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

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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-

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

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,

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 assimilation seems to show that he made use of all kinds of material, absorbing contradictory viewpoints, positive and negative, religious and secular, as if to ensure that *King Lear* would offer no single controlling perspective, but be open to, indeed demand, multiple interpretations. (Foakes 2017: 107)

The major sources have long been identified with versions of the story, 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 canonical 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 legacy,[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 emphasis 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, different questions about death and justice" (234). A few years earlier, John Harvey had noticed other similarities between Sophocles' tragedies and Shakespeare's, pointing out comparable passages and suggesting a sort of Shakespearean effect upon modern English transla-

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 sometimes 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

11 Harvey mentions Storr's (Loeb 1913) and Watling's (Penguin 1953) translations 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 example 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 unchanging 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 detected "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 also 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 blindness 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 geneticallly 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-

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

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 different ways can also be found in Shakespeare's tragedy. Building on previous research she conducted on *OC,* interpreted as an investigation into Athenian acceptance of Oedipus as proof of the polis' hospitality, 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 into a cult figure. In this sense, Slatkin argues, his case offers "an aetiology of democratic strife" because in representing Oedipus' coming to terms with his past and his process of self-examination the play attributes 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 deliberate 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 tragedy Sophocles presents a deeply ambivalent character, combining different human weaknesses, from anxiety to anger, thus making problematic 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 origin 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 design has entrapped him – a time which has him dead even before being born, and criminal before committing the crime. The delusion of

agency unveiled at the end of *OT* will translate into Oedipus' awareness of his unescapable passivity, which will only momentarily be rejected 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 liminality 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 privative 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 divinities. 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 goddess 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 manipulation 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 fragments of his future makes plausible what is denied to the audience's view: as different from *Eumenides*, *OC* does not allow the audience direct access to the mimetic performance of the final ceremony involving Oedipus. In this way, by bringing the resolution of the action outside 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 comparison between the two tragedies. Robert Miola's "Lost and Found in Translation: Early Modern Receptions of *Oedipus at Colonus*" traces the many ways in which Sophocles' play circulated in early modern 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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