the natural order help to shatter that order, characterizing them ethically and giving each play its distinctive dramatic and intellectual force.[17]

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11

Oedipus' εἴδωλον, "Lear's shadow"
(*Oedipus at Colonus* 110, *King Lear* 1.4.222)

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Abstract

The essay analyses the principle correspondences between the themes of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The double plot of the Shakespearean tragedy reworks and expands Sophocles' interwoven themes of sovereignty and paternity which simultaneously contaminate both the bonds of kinship and power relationships. Resorting to poetic retrieval or quotation, or to more elusive recollection – exclusion-vagrancy-resilience; blindness-madness; endurance-(re)action; dynastic and generational conflict – the possibility emerges that *King Lear*, though its perspective is of course Elizabethan, takes up certain of the main ideas behind Sophocles' Theban plays, but with the specific intention of assuming and dramatizing the space-time of liminality and of the transformation of the aged king. This space-time, only presumed and never confronted by the surviving Sophoclean tragedies that fall between the end of *Oedipus Rex* and the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus*, is the space-time of knowledge and consciousness that re-elaborates the shame and repudiates the guilt constantly evoked by the aged Oedipus, by now an anachronism to himself and about to undergo the miraculous consecration of his death.

Keywords: Sovereignty; paternity; kinship; political compromise; fall; resilience; liminality

1. Sources, Models, Echoes

Shakespearian criticism has accurately identified the sources of *King Lear*, a play whose title and main plot recalls the story of the aged king Leir and his three daughters, which has existed in var-

ious forms since the twelfth century. It first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historiae Regum Britanniae*, and continues with variations until the publication of the anonymous play *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir* in 1605, which is considered to be Shakespeare's most immediate and direct source. In the same way, in Philip Sidney's courtly and pastoral romance *Arcadia*, published in 1590, the main themes of the story of old Gloucester and his two sons are to be found (Melchiori 1989: xxxvii-xli). Parallel to this, textual analysis has discovered in the complex weaving of tragic dramaturgy the persistent presence of the language, techniques and *clichés* typical of popular theatre (Weimann 1988: 349ff. and 397).

The origin of the dramatized stories in the Matter of Britain, in history, chronicles, legends and their more recent rewritten versions, placed Shakespeare's tragedy on Lear in direct continuity with its public's shared knowledge and collective imaginary – *de te fabula agitur*. The incorporation of mimetic and expressive forms of dramatic tradition still very much alive at the time, from mimes to Moralities, satisfied customary expectations of enjoyment, guaranteed interaction between stage and spectator and aided the transmission of the new play's more powerful and more complex quality.

The Matter of Britain and the traditional techniques, which ensured that the tragedy of Lear complied with the most long-standing conventions of public taste, nonetheless seemed in the last analysis destined more to surprise and dismay than to satisfy. *King Lear* is unanimously recognized as the most complex of Shakespeare's tragedies, with its double plot structure from the formal point of view, its intricate selection and arrangement of subject matter from that of content (Melchiori 1989: xlix), and, furthermore, as the "greatest and most polyphonic" (Serpieri 2018). Right from the beginning of the first act, native sources and models fade into the background and become an integral part of the play. The sophisticated structure, where the sub-plot runs parallel to and often intersects the main plot may be considered as an advanced version of the multiple plot so often utilized by Shakespeare in the comedies. Nevertheless, the range of themes, developed with a great wealth of motifs and dynamics, bring to

mind those works of classical antiquity which Renaissance humanism had helped to disseminate.[1]

It is Sophocles, more than Aeschylus or Euripides whose shadow may be discerned behind the double plot of *King Lear*, and in particular the Sophocles of the three Theban plays. In these, *Antigone*, the oldest one, written without any doubt in 442, and *Oedipus at Colonus* written in 406/405, with *Oedipus Rex* somewhere in the middle, probably belonging to the post-Periclean period 430-425 (Beltrametti 2012), Sophocles had come back again and again to working almost obsessively on the grandiose theme of regal and paternalistic sovereignty, twisted within the vicious circles of blood relationships and political covenants, the same theme of corruption which runs through both plot and sub-plot of *King Lear*. In the first tragedy, *Antigone*, composed in the most affluent years of Pericles' democracy, Sophocles had staged the harshness and trouble of the beginning of Creon's reign, founded on a political compromise (161-210) and obstructed by a tenacious resistance on the part of the aristocracy, which was generated by loyalty to the bonds of blood and kinship. With *Oedipus Rex*, he had created the tragedy *par excellence* of personal power, with its cargo of crimes of deadly transgression and life-threatening violence dealt to one another by blood relations with the purpose of maintaining or gaining sovereignty. With the posthumous *Oedipus at Colonus*, he had returned to the figure of the aged king, exhausted and destitute, but whose deeds are nevertheless once more absolute in their capacity not only to curse his male heirs, who are struggling against one another for the throne, but also to offer his devastated body as a promise and a gift of salvation for the city of Athens for not rejecting him, that city which had first and most drastically of all the others abolished the monarchy and demonized the king into a tyrant.

Shakespeare's old, crazed, vagabond king, lost on the tempest-torn heath after dividing his kingdom between two of his three daughters inevitably evokes the aged Oedipus, ravaged, beggared and blind, at Colonus. Both of them are all that remains of

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1 On the close relationship between the humanists, classical antiquity and Tudor politics, see Weimann 1988: 284-90.

kings who have abdicated their power, and in this way have unleashed a savage civil war between their sons or daughters, and thus the turmoil of dynastic crisis. But the double plot of *Lear* seems at many points of its dramatic resolution to echo *Antigone*. The theme of brotherhood that degenerates into the fratricide of Eteocles and Polyneices clearly underlies the story of Gloucester's sons and is maintained in the deaths of both Regan and Gonerill, the first of whom is poisoned by the second who then stabs herself to the heart, having murdered her sister and rival to the hand of Edmund. Yet again, the family catastrophe that overwhelms Lear seems to replicate the carnage that ensues around Creon. The retribution that strikes Lear who has rejected the humility of Cordelia, his youngest and dearest daughter, had also fallen on Creon, who had completely denied kinship and paternity in the name of positive laws and civic principles. And finally, the progressive knowledge and understanding of himself that Lear undergoes in the storm that shakes the heavens and his mind, his recognition of himself as 'Nothing', beneath the masks and ornaments of authority, behind the 'Everything' that he was told he was and that he believed himself to be, brings into the foreground the Oedipus of the most famous Theban tragedy, the *anagnorisis* of the king, of the elected one (Delcourt 1981, Nicolai 2018, Beltrametti 2003) who discovers himself to be a monster (Beltrametti 2012).

Sophocles seems apparent throughout the two interwoven plots of *King Lear*. The themes and even the characters of the Greek dramatist seem to inhabit the deep structures of Shakespeare's tragedy, which could almost be considered as a reworking of the Theban plays in an Elizabethan key. The old who are by now spoilt and disenchanted by life – Lear calls them "sophisticated" (3.4.104) – are relegated to blindness or madness, to vagrancy or beggary, as liminal conditions of a suspension necessary to the opening towards or the conquest of a new knowledge or a new clarity of vision; the young are drunk with power more than even their fathers were, and already corrupted by its ways. They too are 'sophisticated', like Gonerill and Regan, the eldest and middle daughters of Lear, like Cornwall, Regan's greedy husband, and like Edmund, Gloucester's unscrupulous bastard son. And then, on the other hand, there are the vulnerable young,

pure, spontaneous, defenceless in their naivety, like Edgar-Tom o' Bedlam, Gloucester's misjudged legitimate son, the "[u]naccomodated man" (as Lear calls him: 3.4.105), the eccentric misfit, disguised as a mad beggar and supposedly possessed by "the foul fiend" (3.4.59),[2] and like Cordelia, Lear's unappreciated daughter.

There exists no document attesting to Shakespeare's knowledge of Ancient Greek, nor to his having seen performances of Greek drama, but many recent studies bring credible evidence to bear upon the diffusion of the Classics, including Greek texts, in Elizabethan England and consequently legitimate the belief in the Humanist content of Shakespeare's dramaturgy (see e.g. Burrow 2013; Demetriou and Pollard 2017). And in the specific case of King Lear, a multiplicity of signs, disseminated at various levels of the tragedy, seem to be there on purpose to guide the reader and the audience towards its most recondite origins, and to discover how Shakespeare in the fullness of his mature powers succumbed to the ascendency of the ancient world and more particularly to a playwright's epiphany on meeting not with Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, not with the Euripides of the *Phoenician Women*, but with Sophocles' versions of the Theban myths.

2. The Wittenberg Effect

The vexed question of Shakespeare's relationship with Greek drama, that is, whether he was aware of it and, if so, how well, has not yet been conclusively settled. Nonetheless it is impossible to ignore the many authoritative studies following those of Freud (1900), Murray (1914) and Starobinski (1961), which famously aver the similarities of the Shakespearian character Hamlet with the Greek characters Oedipus and Orestes, or, again, the references to Euripides' *Alcestis* in the plot of *The Winter's Tale* (Wilson 1984, Most 2004, Dewar-Watson 2009, Wofford 2018). Furthermore, the

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2 The term "fiend" recurs often, but the character of Tom o' Bedlam closely recalls the figure of the *yurodivyl*, the Holy Fool or Fool-for-Christ, typical of the ascetic practices of Orthodox Christianity and linked to the Fools for the cause of Christ according to the definition of Paul of Tarsus in the First Letter to the Corinthians and Letter 11 to the Hebrews.

English translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, carried out by Sir Thomas North in 1579 on the French version by Jacques Amyot, is an important and constant background presence that should never be forgotten. Shakespeare definitely drew heavily on this text for the Roman plays, but there is the possibility that he also used it to satisfy his interest in Greek culture. And Sophocles, in particular, could have met this requirement, with his Theban tragedies which dramatized on the stage the theme of the continual strengthening and then the reciprocal spoiling of the combination of political power and kinship, so typical and intrinsic a part of Renaissance courts and in this case of the English monarchy.

In 1534, in Leipzig, Joachim Camerarius had translated and commentated the three plays in Latin,[3] and Philipp Melanchthon,[4] who was professor of Greek at Wittenberg from 1518, gave public readings in the city from Luther's *Studium* – he had become, over the years, a friend of Luther's and his close collaborator.[5] How is it possible, then, to fail to imagine a Wittenberg effect, an impact that the cultural attraction and brilliance that this exceptional, ground-breaking city must have had on Europe, animated by the teaching of such prodigies as Luther and Melanchthon, besides by their close friendship and collaboration. Wittenberg, where the translation, commentary and reading of the Bible went on in parallel with the translation and reading of the classics, criss-crossing them and at the same time profoundly modifying cultural conventions, must have been the most powerful magnet for all the European intelligentsia of the period, and of this phenome-

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3 My intention is to further explore the Latin translation of Camerarius elsewhere. Here I confine myself to emphasizing the similarities, in Sophocles and Shakespeare, between images suggested by their words which are independent of any precise lexical correspondence.

4 Melanchthon translated the tragedies of Euripides, published posthumously in 1562, already translated into Latin by Erasmus in 1506. For the relationship with Sophocles, see Lurie 2012.

5 In 1521 Melanchthon published the *Loci communes rerum theologicarum*, the first exposition of Luther's theses and of reformed theology. In 1522 he collaborated with Luther in the German translation of the New Testament and then, in 1524, of the Old Testament and these translations became the Luther Bible that was published at Wittenberg by Hans Lufft in 1534.

non Shakespeare bears witness through some of his characters. The University of Wittenberg was the one Hamlet's fellow student Horatio had just left and where Hamlet himself wanted to return (*Hamlet* 1.2).

Sophocles' versions of the Theban myth, with the three paradigmatic scenes of fratricide, the fall of a king and his reintegration into the Athens of Theseus and its proto-democracy, must have seemed to sixteenth-century Humanists, as they do to us today, the greatest and the most thought-provoking interpretations of these myths and of their principal motifs. Confirmation of a generalized attention for the Theban stories in the culture of the time and consequently in the courts may be found in Lodovico Dolce's *Giocasta*, a rewriting of the *Phoenician Women* by Euripides, published in 1549, and its adaptation in English, with the title *Jocasta*, by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh, performed in 1566 and first published in 1573 (Miola 2002, Dewar-Watson 2010, Bigliazzi 2014). But the apotheosis of Sophocles may be considered to have occurred with the performance of *Oedipus Rex* in the vernacularized version of Orsatto Giustiniani (Mazzoni 2013: 280) on the occasion of the Carnival of 1585 and the inauguration of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, designed by Andrea Palladio. The stage settings by Vincenzo Scamozzi reproducing the seven streets of Thebes became an integral part of the structure of the theatre. There can be no good reason to believe that Shakespeare remained ignorant of this event in Vicenza, a momentous one in theatrical history,[6] at the very time he was using the Veneto region as the setting for four important plays, *The Taming of the Shrew* (before 1594?) in Padua, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (1594-1597) in Verona, and, in Venice, *The Merchant of Venice* (1594-1597) and *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice* (1602-1611).[7]

6 With the reference to the first performance at the Olimpico I have no intention of suggesting that Shakespeare had any idea of the theatre's scenography but simply to call attention to Sophocles' theatrical success and especially that of *OT* in Europe at the end of that century.

7 For dates of composition see Melchiori 1989: xxv-xxxiii.

3. The Shadows of Kings and Fathers, the Deaths of Children. Continuity

It is not the expertly crafted structure of *King Lear* that recalls Sophocles. The elaborate but at the same time geometrically balanced composition[8] of a Shakespeare at the peak of his technical and poetic capacity is as different as it could be from the simple structure typical of Greek tragedy so well described by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. The two plots, the main one concerning Lear and the subplot of Gloucester's tragedy, are sometimes parallel, sometimes mirror one another and occasionally meet when the characters of both stories encounter each other and interact, giving rise to a spiral movement which is much more baroque than classical. But the baroque framework seems created to enable the greatest possible evocation and expansion of Sophoclean themes, to multiply their motifs, to develop them in a greater variety of situations and to extend the time and space of their representation. The two old men, Lear and Gloucester, the madman and the blind man, mirror one another, duplicating and differentiating the themes of decadence and crisis of regal and paternal authority which distinguishes Sophocles' Oedipus. Gonerill and, the perhaps even greater hypocrite, Regan, are, in this case, female enactors of the Sophoclean theme of the desire for the throne that overwhelms filial piety – the accusation that the aged Oedipus makes against his two sons in the grove at Colonus – and Edmund is the Shakespearean personification of this desire. Cordelia and Edgar, the supportive children, take up and amplify (in the case of Edgar, to the highest degree) the theme of care[9] which belonged to Antigone and, though to a lesser extent, to Ismene.

The principal themes of the crisis of authority and of the ensuing conflict between fathers and children and also that between brothers could have arisen in Shakespeare's work completely inde-

8 Melchiori (1989: xlix) mentions a mathematical centre to the play, which corresponds to Lear's rant during the storm in 3.2.1-24.

9 The theme of *nursing* of the father, is evidenced in the story Edgar tells his half-brother Edmund as he lies dying after being mortally wounded by Edgar in a duel (5.3.180-98).

pendently from any connection with Sophocles, simply as reflecting the transformations in history which were in the process of occurring between the reigns of Elizabeth and James. But the numerous coincidences of particular images and expressions sound very much like echoes of the ancient dramatist in the work of the modern one.

We are at the end of the first act of *King Lear*. In scene four, the results of Lear's abdication, and the unjust division of his realm between his two eldest daughters, Gonerill and Regan to the detriment of Cordelia, now married to the king of France, are in the process of being fully realized. The Earl of Kent, the first character to come on stage in the opening scene to introduce the story, and among the last to leave it, in the company of Edgar and Albany, at the play's conclusion (5.3.311-25), has come back disguised as a servant after Lear has banished him for having warned him, the king, of his folly and alerted him to the danger of the servile flattery of his two elder daughters and their husbands (1.1.140-88).[10] At this point the Fool enters after Lear has complained of his absence. The Fool had been keeping away as he was sorry for Cordelia's departure, and now with the sincerity that his status as "bitter fool" (133) allows him, and between one piece of doggerel and another, he serves as a mirror to his king, revealing to him the madness into which he has fallen, the zero, the nothing, the empty pea-pod, the "shadow" he has become:

> LEAR   Dost thou call me fool, boy?
> FOOL   All thy other titles thou hast given away *that thou wast*
>   *born with.*
> (1.4.141-3; my emphasis)

> FOOL   Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care
>   for her frowning. *Now thou art an O without a figure.* I am
>   better than thou art now. I am a Fool. *Thou art nothing.* [*To*
>   *Gonerill*] Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue. So your face

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10 Kent throughout the play, whether as himself or in disguise, is present on stage longer than any other character, and wherever he happens to be it is he who, by word or deed, moves the action along. Indeed it is Kent himself who, as narrator, informs Edgar, after he has recognized him, of Lear's story (5.3.203-20).

bids me, though you say nothing. Mum, mum!
He that keeps nor crust nor crumb,
Weary of all, shall want some.
[*Points to Lear*] *That's a shelled peascod.*
(1.4.182-90; my emphasis)

LEAR Does any here know me? ᵠWhyᵠ, this is not Lear. Does
Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes? Either his
notion weakens, ᵠorᵠ his discernings are lethargied – Ha!
ᵠsleeping orᵠ waking? ᵠSurelᵠ 'tis not so. Who is it that can
tell me who I am?
ᶠFOOLᶠ *Lear's shadow.*
(1.4.217-22; my emphasis)

The new order that Lear hoped to create has recoiled against him, becoming the external sign of an internal state of confusion and mental blindness – "old fond eyes", it is thus that Lear refers to his eyes that weep for Gonerill's betrayal, and he threatens to pluck them out and throw them into quicklime (1.4.293-6) – that have overwhelmed him for Cordelia's "small fault" (1.4.258). The old king curses Gonerill and leaves the palace of Albany, with the intent of joining Regan and Cornwall at their home instead, but in point of fact beginning his time of vagrancy and expiation.

Lear's shadow, that from this point onwards starts to haunt the tragedy, cannot fail to recall the shadow, the "ghost of the man", of the aged Oedipus, the εἴδωλον under whose sign the tragedy of Colonus has its commencement. Oedipus knows he has reached the time and place of the end and of reconciliation. Blind, lame and a beggar, with his daughter Antigone as his guide, he arrives at Colonus, near Athens, to hear the expressions of fear and disgust that his wretched figure prompts in the inhabitant of the neighbourhood, who should have welcomed him. It is Oedipus himself, as he prays to the goddesses of the sacred grove, who asks for mercy for the poor shade, ἄθλιον εἴδωλον, that he has become, for his body that is no longer what it once was, οὐ γὰρ τόδ᾽ ἀρχαῖον δέμας: "Pity this poor ghost of the man Oedipus! For in truth it is the former living body no more" (*OC* 109-10).[11]

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11 References to the Greek text are to Sophocles 2008; if not otherwise stated, translations are from Sophocles 1889.

And the motif of the king's degradation does not simply launch the plots, but it reappears at the crucial moment of recognition, of the protagonists' new awareness that reverses the progression of events and indicates the break, the end of the fall and the beginning of resilience. Oedipus soon regains the tenor and the attitude of a sovereign. The first episode sees Ismene arrive at Colonus with the news that he will be the guarantee, dead or alive, of the victory of one side or the other of the civil war between his sons for the sovereignty of Thebes (*OC* 361-90). And it is at this point that Oedipus rediscovers the kingliness that will survive his bodily ruin and rise again from its annihilation:

> ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ   ὅτ' οὐκέτ' εἰμί, τηνικαῦτ' ἄρ' εἴμ' ἀνήρ;
> ΙΣΜΗΝΗ   νῦν γὰρ θεοί σ' ὀρθοῦσι, πρόσθε δ' ὤλλυσαν.
> (*OC* 393-4)

> [OEDIPUS When I no longer exist then I am a man? ISMENE Yes, for the gods now raise you up; but before they worked your ruin.]

For Lear and for Gloucester, his double, the pathway towards self-awareness and resilience in the play is a much longer one. Lear's, and also Gloucester's redemption only has its beginning in 4.6. The Fool, an illuminating counterfigure of his king, has once again disappeared (3.6). The storm is over, after battering the heath and overturning Lear's sanity (3.2) to the point where he discovers compassion for his Fool (3.4.26) and then for Edgar, the poor madman of Bedlam (3.4.104-7), and, in this way, becomes a man among men, able to immerse himself in relationships that royal ceremonial had up till now hindered him from joining. Now, in the play's greatest scene (4.6) in which the time has come for madmen to lead the blind,[12] the blinded Gloucester manages to wring the truest wisdom from insanity. Gloucester, whose eyeballs had been trodden beneath Cornwall's feet (3.7.66-83), has just mimed on stage the climb up the cliffs of Dover, the fall from the top, apparent death and salvation. He has dramatized the theatrical metaphor of a path of expiation and rebirth that the words of his son Edgar-Tom have accompanied step by step, in a dialogue of the

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12 Reference is to Gloucester's line: "'Tis the time's plague when madmen lead the blind" (4.6.49).

greatest poetical effect (4.6.1-80), and have described to him as fact. And as physical blindness sucks Gloucester back into delusion, the arrival of Lear, who has reached the depths of madness with the simulated trial of his daughters (3.6), turns everything around. The meeting and interchange of folly and blindness in the abyss into which the characters have plunged cause the first stirrings of resilience. Lear, in two tirades, one after the other, that precede his final self-discovery and his meeting with Cordelia (4.7), first ridicules the hypocritical adulation of his two elder daughters:

> LEAR Ha! Goneril ᶠwith a white beard?ᶠ They flattered me like a dog and told me I had ᶠtheᶠ white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything ᶠthatᶠ I said 'ay' and no' to was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o'their words: they told me I was everything, 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof. (4.6.96-104)

Then he denounces the deceptions of authority, the subterfuges that mask its crimes, the lies on the part of the powerful, who are weak with the strong and strong with the weak. Lear envisages authority as a farm dog barking at a beggar and making him flee, a 'solemn' image that Gloucester could see better with his ears, by listening to it barking, than with his eyes:

> LEAR   What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. See how yon justice rails upon yon simple thief. Hark in thine ear: Fchange places andF handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?
> GLOUCESTER Ay, sir.
> LEAR   And the creature run from the cur – there thou mightst behold the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office.
> Thou, rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand;
> Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back,
> Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
> For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.
> Through tattered clothes great vices do appear;
> Robes and furred gowns hide all. FPlate sin with gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
None does offend, none, I say none. I'll able 'em;
Take that of me, my friend, who have the power
To seal the accuser's lips.F Get thee glass eyes,
And like a scurvy politician seem
To see the things thou dost not. Now, Fnow, now, now,F
Pull off my boots; harder, harder, so.
(4.6.146-69)

And while Lear, with the madman's propensity for a language rich in imagery, is beginning to understand the world and the sense of history, Gloucester, for his part, starts to become aware of the significance of the full and painful mastery of his own feelings and his own knowledge:

GLOUCESTER The King is mad: how still is my vile sense,
That I stand up and have ingenious feeling
Of my huge sorrows? Better I were distract;
So should my thoughts be severed from my griefs,
And woes by wrong imaginations lose
The knowledge of themselves.
(4.6.274-9)

The transformation of Shakespeare's two old men, both noblemen and both fathers, is described through a web of metaphors woven of the same images and the same words as those portraying the redemption of the aged Oedipus. In the open spaces of the grove of the Eumenides (Avezzù 2008) or of the heath, backgrounds to the wandering and beggary of the protagonists, both Sophocles and Shakespeare first inscribe the disfigured bodies of the old men – the shadows of Oedipus and Lear, the empty eye-sockets of Oedipus and Gloucester – piercing images of disorder and dissolution which have infiltrated deeply both into the minds of the sovereigns and into the social body, figures of an instability which may only be put right with the overturning of the habits and conventions of perception and comprehension. Then each playwright, interpreting in his own way the motifs of liminality and reversal which are imposed by the attainment of the limit, retraces its resilience.

The separation of the kings and fathers from their past and from the false certainties which had caused them to lose their way is punctuated by the curses that Oedipus calls down upon his sons and upon Creon, figures of a power untempered by affection (*OC* 421-60; 951-2; 1372-89; and 1405-10) and that Lear cries out first against the more shameless Gonerill (1.4.267-81, 2.2.347-57) and then against Regan (2.2.455-75)[13] whose ill-concealed cruelty and deceitfulness he has at last perceived beneath the elegance and docility of her manners.

Redemption requires more drastic behaviour, and implies the reversal of the relationship madness/reason, the recognition of madness as a more authentic form of consciousness, indeed as a sort of liberated reason, and a different use of the senses. Oedipus, having by now reached the end of his peregrinations and also of the introspection facilitated by his blindness, tells the inhabitants of Colonus to see by means of the voice – φωνῇ γὰρ ὁρῶ ("In sound is my sight", *OC* 139). Gloucester begins to see Edmund's scheming against Edgar clearly, through Regan's words, from the very moment he is blinded by Cornwall (3.7.66-83) and then later he will be urged by Lear to see with his ears in order to free himself from false perceptions and from a view of life which is too repressed, inhibited by pseudo-wisdom and conformism (4.6.151).

Reversal occurs after the experience of the ultimate limit. When the inhabitants of Colonus arrive, Oedipus is seated on a jagged lump of rock, untouched by human hand, ἐπ᾽ἀξέστου πέτρου ("unshaped stone", *OC* 19), on the bronze threshold χαλκόπους ὁδός ("the bronze threshold of this land", *OC* 57) which is one of the defensive bastions of Athens, but also at the same time, according to poetic tradition,[14] one of the gates to Hades, the realm of the dead where Oedipus will disappear (*OC* 1590-7) without trace. Lear abdicates so that he may "unburdened crawl toward death" (1.1.40) and at the moment of awakening, just before he regains full sanity and recognizes his daughter Cordelia, he rebukes her for removing him from his tomb ("You do me wrong to

13 Corresponding to 2.4.155-65 and 261-75, respectively, should the long 2.2 follow the modern division into three scenes.

14 See *Iliad* 8, 13-18; Hesiod, *Theogony* 811-12.

take me out o' the grave", 4.7.45).

With the experience and the language of the ultimate limit is connected the motif of suffering. The discovery, near death, of having unwittingly suffered and endured rather than having acted intentionally, establishes the theme which belongs most specifically to the aged Oedipus – . . . ἔργα πεπονθότα μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα (*OC* 266-7: "I have been in suffering rather than doing"), ἔπασχον (*OC* 274: "I suffered", my translation), πέπονθα (*OC* 516, 595, 892, 896: "I have suffered") ἤνεγκον ἀέκων (*OC* 521-2; 964: "I suffered through unintended deeds"), ἔπαθον (*OC* 538: "I have suffered"), Oedipus repeats continuously, and in particular to Chorus, first in words (*OC* 265-74) then as a duet (*OC* 512-48), and to Creon, at the heart of the long rhesis on innocence (*OC* 960-90) – and Lear, on the storm-blasted heath, makes it his own: "I am a man / More sinned against than sinning" (3.2.59-60). Just as he, Lear, will also appropriate the *gnome* of the third *stasimon*: "Not to be born is, beyond all estimation, best (μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἄπαντα νικᾷ λόγον); but when a man has seen the light of day, this is next best by far, that with utmost speed he should go back from where he came" – the Chorus had sung in the antistrophe (*OC* 1224-7); "We came crying hither / . . . When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" – Lear tells Gloucester before being led away by Cordelia's attendants (4.6.174, 179-80).

The number and quality of the coincidences of motifs, words and images could be reason enough to consider *Oedipus at Colonus* as a kind of hypotext or strong reference text of *King Lear*. But the echoes put back on the table Sophocles' other, older Theban plays too. At the heart of the tempest and of the dramaturgy, in 3.2, in a speech of extraordinary intensity, Lear invokes the terrifying bluster of the heavens as an instrument of truth in the hands of the gods, as a jolt that can overthrow pretence and reveal closely-guarded and secret sins, that can even uncover the extreme guilt of incest hidden within a simulacrum of virtue. He, Lear, is a man who has suffered more wrong than he has done.

> LEAR   Let the great gods
> That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads
> Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,

That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
Unwhipped of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
Thou perjured, and thou simular of virtue
That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
Hast practised on man's life. Close pent-up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents and cry
These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
More sinned against than sinning.
(3.2.49-59)

Lear's speech in this case goes beyond Oedipus' suffering at Colonus and echoes almost *verbatim* the first Oedipus in the most tragic moment of *anagnorismos*, of his self-recognition, triggered by the famine of Thebes and arrived at by means of the relentless revelations that while they seem to relieve the sovereign of any guilt, they in fact drag him back into the abyss of his past. The exposure that Lear invokes from the storm coincides with the discovery of the horror that Oedipus finds hidden within himself, within this best of sovereigns, a marvel that hides corruption, κάλλος κακῶν ὕπουλον ("how fair-seeming was I", *OT* 1396), [15] an absolute sinner, so defiled by shame, αἴσχιστα ("all the foulest deeds") that he cannot do or say anything about, that just before he exits the stage he begs to be hidden, καλύψατε, or killed, φονεύσατε, or thrown into the sea, θαλάσσιον ἐκρίψατε, where he will no longer be visible, ἔνθα μήποτ᾽ εἰσόψεσθ᾽ ἔτι ("hide me somewhere beyond the land, or slay me, or cast me into the sea, where you will never behold me any longer", *OT* 1408-12). And this idea will be taken up in the long and important scene of 4.6, when the crazed Lear meets the blinded Gloucester and, after resuming the motif of the mask that hides blame (4.6.160-78) and commenting on the evil of being born (4.6.178-83), he prepares to leave the stage with the same expression as Oedipus Rex at the end of the scene with Jocasta, when he believes she has rejected him:

LEAR   No rescue? What a prisoner? I am even
The natural *fool of fortune*. Use me well,

15 References to the Greek text of *OT* are to Sophocles 1912; translations are from Sophocles 1887.

You shall have ransom. . . .
(4.6.186-8; my emphasis)

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ ὁποῖα χρήζει ῥηγνύτω· τοὐμὸν δ’ ἐγώ,
κεἰ σμικρόν ἐστι, σπέρμ’ ἰδεῖν βουλήσομαι.
αὕτη δ’ ἴσως, φρονεῖ γὰρ ὡς γυνὴ μέγα,
τὴν δυσγένειαν τὴν ἐμὴν αἰσχύνεται.
ἐγὼ δ’ ἐμαυτὸν παῖδα τῆς Τύχης νέμων
τῆς εὖ διδούσης οὐκ ἀτιμασθήσομαι.
τῆς γὰρ πέφυκα μητρός· οἱ δὲ συγγενεῖς
μῆνές με μικρὸν καὶ μέγαν διώρισαν.
τοιόσδε δ’ ἐκφὺς οὐκ ἂν ἐξέλθοιμ’ ἔτι
ποτ’ ἄλλος, ὥστε μὴ ’κμαθεῖν τοὐμὸν γένος.
(*OT* 1076-85)

[OEDIPUS Break forth what will! Be my race ever so lowly, I crave
to learn it. That woman perhaps—for she is proud with more than
a woman's pride – feels ashamed of my lowly origin. But I, *who
hold myself son of Fortune* that gives good, will not be dishonored.
She is the mother from whom I spring, and the months, my kins-
men, have marked me sometimes lowly, sometimes great. Such
being my heritage, never more can I prove false to it, or keep from
searching out the secret of my birth. (My emphasis)]

The aged Lear, like the aged Oedipus of Colonus, revisits his story
from the beginning. The function of time[16] that Sophocles had dis-
tributed throughout the diptych and that dominated the tragedy of
the old Oedipus, is realized through memories and fears that sur-
face in the madness of the final Lear who seems to recall his past
identity through the beginning and end of the story of the Theban
king. Now, emptied of everything, deprived of the adulation of
his subjects and his courtiers, 'nothing' remains of Lear, the same
nothing that Oedipus knew he had become when he arrived at
Colonus. But the Fool of Fortune, the useful tool and plaything of
Chance, that Lear recognizes himself to be, foregrounds the mem-
ory of the first Oedipus, the King. Thus, the guilty crimes of the
powerful, the dark side of power itself hidden beneath the pomp

16 On the function of time in the dramaturgy of *Oedipus at Colonus* and
of *King Lear* see, respectively, the contributions of Guido Avezzù and Silvia
Bigliazzi in this volume.

of authority that Lear desires to expose, are still those ultimate sins that Oedipus had discovered in his own past and of which incest remained the paradigm.

Neither is *Antigone* missing in this great Shakespearian tragedy. The conclusion of *King Lear*, crystallized in the image of the desperation of the aged sovereign who comes on stage with his daughter's corpse in his arms and then dies (5.3.255-309) seems to have been modelled on the exode of *Antigone* (1257-76), where Creon comes back on stage from the cave of death where he has immured Antigone with the body of his son in his arms, and falls to the ground when he learns that his wife too has killed herself in the palace, overcome by grief. But not only this. The whole of the long third scene of the fifth act which concludes the play, the scene in which all the characters appear one by one to die one after the other and one because of the other, a scene without joy, dark and savage – "All's cheerless, dark and deadly" (5.3.288), says Kent, as soon as he has revealed himself to Lear – is interwoven with memories, almost quotations, from Antigone. The scene, which opens with Edmund's triumphant order to imprison Lear and Cordelia (5.3.1-19), continues with the confrontation between the two elder sisters (5.3.62-106) and culminates in the duel between Gloucester's two sons in which Edgar kills Edmund. Edgar reveals his true identity to his dying brother, and as he does so he seems like a new Antigone, a wandering beggar beside that father who has just died of a broken heart but with a smile, having recognized his legitimate son and blessed him before the duel. And before Edmund is carried away to die, on being informed of the deaths of both Regan and Gonerill, he salutes them, superimposing marriage and death, "I was contracted to them both; all three / Now marry in an instant" (5.3.227-8), repeating the same figural and linguistic short-circuit characteristically reiterated by Antigone. Then, just as Creon did, he retracts too late the secret mandate to hang Cordelia, which was supposed to simulate her suicide (5.3.250-3).

Marriage and death, a double fratricide, albeit carried out differently between the pairs of brothers and sisters, an implacable sequence of deaths of fathers and children of two interconnected families, with the single exception of the innocent Edgar, un-

tainted by power. The tragedy of Lear that began on the pattern of *Oedipus at Colonus* ends by reclaiming *Antigone* and in this way reversing Sophocles' dramaturgy. It does so through ever more frequent echoes of images and words, by greatly extending the original dramatic segments and by ensuring that the atmosphere of "decay" (5.3.286) and of the collapse of a world into 'nothing' prevails over the gift of salvation promised by Oedipus to Theseus *in extremis*.

4. The Two Hostile Brothers and the Three Caskets, Blindness and Madness. Discontinuity

The echoes of Sophocles' Theban plays, revisited starting from the final posthumous tragedy, are too specific and also far too numerous in *King Lear*, to be considered as being merely fortuitous. They are indeed so literal that they cannot be passed off as the result of the consultation of handbooks or summaries of mythology in general terms. Neither do they owe anything to Seneca. On the contrary, the references to Sophocles even elude the contemporary interpretative strategy, in its literary form, of intertextuality, which is too often applied as a sort of universal key to texts, even to forms of poetic memory independent of books which rely on auditory echoes from public lectures or theatre, which could neither have foreseen this nor endorsed it. The matter, the structure and the languages of *King Lear* all forbid the hypothesis of simple *en collage* citation. Themes, scenes, and speeches from Sophocles appear as if dropped into the plotting of the Matter of Britain and then are expanded into a virtuoso design, both dual and unitary at the same time. The story of Oedipus and of his four children is here divided into two plots that mirror one another, conferring depth and resistance to the theme of decay and decadence, of the crisis of paternity and sovereignty which contaminates or at least jeopardizes the younger generation. And in the poetic universe of *King Lear*, where madmen accompany blind men, the blindness which Oedipus inflicted on himself by tearing out his eyes so as never again to see the world nor those who stared at him in horror, is divided into two states, madness and blindness, that follow

and defer to one another continually through metaphor and metonymy but never coincide completely.

With the creation of *King Lear*, Shakespeare seems to push the dualistic implications of his work, constrained between traditional culture and the horizons of humanism, between old and new theatre, to the absolute limit. He appears to handle his legacy of legend at a moment when he was fascinated by the Sophoclean dramaturgy of paternity and sovereignty but simultaneously to be compelled by the necessity to transcend this and contend with the urgency of the history of his own times.

The dramatic construction of the play is no longer that of *mise en abyme* so admirably executed in *Hamlet* a few years previously, where the performance by the strolling players, that sort of "mousetrap", imitates on stage at the palace the plot of the killing of the king, old Hamlet, replicating the manner in which it happened but abridging the action. In *King Lear* Shakespeare does not play with embedding, but with expansion, increasing the poles of conflict and the scenes of recognition which paradoxically allude to the lack of any true understanding the characters might have had of one another – Lear cannot distinguish between his cruel daughters and his kind one, Gloucester falls into the trap laid by his bastard son who slanders to his own advantage his legitimate half-brother and Gloucester's true son. The result of their misrecognition is dramatized on the stage as degradation: on the one hand, the decay of kings and noblemen, of "sophisticated" minds into beggarly halfwits and vagabonds, and their belated recovery of a now powerless nobility, on the other, the extreme humiliation of self as a way of redemption and salvation, which is put into practice by the "unaccommodated", by Kent in the guise of a servant and by Edgar dressed in the rags of an outcast from a madhouse.

Divided into two and developed in the two plots derived from the Matter of Britain, the ancient story of Oedipus generates an extraordinary wealth of situations and images. The father of two sons who wage war against one another and of two daughters who, in their various ways, sustain him, is divided into the figures of Lear, the father of three daughters and Gloucester, the father of two sons. The opposition of gender which worked for Sophocles

no longer does so for Shakespeare, especially as his times had been dominated for so long by powerful queens and their conspiracies against one another. The ancient dividing-line between caring daughters and sons who had preferred the throne to their father (OC 421-60) would no longer have rung true in the England of Elizabeth and James. By now, power conflicts involve women no less than men, thus complicating the dynastic intrigue with the erotic plot of the two sisters who dispute the possession of Edmund. And Shakespeare also varies the underlying structure of the sisters' story in Lear's household and that of the brothers' story in Gloucester's. Between the two brothers, the motif of fraternity degenerates as the succession to power becomes imminent. It follows the formula of the Theban fratricide up to a point, but breaks with it when introducing first, the idea of a bastard who compensates for his inferiority by the use of cunning and then that of the legitimate son who, falsely accused of wanting to kill his father, disguises himself in the rags of a Bedlam beggar, a madman, possessed by demons. The relationship between the three sisters and the rejection of Cordelia by her father, Lear, who does not recognize the value of her discretion, is constructed on the basis of the traditional motif of the fable of the three caskets, of gold, silver and lead, used before in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Divided between the madness of Lear and the blindness of Gloucester, in *King Lear* Oedipus' blindness changes its significance. Oedipus, who had torn out his eyes after the discovery of the truth of his past and the shameful actions that he had experienced and understood as representing trials overcome by strength and intelligence, reappears at Colonus as a blind man with the wisdom of the masters of truth, seers, poets and augur-kings: his blindness to the world had been the price and the possibility for him to look inside and behind himself and to understand, to gain that more archaic and sacred dimension of sovereignty that in the fullness of his royal functions he had lost.

The physical blinding of Oedipus is a point of arrival, the sign of the gap that lies between the delirium of secular omniscience and omnipotence of the early Oedipus and the wisdom and self-awareness that underlies the character of the old man of Colonus. The initial metaphorical blindness of both Lear and

Gloucester is a starting point, the sign or the symptom of the darkening of vision, the loss of reference points, of true madness taken for normality. Neither of these two characters, as opposed to Oedipus, who wanted to see too much and too deeply, are able to see or understand the reality surrounding them, but believe in the projections or hallucinations of their minds and in the falsity of their flatterers. And their paranoia will last until Lear's encounter with other forms of madness – first the lucid, Erasmian folly of his Fool and then the sacred madness of the beggarly Edgar-Tom o'Bedlam in the cosmic fury of the storm (3.4) – dissolves the opacity of his spirit, and until physical blindness means, for Gloucester, the discovery of reality so that, notwithstanding the destruction of his eyes, he becomes aware of the obstacles that, paradoxically, had made him stumble when he could actually see them (4.1.20-6).

But now the cards have been reshuffled where is Sophocles?

5. Exclusion, Reintegration, Liminality. Oedipus' gift, Lear's 'Nothing'

The two Sophoclean tragedies of Oedipus, a distanced diptych with the strong intention of revisionism, are tragedies of the exclusion and reintegration of a king. They can be read as a pair: the older play of the two, through the investigation of Oedipus, unveils not only the monster that lies hidden in the best of kings but also the violence, the criminality, necessary to the establishment of personal power; the final, posthumous tragedy reverses the perspective and discovers in the monster, in this humiliated Oedipus who has almost descended to the level of a thing in the course of his beggared vagrancy, the charismatic and powerful sovereign claimed from Theseus and from Athens by Polyneices and Creon as a bastion of salvation. The first tragedy prepares us for the exclusion, better, the self-exclusion, of the saviour king who is found guilty of the recent emergency, the second dramatizes the difficult, but opportune reintegration of this king in a new reality, the reality of Athens which has banished its kings and abolished the monarchy. The first play ends with the self-blinding of Oedipus who

in this way eliminates the sight of worldly appearance, and indeed desires to be helped to disappear himself. The second opens on the figure of the blind Oedipus, guided by Antigone to the *locus amoenus* of the sacred grove of Colonus, the completion of his destiny. What we still read by Sophocles, and what Melanchthon read at Wittenberg in 1545 in Camerarius' Latin translation and with his commentary, are the plays of the first and third moments of the transformation of the old king/father. The tragedy of *King Lear*, with all the Sophoclean memories with which it appears to be studded, slips into the space left by Sophocles and fills it perfectly. It is the tragedy of wandering and of liminality in search of salvation, for Edgar-Tom o' Bedlam and Kent or, of the end, for Lear and Gloucester.

King Lear takes on the space-time that runs between *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, the time of transformation, spent in the *locus horridus* of the tempest-torn heath. And, while in the sacred grove of the Eumenides, the goddesses who have been transformed and converted from vengeance to benevolent concord, the metamorphosis of the aged, exhausted Oedipus is completed and from the ashes of the old sovereign his authority is reborn, there is, on the other hand, no redemption, no conversion in *King Lear*. The death of Cordelia, the sacrificial figure of self-determination and authenticity, signals the collapse of both ethics and politics; the old die having understood too late; the young, who had carried their ambition too far through exasperation with the power of the old and had fought them and one another savagely to gain this power for themselves – Gonerill and Regan, Cornwall and Edmund – fall victims to their own plotting. A few blameless characters, saved by their ingenuousness, are left to take responsibility for the recovery of the realm. The aged Kent ready to follow his king to death, Albany and Edgar, the least corrupted by the machinations of power, but also the least capable of governing.

Change is the core element of Sophoclean dramaturgy: in the most ancient tragedies the archaic figures of the warrior, the sovereign and the father are called into question. Such characters in plays written after the events of 411 are rehabilitated and re-introduced. Change is the sign of Sophocles' profound political awareness. His theatre knows how to express the tension that is

unleashed in cities, that may sometimes flare up between the innovatory arguments and dynamics of politics and the conservative resistance of the collective ethos. And he also has the language to represent the dream of innovation, from 411 onwards justified as a return to the constitution of his/their forebears. Shakespeare, in *Lear*, captures a world that in the first years of James I's reign seems to implode upon itself without finding redemption either in generational change or in a possible brotherly solidarity. A world, in short, that from the tempest-torn moor returns, more corrupt than ever to imprison itself in the palace, and plunge back into the closed, secret chambers of a diseased power, impossible to heal even in the light of the auspices of Albany to Kent and Edgar "[r]ule in this realm and the gored state sustain" (5.3.319). Sophocles opens the grove of the Eumenides on to the city that Antigone descries in the distance on her arrival. In Shakespeare it is the desolate heath that penetrates the palaces and sweeps them away.

Jan Kott, in a celebrated essay, read *Lear* as the premise of Beckett's *Endgame*. I believe he could not have made a more pertinent judgement, especially when he pointed out occasions when sense is swallowed up by nonsense, verisimilitude by the surreal. This comparative and close reading does not intend to go any further than Shakespeare. It stops here having tried to make evident in King Lear the persistent and pervasive memories of Sophocles' Theban tragedies and to understand how these memories generated a deeply-felt dramaturgic challenge and the first reductio ad absurdum of sovereignty and paternity. How the threads extracted from the ancient tragedies of king and father who changes and renews himself from what remains of him were rewoven by Shakespeare in a new portrait of the king and the father as 'Fool' and as 'Nothing'.

Translation by Susan Payne

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12

Time and Nothingness: *King Lear*

Silvia Bigliazzi

Abstract

Lear's division of the kingdom among his daughters splits his own time into a before, when he was a King, and an after, when he is no longer one. The action of cutting, separating, allotting is symbolically aligned with measuring affection quantitatively within parental relations. It brings about the subversion of roles, power, and meaning, precipitating time into the nothingness of death and unbelief in both the future and the transcendental. Taking up a topic which he had already dealt with in such an early play as *Richard II*, Shakespeare deals once again with the effects of abdication on both the socio-political and the private levels. By divesting himself of the title of King, like Richard before him, Lear reduces himself to nothing within the symbolic system of the power signs he has handled until then. Once reduced to an "O without a figure", as the Fool tells him, he discovers the meaning of being a 'thing', the 'real thing' in fact, outside that system. Lear's famous interrogation of what is a man, chiming in with Montaigne's own identical question, passes through an experience of nothingness which looks back at the story of Oedipus, and, at the same time, raises questions about how one's choices determine one's 'being' or 'non-being'. This essay discusses ideas of nothingness in relation to a subjective experience of time and to its dramatisation on stage, and considers the many ways in which the play echoes and seems to respond, conceptually and performatively, to issues Sophocles had raised centuries earlier.

Keywords: Shakespeare; King Lear; Oedipus; nothingness; time

1. Time and No-Time

We are accustomed to thinking that time and nothingness lie at the core of all ideas of the tragic. Northrop Frye (1996), David

Kastan (1982), Matthew Wagner (2014 and 2018), and Rebecca Bushnell (2016 and 2018), among others, have argued that the tragic vision is qualified by a linear view of time, according to which nothing can be "undone", and "all experience vanishes, not simply into the past, but into nothingness, annihilation" (Frye 1996: 3). Tragedy leads us to experience in the present the anxieties of that "directional, irrreversible, and finite" time that leads us to death (Kastan 1982: 80). As Wagner and Bushnell have suggested, that present is not a simple 'now', but multidirectional and 'thick', phenomenologically stratified with layers of past experiences and future expectations. Or in Bergsonian terms, it is an elongated *durée*, more dense than any single point in a linear succession of moments in time. On stage the thickness of the now may be displayed in many ways, making it border on subjective time, strictly, and tragically, intertwined with the subject's sense of an ending. As Heidegger famously argued, our being is constituted by being in time, and it is only in dying that, he says, "I can say absolutely, I am" (1992: 318; see also Wagner 2014: 9-10; Bushnell 2016: 2):

> The certainty that "I myself am in that I will die," is *the basic certainty of Dasein itself*. It is a genuine statement of Dasein, while *cogito sum* is only the semblance of such a statement. If such pointed formulations mean anything at all, then the appropriate statement to Dasein in its being would have to be *sum moribundus* ["I am in dying"], *moribundus* not as someone gravely ill or wounded, but insofar as I am, I am moribundus, The MORIBUNDUS *first gives* the SUM *its sense*. (Heidegger 1992: 316-17)

Perhaps in no other Shakespearean tragedy as in *King Lear* a sense of the complexities of time conflating origin and ending in the 'now', as both dramatic and psychological categories, invades the play from its very outset. Or, at least, not in the same way. What is peculiar about this play is that its beginning inaugurates a new temporality entirely unconnected with what lies in the 'before' of the offstage and deeply imbued with a tragic sense of time. Even references to historical time are absent and what we perceive is the invocation of the mythical time of "classical deities such as Hecate and Apollo, and unidentified pagan 'gods'". As

Foakes further remarks, "the historical past is pretty much a blank, and the present is what matters in the action" ("Introduction" in Shakespeare 2017: 12-13). The first exchange between Kent and Gloucester only vaguely suggests a past when Lear had favoured Albany over Kent. But this feeling is soon dispelled when Gloucester avows that "now, in the division of the kingdom", all seems uncertain, as "it appears not which of the dukes he values most" (1.1.4-5).[1] Lear's purpose is "darker" (1.1.35), that is, secret or possibly "more wicked than the overt purpose of the formal court meeting", as glossed by Foakes. But whatever the meaning for us it remains unrooted in the past, and only in that first scene will it unveil itself, showing Lear's concern about the arrangement of his youngest daughter's marriage. Only in that first scene will all be disclosed, marking the beginning of a new period of time.

Lear's division of the kingdom has been compared – very recently by Kerrigan (2018) – to God's division of heaven and earth in Genesis (1.1-7). The map he asks for visualises his concern about space (1.1.36) as the main criterion to measure power through the extension of one's domain and rule. And yet, his speech shows that his first preoccupation is about time. "Unburdened" he wants to "crawl toward death" (1.1.40). In his self-depiction as an old man wishing to be relieved of worries Lear disowns responsible agency as a prefiguration of his own life's end and a premature abdication of his duties, yet not of his royal rights. But, as Cicero famously recommended in *De senectute* – "the standard authority about old age, widely read in Elizabethan grammar schools" (Kerrigan 2018: 69) – old men should never 'abdicate', as old age "is honoured only on condition that it defends itself, maintains its rights, is subservient to no one, and to the last breath rules over its own domain" (1923: 11 [38]). The negative particle "un-" in Lear's line encodes his desire of a 'lightness' in life to which old age should not give access unless fully aware of the subtraction of 'being' it involves. In this view 'being' depends on predication, not on existence, it entails meaning and this, in turn, entails power: the power of making oneself recognisable as meaningful, which in Lear's case signifies being endowed with royal authority, not with a royal name.

1 All quotations are from Shakespeare 2017.

Lear desires to "shake all cares and business" (1.3.38), but these are not 'shakeable' without the rest being shaken too. Once drained of agency, the name he retains (1.136-7) drains him too of meaning – and 'being'.

Timewise, Lear is entangled in a paradox: he looks ahead at his own ending but closes himself, solipsistically, within a 'thin' now where he does not commit himself to the future, but instead prepares to fully enjoy the present, authoritatively and arbitrarily exerting a power he no longer has (1.3).[2] Being "unburdened" means being 'light' also with regard to time; it means being 'unthinking about the future', unprojected ahead, confined in the 'now'; the negative particle is the figure of his own presentness as negation of becoming; it is the figure of his own death – discursive and symbolic before being actual. The picture he draws of himself on a slow trajectory towards self-dissolution further elaborates on an idea of subverted time, conflating old age and infancy into the figure of an old man morphed back into a baby, tentatively moving on all fours towards his end. This image will recur again with an echo effect in Goneril's comment that Lear is an "Idle old man / That still would manage those authorities that he hath given away" (1.3.17-19; lines present in Q only), and like old fools he is a "bab[e] again and must be used / With checks as flatteries, when [he is] seen abused" (1.3.17-20; in Q only). As Adrian Poole remarks, "[t]he bonds and the differences that make family relations are not static and given, once and for all. This is the fond belief into which Lear has hardened, and which the daughters have allowed to go unchallenged until now" (1988: 228).

Thus, Lear's first words, albeit apparently commonsensical on the part of an old man, in fact suggest a troubled relation with time, a negation of the sense of his own ending the moment he proclaims it. Not surprisingly, the first two acts show the "picture of a man who is not intent on moving forward towards death

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2 Paduano (2018: 105) rightly remarks that Lear shows two different types of folly. The first one has often been neglected by criticism and is refereable to a form of narcissistic, solipsistic egotism that results "in mental pathology" and consists in "a partial rejection of traditional logic, such as the Freudian unconscious and infantile dimension".

but on living fully and perpetually in the present" (Wagner 2014: 90). That is the sense of a 'thin' now, compared to Goneril's and Regan's 'thick' sense of their father's unruly character rooted in the past and resulting in future capriciousness (1.1.280-309).

Lear's division of the kingdom inaugurates yet another temporality, that of succession-as-hereditariness. The first portion of his kingdom will be "perpetual" to "[Goneril's] and Albany's issues" (1.3.65, 66), and the "ample third" allotted to Regan will "[r]emain" to her and her "hereditary" (79-80). Time has been split into two separate long portions: that of *genos*, or lineage, concerning Lear only in terms of the cyclic time of two branches of his family succession. Thus, before crawling towards death, Lear, like the God of Genesis dividing light from darkness and creating the cycles of seasons, days, and years, marks the beginning of a new time, and new genealogies. But there's the rub, as he will be unable to complete his new creation and add a third portion of long temporality to his design. Time will soon be barred to the third daughter and Lear will become the creator of no-time for her. Cordelia will respond with "nothing" when requested to speak, and, as a consequence, in a logic of retribution based on the linear sequence of 'before' and 'after', and 'cause' and 'effect', she will 'have' nothing, and will finally 'be' nothing: non-being will be revealed as intrinsically connected with doing-as-saying in the linear course of time; *ex nihilo nihil fit*: "nothing will come of nothing" (1.1.90).

2. Saying Nothing

As Parmenides famously claimed, whatever is is, and can never not be:

οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῇ εἶναι μὴ ἐόντα·
  ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ᾽ ἀφ᾽ ὁδοῦ διζήσιος εἶργε νόημα.
(Parmenides 1951: B7.1-2)

[For never shall this prevail, that things that are not *are*;
But do you restrain your thought from this route of enquiry.
(Parmenides 2000)]

This statement entails that non-being can neither be thought nor

said. Plato would contest this assumption in the *Sophist* arguing in favour of a philosophy of plurality and difference, so that non-being would in fact be predicable as long as it is not opposed to, but different from what is (that is, from truth).[3] Despite Parmenides' denial of the speakability of nothing, we normally use this word to indicate non-existent objects, as Lear does in 1.1 with a strongly performative function. His speech-act banning Cordelia turns her into a 'nothing' estranged from both himself and the kingdom. In his reply to her "nothing", the denial of allotment of the last third of the kingdom to her, he precipitates the primary meaning of "no-dowry", implying relative value (I will disown you, turning you into a 'nothing' for me), into an existential, absolute meaning, suggesting her non-existence within a system that connects being with owing (property, name, identity).[4] Lear's nullification of Cordelia is a death sentence with immediate execution, entailing her symbolic death and the final severing of her own 'personal time' from that of her family, as well as the denial of 'family time' to her progeny.

Howard Caygill has studied Shakespeare's remarkable treat-

3 In the *Sophist* Plato famously commits 'parricide' on Parmenides by demonstrating the relativistic nature of non-being, according to which 'what is not' should be interpreted as 'what is different from' (not opposite to) 'what is'. In this dialogue, the 'Stranger' tries to define the qualities of the 'false wise man' to demonstrate that discourse is different from things and concepts, which is the premise for arguing that it is possible to say things different from truth. Contrary to Parmenides, the Stranger summarises the demonstration of his dialectical method as follows (258e-259a): "[258e] Then let not anyone assert that we declare that not-being is the opposite of being, and hence are so rash as to say that not-being exists. For we long ago gave up speaking of any opposite of being, whether it exists or not and is capable [259a] or totally incapable of definition. But as for our present definition of not-being, a man must either refute us and show that we are wrong, or, so long as he cannot do that, he too must say, as we do, that the classes mingle with one another, and being and the other permeate all things, including each other, and the other, since it participates in being, is, by reason of this participation, yet is not that in which it participates, but other, and since it is other than being, must inevitably be not-being" (Plato 1921).

4 For a discussion of a similar property-bound, gendered conception of 'being', as put forward by Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* 1.3, see Bigliazzi 2015: 252-4.

ment of 'nothing' in his plays,[5] claiming that it can hardly fall within traditional philosophical categories.[6] His nothings are 'monsters' of nothing, because their equivocal uses at the same time state and disclaim being. Such cases are instantiated especially by the "performative negation of nothing" which "issues in the equivocal condition of not-nothing, a state that is neither being nor nothing" (2000: 107). In this tragedy, Caygill observes, Cordelia's first 'nothing' and Lear's *ex nihilo* reply produce "neither unequivocal being nor unequivocal not-being but a series of equivocal events linked by dissension, betrayal, civil war and madness – not being but not nothing" (ibid.). I am not sure whether equivocal in this case is the right word, unless it refers to communicative equivocation, as some scholars have argued. Recently Burzyńska has remarked that "it is indeed ironic or painfully existential that the two people who believe that they love each other repeat these 'nothings', totally misunderstanding their mutual intentions or needs" (2018: n.p.). But is this really a communicative failure? In this scene Lear and Cordelia display opposite attitudes on the subjects of power and parental and filial affection,[7]

5 Shakespeare's use of 'nothing' and negation has increasingly attracted critical attention in recent years. Here I can only refer to the following studies and make occasional reference to some of them in the course of the present discussion: Fleissner 1962, Fisher 1990, Tayler 1990, Caygill 2000, Rotman 2001, Bigliazzi 2005, Levin 2009, Sheerin 2013, White 2013, Burzyńska 2018, Chabis 2018, Lucking 2018, Pellone 2019.

6 Caygill's assumption that philosophical categories fail to encompass Shakespeare's uses of 'nothing' has recently been challenged by Chiba (2018), who has argued that there are more equivocal categories of philosophical ontology than those of Hegel and Heidegger extensively referred to by Caygill. Both studies, though, stress the equivocal dimension of Shakespeare's 'nothings' as intermediate conditions between being and non-being where nothing indicates meaningless presence or meaningful absence. My own reading of Shakespeare's nothings pits different uses of this word against two opposite semiotic conceptions of being referable, on the one hand, to a symbolic interpretation of identity grounded in a shared, predetermined value, and, on the other, to a subjective, relative meaning concerning the speakability of passion or its effects upon one's perception of reality. In both cases nothing hovers between being and non-being but with significantly different connotations. For a full discussion see Bigliazzi 2005.

7 This is not the place to discuss knowledge deriving from parental con-

and their conflict cannot be reduced to a question of misunder-
standing. The ensuing action makes the meaning of 'being noth-
ing' deriving from that first conflict of 'nothings' very clear within
a system which guarantees position in society and 'meaningful be-
ing' to those who conform to its rules, but transforms those who
do not into non-beings/no-things. Yet it is true that at some lev-
el there is ambiguity, and it emerges on the discursive plane when
the two senses of 'nothing' mentioned earlier (the evaluative/pre-
dicative and the existential) are conflated. Only a few examples
will suffice.

Metaphors of designified, inert bodies – anticipating by con-
trast the meaninglessness of nudity, acknowledged by Lear in
the storm, as testimony of true manhood, of politically unquali-
fied, bare life (in Agamben's terms, 1998) – or of bodies deprived
of any 'addition', define the semantics of banishment in Lear's
words as a synonym of symbolic death and nothingness. For sid-
ing with Cordelia Kent will be exiled and called a "banished trunk"
(1.1.178), a carcass symbolically assimilated to brute matter. In turn,
Cordelia herself will be objectified into a body whose "price is fall-
en" (1.1.198), reduced to a "little seeming substance" (199) which
has "nothing more" (201) to it than itself; she is "*Un*friended, *new
adopted* to our hate, / *Dowered* with our curse and *strangered* with
our oath" (204-5; my emphasis). These are the figures of her hav-
ing been turned into a no-sign within the kingdom (no longer the
King's daughter) and therefore into a no-thing or a meaningless
presence. Her nothingness cannot be separated from its perspec-
tival position and its belonging to the eventive domain of being-
in-time, which contemplates that, outside that sphere, in another
time (that of her banishment), she is both a 'thing' (a living body)
and has also become the wife of France (she has a new identity).
The ambiguous notion of not-nothing which does not result une-
quivocally in something, relies precisely upon the combination of
these different perspectives: although one may be nothing symbol-
ically within one system, one may continue to be existentially and
acquire a different 'being' elsewhere through a resignifying pro-

flict and loss, although it is relevant to the overall discussion. On the episte-
mological value of Lear's experience see Zamir 2007.

cess that produces 'something' out of that 'nothing' (Cordelia is and is France's wife, despite being a banned 'nothing').

That kind of symbolic, eventive not-nothing, which is both evaluative and existential within the social system, yet not in absolute terms, is the fate Lear has ironically and tragically prepared for himself. In the course of 1.4 the progressive emptying out of his performative word in his encounter with Goneril corresponds to the increasingly deconstructive power of the Fool's own language. Starting from that scene, the Fool famously builds a counterdiscourse unveiling Lear's original error which designifies his own royal title (". . . Only shall we retain / The name and th'addition to a king; the sway, / Revenue, execution of the rest, / Belovèd sons, be yours; which to confirm, / This coronet part between you", 1.1.137-40). The Fool notoriously exposes the logic of the 'monstrous' not-nothing Lear has turned himself into, bringing in full view the consequences of his subversion of time and regression to infancy: he has made his "daughters [his] mothers", given "them the rod" and put "down [his] own breeches" (169-71) – an echo of Lear's own earlier image of himself morphed into a crawling baby. The use of nothing is insistent in their exchanges in ways that it will not be at any other time in the course of the play after Lear is finally expelled. Still inside, he is but a zero with no figure before it, a non-entity 'disquantified' to nihil, non-existent:[8]

> FOOL Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care
> for her frowning. Now *thou art an o without a figure. I am*
> *better than thou art now; I am a fool; thou art nothing.* [*to*
> *Goneril*] Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue. So your face
> bids me, though you say nothing. (1.4.182-6; my emphasis)

A grotesque sign drained of meaning, Lear has lost himself. He has a body, yet it is unsignifying; body and being have been stripped apart:

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8 On practices of mensuration and disquantification see Rotman 2001, and David Lucking's chapter in this volume. For a recent discussion of the relation between the digit 'nought' and 'naught' in King Lear, see Pellone 2019. See also Fleissner 1962, Fisher 1990, Barrow 2001, White 2013.

> LEAR Does any here know me? �QWhyᵠ, this is not Lear. Does
>   Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes? Either his
>   notion weakens, ᵠorᵠ his discernings are lethargied – Ha!
>   ᵠsleeping orᵠ waking? ᵠSurelᵠ 'tis not so. Who is it that can
>   tell me who I am?
> ꜰFoolꜰF *Lear's shadow.*
> (1.4.217-22; my emphasis)

We know that he will reconnect body and being once he dis-
covers the meaning of naked manhood on the heath, prey to the
natural storm and that of the mind (3.4.12), face to face with other-
ness (3.4.99-107) – bare life. At that point he will recognise man in
the bare forked animal he sees in Edgar-Poor Tom: one who thus
disguised remains "something yet", while, as a 'banned' man and
nameless, he "nothing" is ("I nothing am", 2.2.192). We also know
that Lear's own distraction will be perceived on stage as going be-
yond his own individual fate. In 4.6 Gloucester will interpret it
as the sign of the nothingness of the entire universe brought to
its own destruction: "O ruined piece of nature! This great world /
Shall so wear out to *naught*. . . " (4.6.130-1; my emphasis). Both the
King-no-King and the world seem about to implode upon them-
selves and time to reach an end.

3. The End of Time

We have seen that the division of the kingdom entails a division
of time. It produces a new beginning, creating the time of new ge-
nealogies, but also, contrariwise, the no-time of Cordelia's sym-
bolic death – and soon of Lear himself. It is both a genesis and its
reverse. This posits the problem of origin as one concerning a dia-
lectic between being and non-being from which there derives the
ambiguous, 'monstrous', concept of not-nothing as an eventive
and perspectival category. But we have also noticed that in the or-
igin of that new time of the divided kingdom yet another sense of
nothingness is contained, referring to the absolute end on an ex-
istential plane: physical death. Chiba's reference of death to that
same ambiguous category of meaningless nothing is convinc-
ing in so far as it too is in turn referred to a perspectival, subjec-

tive category of apprehension: "[f]or Lear, Cordelia's dead body is still Cordelia" (2018: n.p.). And yet, her lifeless body can hardly be called Cordelia in absolute terms. It is still 'something' with regard to her bodily presence, but this too is destined to become 'nothing' over time. And to nothing the moment of intimacy that Lear and Cordelia find at the end of the play is also reduced, shattered by Cordelia's sudden death. As Burzyńska points out, this is what "brings out the whole horror of *King Lear*, as well as its full existentialist load", "mock[ing] the very idea of poetic justice" (2018: n.p.).[9]

Such a radical sense of final ending in which both meaning and existence are drained is what motivates Lear's initial abdication and division of the kingdom (and of time) in the first place. It is a sense whose full meaning Lear will grasp only when confronting Cordelia's lifeless body, but which constitutes the horizon which we all know limits everybody's life even before we directly experience the suffering of someone's loss, itself a prefiguration of our own self-loss. It is that sense of impending annihilation one is aware of, if only abstractly, that incongruously morphes the old man Lear into an infant crawling towards his end as a paradoxical figure of resistance to the idea of ending. It is that same sense that we are eventually brought to distinguish as different from Lear's own symbolic not-nothingness outside the kingdom ruled by his daughters. There he still is, while being nothing, precisely as time still is, and continues to be, indifferent to the collapse of the kingdom's symbolic order following the collapse of its King's meaningfulness and expulsion from it. But on a different plane, that collapse is, again perspectivally, not indifferent to the larger world. In the figure of distracted and demolished Lear Gloucester senses the world's 'wearing out' and annihilation ("O ruined piece of nature, this great world / Shall so wear out to naught", 4.6.130-1).

9 Burzyńska reads this moment through Gabriel Marcel's notion of "creative fidelity" (2002), "a condition of being 'available' for someone over time" (2018: n.p.), as insufficient to restore meaning to an absurd reality, thus challenging ideas of poetic justice. For a very different view on a fundamentally positive redemptive ending, see Pratt 1985. For a similar, yet more critical, appreciative stance of the discovery of compassion and re-evaluation of the sense of mortality in *King Lear* see Pellone 2019.

In this respect, Wagner, among others, has argued that "*King Lear* executes what might seem to be an impossibility: it materializes time precisely by providing an experience of apocalypse; it gives its audience time by generating an encounter with the end of time" (2014: 68). Yet in order to produce this dynamic between origin and ending theatrically it is the present of the action that is spotlighted. Again Wagner, who has offered perhaps the most extensive recent contribution on this topic, has further noticed that in this play "we also see the complex and living, fluctuating dynamic between the time of the theatre and the time of the world – the 'promised end' is both a real apocalypse and 'the image of that horror' (V.iii.261-262)" (69). In that dynamic between our time and that of drama we perceive conflicting patterns which we are also led to sense when the 'thickness' of 'now' becomes manifest on stage. Wagner has elucidated how this happens in a few cases: for instance in the coexistence of different temporalities in the same scene, as when in 2.2 Kent is shown to fall asleep in the stocks and then Edgar enters and disguises himself as Tom O' Bedlam: here we do not know whether a scene break is needed, in fact nowhere is this indicated either in F or in Q, but what we feel is that "two mutually exclusive clocks remove us from clock time altogether and place us instead into a world of unmeasured and perhaps unmeasurable duration" (89). Later in the same scene a radical change of the pace of time, and of its quality, overthrows our sense of normal time scansion. In the space of 172 lines, from 316 to 498, we move from morning to night as we first hear Lear say "Good morrow" to Regan and Cornwall (316), then only seventy-four lines later Gloucester says that "night comes on" (490), and eight lines later Cornwall comments that "it is a wild night" already (498). This collapsing of time into a very short span produces "the destruction of the clock: measurable time has sped up to its breaking point, and we are hurled out into a timeless night and 'storm still'" (Wagner 2014: 89). This may reflect Lear's own subjective sense of time after storming against Regan and Cornwall, as Wagner contends, as if dramatic time were now ruled by his own subjectivity;[10] but it may as well be a dramatic device to ac-

10 On Shakespeare's experimentalism on focalisation in drama see

celerate the action and get Lear's own storming with his daughter and the storm outside closer to one another. In either case, dramatic time is clearly subverted and through conflicting time schemes the 'now' shows itself as having become 'thick'. In 3.2, it is once again the Fool who discloses the extent of the dismantling of linear time by demolishing causal links in his prophecy, "making the relationship between 'when' and 'then' . . . uncertain" (94), and finally setting an unfathomable time frame that reminds us that Lear's story in fact predates Merlin's by fourteen centuries (being set in the eighth century BC by Holinshed, while Merlin is located in the sixth century AD): "This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time" (3.2.96). His last line in 3.6, "And I'll go to bed at noon", in response to Lear's last mad line, "we'll go to supper in the morning" (81), mirrors Lear's own inversion of time before falling asleep, and before the Fool disappears for good.

But if it is true that we "encounter the end of time" in *King Lear*, how does this happen? Besides, whose time? As already suggested, linearity and causality begin being done away with in 2.2 when Lear is about to face the storm in Nature and in his mind, as well as his own not-nothingness in the face of Edgar-Tom's human some-thingness. After cursing Regan in 1.4, and his prayer not to be engulfed by madness in 1.5 ("O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! I would not be mad", 1.5.43-4), his fury against Regan in 2.2 is unrestrained, and yet ineffective. Even imaginatively he cannot envision what he will do in the end – except go mad:

> . . . No, you unnatural hags,
> I will have such revenges on you both,
> That all the world shall – I will do such things –
> What they are yet I know not: but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth! You think I'll weep
> No, I'll not weep: ᶠ*Storm and tempest*ᶠ
> I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
> Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
> Or e're I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad.
> (2.2.467-75)[11]

Bigliazzi 2020.

    11 Corresponding to 2.4.275-83 in modern editions dividing 2.2 into three

Lear is neither a God of creation and of destruction, as in 1.1, nor a *homo faber* any longer; he has lost agency, even in sinning (he says that he is "a man / More sinned against than sinning", 3.2.59-60)[12] and is more a figure of Passion than of action. Imaginatively, his mind is overcome by imageless fury, which will regain figurative power only when he stands alone against the unmerciful heavens, in the "Blow winds" apocalyptic speech of 3.2. Significantly, when Lear experiences his own not-nothingness in the storm, himself a bare 'forked animal' facing Nature's fury, his nullification is no longer talked about using the language of 'nothing', it is dramatised on stage. The last significant use of the word not coincidentally precedes Lear's expulsion from Regan's home; it occurs in 2.2, when Edgar acknowledges that it is only through Tom that he can become 'something'. The shift from an idea of symbolic nullification to that of absolute nothingness in 5.3 is marked by different words, diversely connected to a sense of time: 'No', denying the evidence of death in its present factuality, and 'never', stating the end of time future.

This scene opens on Lear's refusal to see his two wicked daughters and his voiced desire to seclude himself with Cordelia in a prison ("No, no, ^{F}no, no^F. Come, let's away to prison", 5.3.8). Both of them are two 'not-nothings', banished and crushed in the same way, but meaningful to each other, and he wishes for yet another time-space, just for the two of them, outside 'social' time, spectators of human life, of nature and society; separate from the spectacle of life, spying on "the ebb and flow by the moon", "as if they were God's spies" (5.3.17). But then that dream of a prison outside time is smashed to pieces and Lear experiences absolute nothingness in the face of Cordelia's not-breathing, her having "gone for ever" (257). Language fails him except for the ability to invoke howling, and howling himself, like an animal, four times (255: "Howl, howl, howl, ^{Q}howl^Q"), crying out the torment he feels in his own flesh for his own flesh's end of life. Absolute nothingness erases human time: neither time past nor time present, but time future; this is how time is finally nullified. The trochaic pen-

scenes.

12 On this see Sheila Murnaghan's essay in this volume.

tameter inverts with an obsessive sequence of five "never" the usual rhythmical sequence of blank verse (307), encoding rhythmically and in the pounding nasal signifier, linking back to nothing, the sense of the end of time. It follows the emphatic spondaic "No, no ᶠnoᶠ life" (304), reinforcing that same feeling through Lear's refusal to accept Cordelia's absolute nothingness: not the relative no-time that Lear created for her, and unwillingly for himself, but the absolute No-time he must suffer in suffering her death. No time beyond is accessible, even imaginatively.

"Is this the promised end" (5.3.61), asks Kent, or is it "the image of that horror", figure of the apocalypse, asks Edgar (5.3.62). Yet whose end, and in what way is this the end of time? As Beales has recently noticed, even before the play's end

> [t]he impossibility of the future depicted by the Fool [in his prophecy of a topsy-turvy future when "shall the realm Albion / come to a great confusion", 3.2.79-96] reflects the status of Lear's kingdom in Shakespeare's play: since the play ends with the destruction of the ruling family, Britain has no future. The Fool glimpse at futurity is destabilized by Shakespeare's main historiographic alteration, the implosion of the British dynasty. The Tudor and Stuart monarchs traced their ancestry back to the ancient legendary kings of Britain, a line which included Lear. By ending the dynasty prematurely, Shakespeare's play breaks that ancestral link, and thus early modern Britain's genetic and dynastic links to its ancient past. (2018: 201)[13]

13 Bertram has elaborated on the Fool's ineffectual prophecy as further proof of the play's sceptical approach to knowledge: "The Fool reminds us that matter is known only through words, yet words are always somehow detached from matter. Since Merlin has not even made the prophecy yet, there is no matter in the Fool's prophecy, and thus it exists as a collection of words with no real temporal substance. The Fool cannot offer a prediction of the future because words are mired in the materiality of the present. Despite or perhaps because of its confusion, the passage seems to question utopian prophecy by commenting obliquely on the metaphysical idea that the immaterial future can be foretold by words in the material present. The Fool does not offer a visionary escape from disorder and the reality principle, but he does grapple with the moral confusion of reality itself through negation. Unlike the witches in *Macbeth*, the fool cannot 'look into the seeds of time / And say which grain will grow, and which will not' (1.3.58-59)" (2004: 164).

And yet, as Kermode noticed, on a different plane this is not the end of time. "*King Lear* is a fiction that inescapably involves an encounter with oneself, and the image of one's end" (1968: 39), not the end of All. Life goes on, albeit sadly and bleakly. And this is the worst of it, that it does not end at all. That would be a relief. Although nothingness awaits each one of us, more or less horribly, yet life goes on and on, and we must endure, once we have been born:

> LEAR   . . . We came crying hither:
>   Thou knowest the first time that we smell the air
>   We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark ᵒmeᵒ.
> GLOUCESTER Alack, alack the day!
> LEAR   When we are born we cry that we are come
>   To this great stage of fools. . .
> (4.6.174-80)

Perhaps we must "repent" "Our being born", as Beckett would say (2000: 3),[14] dismally aware of a knitting machine, indestructible, that "has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions – and nothing matters". This is Conrad (1983: 425). But perhaps it all started with ancient wisdom, echoed by the Chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus*:[15]

> Πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον
>   μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγὰς ὀξέος ἠελίου,
> φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Ἀίδαο περῆσαι
>   καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμησάμενον.
> (Theognis 425-9)

> [The best lot of all for man is never to have been born nor seen the beams of the burning sun; this failing, to pass the gates of Hades as soon as one may, and lie under a goodly heap of earth. (Theognis 1982: 280-1)]

> μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νι-
> κᾷ λόγον· τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φανῇ,
> βῆναι κεῖθεν ὅθεν περ ἥ-

14 On Beckett and *King Lear* see Barry A. Spence's essay in this volume.
15 Quotations are from Sofocle (2008) for the Greek text and from Sophocles (1994) for the English translation.

κει πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα.
(*OC* 1224-7)

[Not to be born is, beyond all estimation, best; but when a man has seen the light of day, this is next best by far, that with utmost speed he should go back from where he came.]

Coda: Circle and Line

Kerrigan has reminded us that "Edgar's advice to Gloucester, 'Ripeness is all' (5.2.11)", derives from Cicero's *De senectute* (19 [71]), and that in that text Shakespeare would have found a reference to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* which might "have helped Shakespeare see how plots from Holinshed and Sidney could combine and resonate with Greek tragedy" (2018: 69).[16] Closer parallels have often been traced with Seneca. For instance, occasional references to the "learned Theban" as Oedipus-the-solver of the riddle of the Sphinx have been put forward with regard to Seneca's mediation.[17] But more substantially Pratt (1985) has argued that Seneca is closer to Shakespeare than to Sophocles in so far as the moral conflict in his tragedies is internalised in ways that were not in Greek tragedy.[18] On a different note, Kerrigan has noiced sim-

16 Here is the anecdote: "Sophocles composed tragedies to extreme old age and when, because of his absorption in literary work, he was thought to be neglecting his business affairs, his sons haled him into court in order to secure a verdict removing him from the control of his property on the ground of imbecility, under a law similar to ours, whereby it is customary to restrain heads of families from wasting their estates. Thereupon, it is said, the old man read to the jury his play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, which he had just written and was revising, and inquired: 'Does that poem seem to you to be the work of an imbecile?' When he had finished he was acquitted by the verdict of the jury." (Cicero 1923: 22-3).

17 See e.g. Cutts 1963, Hebert 1976, Pascucci 2013: 240n55. Pascucci's claim that the "good Athenian" could instead be Sophocles (239n55) rests on tenuous evidence: his traditionally being qualified as *chrestos* ('useful', 'good') by ancient biographers..

18 "For Sophocles, the divine order involves moral values, to be sure, but it is difficult to find any meaningful, decisive relationship between moral values, or the lack of them, and the downfall of Oedipus. For that matter, 'downfall' is a false term, for in Sophocles the affirmation is not of a moral order,

ilarities between the episode of Gloucester's self-deluded jump from Dover Cliffs and the one Oedipus envisages from the steep hill of Cithaeron he is heading towards with Antigone in Seneca's *Phoenician Women*. Shakespeare might well have known this text, in Latin and/or in Thomas Newton's English translation (1581).[19] But apart from superficial similarities between those two episodes, the old raging man ranting against his two sons at the beginning of the second fragment cannot but remind one of Lear's invoked apocalypse in the storm, including his cursing of his offspring and the ensuing end of his own time qua end of the time of his *genos* or dynasty. Like the Sophocles of *Oedipus Rex*, yet not of *Oedipus at Colonus*, and like the Euripides of *The Phoenician Women*, Seneca plays around with the paradoxical timelessness of Oedipus' story. Reduced to the instant of his own victory over the Sphinx, in Euripides that single moment in time contains both Oedipus' future fortune and misfortune (1689: ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ: ὄλωλ'· ἓν ἦμάρ μ' ὤλβισ', ἓν δ' ἀπώλεσεν, "OEDIPUS: Lost for ever! one day made, and one day marred my fortune", 5.5.154).[20] Shakespeare knew that version, if not in Greek or in Latin,[21] via Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta* (performed 1566; printed 1573), which offered an English adaptation of Lodovico Dolce's own version of that play (1549).[22] But compared to those versions, Seneca emphasised a more radical question. If in Euripides the focus was on the temporal contradiction inherent in being 'done' and 'undone' in the instantaneous conflation of fortune and misfortune when

but of a great human spirit who remains on his feet and goes on. The change in the treatment of moral matter is a great difference between ancient and most modern tragedy. But it began in Seneca." (1985: 53).

19 On Shakespeare's access to Latin and Englished Seneca, see Gray 2016.

20 The Greek text is based on Euripides 1994, the translation is from Euripides 1938.

21 For instance "Periit. una dies me beauit, una quoque perdidit" (Euripides 1541); "Occidi. Unus me beauit, unusque pessumdedit dies" (Euripides 1562).

22 On Dolce and Gascoigne-Kinwelmersh see Miola 2002, Dewar-Watson 2010, Bigliazzi 2014. "EDIPO: Un dì mi fe' felice, un dì m'ha ucciso" (*Giocasta* 5.5.153), "OEDIPUS: One happie day did raise me to renoune, / One hapless day hath throwne mine honour doune" (*Jocasta* 5.5.154-5) (Cunliffe 1906: 402, 403) .

Oedipus solves the riddle, Seneca moves that paradox to a deeper level. Oedipus is directing his steps towards Mount Cithaeron ("*meus* Cithaeron", he says, 13; emphasis mine) where he was first exposed to death when he was born, and where he now wants to encounter the death he was then denied. Temporal circularity here replaces linear time in his tragic experience. Seneca makes it very clear that the nothingness he is after now is different from the imperfect nothingness he has inflicted on himself through blindness and beggary. Oedipus is a self-expelled wandering unburied corpse, he says to Antigone ("peccas honesta mente. pietatem vocas / patrem insepultum trahere", 97-8; "But piety it canot be, to dragge thus vp and downe / Thy Fathers Corpes vnburied", Newton 1581: 43).[23] He finally wants to achieve the real, perfect nothingness of death. He wants to accomplish his destiny inscribed in his own beginning: the day he was born, he was born to die, although it is generally thought that being born means being given life. In Seneca, Oedipus' suicidal drive is twofold: on the one hand, his death accomplishes his own destiny through punishment for the crimes he committed innocently ("scelera quae feci innocens", 218); on the other, his curse against his two sons prefigures the destruction of his own family. In the fragments we possess we do not see what ensues from either of his desires, but we hear Oedipus refrain from his suicidal purpose on account of Antigone's life-inspiring affection, which redresses Oedipus' circular temporality into the directional time of life's endurance: and yet it is a temporality deprived of future in so far as the curse prefigures the end of time of his own stock. Thus, after all, Oedipus' tragic experience does not escape the temporal directionality comprised within the circularity of his birth-and-death: his self-blinding is an imperfect death in linear time which only postpones within that directional temporality Oedipus' accomplishment of the circularity of his destiny. First he longs for a perfect, definitive death, and then he wishes one for his sons too. It follows that for Oedipus linearity is only a fragment of a temporal paradigm whose tragic dimension resides in the paradox of the coincidence of birth and death. They coincide in the instant of their simultane-

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23 Latin quotations are from Seneca 1921.

ous happening, but they also coincide in the full circle of Oedipus' return to Mount Cithaeron where he was first exposed to death when he was born. Both are temporal figures of his paradoxically being criminal and innocent at the same time.[24]

In *Oedipus at Colonus* too we find an old man reduced to a no-man, or no-thing, as he says to Ismene: "When I no longer exist, then I am a man?" (393: ὅτ' οὐκέτ' εἰμί, τηνικαῦτ' ἄρ' εἴμ' ἀνήρ;). An exile like Lear, Oedipus is a monstrous 'not-nothing', alive yet nullified. His rage is directed against his son Polyneices who first banned him in accord with Eteocles, differently from what happens in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, where banishment is at the hands of Creon. Like Lear "crawling" towards his own end, however he knows that there is something awaiting him beyond. But how can the prospect of a transcending temporality be reconciled with the time of his own godly predetermined 'innocent crimes', the time of his unknowing, which Oedipus recuperates at Colonus by referring back to that removed part of his myth in the previous play? How can he be pacified by the promise of a redemptive time beyond? Before being summoned to the grove, still lingering in the liminal space of his 'non-being' outside Athens, Oedipus reclaims his being 'something' through negative agency: he denies himself his homeland when urged to go back to Thebes and stands out as a willing 'thing' outside; he denies support to Polyneices, and curses him instead. But how can he accept recompense for being the victim of the god's first rage against his own father? Resistance to such an acceptance surfaces in his vindication of unknowing and irresponsibility[25] – the one that Antigone will also claim for him in Seneca's *Phoenician Women* and that Oedipus himself suggests in the paradoxical image of "scelera quae feci innocens" for which he inflicts self-punishment.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' resistance to being pacified finally contradicts his acceptance of a timelessness beyond tragic linearity. This contradiction makes the fragments of Seneca's *Phoenician Women* closer to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, at

24 On the paradigm of circular time in Seneca see Paduano 2005: 333-7.
25 See especially the long *rhesis* where he claims his innocence (*OC* 960-90).

least as far as a tragic conception of time, unredeemed by prospects of beyondness, is concerned. Lear has no experience of circular time, like the old, self-blinded Oedipus; he is an old man who has cut time, somehow like the young Oedipus of *Oedipus Rex*, but for different reasons.[26] Like the God of Creation, he has divided time into a before and an after, producing linearity: the time of his daughters' reign and the no-time of the 'nothings' to which he reduces Cordelia and eventually himself. Although at this point a suffering patient, "[m]ore sinned against than sinning", he is the one who initiates the tragic temporality. This leads to the process of nullification he himself undergoes, prefiguring the End of his own time and of his genealogy. Lear shares with Seneca's old wild Oedipus both the sense of his irreconcilability with his past and that of paternal affection. This sense produces in him the delusion of an elsewhere he thinks he can inhabit with Cordelia, as Oedipus presumably does with Antigone at the end of the first fragment in Seneca. But, indeed, that is only a delusion. If Sophocles' old Oedipus does not understand the why of his tragic life, but accepts his final deification, in *King Lear*, on the other hand, one can hardly believe in a sense of significance, if not justice, beyond the characters' own actions. As Gloucester famously remarks, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods. / They kill us for their sport" (4.1.38-9). Oedipus only hints at that sport. But then the thunder calls him and he goes. Lear's End of time is yet to come.

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26 As Guido Avezzù has argued in his essay in this volume, Oedipus "produces an *epoché*" by narratising himself from the moment of his exploit with the Sphinx, after which he divides time into discrete units following a before/after pattern. He is the master of a linear temporality which delusorily turns the essential circularity of his time into a directional, temporal fragment. He draws a genealogy for the Thebans starting from his kingly accession, although he thinks himself not a Theban. A *homo faber*, he gives his time pace and direction, yet vainly, as the time he forges for himself will turn out to be a segment of a longer circular temporality he is still unaware of. In *Oedipus Tyrannus* he is still an active agent before awareness of that circularity turns him into a suffering patient in *Oedipus at Colonus*. For a reading of the essential irreconcilability of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* see Gherardo Ugolini's essay in this volume.

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13

'More than two tens to a score': Disquantification in *King Lear*

Dᴀᴠɪᴅ Lᴜᴄᴋɪɴɢ

Abstract

Although Shakespeare's use of mathematical imagery in *King Lear* has been touched on by various commentators on the play, adequate attention has not always been paid to the function such imagery performs in dramatizing the problem of what constitutes value in a period in which different conceptions of value were coming increasingly into conflict among themselves. It is the purpose of this paper to make a more concentrated effort to investigate the language of mathematics pervading the tragedy – most particularly that having to do with measurement and other forms of quantification – in its relation both to the mentality it reflects and to the rival principles of division and unification which contend with one another throughout the work. If the language of numbers and of comparative value figures processes of mensuration and partitioning that operate ubiquitously and destructively in the universe of *King Lear*, it is also deployed obliquely as a symbolic notation of a countervailing impulse towards unification that, also present in the play, offsets to some degree what might otherwise seem to be the unmitigated pessimism of its conclusion.

Kᴇʏᴡᴏʀᴅs: Shakespeare; *King Lear*; mensuration; numbers

> "They are but beggars that can count their worth"
> *Romeo and Juliet* 2.6.32

Although there are other works in the canon that make significant use of numerical and arithmetical imagery, it is perhaps *King Lear* that qualifies as Shakespeare's most mathematically self-conscious play, intensely interested as it is not only in numbers and what can be done with them, but even more importantly in what they

can do to those who use them. This is not by any means a merely abstract concern, nor one unrelated to the historical circumstances in which the tragedy was produced. The age in which Shakespeare lived was one in which mathematics – if only in the form of those fundamental arithmetical operations indispensable to the commercial activities of every day – was acquiring ever greater ascendancy in the minds of people belonging to all walks of life. The new economic order that was consolidating itself was one in which value was increasingly expressed, whether with literal or figurative intent, in the vocabulary of numbers, as something that could be measured or otherwise quantified according to the criteria of the marketplace, and Shakespeare often evinces a deeply troubled awareness of the implications this might have for the conception of value itself. It is only a short step from Shylock's debating with himself whether he should lend Antonio "Three thousand ducats for three months" in *The Merchant of Venice* (1.3.9),[1] to the kind of confusion that arises when he goes on to observe a moment later that "Antonio is a good man" (1.3.12). What he means by this is simply that the merchant is sound in a financial sense, but Bassanio construes his words in different terms altogether, and his error in some ways reflects the ambivalent perceptions of the society in which he lives.

As this example illustrates, the question that inevitably presents itself, in a world so radically in transition in ideological as well as strictly economic terms, is that of the relation existing between the different categories of value according to which people think and act. These are categories that Shakespeare himself brings into juxtaposition when, as is not infrequently the case, he draws upon the language of commodity exchange to supply metaphors for the world of human emotions. In *The Merchant of Venice*, to continue with the example already cited, he contraposes words belonging to different realms of value – "dear", "worth", "value" itself – in order to show not only that these domains are incommen-

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1 With the exception of those to *King Lear*, all references to Shakespeare's works throughout this article are to the single volume *Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* (2001). References to *King Lear* are to the edition of the play edited by Kenneth Muir (1993).

surate with one another in their very nature, but also that the values that lend moral and spiritual significance to human life cannot without peril be confounded with those of the marketplace, however tempting it might be to conceive them, as our language often seems to invite us to do, as analogues of one another. Although Portia, in assuring Bassanio that "Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear" (3.2.312), is using the idiom of commerce merely as a displaced notation for personal feeling, her words cannot fail to generate disturbing overtones in a play in which a character claims very real rights of ownership over the body of another person, and in which we are reminded that the institution of slavery continues to flourish in the actual world as well (4.1.90ff.). Sonnet 87, which begins with the line "Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing", similarly plays on the multiple meanings of words such as "dear" and "worth" in order to contrast different categories of value. The drift of the poem is that the person to whom it is addressed appraises his own worth in terms wholly different from the poet's, terms once again reminiscent of those employed in the world of mercantile and property transactions, and that he is merely betraying his own deficiencies on the emotional and moral levels when he does so. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare has one of his titular characters remark that there is beggary in the love that can be reckoned (1.1.15), and this is a sentiment that is frequently echoed elsewhere in his work as well.

In *King Lear* Shakespeare goes somewhat further, because what are at stake are not only affective or even moral values alone but the very identities of people themselves, as well as the fabric of the societies to which they belong. In a manner recalling that of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which a pound of human flesh is engaged as surety for a loan of three thousand ducats, the logic of measurement and quantification is taken to the extreme of absurdity in this play, as is the language through which that logic is articulated. The note is sounded in the opening dialogue of the drama, when to Kent's remark that "I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall", Gloucester rather tortuously replies that "in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most; for equalities are so weigh'd that curiosity in neither can make choice of ei-

ther's moiety" (1.1.1-6).[2] In such a context as this the verb "val-
ues" becomes deeply ambiguous in its import, and the fact that
the word which appears as "equalities" in the Quarto version of
the play is transformed into "qualities" in the Folio,[3] the impli-
cation being that something as intangible as a quality can some-
how be weighed as if it had substance, renders it even more so.
This brief exchange is laden with words having to do mensura-
tion and partitioning in one form or another – "more", "most",
"equalities", "weigh'd", "division" and "moiety" – the idea be-
ing introduced from the very beginning that even a sentiment
such as "affect" might in some sense be measured on a meta-
phorical balance and translated into the apportioning of proper-
ty and wealth as well. This becomes even more evident in the bi-
zarre ceremony which precipitates the events of *King Lear*. The
aging king of Britain, determined to unburden himself of the
onus of rule, announces that he has "divided / In three our king-
dom" (1.1.36-7), and invites his daughters to produce verbal at-
testations enabling him to assess "Which of you . . . doth love us
most" (1.1.50) so that he can bestow upon them portions of his
realm proportionate to the degree of devotion they profess. His
eldest daughter Goneril plays the game with consummate dexter-
ity, cynically fanning the flames of her father's egotism with a se-
ries of specifications of what her love is to be measured against
which though vehemently formulated are also patently hollow:

2 It is curious that Kent and Gloucester should refer at this point to Lear's
two sons-in-law rather than to his three daughters as being the beneficiar-
ies of this division, although the king soon makes it clear that the distribu-
tion he has planned is in fact threefold. This is perhaps to be attributed to the
fact that one of the immediate catalysts precipitating some of the concerns of
King Lear would seem to have been the project that King James was pursu-
ing in the years following his accession to unify England and Scotland under
one rule. For a lucid account of the relevance of this play to the debate that
was taking place over this issue see Shapiro 2015: 33-45. Shapiro points out
that the phrase "dividing your kingdoms" appears in King James's *Basilikon
Doron* (33), and that James's two sons held the titles of Duke of Albany and
Duke of Cornwall (40).

3 Although he adopts the Quarto's "equalities" in his edition of *King Lear*,
Kenneth Muir concedes that the Folio's "qualities", accepted by other editors,
"may be the correct reading" (Shakespeare 1993: 3n).

> I love you more than word can wield the matter;
> Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty;
> Beyond what can be valued rich or rare;
> No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
> (1.1.54-7)

The crucial words "more" and "less" will be reiterated almost obsessively throughout the play, reflecting the mentality of those who barter meanings as they barter goods. Not to be outdone by her sister in the devious art of flattery, Lear's second daughter Regan launches into a speech employing very much the same idiom, declaring that she is made of the identical "metal" as Goneril and, in a phrase whose gist is clear even if its syntax is less so, "prize me at her worth" (1.1.68-9). She too invokes an implicit metaphor of mensuration when she proclaims that "I find she names my very deed of love; / Only she comes too short" (1.1.70-1). Very fittingly, considering the character of the process that is underway, a map of Lear's kingdom is prominently on display during these proceedings, representing with almost iconic immediacy what Henry S. Turner well describes as "a 'modern' idea of space as a quantifiable and measurable geometric abstraction" (1997: 172). Having received precisely those tokens of adulation he has expected from two of his daughters, the gratified Lear instantly transcribes their effusive protestations into cartographic demarcations, converting what are supposed to be asseverations of boundless devotion into real estate: "To thee and thine, hereditary ever, / Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom" (1.1.78-9). But when he proceeds to ask his youngest daughter Cordelia what she can say to "draw / A third more opulent than your sisters" (1.1.84-5) she shatters the spell of numbers he has been weaving by pronouncing the words "Nothing, my lord" (1.1.86), thereby throwing the old man's carefully contrived game of weights and measures into complete disarray. Words like "more", "less", "prize" and "worth", and the notion of relative value they encode, have no meaning before a nothingness that admits of no possibility of negotiation.[4]

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4 For the significance of the word "nothing" in this play, see for instance McGinn 2006: 113-18; Rotman 2001: 78-86; Tayler 1990; Calderwood 1986;

As it happens, Cordelia is not entirely immune to the language and its associated mode of thinking that prevail at her father's court, and this is something that has sometimes occasioned consternation even in her most fervent admirers. The first words we hear her utter in an aside are "I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.76-7), the image hovering in the background once again being that of a figurative balance on which genuine feeling is somehow capable of measuring itself against and outweighing mere words. In tones that Millicent Bell accurately though somewhat unsympathetically describes as "coldly legalistic" (2002: 144-5), she goes on to declare that "I love your Majesty / According to my bond" (1.1.91-2), turning the idiom of the court to devastatingly literal use when she appends to this the punctilious phrase: "no more nor less" (1.1.92). Somewhat inconsequentially, perhaps, notwithstanding the disconcerting exordium with which she has announced that she has nothing to say, Cordelia does in the event deliver a speech, and one that rather surprisingly not only avails itself of the language of quantification and partition that is current at her father's court, but does so in a manner which is almost pedantically precise: "Happily, when I shall wed, / That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty" (1.1.99-101). But although what Cordelia is doing here is indeed, as Meredith Skura puts it, echoing her father's "account-book attitude toward emotion" (2008: 126), employing a mode of expression congruent with the rules of the game imposed upon his daughters by Lear, in her case the language she uses is one of emotional sincerity and not of vacant flattery. A.D. Nuttall argues that Cordelia, "bewildered by her sudden apprehension of the dangerous social context, tries to resolve the matter by moving into the cooler medium of rationally demonstrable desert", and that it is this that renders her language "uncomfortably similar to that employed by her sisters in their wholly destructive application of mathematics to human flesh and blood" (2007: 317). Whether Cordelia's motives are quite as delib-

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Fleissner 1962. For more general discussions of the concept of "nothingness" in Shakespeare, see Lucking 2017: 151-78; White 2013; Barrow 2001: 87-91; Willbern 1980; Jorgensen 1954.

erate as this or not, what is certain is that in using such mathematical language to define the nature and extent of her emotional obligations to her father, rather than simply to assert unconditional adoration to the exclusion of all other affective ties as her sisters do, she is testifying to what she actually does feel and not merely rehearsing what, to anticipate the words with which the play concludes, she ought to say (5.3.323).

But Lear fails to understand this. From his blinkered point of view the ceremony of devotion he has so carefully choreographed has been aborted in the most mortifying way possible, and the incensed king retaliates by dispossessing Cordelia of her dowry and disowning her as a daughter, thereby depriving her both of prospects and of social station. "Nothing will come of nothing" (1.1.89), he has warned her, using the word "nothing" in the most literal sense, and it is this threat that he proceeds to make good by effectively annihilating Cordelia as a social entity and so far as possible as a human being as well. The language in which he addresses Cordelia's suitors is now, overtly and demeaningly, that of the marketplace, as if she were no more than an item of spoiled merchandise to be disposed of as expeditiously as possible. To Burgundy he asks "What, in the least, / Will you require in present dower" (1.1.190-1), to which the duke replies, once again in the conceptual language typical of the British court, "I crave no more than hath your Highness offer'd, / Nor will you tender less" (1.1.193-4). But Lear rescinds that earlier offer, and in so doing makes the mercantile paradigm according to which he has been operating only too explicit: "When she was dear to us we did hold her so, / But now her price is fallen" (1.1.195-6). At least in her own world, Cordelia has been reduced to being the nothing she invoked in her first extended speech, Lear cruelly asserting indeed that "we / Have no such daughter" (1.1.261-2). It is the King of France who saves the day for her when he magnanimously takes up the castaway, endowing her with a fresh identity as the future queen of his country and in doing so articulating a series of apparent paradoxes that depend once again on the tension between different categories of value. Cordelia, he says, is "most rich, being poor; / Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd" (1.1.249-50). She has been transformed in his estimation into an incarnate oxymo-

ron whose contradictory identity is summed up in his description of her as an "unpriz'd, precious maid" that no number of "dukes of wat'rish Burgundy" could "buy" of him (1.1.257-8). If the language in which he expresses himself remains that of commerce, it is here used to enhance the sense of Cordelia's human value rather than to diminish it. What the king is implying through such language is, in effect, that the precious but unpurchaseable Cordelia has in his eyes escaped the trammels of the market paradigm altogether.

As the French king's paradoxical formulas also suggest, however, Cordelia has in a sense been divided into two selves, split between a British identity that has by now been emptied of substance, and the elevated French role with which she has newly been invested. This process of division, initiated by Lear's twofold partitioning of his kingdom, is one that becomes a general principle operating in the play. Characters such as Edgar and Kent are analogously riven, as they are obliged to abdicate their endangered former selves and fabricate artificial personas for themselves as Tom the beggar and Caius respectively. "Edgar I nothing am" (2.3.21), says Edgar, who resorts to the expedient of literally effacing himself – "my face I'll grime with filth" (2.3.9) – in order to mask his identity, while Kent has similarly "raz'd my likeness" (1.4.4) so as to render himself unrecognizable. Not only Lear's kingdom, and not only individual inhabitants of it, but the social fabric itself is rent at every level, as Gloucester remarks when he informs his natural son Edmund that the eclipses which have recently been observed presage rifts and insurrections in various spheres:

> Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the King falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. (1.2.103-9)

Gloucester does not know it, but such divisions are correlated less with eclipses in the heavens than with that less visible occultation in the domain of personal relationships that Lear has somewhat ominously described as his "darker purpose" (1.1.35), which perhaps in symbolic terms amounts to the same thing. Edmund will

travesty his father's astrological interpretation of events shortly afterwards when he mockingly says that "O! these eclipses do portend these divisions" (1.2.133-4), and in speaking to the brother he is plotting to rob of his inheritance he takes up Gloucester's words once again, talking of

> unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state; menaces and maledictions against King and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what. (1.2.141-6)

The leitmotif of division permeates the language of the play from beginning to end, reflecting what has become in effect a universal condition. At one point Kent says that "There is division . . . 'twixt Albany and Cornwall" (3.1.19-21), shortly afterwards describing what was once Lear's unified realm as a "scatter'd kingdom" (3.1.31). Kent's words are repeated almost verbatim by Gloucester, himself the victim of the rift between father and son, when he says that "There is division between the Dukes" (3.3.8-9). In a letter Edmund has forged to deceive Gloucester, Edgar is represented as promising his brother that if their father were put out of the way "you should enjoy half his revenue for ever" (1.2.51), and thus that the proceeds of the estate, in despite of the law of primogeniture, would be distributed in equal measure between the two sons. Ironically, Edmund himself is stigmatized as being a "Half-blooded fellow" by Albany (5.3.81), the reference being to the bastardy that allows him only partial recognition as his father's son. Lear tells Regan that if she failed to welcome him with the filial solicitude he is entitled to expect "I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb" on the suspicion of her being an adulteress (2.4.128-9) – this being, rather sadly, the sole reference to the late queen to be found in the drama. Regan and Goneril, initially complicit with one another in their determination to subdue their father to their wills – Goneril herself asserts that in this matter their minds "are one" (1.3.16) – mutate into ferocious adversaries when they both become enamoured of Edmund, their antagonism growing to the point that one will eventually murder the other before killing herself as well. Accusing the opportunistic Oswald of fo-

menting discord in order to gain his own advantage, Kent says that "Such smiling rogues as these, / Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain / Which are too intrince t'unloose" (2.2.70-2). Even the human body is not exempt from this process of division. The Fool remarks at one point that the reason "why one's nose stands i'th'middle on's face" is "to keep one's eyes of either side's nose" (1.5.19-20, 22). This is humorous enough, but later in the play, after one of Gloucester's eyes has been gouged out of its socket by Cornwall, Regan viciously complains that "One side will mock another" (3.7.69), and urges Cornwall to rectify this asymmetry by tearing out the other eye as well. Lear's gruesome suggestion that his daughter's body be dissected in order to seek out the cause of her malicious conduct – "let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart" (3.6.74-5) – partakes of the same pattern. Symbolically at least, the impetus towards division culminates in the tempest both in his mind and in the elements that Lear confronts in the third act of the play.

Not only has he divided his kingdom into two, but in more than one way Lear has divided his kingly identity as well. For a start, as Bell relevantly points out (2002: 159ff.), he has effected a divorce between those different facets of the monarch's character that Ernst H. Kantorowicz describes as the "king's two bodies" – between the "body natural", or his mortal and personal self on the one hand, and the "body politic", or his mystic identity as the embodiment of his realm on the other.[5] At the same time, and as part and parcel of the same process, in seeking to "shake all cares and business from our age" (1.1.38), while retaining his nominal status as sovereign, he has driven a wedge between his formal and effective roles, between title and function:

> Only we shall retain
> The name and all th'addition to a king; the sway,
> Revenue, execution of the rest,
> Beloved sons, be yours: which to confirm,

5 Although he does not consider *King Lear*, Kantorowicz dedicates an entire chapter to *Richard II* in his classic study of the distinction between the two bodies of the king (1997: 24-41).

This coronet part between you.
(1.1.134-8)

It is ironic that Lear should believe he can retain the "addition" to kingship when he is in fact subtracting from himself the power which is the only means by which kingship can be sustained. Goneril scornfully, but not for that reason inaccurately, points out the contradiction latent in his attitude when she describes Lear as an "Idle old man, / That still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away!" (1.3.17-19). That the crown he has "part-ed" between his sons-in-law is parted in other ways as well is something that the Fool taxes him with in his typically mocking manner:

> Fool   Nuncle, give me an egg, and I'll give thee two crowns.
> Lear   What two crowns shall they be?
> Fool   Why, after I have cut the egg i'th'middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i'th'middle, and gav'st away both parts, thou bor'st thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt: thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away. (1.4.152-60)

And the Fool continues to harp upon the theme of division and the cloven condition it gives rise to, a doubleness which in the case of kingship, as of anything else held to have absolute and intrinsic value in itself, is tantamount to nothingness: "thou hast pared thy wit o'both sides, and left nothing i'th'middle" (1.4.183-4). Once the mystique of kingship has been subjected to the logic of numbers, it evaporates altogether. "Now thou art an O without a figure . . . thou art nothing" (1.4.189-91), says the Fool, apparently alluding to the cipher or zero that is used as a placeholder in positional number systems, and that has no value when unaccompanied by an integer.[6] Lear, like his crown, has been reduced to the status of mere

6 There are indications in some of his plays that Shakespeare had some familiarity with Robert Recorde's textbook on arithmetic entitled *The Ground of Artes*, which was published in 1543 and reprinted in a number of subsequent editions over the next century and a half. Among the items of mathematical lore to be found in Recorde's book is the information that of the ten figures employed in arithmetic, "one doth signifie nothing, which is made like an O, and is privately called a Cypher" (quoted in Blank 2006: 122). It is

cipher, a placeholder without a place, and he himself comes to define himself as the absence of his former self when he says that "This is not Lear" (1.4.223).

As the Fool several times intimates in his characteristically cryptic but always trenchant fashion, to live by numbers is to run the risk of perishing by numbers. Lear exclaims at one point that "this heart / Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws / Or ere I'll weep" (2.4.282-4), and it is essentially this that happens to him. The symbol of Lear's regal status, by now purely honorific, is the hundred knights he stipulates must be allowed to attend him as he divides his time equally between the residences of Regan and Goneril, another arrangement that reflects the manner in which his existence has been fractured into two. On the pretext that his retinue is guilty of riotous conduct that offends the decorum of her palace, Goneril tells Lear that it is necessary "A little to disquantity your train" (1.4.246),[7] a threat that is carried out with ruthless dispatch when he is deprived of "fifty of my followers at a clap; / Within a fortnight!" (1.4.292-3). Lear complains to Regan that Goneril "hath abated me of half my train" (2.4.156), and to persuade her to treat him with greater consideration reminds her of the "half o'th'kingdom . . . Wherein I thee endow'd" (2.4.178-9). He is by now frankly bartering, however much he thinks he is merely pleading for justice and common decency, but at this stage in the proceedings he has been shorn of the least semblance of bargaining power. Regan tells him that when he next comes to reside at her palace he must limit himself to bringing "but five-and-twenty" (2.4.246) of his retainers, and at this point Lear, realizing that he is by now inextricably immersed in a universe of relative values in which "Those wicked creatures yet do look well favour'd / When others are more wicked" (2.4.254-5), decides to accept Goneril's marginally more advantageous terms:

>   I'll go with thee:

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possibly Recorde's words, or a reiteration of them in some other work, that is echoed in the devastating phrase "Signifying nothing" which concludes Macbeth's most nihilistic meditation on the meaning of life (5.5.28).

7 This is the only instance of this rather cumbersome verb to be found in Shakespeare.

> Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,
> And thou art twice her love.
> (2.4.256-8)

Lear is reduced at this point to evaluating his status in the world, and his standing in the affections of his daughters, according to the crudest criteria of quantity, but his trial by numbers is not yet over:

> GONERIL   Hear me, my Lord.
>   What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,
>   To follow in a house where twice so many
>   Have a command to tend you?
> REGAN   What need one?
> (2.4.258-61)

After "one" there is only that nothing which, both as a word and as a concept, tolls ominously throughout the play. As Brian Rotman remarks, "the language of arithmetic, in which his train of followers is counted down to nothing, and in which the Fool articulates the loss of Lear's kinghood as a thing reduced to zero, becomes the vehicle and image of the destruction of Lear's self" (2001: 83). It is Lear himself who has implicitly invoked an arithmetical paradigm in his dealings with others, and that very paradigm which now, in accordance with its own inexorable logic, progressively erodes his identity to what in mathematical as well as psychological terms would seem to be a point of no return.

But Lear's journey does not end here. His response to Goneril's question "What need you five-and-twenty?" is "O! reason not the need" (2.4.262), an exclamation that signals the bankruptcy of the kind of calculus he himself has brought to bear even on human relationships. To this he adds that "Allow not nature more than nature needs, / Man's life is cheap as beast's" (2.4.264-5), the word "cheap" once again recalling the market and the activity of bartering through which values are negotiated rather than simply affirmed. In the course of his ordeal on the heath he confronts what he thinks to be the living image of such radical cheapening, of man's essential nature denuded of the social and cultural appurtenances that make human life something more than merely bes-

tial, in the person of Poor Tom. "Thou art the thing itself", he says: "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (3.4.104-6). The spectator of the play recognizes the irony latent in this revelatory encounter, because Poor Tom is really Gloucester's son Edgar, who has reduced himself to such a threshold condition solely for the purposes of self-preservation, and who will subsequently go to considerable lengths to reaffirm his social identity and restore himself to his rightful place in the world. Nonetheless the symbolic significance of Lear's confrontation with what he believes to be a Bedlam beggar is unaffected by this circumstance, and that significance is a positive one. Having reached a nadir of seemingly total disintegration, the play presents unmistakable tokens that the process of division that Lear has set in motion is in some respects reversing itself. From a psychological perspective, the unity from which he has been sundered is one based on his own egotism, on his arrogant belief in his unassailable centrality in the order of things. Now, buffeted by the winds upon the heath that "make nothing" (3.1.9) of the white hair that was previously shielded by a crown, Lear becomes increasingly aware that such a belief has been a spurious one, that he has been inhabiting a fictitious vision of reality that has prevented him from attending to more humane imperatives which are in essence also his own. Even before meeting Tom Lear expresses his sympathy for the "Poor naked wretches . . . That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm" (3.4.28-9), adjuring himself to "Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel" (3.4.34) in a speech that A.C. Bradley hyperbolically but very comprehensibly says is "one of those passages which make one worship Shakespeare" (1971: 237). Shortly afterwards he manifests even further his personal identification with Tom, and everything that Tom represents, when he begins to tear off those "lendings" (3.4.106-7), the garments which are among the few trappings of his former identity remaining to him,[8] that screen him from his own unaccommodated humanity.

If Lear's descent into madness, and his progressive separa-

8 For a fine discussion of how the "play's imagery of clothing . . . enforces the implication that most of the human qualities that make up personhood are things put on or taken off", see Bell 2004 (this quotation 55).

tion from the world of delusive appearances that he has mistaken for reality, has been represented figuratively in the mathematical language of *King Lear*, the transformation in his outlook which opens up the possibility of reintegration and reunification on another level is rendered in very much the same language, a point that has perhaps not sufficiently been remarked by commentators on the play. It is the return of Cordelia to Britain for the purpose of rescuing her father from the abuses of her malevolent siblings which suggests that some at least of the schisms that have developed in consequence of, or as symbolic correlatives to, Lear's perverse mode of perceiving the world are being healed. If, as was suggested earlier, there is a sense in which Cordelia has been divided into a British and a French self in the opening scene of the play, then those two selves merge when she returns to Britain with a French army in order to restore things to rights in her native country. One of the first things that Cordelia does upon arriving at Dover, significantly enough, is issue instructions that a "century" of soldiers be dispatched to search for her distracted father (4.4.6), this recalling the hundred knights, so crucial to Lear's sense of his own identity, that her sisters have so calculatingly deprived him of. In contrast to the devastating literalness of the process by which Lear's escort has been reduced by his other two daughters, this mobilization of a hundred soldiers on his behalf is an essentially symbolic gesture of restoration which indicates that the language of quantification has itself been transposed into another register altogether. This is of a piece with what occurs elsewhere in the drama as well. The Cordelia who at the beginning of the play has used a self-contradictory language of mensuration to signify her refusal to measure, to weigh the extent of her filial devotion on the same scale as that of her sisters, asks Kent upon encountering him after her return to Britain "how shall I live and work / To match thy goodness?", and then adds that "My life will be too short, / And every measure fail me" (4.7.1-3). Kent is speaking a similar language when, in response to this affirmation of virtues whose worth cannot be gauged according to any system of measurement, he says that "To be acknowledg'd, Madam, is o'erpaid" (4.7.4). He, no less than Cordelia, is an exponent of values that can neither be assessed in quantitative terms nor converted

into any currency other than their own.

The language of numbers is deployed obliquely as a symbolic notation in other ways as well. As the impetus towards unification begins, at least on the personal and interpersonal levels, to gather momentum in the play, a character identified only as a "Gentleman" observes that Lear has "one daughter, / Who redeems nature from the general curse / Which twain have brought her to" (4.6.202-4), the suggestion being that an almost religiously conceived "one" will ransom the world from the blight of twoness into which it has fallen.[9] Examining the play from a perspective very different from that adopted in the present discussion, but illuminating nonetheless concerns highly relevant to it, Janet Adelman argues that "two is the first number, the beginning of the counting and accounting that ends in Cordelia's giving away half her love . . . the sign of separation and division", and in connection with Goneril and Regan that "in setting their twain against Cordelia's one, the Gentleman names the play's most primary loss: the fall into division, the loss of one-ness that only the return of the one can redeem" (2008: 122-3). It is precisely the possibility of overcoming division and restoring unity in all spheres that the play continues to hold out as a distant prospect even as it precipitates fatally towards a tragic conclusion which, as Kent painfully remarks, is not the "promis'd end" that has been expected (5.3.262). After their capture by the British forces Lear assures Cordelia that "We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage" (5.3.9), that they will be united in their captivity, and although his prediction as to how their future lives will evolve proves to be mistaken this does not detract from the significance of the moment. "He that parts us", Lear tells Cordelia, "shall bring a brand from heav-

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9 A number of critics have argued that the figure of Cordelia, who seems to be echoing Luke, 2: 49 when she says "O dear father! / It is thy business that I go about" (4.4.23-4), recalls that of Christ. See for instance John Reibetanz's comment that "Shakespeare has . . . prepared us for the play's final, pitiful tableau by associating Cordelia with Christ" (1977: 111), Derek Peat's reference to "the reversed Pieta after Lear enters with Cordelia in his arms" (1982: 48), and, more recently, Nuttall's observation that "the entry of Lear with Cordelia dead or near death in his arms immediately evokes . . . the Pietà of Christian iconography" (2007: 307).

en, / And fire us hence like foxes" (5.3.22-3), words which suggest – with ironic prescience given that they will both be dead within a few hours – that no merely earthly agent will henceforth be capable of dividing them. Elsewhere as well, instances of twoness give way to oneness, or vanish altogether. As early as the first scene of the drama Cordelia's honesty in the matter of expressing emotion serves to reduce the two candidates for her hand to one, Burgundy desisting from his suit when he learns that the only dowry that remains to her is her truth (1.1.107), and this establishes a pattern that intensifies as the play proceeds. If, as has often been maintained, there are respects in which Cordelia and the Fool are the virtual doubles of one another, then the disappearance of the latter when Cordelia returns to Britain might intimate that they have in some symbolic manner coalesced into one, to the point that, as Thomas B. Stroup suggests, "in death she and the Fool are united . . . at least in Lear's mind" (1961: 131).[10] Towards the end of the play, Goneril poisons Regan, and subsequently kills herself as well, thus ridding the world of a singularly unsavoury twosome. Having torn out Gloucester's eyes, Cornwall is killed by his own servant, leaving Albany as Lear's only surviving son-in-law. The two half-brothers, Edgar and Edmund, fight to the death, and not only does Edgar emerge victorious from the contest, vindicating his claim to be sole heir to their father's title and estate, but the dying Edmund attempts, as he says, to do some good despite his own nature (5.3.242-3), and thereby implicitly assimilates himself to his brother's value system.

From a more strictly political perspective, the necessity of promoting this principle of singularity over plurality, of unity over division, is affirmed in the manner in which regal authority is allocated at the conclusion of the play. All other potential contenders for the role of monarch except himself now being dead, Albany makes the wholly symbolic gesture of resigning his "absolute power" (5.3.299) to a man who is no longer capable of wielding it, to that Lear who is therefore at least formally reinstated in

10 Harold Bloom asserts in a similar vein that Lear's lament that "my poor fool is hang'd" (5.3-304), indicates that "the identities of Cordelia and the Fool blend in Albion's confusion" (1999: 499).

his role as the undisputed sovereign of his realm in the brief inter-
val before he dies. In the immediate aftermath of the king's death,
however, the spectre of division appears once again to rear its
head when, instead of reclaiming the crown himself as he might
be expected to do, Albany proposes to Kent and Edgar that "you
twain, / Rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain" (5.3.318-
9). However worthy the two designated co-monarchs might be in
this case, such an arrangement would effectively replicate the er-
ror that Lear has committed at the beginning of the play when he
tells his sons-in-law that "I do invest you jointly with my power"
(1.1.129), an error that would have led to civil war had the invasion
of the French army not necessitated a tactical alliance between
the two parties. The threat is averted however when Kent declines
Albany's proposal, anticipating his own imminent death when he
says that "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go" (5.3.320), and thus
leaving Edgar sole incumbent of the throne.[11] The mystique of roy-
alty is thus vested once again in a single individual, and what
Kantorowicz describes as the "body politic" of the king restored
thereby to its original unity.

But the story of the king's "body natural", the personal saga of
Lear the man, plays out to another conclusion than this, and al-
so to an intimation, at least, of another kind of unification. At one
point in *King Lear* the Fool delivers himself a sequence of rhymed
maxims which, though somewhat rough-hewn and seemingly ba-
nal, reflect so cogently on some of the central concerns of the play
that they perhaps merit more attention than they are generally
accorded:

> Have more than thou showest,
> Speak less than thou knowest,
> Lend less than thou owest,
> Ride more than thou goest,
> Learn more than thou trowest,
> Set less than thou throwest,

11 Unless, as the Quarto seems to imply by assigning to him the final
lines of the play, it is Albany who takes up the sceptre, which from the point
of view of the mathematical symbolism of the drama amounts to the same
thing.

> Leave thy drink and thy whore,
> And keep in-a-door,
> And thou shalt have more
> Than two tens to a score.
> (1.4.116-25)

These lines play insistently on the words "more" and "less" which, as has already been mentioned, reverberate throughout the tragedy. Kent's response to the Fool's set of variations on these words is to remark that "This is nothing, fool" (1.4.126), to which the Fool, once again setting off disparate domains of value against one another, rejoins that "Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer; you gave me nothing for't" (1.4.127-8). On this occasion as well, as in the ceremony with which the play opens, the logic of "more" and "less", of greater and slighter quantities, comes up against the fatal word "nothing", and once again Lear finds himself reiterating his formula "nothing can be made out of nothing" (1.4.130). But perhaps on this occasion he is wrong, and something can after all be made of the Fool's nothing. The final two couplets involve a modulation in the meaning of the word "more", one that has to do with the Fool's persistent concern, manifested at various points in the tragedy, with the "house" and all it represents.[12] The implication of the final lines of his verse would seem to be that by keeping "in-a-door", remaining securely within the confines of the home and what those confines signify in the existential life of the individual, the sterile logic of numbers that equates two tens with a score is somehow transcended. Keeping "in-a-door" is of course something that Lear, who has divided his own house in the name of numbers, and who has in consequence forfeited any stable domestic haven in which he can ground his sense of self, has con-

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12 The Fool repeatedly alludes to the house throughout the play. He tells Lear that the reason why "a snail has a house" is "to put's head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case" (1.5.27-30). Later he says that "court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o'door" (3.2.10-11), and shortly after that "He that has a house to put's head in has a good head-piece" (3.2.25-6). While enduring the tempest on the heath, Lear also uses the notion of "houseless poverty" (3.4.26) and "houseless heads and unfed sides" (3.4.30) to describe human beings reduced to destitution and obliged to confront the elements without protection.

spicuously failed to do. But it is also something that, in envisaging an impossible future in which he and Cordelia will live together like two birds in a cage, he perhaps learns the true value of in the final hours of his life.

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Part 4
Revisiting Oedipus and Lear

14

Happy Endings for Old Kings: Jean-François Ducis' *Œdipe* and *Léar*

Nicola Pasqualicchio

Abstract

The French dramatist Jean-François Ducis (1733-1816) is, to our knowledge, the only author who ever wrote both a tragedy inspired by Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and an adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. His *Œdipe chez Admète* (1778) – a peculiar hybridization of the Sophoclean source with elements taken from Euripides' *Alcestis* – originated from his liking for the tragic theme of Oedipus' old age and death, confirmed by the revival of *Œdipe chez Admète* in 1792 and the creation of *Œdipe à Colone* in 1797. While the treatment of this theme is Ducis' only thematic descent into Greek tragedy, *Le Roi Léar* (1783), following *Hamlet* and *Roméo et Juliette* and preceding *Macbeth*, *Jean sans Terre*, and *Othello*, is one among the many passionate and unfaithful homages the Versailles author paid to Shakespeare. We should look at *Œdipe* and *Léar* as contiguous works, especially if we take into account that Ducis' dramatic muse fell silent during the five-year interval between the composition of these plays. This circumstance stimulates a critical comparison of the two dramas with special regard to their common elements. In the first place, I will devote special attention to the similar enlargement, in both pieces, of the roles of the daughters (Antigone and Helmonde, the Cordelia-figure in *Le Roi Léar*) which, differently from the originals, results in a more precise focalization on the relationship between the fathers and their favourite daughters. Secondly, I will focus on the two Providence-inspired happy endings both works progressively tend to and which, in a perspective of Christian theodicy, eventually redeem the tragic course of the two old kings.

Keywords: Ducis; neoclassical tragedy; Sophocles; Shakespeare; Oedipus; King Lear

The French tragedian François Ducis (1733-1816), is, to our knowledge, the only dramatist to write works inspired both by the theme of *Oedipus at Colonus* and by the story of *King Lear*: *Œdipe chez Admète* (1778, afterwards extensively rewritten as *Œdipe à Colone* in 1797) and *Le Roi Léar* (1783). This circumstance becomes all the more significant when we notice that the two works, despite the fact that more than four years separated their composition and the dates of their first performance, were actually written one after the other, with no other theatrical opus completed and staged between them. This has led us to hypothesize that Ducis became aware of a possible continuity between the two tragic tales and that it is not merely coincidental that after the only time he ventured into the realm of Greek tragedy, he decided to return to his beloved (if oft-betrayed) Shakespeare with a reworking of *King Lear*. Some similarities between the two tragic themes do, of course, immediately leap to the eye, especially the superficial ones such as the relationship of an aging monarch, exiled and abandoned, and his children, among whom the character of a loving and best-beloved daughter stands out. The relationship between the two tragedies was recognized and remarked by Ducis, who, however, adapted them to his own artistic aims and beliefs and in so doing twisted them in ways that distance them conspicuously from their original sources.

Our analysis will be elaborated in three stages: the first two concern the comparison between Ducis' two tragedies and their source texts *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles and *Alcestis* by Euripides for *Œdipe chez Admète*; Shakespeare's *King Lear* for *Le Roi Léar*; the third will analyse the way in which examples of Ducis' reworking of the text have highlighted certain elements of a possible continuity between the original stories of the aged Oedipus and Lear.

1. *Œdipe chez Admète*

Œdipe chez Admète, a tragedy in five acts in Alexandrine metre, performed for the first time at Versailles on 4 December, 1778,

has its origins in a bizarre combination of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Euripides' *Alcestis*. There does not seem to exist any precedent for such an amalgamation so it was very probably an original idea of Ducis'. In this way, the sole example of the adoption of Greek drama as source material on the part of the French playwright may be considered as both a re-visitation and an intersection of two classical tragedies, which might seem to have little to do with one another, either from the point of view of specific content or from that of mythological relationship. However, it is certainly the case that the two plays share a particular feature which is clearly connected to the idea Ducis held of 'the tragic', as far away as was possible from any direct reference to bloody events or to the pitiless inevitability of a fate that concedes no justification or redemption of human suffering. Though both the source plays have death as a thematic fulcrum, it is presented in a way which is far more amenable to the Christian concept of reconciliation between mankind and death towards which Ducis' theatre tends: Oedipus' death in Sophocles is an event accepted in a wise and dignified manner, and it benefits the city that has taken him in; Admetus' grief for the death of Alcestis only lasts until the moment he realizes that she is alive when he sees her return from Hades, thanks to the intervention of Heracles. Hospitality, gratitude, love, all these attenuate or postpone death's cruelty (although, as we shall see later, Ducis needs to soften the negative elements even further). The intersection between two distinct mythological narratives permits Ducis, in one fell swoop, to present Oedipus' death as the ascent into heaven of a redeemed sinner and to avoid death's entrance, if only temporarily, into the house of Admetus. Indeed, the underlying idea of this pastiche is that of allowing the aged Oedipus to cleanse himself of his terrible, if unwitting, offences through offering his life, by this stage at its end, in exchange for those of King Admetus and Alcestis, his wife, who, as is familiar, had decided to sacrifice her own to prolong that of her husband.

Just as he does in Sophocles, Oedipus, with the help of his loving daughter Antigone, reaches the vicinity of a sanctuary dedicated to the Eumenides. But this is not, however, at Colonus, near Athens, and under the jurisdiction of Theseus, but in Thessaly, in

the neighbourhood of the city of Pherae, which was of course in the kingdom of Admetus. The juncture between the two different storylines necessarily presupposes simplifying both of them, with the consequent elimination of the two characters of Creon and Ismene in Sophocles' play and of Heracles and Admetus' parents in that of Euripides.

It may be recalled that, initially, the plan for Ducis' first foray into Classical mythology was only to involve Euripides' tragedy, consequently, the story of Admetus and Alcestis with no amalgamation with other tragic plots. From a letter to the actors of the Comédie Française of 13 December, 1773, we learn that the playwright had entered in the registers of the Comédie a tragic work entitled *Admète et Alceste* together with his reasons for wishing the realization of this project to precede a further sortie into Shakespeare, this time on the subject of *Macbeth*: "Après ma tragédie de Roméo, j'ai voulu offrir aux yeux du public des tableaux d'une autre nature, et ne point lui présenter de suite le terrible Macbeth après le terrible Montaigu. Je me suis donc attaché au sujet d'*Admète et d'Alceste*, et c'est dans la préface de l'*Iphigénie* de Racine que j'ai puisé la noble tentation de traiter cet admirable sujet" (Albert 1879: 16; "After my tragedy on Romeo, I wanted to offer pictures of another kind to the public eye, and not present them with the terrible Macbeth straight after the terrible Montague. So I set to work on the subject of *Admète et Alceste*, and it was the preface to Racine's Iphigénie which caused me to succumb to the noble temptation to treat this admirable subject"; all translations from the French are mine). Here, as can be seen, there is no hint of a possible fusion with the story of the aged Oedipus, with whom Admetus has to share the stage in the play actually put on in 1778, and then surrender it completely to him in the remake of 1797. From Ducis' letter to David Garrick on 6 July 1774, we learn that the tragedy of Admetus has been completed: "Je viens de terminer une nouvelle tragédie: c'est *Admète et Alceste*, sujet tiré de notre Euripide. Je suis à la veille de la faire lire à la Comédie-Française" (Albert 1879: 20; "I have just finished a new tragedy: it is *Admète et Alceste*, the subject drawn from our Euripides. I am about to give it to the Comédie Française to read"). This, however, is the last time the tragedy derived solely

from Euripides is mentioned; in a letter dated 25 January 1775 to his friend Michel-Jean Sedaine we find the first reference to a tragedy about Oedipus, which is already very probably the one destined to become *Œdipe chez Admète*: "Je lis demain ou après-demain ma tragédie d'Œdipe à M. le marquis de Montesquiou, et mes mesures sont prises pour que Monsieur l'entende à son tour et demande qu'elle soit représentée devant le roi" (ibid.; "Tomorrow or the day after I shall read my tragedy on Oedipus to the Marquis of Montesquiou, and I have taken all measures to ensure that Monsieur [the king's brother] will hear it in his turn and will ask for it to be performed before the king").

To return to the juncture of the two storylines mentioned above, the character of Admetus and the plot-line involving him are just as important as that of Oedipus, who in point of fact only comes on stage in the second scene of the third act, although it must be said that from now on the stage will belong almost entirely to him. In this way Oedipus makes his appearance when we are already almost halfway through the tragedy, at the point where the topic of the fated death of the King of Pherae and his wife's offer to sacrifice herself in his place has already been amply presented and developed and has served as a thematic fulcrum to the first two acts. However, the mingling of the two stories is revealed from the very first lines of the tragedy, in the exchange between Admetus and Polyneices: Oedipus' son has come to Pherae to ask for the king's help in the attack that he is about to launch upon the city of Thebes and on his brother Eteocles, who is governing it illegally. And even if Admetus is for now far from imagining a meeting with Oedipus so soon, the aged king is mentioned several times both by his son and by Admetus himself in their dialogue. Indeed, Oedipus' miserable condition, soon to be before the eyes of the spectators, is already prefigured in the words with which Admetus evokes the son of Laius: "Hélas! Sur sa misère, / Quel cœur, s'il est humain, ne s'attendriroit pas!" (1.1) (Ducis 1819: 180; "Alas! Over his misery / What heart, being human, would not melt?"). On his part, Polyneices, who (as different from Sophocles' depiction of him) repents of having exiled his father and mourns over the old king's miserable lot:

Hélas! pour un vieillard si vertueux, si rare,
La terre est sans asile et le ciel sans flambeau!
L'Univers dès long temps n'est pour lui qu'un tombeau :
 Il n'a pour tout secours, privé de la couronne,
Que ses pleurs, ses destins, et le bras d'Antigone.
Que ma sœur est heureuse! elle aura pu, du-moins,
Guider ses pas tremblans, lui prodiguer ses soins.
(ibid.)

[Alas! For such a rare and virtuous old man,
Earth is without refuge and heaven without light!
For a long time the universe has only been a tomb for him:
He has, for his only aid, lacking the crown,
His tears, his destiny, and Antigone's arm.
How lucky my sister is! At least she has been able
To guide his trembling steps, to lavish her care on him.]

The coming together of the two stories in a single text also entails the impossibility of maintaining the perfect unity of place that characterizes both the source tragedies: in Sophocles, the sacred wood on the hill at Colonus, and in Euripides, the space behind Admetus' palace. In Ducis, the place of the action is divided between the interior of Admetus' palace in the first, second and fourth acts and the space in front of and inside the temple of the Eumenides in the third and fifth. But the differences between the French play and its Greek sources are particularly striking when we come to the character, behaviour and motivation of the main dramatis personae.

Ducis' Oedipus is in some ways very similar to Sophocles' aged hero: a blind vagrant, poverty-stricken and forlorn, who despite everything bears his terrible misfortune with a noble dignity. However, he is in some ways, especially during the first part of the tragedy, more fragile, more bewildered, and even more frightened than his Greek model. If the Greek Oedipus on more than one occasion asks Antigone for advice on how to behave, he always takes personal responsibility for his decisions. Ducis' hero, on the other hand, is shown almost as a victim of infantile regression, and is consequently much more dependent on his daughter's protection. The proximity of the Eumenides terrifies him and makes him ask Antigone, just as a small child would ask his moth-

er, to put her arms round him and protect him. He has not even the courage to reveal his identity to the citizens of Pherae: they find it out by themselves. When Oedipus becomes aware of their hostile reaction to this, he first asks Antigone to hold him in her arms, and then falls to the ground as if in a faint.

On the other hand, when Sophocles' Oedipus realizes he is in Colonus he feels reassured because he knows that this is the place towards which the gods have been driving him so that he may die a serene and sacred death. It is not chance, but a divine edict prophesied to him by Apollo that has led him to the place of his death near the sanctuary of the Eumenides:[1]

> ὅς μοι, τὰ πόλλ᾽ἐκεῖν᾽ὅτ᾽εξέχρη κακά,
> ταύτην ἔλεξε παῦλαν ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ,
> ἐλθόντι χώραν τερμίαν, ὅπου θεῶν
> σεμνῶν ἕδραν λάβοιμι καὶ ξενόστασιν.
> (Soph. *OC* 87-90)

> [For he told me, when he predicted all that evil, that this should be my respite after long years, when I came to the land that was my final bourne, where I should find a seat of the dread goddesses and a shelter.]

But Sophocles' hero also knows that the gods have entrusted him with a final duty before he dies; he must reveal to Theseus the secrets upon which the prosperity of Athens will be founded, a duty which the aged king will carry out with a fully aware authority:

> ἐγὼ διδάξω, τέκνον Αἰγέως, ἅ σοι
> γήρως ἄλυπα τῇδεκείσεται πόλει.
> χῶρον μὲν αὐτὸς αὐτίκ᾽ ἐξηγήσομαι,
> ἄθικτος ἡγητῆρος, οὗ με χρὴ θανεῖν.
> τοῦτον δὲ φράζε μήποτ᾽ ἀνθρώπων τινί,
> μήθ᾽ οὗ κέκευθε μήτ᾽ ἐν οἷς κεῖται τόποις.
> (1518-23)

> [I will explain, son of Aegeus, what things are laid up for your city, invulnerable to passing time! I myself, with no guide to lay a hand on me, shall now show you the place where I must die. Do

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1 Text and translation are from Sophocles 1994.

not ever reveal to any human being either where it is concealed or
the region in which it lies.]

On the contrary, the gods have not revealed anything about his
death to the Oedipus of Ducis' tragedy. Pherae for him is nothing
but another stage in his wanderings, not in any way remarkable.
Here there is no reason for a possible relief of his fear and suffer-
ing. Only the development of events will disclose the fact that this
is where he is fated to die and where the possibility of his redemp-
tion will be generated by his offer to give his life in exchange for
that of Admetus. Correspondingly, this will occasion a psycholog-
ical evolvement in the character, who is able to rise above his in-
itial state of fragility and regression. This change is already to be
discerned in the tense and emotional meeting with Polyneices: at
first it is Oedipus' inflexible anger towards his son which allows
the aged hero to reassume an attitude of authority and dignity as
regal as it is paternal; then these re-acquired virtues are displaced
into the magnanimity of forgiveness, in response to Polyneices'
repentance and love.

Nevertheless, this is only a passing recovery on the part of
Oedipus. The news of the imminence of Admetus' death touch-
es the old man so deeply (as it also leads him to interpret the ap-
proaching calamity as the result of defilement from the guilt he
bears with him) that it causes him to suffer a fresh state of pros-
tration. This he will recover from at the conclusion, when he gains
back an even greater human and heroic stature, at the moment he
finally understands that his arrival at the court of Admetus, so that
he might offer his life in exchange for those of the king of Pherae
and his wife, was in fact the work of the gods. We realize at this
point that Oedipus has undergone a genuine transfiguration, not
one that is doubly concealed from the eyes of the spectators, such
as is the case in Sophocles, by the ῥῆσις of the Messenger and by
the modality of the disappearance of the protagonist which is in
any manner of speaking mysterious and invisible. In Ducis' cli-
max everything is explicit in a modality very close in type to that
of Christian redemption. Indeed, the spirit of Christianity in the
last words of an Oedipus forgiven and saved is more than evident,
as is the fact that, behind the formal preservation of a plurality of

gods, the aged king's farewell to life is directed towards a god in the singular:

> Grands Dieux! par vous bientôt mon ame va s'ouvrir
> A ce jour éternel qui doit tout découvrir !
> . . .
> Tout fuit, le temps n'est plus ; je meurs, je vais renaître.
> . . .
> . . . il n'est point de malheur où survit la vertu.
> Mais je sens que mon ame en dédaignant la terre,
> A l'approche des Dieux s'agrandit et s'éclaire.
> . . .
> Et vous, Dieux tout puissans! si vous daignez m'absoudre,
> Annoncez mon pardon par le bruit de la foudre ;
> . . .
> Mon esprit se dégage ; il n'est plus arrêté ;
> Je tombe, et je m'élève à l'immortalité.
> (5.7; Ducis 1819: 87-8)

> [Great Gods, thanks to you my soul will soon open
> To that eternal light that will show everything
> . . .
> All is fleeing from me, time is no more; I die and I prepare to be reborn;
> . . .
> here is no unhappiness where virtue survives,
> But I feel that my soul, disdaining the earth,
> As the Gods come nearer expands and brightens,
> . . .
> And you, almighty Gods! If you deign to absolve me,
> Announce my forgiveness with a thunderclap;
> . . .
> My spirit frees itself; it is no longer chained;
> I fall and raise myself to immortality.]

A thunderclap, the sign of divine forgiveness, is immediately heard, and the flash of lightning that follows strikes Oedipus,[2] who

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2 The way in which Oedipus dies seems to clash with the symbolism of the scene of forgiveness and quasi-beatification of the hero; but in the ancient world death caused by a flash of lightning was not always the sign of vengeance or punishment on the part of the gods. Erwin Rohde points out

falls down dead at the foot of the altar, in sight of the audience.

Another substantial difference from the Sophoclean text, is evinced in the meeting between the aged king and his son. Sophocles' Polyneices is actually in the process of looking for his father to convince him to come home (his motive being that the oracles say such a move would help him regain power over the citizens of Thebes), while the fact that he comes across his father in Pherae is presented by Ducis as simply a matter of chance. Polyneices has come to Thessaly, as has been noted above, with the objective of obtaining military aid from Admetus: however, Admetus politely but firmly refuses it. In this way he avoids increasing the mythologically famed number of the seven against Thebes. But Polyneices' visit to Pherae for reasons of diplomacy results in a fortuitous meeting with his father. The absence of any purely exploitative motivation in this meeting on the part of Ducis' Polyneices renders him a far more positive character than the one we meet in Sophocles' play. This version of Polyneices is someone sincerely sorry to have exiled Oedipus and he makes no attempt at all to convince his father to return to Thebes for self-

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that, on the contrary, "in many legends death by *lightning* makes the victim holy and raises him to godlike (everlasting) life" (Rohde 2001: 581). The German philologist cites the case of Semele (Pind. *Ol.* 2.27) as an example, but even recognizes in the case of Capaneus the emblem of divine retribution by lightning, an aspect of deification not in contradiction with the punitive element. Referring to Euripides' *Suppliants*, in which Capaneus, even though he dies struck by divine lightning, "is certainly not regarded . . . as an impious person (as he is generally in Tragedy) . . ." (582), Rohde argues that in this case "the death of the Hero by lightning can no longer stand for his punishment, but is on the contrary a distinction. He becomes a ἱερός νεκρός . This, however, could not be done by Euripides unless the view that such a death might in certain circumstances bring honour on the victim and elevate him to a higher plain of being, had at that time widespread and generally recognized" (ibid.). Ducis, to tell the truth, had not initially intended his protagonist to die struck by lightning, but gratefully recognizes his debt to his friend the Count of Angivilliers who suggested this spectacular final solution: "J'ai fait mourir mon Œdipe au pied de l'autel, après une prière, renversé par un coup de foudre. C'est M. d'Angivilliers qui m'a donné ce conseil, qui y a insisté ; et, par ma foi! il a eu raison". (Albert 1879: 21; "I have made my Oedipus die at the foot of the altar, after a prayer, struck down by lightning. M. de Angivilliers suggested this to me and, in faith! he was right").

ish reasons. On the contrary, when he obtains his father's forgiveness his happiness is so great that he even seems to forget for a moment his hatred of his brother Eteocles, and proposes the sacrifice of his own life to lengthen that of Admetus. In parenthesis we should add that Ducis' Admetus is indeed a lucky man: here, people almost seem to be queueing up to save him, whereas, as we know, in Euripides things were very different. In any case, Polyneices' sacrifice does not take place: the Eumenides, as they make known through the words of their chief priest, do not consider him worthy of such a gesture. So Oedipus' son realizes that, come what may, his fate is leading him towards war and mortal combat with his brother, and at this point he consciously accepts this fate, not as a confirmation of his opportunity of power, but as a punishment for his sins that have rendered him unworthy of a generous death.

On the other hand, Antigone, here, embodies pure filial virtue. We find in her the absolute devotion to her father and the loving care she takes of him which are hallmarks of the same character in Sophocles, with the addition of a degree of maternal protectiveness and reassurance in direct proportion to the fragility and bewilderment of the French Oedipus. She also manifests a heartfelt desire to repair the relationship between her father and her brother Polyneices.

Admetus, on his part, fully inherits an emphasized version of the traits of nobility, justice and welcome of Sophocles' Theseus, which render him a prototype of the ideal sovereign. He shares very little, on the contrary, with his namesake in Euripides. He does not fear death, rather he wishes to postpone it – not from terror, but because he does not want to leave his beloved subjects unprotected; and he does not desire at any point to accept the sacrifice of his wife, who is also in her turn much less undecided and fearful of making the fatal decision than her counterpart in Euripides. To the wide variety of examples of selfishness and arrogance that the two Greek tragedies are studded with, Ducis opposes a world of prevailing generosity, where no-one is completely bad, and forgiveness and redemption are waiting at every corner; so that there is not a single "criminal" who is not at the same time at least potentially "vertueux" (4.2; 1859: 53).

Very little of what concerns the part relative to Oedipus is changed in *Œdipe à Colone*, performed for the first time at the Théâtre Français de la rue de Richelieu on 5 June 1797. But the story of Admetus and Alcestis is completely eliminated, with the consequent reduction of the play to three acts and the restoration of the setting in Athens and Colonus. Theseus, who regains the role assigned to him by Sophocles, corresponds, however, in every particular, to the preceding character of Admetus, save only in the involvement of his wife in his death. Theseus too, like the king of Pherae, is predicted by the oracle to suffer an impending death, but he will manage to avoid it thanks to Oedipus' offer to take his place. Although at a textual level the character of Polyneices does not undergo any changes, it gains particular emphasis, especially in the performance, owing to the fact that it was played by the great Talma, who, moreover, had already interpreted this role in the repeat performance of *Œdipe chez Admète* in 1792, and had become in the meantime Ducis' favourite actor. A letter from the playwright to Talma bears witness to how, in the rewriting of his *Œdipe*, he was already thinking of the great *tragédien* as the ideal embodiment of a heroic character with the traits of Polyneices:

> Je viens de mettre mon *Œdipe* en trois actes, tout est au moment d'être achevé. J'ai fait l'annonce de Polynice, ou de vous: sur ce signalement il n'y a point de gendarme, point d'agent de police qui ne vous arrête dans toute la république. Votre figure appartient à la famille de Laïus ou de Pélops.
> (Madame Veuve Talma 1836: 331-2).

> [I have just put my *Œdipe* into three acts, and it is almost at the point of completion. I have just announced the arrival of Polyneices, or of you: on the basis of his description not a *gendarme* or a police agent exists in the whole republic who would not arrest you. Your appearance is that of a member of the family of Laius or of Pelops.]

In *Œdipe chez Admète*, the character of Polyneices was on stage from the very beginning, together with Admetus, and a dialogue between them opens the play. On the contrary, *Œdipe à Colone* opens with an exchange between Theseus and his servant Arcas, which is interrupted by the entrance of Phoenix, another servant,

who announces (and this is the *annonce* to which Ducis is refer-
ring in his letter) the arrival of a stranger:

> Seigneur, un étranger vous demande audience:
> Tout annonce dans lui son rang et sa naissance.
> . . .
>   . . . Dans son superbe ennui,
> Il m'a paru porter, renfermant sa vengeance,
> Le poids d'un grand malheur et d'une grande offense.
> On voit percer la haine et l'orgueil irrité
> A travers sa douleur et son calme affecté.
> Quelque tourment secret l'agite et le déchire.
> Pourtant il intéresse, il plait, il vous attire;
> Par son air, par sa grâce, on se laisse charmer;
> Mais quand son œil se trouble, on frémit de l'aimer.
> (1.2; Ducis 1824: 9)

> [Sire, a stranger is asking for an audience:
> Everything about him announces his nobility and his breeding
> . . .
>   . . . In his proud nonchalance
> He seemed to me to be bearing, while controlling vengeful thoughts,
> The weight of a great grief and a great injury.
> One can see the shadow of hatred and insulted pride
> Beneath his suffering and his unnatural calm,
> Some secret torment distresses him and tears him asunder.
> Despite this, he fascinates, pleases, attracts;
> By his air, by his grace, we feel ourselves enchanted;
> But when his glance is troubled, we fear to love him.]

This passage therefore on the admission of the author himself was
engendered and moulded by the figure, the deportment, the de-
clamatory style of Talma. For whom, it transpires, in that very pe-
riod (it is the same letter we have already quoted that informs us
of this) Ducis was working on yet another *Œdipe*, by Voltaire,[3] to
which the actor had asked him to make a few changes to his role

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3 *Œdipe*, the first tragedy by François-Marie Arouet and the first work to
be signed by him with the pseudonym Voltaire, was staged for the first time
on 18 November 1718 at the Comédie Française. The author derives his story
from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, adding the character of Philoctetes, who is sup-
posed to be passionately in love with Jocasta.

of protagonist. This task, that of a *dramaturg* more than of a playwright, inasmuch as he is an adaptor of someone else's text with the intention of facilitating a specific performance, also concerns the theme of Oedipus, and confirms the fact that this was the only myth from Greek tragedy (with the sole, momentary exception of Admetus-Alcestis) on which Ducis bestowed his attention as a tragedian.

2. *Le Roi Léar*

In 1780, interrupting two Shakespearian projects he had already started, the adaptations of *Macbeth* and *Timon the Misanthropist*,[4] Ducis began to plan and then to write his version of *King Lear*, basing it on the recent translation of the tragedy by Pierre Letourneur (1799). We shall return to the motives behind the tragedian's decision later: what is certain is that the theme of Lear absorbed Ducis' creative energies completely, right up to the moment he finished it, in the spring of 1782. It was staged from the 20 January 1783 at the Comédie Française (Faubourg St-Germain), and was therefore Ducis' first public appearance as a playwright since the period of *Œdipe*. His previous adaptations of Shakespeare (*Hamlet* and *Roméo et Juliette*) had been based on abridged 'translations' (especially in the case of the tragedy of the lovers from Verona, which was no more than a summary) by Pierre-Antoine de La Place. But now Ducis' *Le Roi Léar* could start from Letourneur's translation which was in prose and almost integral; indeed Golder affirms "it was as complete a version of *King Lear* as the restrictions of his age and Letourneur's own limitations as a poet would permit" (Golder 1992: 116). This meant that Ducis was beginning from "a much more faithful reflection of the original than anything from which [he] had yet worked" (129), not that this permits us to imagine that "what the Comédie Française pre-

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4 *Macbeth* would only have to wait a year before being staged, in January 1784; the play on *Timon*, that Ducis had begun on the advice of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, despite the fact that its performance would be announced several times, was never staged, and perhaps not even completed (see Golder 1992: 350).

sented in January 1783 was genuine Shakespeare. What Paris saw was a play by Ducis which had taken Shakespeare's *King Lear* as its point of departure" (ibid.).

However, in this play the dramatist from some points of view attempted far more than he had ever dared before, both on the level of dramatic structure (fourteen speaking characters was a very large number for a neoclassical tragedy) and on that of the staging (Ducis exploits the spectacular possibilities offered by the tempest to their utmost limits, creating a scene much more suited to the popular taste of the minor theatres or to the visual effects of the opera house[5] than the aristocratically dignified and word-centred aesthetics of the Comédie). The greatest risk Ducis took, however, was that regarding one of the thematic nuclei of the tragedy, that of the king's madness. This was a very thorny subject in pre-revolutionary France, and became the target of several critical reviews of the play; and even when the criticism was positive, the madness of the king was mentioned as an obstacle which had been brilliantly overcome, but nevertheless as an obstacle, as much from the viewpoint of moral tolerability as from that of dramatic stability. An example of this is to be found in an article in the *Journal de Paris*: "Il était difficile de faire supporter pendant le cours d'une longue tragédie un vieux prince qui a presque entièrement perdu la raison. Mais M. Ducis a jeté tant d'intérêt sur ce personnage qu'il est parvenu à vaincre cet obstacle". (Golder 1992: 145; "It was difficult to make bearable for the whole stretch of a long tragedy the subject of an old king who had almost completely lost his mind. But M. Ducis has invested so much interest in this character that he has managed to overcome the obstacle"). The playwright himself was, however, perfectly aware of the problem and shows this in the "Avertissement" prefaced to the text in the 1819 edition: ". . . j'ai tremblé plus d'une fois, je l'avoue, quand j'ai eu l'idée de faire paraître sur la scène française un roi dont la raison est aliénée. Je n'ignorais pas que la sévérité de nos règles

5 Here it is interesting to note the judgement (real or invented) of a spectator quoted sarcastically in the *Journal de Monsieur*: "Oh, c'est superbe, mon ami, c'est comme à l'opéra!" (Golder 1992: 151; "Oh, it's marvellous, my friend, it's just like the opera!").

et la délicatesse de nos spectateurs nous chargent de chaînes que l'audace anglaise brise et dédaigne" (Ducis 1819: 271; ". . . I trembled more than once, I confess, when the idea came to me to bring on to the French stage a king who has lost his mind. I was not ignorant of the fact that the severity of our rules and the gentility of our spectators load us with chains that English audacity shatters and disdains").

In reality, what had made Lear's madness acceptable to at least a part of contemporary criticism and to most of Parisian theatre-goers was the marked watering-down and softening of this aspect on Ducis' part. He transforms it into "un égarement doux et paisible" (3.7; Ducis 1819: 332; "a sweet, peaceful bewilderment") never completely separated from a vestige of awareness, and therefore a long way away from the desperate mental darkness in which Shakespeare immerses his sovereign. As a demonstration of the fact that not only the theme of madness, but also the other "audacities" mentioned above, do not possess a force of impact that can, not cancel, but at least diminish Ducis' propensity to replace the tragic with the pathetic, his deference towards Neoclassical *bienséances*, his repudiation of any trace of comedy, his allocation of every human action within the perspective of Christian morality, and finally his incapacity to accept the existence of real irremediable evil either in human acts or in nature. In this way it is inevitable that Ducis' *Léar* ends up by expressing a vision of the theatre, human beings and the world which is the complete opposite of Shakespeare's.

We only need examine the changes made to the plot to realize the stringency of the ethical and aesthetic margins between which Shakespeare's tragic genius is forced to flow. The tragedy begins when the kingdom has already been divided between the two elder of Lear's three daughters, Régane e Volnérille (Shakespeare's Gonerill), while the third and youngest, Helmonde (corresponding to Cordelia) has been disinherited and cursed because she has been accused of plotting against her father's realm together with Prince Ulrich of Denmark. Léar has been informed of this plot (in reality completely non-existent) by the jealous and greedy Volnérille. Kent, the king's best friend, as he has defended the innocent Helmonde is in his turn repudiated and exiled. Léar very

soon falls victim to the toils of his two heirs, who deny him hos-
pitality and any residual power, and send him away humiliated.
Meanwhile Helmonde has disappeared and there are rumours of
her death. In reality she has found a secret refuge in a cave thanks
to the help of Edgard, Kent's son, who tells his brother Lénox what
he has done and involves him in a rebellion that he is organizing
in favour of Léar and Helmonde against Cornouailles, Régane's
husband, who has officially assumed sovereignty. The two broth-
ers, to keep their father, Kent, from harm, fail to reveal their plans
to him, and he interprets their behaviour as an indication that
they are on the side of the new regime and, by taking advantage
of it, are betraying him. With his mind weakened by grief and re-
morse towards Helmonde, Léar wanders about with Kent whom
he has met with and restored to his favour. On a stormy night he
happens across Helmonde's hiding place and seeks refuge there.
Father and daughter meet again, but Léar's disordered mind makes
him take Helmonde first for one and then for the other of his un-
grateful elder daughters. When, in a brief flash of lucidity, he final-
ly recognizes Helmonde for who she really is he is overcome by
guilt and threatens to kill himself, but Helmonde manages to dis-
suade him from this. Cornouailles' troops arrive, having for the
moment got the better of the rebels and they capture the king and
his daughter. The counterattack by the rebels with Edgard at their
head, with the aid of Albanie, the husband of Volnérille, succeeds
in freeing the two captives and leads to the happy ending, with the
arrest and imprisonment of Volnérille, Régane and Cornouailles,
the complete reconciliation of Kent with his sons, the wedding of
Edgard and Helmonde and their accession to the throne, beneath
the paternal and benedictory eye of Léar.

The narrative framework of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is clear-
ly recognizable in the plot we have just summarized, and so are
many of the situations, the dramatic resolutions and the relation-
ships between the characters. But the various absences and chang-
es are just as evident, together with the ideological overturning of
the English tragedy they cause. On the level of dramatic structure
the difference that immediately leaps to the eyes is the elimination
of the subplot regarding Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund, of whom,
in Ducis' version there only remains a weak reflection in the fig-

ures of Kent, Edgard and Lénox. The character of the duke of Gloucester is completely eliminated – a figure whose destiny tragically doubles that of Lear in his mistaken opinion of his children's worth. This error causes Gloucester's repudiation of the faithful and generous Edgar, his legitimate son, a consequence of the slanderous accusations of the cunning and perfidious bastard Edmund, who on the contrary manages to gain his father's trust. It is very obvious that Ducis combines the characters of Gloucester with that of Kent, who becomes the father of two sons who are non-existent in Shakespeare. One of them, Edgard, is a moral replica of Gloucester's legitimate son – even his name is almost identical (with the exception of the final 'd'), but the second is certainly not his rival and opposite: the gentle and honest Lénox has nothing in common with the diabolical Edmund. The quarrel between father and sons is limited, as we have seen, to a short-lived suspicion Kent nourishes regarding Edgard and Lénox, which in the end vanishes without trace when the good intentions of the two young men are recognized. Ducis' main objective here is not so much that of eliminating or even of reducing to the minimum the anti-Classical redundancy that a subplot represents; it is more that of cancelling the part of the original play in which human cruelty and the ferocity of its consequences rises to almost intolerable levels, much more so than what happens during similar events in the main plot involving Lear and his daughters. The torture and blinding on stage of Gloucester naturally could not occur in Ducis' play or indeed in any other French (and not only French) tragedy at the time. But what disgusts Ducis even more than the visible demonstration of such savage violence is the behaviour of Regan and Gonerill, their sadistic, inhuman brutality towards Gloucester, that reduces the two sisters to two unprecedented monsters of cruelty. It is impossible for such beings to frequent Ducis' theatrical world, where evil is never strong enough to vanquish good completely, and no heart is so pitiless as not to harbour at least a possibility of redemption. The fact that Shakespeare can make two women the incarnation of such absolute evil makes their characters and actions even less acceptable in the eyes of the French playwright. If the absence of Gloucester from *Le Roi Léar* is linked to the attenuation of the cruelty of the king's two elder daughters,

that of Edmund (desired in Shakespeare by both of them) permits Ducis to absolve them from the sin of adultery as well. But even this does not seem to the playwright to represent sufficient ethic and aesthetic caution. Because of this, Volnérille, who is the more determinedly evil of the pair, although she is frequently mentioned, never appears on stage, while Régane is so watered-down as to cause Golder, though he exaggerates, to affirm that "the character as written is not heartless at all" (143), given that she is ignorant of the plot against Helmonde hatched by Volnérille, and when she encourages Cornouailles to kill her younger sister, "it is because she still believes her sister to be the traitor that Volnérille and Cornouailles have made her out to be" (144).

As far as the deeper significance of the play is concerned, the most flagrant dissociation from Shakespeare's tragedy is not the elimination of Gloucester and Edmund, but that of the Fool. Irrelevant to the development of the action (*King Lear* can very well be summarized without mentioning him once), the court jester, almost the incarnation of a Shakespearian version of the Erasmian *Moriae encomium*, has been recognized as one of the fundamental symbolic keys to this tragedy: the first emblematic representation of madness in the play, on the one hand, he embodies and simulates it through his paradoxes, his overturning of logic, his lack of reverence towards authority, and on the other, by revealing himself, beneath the apparatus of feigned madness, the most lucid and straightforward among the characters, he accentuates the madness resulting from arrogance, obstinacy and greed to which the majority of the characters, their actions and finally the whole story succumb. In Shakespeare's play madness spreads rapidly, infecting to a greater and greater extent the language, the emotions and the actions both of human beings and soon of nature itself, which finds, in the storm, the language for its own madness: "such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder, / Such groans of roaring wind and rain" (3.2.46-7)[6] have never been seen or heard before, a chaotic chorus of the elements that acts as a background for the bizarre demented trio interpreted by Lear, the Fool and Edgar-Poor Tom. Between the madness of the

6 Quotations are from Shakespeare 2017.

elements and that of human beings, and among these last between true and simulated madness, between joyful madness and desperation, there is no longer a dividing line; madness is the unremitting figure of a world entirely and irremediably sunk in chaos.

Not only the peaceable and reasonable Ducis, but also the whole of French cultured society of the time, would have refused to accept even an infinitesimal part of such a view of the world, and even less would they have tolerated its representation on the stage, which would have been perceived as the conflagration of a whole series of *bienséances*, both moral and aesthetic, which were considered as finding their proper place of validation on the tragic stage. As we have already seen, even the more restricted theme of madness on the part of the king presented a significant problem, but this could be solved (as in fact it was, although this raised the eyebrows of quite a few of the critics) by mitigating the intensity of the madness, justifying it by citing wounded affection as its cause and in any case making it transitory. The passage from pathological folly of the individual to universal disruption would, however, have been intolerable to the rationalism of neoclassical eyes and was therefore impossible to realize. The theme of madness in the tragedy had necessarily to be reduced simply to that of the protagonist, thus eliminating the Fool, the transformation of Edgar into Poor Tom and the importance of the flamboyant objective correlative of the storm, relegated to becoming simply a phenomenon adding to the element of spectacle and the dramaturgical expedient required to cause Lear to seek shelter in the cave where Helmonde is hiding.

It was almost inevitable, with these premises, for Ducis to decide to allow the various stories to come together in a happy ending. This, in point of fact, was not the first time it had happened: the English playwright and adaptor, Nahum Tate, had in this regard actually preceded Ducis by a century. In 1681, *The History of King Lear* had been performed, and this adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy replaced the original almost completely on the English stage, right up until 1838. The new political and cultural climate of the Restoration had encouraged the theatres to prefer a 'purged' version of the story, with the intention of saving the figure of the monarch as much from an excess of guilt as (even)

from death. This version had influenced Letourneur's transla-
tion hardly at all,[7] but Ducis evidently had at least indirect knowl-
edge of it, as his adaptation shared with Tate's some substantial
changes such as the disappearance of the Fool or the absence of
France, first as Cordelia's refuge and then as military reinforce-
ment when she comes back to England again (in both versions
Cordelia/Helmonde stays in England to hide and it is a local re-
volt not a foreign army that makes war against the enemies of
Lear/Léar). Above all in both there is a happy ending, which in-
cludes the survival of the king and the marriage between the re-
discovered daughter and Edgar/Edgard. The softening of the at-
mosphere on Tate's part does not, however, manage to rescue the
villains from death; in Ducis, on the contrary, they are saved by
the clemency of Léar, who simply sends Volnérille, Régane and
Cornouailles to prison. However hard it may be to believe about
a work that is among the most violent and pitiless of the Bard's
tragedies, nobody in *Le Roi Léar* actually dies except for Oswald,
officier to the Duc de Cornouailles (present also in Shakespeare
where he is Gonerill's steward). He becomes the scapegoat for all
the nobles and is much more evil as an individual ("monstre in-
humain" and "perfide" he is labelled by the Duc d'Albanie, 85.12;
Ducis 1819: 386) than the servile, despicable pawn for the un-
scrupulous he appears in the source play (". . . a lily-livered, ac-
tion-taking ᱮknave, aᱮ whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable,
finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave", as Kent defines him, 2.2.
16-20). But he is certainly not important enough as a character to
be considered the incarnation of absolute evil which of course in
Ducis is non-existent.

3. Oedipus and Lear: Continuity Between the Two Tragedies

"Not everyone felt that Ducis was right to go ahead with *Léar*.
Similarities between it and *Œdipe chez Admète* . . . had not passed
unnoticed and there were some who tried to persuade Ducis to

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7 "Letourneur's translation . . . has undergone relatively little NahumTat-
ification" (Golder 1992: 116).

substitute his *Macbeth*, which had been accepted by the actors [of the Comédie Française] 'avec acclamation'" (Golder 1992: 115). Some friends, in particular Léonard-Antoine Thomas, had expressed their anxiety that the touchy nature of the subject, together with the too close similarity of the theme with regard to *Œdipe*, might lead to its failure (ibid.). Ducis himself was well aware of the resemblance between the two tragedies: he does not seem to disagree with those who draw his attention to the fact that "ce sujet a un fond de resemblance inevitable avec *Œdipe*" (Albert 1879: 59; "this subject matter has an inevitable underlying resemblance to *Œdipe*"), he wrote in a letter to Monsieur Deleyre on 23 September 1782. Immediately afterwards, in the same letter, the playwright mentions a practical reason for anticipating the staging of *Léar* to that of *Macbeth*: the expediency of not wasting Brizard's study of the part, which the actor chosen to play Léar had already completed. Considering the fact that the sixty-one-year-old actor's memory was already failing, a substantial postponement of the début of *Le Roi Léar* might very well make matters worse. There are, however, two details which are worth noticing. First of all the adjective, *inevitable*, that Ducis attributes to the similarity between the two tragedies. It is certainly true that both in the story of *Oedipus at Colonus* and in that of *King Lear* the central relationship is that between an old dethroned king and his favourite daughter. This constitutes an objective similarity between the tragedy by Sophocles and the one by Shakespeare, but this is only to be considered at a superficial level, because on going deeper it is evident that the father-daughter relationship in the two plays takes on a dramatic role and a connection with the general dramaturgical context which is profoundly different and very difficult to equate. The resemblance is there, but perhaps, in point of fact, it is not really so *inévitable*. If Ducis had produced two tragedies which were much closer to the originals, he would have had no difficulty at all in objecting that the similarity exists but it is not significant. But in the two plays that he actually did write, the resemblance is very much closer, simply because it is the dramatist himself that has not wanted to avoid it, moreover, he has clearly emphasized it. Our hypothesis is that, to all intents and purposes, the resemblance between *Œdipe* and *Léar*

is not, in Ducis' opinion a drawback, but, on the contrary, a mo-
tive for making one the continuation of the other, and therefore
preferring to stage *Le Roi Léar* before *Macbeth*. This hypothesis
would seem to be borne out by the second point: Brizard's inter-
pretation. The reasons the playwright gives for not losing the op-
portunity to make certain of him in the role of Léar, as he says in
the above-quoted letter, are true but incomplete. He withholds the
very significant fact that Brizard had been the (highly acclaimed)
interpreter of the character of Oedipus. To desire him in the role
of Léar, as well, means that Ducis wanted to reaffirm on stage
what he had already made clear within the text, that is his inten-
tion of making the Greek hero live again in the English king by
creating between the two characters a recognizable resemblance
and quasi-identification.

To reach this objective, it is above all the adaptation of the
character of Léar which appears forced respecting the original: in
Ducis there remains nothing of the almost obtuse pride, the ran-
cour and the irritability of Shakespeare's king. Like Oedipus, he
is presented as a wise and generous sovereign, much beloved by
his subjects; just as the king of Thebes is, at least to modern eyes,
the innocent victim of Fate, so is his English counterpart the guilt-
less dupe of one of his daughters. When calamity arrives and over-
whelms them both it weakens them, but not enough to take from
them their dignity and the strength that enables them to react and
redeem themselves. They both experience moments of bewilder-
ment, sometimes Léar advances as if he were blind, as Oedipus is,
and the way in which Kent guides him reminds us of Antigone's
attitude towards her father, just as later Léar will ask his restored
Helmonde a physical and emotional support which is very like
that which Oedipus receives from his daughter. Indeed, faced with
the symptoms which are common to both old men, of a sort of in-
fantile regression, both daughters behave like protective mothers.
This bewilderment, as we know, takes on, for both kings, the form
of a slight ephemeral madness, consisting of memory gaps and
confused identity (significantly, both Oedipus and Léar suffer hal-
lucinations which cause them to mistake their good children for
their bad ones: Oedipus suddenly rejects Antigone, convinced that
he is talking to his son, Polyneices, instead of her, and in the same

way Léar confuses Helmonde first with Régane and then with
Volnérille). In both tragedies the relationship between the protago-
nist and the best-loved daughter acquires an even greater position
and significance than the already prominent one it had in the orig-
inal works. Ducis' Antigone has far more to say than Sophocles',
and also does not have to share her father's love with her sister,
Ismene, who is absent from the French tragedy. But, above all, the
emotional aspect of the dialogues between father and daughter, is
far more evident with the reiterated expressions of mutual affec-
tion, the voicing of care and protection on the daughter's part and
gratitude on the father's.

As Volnérille does not appear on stage and Régane's part is
much less incisive in comparison with her Shakespearian coun-
terpart, Léar's negative emotions towards his ungrateful daugh-
ters interfere much less with his loving and positive concentration
on Helmonde. The only scene in which the king's hostile repudia-
tion and banishment of his youngest daughter is carried out, is rel-
egated to the antefact, and the Léar who appears on the stage is
from the outset a loving father towards Helmonde, tormented not
so much by the betrayal on the part of his elder daughters as by
that which he perpetrated in regard to his youngest, when he be-
lieved the lies about her. The long separation that the plot imposes
upon the two characters does not allow them much more time face
to face, when compared to Shakespeare's text, but the thoughts
that cross their minds before they meet set up a sort of pain-
ful long-distance dialogue between them, filled with remorse on
the father's side and apprehension and regret on the daughter's.
Nevertheless, Helmonde is granted, throughout the play, many
more speeches than are the lot of Cordelia, who is consistently
sparing of words from the beginning to the end of Shakespeare's
play. On this subject it is useful to compare the respective scenes
of the two plays in which the king, finally escaping from the mists
of his madness, recognizes his daughter and realizes he is forgiv-
en. A few, intense speeches in *King Lear* (4.7.44-76), decidedly brief
on the woman's part, but a long, and of its kind, masterly, piece of
comédie larmoyante in *Le Roi Léar* (4.5; Ducis 1819: 349-58), where
Helmonde, replacing (and outdoing) the doctor in Shakespeare,
gradually calls her aged father back to sanity, combining an emo-

tional daughterly solicitude with a therapeutic and cathartic skill. Very different is the real climactic scene of the love between Lear and Cordelia, augmented by Shakespeare in the play's conclusion (5.3), where the daughter can no longer answer her grief-stricken father as she lies dead in his embrace.

Even though there was not the same coincidence of interpreters (Madame Vestris, who played the part of Helmonde, had been Alcestis in *Œdipe*, while the role of Antigone had been given to Mademoiselle Saint-Val *cadette*), the characters of the young daughters, consistent with those of the respective aged fathers, are also juxtaposed, thanks especially to the elimination of those traits of harsh clarity which, at least at the beginning, characterized Cordelia. Another conferral of different roles to the same actor leads us to retrace yet another, less predictable element of continuity between Ducis' two works. We are referring to Talma, and to his almost contemporary *début* in the role of Polyneices in June 1792 and of Edgard in July of the same year. Linked, in Ducis' writing, by the same noble and generous attitude, that inspires them to fight for the renewal of justice and the rule of law, the interpretation of this great actor must certainly have caused the similarity of the two young heroes to stand out, and in this way build yet another bridge, on the level of spectacle, between Ducis' two tragedies.

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15

Shades of *King Lear* in Beckett's Theatre and Late Work

Barry A. Spence

Abstract

Samuel Beckett's late prose work *Worstward Ho* (1981), which arguably breaks ground as a form of theatre of the page, performs multiple recursive variations of his favourite line from *King Lear*, Edgar's remark as an aside, on seeing his blind father: "The worst is not So long as we can say 'This is the worst'" (Act IV, scene 1). This line is among a group of lines from Shakespeare's play that Beckett copied into his so-called Sottisier Notebook in the 1970s (UofR MS2901) and that pertain to his longstanding preoccupation concerning the limits of language. Using the fact of the importance of *King Lear* to such late works as this and *Ill Seen Ill Said* as a jumping off point, this paper offers a reading of Beckett's work of the 1950s and '60s as directly and indirectly influenced by this most devastating of Shakespeare's tragedies. Of particular interest is Beckett's innovative use of different media: theatre, radio, cinema, and prose.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett; *All That Fall*; *Film*; *Krapp's Last Tape*; *Worstward Ho*; Shakespeare's *King Lear*; language; speech; vision; old age; infirmity

In an October 1983 letter to Joseph Chaikin, Samuel Beckett wrote, "When I recently reread *Lear* I thought: unstageable. I know I'm wrong" (Beckett 2016: 620). Among whatever else, one element Beckett presumably had in mind is the powerful tempest that drives the centre of Shakespeare's play: "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! / You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout / till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd our cocks! . . . Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!" (Shakespeare 1989: 3.2.1-3, 14). Thus does the cast out king greet the savagery of the storm as fit reflection and partner of his interior torment ("this tempest in my

mind", 3.4.12). The storm serves as visualizable counterpart, even while the theatrical medium, with its limited special effects – perhaps the most significant limitation of which concerns dimensions of spatial scale – depends of course primarily on the performative power of words: the verbal extremity of Lear complements the however partially realized spectacle of a storm ("where the greater malady is fix'd, / the lesser is scarce felt", 3.4.8-9). The thunderclaps of Lear's own anguished rhetoric – "Take physic, Pomp; / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them, / And show the Heavens more just" (3.4.33-6) – contribute to any successful staging of the tempest's violent dimensions and the proportionate smallness of its suffering "forked" creatures.

Twenty-five years before this letter, Beckett had staged his own transformative storm:

> Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. (*Impatient reaction from Krapp.*) The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to (*Violent reaction from Krapp.*) record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that... (*hesitates*). (*Krapp thumps on table.*)... for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely – (*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, mechanical with gabble, 2 seconds, switches on again.*) – great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most – (*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, mechanical with gabble, 3 seconds, switches on again.*) – unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire – (*Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, mechanical with gabble, 4 seconds, switches on again, lowers head.*)
> (Knowlson 1992: 7-8)

While in *Krapp's Last Tape* (hereafter *KLT*) Beckett subsumes the visualized immediacy of the storm within the several temporal re-

moves – the sixty-nine year old Krapp is listening to a tape-re-cording of his thirty-nine year old self recounting the event from March of his thirty-eighth year – the visceral power of that storm's howling wind and flying foam on the "jetty" or East Pier in Dún Laoghaire is indirectly evoked through the turbulent reac-tion the recording triggers: Krapp's curses, impatient switching on and off, his furious fast forwarding, underscored especially by the mechanical "gabble" of the tape recorder during these increasingly lengthy spurts of fast forwarding. And while it may seem of sec-ondary dramatic significance, the storm, as in *King Lear*, forms the setting for a pivotal change in self-knowledge and life direction – what Beckett, in the play's first two typescripts, had called "The turning-point, at last" (Van Hulle 2015: 213). Both plays present the storm as an environmental parallel to an internal transformation, a revelation and embrace of "dark". In both plays the storm func-tions as a dramatic, and in the case of *KLT* arguably a Romantic, extension of the protagonist's internal struggle.[1] And it is this Romantic image of a storm-centered self-awakening that the six-ty-nine year old Krapp rejects as hollow, dishonest, and an embar-rassment; much as Beckett's artistry assiduously pared itself free of such superfluity, pomp, and the circumstance of high meaning.

The unremitting darkness of Shakespeare's tragedy offers a ste-reoscopic tale of personal blindness, realization, and the potency of sight independent of the eyes. This transformational arc is real-ized in the figures of Lear and Gloucester. The narrative of Krapp has elements of a similar trajectory: his thirty-nine year old self's clarity of "vision", gained during the storm, is understood by his sixty-nine year old self as a form of blindness, which makes way for an end-of-life staring into memory and void: "(*Krapp motion-less staring before him. The tape runs on in silence*)" (Knowlson 1992: 10).

The issue of the limits of language pervades *King Lear* in mul-tiple forms. From the challenge Lear sets his daughters and which opens the play – Goneril: "I love you more than word can wield

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[1] Beckett was known to draw on such Romantic images, so for example Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Two Men Observing the Moon* contributed to the dramatic image of two wayfarers in *Waiting for Godot*.

the matter; / Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty" (1.1.54-5) and Cordelia: "Since I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.76-7) – to Edgar's exclamation on seeing his blind father: "Who is't can say, 'I am at the worst'. . . The worst is not / So long as one can say, 'This is the worst'" (4.1.25, 27-8), the play plumbs the depths of language's inadequacy to (and implication in) the extremes of human experience. The tragedy, to a similar degree, develops the theme of human visual perception. Here the faculty of sight is misleading as well as easily misled. Consider the role of disguise and concealment that runs the course of the play. Kent and Edgar in particular maintain the play's moral compass through the use of disguise. Gloucester is deceived by the false letter of Edmund, sees Edgar as wicked and Edmund as virtuous, and only has the veil of deceit removed when Cornwall gouges the "vile jelly" from his sockets. One thinks as well of Lear's dying words: "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!" (5.3.310-11), his last breath escaping as he mistakenly believes he sees the breath of Cordelia in a misted mirror. Furthermore, the play intertwines the powers of sight and speech and associates their sharp limitations. Lear: "O! You are men of stones: / Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so / That heaven's vault should crack." (5.3.256-8). Cordelia: "But even for want of that for which I am richer, / A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue / That I am glad I have not." (1.1.229-31).

As shown by passages copied into his Sottisier Notebook,[2] Beckett reread *King Lear* at some point between 1979-1981, as he was well into his seventies. Several prominent elements of Shakespeare's play figure as fundamental to his late prose work, particularly to *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1979-1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1981). But the central thematic concerns of *King Lear* – vision and blindness, the limits of language and sayability, the plight of worsening, and old age and infirmity – are not only essential to those late works but form the ground of much of Beckett's work following his own "turning-point" (Van Hulle 2015: 213) or revelation in 1945, in which he realized that his artistic "way was in impov-

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2 MS 2901, University of Reading. All manuscripts referred to in this essay are in the collection of the Beckett Archive at the University of Reading.

erishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding" (Knowlson 1996: 319).[3] In other words, Beckett's personal anagnorisis in 1945, his realization of the true nature and path of his artistic work, which amounted to an embrace of the "dark" (Knowlson 1992: 7) that artists typically avoided, this resolution to focus on impotence, infirmity, failure, wandering, and exile, would motivate his formal innovations to embody this impoverishment, to eschew or elide, for instance, the grand Romantic image and ironize it into gesture. Such is the way *KLT* uses tape-recording technology to redirect the drama of a momentous storm into an irritant in an old man's impatience. Theatre is the space of the human interior.[4]

Beckett's passing comment about stageability in relation to *King Lear* serves as a reminder of his lifelong focus on formal innovation within different artistic media. He had composed works for media typically more suited to conveying nature's large-scale machinations, namely film and radio. His awareness of the relative resources of scale involved in different media is clear. For example, in 1961 Beckett authorized a BBC television production of *Waiting for Godot.* After viewing the results he "put his head into his hands" and commented, "it's not right for television", later saying, "My play wasn't written for this box. My play was written for small men locked in a big space" (Knowlson 1996: 435-6).[5] This judgement accords with the general truism of Beckett as exacting in his vision that a given story is to be realized, with some exceptions,[6] in particular forms or media. His attention to such formal

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3 In interviews with James Knowlson Beckett was clear that his own turning-point came in his mother's house in Foxrock, not on the jetty in Dún Laoghaire. See Knowlson 1996: 319.

4 Of course the theatre of classical Greece was ideal for depicting vast scale, due to the fact the theatres were uncovered and built into the landscape, open to the sky and elements.

5 While this anecdote appears to run contrary to my hypothesis about Beckett's comment concerning the unstageability of *King Lear*, the latter concerns the scale of the tempest, not the evocation of "big space".

6 There are numerous exceptions here. *Not I*, for instance, was produced for theatre and television, and both *Eh Joe* and *Quad* were realized in two media, in addition to their printed form.

concerns seems to have intensified in the wake of his own turn-
ing-point. He began writing works for theatre, mime, radio, film,
and television, and his prose fiction became, on the one hand, in-
creasingly resistant to categorization, and on the other hand, more
distinctly performative. He puts the resources of each of these me-
dia to work in his artistic process of "subtracting" (Knowlson 1996:
319) and lessening. And it is noteworthy the way this art of lessen-
ing, as it finds instantiation in different media, enacts those core
themes and concerns of Shakespeare's darkest tragedy.

One can observe the practice of what can be called a Lear poet-
ics at the heart of much of Beckett's work following the 1945 turn-
ing-point. This consists in a simultaneous thematic and formal
exploration of: 1) the limits of language; 2) the role of sight and vi-
sion; 3) a lessening or worsening, which especially takes the form
of paring down of expressive elements and essentials of a given
work; 4) the pervasive effects of age and infirmity. This *Lear* po-
etics is a way of reading Beckett's artistic practice across media.
It offers a reading of this practice in light of his rereading of *King
Lear*, as a way to suggest the affinity Shakespeare's tragedy has to
Beckett's artistic sensibility, and, in turn, is a form of speculation
on what drew him back to the play. Although admittedly, any at-
tempt to make such a sharp distinction between his pre- and post-
World War Two work is doomed to faulty formulation.

The four attributes that characterize this *Lear* poetics surface in
his earlier writing. For instance, his preoccupation with the lim-
its of language and of the idea that anything said must necessarily
be missaid is perhaps most famously formulated in the common-
ly quoted letter to Axel Kaun from 9 July 1937: ". . . more and more
my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart
in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it.
Grammar and style! . . . A mask . . . To drill one hole after anoth-
er into it until that which lurks behind, be it something or noth-
ing, starts seeping through . . ." (Beckett 2009c: 512-21). The read-
ing offered here though is of necessity circumscribed, an attempt
to highlight the prevalence of certain correspondences, specifically
how the driving themes of *King Lear* are a deep concern of Beckett
and how they are reflected in formal methods and strategies in
his mature work. Four works in distinct and different media will

serve to illustrate the range of this *Lear* poetics: *All That Fall* (a radio play from 1956), *Krapp's Last Tape* (theatre, 1958), *Film* (cinema, 1963-4), and *Worstward Ho* (prose, 1981).

1. Genetic Evidence

The so-called Sottisier Notebook contains several Shakespeare passages in Beckett's hand, in the following layout:

> <u>Where is the life that late I led</u>?
>   (Petruccio: IV.i)
>
>   —————
> "unburdened crawl towards death"
>   (Lear I.1)
>
>   —————
> "The lamentable change is from
>   the best,
> The worst returns to laughter—"
>   (Ib.iv: Edgar)
>
>   —————
> "Who is't can say, I am the worst—"
>   (Ib.)—
>
>   —————
> "   -- The worst is not
> So long as one can say, This is the worst"
> (MS 2901)

Beckett has underlined the quotation from *The Taming of the Shrew* and used a short line to separate the quotations. These are immediately followed by a number of English translations of some of the "Mirlitonnades", very short poems written in French between 1976 and 1980 (the final versions of which were also entered in this notebook). These English versions are all dated within the year 1981, which suggests the likelihood that the Shakespeare passages, which are not dated, were copied not long before. The first of the English "Mirlitonnades" that follows these passages is an answer to Petruccio's question "where is the life that late I led?":

> There
> the life late led

down there
all done unsaid
(MS 2901)

As a response, it seems to further underscore the importance giv-
en to the Petruccio question by the underlining. And the Lear quo-
tation from *King Lear* Act 1 Scene 1 also seems to extend the train
of thought of Petruccio's line: the first and last words of "unbur-
dened crawl towards death" echo the rhyme in the "Mirlitonnade"
response, "led" and "unsaid", where an unburdening is equivalent
to an unsaying and the past tense of leading life is death. The en-
tire group of quotations could be read as related to the Petruccio
line, since the lines from Edgar are really uttered as woeful asides
upon seeing Gloucester blind and hearing his comment: "I have
no way, and therefore want no eyes; / I stumbled when I saw . . . /
Might I but live to see thee [i.e., Edgar] in my touch, / I'd say I had
eyes again" (4.1.18-19, 23-4). The overall sentiment uniting these
various elements, on the one hand, relates to the metaphor of life
as a path or way (form of spatial extension), and, on the other,
suggests notions of worsening, particularly in the form of the in-
firmity of old age ("crawl towards death", "down there"): that life is
a way worsening towards death and unsaying. And it was at this
time that Beckett was working on the prose piece *Worstward Ho*,
which, as will be discussed, presents a set of performative varia-
tions on Edgar's "worst" comments, all in short phrasal units and
in language that arguably resonates with the idea of unsaying:
"Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid" (Beckett
2009b: 81).

Whether or not the Petruccio line can be read as a sort of head-
ing does not change the basic importance of these quotations to
Beckett's work and to the idea of a *Lear* poetics. They express the
ideas of worsening, of old age, and of what can be said, unsaid,
and missaid. The three quotations from Edgar give, not just the
idea of the relative nature of the condition of being "worst", but
also put forward the conundrum of the limits of sayability itself.
Moreover, the words of Gloucester that hover in the background
of these lines of Edgar bring in the fourth attribute of the *Lear* po-
etics: vision, blindness, and the phenomenon of seeing without

eyes ("Might I but live to see thee in my touch, / I'd say I had eyes again"). This sentiment is given even sharper focus by Gloucester when he later says to Lear: "I see it feelingly" (4.6.146). In other words, these quotations ground this formulation of a poetics, not just in what can be observed in the artistic works as Beckett produced them, but as a detectable element in the composition process itself.

Another line from *King Lear* deserves mention in this connection, although it does not appear as a separate item copied into a notebook. It does, however, exist as an element in a revision process. Cornwall's exclamation as he gouges out Gloucester's eyes: "Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly! / Where is their lustre now?" (3.7.81-2) was worked into the final version of *Ill Seen Ill Said*. In the second typescript, the phrase "weary eye", which Beckett translated from the original French "oeil las", was replaced by "vile jelly" (MS 2207/1).

> Suddenly enough and way for remembrance. Closed again to that end the vile jelly or opened again or left as it was however that was. Till all recalled.
> (Beckett 2009a: 73)

Cornwall's phrase "vile jelly" offers an especially vivid visual image, but one whose vividness depends on palpability to the sense of touch: a jelly quivers before the eyes but also to the touch and has material properties that render it somewhere on the continuum between liquid and solid, a state the sense of touch may shrink from encountering. The sense of taste – perhaps strictly in terms of mouth feel – is also involved, since jellies are a food type and associated with puddings, like blancmange. Cornwall's metaphor, while inflecting this multi-sensory image with the quality of being revolting, particularly through the use of the modifier "vile", is powerful in this context because it anticipates how Gloucester will have to lead his life, or crawl towards death, by seeing feelingly.

2. Radio

The four works discussed here are demonstrably self-reflexive, as much about the medium that actualizes them as anything

else. This is certainly the case with Beckett's first "play for radio", which he wrote on invitation from the BBC, in 1956. The particular challenges posed by radio triggered more or less a seven-year focus on stories for that medium, during which he realized seven compositions, including: *Embers* (1959), *Esquisse radiophonique / Rough for Radio I* (1961), *Pochade radiophonique / Rough for Radio II* (early 1960s), *Words and Music* (1961-1962), *Cascando* (1962-1963), and *The Old Tune* (English version of a play by Robert Pinget, 1963).

The medium of radio is particularly adept at conveying a sense of spatial openness and depth. Louder sounds occur more in the foreground, whereas softer ones seem further away, but a sense of precise spatial dimensionality eludes the listener. A medium without a visual dimension, it nevertheless relies on visualization through aural experience, on the capacity to unfold within the listener's skull. It is the peculiar power of radio that when broadcast it is there, it is everywhere, and yet it is nowhere. It is a decidedly interior and intimate medium, and yet, also impersonal and public (Connor 2014: 66).

All That Fall is a radio play that continually reminds the listener of the ongoing act of visualization involved in making sense of the story. Vision is one of the story's primary themes. The play tells of Mrs Rooney's walk up the road to the train station to welcome home her blind husband Dan. She is old, infirm, and has difficulty moving, much less walking. Along the way she encounters a man driving a horse and cart carrying a load of dung, a man on bicycle, an old admirer driving an automobile, and finally the train. The play offers the aural spectacle of significant technological developments: in addition to the various machines of transport, she twice hears the distant sound of a phonograph playing a recording of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, and Mr Slocum, the motorist, on being asked about his "poor mother" responds by praising the medical capacity to "keep her out of pain" ("That is the great thing, is it not, Mrs Rooney?", Beckett 2006a: 163). The technologies of the road tend to overwhelm Mrs Rooney, in terms of their speed, noise, and ability suddenly to stir up the dust.

Mrs Rooney's anxieties are frequently manifest as is the persistent grief over her young daughter's death several decades in

the past. She is depicted as an elderly, overweight, and debilitated woman out of step with the time and (somewhat) out of place in her community. While many of her anxieties and memories are understandable, she is also beset at moments with more existential anxieties that usually involve the faculties of sight or speech. A particularly noteworthy instance of the anxiety of vision occurs when the dung carter's horse stares at her:

> How she gazes at me to be sure, with her great moist cleg-tormented eyes! Perhaps if I were to move on, down the road, out of her field of vision… (*Sound of welt.*) No, no, enough! Take her by the snaffle and pull her eyes away from me. Oh this is awful!
> (Beckett 2006a: 159)

This odd moment is immediately followed by a complaint about the lot befallen her ("What have I done to deserve all this . . . ", ibid.) which presumably means the difficulty of walking on the road and the discomfort of being stared at by the horse. Given the proximity of the image "great moist cleg-tormented eyes", what she then says serves to put one in mind of Cornwall's image in *Lear*:

> (*She halts.*) How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel.
> (Ibid.)

Again, the listener is called upon to see feelingly and is rewarded with a particularly vivid image. While here the jelly is ostensibly a food item (Dan later says, "You are quivering like a blancmange", 176), there are resonances with Cornwall's "vile jelly". These work primarily through the network of immediate verbal associations, which link the jelly with the eye. The horse staring can be seen as triggering this exclamation. A "cleg" is a horsefly, so Mrs Rooney's image of being a jelly "thick with grit and dust and flies" makes a figurative connection between the jelly and the horse's eyes, since both are pursued by flies. Second of all, soon after (two pages of text later), Mrs Rooney comments to the cyclist Mr Tyler, "Let us halt a moment and let the vile dust fall back on the viler worms"

(161). The missing modifier in Cornwall's image (vile) is restored and doubled, and the appearance of the dust makes a connection to the "thick with grit and dust and flies".[7]

Furthermore, this constellation of elements – the dust, the condition of being vile, the acts of mental visualization and actual seeing – might put one in mind of a similar constellation in *King Lear*, during the verbal confrontation between Albany and Goneril:

> Albany   O Goneril!
> You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
> Blows in your face.
> . . .
> Albany Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile.
> . . .
> Albany   If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> It will come,
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep.
> (4.2.29-31, 38, 46-9)

Admittedly, this last point is a debatable reading, but the echoes are suggestive. And they are supported by the importance of wind in *All That Fall*. The sound of wind is repeatedly used for aural effect. But this is not to argue that the figure of Goneril is associated with Mrs Rooney, or that Beckett is creating the kind of grand confrontation that Albany speaks of. (Although in *Worstward Ho* the notion of "preying" is important, and that work clearly draws on *King Lear*.)[8] But it seems reasonable to connect the textual occurrence of jelly and vile and to see the combination as evocative of Cornwall's image.

Mrs Rooney is at other moments clearly associated with eyes.

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7 See Van Hulle 2010 for a related reading of the connection to Cornwall's "vile jelly".

8 For example: "That said on back to try worse say the plodding twain. Preying since last worse said on foresaid remains. But what not on them preying? What seen? What said? What of all seen and said not on them preying?" (Beckett 2009b: 94). The association between seeing, saying, and preying is also an element in *King Lear*.

At the train station she says to the small crowd on the platform awaiting the train:

> Do not flatter yourselves for one moment, because I hold aloof, that my sufferings have ceased. No. The entire scene, the hills, the plain, the racecourse with its miles and miles of white rails and three red stands, the pretty little wayside station, even you your-selves, yes, I mean it, and over all the clouding blue, I see it all, I stand here and see it all with eyes…(*The voice   breaks.*)…through eyes…oh if you had my eyes… you would understand…the things they have seen… and not looked away…this is nothing…nothing…
> (Beckett 2006a: 172)

Here the act of seeing is equated with the fact of suffering. This is a permeating theme in Beckett's work. And it is unmistakable in this radio play, especially given the way Mrs Rooney seems to suffer under the gaze of the horse. The phenomenon is remarkably similar to what Beckett would construct as the central theme in his film *Film*. In that work, which he wrote immediately following his spate of works for radio, the term he uses to describe that dynamic is the "agony of perceivedness" (Beckett 2006b: 372-3). This phrase is apt for describing Mrs Rooney's experience of the horse. And similar to the protagonist's (O's) reaction in *Film*, she speaks of wanting to get out of the angle of his field of vision – what is termed in the script of *Film*, being within the "angle of immunity" (ibid.). There O must keep the gaze of others within the angle of immunity in order to avoid the agony of perceivedness.

Mrs Rooney also invokes the idea of seeing feelingly. When getting into Mr Slocum's motorcar, Mrs Rooney's frock gets torn by the closing door. She complains and says:

> What will Dan say when he sees me?
> Mr Slocum   Has he then recovered his sight?
> Mrs Rooney No, I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole?
> (Beckett 2006a: 164)

None of these possible intertextual echoes are meant to demonstrate conclusively that Beckett is thinking of *King Lear*. Rather, they demonstrate the idea of a Lear poetics in practice. Mrs Rooney's words not only gain meaning when said within the

diegesis – the fictional world as narrated – a meaning that is particular to the narrative, they also highlight, on a meta, extra-diegetic level, the fact of the visualizing process that the medium entails for the listener, who must see it all "with the eyes" and "through the eyes" (172), but in the vast receptive theatre of the skull; in other words, must see it feelingly. For instance, the fact of Mrs Rooney's considerable physical weakness is brought to life in the radio play by the sounds of her "*dragging her feet*" or the "*sound of her toiling up steps*", as the stage directions indicate (170). But it is the complex imaginative process of mental visualization in the listener that actualizes and brings the fictional world to life, aided of course by the sound effects of the radio broadcast.

It is worth briefly pointing out other, arguably meaningful, correspondences between Beckett's radio play and Shakespeare's tragedy. Her husband Dan is blind, and she, like Gloucester's Edgar in *Lear*, must serve as his eyes: another way Mrs Rooney is figuratively linked with the faculty of sight. In *Lear* an Old Man initially serves as guide and leads the recently blinded Gloucester into the care of Edgar. In *All That Fall*, the little boy Jerry leads Dan down the train platform into Mrs Rooney's care. Whereas Gloucester instructs Edgar to lead him to the cliffs of Dover, Dan comments to Mrs Rooney, as they are about to descend the platform stairs: "Let us get this precipice over" (176). Rain becomes audible to the listener as Mr and Mrs Rooney are trudging slowly, haltingly home, and the final stage direction of the play indicates: "*Tempest of wind and rain*" (188). The themes of children and the parent-child relationship figure in multiple ways in the play: Mrs Rooney suffers remembering her own lost child; it is mentioned that the little boy Jerry loses his father ("They took him away, Ma'am") and is "all alone" (175); and the final dialogue of the play establishes that the reason the train was late was because "a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. (*Pause.*) On the line, Ma'am. (*Pause.*) Under the wheels, Ma'am" (188).

In general, the radio play associates seeing and being seen with the experience of suffering, and this suffering is strongly connected to the infirmity of old age. The notion of senescence pervades the work. Finally, language and speech surface as another theme. This is most prominent when Mrs Rooney asks the carter:

> Do you find anything... bizarre about my way of speaking?
> (*Pause.*) I do not mean the voice. (*Pause.*) No, I mean the words.
> (*Pause. More to herself.*) I use none but the simplest words, I hope,
> and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very... bizarre.
> (158)

This is picked up later when Dan comments, "Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language" (182). It is tempting to interpret this somewhat abrupt theme as another self-reflexive comment on the fact that the listeners' experience of *All That Fall* relies more on the performative power of words than on the descriptive. The resources of radio entail much more than the signifying power of speech. Words must do something, and not just say. Performative sounds – *"Rural sounds. Sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together."* (157) – along with their silence contribute to radio's distinctive dimensionality.

3. Theatre

During the period Beckett created his works for radio he also broke new ground in theatre by writing *Krapp's Last Tape*, a play that makes innovative use of tape-recording technology to bring temporal depth and complexity to an intimate, interior setting wherein a "wearish old man" (Knowlson 1992: 3) (that is, sickly and withered) performs a self-examination by way of two archived past self-examinations (from his thirty-ninth and twenty-ninth years). While ostensibly focusing on the full life of an individual, this is theatre envisioned on the micro scale; an antidote of sorts to the scale of *King Lear*, while also following its essential themes. Set on the evening of his sixty-ninth birthday, the tape-recording ritual of annual remembrance is the occasion for setting down a recap ("These old PMs are gruesome . . . ", Knowlson 1992: 5), a distilled personal narrative of the important moments and events from the previous year.

Krapp is undone in this effort by the complex feelings of regret, anger, and arguably despair which an old recording triggers. In a concrete sense, he is unsaid as he prepares his own saying of him-

self and realizes that in the past he has "missaid" (Beckett 2009b: 81). The play dramatizes the general truth that an individual is not a single self but a series or succession of selves. And in the case of Krapp, this sense of a succession is presented through the experience of simultaneity, as three distinct versions of himself are given voice (two of which are embodied through the tape-recorder itself) on stage at the same time, are interlocutors even. Such a story of personal reflection could go in many directions, and the spectacle of an individual at three different periods in his or her life might easily convey a sense of personal development and growth in self-knowledge, just as the traditional conception of tragedy entails a kind of linear developmental process: a hamartia or fatal mistake, followed by a realization or anagnorisis, which produces an increase in self-knowledge, even if the final end point is one of doom. Lear's personal trajectory in *King Lear* is a case in point. But while there are many of the same elements in *KLT*, Beckett manages to instill an ambiguity in the trajectory of Krapp. It is not clear whether Krapp attains a greater degree of self-knowledge or succumbs to a species of nostalgia due to the worsening effects of old age. In other words, in a certain light Krapp is a tragic figure, from other angles he is an ordinary old man overcome by personal failures and bad decisions.

Because nostalgia, in the pure etymological sense a grief or longing for homecoming, is a dramatic feature here, the play might easily become marred by sentimentality. But Beckett is careful to avoid this pitfall. He does this largely by undercutting the objective authority and judgment of the old Krapp reacting to his former selves: the audience is made aware of the old Krapp's foibles and missaying, even as Krapp is registering those of his earlier selves. The overall effect is a lifetime of worsening despite regular efforts at saying himself to clarity, but which end as failures and missaying. On a formal level, Beckett achieves this by breaking up the language into halting phrasal units (aposiopesis), by adding and expanding the pauses between the bursts of speech, and thus creating a tension between periods of silence and efforts at articulation. And perhaps most significantly for the arguments here, he scatters the play with moments wherein Krapp assumes the "*listening position*" (Knowlson 1992: 4, 221): protracted peri-

ods of staring into "dream and nothingness" ("Traum – Nichts", Knowlson 1992: 241) as he listens to the tape-recorder. These moments of staring represent an exchange of seeing with the eyes for seeing in the skull. The ambiguity rests in the question of blindness or vision: when, if ever, does he see himself correctly.

Ultimately, one can recognize resonances between Edgar's aside on the sayability of being worst and *KLT*. Both in terms of Krapp's repeated (annual) efforts to say himself into a narrative fit for archiving – the play stages the way the man eludes sayability – and in the way Krapp's disposition predisposes him towards pronouncements that reveal his own worsening, the play, while downplaying any high drama and keeping the scale intimate and quotidian, offers an enactment of those twin aspects of Edgar's aside. Beckett's close attention to staging and choreographing Krapp's gestures and positioning in relation to the tape-recorder on the table in front of him, which achieve a palpable intimacy, along with the strategic use of aposiopesis and stretches of staring silence achieve a powerful demonstration of the full resources of theatre, as a medium in which language is the helpmate of aural and visual spectacle. One can see the connection between the medium of radio and his use of a tape-recorder as a diegetic form of archival broadcasting: both create an enveloping soundscape that requires active visualization on the part of the listener. And just as in his works for radio, the role of silence is as important as that of words.

One further connection to Edgar's aside needs to be discussed, beyond the general way *KLT* seems to enact its sentiment. Edgar's statement, as said already, brings together the issue of the limits of language and sayability and the idea that an extreme situation – as long as it remains utterable – can become worse or more extreme. Beckett was clearly drawn to this expression, and not simply in the form uttered by Edgar. Notebook evidence and correspondence reveal that he was drawn to what can be described as allomorphic versions of the same essential idea. For instance, in the so-called *Sam Francis Notebook* (MS 2926), which Beckett most likely used between 1950 and 1959 (during the period he wrote *KLT*), one finds a quotation from the final line of poem 170 of Petrarch's Canzoniere: "chi pò dir com' egli arde è 'n

picciol foco" ("he who can say how he burns is in but a little fire").[9]
It is a line he quoted on multiple occasions. In April 1958, a couple
months after he started writing *KLT*, he includes the line in a let-
ter to A. J. Leventhal and Ethna MacCarthy-Leventhal, after which
he explains:

> *arde* being understood more generally, and less gallantly, that [*for*
> than] in the Canzoniere. As thus solicited it can link up with the
> 3rd proposition (coup de grâce) of Gorgias in his *Nonent*:
> 1. Nothing is
> 2. If anything is, it cannot be known.
> 3. If anything is, and can be known, it cannot be expressed in
> speech.
> (Beckett 2014: 136)

This passage from Gorgias offers a related formulation of the lim-
its of speech in terms of knowledge, although expressed as a syl-
logism rather than a pithy utterance. A third allomorphic instance
is a line Beckett copied from Seneca's *Hippolytus* into a notebook
(MS 2934) kept during the same period as the Sottisier Notebook:
"curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent" ("light sorrows speak,
deeper ones are silent").[10] Each formulation of this idea echoes the
central dilemma of *KLT*. The Seneca line especially is an elegant
way of stating Krapp's self-analysis on his sixty-ninth birthday.

   Dirk van Hulle offers a thorough analysis of this intertextu-
ality in relation to Beckett's play, exposing the genetic process
that links the Petrarch line in particular to Beckett's revisions. He
shows how the words "burning" (*arde*) and "fire" get added at key
points in Krapp's speech, most crucially in the tape-recorded re-
counting of the "vision" during the storm on the jetty, which was
discussed above. "[F]ire" occurs twice in that brief aposiopetic pas-
sage: "for the fire that set it alight" and "unshatterable association
until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the un-
derstanding and the fire". Van Hulle argues that the Petrarch line
was in Beckett's mind when he wrote *KLT*, and that one can see
this in the changes made during the various stages of composition,

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9 Translation by Durling 1976: 317 (quoted in Beckett 2014: 138).
10 Translation by Dirk van Hulle (2015: 177).

as Beckett built in the subtle distinction between the notion of burning and fire associated with romantic passion, which is how the older Krapp thinks of the words, and the notion of fire associated ("more generally, and less gallantly", as Beckett says in the letter) with intellectual passion, which is how the thirty-nine year old Krapp means it in the recording (Van Hulle 2015: 171-80). The point here though is that Petrarch's line is equivalent to Edgar's as far as the notion of a *Lear* poetics is concerned, both link the limits of language and the phenomenon of worsening.

4. Cinema

Beckett wrote his only screenplay in 1963, and the shooting of the film was done in New York City in the summer of 1964 (the opening street scene in lower Manhattan, near the Brooklyn Bridge, the interior scenes on the upper West Side). The twenty-two minute black and white film that resulted was screened at the Venice and New York film festivals in 1965. It starred Buster Keaton, was directed by Alan Schneider, had Boris Kaufman as director of photography, Sidney Meyers as editor, and Barney Rosset as producer. The film makes an important contribution to modernist experimental cinema of the 1960s. In recent years it has gained acclaim as an important work in Beckett's *oeuvre*, no doubt helped by Ross Lipman's 2015 documentary or "kino-essay" on Beckett's film, *NotFilm*. Prior to this, its one-off nature may have encouraged its marginalization as a fleeting experiment. But this is a mistake, on the one hand, because the film is of a piece with his formal innovations in other media, and, on the other hand, because Beckett was deeply interested in cinema and had considered becoming a filmmaker himself, reading widely in film theory and writing Sergei Eisenstein in the hope of studying with him at the Moscow State School of Cinematography ("naturally in the scenario and editing end of the subject", Beckett 2009c: 317-18).

Significantly, Beckett titled his film *Film*, calling immediate attention to the self-reflexive nature of the work. The title signals that Beckett would focus not just on the formal aspects of cinema but on perhaps the core defining feature of the medium, on

what makes a film cinema. It tells a pared down story that especially falls in line with one aspect of his *Lear* poetics: the inseparable relationship between being, seeing, and being seen – what he articulated, borrowing a line from the idealist philosopher George Berkeley, as "*esse est percipi*" ("to be is to be perceived").[11] In one formulation he summarized the film as: "for one striving to see one striving not to be seen" (MS 1227/7/6/1).

The film focuses on one character and it splits that protagonist in two: an individual who is seen by the camera, called "O" (object) in the screenplay, and who is seeking to escape the gaze of both the camera and the other characters (and creatures) in the film; and the following eye of the camera itself, referred to as "E" (eye) – ("the protagonist is sundered into object (O) and eye (E), the former in flight, the latter in pursuit", MS 1525/1). A primary innovation in the film is to have the properly focused image of the camera's gaze function as the perspective of E, and to have a blurred version of the camera's gaze function as the subjective perspective of O. The latter is experienced by the audience as a point-of-view shot (POV), but both camera perspectives are, by this logic, POVs. Despite having no formal training in filmmaking, Beckett recognized the importance of realizing this sundering of protagonist into subject and object on the formal level, by utilizing the technical capacity of the medium. That is, the camera would have to serve in the roles of both E and O, but each role must be realized through a distinguishing technique. Beckett pared down the story to where there is no exposition of the central concept. This lessening of elements to the essential, which is then conveyed through formal strategies, increases the interpretative challenges for the viewer.

As already discussed, Beckett characterized O's motivation for fleeing as due to the "agony of perceivedness" (Beckett 2006b: 372-3). E prevents triggering this agony by keeping the camera's gaze within the "angle of immunity" (ibid.), which Beckett defines as keeping the camera within forty-five degrees of the axis directly behind O. Basically this means keeping the camera's position outside O's peripheral vision. There is no explanation offered with-

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11 Author's translation.

in the film (or in Beckett's *Film* notebook or screenplay) as to why O feels the agony of perceivedness (just as there is no explanation of why Mrs Rooney experiences it in *All That Fall*). Moreover, the three secondary characters in the film also experience this agony when they return the camera's direct gaze. The so-called agony of perceivedness appears therefore to be a general malady, not one specific to O. The film demonstrates the horror of perceivedness three times: first, with a "shabby genteel" (Beckett 2006b: 373) couple on the street into whom O collides as he is fleeing; second, with a woman carrying a tray of flowers down a flight of stairs; third, in the final confrontation between O and E in the room where O is sitting in a rocking chair. "As they [the couple] both stare at E the expression gradually comes over their faces which will be that of the flower-woman in the stairs scene and that of O at the end of film, an expression only to be described as corresponding to an agony of perceivedness" (MS 1525/1). It is through the last confrontation that the audience realizes that E and O are the same person: "that pursuing perceiver is not extraneous, but self" (MS 1525/1). This third and climactic time happens in what Beckett called, both in the notebook and the screenplay, the "investment". The use of the word here has an archaic meaning: "the surrounding or hemming in of a town or fort by a hostile force so as to cut off all communication with the outside; beleaguerment; blockade" (*OED*: 458). The connotations of hostility and martial aggression clearly point to Beckett's attitude about this pressing danger of perceivedness. It gives credence to Ross Lipman's argument in *NotFilm*, that Beckett himself "felt the camera as a literal wound and sought to avoid it" (2015). Lipman corroborates this claim with anecdotal evidence from James Knowlson, such that he is able to extend his diagnosis to a personal anxiety of Beckett's that included a general aversion to being recorded, whether visually, audially, or audio-visually.

Rather than focus on this as a possible phobia of Beckett's, one can instead recognize how Beckett understands the interrelationship of perceiving and being perceived, both as relates to the nature of cinema and in terms of the general ontological condition. The interpretative challenges of *Film* can be navigated by viewing them in layers. One insight of *Film* is that a film does not exist

outside the viewer's act of perception. A film is, in a sense, an act of seeing: the camera sees and records as it sees. And as a recorded act of seeing, the medium of film functions to be seen: a film does not exist until what it saw is then seen, but when the viewer sees it the film becomes a present tense act of seeing, or a re-seeing. For cinema, its act of seeing is a step towards its being, but it needs to be seen by an audience in order to exist fully. To be, in the case of film, is to be perceived. Beckett's *Film* anatomizes this reality. It demonstrates this basic fact of cinema: a film is actualized in the perceiving mind of the viewer.

Secondly, the viewer's act of watching a movie makes the movie into an object, and by extension what the camera saw and recorded becomes in turn the equivalent of that object. The recording act of the film camera – a movie's inherent 'eye' – has a similar structure to that of this viewer/film arrangement. In both cases, seeing entails a subject positioning and thus a subject and object relationship: viewer and movie; film camera (subject) and the event seen and recorded (object). Beckett's "sundering" (MS 1525/1) of the protagonist into eye (E) and object (O), or pursuer and pursued, dramatizes this dynamic, even while it mirrors it. *Film* fulfills the basic archetypal pattern of a chase movie, and here the pursuer is subject (E) and the prey is the object (O). The nature of this chase is that of seeing and being seen. The role of subject is technically equated with the camera (or camera's seemingly objective gaze). This arrangement mirrors the relationship between spectator and projected film, but whereas in the former arrangement the camera's gaze is the subject, in the latter the camera's gaze as presented is the object. By aligning the camera's act of seeing (subject) with the spectator's act of seeing (subject), Beckett seems to be making the theoretical point that to be is to be perceived, not just for film as a medium, but for the spectator as well. And here is one place the agony of perceivedness starts to make interpretative sense: the film spectator is typically understood to enjoy a kind of voyeuristic privilege and power, able to see without being seen, able to be without being perceived. But the idea that the film needs to be seen by the spectator in order to exist as a film means that the spectator's act of seeing – the spectator's presence, in other words – is an anticipated formal component in

the arrangement. The spectator too is therefore perceived. The liberation from being which the voyeur by implication enjoys is, as a result, cancelled.

Thirdly, in *Film* Beckett stages the ontological condition that the individual has no being without the act of self-perception: self-perception is inherent in being. As he describes the dynamic yoking O and E: "Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception" (Beckett 2006b: 371). O is the "non-being", and E is his completing act of self-perception. This is one way of stating the film's concern with the twin nature of the eye: of sight and of self-consciousness. And the implication would seem to be that the agony relates to the inescapable reality of this burden of self-consciousness. In *King Lear*, Lear's self-possession during the first two acts corresponds to a sense of self-consciousness, but during the tempest his demands to be perceived as the monarch he was, which would maintain his being who he was, gives way to a scattering of his former sense of self until he becomes, like O, a preyed upon non-being. In the tragedy, the initial self-consciousness of Lear is exposed as an error (hamartia), a form, not of perception, but of blindness, or what one might call a diseased perception.

Beckett, in a discussion with film colleagues, used similar language to characterize the acts of perception in *Film*:

> The space in the picture is... the function of two perceptions both of which are diseased... Exemplifying these two try and find a technical... technical equivalent, a cinema equivalent for visual appetite and visual distaste... There is no normal eye in the picture. The norm is in the spectator's personal experience, with which he will necessarily compare these new experiences.
> (from a tape-recorded conversation quoted in *Notfilm*)

The perceptions of E and O are both "diseased", and E represents "visual appetite" and O "visual distaste". The latter two descriptions help clarify the meaning of "disease" here. It seems the idea of the chase in *Film* functions as more than just a quintessential act of cinematic storytelling. A chase involves turning an individual or entity into an object of pursuit; it entails a process of objectification, and a predator and prey relationship. This is similar

to the structure of *King Lear*, where Lear is displaced into the status of prey, as are both Kent and Edgar, although the latter make use of disguise to stay figuratively within the angle of immunity and avoid being perceived. Disguise is key to how Shakespeare's tragedy explores the related issues of being, perceivedness, and self-perception.

In Beckett's lessening process conventional dramatic devices like disguise are avoided, though it is worth noting how O counters E's trespassing of the angle of immunity by having his "right hand shielding the side of face" or by "halting and cringing aside" (Beckett 2006b: 372). He does not wear a disguise but employs gestures indicative of a wish to be incognito, to remain "unknown" (*incognitus*), immune to visual perception. This is in keeping with the way the film stages the ontological dynamic in purely visual terms. In his notes, Beckett situates the action of the film in 1929, right at the time that sound technology entered cinema. *Film* comments self-reflexively on its nature as a 'talkie' by limiting the sound dimension to one "sssh!", which is uttered by the shabby genteel woman as she looks in the camera. Within the diegesis she is silencing her male partner as he prepares to verbally assail O, who, after colliding into them, has taken off without apology. On the meta level, her "sssh!" alerts the audience that while the medium is an audio-visual one, the dimension of sound will be bracketed. It foregrounds the visual nature of the medium. By doing so the film offers a narrative world that is an embodiment of the E/O split, one that enacts the principle *esse est percipi* and that therefore has nothing to do with the cinematic medium's capacity for naturalistic presentation.[12] *Film* is not an exercise in realism or naturalism. In a sense, the entire film occupies the space of the protagonist's being. "In the skull the skull alone to be seen", as Beckett writes in *Worstward Ho* (Beckett 2009b: 91).

In *All That Fall* Beckett used the resources of the radio medium

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12 Beckett's loathing of naturalism is well-documented, and it extends to his attitudes about cinema. He was interested, for instance, in the theories of Rudolf Arnheim, who celebrated cinema's capacity for artifice. An early indication of this attitude can be seen in a February 1936 letter to Thomas McGreevy (Beckett 2009c: 312).

to construct primarily a spatial experience. In *KLT* he employed sound recording technology to give an experience on stage of extended and layered temporality. In *Film*, while he clearly recognizes that one of the defining tropes of cinema is the chase, and he builds the film on this, he also constructs a film that can be viewed as enacting an interior reality in the form of an abstract ontology, much like *KLT*. Furthermore, in *Film* he foregrounds the phenomenon of visual perception and also the image itself. In this connection it is worth noting his actor Billie Whitelaw's anecdote during an interview. She said that Beckett commented that he didn't know if the theatre was the right place for him. She responded, "I know, sometimes I feel you could put a frame around me and hang me on a museum wall" (MS 4564). This neatly encapsulates the way Beckett's theatre tends towards the crystallization of images, rather than emphasizing movement, and it suggests as well Beckett's openness to and resourcefulness in the use of different media. His lifelong interest in visual art and painting clearly relates to this gravitation towards the image, whether dramatic, painterly, or photographic. But with *Film*, as an instance of cinema, the structural motif of the chase means that the visual presentation of movement is primary, rather than the stasis of the image, even though he also noted the "strangeness and beauty of pure image" in connection with his film (*Notfilm* 2015).

The "strangeness and beauty of pure image" is manifest from the film's beginning, and can be most clearly described through a brief analysis of the opening sequence of the film. This reveals both what Beckett means by "pure image" and how the film works as an ontological instantiation of visual perception.

Film's opening sequence shows: 1) an extreme close-up of the heavily wrinkled eyelid of the closed eye of the protagonist (Keaton); 2) an extreme close-up of the gazing pupil; 3) dissolve to a medium long shot of a heavily textured exterior wall, the only remains of a building (the dissolve suggests the wall is the object of the pupil's gaze); 4) a steady pan to the right scanning horizontally the length of the wall, as though examining it; 5) the pan continuing as it ascends into the sky, still towards the right; 6) the motion of the camera continues but as a direct vertical tilt downwards from the sky; 7) which becomes momentarily stationary

gazing on the rear façade of a multiple story building (fire escape, windows, doorways); 8) following the same rhythm and pace, the camera's gaze tilts straight upward and retraces the panning path in reverse; 9) once back at the initial perspective on the wall, a sudden whip pan to the right down the wall coming to rest on the figure of O, who is in flight.

This opening sequence is in sharp focus and therefore represents the perspective of E. The opening extreme close-up on the eyelid, which is repeated at the end of the film, foregrounds the act of visual perception. It becomes clear that the eyelid is that of E, and therefore that of the focused camera's gaze. In other words, the opening sequence establishes an equivalency between the eyelid and pupil and the camera's eye. The use of lighting in the shot of the eyelid is such that it heightens the effect of the eyelid's wrinkled texture: a very visceral visual effect, which among other associations conveys agedness.

There are two significant aspects of this opening sequence. The first is the strong juxtaposition of similar visual textures linking the wrinkled eyelid with the rough and pocked surface of the wall. This juxtaposition establishes an undeniable visual equivalency between the two surfaces, even though one is of skin, the other stone, and by extension an identity relation between the objects themselves. The eye is therefore made to equal the wall, which makes clear sense once one is aware of the *esse est percipi* principle: to be, in other words, to see (eye) is to be perceived (wall); the audience sees the eye as an object like the wall. So in a subtle associative move the film foregrounds its central concept through a strange and beautiful graphic match. The eyelid and its pupil are made to equal the camera's eye, but they are also made to equal the object of a gazing eye. This building of meaning happens purely through visual technique. In this way, the opening graphic match establishes the primary theme of the film, and it also unwittingly evokes key elements of the *Lear* poetics: vision, old age (the wall is a ruin, the eyelid suggests age), and worsening (the eyelid and wall convey a sense of decrepitude). But the equivalency connecting the eyelid and wall also signals the way the film will enact a non-naturalistic scenario demonstrating an abstract ontological proposition.

The second important aspect of this sequence concerns the façade or rear exterior wall of the building which the camera's gaze pauses on momentarily between the forward and reverse phases of its pan. As the camera tilts downwards and comes to rest on the building, there is a figure in a white shirt seated in the doorway of one of the fire escape landings. At the exact moment the camera comes to rest from its downwards tilt, the figure stands and retreats into the interior of the doorway, disappearing from view. As soon as the figure disappears, the upward tilt of the camera engages and the steady movement of its arcing return pan takes over. The white-shirted figure is indistinct as an image (presumably a male), but clearly present. This figure appears on first glance to be purely an accident of the shooting process: an actual inhabitant of the building who happened to be there when Boris Kaufman was filming the shot. The effect is reminiscent of the way shooting on-location (as in Italian neorealist or Nouvelle Vague cinema) can capture incidental actual world elements. And Ross Lipman clearly views the figure in this light, since he makes such a comment in *NotFilm*. But a closer examination suggests a different reality. The precise timing of the movement of the two camera tilts, the second of which is seemingly activated by the figure's disappearance or flight, suggests an element of intentionality, rather than indeterminacy. A careful reading makes it arguable that this part of the opening sequence establishes the idea of the central chase dynamic in the film and that the figure experiences an agony of perceivedness. The white-shirted figure flees the camera's eye or E (presumably in horror) just as the shabby genteel couple, the flower woman, and O will. Against this reading, the apparent accidental nature of the figure can be indicated. But there is nothing to say the figure himself was not incidental at the time of shooting, and then became an intentional establishing element during the post-production phase of editing, under the perceptive vision of Sidney Meyers.

There is potentially a third aspect of the sequence that bears scrutiny. In the centre of that section of the wall which the camera initially focuses on, after the dissolve cut from the close-up of the pupil, there is a detectable outline of a former double door. It is only an outline, as if the doorway had been removed and filled

in with the stone material of the rest of the wall. Again, this subtle visual element suggests associative links, specifically between the idea of the eye as doorway or threshold and the idea of the film screen as a type of window or doorway. If this reading is convincing, it creates equivalencies between the protagonist's and camera's eye and the object of vision and cinema's projected image. But whether this third element is intentional or not, the two primary pieces of this sequence use the power of the image to announce the concerns of *Film*. Bypassing the resources of speech altogether, *Film* deploys a visual grammar that enacts the ontological principle of self-perception, which is also at the heart of Beckett's *Lear* poetics.

As already argued, *King Lear* stages the limits of speech and in equal measure broods upon the limits of seeing and the penetrative power of the eyes. Gloucester is incapable of seeing past the dissembling of Edmund or recognizing Edgar. The pervasive role of disguise further puts in question the epistemic power of sight: that seeing bears little or no relation to knowing. After Gloucester is relieved of his eyes he proceeds "feelingly", and it is this eyeless form of seeing that opens the way to knowing. In this way *King Lear* explores the epistemic limits of both speech and vision, but also depicts the human inclination to rely on both as the ground of knowledge. Think here of Lear's dying hope based on misperception.

Beckett explores similar terrain. Mrs Rooney speaks of Dan's reaction to her torn frock in terms of knowing, feeling, and saying: "I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole?" (Beckett 2006a: 164). Both Beckett and *King Lear* link the acts of seeing and saying as deceptive or unreliable paths to knowledge, but also link them as definitive of being, as necessary to existence, even though they fail as sureties of knowledge. *KLT* stages the breakdown of speech, particularly in terms of the act of instantiating self-knowledge: Krapp's selfhood eludes his annual attempts at archival summary. The tape-recordings amount to something shy of a mockery of this effort. And yet they form an iterative record, a manifestation of the succession of selves that constitute the self.

Knowledge too is bound up in these annual acts of self-analysis: each item culled from the year's memory and cast into the per-

manent stasis of the tape-recording stands for a kernel of knowledge chosen for preservation. For example, Krapp recounts having waited, on a bench outside the place where his mother's death is imminent, for the sign of the lowered blind:

> (*Krapp switches off, broods, switches on again, back to normal listening position.*) – the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (Pause.) Moments. Her moments, my moments. (*Pause.*) The dog's moments. (*Pause.*) In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (*Pause.*) I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. (*Pause.*)
> (Knowlson 1992: 7)

The process here of witnessing his mother's passing ("the blind went down") is subsumed within the experience of seeing feelingly the small hard ball ("I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day"). The feel of the ball in his hand concretizes the memory of those "few moments" at his mother's passing: the feel of the ball holds within it the entire visual scene, which is sketched so vividly in the tape-recording. Here one can say that it is the act of seeing feelingly that both allows the crystallization of memory and that gives rise to a form of knowledge.

This relationship between knowledge and seeing feelingly is underscored by the central formal strategy that comprises the play: the use of tape-recordings to call up scenes before the mind's eye (both Krapp's and the audience's) while providing little in the way of a domestic scene, one barely illuminated by a suspended lamp, for the eyes of the audience to rest on and draw from. This again is a play that discounts the epistemic power of the eyes and invokes the limits of speech but foregrounds the indefatigable persistence of both in the hunger for knowing, understanding, and being.

Lear's storm-tossed anagnorisis involves the visitation of memories of various forms and potencies (think, for instance, of the mock trial of Goneril and Regan). Likewise memory is at the heart

of both *KLT* and *Film*. Each work uses its respective technology (the tape-recording and the photographic image) to stage the confrontation between, not just a protagonist and his memories, but an individual and his sense of self as mediated by that technology's representation of him as a succession of selves. In *KLT* this happens through the tape-recordings of the voices of his younger selves. In *Film* it happens during the "investment" when O, while sitting in the rocking chair, examines a series of seven photographs of himself at various ages and developmental stages (as infant of six months, as child of four years, at fifteen years old with his dog, on graduation day at the age of twenty, at twenty-one with his fiancée, at twenty-five years "newly enlisted", and at the age of thirty "looking over forty. Patch over left eye…. Grim expression", Beckett 2006b: 381-2). The photographs are viewed by the audience (and therefore E) as O examines them. They are handled in chronological order. After viewing them all, O proceeds to tear them up in the same order and drops them on the floor. Like with Krapp in *KLT*, he is earnestly focused on this self-analysis but ends by rejecting what he sees. The difference is that the concretization of memory in *KLT* happens in the form of recorded speech acts, whereas in *Film* it happens through a series of visual records. But the technology in each case allows for a kind of doubling: the tape-recordings double the speech acts of the living Krapp, and the photographs constitute fixed acts of seeing which are then the object of O's act of seeing. In each case, the formal strategy creates a double articulation that then arguably fails to provide self-knowledge. The archival fixity of these products of technologies of memory fails in terms of epistemic certitude and in bolstering the vitality of a sense of being.

5. Prose

Along with the characteristic elements of the *Lear* poetics, the mental phenomenon of memory figures prominently in Beckett's late work for the page *Worstward Ho*. The hard to classify work also offers the most developed exploration of the conjunction between saying, seeing, knowing, and being. In its concern over the

limits of language, the faculty of sight and interior vision, the process of worsening, and the deteriorating effects of old age it is a fit culmination to arguments for the influence or ghostly presence of *King Lear* in Beckett's work.

   Worstward Ho is the sole work of Beckett that is explicitly and intentionally connected to Shakespeare's tragedy in terms of its general project. The prose work is an extended set of performative variations on Edgar's aside on being "worst". As a sounding of the Shakespearean theme of the unsayable worst its language is assiduously pared down to a minimum of lexical elements in limited arrangements of spare syntactic combinations. One can see this in its opening two paragraphs:

> On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on. Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid.
> (Beckett 2009b: 81)

It takes up the challenge in Edgar's formulation and attempts to say the "worst". It does this, on one hand, by way of simplification in the variety of words and in their syntax. Often, for instance, a line must be sounded aloud in order to find the natural pauses that then dictate the part of speech a given word has. And usually the line can be read multiple ways. Many times a word, which might normally be a verb, noun, or adjective, functions in a grammatical role contrary to the norm. This tendency to mutable syntactical functionality is related to the way the text is rich with neologism. One sees this neologistic tendency in the word "nohow" in the above example. And the inventive neologisms proliferate especially in relation to the concepts of "worse", "worst", and "less":

> Void most when almost. Worst when almost. Less then? All shades as good as gone. If then not that much more then that much less then? Less worse then? Enough. A pox on void. Unmoreable unlessable unworseable evermost almost void.
> (101)

The paring down process of both the lexical and syntactical dimensions results in an effect of widening polysemy and ambiguity in the language over all, which oddly creates an enrichment of language, one contrary to the notion of worsening.

The lessening and worsening process also extends beyond the formal level of the language. The words unsay the scene and elements of the narrative itself. There is a general absence of subjects in relation to verbs, and this accords with the thinning away of the narrative scene. And verbs themselves often hover in a sort of undirected imperative mood. It is difficult to know what is happening, where it is happening, who is doing it and to whom it is being done. In fact, there is almost a total absence of narrative 'doing'. In other words, the diegesis is very minimally furnished, and those furnishings it does have, say the "black great coat" that one shadowy figure is initially described wearing, are gradually diminished ("cut off midthigh", 85) until eventually eliminated down to the vaguest "blur" ("Shades can blur", 99). Instead, this narrative is one only in the barest sense possible. There are no events, per se, beyond the seemingly extra-diegetic event of thinning, lessening, and worsening the narrative. Even the use of the word 'narrative' here as a way of describing *Worstward Ho* is suspect, a merely provisional categorization.

But just as Edgar's words simultaneously entail a suggestion, if not of hope, then of at least the positive position: "it could be worse" – so ultimately Beckett's prose exercise in worsening might be said to reveal the resuscitative power of language and speech. The work's language and syntax of the unworsenable worst take on unexpected life through this process of simplification. One witnesses this enrichment in the growth of neologistic language and in the polysemic multi-directionality that steadily replaces the usual process of signification. This fecundity of worsened words and compounds may lack clear signifying meanings, but the language gains a compensating spare beauty:

> So leastward on. So long as dim still. Dim undimmed. Or dimmed to dimmer still. To dimmost dim. Leastmost in dimmost dim. Utmost dim. Leastmost in utmost dim. Unworsenable worst.
> (95)

The reader is led deeper and deeper into the increasing "dim" and "void", but language itself stubbornly retains its captivating beauty. As an embodiment of *Lear* poetics, here the need to continue to both speak and see, despite the gathering worseness and the infir-

mity of old age, remains.

The work engages Edgar's aside in complex ways, and one method is in how it diminishes the focalizing aspect of the narration and therefore sharply diminishes the reader's ability to visualize elements in the narrative. This is arguably attributable to *King Lear*'s thematization of blindness and disguise, which in the tragedy are related issues. To follow or enact the trajectory of worsening, as Edgar learns, one becomes acquainted with blindness. *Worstward Ho* establishes a dim gloom with only a few discernible shades flitting among its shadows. In one light, these shades seem to have to do with the pared down essence of memories:

> Hand in hand with equal plod they go. In the free hands – no. Free empty hands. Backs turned both bowed with equal plod they go. The child hand raised to reach the holding hand. Hold the old holding hand. Hold and be held. Plod on and never recede. Slowly with never a pause plod on and never recede. Backs turned. Both bowed. Joined by held holding hands. Plod on as one. One shade. Another shade.
> (84)

In keeping with the idea that "in the skull the skull alone to be seen", the work unfolds an interior cognitive space, and within this skullscape one finds the flitting figures of memory. And these shades are increasingly blurred through the worsening process. It is also worth noting how this important theme of blurring (99) appears as a theme in at least two of the other works that fulfill the notion of a *Lear* poetics. In *Film*, O's visual perspective is blurred. And in *All That Fall*, Miss Fitt explains to Mrs Rooney that she did not recognize her because, "All I saw was a big pale blur, just another big pale blur" (169).

The diminished focalization in the narration in *Worstward Ho* makes it less like narrative and more like theatre. Beckett's project, while on one level about pushing language to "say the worst," on further reflection also seems to aim for an innovative linguistic performativity. He gets language to perform on the page, or at least demand to be performed in the mouth so that its multiplicities of meaning, which in many instances remain inert if read silently, can be brought to life. Thus, while this argument stretches

the notion of theatre proper, it is certainly the case that this work is akin to theatre in its attempt to move beyond simply saying – which would end as a missaying – and, following on the implications of Edgar's aside, actually enact or perform a saying of the worst.

Finally, one can see the *Lear* poetics in the way *Worstward Ho* conjoins the acts of saying and seeing. It starts by giving a sort of conceptual and terminological lesson: "Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid" (81). And soon after it gives a further lesson: "See for be seen. Misseen. From now see for be misseen" (84). The trajectory of the whole work serves as a performative demonstration of this interrelationship, even as it presses nohow on.

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16

Sam Shepard's 'Body' of Tragedy

Tamas Dobozy

Abstract

Sam Shepard's play, *A Particle of Dread (The Oedipus Variations)*, is haunted by a biological inevitability pointing to Shepard's own death from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in 2017, one characterized by precisely the progressive degeneration of muscles and mobility, ultimately leading to paralysis, that guides the form of his last published play.

Keywords: Sam Shepard; Oedipus; ALS

Since Sam Shepard's death on July 17, 2017, of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), there has been an uptick in reevaluations of his legacy. The "Backpages" section of the *Contemporary Theatre Review* featured a number of articles/eulogies that took issue with a 'narrow' critical discourse that had framed Shepard as a writer of "family dramas" (Scott-Bottoms 2017: 536); or, conversely, praised him for not writing "the same play over and over again", becoming "more not less ambitious as he got older" (Parker 2017: 541); or, celebrated his willingness to experiment beyond the conventions of mainstream theatre (Kreitzer 2017: 542). James A. Crank, in *Understanding Sam Shepard*, affirmed Shepard's late-career "evolution" from the "familiar emotional territory of his early work" (2012: 114) towards a more experimental theatre devoid of psychological realism. Shannon Blake Skelton's monograph, *The Late Work of Sam Shepard*, argues that Shepard's "late style" – beginning with his film *Far North* in 1988 – constitutes not a tapering off of creativity, but a new phase that "stands apart from [his] pre-

vious work" (2016: 3) both formally – creating "transmedia" works that revolutionized his approach to theatre – and in forging into new thematic territory, including topical politics, feminism, and aging, among others. Add to this the critical acclaim for the prose works Shepard published during the last two decades of his life – three story collections and two novels – and it seems that a scholarly renovation of Shepard is beginning to pick up speed.

As in Skelton, this paper argues that a productive reading of the last new play Shepard lived to see staged, *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*, must abandon the usual critical practice of focusing either on Shepard's treatment of a mythic, western American masculinity, or the family drama. Neither of these explains why *A Particle of Dread* should be considered an important play within Shepard's canon. Rather, it is the play's focus on the diseased body in light of its source texts – Sophocles' *King Oedipus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* – that offers critical insight. In this play, the body's treatment as metaphor – for either the moral order or the state – is continually questioned. Hence the play's fascination with DNA, blood, dismemberment, procreation on the level of content, and with disintegration on the level of structure. As Lisa Diedrich suggests in *Treatments: Language, Politics and the Culture of Illness*, Shepard's play belongs to that late 20th- and early 21st-century literature that treats the body as both "affective as well as effective" (2007: xviii), in ways at once highly personal but also beyond "any particular individual's experience and account of it, reflecting wider cultural categories" (vii). Shepard's long obsession with identity – poised between authenticity and performance – is put to bed here, as the play suggests that the condition of both is nothing more than healthy biology. The play is less a reenactment of Sophocles than its impossibility. With that comes the undoing of much of what the source text foregrounds: accountability, individual and state order, revelation. Ultimately, however, the institution that Shepard takes on is not Sophocles but himself. As Skelton observes, an artist's late style is often a repudiation or reconsideration of, as well as alienation from, the early works and the discourse they are part of (2016: 4). In Shepard that includes what James A. Crank has noted as the conflation of the fiction and autobiography that constitutes the public persona of Sam Shepard

(2012: 2, 7). What we are seeing, I think, is no less than a repudiation of that persona.

   A Particle of Dread premiered in Ireland in 2013. As stated, the text recasts parts of Sophocles' *King Oedipus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, though the former provides the main intertext. *A Particle of Dread* vacillates between its sources and a fragmented murder mystery, often resequencing Sophocles' timeline and violating the integrity of his play altogether. As Skelton observes, "The work serves not as an adaptation . . . but rather a rumination and reflection on fate and destiny that appropriates elements from the classic tragedy . . . [It] duplicates and remixes the Oedipus myth, while generating and constructing a piece that unfurls in a seemingly different time and place" (2016: 66). The play's bifurcation between ancient text and this "different time and place" is mirrored in a bi-, tri- and sometimes quadfurcation of its characters. Classical Oedipus is at once modern-day Otto, two characters performed by one actor. There is the quadfurcated Tiresias/Traveller/Uncle Del/Maniac of the Outskirts (Brantley 2014: C1) who seems to absorb the characters of the seer, Creon, Messenger and Shepherd from *King Oedipus*, and also another incarnation of Oedipus himself, albeit prior to being identified as the murderer of Laius and his travelling companions, while he is still, as yet, an unnamed suspect in the minds of the detectives investigating the roadside slaying. We have the character of Laius/Lawrence/Larry/Langos at once king, father, brother and mobster. Jocasta/Jocelyn and Antigone/Annalee round out the multiply-identified characters.

   In one example of the intertextual spasms created by Shepard, the Maniac's scenes are sometimes adjacent to those of Oedipus, as if we really were dealing with one person in two characters. The Maniac admits he is someone with a "powerful lineage" whose father "had one of the largest, most expansive Chevy dealerships in the entire county of San Bernardino" (2017b: 28). Throughout, Oedipus appears sometimes whole and at others with his eyes already gouged out, though he has not yet realized his fate and committed the act of self-mutilation. This odd dwelling in Sophocles while also departing from him without getting anywhere else, is further compounded by Annalee/Antigone, who at times seems

to be Oedipus's daughter – leading him, blind, aged, and befuddled, but before Jocasta's suicide, to Colonus (62) – and at other times his mother – such as when she mentions her own child, "scarred" and "branded", presumably on the "ankle" (44). The fact that she discusses this scarring with Oedipus/Otto makes for an even more convulsive temporal and intertextual frame. She is, as well, married to someone called James, who, as the play opens, has raped and murdered a babysitter. In other words, while the play's arc does begin with prophecy, progressive revelation, and ends with Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus's blinding – in other words while it is recognizably *King Oedipus* in its broad strokes – it is also something other, though what this other is is not quite ascertainable. The play seems rather, a decomposition or disintegration of Sophocles than a second or complimentary play alongside his. This pathologizing is most visible in the fact that Otto/Oedipus spends much of his time during the play in a wheelchair, as if Shepard's own take on the material never quite finds its legs, and that this is at least part of the point. I will return to this momentarily.

When *A Particle of Dread* was performed in 2014, *New York Times* critic, Ben Brantley, asked what "new insights" (2014: C1) Shepard had brought to Sophocles, and found the play wanting. For Brantley, *A Particle of Dread* is a contemplation on "the nature of tragedy" and the "value (or lack thereof) of self-knowledge and the persistence of myth in our collective memory" (ibid.). In bringing together myth and self-knowledge, he suggests a connection between the concern over authenticity in Sophocles with that of Shepard's long fascination with performance as the medium of both self-expression and loss of self. Brantley draws attention to the fact that, in this particular staging of *A Particle of Dread*, characters move between an "Irish and an American Western accent", accompanied by "polymorphous string music", where the "slippage" "ingeniously suggests how a myth mutates from era to era and culture to culture" (ibid.). He likewise notes the bi-, tri-, and quadfurcation of characters who are "paradoxically both outside of and implicated in the world they observe" (ibid.). Finally, Brantley ends with the assessment that this is an "endlessly circular play" (ibid.) that visits and revisits Sophocles, as well as the markers of

Shepard's own theatrical works, without arriving anywhere new. It is, in other words, paralyzed – neither fully inhabiting nor fully exiting its corpus. In this sense, Brantley is correct, though somewhat unintentionally, in noting that this "restless riff on ancient themes [ultimately] says more about its creator than its subject" (ibid.). He does not go on to question why and how this reference to its "creator" might feed back into our appreciation of the spectacle. Nor does he question what the static action of the play is in service of. This is left to a later critic, Stephen Scott-Bottoms, to answer: "As the musical term 'variations' suggests, [Shepard] offers not a coherent (Aristotelian) narrative, but theme and repetition. The play is an assembly of fragments which often deliberately confuse time-frames and family relationships, so that in the end, nothing is certain except for the persistent, traumatic return of violence itself" (2017: 539). At centre is a continual enactment of violence whose focal point seems to be theatrical coherence, or the very act of playwrighting itself. Hence the importance of Brantley's inadvertent observation on the centrality of the play's creator. *A Particle of Dread* is, then, a kind of meta-theatre, whose disruptions prevent summary understanding, and leave us only with spectacle itself: one of violent disintegration and paralysis. In a sense, it is meta-theatre for the purposes of forestalling any meta-level of awareness, as if the play wishes only to have us experience symptoms without diagnosis or cure. A pure pathology.

In the latter half of the play Annalee/Antigone approaches the audience directly to ask: "Oh tragedy, tragedy, tragedy, tragedy. Piss on it. Piss on Sophocles' head. . . . Why waste my time? Why waste yours? What's it for? Catharsis? Purging? Metaphor? What's in it for us? . . . I'd rather not know. Tell you the truth. I go around and around and around about it. . . . Am I better off? No! Are you?" (76-7). Key here is Annalee/Antigone's experience of the moment of theatre rather than take-aways such as "catharsis", "purging", or "metaphor". Theatre is not articulated as knowledge. It is not even motivated by the possibility of or desire for it. Annalee/Antigone's last question, "What's in it for you and me? A broken memory?" (77) suggests that tragedy is not even conducive to historical awareness, since the witnessing of its spectacle is to 'break' with "memory", to misremember, to attend upon that

which fails, ultimately, to permanently register or cohere. While there is arguably a restoration of sorts at the end of *King Oedipus*, *A Particle of Dread* offers only an irremediable brokenness in a series of persistent questions. At the same time, it is a refuge from the goad of answers. In other words, inauthenticity becomes one half of a dualism whose legitimacy Shepard calls into question. Spectacle is, in the end, self-enclosed, repetitive, paralyzed, and inauthenticity and authenticity are irrelevant. Purgation is understood as the exorcising of what is debilitating in Shepard: the desire for catharsis, purging, metaphor, closure – in other words redemption or transcendence – none of which seems to account for the desire underlying theatre. As Jocelyn/Jocasta tells Oedipus, "What can I trust if not my mind?" to which he responds, "They're shaping things in you that don't exist" (93). Note that the mind is plural here – "they" – as multiple, self-conflicted, and static as the characters on stage. Gone are the Shepard characters who demanded the "true west", as in the title of one of his mid-career plays, or any other form of authenticity. What is left is the constant seizure of a disintegrating corpus – pure spectacle, without remedy. I want to be clear here: it is not that Shepard denies metaphor, but that he probes its functions without reconstituting it. It is action or process, not a discernible content, that this play enacts.

When Brantley identifies the centre of this play as its creator he is probably speaking of Shepard the Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, Oscar-nominated movie star, celebrity ex-husband of Jessica Lange, not the Shepard of the late works, which are increasingly taken up with the aging body. In *A Particle of Dread*, as I hope to have suggested, the diseased body is itself a vital structuring agent. If, in Sophocles, the body is often the figurative expression of destiny and/or condition of the state, in Shepard it is "de-metaphorized" as such. The gesture is always away from metaphor. The creator at the centre of this play is the aging playwright, actor and husband/father stricken with ALS. His final two prose works, *The One Inside*, published in 2017, and *Spy of the First Person*, published posthumously but also in 2017, are explicit in their descriptions of the ravages of the disease: "Lately, there've been spasms, clenchings at the calves and feet – strange little electric jolts around the neck" (2017a: 48). That Shepard testifies to

writing the novel from which this excerpt emerges as far back as the documentary, *Shepard and Dark*, released in 2013, suggests that he was conscious of the disease during the writing of *A Particle of Dread*. That the typical time frame between the onset of ALS and death is three to five years, and sometimes as long as ten, further corroborates this.

Textual evidence abounds. The opening scene features Oedipus mopping up his own blood, which continues to pour from his face (but not his eyes) throughout (5); his opening line, "This . . . this was the place, wasn't it?" (5) conflates the setting with the body itself. Scene 2 continues this focus on corporeality with Uncle Del/Tiresias digging into a vat of bloody animal and human parts from which he reads the future, as he and Lawrence/Laius discuss the benefits of various sexual positions for procreating with Jocelyn/Jocasta (9). Uncle Del/Tiresias makes clear that the body itself supplies "futures" (11) again conflating the play's non-story with the body. That Uncle Del/Tiresias is reading, at that point, before even the birth of Oedipus, the intestines of someone executed for lying "about his origins" (11) suggests the fatality of the body rather than the "lies" of a narration bound up in progress from and fulfilment of an origin. Here, there is no way to speak of origin, understood biologically, because there is no departure from it. Later on, Uncle Del/Tiresias corroborates this, telling the audience that people come to him for prognostication, but all the while they know that "things are hopeless. Futile. Obliteration. Annihilation . . . All the while they've felt it creep in their bones . . . They know. They already know" (45). This embodiment is echoed throughout, such as where Uncle Del/Tiresias describes the scene of Laius/Lawrence/Larry/Langos's murder: "The bodies were all in pieces . . . The heads here. Arms and legs over there. They had to search for all the parts. The king's penis was missing. Imagine that! . . . They put the bodies back together. Laid them out like a jigsaw puzzle" (18). The disposition of the body takes centre stage, but the story is never recovered. In other words, the failure to redeem the fatality of dismemberment 'is' the story: "Disembowelling, hearts torn out, drawn and quartered, heads rolling. Blood dripping down the altar steps" (23). Most glaringly, Otto's frequent appearance throughout the play in a wheelchair – unaccounted for

as both medical condition or anachronism – further foregrounds ailment as well as the connection between the subject of the play and its author. Here, rather than being a medium for prognostication, the body is destiny, and the play as a whole is haunted by a biological inevitability pointing to Shepard's own death from ALS, a disease characterized by precisely the progressive degeneration of muscles and mobility, ultimately leading to paralysis, that is structurally enacted in the play. As the detectives say, "Tire tracks, bones, teeth, pieces of cloth . . . They all tell a story" (22), but the story they tell is not one of "sense" (23) but of non-sense, for in this play even primal emotions – fury, depravity, aggression – are merely aspects of the blood (47) rather than individual will, and Otto/Oedipus is not tragic by virtue of a character flaw he might have attended to, but "a deadly thing, beyond cure" (38). It is Langos/Laius who midway through the play states directly what Shepard has been telling us all along: "These 'tellers of tales' never know what goes on inside a man's feelings. They turn things to suit their own needs. Plot twists, story – inventions to make the listener think he's onto something while all the while intestines are roiling, blood is shooting itself into the heart" (50). Shepard offers no mirror to Sophocles' source text because that is precisely his point: there is no alternative narrative. "All the guts are now on the table" (79) and what they tell us is, as the Maniac puts it, "What fleeting skin we wear. Every day shedding another layer until nothing's left but blood and muscle" (91). He is, indeed, not Oedipus at all, even if they inhabit the same character in a play. Reconciliation is not possible.

So, then, what to make of this non-play, whose final lines treat sickness not as a metaphor of a state in peril of moral and political rot, but as the 'origin' of the desire for such metaphors? "I am sick", Oedipus tells us. "Sick in daily life. Sick in my origins" (115). Narrative is borne in the attempt at rememberment, both restoration of the body and the construction of a dependable memory, none of which are attainable here in this dismemberment of Sophocles. The fact that Annalee/Antigone has already given birth to a new Otto/Oedipus before the current Otto/Oedipus has been blinded, much less died, foregrounds the circularity of a biological fatalism, and the illusory nature of selfhood as the expression

of will in the face of fate. The subjectivity Shepard has wrestled with throughout his work has at last been proved irrelevant, since the subject is nothing more than a spectacle of health/infirmity, simultaneously engendering and collapsing metaphor. The derangement of the spectacle is no less than the derangement of the diseased subject.

I will close by noting that relatively little work has been done on the conjunction between disease and literature, and certainly none, as far as I have been able to ascertain, vis-a-vis Shepard. Yet it suggests fertile ground for renovating scholarship around his work. Articles such as Andrea R. and Michael H. Kottow's "The Disease-Subject as a Subject of Literature" (2009) suggest that the healthy and diseased body is itself the 'origin', as Shepard puts it, of narrative form: "Disease and its sequels redimension the limits and possibilities of the body and, as the subject becomes aware of these modified boundaries, it develops into a disease-subject in search of a narrative adapted to the new circumstances" (Kottow 2009: 1). Writing on the need for clinical practice to engage with these narrative adaptations, such work probes, as Shepard's does, the "biographical disruption between the subjective experience of disease, and a modified subject . . . whose different mode of being-in-the world requires a new narrative" (1-2). What we are witnessing in Shepard is precisely this turn – an almost real-time observation of how a disease-subject reconfigures text and narrative to reposition him or herself in the world, one that has little patience for the aesthetic, political, and cultural meanings that offer coherence. It is as if, in the end, Shepard had finally achieved the synthesis of spectacle and authenticity he had long been striving for. Much to his horror.

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Opening Up Discoveries through Promised Endings: An Experimental Work in Progress on *Oedipus at Colonus* and *King Lear*

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Abstract

As its title indicates, this essay is based on an original theatrical project, co-produced and co-directed by the authors in Verona, Italy, in Spring, 2018. More than a mere *resumé*, however, the article addresses theoretical as well as practical aspects of preparing and staging an outdoor performance of a bi-lingual script (in Italian and English) comprised of scenes from Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, with a heterogeneous, international cast of actors in various stages of experience. Applying a Performance As Research approach (PAR), the project challenges its own title by pursuing not endings and closures but rather beginnings and openings, celebrating process, liminal encounters, ruptures, and discoveries. The hybrid pastiche maintains tensions by, for example, inserting a Sophoclean Chorus into King Lear's storm scene, and applying improvisation techniques and the frequent use of live bassoon accompaniment to the faithful rendition of poetically crafted, rhetorically constructed verse and prose lines. Shared themes such as aging, blindness, father-child conflict, exile, homelessness and reconciliation are accentuated, in a site-specific, Greek-style mini-amphitheatre with a backdrop of cypress grove/ex-military bunker, where the audience itself becomes a border zone, amidst a heterotopic and heterochronic experiment. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of "rhizomes", this literally eccentric, multifarious theatrical work-in-progress seeks neither to make nor keep promises of achieving a coherent historical/representational narrative. Instead, it aims to engage actors and spectators in an open and fluid process of supplication and exchange, for the "rhizome has no beginning or end, it is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, intermezzo" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A*

Thousand Plateaus). One of the project's key discoveries has been to understand the act of supplication as one that connects theatre makers and audiences with contemporary experiences of exile and migration.

Introducing the Athenian court performance of *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe*, the carpenter and part-time director Peter Quince declares to Theseus, Hippolyta and their fellow audience members that "To show our simple skill, / That is the true beginning of our end" (Shakespeare 2008: 5.1.110-1). Quince's promise aptly serves as our own opening line, for this essay on theatrical endings and beginnings which stems from an original project co-produced and co-directed by the authors in Verona, Italy, in Spring, 2018. More than providing a mere *resumé*, however, the following article will address theoretical, methodological as well as practical aspects of preparing and staging an outdoor open rehearsal/performance of a bilingual script (in Italian and English) comprised of scenes from Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, with a heterogeneous, international cast of actors in various stages of experience. Although most of the participants, including Ms. Sidiropoulou, were working together for the first time, and cast members were recruited mainly via a locally as well as internationally posted call for auditions, the project was not a completely original, unprecedented one. It was in some key respects a sequel to a similarly unorthodox work-in-progress presented a year before (in June, 2017), also directed by Eric Nicholson. Entitled *Richard II in-contra i Sette contro Tebe*, this experiment grafted Shakespeare's *Richard II* on to Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, juxtaposing and blending together selected scenes from each of these two classic play-scripts.[1] A production and acting nucleus also had been formed, since not

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1 For an account of this project, see Nicholson 2017.

only Nicholson but several other participants in the 2017 project were returning, among them Elena Pellone, who had performed King Richard and would now perform the role of Lear; David Schalkwyk, who had played Northumberland and First Gardener, and would now play Kent; and Mario Cestaro, who played John of Gaunt and a Messenger, and would now perform the Koryphaios. Consequently, there was a fair amount of direct continuity, and the potential anxiety about merely attempting the "Promised Endings" project was alleviated by the example of the previous year's efforts. Moreover, the group was able to benefit from practical knowledge and insights gained through preparing, rehearsing, and publicly presenting a previous bilingual performance by a mix of novice, first-time actors and experienced, professionally trained ones. Thus the particular kind of *contaminatio* being practised was both textual-interpretive and logistical-performative. Furthermore, by employing a Performance As Research approach (PAR), the project – as indeed this essay itself – challenges its own title by pursuing not endings and closures but rather beginnings and openings. In the process, it accentuates and celebrates process, ruptures, liminal encounters, and discoveries.

Deliberate, risk-taking hybrids and paradoxes abound: the performance-script, alternating between passages of the ancient Greek tragedy (mainly in Italian translation, partly based on Sofocle 2008) and the early modern English one (mainly in its original language), juxtaposes two divergent periods, styles, acting traditions, and cultural frames of reference, without favouring one over the other. The hybrid pastiche maintains tensions by, for example, inserting a Sophoclean Chorus into *King Lear*'s storm scene, and applying improvisation techniques and the frequent use of live bassoon accompaniment to the faithful rendition of poetically crafted, rhetorically constructed verse and prose lines. Shared themes such as aging, blindness, father-child conflict, exile, homelessness and reconciliation became accentuated, in a site-specific, Greek-style mini-amphitheatre with a backdrop of cypress grove/ex-military bunker, where the audience itself becomes a border zone, amidst a heterotopic and heterochronic experiment. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of "rhizomes", this literally eccentric, multifarious, and still incomplete theatrical work-

in-progress seeks neither to make nor keep promises of achieving a coherent historical/representational narrative, but rather to engage actors and spectators in an open and fluid process of supplication and exchange, for the "rhizome has no beginning or end, it is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, intermezzo" (1987: 12). In fact, one of the project's key discoveries has been to understand the act of supplication as a difficult, spatially and temporally determined form of mediation, with the potential of connecting theatre makers and audiences to contemporary experiences of exile and migration.

In keeping with its experimental and 'work in progress' characteristics, the "Promised Endings" project was neither designed nor accomplished as an exercise sustaining the relatively recent (since approximately 2005) evolution of PAR as an articulated creative/intellectual/heuristic modality and practice. In other words, there was not an *a priori* plan to apply the criteria of PAR to our work in any systematic or strictly defined way. This might have been an almost impossible mission in any case, since, as Bruce Barton has noted, "PAR remains a conspicuously elusive idea – at precisely the same time that it is passionately advocated" (2017: 2). To be sure, this is not to suggest that we wish to remain coyly elusive ourselves, or that we proceeded in presumptuously or even romantically haphazard, improvisatory style, but rather to explain that prominent aspects of our working process, revealed themselves to be consistent with severals component of the PAR approach. For example, while a play-script was deliberately stitched together from various sections – almost all in Italian translation – of *Oedipus at Colonus* and scenes in the original Shakespearean English of the second half of *King Lear*, the eventual sequence, assignment of specific lines (especially for the Chorus, and the two actors who shared the role of Oedipus), and coordination of verbal with non-verbal utterances and musical accompaniments were arrived at only through improvisation and practicing alternatives: in this respect, our often overtly playful workshop/performance did follow PAR's premium on "embodied knowledge",[2] as well as inter-

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2 See Fleishman 2012 and his assertion that the "difference of performance as a mode of research [is] its refusal of binaries (body-mind, theo-

est in "ludic knowledge".[3] While we based our project on two canonical texts of the Western tradition, we also adhered to PAR's Practice as Research commitment to crossing conventional cultural and linguistic boundaries, as well as to superseding and indeed rejecting the usual binaries and binarism that one comes across in standard interpretations of classical works. Thus a Chorus, following Greek tragic staging practice,[4] did appear early on in our performance-script, but instead of entering into a central, downstage orchestra and reciting lines from the Sophoclean text, they remained upstage, on a hillside. There they served as collective producers of various ambient sound effects, to evoke the raging storm King Lear pretends to command in English, in his "Blow winds, and crack your cheeks" speech. In this way, a path towards a third sort of script/soundscape, neither strictly ancient Greek nor early modern English, was opened. This particular opening was felt and recognised by several audience members who shared their responses during an extended post-show discussion: there was a consensus that at this point, the visible, audible, but non-recitative Chorus members were vital to the essential handling of the stagecraft, more than to the verbal and gestural articulation of a dramatic conflict. No formal anapests here, then, or even an emulation of them, but an effort to transmit a rough, tempestuous, non-linguistic kind of 'natural' music.

After all, the experimental workshop's primary aim was to play with the paradigm of 'openness', meaning that the perfor-

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ry-practice, space-time, subject-object), its radical openness, its multiplicities, its unrepresentability, its destabilization of all pretensions to fixity and determination" (32). Our rehearsal process also utilized an eclectic range of approaches and physical-vocal exercises, theatre games, etc. derived from such sources as the Alexander Technique, Augusto Boal's, Keith Johnstone's and Kristin Linklater's writings, and the work of Peter Brook. On Brook's helpful notion and practice of "energy release", and his as well as other recent directors' applications of Antonin Artaud's ideas to theatre ensemble work, see Sidiropoulou 2011: 85-90.

3 On the uses of ludic knowledge, see Jonathan Heron's interview with Baz Kershaw, in Arlander et al. 2017: 22-3.

4 On the central storytelling, theme-setting, and "community representative" role of the Chorus in classical Greek tragedy, see Easterling 1997: 151-73; Taplin 2003; 13-16; and Rehm 1994: 51-61.

mance before a live audience was offered as an open rehearsal, just as in the preceding weeks of preparation, the practical methodology entailed truly 'in-process' collaboration, and insisted on an opening up of various possibilities of interpretation. For example, it was only at our first full-cast read-through, in early March (over two months before the public open rehearsal) that we made decisive cuts to long speeches, and assigned – though on a tentative, preliminary basis – specific lines to specific performers, in either Italian or English according to the needs of the dramatic moment as well as the relative linguistic command of the particular speaker. Similarly, not pre-determined evaluation but group improvisation and interaction exercises enabled us to find appropriate 'doubled' casting choices, sometimes of a bi-gendered kind. One of these enabled the same young female performer, Francesca Sammaritano, to play both the Resident of Colonus from the first scene of Sophocles' play, and Albany from the last scene of Shakespeare's. A Performance As Research project often will follow the three criteria of Knowledge, Methods, Impact, with an emphasis on plural forms of knowledge, in a way that runs counter to the standard sense of acquiring a definite quantity of information and/or mastering a set of identifiable and profitable skills. In keeping with this approach, our "Promised Endings" endeavour was in some ways an exercise in 'embodied knowledge', wherein utterance, composition and movement in space, musical instrumentation, trying on of various costumes and masks, experimentation with interpretive options – in short, rehearsals-cum-performance – all were needed and coordinated to enact the preliminary thesis that the two selected tragedies have connections worth exploring. As Baz Kershaw, a leading theorist and practitioner of PAR, puts it, this approach entails a "dislocation of knowledge by action", in the spirit of Gregory Bateson's paradox that "an explorer can never know what he is exploring until it has been explored" (Bateson 1972: 2; Kershaw 2009: 4-5). The related paradox of applying a criterion of 'un-knowing' to a knowledge(s)-focused work, that brought together professors, directors, students, and professional as well as non-professional theatre artists did seem appropriate and congenial to the chosen material: both plays pursue – through gestures and speech-acts of divestiture, loss, and alienation – par-

allel yet also contrasting dramatic inquiries into the phenomena of cognition, recognition, ignorance, insight, blindness, nothingness and revelation. Sustaining our essential interpretive agenda and methodology of openness all the way through the project until the affirmation of the public performance as an open rehearsal, we found this criterion to be of special value, since we were experimenting with two emblematic 'classic plays' of the western dramatic canon.

These epistemological concerns, crucially focused on the traumas of the struggle towards knowing the self, take on special urgency for *King Lear* and its stress on disowning knowledge.[5] "Off, off, you lendings" (3.4.106),[6] cries the maddened Lear as he confronts the shivering, nearly naked Edgar/"Poor Tom", and is inspired to strip himself likewise down to nothing. Our own PAR approach sought to emulate this pattern, at the physical level using minimal means and bare, uncluttered rehearsal and performance spaces, and at the cognitive/interpretive level removing 'subtext', 'background', and 'character development' by starting with the storm scene (3.2), and then cutting to the first scene of *Oedipus at Colonus*. The Chorus of the Sophoclean play did appear, entering in approximately ancient Greek style from the rear and side *parodos* as the elders of Colonus, speaking their lines of verse in Italian translation; yet the actors who embodied these characters were not making their first appearance, since they had already 'performed', through whooshing sounds, other utterances, and the use of a metal thunder sheet, the storm from *King Lear*. As far as we knew, there never had been a prior theatrical production that had juxtaposed these scenes and doubled these roles, meaning that we only could know how our experiment would play out through the actual practice of rehearsing and staging it. Thus, rather than merely 're-producing' a single, authoritative 'classic' text of the western repertoire, in a way that would affirm, extend and perhaps slightly modify pre-existing, familiar knowledge, our hybrid

5 A well-known, illuminating interpretation of this pattern in *King Lear* is that of Cavell 2003. Also influential for our understanding and interpretation of *King Lear* have been the studies by Greenblatt 1989 and Shapiro 2015.

6 This and all ensuing citations of *King Lear* are from Shakespeare 2017

script-in-action was able to 'produce' performative phenomena, thanks to its experimental and heterogeneous method. In this context, knowing becomes a practice of 'physical engagement', to employ the terms of scientist and queer theorist Karen Barad (2007: 342).

Hence the importance of the material site, for our final rehearsals and public performance: this was the cypress grove atop a mound overlooking a grassy 'raised stage', located at the far edge of the grounds of Verona's "Educandato Agli Angeli" secondary school. While this space, with its three semi-circular tiers of large grass-topped stone benches, divided by stepped aisles, does have the contours of a traditional outdoor theatre, it is by no means a 'purpose built' performance space. Its rudimentary, nature-imbued structure and decidedly liminal position make it especially open to dramatizations of wandering, disorientation, and alienation from civilized society. In a literal as well as figurative sense, our work in progress involved "situated knowledge", of the kind delineated by Lynette Hunter: "situated knowledge becomes a situated textuality, knowledge always in the making, focused on the process" (2009: 152). The key role played by physical engagement in this process of opening up situated knowledge, for spectators as well as performers, was enacted by having the raging, shouting Lear enter from behind and through the audience, followed by the Fool. Technical stagecraft rubbed up against character interpretation: audience members had seen and heard Nicholson, standing behind/next to them, making 'storm noises' with both his deep vocal resonators and the vibrating piece of sheet metal, a few moments before they witnessed his entrance as the Fool, now wearing a yellow Shakespeare-as-Superman t-shirt, floppy multi-colored Renaissance-style beret, shiny silver synthetic 1970s 'disco'-style jacket, and battling the "wind and the rain" with a small, battered, and malfunctioning rainbow-colored umbrella.[7] His deployed res-

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7 This costuming for the Fool was one of the few fully particularized ones in our project, which favoured the use of contemporary everyday wear, or 'neutral rehearsal outfits', with simple, loose-fitting, and solid-coloured garments. The young general Polynices, however, did wear an officer's coat, and a combat helmet.

onators now moved to higher ones, as he tried to shout out, more hoarsely and ineffectually than otherwise, "Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughter's blessing" (3.2.11-12) to the desperate King.

With this usage of alternately communicative and incapable voices, and an unstable acoustic dimension, we brought further enacted hybridization to our praxis, as well as to our Sophoclean-Shakespearean text. Our usage of the term 'hybridization' stems not only from Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical model, but from the deliberate mixture – though at times more of a non-mixture, allowing for rough juxtapositions and even dissonances among constituent parts – of distinct stage discourses in our preliminary rehearsals and final 'open' rehearsal/performance. We also sought to combine, as well as alternate between, a number of different approaches to interpretation, including the cognitive-rational, multisensory, kinetic-emotional, memorized and improvisational. For the most part, we preserved the primarily poetic language of the two plays, encouraging if not requiring full memorization of the often rhetorically crafted lines: thus the articulated word, whether in Italian or English, was an integral facet of our project. At the same time, we pursued the use of non-verbal utterances, including shouts, moans, groans, growls, imitations of animal sounds, and the like, preparing the way for Lear's anguished cry/command of "Howl, howl, howl, howl" (5.3.255), with its fusion of viscerally sounded grief and the semantically apt imperative to join the king in bewailing the loss of his daughter Cordelia, whom he carries in his arms. This is a non-locution that is at the same time a locution, in J.L. Austin's terms a speech-act that is at once illocutionary and perlocutionary (Austin 1976: 10-24). Even in translation, the metrically patterned verses of *Oedipus at Colonus* – many if not most of which were originally chanted, sung, and accompanied by wind (e.g., the *aulos* double-flute) and percussion (e.g. the *tympanon* frame drum) instruments – deploy onomatopeia, assonance, and other aurally charged devices to accentuate the passions and expressions of sorrow, anger, desperation, wonder, and blessing that mark the play.[8] We aimed to perpetuate this organic

8 On these physical and musical aspects of ancient Greek acoustic performance, see Wiles 2000: 144-64.

musical component of the plays by commissioning an original instrumental score from contemporary Greek composer Nikos Vittis, who generously provided several short but compelling and suggestive pieces, recorded for transmission by electronic speakers during the performance. Here again, practice superseded planning and preparation, as we eventually discarded the use of the recordings in favor of live performance of the compositions, by the professional concert bassoon-player Alessandra Bonetti. Cast and audience members agreed that this choice enhanced the organic and natural feel of the *mise en scène*. Thus the deep, haunting notes of the live bassoon were as crucial to the performance's method and impact as were the variety of pitches, timbres, rhythms, aspirations, and intonations produced by the actors' voices.

In keeping with Deleuze and Guattari's theory of "rhizomes", our project modulated a series of non-binary, in-process mediations and intermediary expressions. Essential among these were the live, bilingual, and regionally accented voices and voicings of our cast members, who included Italian speakers born and raised in Italy but also ones from Brazil and Argentina, and English speakers born and/or raised and trained in South Africa, Iran, Australia, the United States, and England. Motley inconsistencies of pronunciation, and occasionally disharmonic clashes of semantic units and elocution were neither a hindrance nor a liability, but rather a means for discovering unexpected inflections of the performance-script's thematic elements of exile and vagabondage, of suffering the experiences of the outcast, the homeless, and the marginalized 'other'. Extending Adriana Cavarero's theoretical work on reclaiming voice and vocality as essential, rather than incidental, to articulated speech and thought, Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson have proposed that because of its "in-betweenness", voice "has the power to create what Erika Fischer-Lichte terms a 'liminal space of permanent transition, passages, and transformations'" (2015: 3, quoting Fischer-Lichte). As Thomaidis also observes, this liminal and dynamic "in-betweenness" can be usefully channeled into PAR projects: in our own "Promised Endings" it could be seen as a case in point. We deliberately avoided any attempt to 'regularize' the actors' voices, accents and speech patterns, or to impose a consistent theatrical 'style' of

vocal delivery, a common danger when performances of the classics are undertaken. Utterances thus occurred in surprising, previously and literally unheard-of ways, that could at times communicate the intricate, unresolved tensions between the characters of the play. For example, thanks to our young Iranian actor Arash Shafiee's heavily accented, Farsi-cadenced English, unconventional as well as unexpected nuances came to tinge the mimetic complexities of Edgar's impersonation of the Other-voiced, pseudo-demonically possessed "Poor Tom" while leading his blinded father Gloucester. When Mr. Shafiee, in his guise as a lucid "most poor man" (4.6.217) then used a pseudo-Devonshire 'rural' accent to speak lines like "Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air, / So many fathom down precipitating, / Thou'dst shivered like an egg" (4.6.49-51), the speech rhythms and histrionic energy overshadowed any precise semantic or imagistic values: of primary interest was Gloucester's augmented confusion and disorientation, which to some extent mirrored that of the audience. Thus, having been forced to listen to Edgar's dialectally inflected lines with especially acute attention, the professional American actress (Ms. Noelle Adames) playing Gloucester spoke her response in deliberate and carefully enunciated fashion. In this case, then, the contrast between the blind, suicidal father and his dissimulating 'guardian'-son, whose tactics are of questionable ethical and psychological validity, achieved its own unique resonance and veracity beyond any possible directorial anticipation.

Similarly, unplanned discoveries of sound and sense were made through another organically evolved doubling choice, which allowed the same actor, Tiago Vesentini, to play the young prince Polynices of *Oedipus at Colonus*, and the unnamed Old Man (Gloucester's humble vassal-tenant) of *King Lear*. This was something of an improbable experiment, since these two characters are diametrically opposed in terms of age, social-political status, cultural background, and rhetorical style. The one, preparing to lead a mighty army against Thebes, attempts to use a suppliant's kneeling pose and a series of wheedling, conditional verbal appeals to persuade his father to bestow on him his blessing; as his sister Antigone, played by the non-doubling Anna Benico, forcefully confirms, Polynices' mission is doomed to ultimate failure. The

other, self-identified as eighty years old, tersely insists on staying with the blinded Gloucester, until Edgar/Poor Tom appears and he is ordered to "bring some covering" (4.1.46) for the naked "madman and beggar" (4.1.33). Although he promises to return with the best apparel he owns, he never reappears in the play: his is a true cameo part. To accentuate the contrast between the two roles, but also to link the ancient play-script with the early modern one, the young actor wore a full-face mask, grey and white in color with a jutting beard and large staring eyes, capturing the essence of the 'Senex' character-type from Hellenistic and early Roman comedy. This usage of the mask not only assisted the actor in taking on an entire persona, but also in altering his voice, posture, and gait. He also was able to convey a close connection of solidarity with his master, since Gloucester was now wearing a more individualized mask, with wildly dishevelled hair and blood-rings around the hollow 'eyes', which in fact was the same mask worn by Oedipus in the immediately preceding scenes. Since he then 'morphed' into a Chorus member, the young, novice actor with personal roots in Brazil imparted especially transnational consciousness and pathos to his renditions, which featured him in frequent movement and inferior social as well as dramatic status.

While some early consideration had been given to crafting masks in ancient Greek style for the Chorus of *Oedipus at Colonus*, as well as for the other characters of the play, the decision was eventually made to commission a special leather mask for the character of Oedipus.[9] The 'foreignness' of having a Chorus participate in *King Lear* was already sufficient, without the physical and visual markers for this collective 'character'. Instead, the prominent mask for the Greek king-turned-vagabond gained all the more importance for its uniqueness, as the only custom-made, character-specific mask in the production, and by its cross-over into the Shakespeare play. Audience observers appreciatively singled out the moment when one of the two actors playing Oedipus

slowly removed his mask and passed it on to the actress playing Gloucester: this gesture affirmed the link between the two plays, as both a sign of the historical legacy of Greek tragedy, and as an embodied metonymy of our own experiment. Again, this form of knowledge and interpretive outcome was arrived at via practice, during the rehearsal process.

Perhaps even more significantly, a chance, improvised variation of a planned method led to a truly unconventional and 'rhizomic' use of the Oedipus-Gloucester mask. While Ms. Adames found that the mask fit over her face acceptably, the two Oedipus actors (Roberto Adriani and Paolo De Paoli) encountered problems, as both of them felt excessive constraint and pressure on their respective faces, even when the elastic holding-strap was loosened. When, however, they altered the standard positioning, by keeping the mask's eyes at the level of the forehead and mouth at the bridge of the nose, they were able to avoid any discomfort. Moreover, the altered placement of the mask enhanced their interpretation of the character and his circumstances, in exile, exhausted, and at the end of his life's journey: not only did the mask become a kind of emblem and apotropaic head-shield (especially with its wide open, plaintive mouth and long, Gorgon-like snaky 'hair'), but with its wearers now needing to tilt their backs and heads forward in order to maintain their balance and orientation, it assisted their communication of Oedipus' elderly, weakened, and sight-challenged condition. Increased theatrical tension thus emerged, between the uncanny physical placement and movements of the unchanging stylized forehead-mask, and the convincing expression of particular thoughts, emotional reactions and outbursts through the actors' bodies and voices. The shared casting of Oedipus had already aimed to envoice and embody two sides of the character's mixed qualities, with DePaoli accentuating the agèd character's contemplative and sorrowful moods, and Adriani his extroverted and agitated energies; the specific gestures, and general physical inflections and contrasts caused by the unusually positioned mask made variations all the more evident, and startling. Multiple folds, branchings, turns, continuities and discontinuities thus could be bodied forth more unpredictably and spontaneously, thanks to the fact that a third actor, with a voice

and physique markedly different from the other two, wore this same mask to portray a similarly blind and outcast Shakespearean character.

If our hybrid performance-script established and accentuated key parallels, such as the one involving the stage *tableau* of a dispossessed child leading a blinded father toward a liminal destination (the grove of Colonus, the "cliff" at Dover), it also maintained divergences. For Oedipus, the revelation that he has reached the sacred habitation of the Eumenides confirms the prophecy of a divinely sanctioned *telos*, a meaningful end to his wretched earthly life. His terrifying curse will be his legacy for his sons, but his mysterious passage into the afterlife at Colonus – himself a *miasma*, transformed into a protector – will persist as a blessing for the realm of Theseus. In contrast, and despite his prayer to the gods that they might bless his son, the suffering Gloucester dies without a divine revelation or guarantee of redemption. While he is granted an off-stage recognition and reconciliation with Edgar, this very act triggers his ambiguous passing, "'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief" (5.3.197). Thus between the two plays themselves there are irreconcilable differences, which we did not attempt to smooth over. Gloucester did not return to give his mask to Oedipus, nor participate in the final procession toward the place of death led by the blind King himself, almost miraculously turned guide for his daughters, Theseus, and attendants. Instead, our performance cut from this scene, with the two actors playing Oedipus now leaning on each other and sharing their speeches (at times seated back-to-back on a cloth-draped stool/altar), and with the Chorus beseeching the god of eternal sleep to give Oedipus lasting repose, to Act Four, scene six of *King Lear*, followed by Act Five, scene three: the sequence, after an interval featuring a melancholy piece played on the bassoon, thus moved directly from the encounter between the suicidal/'rescued' Gloucester and the mad, flower-crowned Lear to the play's tragic climax. The chosen method, applied to the performance-script for its culminating phase, aimed to experiment more with juxtaposition than with fusion.

There also was a shift in spatial emphasis, as Lear entered, picking actual weeds and flowers from the edges of the playing area, ascending to the low semi-circular stage to engage in dialogue

with Gloucester, and then returning to confront audience members, pointing at them and looking in their eyes on lines such as "Thou, rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand" (4.6.156). With the Fool absent, Lear performs the comical and satirical as well as tragically poignant elements of this scene, and Elena Pellone conveyed this truly madcap, seriously funny yet deeply moving tonal variety to the full. This section stood apart from the Oedipus scenes all the more, since its actors were not the ones who doubled parts across the two plays (like Eric Nicholson, who with tonal contrast and politically thematic implications played Theseus as well as the Fool). By the time of Lear's ranting threat to "kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill" (4.6.183), our audience was focused on and involved with the play in its own discrete world of dramatic representation, an effect which increased with the arrival of Cordelia's attendants, prompting the King's progressive switch to the ironically playful and wittily punning "I will die bravely, like a smug bridegroom. What? / I will be jovial" (4.6.194-5). The heterotopic emphasis of our experiment aimed to coordinate the audience as a kind of border zone, at times critically detached in a Brechtian way from the excerpted, bilingual scenes that they were observing, at others vitally engaged with particular dramatic moments and interactions. Audience members thus could feel themselves emotionally transported, as Lear cajoled all present, "Come, an you get it, / You shall get it by running, sa sa sa sa" (4.6.198-9), but returned a few moments later – no intervening scene from either *King Lear* or *Oedipus at Colonus* – carrying the limp "corpse" of Cordelia in his arms, shouting the sounds/words "Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones" (5.3.255).

In almost any circumstances – including merely reading the script of the play alone, in silence – this is an exceptionally powerful dramatic moment. At the same time, it runs the risk of narrow over-sentimentalisation, if a production serves up the standard, anticipated 'Pietà' icon of agèd grieving father holding his sacrificed daughter. Since our objective was to widen the frame of reference of both plays, the casting of a much younger woman as Lear, dressed in a simple, 'timeless' and 'unisex' muslin robe, did aspire to connect the scene with similar potential tragedies in the off-stage real world, both past and present. We also reinforced the

links to the *Oedipus at Colonus* cypress grove setting by turning one of the thick, twisting hemp ropes tied to the tree trunks, and grasped by the Chorus for descent into the main playing area, into the noose used to hang Cordelia. Josefina Pelosi, who doubled as Ismene, solemnly inserted her neck into the hanging 'noose', and remained there as the dead Cordelia until she was freed by Lear. This and the other remaining ropes, dangled across the slope of the hillock like the apparatus of a ship, helped to frame the concluding sequence of the performance, from Lear's own "look there, look there" (5.3.310) passing, through a reprise on the bassoon of a solemn 'death march' motif, to the Messenger/Theseus' speech – delivered in both Italian and English – recounting Oedipus' wondrous death to Antigone, Ismene, the Chorus, and the audience. Katharsis was made available as a possibility, but not striven for as an artistic/spiritual goal. Then, having climbed to the top of the hillock, the Messenger/Theseus spoke Edgar's final quatrain, offering a brief 'epilogue' that might tie the two play-scripts together:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long.
> (5.3.322-5)

Yet if this utterance had the impact of an epilogue, its shift from imperative injunction to prophetic declaration also opened up, and continues to open up, radical uncertainties about the future, resuming the unanswered questions of Kent "Is this the promised end?" and Edgar "Or image of that horror?" (5.3.262-3).

At a symbolic level, the dangling ropes of our *mise en scène* evoke various crucial aspects of our work in progress. Loosely but securely tied to evergreen trees traditionally associated in the Mediterranean world with death and the afterlife, they provide support as well as connection, for fruitful studying and re-animating of scripts from ancient and early modern times. These ropes neither bind nor suffocate, since they can be stretched out and left open, as they become untied from one specific mooring, to be reused at other times and places, and for a variety of other purposes. To invoke Beckett, they can move on to fail better, like our own

and other experimental theatrical projects. In the mode of PAR, these multiple purposes and failures will begin, 'end', and begin again by pursuing traceable paths in aleatory ways. Finally, creative ropes, threads, and strings of all kinds – including musical ones – may enable theatre-makers and theatregoers, in today's world of movement and migration, to seek and receive help, knowledge, protection, guidance, and transformation. For when they wander away from home, as suppliants, the blinded Oedipus and Gloucester start to see feelingly, through their blood-stained masks.

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The story of *King Lear* seems to fill in the blank space separating the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus*. In both *Oedipus at Colonus* and the latter part of *King Lear* we are presented with an old man who was once a King and, following his expulsion from his kingdom on account of a crime or of an error, is turned into a 'no-thing'. This happens in the time of the division of the kingdom, which is also the time of the genesis of intraspecific conflict and, consequently, of the end of the dynasty. This collection of essays offers a range of perspectives on the many common concerns of these two plays, from the relation between fathers and sons/daughters to madness and wisdom, from sinning and suffering to 'being' and 'non-being' in human and divine time. It also offers an overarching critical frame that interrogates questions of 'source' and 'reception', probing into the possible exchangeability of perspectives in a game of mirrors that challenges ideas of origin.

The Authors

Guido Avezzù, Carlo M. Bajetta, Anna Beltrametti, Anton Bierl, Silvia Bigliazzi, Tamas Dobozy, David Lucking, Francesco Lupi, Robert S. Miola, Sheila Murnaghan, Eric Nicholson, Stephen Orgel, Nicola Pasqualicchio, Seth L. Schein, Avra Sidiropoulou, Laura Slatkin, Barry A. Spence, Gherardo Ugolini.

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