

Skenè Studies I • 2

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

Edited by Silvia Bigliuzzi



<i>Executive Editor</i>	Guido Avezzù.
<i>General Editors</i>	Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliuzzi.
<i>Editorial Board</i>	Simona Brunetti, Francesco Lupi, Nicola Pasqualicchio, Susan Payne, Gherardo Ugolini.
<i>Managing Editors</i>	Bianca Del Villano, Savina Stevanato.
<i>Assistant Managing Editors</i>	Valentina Adami, Emanuel Stelzer, Roberta Zanoni.
<i>Editorial Staff</i>	Chiara Battisti, Giuseppe Capalbo, Francesco Dall'Olio, Marco Duranti, Sidia Fiorato, Antonietta Provenza.
<i>Advisory Board</i>	Anna Maria Belardinelli, Anton Bierl, Enoch Brater, Jean-Christophe Cavallin, Rosy Colombo, Claudia Corti, Marco De Marinis, Tobias Döring, Pavel Drábek, Paul Edmondson, Keir Douglas Elam, Ewan Fernie, Patrick Finglass, Enrico Giaccherini, Mark Griffith, Stephen Halliwell, Robert Henke, Pierre Judet de la Combe, Eric Nicholson, Guido Paduano, Franco Perrelli, Didier Plassard, Donna Shalev, Susanne Wofford.

Supplement to *SKENÈ. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*

Copyright © 2019 SKENÈ

All rights reserved.

ISSN 2464-9295

ISBN 979-12-200-6185-8

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means
without permission from the publisher.

SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies

<https://textsandstudies.skeneproject.it/index.php/TS>

info@skeneproject.it

Contents

SILVIA BIGLIAZZI	
Introduction	9

Part 1 – Being Classical

1. STEPHEN ORGEL	
How to Be Classical	33
2. CARLO MARIA BAJETTA	
Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Raleigh's Classics: The Case of Sophocles	61

Part 2 – Oedipus

3. LAURA SLATKIN	
Revisiting <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	89
4. GHERARDO UGOLINI	
A Wise and Irascible Hero: Oedipus from Thebes to Colonus	101
5. GUIDO AVEZZÙ	
Some Notes on Oedipus and Time	119
6. FRANCESCO LUPI	
Liminality, (In)accessibility, and Negative Characterization in Sophocles' <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	147
7. ANTON BIERL	
<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> as a Reflection of the <i>Oresteia</i> : The Abomination from Thebes as an Athenian Hero in the Making	165

Part 3 – Oedipus and Lear

8. ROBERT S. MIOLA	
Lost and Found in Translation: Early Modern Receptions of <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	203

9. SHEILA MURNAGHAN	
“More sinned against than sinning”: Acting and Suffering in <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> and <i>King Lear</i>	227
10. SETH L. SCHEIN	
Fathers Cursing Children: Anger and Justice in Sophocles’ <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> and Shakespeare’s <i>King Lear</i>	247
11. ANNA BELTRAMETTI	
Oedipus’ εἶδωλον, “Lear’s shadow” (OC 110, <i>King Lear</i> 1.4.222)	265
12. SILVIA BIGLIAZZI	
Time and Nothingness: <i>King Lear</i>	291
13. DAVID LUCKING	
‘More than two tens to a score’: Disquantification in <i>King Lear</i>	317

Part 4 – Revisiting Oedipus and Lear

14. NICOLA PASQUALICCHIO	
Happy Endings for Old Kings: Jean-François Ducis’ <i>Ædipe</i> and <i>Léar</i>	341
15. BARRY A. SPENCE	
Shades of <i>King Lear</i> in Beckett’s Theatre and Late Work	367
16. TAMAS DOBOZY	
Sam Shepard’s ‘Body’ of Tragedy: <i>A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)</i>	403
17. ERIC NICHOLSON AND AVRA SIDIROPOULOU	
Opening up Discoveries through Promised Endings: An Experimental Work in Progress on <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> and <i>King Lear</i>	413
The Authors	433
Index	443

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 phenomena.

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' Οιδίπους, πύργοι μὲν οἷ
 πόλιν στέφουσιν, ὡς ἀπ' ὀμμάτων, πρόσω·
 χῶρος δ' ὄδ' ἱερός, ὡς σάφ' εἰκάσαι, . . .

[ANTIGONE 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 δὴ μ' ὅποι καθέσταμεν;
 ΑΝΤ. τὰς γοῦν Ἀθήνας οἶδα, τὸν δὲ χῶρον οὐ.
 (23-4)

[OEDIPUS Can you explain to me where it is we are? / ANTIGONE 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-

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*², 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 *ταλαιπώρος 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) . . . ὄν δ’ ἐπιστεῖβεις τόπον
 χθονὸς καλεῖται τῆσδε χαλκόπους ὁδός,
 ἔρεισμι’ 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

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 παθῶν, 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' ὁμφὰς τὰς Απόλλωνος δότε
πέρασιν ἤδη καὶ καταστροφὴν 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,

(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: φυγὰς σφιν ἔξω πτωχὸς ἠλώμην αἰεὶ (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 αἰεὶ δ' ἀλήτην κάπῃ προσπόλου μιᾶς / βιοστερεῇ χωροῦντα, τὴν ἐγὼ τάλας / οὐκ ἄν ποτ' ἐς τοσοῦτον αἰκίας πεσεῖν / ἔδοξ', ὅσον πέπτωκεν ἦδε δῶσμορος, / αἰεὶ σε κηδεύουσα καὶ τὸ σὸν κάρα / πτωχῶ διαίτη . . . (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 *χωρον οὐκ ἄγνων πατεῖν* (37), “ground [that] cannot be trodden without pollution”; the old man of Colonus describes it as a (*χωρος*) *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 *ἄκτῆ*, ‘shore’, where the reject Philoctetes was abandoned by Odiseus 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 . . . / βᾶθρον . . . 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 τι ν’ οἴσεις / πρὸς ἐμὴν λέσχην, 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 ἀκόρεστατος (120), "the man most impudent of all", thus implying the concept of κόρος, 'satiety', and Oedipus' failure to 'sate' 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 terms⁷ 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).

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:

OI. οἰκτίρατ' ἀνδρὸς Οἰδίπου τόδ' ἄθλιον
εἶδωλον· οὐ γὰρ δὴ τό γ' ἀρχαῖον δέμας.

[OE. 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 εἶδωλον, 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 physicality⁹ of 'old' Oedipus is brought to the fore by the position of εἶδωλον and δέμας, which emphatically frame line 110, and with the former further emphasised by the *enjambement* (τόδ' ἄθλιον / εἶδωλον). 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):

OI. οὐ πάνυ μοίρας εὐδαιμονίσαι
πρώτης, ὧ τῆσδ' ἔφοροι χώρας.
δηλῶ δ'· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ὧδ' ἄλλοτριόισι

8 Cf. 576-7 (Oedipus to Theseus) δώσων ἰκάνω τοῦμὸν 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' ἀνὴρ; ("When I no longer exist, am I then a man?", 393).

ὄμμασιν εἶρπον,
κάπτι σμικροῖς μέγας ὥρμου.

[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 another'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 εἰδῶς ("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 remarkably frequent – nine in total – among privative adjectives and adverbs 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-

¹¹ A further instance of the theme of Oedipus' ignorance may underlie lines 525-6 (*lyr.*), ΟΙ. κακᾶ μ' εὐνᾶ 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 eighteenth century (Lloyd-Jones' translation presupposes this change: "By an evil wedlock the city bound me, in all ignorance, to the ruin caused by my marriage."). 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 assumptions on the base of *hapax legomena*, as any word's status as *hapax* may solely be the result of the vagaries of textual transmission. However, the (relatively) 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 <i>hapax</i>
ἄσκέπαρνος (101)	unhewn	absolute
ἄκορέστατος (120) (superlative form of ἀκορής)	most impudent	tragic
ἄδέρκτως (130)	without looking	absolute
ἄφώνως (131)	without sound	tragic
ἄλόγως (131)	without speech	tragic
ἀνήνεμος (677)	never vexed . . . by the wind	tragic
ἄδερκτος (1200)	blind	absolute
ἀπροσόμιλος (1236)	unsociable	absolute
ἄκτένιστος (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

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 μαμάω (‘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

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 ἀμαιμακετῶν 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 Brélie 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): (ἀμαιμακετῶν): ἀκαταμαχήτων ἢ ἀπροσπελάστων.

tragedy overall, ἀμαϊμάκετος 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 πύματον ἀκρατὲς ἀπροσόμιλον γῆρας ἄφιλον, ἵνα πρόπαντα κακὰ κακῶν ξυνοικεῖ. ἐν ᾧ τλάμων ὄδ', οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος πάντοθεν βόρειος ὡς τις ἀκτὰ κυματοπλήξ χειμερία κλονεῖται, ὡς καὶ τόνδε κατ' ἄκρας δειναὶ κυματοαγεῖς ἄται κλονέουσιν αἰεὶ ξυνοῦσαι, αἰ μὲν ἀπ' ἀελίου δυσμᾶν, αἰ δ' ἀνατέλ- λοντος, αἰ δ' ἀνὰ μέσσαν ἀκτῖν', αἰ δ' ἐννυχιᾶν ἀπὸ Ῥιπᾶν. (1234-9)	1235 1240 1245
-------	---	--

23 Cf. Soph. *OT* 176 (*lyr.*), where the adjective is employed to describe fire: ἄλλον δ' ἄν ἄλλῳ προσίδοις ἄπερ εὐπτερον ὄρνιν / κρεῖσσον ἀμαϊμακέτου πυρὸς ὄρμενον / ἀκτᾶν πρὸς ἐσπέρου 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” (Ἄιδος . . . 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 characterization²⁵

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.) ... ἄξεστος πέτρου
- 37 (AN.) ... χώρον οὐκ ἀγνὸν πατεῖν
- 39 (ΞΕ.) ἄθικτος οὐδ' οἰκητός ...
- 99-100 (OI.) ... ὑμῖν ... / ... αἰνοῖς ...
(Oedipus praying to the Eum.)
- 101 (OI.) βᾶθρον ... ἀσκέπαρνον

- 73 ... ἀνδρὸς μὴ βλέποντος . .
(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
- 109-10 οἰκτίρατ' ἀνδρὸς Οἰδίπου
τόδ' ἄθλιον / εἶδωλον· οὐ γὰρ δὴ
τό γ' ἀρχαῖον δέμας
(Oedipus praying to the Eum. and
Athens/Athena)

Parodos

- 125-32 (str. 1)
... προσέβα γὰρ οὐκ
ἄν ποτ' ἀστιβές ἄλσος ἐς
τᾶνδ' ἀμαμακετᾶν κορᾶν,
ἃς τρέμομεν λέγειν,
καὶ παραμειβόμεσθ' ἀδέρκτως,
ἀφῶνως, ἀλόγως τὸ τᾶς
εὐφήμου στόμα φροντίδος
ιέντες ...
- 155-7 (ant. 1)
... ἀλλ' ἴνα τῷδ' ἐν ἄ-
φθέγκτω μὴ προπέσης νάπει
ποιᾶεντι, ...
- 167 (ep.) ... ἀβάτων ἀποβάς,

- 118-20 (str. 1)
ὄρα· τίς ἄρ' ἦν; ποῦ ναίει; ποῦ
κυρεῖ / ἐκτόπιος συθεῖς, ὁ πάντων,
ὁ πάντων ἀκορέστατος
(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
- 124-5 ... οὐδ' / ἔγχωρος ...
(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
- 141 δεινὸς μὲν ὄραν, ...²⁶
(the Chorus referring to Oedipus)
- 142 OI. μὴ μ', ἱκετεύω, προσίδητ'
ἄνομον.
- 208 ... ἀπόπολις ...
(Oedipus referring to himself)

First episode

- 471 (OI.) ... χεῦμ' ἀκήροτον ...

- 273 (OI.) ... οὐδὲν εἰδὼς ἰκόμην ἴν'
ἰκόμην,
- 348-9 ... πολλὰ μὲν κατ' ἀγρίαν /
ὔλην ἄσιτος νηλίτους τ' ἄλωμένη,
(Oedipus referring to Antigone,
who shares her father's exilic
condition)
- 489-90 ἄπυστα φωνῶν ... / ...
ἄστροφος ...
(the Chorus instructing Oedipus)
- 495-6 ... λείπομαι γὰρ ἐν / τῷ μὴ
δύνασθαι μηδ' ὄραν, δυοῖν κακοῖν·

25 Privative lexical items in the table are underlined.

26 Cf. *schol. vet. OC* 141b (Xenias 2018): (δεινός): ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀσεβής. L^{sl}.

(Oedipus to his daughters)

- 513 τὰς δειλίας ἀπόρου φανείσας / ἄλγηδόνος, ἧ ξυνέστας.

(the Chorus inquiring into Oedipus' suffering)

- 547-8 (Ol.) καὶ γὰρ ἄνους²⁷

ἐφόνευσα καὶ ὤλεσα· / νόμῳ δὲ καθαρός ἄιδρις ἐς τόδ' ἦλθον.

(cf. 273 οὐδὲν εἰδώς)

- 576-7 δώσων ἰκάνω τοῦμὸν ἄθλιον δέμας / σοί, δῶρον οὐ σπουδαῖον εἰς ὄψιν... (Oedipus to Theseus)

First *stasimon*

- 675-8 (str. 1)

καὶ τὰν ἄβατον θεοῦ
φυλλάδα μυρικόκαρπον ἀνήλιον
ἀνήνεμόν τε πάντων
χειμώνων . . .

Second episode

- 944-5 ... ἄνδρα ... / κἄναγνον ...

(Creon referring to Oedipus)

- 973 ... ἀγέννητος ...

(Oedipus referring to himself)

Third episode

- 1200 τῶν σῶν ἀδέρκτων ὀμμάτων
τητῶμενος.

(Antigone to Oedipus)

Third *stasimon*

- 1234-9 (ant.)

... τό τε κατὰμεμπτον ἐπιλέλογχε /
πύματον ἀκρατὲς ἀπροσόμιλον
γῆρας ἄφιλον, ἵνα πρόπαντα
κακὰ κακῶν ξυνοικεῖ.

Fourth episode

- 1261 κόμη ... ἀκτένιστος ...

(Polynices referring to Oedipus)

- 1277 τὸ δυσπρόσοιστον κάπροσή-
γορον στόμα, (Polynices referring
to Oedipus)

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

Exodos

- 1672 ἄλαστον αἷμα ...
- 1702 οὐδὲ γερῶν ἀφίλητος ἐμοί
ποτε / καὶ τᾶδε μὴ κυρήσης.
(Antigone referring to her dead
father)
- 1732 ἄταφος ἔπιτνε δίχα τε παντός.
(Ismene referring to Oedipus'
death)

Works Cited

- Brelie, Wilhelm von der (1911), *Dictione trimembri quomodo poetae Graeci imprimis tragici usi sint*, Diss. Inaug., Göttingae: Officina Academica Dieterichiana typis expressit.
- DELG (1968-1980), *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, ed. by Pierre Chantraine, 4 vols, Paris: Éditions Klincksieck.
- Fraenkel, Eduard (ed. and trans.) (1950), *Aeschylus. Agamemnon*, 3 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- GE (2015), *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. by Franco Montanari. Co-authors: Ivan Garofalo and Daniela Manetti. Editors of the English Edition: Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder, Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Kannicht, Richard (ed. and trans.) (1969), *Euripides. Helena*, 2 vols, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag: Heidelberg.
- Markantonatos, Andreas (2007), *Oedipus at Colonus. Sophocles, Athens, and the World*, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Nuchelmans, Jan C.F. (1949), *Die Nomina des sophokleischen Wortschatzes. Vorarbeiten zu einer sprachgeschichtlichen und stilistischen Analyse*, Centrale Drukkerij N.V.: Nijmegen.
- Pearson, Alfred C. (ed.) (1917), *The Fragments of Sophocles*, edited with additional notes from the papers of Sir Richard C. Jebb and Dr

- Walter G. Headlam, 3 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sophocles (2018), *Sophocles. Oedipus the King*, ed. with introduction, translation, and commentary by Patrick J. Finglass, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2008), *Sofocle. Edipo a Colono*, ed. by Guido Avezzi and Giulio Guidorizzi, trans. by Giovanni Cerri, Milano: Mondadori (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla).
- (2005) *Sophocles. Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. by Eamon Grennan and Rachel Kitzinger, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1998), *Sofocle. Edipo a Colono*, a cura di Andrea Rodighiero, Venezia: Marsilio.
- (1994), *Sophocles*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, 2 vols., Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press.
- (1890), *Sophocles. The Plays and the Fragments*, with critical notes, commentary, and translation in English prose, by Richard C. Jebb, Part II, *The Oedipus Coloneus*, 3rd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Nortwick, Thomas (2015), *Late Sophocles: the Hero's Evolution in Electra, Philoctetes, and Oedipus at Colonus*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Villari, Elisabetta (2013), “Dal kepos al témenos. Note sul paesaggio dell’Attica tra *locus amoenus* e ‘giardino funerario’ nell’*Edipo a Colono*: il bosco delle Eumenidi e l’*Ur-Athen* pre-sinecistica”, in Elisabetta Villari (ed.), *Il paesaggio e il sacro. L’evoluzione dello spazio di culto in Grecia: interpretazioni e rappresentazioni*, Genova: De Ferrari, 117-53.
- Xenis, Georgios A. (ed.) (2018), *Scholia Vetera in Sophoclis Oedipum Coloneum*, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.