

ῥοπή βίου μοι: THE PASSIVE ROUTE TO APOTHEOSIS IN SOPHOCLES'

*OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*

by

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to demonstrate the necessary role of passivity in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* as a catalyst of Oedipus' restoration to community, of his ethical innocence and of the renewed personal agency that culminates in his apotheosis. I argue that the exiled wanderer is reconciled to the Eumenides and made a citizen once again through the mediating work of his φίλοι. These mediations, coupled with Oedipus' submission to the will of the gods and the prudent council of his φίλοι, enable his transition from utter dependency to daimonhood. The characteristic ambiguity of Sophocles' poetry is elucidated by comparison with the ethical arguments of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

## List of Abbreviations Used

<i>Ai</i>	<i>Ajax</i>
<i>Ant</i>	<i>Antigone</i>
Dem. 20	Demosthenes, <i>Against Leptines</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Eudemian Ethics</i>
<i>El</i>	<i>Electra</i>
<i>HA</i>	<i>History of Animals</i>
<i>HM</i>	<i>Heracles Mainomenos</i>
<i>Il</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>Meta</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>Phil</i>	<i>Philoctetes</i>
<i>Pol</i>	<i>Politics</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>OC</i>	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
<i>Top</i>	<i>Topics</i>

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## Chapter I: Introduction

In the opening passages of his *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles quickly establishes the passive dependency of his protagonist. Yet this passivity is not an insuperable barrier to the fully actualized activity that he embodies by the end of the play. Rather, it is an essential element in his transformation, present throughout his arc of development, both in the early stages of his restoration to community and culminating in his apotheosis.

In *OC*, Oedipus manifests nearly every conceivable form of passivity. He is blind and weak, estranged from his former φίλοι, and wholly dependent on the mediation of others to facilitate his basic physical and social functions. Even so, despite their apparent limitations, not all such manifestations are negative; Oedipus has also become pliant and submissive to prudent counsel and to the will of the gods. It may appear that passivity is what ails him, but in many ways it becomes the cure.

Although Sophocles' use of passivity in *OC* is best demonstrated through a close reading of the text, earlier analyses of the play have often suffered from a tendency to import assumptions about the characters and their life events from other sources, all while ignoring relevant cultural context.<sup>1</sup> It was E.R. Dodds who popularized the well-known formula that “what is not mentioned in the play does not exist.”<sup>2</sup> Yet the danger implicit in the application of this formula is that it effectively limits the range of allowable questions, since “we are not entitled to ask questions that the dramatist did not intend us to ask.”<sup>3</sup> To this, Friedrich Ahl parries, “but how can one know which questions the

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<sup>1</sup> See Daniels and Scully 1996, Wilson 1997, Ahrens Dorf 2009 and Mulroy 2015

<sup>2</sup> Dodds 1966: 180

<sup>3</sup> Dodds 1966: 37-49

dramatist did not intend us to ask?”<sup>4</sup> For our purposes, this question applies not only to what sources outside of Sophocles' work may provide useful context and clarification, but also what relation, if any at all, may exist between plays. These answers are seldom clear.

As Ahl demonstrates, much of what is commonly believed about Oedipus is derived from Seneca's work, rather than Sophocles'. For example, the details of Oedipus' encounter with the sphinx are never mentioned in Sophocles' plays.<sup>5</sup> Worse still, the modern mind is apt to conflate the literary Oedipus with Freud's psychoanalytic theory, an association so deeply unappealing that Ruby Blondell favours the seldom-seen 'Oidipous' spelling in part because it helps the reader differentiate between the notoriously unlucky man of Greek myth and the Freudian creation that came to bear his name.<sup>6</sup>

Dodds' formula seems a much-needed corrective to these errors, yet as Seaford writes: “to confine ourselves, in attempting to understand Greek literature, to what the Greeks themselves said about it would be as myopic as to stay within what the Greeks themselves said about their economy, their religion, their kinship relations, and so on.”<sup>7</sup> Surely Sophocles and his brethren are not confined by historical particulars or normative cultural practices in the creation of their tragic worlds. None of these have the authority to shackle the playwright, whose creative authority remains sovereign within the boundaries of his text, but readings that fail to consider contextual influences run the risk

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<sup>4</sup> Ahl 1991: 5

<sup>5</sup> Ahl 1991: 1-13

<sup>6</sup> Blondell 2002: preface vii

<sup>7</sup> Seaford 2000: 33. In response to Jasper Griffin's skepticism over literary interpretation based on elements that the plays mention” only elliptically or not at all” (Griffin 1998: 53), Seaford counters that “there are numerous practices of the Athenian πόλις that, even though mentioned in tragedy either not at all or far less frequently than hero-cult is, cannot be ignored by serious interpreters of tragedy: democracy, philosophy, written law, the mysteries, the development of rhetoric, the legal position of women, the Peloponnesian war, to name but a few.” (Seaford 2000: 39)

of transposing modern notions about friendship, community, happiness and divinity over the poet's words. For this reason, this thesis attempts to consider relevant external discussions of cultural, religious and philosophical elements insofar as they contribute in situating the play within the Athenian thought that influenced both its author and its intended audience.

Although his treatises were penned at a considerable remove from the fifth century tragedians, Aristotle's work remains particularly useful for the comparison and analysis of their ethical ideas, including the nature of citizenship, the bounds of culpability and the necessity of human community for εὐδαιμονία. The nature of his work is such that ethical concepts that are implicit in earlier poetry are carefully articulated and made explicit step-by-step through reasoned arguments.<sup>8</sup> This technique stands in clear contrast not only with the rich symbolism and spectacular imagery of Plato's dialogues, but also with Sophocles' own tendency towards poetic ambiguity.

Perhaps on account of this tendency there is remarkably little consensus among scholars on such crucial questions as: Is Oedipus purified of his miasma? Is he made a citizen? Is he at fault in his sons' mutual demise? Does he end happily? Is he then a δαίμων or lucky set of dry bones? This thesis attempts to shed light on these inquiries, giving particular attention the counterintuitive necessity of passive receptivity in Oedipus' transformative arc.

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<sup>8</sup> Martha Nussbaum's helpful discussion of luck and ethics in Greek literature provides a useful link between 5<sup>th</sup> century Attic thought and the poetry that precedes it, but her broad ranging treatment prevents more than a cursory analysis of a particular play. (Nussbaum 1986)



Efforts to tie *OC* to its historical moment have led some critics to read it as an ode to Athens' former dominance and a lament for her faded glory.<sup>9</sup> For these, *OC* is a bittersweet song to Athens from a devoted lover. Others, noting the poet's advanced age, propose that Oedipus and his eventual heroization represent Sophocles himself, as a prescient nod to the immortality of his poetry.<sup>10</sup>

Yet all too often, *OC* is read as a lesser echo of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in a narrative continuation that reverses, or at least complicates, the themes of the earlier play. Although *OC* is drawn from the same mythic origin and is subtly woven with intertextual references to its predecessor, it remains an artistic whole on its own.<sup>11</sup> To understand the circumstances in which the blind vagrant and his faithful daughter arrive in the Eumenides' grove, we need only look to the history that Sophocles presents in *OC*, albeit often in vestigial form.<sup>12</sup> After Jocasta's death and Oedipus' self-mutilation, Creon alone rules Thebes. Despite Oedipus' initial desire to hide his shame in banishment, he yields to a contented solitude during his latter years in the city, hidden from the public eye and wholly dependent on the loving ministrations of his daughters. Sufficient time passes for his sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, to grow from small boys into men who make no protest when their father is driven from the city.<sup>13</sup> Exiled from Thebes, Oedipus wanders

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<sup>9</sup> Conversely, for Bernard Knox, Oedipus' journey from his prime to degeneracy to immortality is not simply an image of Athens' decline but a hopeful vision of its future. (Knox 1964: 144)

<sup>10</sup> For parallels between Oedipus and the poet see Bowra 1944: 307, Adams 1957: 160 and Ringer 1998: 97-9. See also Segal 1981: 407 where Charles Segal writes that for Sophocles, "as for his hero, power and existence reside in the spirit and in art."

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A for a more complete consideration of the relation between *OC* and *OT*.

<sup>12</sup> R.C. Jebb writes that we have to make out the events from the interval between the action of *OT* and of *OC*, "from the stray hints in the *Coloneus*." (Jebb 2004: intro ix) It is entirely possible, however, to glean Oedipus' relevant history independently from *OT*, a question that Appendix A discusses in further detail.

<sup>13</sup> As Jebb argues, the desire of Creon and his fellow Thebans to expel Oedipus seems to emerge from their personal concerns over the consequences of harbouring pollution, rather than from consultation of the oracle as Creon promised Oedipus in the final lines of *OT*. There is no indication in *OC* that Oedipus' exile, much less the timing thereof or the extreme neglect for his nurture, was mandated by the gods.

as a beggar in the Cithaeron wilderness, estranged from his former φίλοι, from his position in civic community and from access to the sacred rituals that imbue community life. The Thebans must suppose that he is destined to perish from exposure and want, as his own parents had once intended. The gods, however, determined otherwise.

By the same prophetic utterance that foretold Oedipus' parricide and incest, Apollo promised that Oedipus would find rest in the end. Moreover, he will wield the power to help those who have received him and harm those who have cast him out. The second part of the promise is particularly striking in light of Oedipus' utter passivity at the outset of the play. Homeless, citiless, polluted and friendless except for his daughters, Oedipus is physically, spiritually and politically helpless, entirely dependent on the actions of others. Yet, as Kitto notes, "in the opening scene Oedipus is at everyone's mercy...in the end he towers above everybody".<sup>14</sup> Clearly, his remarkable transformation is the fulfillment of Apollo's oracle, but how is this transformation effected?

The following chapters explore Oedipus' passivity in relation to his restored activity, his ethical culpability and his ultimate divinity. Chapter II treats the opening scenes of the play, with a focus on Oedipus' initial passivity as the condition for his twofold reintegration into οἶκος and πόλις. As his twin supports (σκήπτρα), Antigone and Ismene represent the two essential aspects of the οἶκος, trophic care for the physical body and ritual care for the family religion. Each daughter becomes an agent for her passively receptive father, mediating his physical needs and his spiritual impoverishment. Once Oedipus is restored to a proper relation to the οἶκος, he is then eligible for inclusion in the larger civic community. On Theseus' arrival, Oedipus is made ἔμπολις, no longer a

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<sup>14</sup> Kitto 1954: 388

citiless exile, but a citizen of the land and people that he will one day protect. exile, but a citizen of the land and people that he will one day protect.

Chapter III examines the recovery of Oedipus' activity through the remaining episodes of the play. On account of his earlier reintegration, Oedipus is able to leverage his new civic relationship for the protection of his family unit when Creon abducts his daughters in an effort to force his return to Thebes. Out of gratitude to Theseus, Oedipus cedes to his friend's counsel to grant an audience to his estranged son, Polyneices. With his subsequent confrontation, Oedipus no longer relies on the agency of others, but shapes the future with a prophetic word uttered under his own authority. Once he has completed his self-distinction from his former ties, pealing thunder calls Oedipus on to his heroization. In the final episode, Oedipus is now self-moving, without any physical aid, leading those who once acted on his behalf. In an echo of Ismene's earlier propitiatory work, Oedipus' daughters assist in the ritual preparation for his death, the final act of his remaining οικόζ. Once they have wept together, a god calls out to hasten Oedipus onward, but only Theseus may accompany him and hear the sacred words (ἐξάγιστα) that will safeguard Athens' future. In his apotheosis, the actualization of Oedipus' agency is complete. At the same time, even as a daimonic hero, his agency is not without assistance or constraint. Instead, Oedipus retains a degree of dependency on his friendship with the Athenian πόλιζ, even as they are reciprocally dependent on Oedipus to safeguard the city. At the same time, the scope of Oedipus' power is limited both by geography and by Oedipus' subservient position within the divine hierarchy.

Chapter IV addresses the ever present question of Oedipus' culpability through the lens of the ethical argument he offers in his own defense, the essence of which is that

he acted in ignorance, a passive participant in the crimes that came to define him. Passages from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* prove helpful in mapping the ethical implications of Oedipus' argument. Oedipus' insistence on his own innocence has raised doubt among scholars concerning the propriety of his rigid condemnation of Polyneices. Yet Polyneices, though he practices the due deference owed to the ruler of the land and to their local altars, was neither ignorant of his actions when he contributed to Oedipus' heavy hardships, nor is he ignorant of the terrible consequences should Oedipus grant him the favour he now desires. Lastly, the chapter considers the status of Oedipus' pollution or purity and whether this comes to bear on the outcome of the play.

The discussion in Chapter V centers on the Chorus' assertion that Oedipus has ended his life blessedly. In order to interpret their words correctly, it is necessary to understand both what the implications are of a happy or a blessed life in this context, together with the mode of being enjoyed by a cult hero following divinization. As an individual, Oedipus' happiness is severely mitigated by the circumstantial lack of external goods that casts a pall over much of his life. Although he himself achieves heroization, he is unable to prevent his daughters' future hardship or assuage their grief at his loss. Instead, the extent to which his end is blessed is directly predicated on the blessing that he brings to the city of Athens.

The process that Oedipus undergoes is not a generalizable formula by which any mortal soul might attain divinity, not least because he had no part in choosing his destiny. Many a blessed man passively receives the benefits of οἰκός, πόλις and divine reverence as preconditions of his blessed life without becoming himself divine. But Oedipus is no εὐδαίμων, at least not in the ordinary sense. He enjoys the benefits of receptivity too late

to count his own life as blessed, but in becoming a blessing to Athens he is granted something nobler and more godlike than personal happiness.

## Chapter II: Restoration via Passivity

The central consideration of this chapter is how the unfortunate Oedipus transcends his radically passive state by means sourced neither in the goodness of his nature nor in the goodness of his living, but in the relational goods to which he becomes a receptive vessel. The Oedipus of *OT* is a principle of pure agency, incapable of submission either to the gods or to the counsel of friends. By contrast, much of what enables Oedipus' divination at the end of *OC* is made possible by the agency of others, specifically of his two daughters, who embody Oedipus' relation to οἰκός, and Theseus, whose political generosity grants Oedipus a place in the political community once more. Through these interventions Oedipus undergoes a two-stage restoration that would otherwise remain out of reach for one in such a state of dependency.

Though blinded, Oedipus is not without a certain vision of the future. From the outset of the play, Oedipus is already acquainted with the essential elements of his lot: he knows that his powerlessness is not permanent, but that in death he will become a bane to his Theban enemies and a boon to his Attic friends, bestowing both blessing and curse with the unlikely instrument of his ineffectual body. Yet in order to achieve these ends, there is more required of Oedipus than simply to die, or the play would be far shorter than its 1779 lines. On his journey from outcast to cult hero, Oedipus is impeded not only by the immediate physical barriers of his old age and his self-inflicted infirmity, but also by his twin estrangements from the οἰκός and the πόλις, apart from which he is unequipped to fulfill his prophesied destiny. In each of these arenas, Oedipus is unable to act on his own behalf, but must rely on the agency of his friends. Friendship not only enriches life,

but is a necessary element of εὐδαιμονία. While this is articulated most clearly by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, we find the same principle at work among Sophocles' protagonists, who suffer estrangement from their communities, such as Ajax, Electra and Philoctetes. While the ten-year isolation of Philoctetes on the desolate island of Lemnos is the most extreme of these, and Ajax is the furthest from remedy, none perhaps demonstrates so clearly the cost of social estrangement in contrast with the intrinsic benefit of recuperated connection as does Oedipus.

As he emerges in the *prologos*, Oedipus is subject to social isolation<sup>15</sup> that many scholars, following Knox, have come to associate with a prototypical Sophoclean hero. His banishment estranges him from the city where he once ruled, and where he later found assuagement for his miseries in the aftermath of *OT*. Although he no longer held power, it was not until his exile that Oedipus was entirely bereft of any place in community, effectively ἀπόπολις in a world where one's identity is heavily predicated on his relation to πόλις and to οἶκος. Equally if not more radically so, Oedipus is estranged from a proper relation to οἶκος, having violated every social standard of familial decency with the patricide that allowed him to supplant his father in his own mother's bed and sow sibling-children. This is the true cost of the pollution that clings to him; an inability to participate in the spheres of home and city is the overwhelming impediment that prevents Oedipus from regaining a measure of the activity he enjoyed as the prince of

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard Knox's profile of the Sophoclean hero describes him as "alone...abandoned, deserted" (Knox 1964: 32), isolated by men and abandoned (or so he believes) by the gods. His isolation is so total that he cries out to the landscapes in his greatest despair (*Phil* 938, *Ai* 1081). In addition to his "total alienation from the world of men" (Knox 1964: 34), Knox's Sophoclean hero is driven by passion (θυμός), fiercely independent, immune to argument and outraged when treated without honour. The single exception Knox makes is *Trachiniae* (Knox 1964: 172). For the purpose of this thesis, the salient characteristic of Knox's hero is isolation, which is largely supported in modern scholarship. Sarah Nooter notes in her recent monograph that most Sophoclean heroes are even "isolated in their lyrics". Oedipus in *OC* is remarkable for his ability "to draw his interlocutors into lyrical interface with him" (Nooter 2012: 147).

Corinth or the tyrant of Thebes. In a sense, Oedipus must be reborn before he can die; there is a chasm here that must be bridged before Oedipus will be ready for the divine thunder that marks his transition to daimonhood. Although the chasm is of his own making (for however unwitting his crimes were, they were enacted with his participation), the remedy is entirely beyond Oedipus' power.

The extent to which Sophocles intends for *Colonus* to serve as a sequel or an epilogue to *Tyrannus* we will explore in greater depth in Appendix A. Yet in terms of his present passivity, it is useful to make at least a cursory analysis of how vividly this contrasts with his pure activity in *OT*. In that play, his very presence in Thebes is the result actions taken to evade his prophesied lot of incest and patricide, believing that the same wit that defeats the clever Sphinx will outfox Apollo's oracle. When the Thebans first approach their king to lament the city's scourge, Oedipus is quick to assure them that he does not slumber, but has already taken action towards the cure by sending Creon to supplicate Apollo,<sup>16</sup> and vows that he himself will enact the remedy as quickly as it is revealed.<sup>17</sup> He asserts his agency again at 145 and 235, relying on the efficacy of his own efforts to rid Thebes of miasma and to unmask Laius' murderer. When at last his own pollution is revealed, even still Oedipus attempts to control his outcomes as he stubbornly calls for his own punishment, despite Creon's more prudent decision to first inquire of

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<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. ὥστ' οὐχ ὕπνω γ' εὐδοντά μ' ἐξεγείρετε, ἀλλ' ἴστε πολλὰ μὲν με δακρύσαντα δῆ, πολλὰς δ' ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις. ἦν δ' εὖ σκοπῶν ἠῦρισκον ἴασιν μόνην, ταύτην ἔπραξα: "For you do not awaken me from sleep, but I have wept long and bitterly, taking many paths of wandering thought, and the only remedy I have found by my careful consideration, I have acted on." (*OT* 65-69)

<sup>17</sup> ὅταν δ' ἴκηται, τηνικαῦτ' ἐγὼ κακὸς μὴ δρῶν ἂν εἶην πάνθ' ὅσ' ἂν δηλοῖ θεός. "When [Creon] comes, I would be base if I did not do all that the god makes known." (*OT* 76-77)



the gods.<sup>18</sup> At no point in *OT* does Oedipus learn the necessary passivity that establishes and maintains a man's relation to his family, to his political community and to the gods.

By the loving hand of his daughter Antigone, Oedipus is guided to the very place he is destined to safeguard as a protective ἥρωϛ, the Attic δημός of Colonus, about one mile northwest from Athens' acropolis.<sup>19</sup> The region falls under the political sway of king Theseus,<sup>20</sup> but Colonus, as a rural, more natural setting, retains its distinction from the ἄστυ itself. The surrounding area is sacred to Poseidon, the Olympian whose realm bridges the divide between the heavens above and the underworld below, to Prometheus, the most olympic of the otherwise chthonic titans, and to Colonos Hippios, a local founding hero. Most propitiously for a man in Oedipus' condition, the immediate area is dedicated to the Eumenides,<sup>21</sup> the daughters of Earth and Darkness. Broadly feared as vengeful Furies (Ἐρινύες) or the Dread Goddesses (Σεμναί Θέαι) for the retributive justice they seek, in Athens they are held in honour as the Kindly Ones (Εὐμενίδες), venerated as guardian deities of the οἰκός. Both of these attributions prove relevant for Oedipus'

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<sup>18</sup> *OT* 1435-1445

<sup>19</sup> Sophocles has "chosen to exaggerate the distance from Athens to Colonus in order to foster an illusion that Colonus lies on some distant stretch of the Attic frontier" (Wilson 1997: 101). For Wilson, this is meant to emphasize the wildness of the place. Crucially, however, Colonus is neither uninhabited nor desolate. As Segal notes, "For [Oedipus] the point of no return is not a desolate island, a lonely cave, or the remote summit of a mountain but a sacred grove which serves as a border between the city and the wild." (Segal 1993: 364). In respect to the tie between Athens and Colonus, Andreas Markantonatos writes that the Chorus' praise of the former is "simultaneously a praise of Colonus, given the strong political and religious affiliations between the city and Colonus established in [*OC* 707-719]" (Markantonatos 2002: 193).

<sup>20</sup> At *OC* 48, the stranger hesitates to expel Oedipus from Colonus' sacred space without explicit authorization from Athens.

<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere in Greek mythology, Colonus appears as the location where Theseus and Peirithous descend into the underworld, further emphasizing the tie between Colonus and the chthonic.

restoration here in their hallowed grove, where the landscape is at once rife with associations of death and yet bursting with abundant life.<sup>22</sup>

Before Oedipus and his daughter can discover what neighbourhood of Athens they have wandered to, Antigone immediately observes the lush growth of the bay, olive and vine together with the music of the nightingale as a signal that the place they have come to is sacred.<sup>23</sup> Her intuition is confirmed when a stranger who happens upon them decries their trespass on the untouchable and uninhabited grove sacred to “the all-seeing Eumenides”.<sup>24</sup> We soon learn that Oedipus’ joy over learning the deities’ name stems from Apollo’s promise that Oedipus would have power to help his friends and to harm his enemies when at last he rests in the soil sacred to these goddesses, the very place he now stands.<sup>25</sup> To the ears of his interlocutors, these words must sound as impossible as the prospect of defending Attica against the Persians by means of a wooden wall.<sup>26</sup> The aged husk of a man that stands before them is foreign, starved, dressed in beggar’s rags and stone blind. Until moments before, he knew not even the name of the place to which

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<sup>22</sup> The nightingale, named in the *prologos* by Antigone (*OC* 18) and by the Chorus in their first *stasimon* (*OC* 671) is associated with death, as are the clustered narcissus and the “gold-gleaming crocus” that grow in the area. (*OC* 683-685)

<sup>23</sup> The laurel, olive and grape are associated with Apollo, Athena and Dionysius, respectively. (Suksi, 2001: 654).

<sup>24</sup> τὰς πάνθ’ ὀρώσας Εὐμενίδας (*OC* 42)

<sup>25</sup> ὅς μοι, τὰ πόλλ’ ἐκεῖν’ ὅτ’ ἐξέχρη κακά, ταύτην ἔλεξε παῦλαν ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ, ἐλθόντι χώραν τερμίαν, ὅπου θεῶν σεμνῶν ἔδραν λάβοιμι καὶ ξενόστασιν, ἐνταῦθα κάμψειν τὸν ταλαιπῶρον βίον, κέρδη μὲν οἰκήσαντα τοῖς δεδεγμένοις, ἄτην δὲ τοῖς πέμψασιν, οἳ μ’ ἀπήλασαν: σημεῖα δ’ ἤξειν τῶνδὲ μοι παρηγγύα, ἢ σεισμόν ἢ βροντὴν τιν’ ἢ Διὸς σέλας. “Phoebus, when he foretold these many woeful prophesies to me, told me that after a long time I would come to my resting place, in a land where I would find the seat of the Dread Goddesses and shelter for strangers. There I would enter the home-stretch of my wretched life, dwelling with profit for those who received me, and ruin for those who sent me away and cast me out. And he promised that signs of these things would come, earthquake, thunder, or a lightening bolt from Zeus.” (*OC* 87-95).

<sup>26</sup> Budelmann 2000: 124

he had come. He lacks even the ability to guide his faltering step to a seat without his daughter's assistance.<sup>27</sup>

Yet as grotesque as his appearance may be,<sup>28</sup> a far greater impediment to Oedipus' social acceptance is his infamous reputation and the Chorus' fear of his polluting presence. Compelled by Colonus' elders to reveal his name and background, Oedipus asserts that he is pure before the law,<sup>29</sup> for he committed his crimes of patricide and incest unknowingly,<sup>30</sup> ignorant of his parentage and his place of birth. This vacuum of pertinent self-knowledge is yet another way in which Oedipus displays passivity, born into a type of spiritual blindness which his self-inflicted disability later makes manifest. In a strictly literal sense, the Chorus is off the mark when they ask Oedipus if he was blind from birth<sup>31</sup>, but symbolically, they speak a greater truth than they know. Although the Delphic oracle foretold these very events to Laius and to Oedipus himself, Oedipus' ignorance of his true origins led him to believe that he might elude his fate by a self-imposed exile from Corinth, resulting in the bitter irony that his fate is accomplished by his very attempt to escape it. When Oedipus' lineage is at last made known, he is already stained by his participation in Laius' death and the incestuous marriage to Jocasta. As Oedipus is unable to control the circumstances of his restoration and the means of his

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<sup>27</sup> *OC* 21

<sup>28</sup> The Chorus' first impression of Oedipus at 140 is that he is dreadful to behold (*δεινος* *όειν*) or in Oedipus' own words, "hard to look at" (*δυσπρόσποπτον*) (*OC* 487). The horror his appearance inspires is later captured by Polynices' reaction to his father after years in exile: *ένθάδ' έκβεβλημένον έσθήτι σὺν τοιᾶδε, τῆς ό δυσφίλης γέρων γέροντι συγκατάφηκεν πίνος πλευράν μαραίνων, κρατι δ' όμματοστερεϊ κόμη δι' αύρας άκτένιστος άσσεται: άδελφά δ', ώς έοικε, τούτοισιν φορεϊ τὰ τῆς ταλαίνης νηδύος θρεπτήρια*. "Wrapped in such rags as these – the accumulated filth clings to his withered old body, wasting away the skin, and the unkempt hair on his sightless head, flying in the wind! And all of these are matched, by the scraps he carries to fill his shriveled belly." (*OC* 1257-1263)

<sup>29</sup> *νόμῳ δέ καθαρός, ᾄιδρις εις τόδ' ἤλθον*. "Pure before the law, I came to this unknowingly." (*OC* 548)

<sup>30</sup> *νῦν δ' οὐδέν ειδῶς ικόμην ἴν' ικόμην, ὑφ' ὧν δ' έπασχον, ειδότων άπωλλύμην*. "But I went where I went knowing nothing, while those by whom I suffered, they destroyed me knowingly." (*OC* 273)

<sup>31</sup> *έή, άλαῶν όμμάτων ᾄρα και ἤσθα φυτάλμιος*; "Woe for your blind eyes! Were they blind even from birth?" (*OC* 150-151)

apotheosis, so he was unable to choose the circumstances of his birth and the fate to which he was born. Certainly no man is able to choose his parents or their circumstances, their poverty or wealth, their position in society or their relation to the divine. Prior to Oedipus' birth, the oracle already had foretold the horrors he would unwittingly partake of, or as Oedipus himself declares, the deeds that were suffered (πεπονθότα) rather than enacted (δεδρακότα).<sup>32</sup>

Even so, beyond the question of his innocence or guilt in relation to these acts, the Chorus' expectation of a contagious defilement is far from irrational. The lingering religious danger of miasma from a blood crime is not limited to deliberate offences,<sup>33</sup> but threatens the perpetrator and those in community with them until the miasma is cleansed by ritual purification. Such were the consequences at Thebes in *OT*, when the city suffered λοιμός, the triad of disasters including failed crops, women and animals unable to bear young and a raging plague. Despite his innocence before the law,<sup>34</sup> a religious defilement remains in *OC* that cannot be remedied by Oedipus, but must be mediated by another. Just as a child is accepted first as a member of his family and second of his political unit through the mediation of his φίλοι, so Oedipus must be brought back into relation with the religious and political aspects of communal life through the mediation of his friends.

Clearly, Oedipus is helpless to meet his physical needs, but this is not the limit of his dependency. In addition to the nurture that Antigone provides, Oedipus is passively

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<sup>32</sup> ... τά γ' ἔργα με πεπονθότ' ἴσθι μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα . "...my deeds were suffered rather than enacted." (*OC* 266-7)

<sup>33</sup> Plato writes in *Laws* 865c that a man who commits involuntary homicide, except under particular mitigating circumstances, must suffer exile.

<sup>34</sup> *OC* 548

dependent on Ismene to act as the caretaker of the household religion to effect his purification and on Theseus to reintroduce him to political life. Although Oedipus knows himself to be destined for greater agency than his present state believes, the restoration necessary to bridge the seemingly insuperable divide is beyond his own power. Rather, it is accomplished by Oedipus' φίλοι, whose agency propitiates the lingering chthonic curse resulting from incest and familial bloodshed and accepts the citiless outcast back into the πόλις community.<sup>35</sup>

True to Athenian custom, Oedipus is restored as a member of the οἰκός before he becomes a citizen of the city. Although the action of *OC* takes place outside of the city itself in the more rural atmosphere of the δῆμοι, the social and political life of Colonus is an extension of Athens. The process of mediation by which Oedipus is rehabilitated to communal life is a poetic reflection of Athenian practices during the classical period. For Athenians, citizenship was accomplished in a necessary sequence, establishing the relation of a male child to his blood relatives before he could be recognized as a citizen of the πόλις. According to custom, before an Athenian infant even received a name, the child was welcomed into the nuclear family on the fifth or seventh day following the birth by the ἀμφιδρόμια, a ceremony in which the child was carried aloft around the family hearth.<sup>36</sup> Classical sources vary as to whether the child's father or the attending midwife carried the newborn babe and whether others were in attendance to witness the proceedings, but gifts were sent by well-wishers to acknowledge the child's birth on this

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<sup>35</sup> Antigone and Ismene's pious care for their father extends up to the final moments of his life, where they assist in the ritual cleansing that prepares him for death, (*OC* 1600-04) an echo the cleansing ritual Ismene earlier undertook on his behalf. (*OC* 507-10)

<sup>36</sup> Hamilton 1984: 243-46 For the role of the hearth in Classical and Hellenistic Greek houses, see Tsakirgis 2007: 225-231.

occasion, which supports the position common amongst scholars that children who were celebrated by the ἀμφιδρόμια were expected to survive. As such, they were now welcomed as members of their nuclear family.<sup>37</sup>

The second stage in which citizenship was demonstrated came at the age of sixteen when a boy's father would formally present his son to his φράτρα on the third day of the Apatouria festival, publicly claiming his son as his own and thereby affirming his membership in the extended family. Only after a son's formal acknowledgement by the family would he then be introduced around the age of eighteen to the members of his δῆμος as an Athenian citizen and a member of the assembly.<sup>38</sup> None of these steps could be enacted of the boy's own volition, but must be mediated on his behalf by an established member of the community. As Roy writes, "the state relied on the household not only to produce new citizens, but also to demonstrate that the new citizens were in fact properly qualified to assume citizen status".<sup>39</sup> Equally so, a prospective citizen is reliant on established members of the community to mediate and to bear witness to his citizen status. Without such mediation, one could neither enlist to join a city-state nor a family, the basic unit of which the πόλις was comprised. Even in cases of adoption, the agency clearly lies with the πάτηρ and not the orphan.<sup>40</sup>

When Oedipus arrives at Colonus, he is such an orphan, unable to claim a rightful place in any human community. It is not to say that he is bereft of familial relations, for

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<sup>37</sup> Aristotle concurs with this, writing in *HA 588a8* that an Athenian child is named on the 7<sup>th</sup> day because weak infants will have died in that interval.

<sup>38</sup> F.B. Tarbell describes the φράτρα as "the chief guardian of the purity of Athenian citizenship" (Tarbell 1889: 135) See Cole 1984: 233-244 for the sacrificial rituals associated with the introduction.

<sup>39</sup> Roy 1999: 5

<sup>40</sup> Plato underscores the dependence of a citizen on his πόλις, not only for his status in community, but also for his very life. Socrates' argues that the city is responsible for his very biological existence, and the existence of the οἶκος that birthed him. (*Crito* 50d)

although Oedipus' relation to his οικόζ is corrupted by his blood crimes, he still enjoys the companionship of his daughters, whose devotion to him is clearly undiminished. Yet what he lacks goes beyond the basic needs of physical nourishment and friendship. His patricide and incest, coupled with his exile, have interrupted his access to the religious element of family life. As a child depends on his father for introduction to the community, so Oedipus now depends on the agency of his daughters. Standing in for his slain father is Ismene, who, along with Antigone, represents the twin pillars of Oedipus' οικόζ. While Antigone's role encompasses the trophic elements of family life, relating to the care and nurture of their physical needs,<sup>41</sup> Ismene's serves a complementary purpose as the steward of the family's piety. Antigone labours continually at her father's side to accommodate his physical needs, while Ismene, whose continued participation in the life of Thebes interrupted her communion with Oedipus and Antigone, is the only link that the exiles have to proper piety. This is of particular utility here in Athenian Colonus, where, unlike at Thebes, there exists a space sacred to the Eumenides where one can be purged from the miasma of familial pollution by rites of purification.

Athens and its immediate environs seldom figure as a setting for a fifth-century tragedy. The Athenian tragedians preferred setting their plays in areas other than Athens "to create a sense of distance and perspective for their audiences".<sup>42</sup> Any critique on the social or political structure of their own πόλις is instead mirrored in Thebes, Trachis or Troy, thereby affording the tragedian greater liberty with his inherently flawed characters and their ethically problematic actions. It is clear then that Sophocles' decision to situate

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<sup>41</sup> When Oedipus hears of his sons' ambitions, the word τροφή (or τροφεία) occurs 5 times in 33 lines, what Winnington-Ingram calls "a characteristic Sophoclean technique." (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 257). Their neglect is characterized as a lack of τροφή, which Antigone has supplied in their stead. See *OC* 330-363.

<sup>42</sup> Ringer 1998: 90.

his final play in his own πόλις, and moreover in his home δημός of Colonus, is an exception, and no doubt a calculated one. Athens and the δημός of Colonus in particular are uniquely suited to Oedipus' needs in his present state of passivity:

τάς γ' Ἀθήνας φασὶ θεοσεβεστάτας  
εἶναι, μόνας δὲ τὸν κακούμενον ξένον  
σώζειν οἴας τε καὶ μόνας ἀρκεῖν ἔχειν

Athens, they say, is most reverent of the gods  
and alone will protect the troubled stranger  
and alone will give him succor . . . (260-63)

Described as the only city on earth to save the ruined stranger, Athens is well known as a refuge for the oppressed and ill-fated in Greek tragedy. It was Athens which sheltered the children of Heracles, gave sanctuary to Heracles himself after he killed his whole family in a fit of madness, and compelled Thebes to bury the corpses of the seven Argive lords who warred against her. It may have been on the strength of this reputation that Ismene, Creon and Polyneices all sought Oedipus in the neighbourhood of Athens, each independently of the others.

For Oedipus, however, the location has a more poignant significance than the likelihood of the city to shelter a weary outcast. The stain Oedipus bears from the sins against the bonds of family cannot be addressed so efficaciously in Thebes or Corinth or Sparta as in Athens, where a sacred space is dedicated to the Eumenides, the chthonic ministers of vengeance for blood crimes within the οἶκος. This allows for the possibility of a ritual purification which was unavailable to him as long as he lingered in Thebes. As Oedipus is prevented from performing these rites on his own behalf by the double curse



of blindness and infirmity,<sup>43</sup> Ismene becomes his hands and feet, much as Antigone has been in the day-to-day life of his exile.<sup>44</sup>

In the immediate context of the play, Oedipus is compelled to offer libation to the Eumenides to remedy his trespass in their inviolable grove, though the greater significance of his mediated propitiation is in connection with the pollution he carries from his prior actions. As Segal writes, “The ritual act of purification for entering the grove is also a symbolic purification of that entrance to a forbidden place which is part of his curse”.<sup>45</sup> Nagy adds, “once Oedipus properly worships the Eumenides, he will be purified of his pollution, and he can then become a cult hero for the people of Colonus in particular and for Athens in general.”<sup>46</sup> While this could not be adequately addressed in Thebes given the lack of a dedicated space to the chthonic guardians of the οἰκός, even less recourse was available to Oedipus during his years of banishment, when he was unable to observe even basic forms of piety.

For a citiless exile, barred from public places of worship and the household religion of the οἰκός, there is no direct relation to the gods. Parker cites the absence of the blood feuds in the early Greek period common in non-centralized societies as probable evidence that the customary proclamation by the ἄρχων βασιλεύς made together with the

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<sup>43</sup> ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐχ ὀδῶτά: λείπομαι γὰρ ἐν τῷ μὴ δύνασθαι μὴδ’ ὄρᾶν, δυοῖν κακοῖν: “I cannot do it, for I am prevented by twin troubles: weakness and lack of sight.” (*OC* 495-96)

<sup>44</sup> Oedipus is instructed to draw water from a free flowing stream (469) to pour out as a libation (477), with an admixture of honey, but no wine (481), in three streams (479) from a bowl edged with the fleece of a newly shorn lamb (475). The suppliant must stand facing the dawn (477) and cover the anointed ground with olive branches (483) before invoking the Eumenides as saviours of the suppliant in a low, reverent voice. (486-7).

<sup>45</sup> Although Charles Segal recognizes the dramatic link between ritual ablution and moral purification, he extends the symbolism to the denouement of *OC* as a whole: “The entire play enacts Oedipus’ rite of purification, both literal and figurative.” (Segal 1993: 385)

<sup>46</sup> Nagy 2013: 509 As we have seen, Oedipus’ worship is mediated by Ismene on her father’s behalf. Oedipus’ daughters will assist their father again with ritual cleansing (λουτρά) in the moments prior to his death (*OC* 1598-99). Contra Segal and Nagy, Parker believes that Oedipus is never ritually purified. (Parker 1983: 386)

victim's family barring the killer from "lustral water, libations, mixing bowls, shrines, agora"<sup>47</sup> was often respected, thereby blocking the offender from any participation in the social and religious life of the community. "Instead of remaining with his kinsmen to fight it out, or seeking refuge with a powerful lord in his own land, the killer . . . flees to another country where he is purified and starts life anew".<sup>48</sup> Oedipus, too, has come to another land, one that is particularly suited for purification of his blood crime. Here, it is possible for Oedipus to amend his relation to the gods of the *oikós*, an essential step in his restoration that is requisite both for his reengagement with political life and the recovery of his activity.

Before his body is interred in their sacred ground, Oedipus must be reconciled to the Dread Goddesses. This pivot point in his life narrative is crucial both to atone for his past actions, and to set in motion his amicable identification with the Furies, until, as a cult hero, he himself assumes a similar role as a chthonic deity able to help and to harm. The "watchword of his fate"<sup>49</sup> confirms that this is where Oedipus will regain agency and power, yet it is not enough to be present in a propitious place; somehow Oedipus must transition from his state of anathema to the essential principles of the *oikós* into friendship with its staunchest guardians. Both his daughters play an essential role in bringing this to bear: Ismene in performing the religious ritual on her father's behalf, and Antigone in leading and caring for her father on the winding journey from the gates of Thebes to the Eumenides' grove. Antigone functions in place of her brothers as Oedipus' trophic support, sustaining his physical body and acting as a proxy for his blinded eyes.

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<sup>47</sup> Dem. 20.158

<sup>48</sup> Parker 1983: 126

<sup>49</sup> *OC* 46

Her support and companionship through his sufferings came at no small cost to her own person, as Oedipus well knows:

ἡ μὲν ἐξ ὄτου νέας  
τροφῆς ἔληξε καὶ κατίσχυσεν δέμας,  
ἀεὶ μεθ' ἡμῶν δύσμορος πλανωμένη  
γερονταγωγεῖ, πολλὰ μὲν κατ' ἀγρίαν  
ὔλην ἄσιτος νηλίπους τ' ἄλωμένη,  
πολλοῖσι δ' ὄμβροισι ἡλίου τε καύμασιν  
μοχθοῦσα τλήμων δεύτερ' ἡγεῖται τὰ τῆς  
οἴκοι διαίτης, εἰ πατήρ τροφήν ἔχοι.

[Antigone], from the time she left her childhood behind and came into her strength, has volunteered for grief, wandering with me, leading an old man, hungry, barefoot through the wild woods . . . enduring the drenching rains, the scorching midday suns. Hard labor, but the wretched girl endured it all, never a second thought for home, a decent life, so long as her father had nourishment. (345-53)

Even apart from the heroic role Antigone assumes in her namesake play, her character in *OC* embodies strength, resilience and unwavering faithfulness to the demands of filial piety. Although the Thebans did not force Antigone into exile along with her father, she is nonetheless compelled by her loyalty to ensure his safety and wellbeing insofar as she is able, ministering to his needs and supplementing the activities of his failing body in true kinship.<sup>50</sup>

As Creon points out,<sup>51</sup> Antigone assumes a certain degree of personal danger in doing so, both in sharing his physical privations and also in wandering abroad without the protection of an able guardian. Although it seems that Creon himself is the first to exert

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<sup>50</sup> *NE* 1155a12-13

<sup>51</sup> *OC* 751-52

physical power over her vulnerability, Antigone has indeed spent the years of their exile without the benefit of a male relative or trusted servant who might ensure her personal safety. Instead, Antigone herself is both loving guardian and loyal servant to Oedipus, without whom he would surely have perished in the wilderness surrounding Thebes. Her filial piety is reminiscent of Sophocles' Electra, who persists in adversity and isolation to mourn her murdered father for ten years as she awaits justice. Not infrequently, scholars have compared Electra's relationship with her sister Chrysothemis to that of Antigone and Ismene.<sup>52</sup> In *Electra* and *Antigone*, the titular heroines display fierce courage, heedless of their personal risk, while their cautious sisters urge moderation and submission to authority. In *OC*, however, we find no such opposition between the sisters. Instead of vying against one another over their differences, they bewail their shared blood<sup>53</sup> and their shared destiny<sup>54</sup> as though their lot is one and the same. Yet as devoted aides to their father, their roles are far from equal.<sup>55</sup>

Although Oedipus praises both Ismene and Antigone as his σκήπτρα,<sup>56</sup> the staffs that he leans on for support, the support provided by each is not interchangeable with the other, rather they are parallel and complementary. It is Antigone alone who has lived with Oedipus in the years of his exile, sharing his daily sufferings, sustained by what little they

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew Wright notes, "In *Electra*, as in *Antigone*, the sisters are characterized by mutual incomprehension." (Wright 2005: 179)

<sup>53</sup> ἔστιν ἔστι νῶν δὴ οὐ τὸ μὲν, ἄλλο δὲ μὴ, πατρὸς ἔμφρον ἄλαστον αἶμα δυσμόρον στενάζειν. "Now indeed it is for us to mourn in full our father's cursed blood, born in us, miserable pair. (*OC* 1670-72)

<sup>54</sup> τίς ἄρα με πότμος αὐθις ὧδ' ἐπαμμένει σέ τ', ὦ φίλα, τὰς πατρὸς ὧδ' ἐρήμας; "What lot still awaits you and me, dear sister, thus bereft of our father?" (*OC* 1715-17)

<sup>55</sup> G.M. Kirkwood is wrong to claim in regards to Oedipus' daughters: "there is no pronounced distinction between them, except just at the end of the play, where their characterization does not directly concern Oedipus" (Kirkwood 1958: 150). Their distinct areas of service to their father are clearly demonstrated throughout the play.

<sup>56</sup> *OC* 1109. See also *OC* 848 where Creon taunts Oedipus that he will no longer travel with these two staffs for support: οὐκουν ποτ' ἐκ τούτων γε μὴ σκήπτρον ἔτι ὁδοιορήσης...

can beg from hostile neighbors.<sup>57</sup> Oedipus speaks of Antigone's perpetual assistance to him in exile from the time she left her childhood, while Ismene's aid after Oedipus' departure from Thebes is intermittent and lacks the element of 'living-with' that Aristotle highlights as essential to true friendship.<sup>58</sup> Even so, Oedipus' appraisal of his daughters places them on equal footing, insofar as they remain loyal to him and serve his needs in lieu of his absent sons, shouldering their father's sorrows while their brothers tend the hearth.<sup>59</sup> Ismene's action on Oedipus' behalf is altogether different from her sister's, but despite the disparity in their manner aid and manner of living, what Ismene provides is no less essential. At their reunion, Oedipus articulates her service to him in this way:

σὺ δ', ὦ τέκνον, πρόσθεν μὲν ἐξίκου πατρὶ  
μαντεῖ' ἄγουσα πάντα, Καδμείων λάθρα,  
ἃ τοῦδ' ἐχρήσθη σώματος, φύλαξ τέ μου  
πιστὴ κατέστης, γῆς ὅτ' ἐξηλαυνόμην:

And you child, in the early days, unknown to the Thebans  
you left the city, brought your father the oracles,  
any prophecy said to touch his life.

You were my faithful guard, when I was an exile from the land. (354-56).

Ismene counts her 'ill-fated self'<sup>60</sup> as Oedipus' and Antigone's third partner in misery. She speaks of trials endured along her journey to seek them, but clearly she suffers from none of their deprivation. In contrast with their beggar's rags, Ismene is sheltered from the harsh rays of the sun by a broad brimmed, felt travelling hat from Thessaly, dressed

<sup>57</sup> OC 3-4

<sup>58</sup> οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτως ἐστὶ φίλων ὡς τὸ συζῆν. (NE 1157b20)

<sup>59</sup> οὓς μὲν εἰκὸς ἦν πονεῖν τάδε, κατ' οἶκον οἰκουροῦσιν ὥστε παρθένοι, σφῶ δ' ἀντ' ἐκείνοι τὰ μὰ δυστήνου κακὰ ὑπερπονεῖτον. "Those for whom this work was fitting stay at home like maidens in the house, but you two bear troubles of your miserable father in their place." (OC 342-45)

<sup>60</sup> OC 331

more like a well-heeled tourist than a mendicant outcast. She travels on an Etnean colt, an imported breed from Sicily prized in the Attic world.<sup>61</sup> Not only do Oedipus and Antigone make every mile of their journey on weary feet, they would have no means to provide provisions for such an animal if one were granted to them; those who struggle to fill their own bellies can offer nothing to satisfy an active steed. Moreover, Ismene travels with the aid and protection of a household servant, albeit the only one she can trust.<sup>62</sup> Even so, the comfort and relative prestige of her travel lies in sharp contrast with those of Oedipus and Antigone. She shares their burdens on an emotional level, but not in the physical sense.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that distance weakens the philial bond, as a lasting disruption of the activity of friendship causes one to forget, hence the saying ‘out of sight, out of mind’.<sup>63</sup> Yet, despite her loved ones’ absence from her daily life, Ismene remains faithful to the pursuit of their ends, travelling in secret from Thebes on more than one occasion to bring her father news of the oracles and acting in some capacity as the guardian of his interest in Thebes. Although the text makes no suggestion that Ismene stood lamenting her father before the Thebans in a perpetual protest as Electra does for Agamemnon, she nonetheless exhibits a resolute devotion to her loved ones that is undimmed by the passage of years, a characteristic that Aristotle tells us is uncommon amongst absent friends.

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<sup>61</sup> James C. Hogan believes that the details of the hat and colt “seem to have no other point beyond specific realism” (Hogan 1991: 88), but this ignores the obvious contrast that her prestigious mode of travel creates with the poverty of her father and sister. Ismene’s costly hat and imported horse demonstrate both her continued enjoyment of their former standard of living, and her on-going participation in the life of the city. This need not be a negative distinction, for it is by this same participation in civic life that she retains access to religious ritual observance.

<sup>62</sup> *OC* 334

<sup>63</sup> ἐὰν δὲ χρόνιος ἡ ἀπουσία γίνηται, καὶ τῆς φιλίας δοκεῖ λήθην ποιεῖν: ὅθεν εἴρηται “πολλὰς δὴ φιλίας ἀπροσηγορία διέλυσεν. (*NE* 1157b10-13) Trans. W.D. Ross

One might ask why Ismene did not also accompany Oedipus in exile as her sister Antigone volunteered to do. While Ismene's love for her father is as such that she longs for "murderous Hades" to overwhelm her, so that she may share in Oedipus' death,<sup>64</sup> she is a far more efficacious messenger and proxy than she could be as Oedipus' companion in exile. Beyond the impracticality of another mouth to feed and another back to clothe if she had joined them in exile from the outset, the role Ismene enacts on Oedipus' behalf is of great value in itself. Without her presence in Thebes, Oedipus would have no one there to guard his interests or to apprise him of new revelations. Moreover, as an exile, Oedipus is barred from access to religious life and the maintenance of even the most basic observances of piety. As his constant companion, Antigone too has led a necessarily secular life during their years of wandering.<sup>65</sup> Ismene alone maintains their connection to the gods, both in the messages she carries from the oracle, and in her ability to visit temples and shrines, pour lustral offerings and reverence the gods with physical acts of worship. For this reason, it is she who is best suited to make Oedipus' propitiatory offering to the Eumenides, not only because Antigone is needed to offer physical support as she has long been accustomed to do, but also because neither Oedipus nor Antigone have Ismene's advantage of position in community. Precisely because she has not lived in exile, Ismene's ongoing participation in the life of the city affords her father the mediation he now requires.

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<sup>64</sup> *OC* 1689-90

<sup>65</sup> Before arriving at Colonus, Oedipus and his daughter have been routinely unwelcome in any community, but wandered "barefoot in the wild woods" (*OC* 348), without access to the religious rituals that would normally occur in the context of their own dwelling, or knowledge of the proper observances in unfamiliar lands. Instead, they depend on local inhabitants for knowledge of the ritual customs particular to a given area, such as the Chorus describes at 466-93. Kitzinger writes, "the careful description of this ritual makes it clear that it belongs to a particular place and group of people; it is the kind of thing Oedipus must learn anew each time he comes to a new place. Yet Oedipus seems to invest it with a meaning that transcends its local practice." (Grennan and Kitzinger 2004: 107)

As is fitting in light of their close association with the οἶκος, Oedipus' nascent friendship with the Eumenides is not of his own initiation,<sup>66</sup> but is brought about by the loving actions of his daughters who together enact the dual role of the οἶκος both to nurture the physical body and to maintain the relation of its members to the divine; it is not possible for an individual in himself to maintain proper piety, whether as an exile or as a king. There is significant disparity in the lived experience of the sisters, both in terms of their standard of living and also in the degree to which Antigone shares their father's life, but each role is necessary to Oedipus' restoration as each daughter acts for her father in ways he is helpless to do for himself. Antigone's ceaseless care for Oedipus' physical needs comprises the trophic pillar of the οἶκος, while Ismene's attendance on behalf of her family to the chthonic deities that govern blood relations represents the οἶκος' religious pillar. The symmetry of these two roles yield a balanced whole which neither of the two could achieve alone.

Once Oedipus' harmonious relation to the Eumenides as the gods of the household is reestablished, the stage is set for the next phase of reconciliation. With the arrival of Theseus, the focus transitions from religious and familial concerns to Oedipus' estrangement from the πόλις. While the atonement of his crimes against his blood is necessarily prior to his acceptance by the city, the political community is essential both to preserve the family unit and to prepare Oedipus for his eventual transformation. Now, after Oedipus' long exile from Thebes and his privation of the rituals and relations afforded by community life, the mendicant outcast is given both the political protection

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<sup>66</sup> Mary Whitlock Blundell posits that Oedipus' supplication to the Eumenides initiates "a *philia* of a different kind [than kinship]" (Blundell 1989: 229), but neither the supplication nor the resulting friendship were initiated under Oedipus' own power.



that he seeks against his former countrymen and a proper place in the community to which he has come.

Although the Chorus of Colonus' elders is keen to chase away the notorious sinner lest his presence provoke divine judgment, Theseus not only honours Oedipus' status as a suppliant, but accepts him as one of Athens' own:

ικέτης δαιμόνων ἀφιγμένος  
γῆ τῆδε κάμοι δασμὸν οὐ σμικρὸν τίνει.  
ἀγὼ σέβας θεῖς οὔποτ' ἐκβαλῶ χάριν  
τῆν τοῦδε, χώρα δ' ἔμπολιν κατοικιῶ.

He has arrived here as a suppliant of the gods,  
and pays no small tribute to this land and to me.  
Honouring this, I will never cast away his favour,  
but I will establish him in the land as a citizen. (634-37)

When Oedipus supplicates Theseus for protection as the king over Athens and Colonus, he hopes to prevent Creon and his cohort from forcibly removing him back to Thebes as their talisman against future harm. Yet while Oedipus' rages against the Thebans for his ill-timed expulsion and ongoing lack of concern for his suffering, there is more behind his reticence to return homeward than simple spite.<sup>67</sup> In effect, the city of his forefathers is no longer Oedipus' home.<sup>68</sup> If his excommunication and the years of mendicant

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<sup>67</sup> Oedipus' initial desire for expulsion had long since abated when the Thebans chose to cast him out: οὐ δῆτ', ἐπεὶ τοι τὴν μὲν αὐτίχ' ἡμέραν, ὀπηνίκ' ἔξει θυμός, ἠδιστον δέ μοι τὸ καθθανεῖν ἦν καὶ τὸ λευσθῆναι πέτροις, οὐδεὶς ἔρωτ' ἐς τόνδ' ἐφαίνεται ὠφελῶν: χρόνω δ', ὅτ' ἤδη πᾶς ὁ μόχθος ἦν πέπων, κάμάνθανον τὸν θυμὸν ἐκδραμόντα μοι μείζω κολαστὴν τῶν πρὶν ἡμαρτημένων, τὸ τῆνικ' ἤδη τοῦτο μὲν πόλις βία ἤλαυνέ μ' ἐκ γῆς χρόνιον, οἱ δ' ἐπωφελεῖν. "For on that first day, at the time when my spirit seethed and death was sweetest to me – death by stoning – no one appeared to help me in my desire. But when time had passed, when my anguish had mellowed, and I understood that my heart had gone too far in punishing my past errors, this was when the city drove me from the land by force. After all that time!" (OC 433-41)

<sup>68</sup> This is contra Creon, who, based on his seeming belief in the immutability of human relations, cites Thebes as the city most deserving of Oedipus' loyalty: πρὸς θεῶν πατρώων, Οἰδίπου, πεισθεὶς ἐμοὶ

wandering that followed were not enough to establish this, the oracle of Apollo clearly indicates that Oedipus will be planted in the ground sacred to the Eumenides, and not in the neighbourhood of Thebes. Oedipus' resistance to returning to Thebes is certainly vehement, and is further fed by his visceral desire to avenge himself against his former φίλοϊ, but it also is aligned with the will of the gods, which is an important contrast between the Oedipus of *OT* and the Oedipus we have before us now. When Oedipus petitions Theseus to safeguard him from Creon, he both refrains from any course which is not encompassed within the articulated divine will, and he allows space for the furtherance of divine ends. This furtherance comes about through Theseus' agency, whose generosity extends beyond the ordinary support from a host to his suppliant found in the typical pattern of a suppliant drama. As Burian writes:

Theseus, however, goes beyond the pledge of protection required by the pattern, and indeed beyond what Oedipus has requested, by making him an Athenian citizen. Oedipus the *apoptolis* is now *empolis*, fully associated with the city that protects him, as he will one day protect it.”<sup>69</sup>

In other words, there is more than a simple *quid pro quo* at work in the friendship that Theseus offers Oedipus. Although Oedipus promises a future benefit to Athens, Theseus does not limit his largesse to the fixed terms requisite to secure the utility that Oedipus offers.<sup>70</sup> Arguably, the benefit that will accrue to Athens is of far greater value than the potential cost to the city of extending citizenship to Oedipus, but nonetheless, Theseus'

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κρύψον, θελήσας ἄστῦ καὶ δόμους μολεῖν τοὺς σοὺς πατρώους, τήνδε τὴν πόλιν φίλως εἰπών: ἐπαξία γάρ: ἡ δ' οἴκοι πλέον δίκη σέβοιτ' ἄν, οὗσα σὴ πάλαι τροφός. “By the gods of your fathers, Oedipus, hear me and come willingly to your ancestral home, having bid this city a friendly farewell. If is worthy of it, but your own city merits greater reverence, for it nurtured you long ago.” (*OC* 756-60)

<sup>69</sup> Burian 1974: 416-17

<sup>70</sup> *NE* 1162b

decision to elevate Oedipus above the status of suppliant to a member of the πόλις indicates that his relation to Oedipus is not merely one of utility.<sup>71</sup>

Although the reciprocal benefit that Theseus' anticipates from his friendship with Oedipus is clear, even after he has extended citizenship, Theseus must still be persuaded at 590 that "it would not be more *kalos* for Oedipus to return to Thebes",<sup>72</sup> despite the loss to Athens of the military advantage that he hopes to gain. In doing so, Theseus demonstrates that his is a perfect friendship, predicated on the desire to advantage one's friend rather than one's self.<sup>73</sup> Perfect friendship of this kind, however, is found among "men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves".<sup>74</sup> Is it possible then, that Oedipus is capable of friendship with such a paragon as Theseus? Of all the characters in *OC*, Theseus is remarkable for his unwavering piety and virtue. Oedipus, by contrast, is a benighted outcast whose past crimes inspire both pity and fear in others present. Theseus, however, shares none of the Chorus' frank horror in response to Oedipus' infamous name, nor does he share the Thebans' fear that Oedipus will imperil the city with his lingering miasma. Instead, Theseus empathizes with Oedipus based on their shared experience:

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<sup>71</sup> Such friendships are common between dissimilar people whose love for one another cannot be based on an equality of virtue. Since dissimilarity of purpose and character defines such friendships, equality can be achieved in them only through proportionality of services rendered. The friendship that underlies the πόλις is primarily of this nature, because a πόλις unites a multitude of dissimilar people. (Hutter 1978: 113, see also *EE* 1240a6-1241a1)

<sup>72</sup> While Blundell rightly points this out as evidence that personal gain is not Theseus' overriding motive (Blundell 1989: 231), it further serves to illustrate the importance Theseus places on the connection between a man and his city. The bond is not to be lightly cast aside or superseded by another without ample cause. In Oedipus' case, the mitigating factors are the actions of his former φιλοῖ, which effectively severed this bond, together with the Delphic prophesy that binds his fate to another land.

<sup>73</sup> *NE* 1156b10

<sup>74</sup> Τελεία δ' ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φιλία καὶ κατ' ἀρετὴν ὁμοίων. οὗτοι γὰρ τὰγαθὰ ὁμοίως βούλονται ἀλλήλοις, ἢ ἀγαθοί, ἀγαθοὶ δ' εἰσὶ καθ' αὐτούς· οἱ δὲ βουλόμενοι τὰγαθὰ τοῖς φίλοις ἐκείνων ἔνεκα μάλιστα φίλοι, δι' αὐτούς γὰρ οὕτως ἔχουσι καὶ οὐ κατὰ συμβεβηκός. (*NE* 1156b6-10)

ὄς οἶδά γ' αὐτὸς ὡς ἐπαιδεύθην ξένος,  
ὥσπερ σύ, χῶς εἷς πλεῖστ' ἀνὴρ ἐπὶ ξένης  
ἤθλησα κινδυνεύματ' ἐν τῶμῳ κάρᾳ,  
ὥστε ξένον γ' ἂν οὐδέν' ὄνθ', ὥσπερ σὺ νῦν,  
ὑπεκτραποίμην μὴ οὐ συνεκσώζειν· ἐπεὶ  
ἔξοιδ' ἀνὴρ ὢν χῶτι τῆς εἰς αὐρίον  
οὐδὲν πλέον μοι σοῦ μέτεστιν ἡμέρας.

I know well that I myself was also raised as a stranger  
like you, and I contended with more dangers to my life  
than any other man, so that I would never turn away  
from helping as stranger as you are now.  
For I know well that I am a man, and that  
I have no greater claim on tomorrow than you. (562-68)

Theseus himself was reared as an exile in Troezen, ignorant of his father's identity until adulthood. He, too, grappled with dangers along his journey to Athens, to present himself to his father, the king. The crucial difference lies with Oedipus' enduring ignorance of his parentage and the ignoble fate that brought him grief after he had assumed kingship in the city of his birth. Theseus, however, chooses to focus on their common ground, rather than their differences.<sup>75</sup> This is in no small part because of the ritual purification of Oedipus' blood guilt and familial crimes has already been accomplished through the mediation of his daughter. Further, Theseus cites both the hearth and Oedipus' status as a suppliant to the Eumenides when he names him a citizen of Athens, emphasizing the necessity of his ritual purification prior to seeking integration into political life.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The historic alliance of spear-friendship between the ruling houses of Thebes and Athens is alluded to at 632, but no mention of this is made when Theseus first receives Oedipus as suppliant and citizen.

<sup>76</sup> For Thomas Van Nortwick, Oedipus' restored power comes not from imposing his own will on others, but by assenting to being part of something larger than he is (Nortwick 2015: 153). While his submission to the counsel of his φίλοι does emerge as an essential element of Oedipus' renewed activity, Nortwick's formula fails to take into account the importance of Oedipus' purification from his blood guilt, both for reopening the path to citizenship and for proper reverence of the gods.

These two branches of mediation, Antigone and Ismene in relation to the οἰκός and Theseus in relation to the πόλις, heal Oedipus' radical estrangement from their respective spheres and reintroduce the relational goods that are associated with these.<sup>77</sup> While there is no doubt that Theseus' arrival and his subsequent speech resolves the conflict surrounding whether Oedipus will be permitted to remain in Athenian territory or whether he must remain vulnerable to the Thebans who pursue him, scholars disagree on the terms by which Oedipus is accepted. The debate hinges on the use of either an alpha or an omicron in line 637.<sup>78</sup> Either the line explicitly names Oedipus as a citizen of Athens (ἔμπολιν), or it simply states that Theseus will not cast away Oedipus favour, but “on the contrary” (ἔμπαλιν) will establish him in the land. Chief amongst the modern supporters of ἔμπαλιν is Wilson, who concedes that “modern text editors have, on the whole, been won over by Musgrave’s ἔμπολιν, so too have the literary critics”,<sup>79</sup> though he counters that Musgrave’s final edition of the text<sup>80</sup> overstates the extent of Theseus’ welcome. While the ἔμπολιν reading emphasizing citizenship becomes a focal point of the interpretations of Jebb,<sup>81</sup> Whitman,<sup>82</sup> Knox,<sup>83</sup> Segal,<sup>84</sup> Burian<sup>85</sup> and Blundell<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> It is easy to see how someone in Oedipus' compromised position would benefit from the assistance of φίλοι, but insofar as the human is a political animal and naturally disposed to the mutuality and reciprocity of community, even the εὐδαιμόνων needs φίλοι. Aristotle reminds us “how closely bound (οἰκεῖον) every human is to every other and how dear”. (ἴδοι δ’ ἂν τις καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλάναις ὡς οἰκεῖον ἅπας ἄνθρωπος ἄνθρώπῳ καὶ φίλον. *NE* 1155a21-2)

<sup>78</sup> See *OC* 634-37 quoted above on pages 26-27.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson 1997: 65 See Joseph Wilson’s chapter ‘*Empalin* or *Empolin*’ for a thorough discussion of whom among 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars favours one reading over the other.

<sup>80</sup> See Musgrave 1800

<sup>81</sup> Jebb 2004: 108

<sup>82</sup> Whitman 1966: 195-96

<sup>83</sup> Knox 1964: 154

<sup>84</sup> Segal 1993: 364, 373, 379-82, 388

<sup>85</sup> Burian 1974: 416-17

<sup>86</sup> Blundell 1989 : 231

amongst others, Wilson follows<sup>87</sup> Vidal-Naquet, for whom Oedipus is accepted into Athens as a political exile by grant of *enktesis*, which customarily permits habitation in Athens to political exiles with additional provisions for descendants. By this view, Oedipus is a metic who enjoys a few additional privileges rather than a full member of the Athenian community. Although ἔμπολις is so firmly established among modern editors that many pass by the line without further remark,<sup>88</sup> it is worth considering what may be at stake for Oedipus in the competing readings.

In either case, Oedipus is granted sanctuary in the land and permission to remain, either in the city with his host or in the place where he now stands, at his own pleasure.<sup>89</sup> Further, Theseus assures him that no one will remove Oedipus by force against the king's will,<sup>90</sup> which aids in the fulfillment of Apollo's prophesy that at his death, Oedipus will be interred in the Eumenides' sacred grove. Yet in addition to the practical issue of Oedipus' physical location, the prophecy puts us in mind of the transformative process leading up to Oedipus' heroization that begins with his daughters' mediation. The dispersion of Oedipus' miasma through his propitiation to the Eumenides is a crucial stage in his restoration, but alone it is not sufficient. Now that Oedipus' disordered relation to this sphere is rightly aligned, he still depends on a similar change in his relation to political community. Clearly, Theseus has given him a place in Athens, but is

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<sup>87</sup> See Pierre Vidal-Naquet's discussion at 59-63, especially "Même devenu un héros à Athènes, Oedipe demeure un homme en marge" (Vidal-Naquet 1986: 63). Edmunds expresses a similar view, also derived largely from Vidal-Naquet's prior work (Edmunds 1996: 113).

<sup>88</sup> Wilson laments that H. Lloyd-Jones and N. Wilson omitted any reference to the controversy in their masterful *Sophoclea* (Wilson 1997: 65).

<sup>89</sup> εἰ δ' ἐνθάδ' ἡδὺ τῷ ξένῳ μίμνεν. σέ νιν τάξω φυλάσσειν, εἴτ' ἐμοῦ στείχειν μέτα. τί δ' ἡδὺ τούτων, Οἰδίπους, δίδωμί σοι κρίναντι χρῆσθαι· τῆδε γὰρ ξυνοῖσομαι. "If it is pleasing for the stranger to remain in this place, I will appoint you to guard him, or he may come with me." (*OC* 638-41)

<sup>90</sup> οἶδ' ἐγὼ σε μὴ τινα ἐνθένδ' ἀπάξοντ' ἄνδρα πρὸς βίαν ἐμοῦ. "I know that no man will carry you away from this place by force against my will." (*OC* 656-57)

it the station of an alien metic or a citizen who claims full rights of participation in the civic circle? If the line in question reads ἔμπαλιν rather than ἔμπολιν, Oedipus' fully realized status as a member of the Athenian community is not denied, but neither is it confirmed.<sup>91</sup> Wilson argues that the absence of an additional term in the text denoting citizenship, such as πολίτης or ἄστος, “renders a decisive verdict”<sup>92</sup> against Oedipus' Athenian citizenship, but this judgment seems rash, as does his suggestion that Sophocles is at fault for “missing the attendant dramatic opportunities”<sup>93</sup> to emphasize Oedipus' status. A lack of explicit emphasis is not in itself a confirmation of the poet's intent.

Although Sophocles, much more so than either Aeschylus or Euripides, is not averse to ambiguity, his portrayal of Oedipus' reintegration into the political fabric of city life seems clear. Quite aside from the contested line, the text provides ample context for understanding Oedipus as a full participant in the πόλις, whether or not the ἔμπολιν reading is maintained to further articulate this theme. It is true that Oedipus remains in the grove, a chthonic setting on the very outskirts of Athens' authority, but this reflects his adherence to the particulars of Apollo's oracle rather than continued alienation. Oedipus is entirely welcome in the ἄστυ at the king's side, he stays in the δημός at his own volition in recognition of the aid he will render Athens there.<sup>94</sup> As the action of the play moves forward, the city participates in justice for Oedipus when Thebes' emissary behaves as though might makes right, and in turn Oedipus becomes an active participant in Athens' preservation as a protective ἦρωας. In this way, his civic participation extends

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<sup>91</sup> Blundell writes that in either case the sense is largely the same, though if ἔμπαλιν is retained “the verbal echoes are reduced” (Blundell 1989: 231 n.19).

<sup>92</sup> Wilson 1997: 70

<sup>93</sup> Wilson 1997: 71

<sup>94</sup> *OC* 637-44 Theseus offers that Oedipus may accompany him to his own home, if he pleases, but Oedipus knows that it is right (θέμις) for him to remain.

beyond the grave, while it begins with Theseus' frank acceptance of Oedipus as one of Athens' own. Participation of this kind in civic life is for Aristotle the essential definition of a citizen.<sup>95</sup> Though the particular mechanisms he names in his *Politics* post-date the kingship of Theseus, Oedipus is clearly as bound to Athens as he is estranged from Thebes. As a holistic survey of Oedipus' political position shows, the considerable editorial support for ἔμπολις is a reflection of the full measure of Oedipus' relation to Athens, rather than its sole grounds.

Thus far, Oedipus has exhibited his dependence on Antigone, Ismene and Theseus for his essential physical needs, for his atonement to the Eumenides and to the household relationships they rule over, and for his status as a full member of a political community. Each of these branches is reliant on the others: without Antigone's unflagging care, Oedipus could never have survived to see these restorations, Ismene's sacrifice to the Eumenides necessarily is accomplished before Theseus is able to recognize Oedipus as a citizen, and as we will see, the strength of the political community provides the protection and stability within which Oedipus is able to retain his family unit, along with the hands and feet that care for his daily needs. At this point, however, although Oedipus is situated in the very grove where he will meet his end, he has not yet undergone the escalating process of renewed activity that begins with his prudent submission to the counsel of his φίλοι and ends with his own apotheosis.

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<sup>95</sup>For Aristotle's definition of a citizen as one who takes part in the legal apparatus of state, see *Pol* 1275a21-34 and 1275b18-20. For his discussion of a good citizen as one who does good service to his state, see *Pol* 1276b20-31.



### Chapter III: Escalation of Agency

τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἤδη κάποθαυμάσαι πρέπον.  
ὥς μὲν γὰρ ἐνθένδ' εἶρπε, καὶ σὺ που παρῶν  
ἔξοισθ', ὑφ' ἡγητῆρος οὐδενὸς φίλων,  
ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἡμῖν πᾶσιν ἐξηγούμενος·

Now this indeed is clearly amazing; for  
you who were present know how he moved  
away from here, guided by none of his friends,  
but he himself leading the way for us all. (1586-90)

This chapter will explore Oedipus' upward arc of renewed activity from his encounters with Creon and Polyneices to his final moments on this side of divinity. Oedipus' ends are no longer contrary to those of the gods, but are contained within them. Further, he has learned to submit his will to the counsel of his friends, subjugating his pride to the good of the community. Upon his mysterious death, Oedipus becomes a powerful force in helping friends and harming enemies as a cult hero, yet his continued reliance on Theseus' pledge to conceal his resting place and to see to his daughters' needs suggests that the passivity necessary to restore Oedipus' agency retains its relevance all throughout the journey from reconciliation to apotheosis. In this way, Oedipus obtains both the rest and the retribution that he longs for, but only with the help of his friends.

Although the mediation of his φίλοι constitutes a restoration for Oedipus, it is not a return to his prior nature or to his prior relationships. The proud ruler who once relied on his own wit and sagacity is no longer a principle of pure activity, but a passive recipient of the good will of others. Further, in *OT*, Oedipus, like his father before him, strives against the divine prophecy, but his unwitting actions fulfill both the oracle over his birth and the one that he himself receives at Delphi. No amount of practical wisdom

will allow him to outrun what has been divinely spoken; Oedipus becomes an unknowing participant in the oracular fulfillment. In *OC*, Oedipus has become acquainted with his own limitations, and submits both to divine authority and to the counsel of his friends. Oedipus' passivity, first as a matter of necessity and later as the product of practical wisdom, sets in motion the restorative acts of others on his behalf, which in turn prepare him for heroic divinity.

By the first choral *stasimon*, as the elders of Colonus sing the glories of Attica, Oedipus has already made a decisive break with his former connections and his own former tendencies. Now that his religious and political alienation is assuaged, emissaries from both sides of the intra-familial conflict seek to further their control of Thebes by taking control of Oedipus. Segal notes that “both Creon and Polyneices would draw Oedipus back to his Theban past, with its violence, inherited curse and shedding of kindred blood”,<sup>96</sup> but no assault or supplication can uncouple Oedipus from his prophesied fate.<sup>97</sup> Instead, their interventions set the stage for Oedipus' reacquisition of agency as he begins to exercise his powers as a citizen, as a prophet and as a δαίμων.

As a suppliant and citizen, Oedipus now enjoys the protection of the larger community from those who would exploit his vulnerability. In his ἀγών with Creon, Oedipus underscores the distinction between his past and present loyalties as he invokes his new ties in defense against his former φίλοι.<sup>98</sup> Just as the Chorus completes their

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<sup>96</sup> Segal 1981: 383. Segal supposes that the increase in Oedipus' agency in his confrontation with Polyneices compared to his earlier meeting with Creon stems from his acceptance into a “civilized community”. While Oedipus' citizenship is certainly integral to the restoration of his activity, Theseus had established him as such prior to Creon's arrival. The cure for his troubles with Polyneices is spiritual more than political.

<sup>97</sup> The inevitability of Oedipus' eventual outcome is reflected in Theseus' assurance that even apart from his own protection, Phoebus is Oedipus' guarantor. (*OC* 664-67)

<sup>98</sup> *OC* 1000-13

song of praise, Creon enters with an escort of guards, determined to carry Oedipus back to Thebes as a talisman against the Argive forces.<sup>99</sup> The initial veneer of civility that overlays Creon's speech quickly erodes as first Ismene and then Antigone are taken by force as leverage against Oedipus, but Theseus, forewarned that his promise of protection would lead to a struggle,<sup>100</sup> makes good on his word to prevent any man from carrying off either Oedipus or his kin by force. Although his status in Athens grants Oedipus the right of protection, he remains entirely dependent on Theseus' intervention to forestall the deprivation of either his daughters or his freedom. Much as Oedipus relies on his daughters to guide and care for him, he now relies on Theseus for the political standing that allows him to maintain the integrity of his reunited οἰκός. Oedipus' agency is enhanced by his newly minted citizen status, but at this juncture Oedipus is only able to exert his will through the power of those who act on his behalf. Although his relations to οἰκός and to πόλις have been restored by the actions of others, the ongoing status of these relations are yet tied to external agency and goodwill.

Creon, whom Oedipus blames for initiating his exile,<sup>101</sup> now intends to extract the newly welcomed Oedipus from the city of his citizenship. His egregious claim that he has come “with no desire to take action”<sup>102</sup> (δρᾶν) when he has already set Ismene's abduction in motion reveals the duplicity of his aims and undermines his invocation of

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<sup>99</sup> *OC* 389-415. The recent oracle that Ismene brings to Oedipus tells that the Thebans will seek Oedipus for the sake of their own protection, dependent on him for their victory in war. Yet her word from the city confirms that the Thebans will neither allow him within the city, nor bury him in Theban soil, aiming to reap the full reward of Oedipus' aid without exposing themselves to the pollution of his incest and patricide. The Thebans seem to ignore the belief that a cult hero must not only be present, but propitious to those whom he protects. Aid cannot be hoped for from a hostile spirit; adding hostage to the name of exile will not persuade Oedipus to rise in anger against the enemies of Thebes.

<sup>100</sup> *OC* 652-58

<sup>101</sup> *OC* 770

<sup>102</sup> *OC* 732

civic piety. The unspoken question that frames his argument is whether the bonds of *φιλία* are unalterable, or are subject to abrogation when a friend proves false. Creon's stake in the permanence of these bonds is implicit in the grounds on which he petitions for Oedipus to return with him.<sup>103</sup> For Creon, his role in Oedipus' exile and subsequent suffering negates none of Oedipus' reciprocal obligation to him as his *φίλος*. Neither does he recognize Antigone's years of wandering as Oedipus' guide as sufficient grounds to exempt her from his ownership as her male relative and as the head of the remaining royal house of Thebes. By measure of kinship, the claim of an uncle is marginal in comparison to a living father, but behind his attempt to gain custody of Ismene and Antigone lie motivations of a distinctly political colour.<sup>104</sup> Although Creon feigns to act out of familial concern, Ismene's earlier report to her father exposes the falsity of his claims, as does his scheme to preemptively seize Ismene while he plies Oedipus with persuasion.<sup>105</sup> Whatever his pretense, Creon's interest in Oedipus is largely political, either for the sake of his city or for himself. Though he attempts to shame Oedipus for allowing Antigone to wander abroad without proper protection, he himself made no efforts to guard her from harm until he learns of an instrumental use for her father.

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<sup>103</sup> *OC* 813, 850, 854 Creon repeatedly refers to himself and his fellow Thebans as Oedipus' friends, implying that Oedipus' lack of ready cooperation with them denies his ethical responsibility to help friends. It is impossible to say whether his belief in the permanency of *φιλία* is sincere, given the transparent duplicity that underlies his speech, but it is nonetheless the foundation of his argument.

<sup>104</sup> Jebb believes that Creon "considers himself as now the guardian of his nieces – their father having forfeited all rights at Thebes", to which Blundell counters that his guardianship "is arguable for Ismene, who has been living in Thebes under Creon's care, but it is hard to extend to Antigone, who has shared her father's exile". (Blundell 1989: 233).

<sup>105</sup> Although Creon does not reveal his intent to use force until after Oedipus scorns his honeyed words, he commissioned men to seize Ismene from the grove before approaching her father. His actions directly contradict the claim at line 732 that he has not come to take action, but only to persuade. Perhaps the most incongruous stroke is his appeal to Oedipus by his paternal gods (*OC* 756), while at the same time his men are violating the sacred grove of the Eumenides by seizing Ismene, who is in the very act of supplicating the goddesses in a propitiatory ritual. Creon feigns respect for Theseus and for the divine, but both are merely superficial.

Oedipus' own belief in the mutability of relationships is clearly articulated in his speech to Theseus about time and change, when he attempts to persuade the noble-minded ruler that Athens' present friendship with Thebes is no guarantee of future amity.<sup>106</sup>

While the rupture between Thebes and Athens is yet to come, any bond between Creon and Oedipus is long since broken. When Oedipus curses Creon and his family, he does so not as a fellow countryman or as a member of the same house, but as the outsider that they have made him. Oedipus' break with his natural φίλοι was initiated by Creon and upheld by Eteocles and Polyneices, ostensibly with the endorsement of the Theban people.<sup>107</sup> When they cast him from Thebes and failed to provide for his basic trophic needs, they treated him not as a φίλος, but as a φαρμακός, a scapegoat whose future wellbeing was no responsibility of theirs.<sup>108</sup> By consequence, Oedipus' newly acquired alliance does not supplant his natural bonds of city and family, so much as his own rejection by Thebes and its royal house created space for fresh bonds to form between the citiless Oedipus and his chosen Athenian φίλοι.

For Oedipus, Creon violated the demands of φιλία when he drove Oedipus into exile at a time when Oedipus' initial self-judgment had waned and he had grown content to remain in Thebes. Further, he now robs Oedipus of his sole comfort and of the practical assistance on which he completely depends by kidnapping his daughters. By this view, Creon merits none of the deference due to φιλία, nor, for that matter, do his own

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<sup>106</sup> μόνους οὐ γίγνεται θεοῖσι γῆρας οὐδὲ καταναεῖν ποτε, τὰ δ' ἄλλα συγγεῖ πάνθ' ὁ παγκρατὴς χρόνος. φθίνει μὲν ἰσχὺς γῆς, φθίνει δὲ σώματος, θνήσκει δὲ πίστις, βλαστάνει δ' ἀπιστία, καὶ πνεῦμα ταῦτόν οὐ ποτ' οὔτ' ἐν ἀνδράσιν φίλοις βέβηκεν οὔτε πρὸς πόλιν πόλει. "For the gods alone there is no death or growing old; but all-powerful time confounds all other things. The strength within the land decays, the body's strength decays; trust dies, distrustfulness springs to life, the breath of friendship does not stay the same from man to man or one city to the next." (*OC* 607-613)

<sup>107</sup> *OC* 427-430, 1362-1366

<sup>108</sup> For Oedipus as a literary example of a φαρμακός, see Seaford 1994: 130-31, 312-13, 349.

warring sons. He scorns Creon's claim of kinship<sup>109</sup> with a reminder that such ties were "in no way dear" to his brother-in-law when he ejected Oedipus from Thebes,<sup>110</sup> clearly differentiating himself from his former Theban ties. This abrogation is further evident in Oedipus' curse of Eteocles and Polyneices, neither of whom he counts as his sons by consequence of paternal neglect. Despite his pretensions otherwise, Creon's presence at Colonus is not a family matter but a political one, as he accosts his former ally in the name of his former city. Indeed, Creon approaches Oedipus not as a brother-in-law or an uncle, but as a symbol of the Thebans' collective desire to draw in the exile they had once cast off and for the same cause: civic preservation.<sup>111</sup>

Yet Thebes failed to calculate for Oedipus' protected status as a suppliant and citizen, a position that affords considerably greater resistance to forced extraction than the mendicant beggar Creon expected to find. Although Creon recognizes that his quarry is protected by the Athenians, he attempts to coerce Oedipus' cooperation by claiming conservatorship over Oedipus' daughters if he cannot do so over the man himself, using force when persuasion fails.<sup>112</sup> A political violation calls for a political remedy, which we find in the privileges afforded to a citizen of Theseus' Athens.<sup>113</sup> Both Theseus<sup>114</sup> and the

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<sup>109</sup> In addition to framing the Thebans and himself as Oedipus' friends, Creon invokes ties of kinship at *OC* 738 and 754 calling himself γένοϋς.

<sup>110</sup> *OC* 770

<sup>111</sup> *OC* 337-38

<sup>112</sup> *OC* 830-32

<sup>113</sup> For Segal, Creon is presented in direct contrast with Theseus. While Theseus offers Oedipus a dwelling place and citizenship, "Creon claims the right to 'nurture' Oedipus (τρέφειν, 943) but will not allow him the proper nurture of a house (δόμοι) in his own land...nor will he allow him to be covered by his native earth in proper burial (406-07), a denial of a basic property of civilized communities that recalls the Creon of *Antigone*." Segal is right to draw this contrast between the Theban and Athenian rulers, but he goes too far in suggesting that Oedipus would be unburied. While Ismene reports that they will not suffer him to be buried in Theban ground, their interest in retrieving him from exile is for the express purpose of interring his remains at relative proximity to Thebes, so they might benefit from the blessings foretold in the oracle.

<sup>114</sup> *OC* 911-23

Chorus<sup>115</sup> recognize that Creon's seizure of Ismene and Antigone constitutes "an illegal act of plunder against a sovereign state".<sup>116</sup> As such, Theseus is honour bound to fetch them back again, lest Athens fall into disgrace by failing to protect its own. In doing so, Theseus' protective action brings the reciprocal dependency of πόλις and οἶκος full circle. Not only is Oedipus' relation to family a demonstrated prerequisite for re-establishing a relation to the πόλις, but his status within the πόλις is essential to the maintenance of his family unit. Had Creon caught up with his relations earlier in the day, Oedipus would have had no political status with which to protect his family. He confesses as much to Theseus as he celebrates his daughters' return:

ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ τήνδε τὴν ἐς τάσδε μοι  
 τέρψιν παρ' ἄλλου μηδενὸς πεφασμένην.  
 σὺ γὰρ νιν ἐξέσωσας, οὐκ ἄλλος βροτῶν.  
 καὶ σοι θεοὶ πόροιεν ὡς ἐγὼ θέλω,  
 αὐτῷ τε καὶ γῆ τῆδ', ἐπεὶ τό γ' εὐσεβὲς  
 μόνοις παρ' ὑμῖν ἦνρον ἀνθρώπων ἐγὼ  
 καὶ τοῦπεικῆς καὶ τὸ μὴ ψευδοστομεῖν.  
 εἰδὼς δ' ἀμύνω τοῖσδε τοῖς λόγοις τάδε.  
 ἔχω γὰρ ἄχω διὰ σὲ κούκ ἄλλον βροτῶν.

I know well that my present joy has reappeared  
 to me from you and no one else. You and no other  
 mortal have saved them. May the gods reward you  
 as I wish, both yourself and this your land:  
 in you alone among men I have found due  
 reverence, and fairness, and no false speech.  
 And acknowledging these things, I repay them with these words.  
 For what I have, I have through you, no other mortal. (1121-29)

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<sup>115</sup> *OC* 842, 879, 884

<sup>116</sup> Edmunds 1996: 117. Creon presses his violation even further when he utters threats of Theban retribution to Theseus in response to his words of rebuke. Already the truth of Oedipus' speech to Theseus on the inherent fragility of the friendship between the two cities shows through.

The nuanced interconnection between πόλις and οἶκος is pressed to an even greater extent with the arrival of Oedipus' elder son. Oedipus' natural response when he learns of Polyneices' presence is revulsion.<sup>117</sup> This comes as little surprise when we consider his recent luck with the last emissary to arrive from his past life.<sup>118</sup> The pain he anticipates at hearing Polyneices' voice is amplified by the absence of the ordinary reverence he owed to Oedipus as his father. When Creon claims Oedipus' loyalty on behalf of Thebes, he fails to recognize that Oedipus' primary connection is no longer to the city he once ruled but to the city that has made him politically whole. Polyneices' appeal to Oedipus against Eteocles is similarly ill-conceived, founded on an assumption that Oedipus does not share. Oedipus has little incitement to bolster one son's claim at the expense of the other, not because they are equally dear to him but because they are equally abhorrent. Creon took part in the same acts of betrayal as Polyneices, but Greek custom demands more from a son to a father than between relatives by marriage. Both men embody a mingled political and familial relation to Oedipus that is broken beyond repair, but while Creon's role is more distinctly political, Polyneices' presence emphasizes the ruptured blood ties between the father and his sons. The outcome of their joint betrayal is largely the same: Creon is no longer a co-regent and fellow citizen to Oedipus, and Polyneices is no longer his child.<sup>119</sup> Both men, together with Eteocles, embody the mutability of human relationships and the fragility of relational goods as Oedipus former φίλοι have become his enemies.

While Waldock famously interprets Oedipus' scene with Polyneices as evidence

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<sup>117</sup> *OC* 1170-74

<sup>118</sup> It is, however, a contrast to his initial reaction to Theseus' news of a supplicant. Before he knew Polyneices' identity, his natural response was to respect the unknown man's suppliant status. (*OC* 1163)

<sup>119</sup> *OC* 895, 1369, 1383



that *OC* is a medley of episodes beaded together to plump out a thin story prior to Oedipus' heroization,<sup>120</sup> the scene is in fact crucial to Oedipus' transition between utter passivity and divine activity. In his conflict with Creon, Oedipus' agency only extends so far as the action of those who intervene on his behalf. Without the protective umbrella of his friendship with Theseus, Oedipus would remain every bit as vulnerable as the moment when he entered the grove on Antigone's arm. In interaction with Polyneices, we see for the first time a resurgence of his own active power. This, however, does not come about independently from the mediating influence of his φίλοι and of the gods.

Indeed, before Oedipus can reassert his own agency, he must first learn to submit himself to the will of others, not only to the gods, but to man. Sophoclean heroes are often chided for failing to heed the counsel of their friends. In *Electra*, the Chorus laments that she will not learn moderation, but inflames Aegisthus' and Clytemnestra's anger against her by her protracted mourning for murdered Agamemnon. Ajax is unable to accept the alienation wrought by his night of mad rage and so is unable to listen to the pleas of his spear-wife or the exhortations of his own sailors. Not least of these, Oedipus of *OT* continually persists in acting according to his own judgment despite Creon and Tiresias, let alone the oracles of Apollo. When Theseus returns from rescuing Ismene and Antigone with word that a kinsman of Oedipus' who hails from Argos desires an audience with him, Oedipus overcomes his initial reticence in deference to the counsel of his friends. Antigone joins with Theseus in bidding Oedipus to respect Polyneices' status as a suppliant:

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<sup>120</sup> Waldock 1951: 218-220

ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἶκε: λιπαρεῖν γὰρ οὐ καλὸν  
δίκαια προσχρηζουσιν, οὐδ' αὐτὸν μὲν εὔ  
πάσχειν, παθόντα δ' οὐκ ἐπίστασθαι τίνειν.

Yield to us! It is no fine thing for those who make a just  
request to persist, or that someone who receives benefits should not  
understand how to repay what he has received. (1201-03)

Oedipus' choice to submit to the will of Theseus (πόλις) and his daughters (οἰκός)  
demonstrates how his burgeoning agency is correctly aligned with community, unlike  
OT, where his blind confidence prevents him from heeding the counsel of his φίλοι.  
While it is not necessary to assume continuity of character from one play to the next,  
Oedipus' opening remarks in the *prologos* imply that it is during his exile that he has  
learned to submit, or to be content (στέργειν).<sup>121</sup> Prepared by his earlier reconciliation to  
οἰκός and πόλις through the agency of his friends, Oedipus regains his activity following  
the prudent submission of his own will to that of his φίλοι when he heeds their counsel to  
give audience to his estranged son:

τέκνον, βαρεῖαν ἠδονὴν νικᾷτέ με  
λέγοντες: ἔστω δ' οὖν ὅπως ὑμῖν φίλον.

Child, you overcome me, winning by your words a pleasure  
that is grievous to me. Yet let it be as you please. (1204-05)

Like Theseus before him, Polyneices invokes the similarity of his own situation to  
Oedipus'. Theseus acknowledges their common upbringing as a ξένος in a foreign land,<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> σμικρὸν μὲν ἐξαίτουδντα, τοῦ σμικροῦ δ' ἔτι μείον φέροντα, καὶ τόδ' ἐξαρκούν ἐμοί: στέργειν γὰρ αἱ  
πάθει με χῶ χρόνος ξυνῶν μακρὸς διδάσκει καὶ τὸ γενναῖον τρίτον. "I ask for little and I receive still less,  
but it is quite enough for me. For much time, and the things I have suffered and thirdly my noble birth have  
taught me to be content." (OC 5-8)

<sup>122</sup> OC 562-6

while Polyneices claims that he comes as a beggar and a ξένοϛ, just as Oedipus is. The difference, however, between the two claims is conspicuous. Theseus frames the comparison as a causal factor for the empathy Oedipus inspires in him. In this moment, he is about to elevate Oedipus from a citiless beggar to a citizen of Athens. He recognizes Oedipus' worth to the community, but places no contingent demands on the blessing he is about to bestow. By contrast, Polyneices hopes to manipulate his father into assisting an Argive invasion of Thebes. Although he never attempts to accomplish his ends by force, his desires mirror those of Creon: to leverage Apollo's oracle against their enemies through the possession of Oedipus' physical body, while doing nothing to assuage his alienation from political community or their own broken filial bonds.<sup>123</sup>

Oedipus' rejects Polyneices' comparison on the grounds that the hardship Polyneices has met with, in addition to the lamented circumstances of his father, are of his own making. The two brothers, together with Creon, enacted and enabled Oedipus' exile and subsequent sufferings. For Oedipus, their willingness to advance their own claims for power at their father's expense and their lack of care for his well-being in exile are sufficient to negate the claims of kinship. Just as Thebes' claim to Oedipus' loyalty is forfeit on account of his mistreatment, so Polyneices and Eteocles can no longer claim his sympathy as their father. In this way, Polyneices is no longer Oedipus' child in the manner of Antigone and Ismene, his lack of filial piety places him outside the tightly knit οικόϛ that Oedipus and his daughters share in common. Much like Sophocles'

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<sup>123</sup> See James Doull 2003: 35-37 for a discussion of the undivided unity of family as the only possibility for peace between Polyneices and Eteocles.

Clytemnestra is denounced as a mother-who-is-no-mother,<sup>124</sup> Oedipus' sons are no longer his sons. In both *Electra* and *OC*, Sophocles demonstrates that the transgressions of one family member against another can negate the ordinary requirements of piety. The one whose actions have severed the bond is then regarded as an enemy, with all the accompanying hostility that the title implies. Neither Clytemnestra nor Polyneices expected to suffer for their deeds when they held the scepter of authority, but neither can they expect clemency in the name of family ties that they previously scorned. Bowra writes that Oedipus' rage towards his son must be contextualized within the Greek understanding of the duty a son owes to his father:

It was an Unwritten Law that a son should honour his parents, and this took concrete form in the laws of Athens. Solon is said to have legislated about wrongs done to parents, and among his headings was failure to look after or provide lodging for a parent. It penalized the deprivation of parents of what was due to them, and a son who was convicted of maltreating his parents lost his personal rights as a citizen.<sup>125</sup>

This sentiment had not gone out of fashion in fifth century Athens. Indeed, it seems only to increase as time went on; Plato's *Laws* suggests that Solon's prescribed punishments are too lenient, calling for banishment in the case of assault and flogging in return for elder neglect.<sup>126</sup> But Polyneices' transgression goes beyond the censure of his peers; not only has he acted against the customs of the community, he has acted against Zeus as the

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<sup>124</sup>Jenny March writes, "throughout the play Clytemnestra is repeatedly depicted as a "mother who is no mother" (*mater amator* 1154, and cf. 597-98, 1194)...by her behaviour to her children, she has forfeited the right to the name of mother". March 2001: 157. See also MacLeod 2000: 121-22 for the negation of the tie between mother and offspring.

<sup>125</sup> Bowra 1944: 327-28 For C.M. Bowra, Polyneices' troubles stem from the same ambition that led him to endorse his father's exile and subsequent neglect. In this way, the young man's present suffering is not a cause for pity, but a misfortune of his own making.

<sup>126</sup> See *Laws* 881d and 932d.

guardian of justice.<sup>127</sup>

Critics are divided on the question of Polyneices' sincerity when he approaches his father in lamentation and derides himself as the worst of men.<sup>128</sup> If, however, Polyneices is repentant of his failure to provide the basic necessities for Oedipus since his exile, he chooses to show it only after word came to him that Oedipus' physical presence could determine the victor in his fight to regain the scepter of Thebes.<sup>129</sup> As Oedipus notes in the first episode, Eteocles and Polyneices were content to stay at home and allow their sisters to shoulder the entire burden of their father's care.<sup>130</sup> On that count, their shame should extend beyond their elder neglect to the egregious hardship that Antigone in particular has endured in their stead.

It is notable that neither Theseus nor Antigone expresses any antipathy towards Polyneices, though Theseus is by this time versed in his acts of betrayal and neglect, and Antigone herself has suffered under the burden of her brothers' shortcomings. As Blundell notes, "forgiveness per se is not a characteristically Greek virtue",<sup>131</sup> but Polyneices' posture of humility is doubtlessly more palatable than Creon's overt duplicity and aggression.<sup>132</sup> For Theseus, it would be entirely out of character for him to spurn a ξένοσ who comes to his realm as a supplicant at the altar of Poseidon, or any other god

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<sup>127</sup> See Winnington-Ingram: 1980: 270-72 on the emergent prominence of Zeus in the Polyneices scene.

<sup>128</sup> *OC* 1254-70 Polyneices acknowledges his failure to meet the trophic needs of his kin, but he owns no part of perpetuating his father's exile or the political strife that underlies his march against Thebes. Neither does he acknowledge that he and his brother had earlier thought best to cede the rule to Creon for the sake of the city on account of their cursed origins. (*OC* 367-370)

<sup>129</sup> Segal characterizes Polyneices' supplication as "almost a parody of Oedipus' own supplication at the beginning of the play". Although he feigns the status of a beggar "he is no isolated wanderer, but a general with allies at his back". (Segal 1981: 383)

<sup>130</sup> *OC* 337-345

<sup>131</sup> Blundell 1989: 243

<sup>132</sup> Theseus' criticizes Creon's disrespect for law and custom (*OC* 905-30), but honours those who know "how a foreigner ought to behave among citizens" (*OC* 927-28), as he himself would.

who holds sway therein.<sup>133</sup> As for Antigone, her behaviour in this scene is consistent with her eponymous play: though she knows Polyneices to be in the wrong, her essential trophic nature compels her to soothe the strife between family members and to nurture seeds of reconciliation. In this way she is the perfect foil to Polyneices, selfless where he is solipsistic, perfect in her filial piety where he exhibits none.<sup>134</sup> Polyneices may experience true horror and regret at the extremity of his father's suffering, but his errand is for his sake alone.

Unlike the prior episode, Oedipus need not rely on protection from his Athenian friends, but repels Polyneices by his own power. While it is clear that Polyneices' request would require Oedipus to act against both the oracle of Apollo and his own word to Theseus, Oedipus does not limit himself to what the god has spoken or to his vowed service to Athens when he proclaims his sons' fate. In doing so, Oedipus goes beyond his role as a messenger of the god in the faithful report of divine dicta in the earlier episodes. Instead, Oedipus shapes the future by his own speech as an active force of prophecy; as Bushnell puts it, "Oedipus first supports Apollo's oracles and then assumes the prophet's role himself."<sup>135</sup> While Tiresias met with direct opposition from Oedipus in *OT* in a continuation of the common conflict between hero and prophecy, Oedipus' assumption of the prophetic mantle in *OC* "collapses all the oppositions that mark the conflict between

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<sup>133</sup> Bowra notes that Theseus "feels that Polyneices deserves the same respect that he has shown to Oedipus and for the same reason". (Bowra 1944: 330). Yet while he shows no enmity to Polyneices, he does not extend the level of personal empathy to him that he has to Oedipus, nor is Polyneices offered a permanent status in Athens or any material assistance beyond Theseus' influence on his father to grant him an audience.

<sup>134</sup> For all his noble words, Polyneices has exhibited no more care for his sisters than his neglected father. Creon's remarks about Antigone's vulnerability were meant to shame Oedipus (*OC* 747-752), but the greater shame belongs to Polyneices and Eteocles. Not only did they fail to provide for their father's nurture, their neglect has directly imperiled their sisters.

<sup>135</sup> Bushnell 1988: 86

hero and prophet in earlier Theban plays".<sup>136</sup>

This confrontation with Polyneices is the pivot point where Oedipus, long the subject of prophecy, begins himself to prophesy:<sup>137</sup>

σὺ δ' ἔρρ' ἀπόπτυστός τε κἀπάτωρ ἐμοῦ,  
κακῶν κάκιστε, τάσδε συλλαβὼν ἀράς,  
ἄς σοι καλοῦμαι, μήτε γῆς ἐμφυλίου  
δόρει κρατῆσαι μήτε νοστιῆσαί ποτε  
τὸ κοῖλον Ἄργος, ἀλλὰ συγγενεῖ χερὶ  
θανεῖν κτανεῖν θ' ὑφ' οὐ̄περ ἐξελέηλασαι.  
τοιαῦτ' ἀρῶμαι, καὶ καλῶ τὸ Ταρτάρου  
στυγνὸν πατρῶον ἔρεβος, ὡς σ' ἀποικίση,  
καλῶ δὲ τάσδε δαίμονας, καλῶ δ' Ἄρη  
τὸν σφῶν τὸ δεινὸν μῖσος ἐμβεβληκότα.  
καὶ ταῦτ' ἀκούσας στεῖχε, κἀξάγγελλ' ἰὼν  
καὶ πᾶσι Καδμείοισι τοῖς σαντοῦ θ' ἅμα  
πιστοῖσι συμμάχοισιν, οὐ̄νεκ' Οἰδίπους  
τοιαῦτ' ἔνειμε παισὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ γέρα.

Be gone! I spit you from me fatherless,  
worst of all wicked men! And take with you these curses  
that I call one you: you will not conquer  
the land of your own race with spears, or ever return safe  
to Argos' valley, but by a kindred hand  
you will both die and kill the one who drove you out.  
This I pray. And I call on the abhorrent  
darkness of paternal Tartaros to take  
you to another home. I call on these divinities.  
I call on Ares, who has cast this terrible hatred into both  
of you. Hear this before you go: report all this to the Cadmeans,  
and likewise to your own trusty allies, that this is the  
honour Oedipus apportions to his sons. (1383-96)

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<sup>136</sup> Bushnell 1988: 87

<sup>137</sup> Oedipus first denunciation of his sons is in the optative, framed as a wish rather than a statement of fact. (*OC* 421-26) When he speaks directly to Polyneices, "there are no longer optatives and conditionals but confident futures. (Kitto 1954: 390)

Oedipus' reply to Polyneices is a powerful moment of recaptured agency, but how are we to understand the merciless aggression of Oedipus' words to his son? For some, his wrath is unsettling, an indicator of his persistent personal defects of self-righteous rage and emotional incontinence.<sup>138</sup> Here, however, Oedipus is not leaping to unfounded conclusions when he recognizes Polyneices' errand is rooted in the achievement of his own ends rather than any pious concern for his father. The audacity of his supplication is furthered by the implied outcome if Oedipus should cooperate: the death of Eteocles, who is by this account no more or less guilty than Polyneices. If Polyneices' petition in the name of kinship is valid, then his triumph would reignite the same miasma of family bloodshed that Oedipus was so recently cleansed of.

Although he approaches with deference to the customs of the land, to Theseus and to the altar of Poseidon, the substance of his petition is not improved by his observance of proper form. Polyneices asks Oedipus to recognize a bond of kinship between them, while at the same time he seeks aid in a venture that would culminate in the ruin and death of his brother.<sup>139</sup> Either the filial ties are defunct in the same sense that Oedipus is no longer any friend of Creon's, or they are inviolable. If, however, Polyneices retains his relational status as Oedipus' son, so too must Eteocles. As such, the grounds on which Polyneices claims empathy are the same that make his request abhorrent. The same can be said for the political element of his request. While Polyneices comports himself with proper reverence to Theseus and the city of Athens, he desires Oedipus to act against

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<sup>138</sup> In *OT*, Oedipus denounces Tiresias as a traitor to Thebes when he demurs from speaking what he knows of Laius' murder. When Tiresias is provoked into revealing that Oedipus is the murderer that he seeks, Oedipus accuses Tiresias and Creon both of colluding against him for their own political gain. As we shall see, Polyneices neither is blameless of the charges that his father lays, nor does he speak on behalf of the gods.

<sup>139</sup> *OC* 1341



Athenian interests by assisting the Argives against Thebes. If, however, Oedipus' civic status were parallel to Polyneices, who has secured new allies in Argos but does not identify as an Argive himself, then acting in concert with Polyneices would constitute an even graver sin: marching against their fatherland in civil war. Whether or not Oedipus validates the claim of kinship, whether or not he understands himself as an Athenian or a Theban in exile, what Polyneices asks of him is incoherent. Moreover, it is an abomination to the gods. Polyneices marches an army against his city in an effort to destroy his brother not by divine guidance, but driven by his injured pride, unable to bear the imagined laughter of Eteocles and the Theban citizens who supported his coup. Polyneices may have αἰδώς in his favour, as he is careful to approach Athens, the altar of Poseidon and his estranged father in a posture of reverence, but Oedipus is correct to counter that justice is against him.<sup>140</sup> Polyneices invokes αἰδώς to remind his father of the honour due to a suppliant, much as Antigone did with the Chorus at 237. Polyneices' suppliant status is formally honoured by granting him the audience he sought and the ability to leave unhindered. Given the content of his request, however, an affirmative response would not accord with piety, but would facilitate the family's participation in the injustice of kin-slaying and civil violence.

While it is a grim fate that Oedipus' prophecy allots to Polyneices and Eteocles, there is a sense that the curse is earned. Aside from their joint actions and omissions towards their father, at this time Polyneices and Eteocles are already entrenched in opposition against each other. Jebb notes, "It is a distinctive point in the Sophoclean treatment of the story that the curse of Oedipus on his sons comes *after* the outbreak of

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<sup>140</sup> See *OC* 1380-82 where Oedipus stakes his curses on Justice's seat at Zeus' side. This is a direct rebuttal to Polyneices' claim at 1267-68 that Aidos is beside Zeus on his throne.

war between them, not *before* it, as with Aeschylus and Euripides.”<sup>141</sup> Their personal ambitions have set them on a collision course with one another at the expense of what is beneficial for either their city or their family members. For Jebb, Polyneices’ headstrong character is further demonstrated by his refusal to abandon the war despite his knowledge of its outcome. As they attempt to manipulate the outcome of divine oracles and jeopardize both the well-being of Thebes and of their blood relatives through their own self-conceit, Polyneices and Eteocles perpetuate some of Oedipus’ youthful errors. Yet crucially, just as Oedipus is quick to point out to Creon, what he did in ignorance they do with open eyes.<sup>142</sup>

In addition to the clear negation of Polyneices’ sonship, a burgeoning change in Oedipus himself further redefines their relation. Although modern critics are often appalled by the lack of clemency extended to his firstborn, Oedipus’ wrath is entirely appropriate to the hero he is about to become. His fatherly tenderness is evident in his relation to his daughters, his distress at their capture by Creon, his jubilation at their safe return and his end of life exhortation to Theseus to be gracious to them once he is gone.<sup>143</sup> The absence of a similar affection for his sons can be explained in part by their unholy neglect of him as a vulnerable parent, and further by the righteous anger of a hero against the avarice that undermines the stability both of πόλις and οἶκος. Insofar as Oedipus is a man, he responds to Polyneices as a former φίλος who has become his enemy; insofar as Oedipus is on the threshold of heroization, he responds with the wrath proper to a chthonic spirit.

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<sup>141</sup> Jebb: 2004: 203

<sup>142</sup> *OC* 985-87. The contrast of their willful action with the passivity that comes from ignorance will be the focus of the next chapter.

<sup>143</sup> *OC* 1633-35

Unlike Orestes' vengeance on Clytemnestra, Oedipus does not claim retribution from his sons by his own hand, but with his words. In doing so, he begins to exercise a level of agency unparalleled since the moment of his self-mutilation. As he prophesies the mutual slaughter of his sons, Oedipus does not claim the authority of Apollo as he did when he reported the god's oracles to Theseus.<sup>144</sup> This time, Oedipus speaks by his own authority, shaping their fate. When Antigone expresses dismay that Polyneices accepts the curse with resignation and will not stand down from his planned assault on Thebes, he responds that a δαίμων will determine the outcome.<sup>145</sup> On one level, this can be understood as a general platitude. Of course a god will govern his fate, no fifth century Greek would suggest otherwise. Yet in this context, the δαίμων that determines his lot is not an unnamed Olympian or an abstract concept of divinity, but the wizened beggar man before him who has already begun the processes of transformation into a chthonic cult hero. By means of prophecy, Oedipus first begins to harm his enemies, not simply thwarting their desires by invoking the protective power of new φιλοῖ, or the received dicta of the gods, but by his own daimonic authority.

Nor is his prophetic utterance the apex of his newfound agency. Directly after Polyneices' departure, the long awaited thunder sounds to announce the τέλος of Oedipus' time on earth, in the dual sense of his final moments, and of the great fulfillment of his purpose. All at once, the man who could not seat himself without assistance begins to lead those who previously led him. Oedipus bids his daughters, together with Theseus and the Chorus of elders, to follow after him, but not to attempt to influence his path with the gentle touch that led him from Thebes to Colonus:

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<sup>144</sup> *OC* 623

<sup>145</sup> *OC* 1445

ὦ παῖδες, ὧδ' ἔπεσθ'. ἐγὼ γὰρ ἡγεμῶν  
σφῶν αὐτῶν πέφασμαι καινός, ὥσπερ σφὼ πατρί.  
χωρεῖτε, καὶ μὴ ψάυετ', ἀλλ' εἰπέ με  
αὐτὸν τὸν ἱερὸν τύμβον ἐξευρεῖν, ἵνα  
μοῖρ' ἀνδρὶ τῷδε τῆδε κρυφθῆναι χθονί.  
τῆδ', ὧδε, τῆδε βᾶτε: τῆδε γάρ μ' ἄγει  
Ἑρμῆς ὁ πομπὸς ἢ τε νερτέρα θεός.

My children, follow me this way. For I have been  
revealed as your new guide, as you two were for your father.  
Give way and do not touch me, but let me find myself  
the sacred tomb in which it is the destiny of this man  
here to lie hidden within this land.  
This way, here, come this way! Hermes the escort leads  
me this way, and the goddess of the underworld. (1542-48)<sup>146</sup>

His knowledge of their destination can come only from the very source of the sight by which he leads – at the outset of the play the grove and its environs are so foreign to Oedipus that he does not know even what city they draw near to, let alone the lay of the land.<sup>147</sup> There is no suggestion that Oedipus' sensation is restored; rather that by physical perception, Oedipus sees with a spiritual sight. His present certainty is divinely inspired, not in the mediated manner of an oracle, but with an immediacy that belies the apotheosis that he is about to undergo. Indeed, as Oedipus steps forward in divine sight, the process that began with prophetic utterance continues to unfold.

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<sup>146</sup> See also *OC* 1518-21: ἐγὼ διδάξω, τέκνον Αἰγέως, ἃ σοι γήρωσ ἄλυστα τῆδε κείσεται πόλει. χῶρον μὲν αὐτὸς αὐτίκ' ἐξηγήσομαι, ἄθικτος ἡγητῆρος, οὐ με χρὴ θανεῖν. "Child of Aigeus, I will explain to you the things your city will have stored away for it, unpaired by age. Soon I myself shall guide the way, untouched by any guide, towards the place that I must die." In each of these, and 1587 as well, the language clearly indicates Oedipus' self-motion. He moves separately from any human assistance, though not necessarily from divine aid.

<sup>147</sup> Lowell Edmunds writes, "His fundamental passivity that was expressed in his physical dependence on his daughters is now exchanged for independent action, as his movement on stage shows" (Edmunds 1996: 76). Since Edmunds' own work is focused on *OC*'s theatrical space, it is natural that he should focus on the physical nature of Oedipus' passivity. Oedipus' act of leadership, however, encompasses not only the physical, but the spiritual and the political as well. This is further reflected in his company of followers, comprised not only of Antigone, who mediated his physical needs, but Ismene and Theseus, who mediated his religious and political restoration.

No longer resisting the oracles of the gods, throughout *OC* Oedipus submits to alignment with their dicta. Now, as an active principle of prophecy, Oedipus is a conduit of divine agency, and not merely his own. As he leads the party onwards, Oedipus reiterates his alignment with both the gods above and below, invoking Hermes and Persephone much as he called upon both Ares and the Eumenides when he cursed his sons.<sup>148</sup> While the assuagement of his extreme passivity hinges directly on his restoration to the political community and the repair to his ruptured access to household worship through the propitiation of the Eumenides, these do not guarantee his restored activity in and of themselves. Instead, his agency is contingent to a certain extent on his continued passivity. That is to say, without Oedipus' submission to the will of the gods and to the counsel of his friends, he would remain reliant on the physical, spiritual and political mediation of others. Only when he surrenders his own stubborn will to the greater forces of the heavens and of the community is he able to regain his activity.

The full manifestation of Oedipus' agency is achieved in death by his actualization as a cult hero, but what is a hero in this context? It is perhaps impossible to understand the consequences of the radical transition that Oedipus undergoes from blind beggar to cult hero without a closer consideration of the cult hero in Greek society. While our modern understanding of the term accords more closely with the strength and courage of the Homeric heroes, or even the tragic hero that Knox defines,<sup>149</sup> the Greek cult hero refers to “men and women on whom the gods had bestowed extraordinary power at the moment of their deaths”, whose presence “conferred benefits on the locality”,<sup>150</sup> to the

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<sup>148</sup> *OC* 1391 τᾶσδε δαίμονας is broadly agreed to be a reference to the Eumenides.

<sup>149</sup> See Chapter II n.15 for Knox's description of his prototypical tragic hero.

<sup>150</sup> Bagg 2004: 88-89

effect that the hero's remains were at times stolen by rival cities who coveted their saving power. The one transformed by heroization is no longer a mortal, but a divine being who merits worship from the citizens he protects. Though their power is less absolute than the Olympians and restricted to a particular region, Burkert writes, "the hero cult, like the cult of the dead, is conceived as the chthonic counterpart to the worship of the gods, and is attended by blood sacrifices, food offerings and libations".<sup>151</sup>

A cult hero does not linger as an impotent shade in the drab realm of the dead as Homer's Achilles does in Book VIII of the *Odyssey*, but becomes a supernatural chthonic power, a saving help to those whom he guards and death to those who stand against them. Textual references to Trophonios by Pausanias and to Protesilaos by Herodotus confirm what Sophocles demonstrates in *OC*, a hero is no longer a mere man, but a θεός. As Knox puts it, Oedipus experiences "death as a human being, but power and immortality as something more than human".<sup>152</sup> Nagy argues that both the human and divine identities are retained in the cult worship of a given hero, where "the hero is envisioned as a mortal in the preliminary phase of the ritual program of worship, then as a god in the central phase, at a climactic moment marking the hero's epiphany to his worshippers".<sup>153</sup>

Through their worship, the initiates in a hero's cult seek to emulate through ritual the mythological descent of the hero into the underworld and their subsequent return to life.

The hero cult, though it belongs to the πόλις, arose under the influence of epic poetry. The Iliadic heroes are a precursor to the divine cult heroes of Athens' golden age.

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<sup>151</sup> Burkert 1985: 206

<sup>152</sup> Knox 1964: 143

<sup>153</sup> Nagy 2013: 429 Gregory Nagy emphasizes that Amphiarious, Trophonios and Protesilaos were already famous in Herodotus time, 600 years prior to Pausanias, as a triad of cult heroes. Yet by the time Pausanias writes, "the mysteries concerning the death and the resurrection of all three of these cult heroes were becoming ever less mysterious... Correspondingly, the eventual status of such heroes as θεοί, 'gods', became ever more obvious to all." Nagy 2013: 430

While some, such as Ajax, were later worshipped by hero cults, the men who warred against Troy under the brothers Atreus are not gods or δαίμονες in Homeric tradition, as Achilles' presence in the underworld attests. They are, however, described as "equal to a δαίμων" at "the precise moment when a warrior comes face to face with his own martial death".<sup>154</sup> One such example occurs when Patroclus is thrice beaten back by Apollo, but charges ahead for the fourth time, "equal (ἴσος) to a god (δαίμων)"<sup>155</sup>. After Patroclus is killed in a later battle, Achilles himself earns the epithet "equal to a god" (δαίμονι ἴσος) on four separate occasions where he challenges death with heroic courage.<sup>156</sup> This equation of mortal men to the immortals is an early image of the full measure later enjoyed by the cult heroes.

Part of a hero's essential nature is his uncommon capacity for wrath, a force that contributes both to his enemies' terror and his friends' salvation. Seaford draws a parallel between Aeschylus' expansion of the Furies' jurisdiction from issues of kinship to the city as a whole with Oedipus' role in *OC*. "The transition is from the temporary victories of reciprocal violence within the (Argive) family to a permanent resolution involving and benefiting the entire Athenian πόλις."<sup>157</sup> His death is a heartfelt loss to his devoted daughters, but "the private grief of kin must give way to the collective, permanent benefit of the hero cult".<sup>158</sup> As the Eumenides protect their sacred precinct, so Oedipus will protect the land that is sacred to him as a divine hero.

Normatively, a hero cult cloaked its ritual observances in mystery, although the

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<sup>154</sup> Nagy 2013: 109

<sup>155</sup> *Il* XVI 705

<sup>156</sup> *Il* XX 443-44, 493; XXI 18, 27

<sup>157</sup> Seaford 1994: 132-33 Seaford holds that Oedipus is transformed from "an agent of reciprocal violence within an (alien) family to an honoured place under the earth where he will benefit the entire πόλις".

<sup>158</sup> Seaford 1994: 135

location of a hero's tomb and place of death might be broadly known.<sup>159</sup> By contrast, every reference made to Oedipus' death and entombment is conspicuously secretive. The precise place and manner of his death are known only to Theseus and to his eventual successor, a limitation that places sole responsibility for heroic veneration on the Athenian rulers. As for the manner of his death, the tradition offers several templates in which a hero dies a spectacular death before coming back to life. In Sophocles' version we know that Oedipus was not struck down by a thunderbolt like Heracles, or spirited away by a gust of wind as Phaethon is in Hesiod's *Theogony*<sup>160</sup> The messenger who recounts Oedipus' journey into the grove to the Chorus eliminates both of these possibilities and concludes that "it was either a messenger from the gods, or else the underworld kindly opened the unlit door of the earth".<sup>161</sup> Oedipus' promise from Apollo that this body will be interred in the Eumenides' grove where he will drink the blood of his enemies effectively eliminates the possibility that he is simply caught up to Olympus. The remaining option is consistent with the text and is a method attested in the tradition by the deaths of Amphiaraos and Trophonios, both of whom were engulfed by the earth.

Yet for those who depend on a hero's protective power, the manner of death is of considerably less consequence than the physical location of the tomb. Nagy holds that Theseus' double gesture of reverence towards the heavens and the earth indicates a double outcome for Oedipus, who first "descends into the depths of the earth" and then

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<sup>159</sup> See Edmunds 1996: 97-98 for parallel examples in both Thebes and Corinth where knowledge of a hero's tomb is highly restricted. Edmunds suggests that in addition to protecting Oedipus' bones from would-be grave robbers, the secret location of Oedipus' grave glossed over the contemporary uncertainty over the burial place. See also Jebb 2004 on 1522ff.

<sup>160</sup> *Theogony* 986-91

<sup>161</sup> ἀλλ' ἢ τις ἐκ θεῶν πομπὸς ἢ τὸ νερέτερον εὖνουν διαστὰν γῆς ἀλάμπετον βάθρον. (*OC* 1661-62)



"will somehow ascend to Olympus".<sup>162</sup> This two-part solution to Oedipus' resting place fails to address how Apollo's oracle could be fulfilled if Oedipus' body did not remain in Athenian soil. Indeed, if his physical location were not of great importance, the question of whether he dies in Colonus, or Thebes or the barren wilderness is of minimal concern. Yet as befits the close association of a cult hero with a particular location, Oedipus is keenly intent that he should inhabit the Eumenides' grove, in keeping with the word of the god and with his own desires both to aid his new φίλοῖ and to avenge himself on those who have wronged him. As Burkert writes, "an important difference between the hero cult and the cult of the gods is that a hero is always confined to a specific locality: he acts in the vicinity of his grave for his family, group or city.... the hero cult is at the centre of local group identity".<sup>163</sup>

The location of Oedipus' death and interment determines which group he is associated with as a cult hero, and which is able to benefit from his daimonic aid. Yet while Oedipus' Athenian φίλοῖ will depend on his help at a future time to stave off a Theban invasion, Oedipus' mutual dependency does not end with his death. In this way, Oedipus sustains a measure of passivity, even beyond the full actualization of his daimonhood. We have already seen Oedipus' reliance on Theseus' protection to prevent his forced removal by Creon. Similarly, though Polyneices makes no attempt to overpower his father, Oedipus meets with him on the strict condition that Theseus will not allow him to fall into Polyneices' power. Even following Oedipus' transformation, a certain vulnerability remains. Oedipus knows full well that both the Thebans and the Argives desire to possess his body in death as leverage against the opposing side in their

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<sup>162</sup> Nagy 2013: 518

<sup>163</sup> Burkert 1985: 206

conflict. Thus the sanctity of Oedipus' resting place is sustained by the surest possible means, abject secrecy.<sup>164</sup>

τοῦτον δὲ φράζε μήποτ' ἀνθρώπων τινί,  
μήθ' οὐ κέκευθε μήτ' ἐν οἷς κεῖται τόποις:  
ὥς σοι πρὸ πολλῶν ἀσπίδων ἀλκὴν ὄδε  
δορός τ' ἐπακτοῦ γειτονῶν ἀεὶ τιθῆ.  
ἂ δ' ἐξάγιστα μηδὲ κινεῖται λόγῳ,  
αὐτὸς μαθήσῃ, κεῖσ' ὅταν μόλῃς μόνος:  
ὥς οὔτ' ἂν ἀστῶν τῶνδ' ἂν ἐξείποιμί τῳ  
οὔτ' ἂν τέκνοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς, στέργων ὅμως.  
ἀλλ' αὐτὸς αἰεὶ σῶζε, χῶταν ἐς τέλος  
τοῦ ζῆν ἀφικνῆ, τῷ προφερτάτῳ μόνῳ  
σήμαιν', ὃ δ' αἰεὶ τῶπιόντι δεικνύτω.  
χοῦτως ἀδῆον τήνδ' ἐνοικήσεις πόλιν  
σπαρτῶν ἀπ' ἀνδρῶν.

Never tell any man where this is -  
where it is concealed or in what place it lies,  
that it may always give you strength,  
better than many shields, or your neighbour's  
borrowed spears. The things that are holy, which must  
not be disturbed by words, you yourself will learn  
when you go there alone; I would not speak of them  
to any one of these citizens, or to my children, though  
I love them all the same. But you yourself protect these  
things always, and when you reach your life's end,  
reveal them only to the foremost man; let him show  
his successor and so on. And thus this city where you  
dwell will stay unravaged by the sown men. (1522-34)

Only Theseus is permitted to accompany Oedipus on the final leg of his journey.

Only Theseus may know the manner of his death and the place of his entombment,

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<sup>164</sup>For an interesting, though speculative, analysis of the six mystical landmarks of Oedipus' grave that the messenger names (*OC* 1590-1601) see Nagy 2013: 506-08, 515-16. Hogan encourages the assumption that these "would have been familiar landmarks to Sophocles' audience" (Hogan 1991: 122), though Ruby Blondell adds that "their significance is lost to us" (Blondell 2002: 97 n.166). At best, these landmarks provide the approximate area and not the specific location, as Oedipus continues on from this place alone with Theseus (*OC* 1643-47). David Mulroy calls them an allusion to "bizarre, discredited abduction tales" that complicate our understanding of Theseus, but this perhaps reaches too far. (Mulroy 2015: 90).

thereby safeguarding his friend against the warring parties who might disturb his tomb for their own ends. Yet this is not all that Oedipus entrusts to Theseus' guardianship; the secrecy of Oedipus' final moments further allows him to impart to Theseus the esoteric wisdom that will accomplish the salvation of the city. These holy words (ἐξάγιστα) are meant only for the ruler of the political community, and not for the accompanying servants, the Chorus of elders or even his beloved daughters. In this way, the πόλις is once again entrusted with the safety and preservation of the οἶκος, as Oedipus makes explicit when he charges Theseus with his daughters' care. The οἶκος, although necessarily prior to the πόλις, is nonetheless dependent on the stability of its political context for its ongoing sustainment. This is manifest on the personal level of Oedipus' own family, but extends equally to the city of Athens and its people.

## Chapter IV: The Question Of Culpability

...οἵτινες βάθρων  
ἐκ τῶνδὲ μ' ἐξάραντες εἶτ' ἐλαύνετε,  
ὄνομα μόνον δείσαντες; οὐ γὰρ δὴ τό γε  
σῶμ' οὐδὲ τάργα τᾶμ'. ἐπεὶ τά γ' ἔργα με  
πεπονθότ' ἴσθι μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα,

...after bidding me to rise  
from these steps you are driving me off, for fear  
of nothing but my name, certainly not of my body  
or my deeds; for my deeds at any rate were suffered  
more than perpetuated... (263-67).

We have already seen how Oedipus' ongoing passivity is a necessary element in both his restoration to community and his renewed activity. This chapter will explore the relation of Oedipus' passivity to his culpability in the events prior to and during the action of *OC*. Oedipus takes several opportunities to argue that he is innocent of the infamous transgressions for which he is best known. Both components of his argument are firmly founded in the principle that the parricide and incestuous marriage were not of his own making, but rather were passively experienced. The basis of his claim that he was an unwilling participant in his father's death and marriage to his mother is his ignorance of his true parentage. When he killed the well-to-do older man at the cross-roads, he did so believing not only that he acted in self-defense, but that he acted against a person wholly unconnected to himself. Likewise, his marriage to Jocasta occurred without intent to commit incest by either party. Is it then a crime? As is so often the case in Sophocles' poetry, the answer is both yes and no. From the outset, Oedipus insists that he is pure (καθαρός) under the law (νόμῳ) on the basis of his ignorance.<sup>165</sup> As the

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<sup>165</sup> *OC* 548

argument unfolds, he is vindicated on ethical grounds by his involuntary participation in the deeds that he describes as suffered (πεπονθότα) rather than perpetuated (δεδρακότα). He does, however, carry with him from Thebes the ritual pollution from the inarguable atrocities that he passively committed.<sup>166</sup>

When Oedipus arrives at Colonus, the shocking tale that precedes him strikes fear in the Chorus, whose initial response is to send him swiftly on his way, before contact with the polluted man brings grief to their people.<sup>167</sup> Williams finds that Oedipus' argument for his innocence imparts his own understanding of his life to the Chorus, overcoming their initial urge to reject him.<sup>168</sup> "Between the time when the Chorus stops thinking of him exclusively as polluted and before they come to see him as a chthonic power, they sustain ordinary human relations with him, relations shaped, in particular, by pity."<sup>169</sup> This emotion is predicated on the belief that Oedipus is not actively responsible for the outcomes he enabled, despite the unchangeable fact that he was the instrument that carried them out. His civic acceptance is likewise based on an acknowledgement of his passivity, together with the ritual purification that addresses his spiritual pollution.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Notably, the oracle in *OT* attributes no part of the city's pollution to the crime of incest. Instead, it is the miasma resulting from Laius' murder that explicitly drives the action of the play as the city suffers on account of the unavenged murder of their king. (*OT* 95-107) The later revelation of incest adds to the horror, but is not a driving factor of the play. This equation is reversed in *OC*, where the parricide elicits less consternation than Oedipus' marriage and procreation with Jocasta.

<sup>167</sup> *OC* 233-36 The Chorus fears that they will repay (ἀντιδίδωσιν) a debt of suffering (πόνον) to the gods on account of Oedipus' presence among them.

<sup>168</sup> Williams 1993: 68-71

<sup>169</sup> Williams 1993: 71 Bernard Williams is right to call attention to the role of pity in the Chorus' altered response to Oedipus, but he errs in failing to mention that it is Antigone who first beseeches the Chorus on Oedipus' behalf and elicits their pity. (*OC* 237-53)

<sup>170</sup> These two factors are necessarily linked. Oedipus' passive role in his parricide and incest is the basis of his eligibility for purification. The city must willingly accept a candidate for purification in order for the rites to take place. This principle plays out in *OC* when the Chorus renders crucial assistance by articulating the careful steps by which Ismene will propitiate Oedipus to the Eumenides. (*OC* 461-62) Before any rites of purification can take place, the citizens first are satisfied of Oedipus' legal and moral innocence, both of his earlier crimes and his present act of trespass in the sacred grove. (*OC* 292-95)

Although he is reticent to discuss his past actions, Oedipus never attempts to deny what he has done. He does, however, seek to reframe his deeds by insisting that they were something that happened to him, rather than something that he set in motion. In this sense, he is not the author of his actions, and as such ought not to be condemned for them. So great is the contrast between Oedipus' self-condemnation in *OT* and his determined declaration of innocence in *OC*, that "it has sometimes been supposed that the doctrine of pollution had undergone a modification in the intervening years, to take account of motive."<sup>171</sup> Against this, Parker points out the relevance of intention to culpability was known in Athens at least since Draco's code was written. In Sophocles' Athens then, the determination of innocence in the event of an unwilling or ignorant action would hardly have been a new idea. Beyond his primary defense, which applies evenly to both of his crimes, Oedipus extends his argument in regards to his father's death beyond ignorance of his parentage to claim that when he struck Laius down, he acted in self-defence:

ἔν γάρ μ' ἄμειψαι μούνον ὦν σ' ἀνιστορῶ.  
 εἴ τις σέ τὸν δίκαιον αὐτίκ' ἐνθάδε  
 κτεῖνοι παραστάς, πότερα πυνθάνοι' ἂν εἰ  
 πατήρ σ' ὁ καίνων ἢ τίνοι' ἂν εὐθέως;  
 δοκῶ μέν, εἵπερ ζῆν φιλεῖς, τὸν αἴτιον  
 τίνοι' ἂν, οὐδὲ τοῦνδικον περιβλέποις.

Answer this one thing that I ask.  
 If someone stood beside you – you, the just man! –  
 and tried to kill you here and now, would you ask if  
 the killer was your father, or repay him straightaway?  
 I think that if you love to live you would repay the man who is to blame,<sup>172</sup>  
 not look round about for what was just. (991-96)

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<sup>171</sup> Parker 1983: 320

<sup>172</sup> Note that Oedipus identifies the man who initiated the attack as the blameworthy party (τὸν αἴτιον). In this sense Laius set his own demise in motion.

It may at first seem superfluous that Oedipus adds the argument of self-defense to his ignorance of Laius' identity. As he stipulates, a parricide committed in ignorance of the victim's relation cannot be legally or ethically judged a parricide as such. It can, however, still be deemed a murder when a young traveler strikes down his elder along the road. It is important, then, that Oedipus is vindicated both from the guilt of parricide and from the ordinary act of murder. His entanglement with Jocasta, though it inspires even greater horror, is less complex in this way. In that case, the question of his guilt rests entirely on the maternal relationship, not on the act of marriage itself. As for his father's death, Oedipus goes so far as to argue that self-defence would exempt him from moral censure even had he known the identity of the man he struck down and all its attendant implications:

καίτοι πῶς ἐγὼ κακὸς φύσιν,  
 ὅστις παθῶν μὲν ἀντέδρων, ὥστ' εἰ φρονῶν  
 ἔπρασσον, οὐδ' ἂν ᾧδ' ἐγινόμην κακός;  
 νῦν δ' οὐδὲν εἰδὼς ἰκόμην ἴν' ἰκόμην,  
 ὕφ' ᾧν δ' ἔπασχον, εἰδότεων ἀπωλλύμην.

Yet how am I wicked by nature?  
 I who gave in return what I suffered, so that even if  
 I had acted consciously, even then I would not be wicked.<sup>173</sup>  
 In fact, I arrived at that place without knowing it,  
 having suffered by those who destroyed me knowingly. (270-74)

Even so, the foundation of Oedipus' claim is built time and again on the premise that he acted in ignorance, and thereby was as unwilling as he was unknowing. In response to

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<sup>173</sup> Aristotle concurs that Oedipus is not wicked to slay his father in ignorance, for "wickedness is voluntary". (*NE* 1113b16) It is questionable, however, whether the measure of compulsion involved in self-defence would be sufficient to exonerate him alone. "Some acts, perhaps, we cannot be forced to do, but ought rather to face death after the most fearful sufferings." (*NE* 1110a26-27) Yet in Oedipus' case this distinction is hypothetical. He was in fact ignorant of Laius' identity and his ignorance is the primary basis of his defence.

this, it is often suggested that a man who lives under an oracle that he will kill his father and marry his mother ought to prudently refrain from engaging thusly with any members of the older generation whatsoever. Proponents of this belief seek to hold Oedipus fully accountable for such information as is within his power to know, but while Oedipus is conscious of what he knows, he fails to take account for what he does not know. That is to say, he knows that he is fated to marry his mother, but he does not know that he is ignorant of his mother's true identity. Oedipus tacitly points towards this when he argues that the abrupt circumstances of his conflict with Laius were hardly conducive to an investigation of possible blood ties.

The application of this principle is twofold: first, that the throes of violent confrontation at the crossroads left no time to consider the identity of the older man, and second, that Oedipus did not go abroad to find his parents, but to get clear of them. Not only is Oedipus ignorant of his Theban heritage, he is ignorant that his parents are any other than the royal heads of Corinth.<sup>174</sup> Oedipus wrongly believes that he is able to act effectively to evade the deeply undesirable outcome of Apollo's oracle because he mistakes the natural limits of his agency, and the necessary corollary of his passivity. The second application of Oedipus' claim answers the frequent question of why, given the sedate pace of marriage proceedings in comparison with sudden combat, Oedipus also failed to question Jocasta's identity. Simply put, he did not know what he did not know. In this way, Oedipus was always a passive recipient of his fate, though his awareness of

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<sup>174</sup> The rumor of illegitimate birth that drove Oedipus to the Delphic Oracle in *OT* is elided in *OC*, (even by Creon, who holds Oedipus to blame for Laius' murder and is not persuaded by Oedipus' argument for his innocence). As such, the detail of the rumour need not exist in the world Sophocles creates for *OC*. In any case, the rumour of *OT*, which the oracle did not confirm, implies cuckoldry rather than adoption from a foreign city.



this is belated. It is only through this awareness and acceptance of his passivity that he is able to submit to the mediations and counsel of his friends through which his own freedom is achieved.

ἤνεγκον κακότατ', ὦ ξένοι, ἤνεγκον ἐκὼν μὲν,  
θεὸς ἴστω,  
τούτων δ' ἀυθαίρετον οὐδέν...  
κακᾶ μ' εὐνᾶ πόλις οὐδὲν ἴδριν  
γάμων ἐνέδησεν ἅπα.

I bore misery, strangers, bore it against my will,  
may the god be my witness!  
None of these things was chosen freely...  
though I knew nothing, the city bound me by an evil bed  
to a marriage that was my ruin. (521-26)

Some scholars take these lines to mean that Oedipus holds the city at fault for his crimes, but their defense would be the same as his own. If Oedipus is an unwilling participant in his incestuous marriage because he is unaware that the woman whom he marries is his mother, then the city of Thebes is equally unwilling in their advocacy of the marriage, since they are equally ignorant of the biological relation between the bride and groom.<sup>175</sup> Wilson believes that Oedipus' attempt to blame Thebes for his marriage to Jocasta is undermined by his description of the city as a rueful gift that he received, arguing that the supposedly coerced marriage does not square with his willing acceptance of Theban rule.<sup>176</sup> A more likely interpretation of Oedipus' assertion that the city bound him is that

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<sup>175</sup> When Oedipus claims that his marriage to Jocasta was not chosen freely (αὐθαίρετον), he speaks of his unwilling participation in the crime of incest, not to imply that the Thebans marched him to the marriage bed at spear point.

<sup>176</sup> Wilson writes, "The only possible resolution is, of course, that Oedipus is compelled to marry Jocasta in order to become the king of Thebes. This solution does not absolve Oedipus, for nothing compels him to take the Theban kingship, beyond his own desire; his marriage to Jocasta, then, is simply a calculated act to assist him in obtaining that desire." (Wilson 1997: 150)

it was the Thebans who set the marriage between mother and son in motion, not that he was forced into marriage by compulsion. If force enters into the equation at all, it can only be in the sense of one who aims to achieve something noble, for we are given no indication that Oedipus was compelled to marry Jocasta by fear of a greater evil or physical coercion. In any case, it does emphasize that Oedipus' road to incest was not wholly of his own making or the result of a particular end that he sought. In essence, Oedipus had no premeditated desire to slay a man at the crossroads and marry his widow, whether or not he knew of their prior connection to himself or even to each other.

In recent scholarship, the substance of Oedipus' defense is not without critics. Daniels and Scully argue that Oedipus has "let wishful thinking guild his memory".<sup>177</sup> They reject the notion that Oedipus acted to preserve his life, calling on the account of Laius' death in OT as evidence that his "berserk response" was made in defense of "macho pride".<sup>178</sup> For Wilson, Oedipus' arguments are unstable, but possess sufficient intensity to impress the play's audience with an emotional acceptance of his claims, if not an intellectual one.<sup>179</sup> Yet rather than accept these voices as authoritative, it is helpful to consider Oedipus' rhetoric in light of Aristotle's reasoned arguments on the subject of voluntary and involuntary action.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that voluntary feelings and actions are praised and blamed, while the involuntary ones are pardoned and at times even pitied.<sup>180</sup>

A man who acts unwillingly does not bear equal blame for his actions as he who acts

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<sup>177</sup> Daniels and Scully 1996: 79 Among the other problematic aspects of their argument, Daniels and Scully err in treating *OT* and *OC* as a continuous whole. This particular issue is examined in Appendix A.

<sup>178</sup> Daniels and Scully 1996: 78

<sup>179</sup> Wilson 1997: 153

<sup>180</sup> *NE* 1110a20-33

according to his own volition.<sup>181</sup> It is therefore necessary to determine the proper limits of the voluntary and the involuntary in any consideration of virtue or of guilt.<sup>182</sup> What then constitutes an unwilling action? For Aristotle, this includes things that come about either through compulsion or through ignorance.<sup>183</sup> By contrast, what is voluntary has its origin in the agent himself, at such a time when he is aware not only of what he is doing, but of the attendant circumstances. While Oedipus intended to strike Laius, he was unaware that the man whom he struck was his father. By this measure, then, the parricide was committed involuntarily.<sup>184</sup>

Another way of framing the relation between the guilt of a willing act and the innocence of an unwilling one is as the difference between choice and necessity, which Aristotle defines in *Metaphysics* as that which cannot be otherwise.<sup>185</sup> A chosen action includes the possibility both of being and not-being, whereas necessity admits of only one possible outcome. As Oedipus protests, the oracle prophesied Laius' death at the hand of his own son before Oedipus was born or even begotten.<sup>186</sup> It is foolish to assume that divinely ordained fate is something that can be escaped. Oedipus erred in supposing that he might outrun his doom through his self-imposed exile from Corinth, an action that fulfilled rather than forestalled his downfall. By the same measure, it is foolish for critics

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<sup>181</sup> While this has obvious ethical implications, Aristotle's comment that his discussion will prove useful for legislators further highlights the civic implications outside the ethical sphere of an actor's intent as well as his action.

<sup>182</sup> *NE* 1109b30-34

<sup>183</sup> Aristotle clarifies that actions done through spirit or through appetitive desire cannot be considered involuntary, on the grounds that this would include all actions of both animals and children. Moreover, the irrational feelings of spirit and appetite are no less a part of human nature than calculated judgements, all of which may err and miss the mark. (*NE* 1111a24-27)

<sup>184</sup> Oedipus' claim of self-defence strengthens his argument of unwillingness, but pales if divorced from his state of ignorance.

<sup>185</sup> *Met* 1046b2-7

<sup>186</sup> *OC* 969-73

to suppose that he might indeed have evaded incest and parricide if he had acted otherwise.<sup>187</sup> There is no sense of contingency in Apollo's oracle, but a clear-sighted view of what will emerge as time unfolds. The day of Laius' death is the limit of his portion, only Zeus has the power to overstep these bounds.<sup>188</sup> This is further supported by Antigone's words to the Chorus, which indicate the inevitability in human outcomes ordained by the gods:<sup>189</sup>

ἀλλ' ἴτε, νεύσατε τὰν ἀδόκητον χάριν:  
 πρὸς σ' ὅ τι σοι φίλον οἴκοθεν ἄντομαι,  
 ἢ τέκνον, ἢ λέχος, ἢ χρέος, ἢ θεός:  
 οὐ γὰρ ἴδοις ἄν ἀθρῶν βροτὸν ὅστις ἄν,  
 εἰ θεὸς ἄγοι,  
 ἐκφυγεῖν δύναιτο.

Come, grant us this unexpected favour,  
 I entreat you by anything that you hold dear –  
 child, marriage-bed, property or god.  
 For you will not see any mortal whom,  
 if a god leads him,  
 has the power to escape. (248-53)<sup>190</sup>

<sup>187</sup> The desire to assign moral blame to tragic heroes seems to be rooted in a popular misreading of Aristotle's *Poetics*. While Aristotle himself does not say that the tragic hero's *hamartia* is a moral flaw, it is often misconstrued as such. See Dodds 1966: 39-40 for his definition of *hamartia* as an act committed in ignorance. Dodds argues that a hero of reprehensible character would elicit none of the pity and fear that Aristotle ascribes to a tragic audience.

<sup>188</sup> See Burkert 1985: 129-30 for the immutability of a man's fate (μοῖρα).

<sup>189</sup> Oedipus likewise references the gods when he faults Creon's condemnation of his unwilling deeds: ὦ λῆμ' ἀναιδές, τοῦ καθυβρίζειν δοκεῖς, πότερον ἐμοῦ γέροντος, ἢ σαυτοῦ, τόδε; ὅστις φόνους μοι καὶ γάμους καὶ συμφορὰς τοῦ σοῦ διῆκας στόματος, ἅς ἐγὼ τάλας ἤνεγκον ἄκων: θεοῖς γὰρ ἦν οὕτω φίλον, τάχ' ἄν τι μηνίουσιν ἐς γένος πάλαι. "Shameless audacity! Whose old age do you think you are outraging, mine or yours, by casting from your lips against me murders, marriages and those appalling circumstances that I bore against my will? So it was pleasing to the gods, perhaps in ancient wrath against my kin." (*OC* 960-65) The idea that Oedipus' family line (γένος) is long since cursed by the gods adds to his argument that he himself did not determine his course.

<sup>190</sup> Here Antigone introduces the idea that culpability does not negate the possibility of grace. She asks the elders of Colonus to see in Oedipus what Theseus does, that he, like them, is a mortal who has no less share in tomorrow than they. In an earlier example, Ajax struggles with himself in an internal ἀγών over his inability to reconcile himself with the atrocities he committed in a night of divinely induced madness. As with Oedipus and Philoctetes, Ajax is alienated from his community by the fallout of his actions, but for Ajax, the external mediation that effects his reconciliation comes after his death, when his great rival Odysseus intervenes to secure him an honourable burial. Odysseus is well familiar with the details of Ajax' mad behaviour, just as Theseus is with Oedipus' sordid past, but both men are able to recognize that the

Her plea invites the question whether any mortal is truly responsible for his actions, or whether his actions are entirely determined on his behalf by the unassailable necessity of divine dicta. If what the gods have spoken is irrevocable and unavoidable, then is Olympus the locus of control for all the deeds of men? Dodds attributes this false binary to modern thinking, which assumes that determinism and free-will are mutually exclusive, for in Greek thought, the acknowledgement of divine ordination does not negate the freedom of the agent within the framework of his allotted portion:

... fifth-century Greeks did not think in these terms any more than Homer did: the debate about determinism is a creation of Hellenistic thought. Homeric heroes have their predetermined 'portion of life' (*moira*); they must die on their 'appointed day' (*aisimon emar*); but it never occurs to the poet or his audience that this prevents them from being free agents... Neither in Homer nor in Sophocles does divine foreknowledge of events imply that all human actions are predetermined.<sup>191</sup>

It is possible, then, to acknowledge the immutability of a man's destiny, while still recognizing his responsibility for the acts he knowingly commits. This consideration comes once again to the fore in Oedipus' conflict with Polyneices. The primary question of culpability in *OC* is doubtless the headline-grabbing status of his parricide and incest, but quite aside from the crimes that Oedipus committed prior to the action of the play, there are two ways in which Oedipus may be said to transgress during the course of *OC*. The first, which has already been discussed, is his trespass on ground sacred to the

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intrinsic worth of their ill-fated counterpart is no less than their own, despite the wrongs committed. (*OC* 565-568 and *Ai* 120-126) Although Ajax is not reconciled to his community in life, the honour that he receives in death, both from his peers and eventually as an Athenian cult hero, is reflective of Ajax' aggregate virtue as a warrior and a leader of men, rather than the shameful violence that he committed in ignorance against a helpless herd of cattle.

<sup>191</sup> Dodds 1966: 42 This is drawn from Dodd's refutation of common errors in the interpretation of *OT*, but the essence of his argument is equally applicable to other texts.

Eumenides. The second involves Oedipus' curse upon his two sons.<sup>192</sup> Although the strife between Polyneices and Eteocles has already set their civil war into motion, to what extent is Oedipus to blame for their outcomes?<sup>193</sup> Although their shared demise lies outside the scope of the action, Oedipus' twice-repeated curse clearly delineates a future of kindred bloodshed, both in Oedipus' confrontation with his first born, and when he responds to Ismene's news that both of his sons have valued the throne above their father:

ἀλλ' οἱ θεοὶ σφιν μήτε τὴν πεπρωμένην  
 ἔριν κατασβέσειαν, ἔν τ' ἐμοὶ τέλος  
 αὐτοῖν γένοιτο τῆσδε τῆς μάχης πέρι,  
 ἧς νῦν ἔχονται κάπαναίρονται δόρυ:  
 ὡς οὔτ' ἂν ὃς νῦν σκῆπτρα καὶ θρόνους ἔχει  
 μείνειεν, οὔτ' ἂν οὐξεληλυθὼς πάλιν  
 ἔλθοι ποτ' αὔθις.

Then may the gods never quench their  
 fated strife, and may the outcome for both of them  
 come to depend on me in this battle that they are  
 now set on and raising their spears high;  
 then neither will the one who now holds the scepter  
 and the throne survive, nor will  
 the one in exile ever return. (421-427)

What rankles in particular with the first utterance of his curse is his express desire that their murderous outcome may depend upon him. The propriety of his sentiment is dependent on the negation of his own kin relation to them and his own status as a burgeoning cult-hero, the question that remains is to what extent Oedipus is responsible for his sons' fate. It cannot be said that he is ignorant of the civil strife and blood

<sup>192</sup> For Wilson, the question of Oedipus guilt or innocence in *OC* is closely allied with Oedipus' prophetic faculty, as his mantic power suggests (Wilson 1997: 144)

<sup>193</sup> Mulroy 2015: xxxiv Mulroy finds that the curses brought on by Oedipus' overblown anger make Eteocles and Polyneices' mutual slaughter inevitable, with the result that "their blood too is on his hands". For Mulroy, Oedipus' culpability in his sons' demise arises from the same emotional incontinence that defines Oedipus' behavior in *OT*, signaling that the character neither evolves between the two plays, nor during the action of *OC*.

pollution that will accompany their deaths, nor is he unwilling to speak out against them. Far from it, the prophetic utterance is a pure expression of Oedipus' will, just as a divine oracle expresses the will of the god. The proper question then, is whether the first cause of Polyneices' and Eteocles' future actions is found in their father's prophecy or within another source.

In some ways, this question parallels scholars' musings over whether Oedipus could ever have escaped his own allotted fate. The difference, however, is twofold. As Oedipus demonstrates, he himself fell under the sway of force and more particularly of ignorance when he enacted the fulfillment of Apollo's oracle. Conversely, his sons participate of their own volition. They are perfectly well aware of their mutual identity and the inevitable consequences of their war making. Neither side seeks Oedipus' aid in forestalling the bloodshed, only in supporting their preferred result. Polyneices claims that it is impossible for him to turn back, but his true concern is that showing timidity would prevent him from leading the same collaborative force against Thebes in the future.<sup>194</sup> Oedipus was an unwilling participant in parricide and incest; Eteocles and Polyneices, though they do not will their own destruction, are eager to accomplish the destruction of the other. The second difference between father and sons is one of timing. The prophetic revelation of Oedipus' fate comes long before any of his own action contributed to its realization. His sons, however, are already active participants in their own demise when their father speaks his curse against them. How then do we understand Oedipus' prophecy as shaping the future?<sup>195</sup> Polyneices himself never denies the power

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<sup>194</sup> *OC* 1418-19

<sup>195</sup> Knox writes that in this moment Oedipus "both sees and determines the future". (Knox 1964: 160) See also Bushnell 1988: 98, "[prophecy] is thought not just to represent but to make the future". *Antigone*

of what his father has spoken, but instead blames Oedipus and his Ἐπινώες for making the road ahead of him ill-fated.<sup>196</sup> Antigone recognizes the prophetic nature of Oedipus' utterance, but admonishes her brother not to knowingly fulfill the prophecy by destroying both the city of Thebes and himself.<sup>197</sup> In doing so, she recognizes what Polyneices does not, that foreknowledge of his doom does not remove his agency, the fulfillment of which he participates in willingly. In this sense, Oedipus is no more or less to blame for his sons' mutual slaughter than Apollo is for Oedipus' transgressions that his oracle foretold.

Although any discussion of Oedipus' culpability is certain to center on the infamous crimes of his youth that occurred long before either of Sophocles' plays, a fresh example of unwilling transgression opens the action of *OC* when Oedipus and Antigone unwittingly trespass the sacred precinct of the Eumenides. Given Oedipus' preexisting knowledge that he would end his life in this very place, it is entirely likely that he would not have shrunk back from it if he had known. Even so, the crime of trespass that Oedipus passively commits requires active steps for propitiation, affirming the principle that governs Oedipus' relation to his prior crimes.

A similar equation occurs for Philoctetes, who is left behind to suffer alone on the island of Lemnos when his festering wound, together with his cries of agony, proved too much for his fellow Argives as they sailed toward Troy. Like Oedipus, Philoctetes trespassed without knowledge and without malice on ground sacred to a goddess. Like Oedipus, Philoctetes is fated to suffer physical infirmity and alienation from community

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confirms Oedipus speech as prophetic at 1425 when she reproaches Polyneices for ceding without a struggle to the doom his father has prophesied (μαντεύμαθ'), and again at 1428, referring to his words as oracles (ἐθέσπισεν).

<sup>196</sup> *OC* 1432-34

<sup>197</sup> *OC* 1416-17



as the result of a religious transgression.<sup>198</sup> Both men are helpless to effect any restoration on their own behalf; both men are politically reintegrated with the help of external mediation before going on toward prophesied glory.<sup>199</sup> Neither can be described as a willing participant in the crime, but both must accept the consequences of their unwilling action nonetheless. Yet in Philoctetes' case, no one suggests either on stage or in the literary criticism that his unknowing trespass reflects negatively on his character or on his personal eligibility for rehabilitation. Although he is blighted by a god, the cause of Philoctetes' social estrangement is a physical rather than an ethical repulsion that his condition elicits from his community, and as such is more easily remedied.

Oedipus, however, although innocent of his crimes, bears a lingering stain that manifests in his reticence to embrace Theseus. In terms of his relation to Athens, his city of refuge makes no attempt to determine Oedipus' measure of guilt through a formal trial. Theseus, who accepts Oedipus as a friend and fellow citizen never questions the ethical status of Oedipus' actions. Though the Chorus has occasional consternation over the possible consequences of miasma,<sup>200</sup> it is enough for Theseus that Oedipus is a suppliant of the Eumenides, who have already been propitiated when Theseus arrives on the scene.

Yet despite his earlier propitiation of the Eumenides and despite his restoration to

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<sup>198</sup> *Phil* 5-11, 191-94, 265-70 Philoctetes suffered a poisonous snake bite when he inadvertently trespassed on Chryse's sacred ground as the Argive fleet journeyed to Troy. Unable to sacrifice amid his ceaseless howls of pain, his friends abandoned him on the deserted isle of Lemnos.

<sup>199</sup> και σοί, σάφ' ἴσθι, τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν, ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον. ἐλθὼν δὲ σὺν τῷδ' ἀνδρὶ πρὸς τὸ Τρωικὸν πόλισμα, πρῶτον μὲν νόσου παύσει λυγρᾶς, ἀρετῇ τε πρῶτος ἐκκριθεὶς στρατεύματος, Πάριν μὲν, ὃς τῶνδ' αἴτιος κακῶν ἔφυ, τόξοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖσι νοσφιεῖς βίου, πέρσεις τε Τροίαν, σκῦλά τ' εἰς μέλαθρα σὰ πέμψεις, ἀριστεῖ' ἐκλαβὼν στρατεύματος, Ποίαντι πατρὶ πρὸς πάτρας Οἴτης πλάκα. "And to you, know clearly, it is owed to experience this: out of these troubles to make your life renowned. When you go with this man to the Trojan city, first you will be cured from your painful disease, then, chosen as first among the army for your valour, you will rob Paris, who started these troubles of his life with my bow. You will sack Troy and you will send spoils to your home that you will have won from the army for your excellence." (*Phil* 1421-30)

<sup>200</sup> *OC* 233-36 and *OC* 1479-84 When the thunder calls, the Chorus again expresses worry over the kind of favour (*χάρις*) that Zeus will repay them for harbouring Oedipus.

the political community, Oedipus shrinks back from his initial impulse to touch Theseus, decrying the impulse of a man born to misery to touch one so untainted.<sup>201</sup> This seems at first to conflict with Oedipus' vehement denial of Creon's accusation of his baseness.<sup>202</sup> If Oedipus is reconciled to the chthonic deities whose particular provenance encompasses his crimes of incest and kin-slaying, in what sense do his past actions interfere with his present eligibility for personal contact? For Parker, Theseus' silence serves as confirmation that Oedipus remains impure: "This was an opportunity for Sophocles' Theseus magnanimously to defy or deny the reality of pollution, but he did not take it. Though treating Oedipus with all possible generosity, he kept his distance."<sup>203</sup> He interprets this in contrast to Euripides' Theseus in *Heracles Mainomenos* who assures the stricken Heracles that he will gladly share in his suffering as he once did in his prosperity, for no pollution can pass from one friend to another.<sup>204</sup>

As the Greeks feared personal harm from contact with a polluted man, the most visible effect of pollution was generally the social isolation of the perpetrator and the shame that accompanied his ostracization. Parker links the experience of pollution with the shame of heroic disgrace, noting that Sophocles' Ajax reacts similarly to his shame as Oedipus of *OT* and Heracles of *HM* do to their religious pollution, "he spurns food and

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<sup>201</sup> *OC* 1132-38

<sup>202</sup> ἄλλ' ἔν γάρ οὖν ἔξοιδα, σὲ μὲν ἐκόντ' ἐμὲ κείνην τε ταῦτα δυσστομεῖν· ἐγὼ δὲ νιν ἄκων τ' ἔγημα φθέγγομαί τ' ἄκων τάδε. ἄλλ' οὐ γὰρ οὐτ' ἐν τοῖσδ' ἀλώσομαι κακὸς γάμοισιν οὔθ' οὐς αἰὲν ἐμφορεῖς σύ μοι φόνους πατρώους ἐξονειδίζων πικρῶς. "But one thing I know well, that you are willfully maligning me and her, while I both married her unwillingly, and am unwilling to speak these things. No, I will not be called base, not for this marriage or my father's murder, which you ever bring against me and so bitterly reproach." (*OC* 985-90)

<sup>203</sup> Parker 1983: 310

<sup>204</sup> τί μοι προσείων χεῖρα σημαίνεις φόνον; ὥς μὴ μύσος με σῶν βάλῃ προσφθεγμάτων; οὐδὲν μέλει μοι σὺν γε σοὶ πράσσειν κακῶς... οὐδεὶς ἀλάστῳ τῷ φίλοις ἐκ τῶν φίλων. "Why are you waving your hand at me to signal murder? So that I will not be polluted by greeting you? It is nothing to me to take part in your troubles...there is no plague that passes from one friend to another." (*HM* 218-1234)

drink, feels hated by both gods and men, could not look his father in the eye and devotes himself to night because he is ‘unworthy to look with profit on any god or man.’”<sup>205</sup> The disgraced man is equally alienated from his community by what he has done as his polluted counterparts. Although not every disgraced hero becomes so by an act that involves religious pollution, the visible result is similar. For Parker, this demonstrates that the immediate consequences of pollution for the perpetrator stem less from danger to his person than from social stigma. This is not to say that miasma is a social rather than a religious phenomenon. Yet while pollution is religious in origin, the entwinement of sacred beliefs with the civic structure means that what is sourced in one is often made manifest in the other. By consequence, the religious defilement must be addressed before the cleansed criminal can socially reintegrate.

Ritual cleansing marks the point at which the polluted man becomes acceptable to society once more. In Athenian law, a purification ritual would mark the end of a murderer’s exile together with his return to civic life, providing that the community accepts his supplication.<sup>206</sup> In answer to those who suggest that a ritual purification may have only civic and not religious efficacy, Parker rejects the notion that a *καθαρός*, or a purified criminal, is pure only in his exemption from legal punishment and not in a ritual sense, concluding that “this is too paradoxical to be readily accepted.”<sup>207</sup> In Oedipus’ case, his moral innocence has already been established, but there remains the delicate question of how thoroughly Oedipus’ ritual purification accomplishes the erasure of his pollution.

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<sup>205</sup> Parker 1983: 317 see also *Ai* 324,457-58, 462-65 and 397-400

<sup>206</sup> Parker 1983: 371, 387

<sup>207</sup> Parker 1983: 367

When Oedipus shrinks away from intimate contact with Theseus, his reawakened consciousness of his transgressions comes to the fore in a way that is often seen to conflict with his earlier protestations of blamelessness and his self-identification as sacred.<sup>208</sup> If Oedipus were still defiled, he would be ineligible to dwell once again among society, let alone in the house of the ruler, as Theseus freely offered. Clearly he has made peace with the chthonic deities who govern the intimate relationships of kinship and as such, is able to be restored to full participation both in the rituals of the οἶκος and the civic community. This does not, however, mean that his transgressions are removed from him as far as the east is from the west, nor are they cast into a sea of forgetfulness.<sup>209</sup> Oedipus is ritually purified to a sufficient extent that he is once again able to participate in the life of the πόλις, but to some extent his past deeds remain a part of his aggregate person.<sup>210</sup> Though beyond condemnation, Oedipus is still born of a cursed bloodline and the instrument of horrific crimes.

The contrast between the contrition that Oedipus displays before Theseus, in comparison with his bold defense before Creon and the Chorus, stems from two equally significant sources. In the first, as Oedipus' capacity for activity escalates from the point of his ἀγών with Creon, his awareness of his own passivity, the basis of his ethical innocence, is tempered by its juxtaposition with his active power. This by no means alters the bare fact of Oedipus' ignorance and unwilling participation in the parricide and incest, but it does point towards the capacity in which Oedipus nonetheless was an active

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<sup>208</sup> For Oedipus' defense of his innocence see *OC* 263-72 and *OC* 964-99. For his identification as sacred see *OC* 287.

<sup>209</sup> Psalm 103:12, Micah 7:19 That is to say, the Greek understanding of pollution and purification does not equate with any precision to the Judeo-Christian doctrine of sin and redemption.

<sup>210</sup> See Chapter VI n.190. Odysseus' understanding of Ajax as an aggregate of both his heroic and nefarious deeds, in which the former outweigh the latter.

participant in these. The issue is not whether he could have acted otherwise, or whether he suffered these deeds rather than perpetuated them; the issue is simply that they occurred. As we have seen, self-determination and passive submission to one's fate are compatible in Hellenic poetry.<sup>211</sup> Their co-presence in *OC* is made clear as Oedipus' regains his sense of agency. He does not contradict his prior assertion of blamelessness by recognizing the prudence in refraining from such an intimate act with Theseus, who is both the august ruler of the land and portrayed in *OC* as unambiguously virtuous.

Another impetus of the seeming incongruence is the sharply disparate perspectives of his interlocutors. Neither Creon nor the Chorus has any appreciation for Oedipus' nuanced ethical status beyond their horror at his deeds. Oedipus' protests against their imbalanced judgments provide a needed corrective. At the opposite extreme of the pendulum, Theseus speaks no condemnation against Oedipus, neither when he welcomes him as a friend and citizen, nor when Oedipus approaches him in joyful gratitude upon his reunion with Ismene and Antigone. Yet for all of his virtue, Theseus does not curb his idealism in *OC* with a counterbalancing restraint, giving no indication that he would object to Oedipus' original impulse to take him by the hand, kiss him and caress his face.<sup>212</sup> Oedipus' sudden pang of regret provides a counterbalance of realism to Theseus' unbounded ideals in an opposite yet complementary way to the overzealous condemnation of Creon and the Chorus.

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<sup>211</sup> See Chapter VI n.191

<sup>212</sup> See *OC* 1130-31. For the pure, all things are pure. Oedipus' desire to safeguard the untainted Theseus from his wretchedness is contrasted with Theseus' guileless invitation for Oedipus to dwell with him in his own home (*OC* 638-40). Nor can Theseus' faultless piety foresee how it would be problematic for Oedipus to return to Thebes. (*OC* 590)

As a complement to the above argument, a philosophical perspective worth considering calls into question whether Oedipus' show of contrition is rightly read as an indication of guilt. For Parker, Oedipus' shame in Theseus' presence is a mark of his ongoing social experience of pollution, albeit lessened by the passage of time,<sup>213</sup> but for Aristotle, this underscores his involuntary participation, for he was not only ignorant of the attendant circumstances, but grieves continually for the unintended outcome of his actions. When an act is suffered by force or by ignorance, there is a further distinction in the degree of volition based on the contrition that an agent experiences for his unwilling actions. "Everything done through ignorance is non-voluntary, but what is involuntary also causes pain and regret; for the person who acted through ignorance, and is not upset in the slightest by what he has done, has not acted voluntarily, in that he did not know what he was doing, nor again involuntarily, in that he is not pained."<sup>214</sup> Aristotle concludes that he who regrets his ignorant actions is an involuntary agent, while he who suffers no regret is a non-voluntary agent, for although he did not will the acts he committed in ignorance, neither does he will that they should be otherwise. While the earlier scenes are preoccupied with Oedipus' need to assert his innocence, this moment of compunction allows for further justification of the pity and pardon that Theseus bestows.<sup>215</sup> Oedipus' pain and regret demonstrate a noble soul that would have acted

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<sup>213</sup> Robert Parker finds that in the intervening years since the discovery of his transgressions, Oedipus "has come to terms with his deeds by clearly formulating his own innocence. His self-aborrence, though not destroyed, has been greatly reduced, and so naturally also his sense of personal pollution." (Parker 1983: 320) This, however, does not address what factors beyond the passage of time contributed to an assuagement of pollution.

<sup>214</sup> Τὸ δὲ δι' ἄγνοιαν οὐχ ἐκούσιον μὲν ἅπαν ἐστίν, ἀκούσιον δὲ τὸ ἐπίλυπον καὶ ἐν μεταμελείᾳ· ὁ γὰρ δι' ἄγνοιαν πράξας ὅτιοῦν, μηδὲν τι δυσχεραίνων ἐπὶ τῇ πράξει, ἐκὼν μὲν οὐ πέπραχεν, ὃ γε μὴ ἦδει, οὐδ' αὖ ἄκων, μὴ λυπούμενός γε. (NE 1110b16-21)

<sup>215</sup> NE 1111a1 Aristotle specifies that pity and pardon depend on involuntary action, which he distinguishes from non-voluntary action in the previous passage.

otherwise with knowledge of particulars; his regret does not negate, but confirms, Theseus' prior assessment of Oedipus' nobility.

Despite the frequent attention it receives in the dialogue, there is no critical consensus as to what extent Oedipus' guilt is important to the eventual outcome of the play. Are the gods rewarding Oedipus for unjust suffering as Job is rewarded in Hebrew scripture?<sup>216</sup> Ismene seems to say so when she arrives with word of Apollo's oracle: "Before the gods destroyed you; now they raise you upright."<sup>217</sup> Yet on second consideration, there is nothing in her words to suggest that Oedipus' eventual daimonhood is in any way *quid pro quo* for his tribulations in a transactional sense. Scholars who favour a narrative of divine compensation take this line as evidence of the same, but there is no necessary causal connection between hardship and blessing. Unless one is already looking for it, there is no need to find more in Ismene's words than an elegant contrast.

Ahrens Dorf frames Oedipus' anticipation of divine reward as an expectation of his self-perceived just deserts. By this interpretation, Oedipus believes that the gods must necessarily render compensation to him for the egregious injustice of his sufferings, but this does not make it clear why the gods must make Oedipus whole for crimes against him that Ahrens Dorf attributes to Oedipus' parents, brother-in-law and sons.<sup>218</sup> However deliberate the abuse and neglect committed by Oedipus' former φίλοι may be, there is no

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<sup>216</sup> Job is the paradigmatic example in the Western tradition of an innocent man who suffered greatly at the whim of heaven and was ultimately rewarded in excess of what he lost. Aside from the overt differences in the theological context of each story, there is no sense in which Job participated in his downfall, or that his restoration to wealth and social position was in any way a precursor to divinization.

<sup>217</sup> *OC* 394

<sup>218</sup> Oedipus references his parents' attempt to destroy him as a baby at 273-74, an act they engaged in knowingly. Similarly, Creon and Oedipus' sons acted knowingly when they exiled him from Thebes and failed to provide for his basic sustenance. See *OC* 340-45, 440-50, 1355-66.

necessity for these wrongs to be balanced by divine reward.<sup>219</sup> In an effort to undermine what he views as Oedipus' central thesis "that the desire for self-preservation is compelling to excuse his own crimes",<sup>220</sup> Ahrensdorf argues that Oedipus fails to allow for a similar motivation behind Laius, Creon and Polyneices' respective crimes against him. For Ahrensdorf, this substantiates his own thesis that the action of *OC* is in essence a rejection of reason in favour of blind, religious anti-rationalism.<sup>221</sup> The fundamental error in this line of argument is that it mistakes Oedipus' protestations of innocence as based primarily on the issue of self-preservation that in fact is only tangential to his central assertion that his crimes were committed unwillingly. It is on this basis that he denies legal or ethical culpability for his actions and on this basis that he insists on the culpability of his former φίλοĩ.

Nor is an unimpeachable record necessary to make Oedipus' eligible for heroization. It would be terribly convenient to resolve every question of culpability by claiming that Oedipus' innocence is attested by his heroic status at the end of *OC*. This, however, is predicated on the mistaken idea that cult heroes are necessarily virtuous; yet a hero need not be blameless. Other cult heroes have problematic character traits, or

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<sup>219</sup> Peter J. Ahrensdorf believes that Polyneices ought to be excused by the same metric that Oedipus applies to himself: self-preservation. If, he asks, Oedipus could kill his father to protect himself from harm, "then how can it be evil for Polyneices to send his father into exile in order to protect himself and his city from harm, especially if he thought that his sisters might care for him?" (Ahrensdorf 2009: 67). This analysis ignores the crucial distinction between Oedipus' ignorance of his father's identity and Polyneices familiarity with his. Further, the expectation that an unprotected sister might care for their father in exile demonstrates both an appalling lack of filial piety and a callous unconcern for the weighty burden this places on Antigone.

<sup>220</sup> Ahrensdorf 2009: 68

<sup>221</sup> Ahrensdorf 2009: 82 Ahrensdorf credits his general analysis to Nietzsche. (Nietzsche 1967: 42, 68-9) "Indeed, the myth seems to wish to whisper to us that wisdom, particularly Dionysian wisdom, is an unnatural abomination; that he who by means of his knowledge plunges nature into the abyss of destruction must also suffer the dissolution of nature in his own person. 'The edge of wisdom turns against the wise: wisdom is a crime against nature': such horrible sentences are proclaimed to us by the myth" (Nietzsche 1967: 69).



committed serious crimes of their own volition during their lifetimes. Notably among these is Cleomedes of Astypalaea, who went mad with grief when stripped of a boxing prize for a match in which he had killed his opponent. In response, he pulled down the pillar supporting the roof of a local school, causing the deaths of sixty children. Even so, the priestess at Delphi bid the people to honour him as a hero.<sup>222</sup> In Oedipus' own sector of transgression, Athens hosted cults associated with more than one hero who in life was tried for involuntary homicide.<sup>223</sup>

What then is at stake in terms of Oedipus' culpability if not his status as a cult hero? To a great extent, his innocence is enmeshed with every step between the *prologos* and his apotheosis. Oedipus' ability to impact the Chorus' understanding of his crimes encouraged their cooperation with the propitiatory offering Ismene makes on his behalf. This offering in turn is essential to Theseus' acceptance of Oedipus as a friend and fellow citizen. His ruptured relations with Creon and Polyneices are likewise predicated on Oedipus' understanding of his innocence. The distinction between active and passive participation in the parricide and incest is central to Oedipus' claim that his former φίλοι are φίλοι to him no longer, for his justification makes their acts of radical censure against him abhorrent. As it is through his ἀγών with Creon and then Polyneices that Oedipus' agency is renewed, every stage between utter passivity and the full actualization of activity is somehow entwined with the question of Oedipus' guilt.

Despite his proven innocence, no argument can efface the permanent consequences of the events that took place. Though an unwilling participant and thereby beyond condemnation, Oedipus is still the unlucky man who killed his father and married

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<sup>222</sup> Pausanias 6.98

<sup>223</sup> Seaford 1994: 134, see also Kearns 1989: 155

his mother. That said, the mediations of his true φίλοι have restored Oedipus' relation to οἰκός and to πόλις, precipitating the conflicts through which he regains his agency, transitioning from pure passivity to a principle of active prophesy. The two seemingly incompatible elements of Oedipus' story are held together by the divine activity that binds together every opposition within itself. Zeus who "stands above all faction" and "holds everything in limits"<sup>224</sup> summons Oedipus with his thunderbolts; Hades, the chthonic Zeus, quakes the earth to hasten his coming,<sup>225</sup> and Poseidon, whose altar is the constant recipient of Theseus' piety, gathers both sky and earth to himself as he bridges between them both. Their unity is the undying root that holds together the Olympic and chthonic powers that hold sway in Colonus, and the duality of a blameless man who is nonetheless born into a curse.<sup>226</sup> Oedipus is both wretched and sacred, both innocent and stained, both burdened by the horror of his human transgressions and awaiting the thunder call to his divinization.

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<sup>224</sup> Burkert 1985: 130-31

<sup>225</sup> *OC* 1606

<sup>226</sup> Although Zeus is referred to less frequently in *OC* than other deities, for Doull, it is never inappropriate to read Zeus as the essence of a tragic narrative. As Doull writes, "This is the poetry of an ordered community where family and state are assumed to constitute one whole, where a theoria of their division is possible, a subsumption of it under their unity and a knowledge of this as the one true actuality into which pass the multiple divine and human purposes and fate or necessity itself. Of this actuality one poet will say 'And in all this action there is nothing that is not Zeus' (Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 1278)." (Doull 2003: 33)

## Chapter V: Unpacking Apotheosis

In the midst of Ismene and Antigone's grief over the loss of their beloved father, the Chorus exhorts them to cease from sorrow "since he resolved the end (τέλος) of his life happily (ὀλβίως)".<sup>227</sup> There are a number of ways in which this argument can be understood depending on how we interpret τέλος and ὀλβίως. Is the τέλος of Oedipus' life the chronological end or the purpose towards which the whole is oriented? For whom exactly is Oedipus' spectacular exit a happy ending? Certainly his life experience is far from blessed, but perhaps his sufferings point toward a propitious outcome, if not for himself, then in the broader context of his φίλοι.

Bowra interprets the Chorus' words as "the well-worn consolation that Oedipus has died happily and that his children must endure the common fate of the bereaved".<sup>228</sup> There is little, however, about their circumstance that is common. Few daughters must reconcile their personal loss with their father's elevation to daimonhood, and few among these are further denied knowledge of her loved one's tomb. Neither is there anything common about the manner of Oedipus' death. Rather, we are told that he was called forth as one who inspires awe (θαυμαστός), the same word that Aristotle uses in praise of justice, more θαυμαστός than the morning or the evening star.<sup>229</sup> As we have seen, the virtue of a cult hero is epitomized in helping friends and harming enemies, but not all

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<sup>227</sup> *OC* 1720-21 From a cultural standpoint, this is an odd admonition to grieving relatives, as "burial, and then the cult of the dead and the hero cult are all attended by weeping and lamentation". The embargo on mourning better resembles the sacrifices made to Olympic gods, at which "the *euphemia* must never be broken by any sound of lamentation" (Burkert 1985: 199). Theseus echoes the same sentiment at 1751-53, when he warns that when death comes as a kindness (χάρης), mourning will anger the gods.

<sup>228</sup> Bowra 1944: 345

<sup>229</sup> καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πολλάκις κρατίστη τῶν ἀρετῶν εἶναι δοκεῖ ἡ δικαιοσύνη, καὶ οὐθ' ἔσπερος οὐθ' ἑφῶς οὐτω θαυμαστός. (*NE* 1129b15)

critics are persuaded that Sophocles intends for his hero to accomplish these prophesied ends with an active consciousness. For those such as Mulroy and Wilson who hold agnostic views on a cult hero's status beyond the moment of his death, the benefit promised to Athens is fulfilled not by an active consciousness, but by the mystic power imbued in the hero's bones. For these scholars, the final moment of Oedipus' life is blessed simply because it marks the end of his sufferings. After years of protracted hardship, death itself is a happy event. Yet while Oedipus is eager to find his promised rest in the Eumenides' grove, his purpose there cannot be reduced to the cessation of his physical pain or even his social estrangement. In the moments prior to his death, the distinction between the gods and this singularly unlucky man is blurred as Oedipus is audibly summoned towards the apotheosis that will ensure the perpetual well-being of the community.

In an argument that further complicates the debate over a cult hero's consciousness, Winnington-Ingram criticizes Bowra's failure to include in his calculations "that the conception of a *heros* might itself be a mystery, itself discordant". He further notes, "neither Sophocles nor popular belief tells us much about the mental state of a *heros* after death", citing Linforth's paper as evidence of his own position.<sup>230</sup>

While he is right that little is stated explicitly in the play about the "mental state" Oedipus will experience as a cult hero, secondary evidence, both internal and external to the text,

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<sup>230</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1980: 255, citing Linforth 1951: 99 Linforth points out: "there is no hint that Oedipus regards the heroic state as something desirable in itself, or that he looks forward to the conscious enjoyment of worship and power. His eagerness to impart the secret to Theseus is due to his desire to pay his debt of gratitude for Theseus' generous hospitality (*OC* 1486-90, 1508-9)." (Linforth 1951: 99). In contrast, Bowra believes that in death "we can be sure that he will be conscious and active, rather as Protesilaus was believed to be able to punish the wrongdoer from the grave because the gods gave him special power." (Bowra 1944: 354). Sophocles could easily have clarified such particulars as these, but evidently chose not to do so, either due to his taste for ambiguity or a contemporary understanding of hero cults that required no further explanation.

supports the theory that a hero's power is not only in his sacred bones, but in his ongoing consciousness. Through his exposition of the common Greek belief in a hero's resurrection to divine life following their spectacular death, Nagy demonstrates the theological significance not only of the hero's physical death but also of a continued spiritual life. The post-mortem assistance they render to cult adherents consists not only of material assistance against enemies but of intellectual guidance.<sup>231</sup> Through the consultation of heroic oracles, a cult hero continued to impact human life from beyond the grave even as the hero himself was "activated" by the ritual worship of his cult. According to the "traditional mentality" of heroic veneration, "whenever they came back to life, cult heroes were endowed with a superhuman consciousness".<sup>232</sup> Wilson also follows Linforth in asserting, "nothing in the sources suggests that a recipient of cult worship 'had any gratification or enjoyment' of his position."<sup>233</sup> Yet as Nagy shows, the ritual act of consulting a hero's oracle is predicated on the belief that the hero's awareness is sufficiently dynamic both to hear and respond. Though he dies, Oedipus does not

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<sup>231</sup> A similar duality is suggested within the scope of *OC* in Oedipus' assistance to Athens. It is not only through his protective capacity as a cult hero that Oedipus renders aid, but also in the esoteric wisdom he confides in Theseus. As is fitting, the precise nature of this wisdom is left obscure. We are told only that careful adherence to it will ensure Athens' peaceful future. There is, however, a possible indication in Theseus' dual gesture of reverence to the earth below and the heavens above that the protection Athens will enjoy from future harm is founded in the undying root that holds the two sides together. The heirs to Theseus' rule of the city are destined to inherit their forebears' position of mediation between Athens and the divine, in keeping with the earlier conciliatory work performed by Theseus, Ismene and Antigone on Oedipus' behalf.

<sup>232</sup> Nagy 2013: 445. It is particularly notable that the power of the cult hero is "activated" by the theurgic attentions of his cult followers. For Oedipus, the power by which he will defend Athens is to be activated by the veneration of Theseus and the rulers who follow after him in a relation of ongoing reciprocity. Even on this level of divinity, agency is paired with receptivity.

<sup>233</sup> Wilson concludes that the "specifics of the workings of [Oedipus'] heroic cult, like the precise workings of the Trinity and the reconciliation of relativity to quantum theory, remain a mystery". (Wilson 1997: 185) Although the "precise workings" of any mystery cult are by definition a mystery to the uninitiated, if Wilson had consulted more recent voices than Linforth's 1951 paper, greater clarification than he admits of is readily available.

perish utterly, but is resurrected to a new mode of life. As Knox writes:

The gods of Sophoclean tragedy, the most remote and mysterious creation in all Greek literature, here show their respect for the hero in unmistakable terms; they gave Ajax his burial, Antigone her revenge, Electra her victory, Philoctetes his return to life – but to Oedipus, who suffered most and longest, they give, in the death he longed for, immortal life and power.<sup>234</sup>

The conflicting views are rooted, perhaps, in too narrow a definition of divinity.

In addition to the Olympians who enjoy top billing in myth and poetry, Attic Greeks worshipped a broad array of other divine beings.<sup>235</sup> Broadly speaking, they can be grouped under the banners of Olympian or chthonic, belonging either to the sky above or the earth below. This, of course, is not a perfect binary, as the divinities most associated with Colonus illustrate.<sup>236</sup> Bowra elides the distinction between the upper and lower powers in his famous statement that “what counts is that he is a δαίμων.”<sup>237</sup> Attribution of daimonhood does not overstate the powers granted to a cult hero; a hero is mighty to help and to harm according to his own relational motives, but he remains a relatively minor player in the grand hierarchy of Greek deities.

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<sup>234</sup> Knox 1964: 162

<sup>235</sup> After giving special attention to the twelve gods of Olympus, Walter Burkert asserts that in the open pantheistic system of Ancient Greece, “the gods are beyond number - no exhaustive list can be given” (Burkert 170). Lesser gods include nature deities, foreign gods, cult heroes and other δαίμονες, an eponym that, although it is applied from time to time to Olympians and heroes alike, is broad enough to cover “the remainder which eludes characterization and naming.” (Burkert 1985: 180).

<sup>236</sup> As mentioned in Ch.1, Poseidon is the Olympian whose realm bridges the divide between the heavens above and the underworld below, while Prometheus is the most olympic of the otherwise chthonic titans. Oedipus himself is something of a bridge figure, associated with deities from both sides of the spectrum.

<sup>237</sup> Bowra couches this observation within a larger argument that claims that Oedipus' new life has erased the relevance of his human ties, so that “reference to them is now irrelevant” (Bowra 1944: 345-6). While it is true that Oedipus' daimonhood is the defining factor through which the ending of the play must be interpreted, his human ties are not altogether abrogated. As a cult hero, the ordinary connection to family is set aside, particularly as their access to his grave is restricted. The human connections forged between himself and the Athenian πόλις are however the basis for his primary daimonic role as protector to the city.

If Sophocles does not unpack the idea of a cult hero for his Athenian audience, it is because such an explanation would prove superfluous. He does not include a discussion of a hero's cognitive state, but neither does he ruminate over the mysteries of the cult rituals or outline the procedures for oracular consultation at a cult hero's tomb. For the purposes of *OC*, it is enough to recognize that a hero, though a lesser divinity, is nonetheless divine, though subordinate to greater powers than his own. As such, the process by which Oedipus is elevated to a cult hero can rightly be understood as an apotheosis. At the end of the play, then, Oedipus is not merely a bag of blessed bones, but a blessed being with an ongoing capacity for both practical action and intellectual thought.<sup>238</sup>

The distinction between Oedipus as he arrived in Colonus and as he exits the stage as a nascent δαίμων is remarkable for the contrast in agency, in civic status and in divine favour. Kitto writes, "We can see that Oedipus enters the play a disregarded outcast and leaves it – followed by the King of Attica – to keep a strange appointment with Heaven."<sup>239</sup> Yet by what power does this final transition come about? Critics differ in their identification of the source as internal or external to Oedipus himself. For Winnington-Ingram, Oedipus' passionate storm of emotions makes him an apt candidate for heroization. It is fitting that Oedipus should attain cult-hero status because he "loved and hated with such intensity".<sup>240</sup> While emotional intensity is an attribute appropriate to a cult hero, particularly as it pertains to his ability to help friends and harm enemies, this

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<sup>238</sup> Oedipus' practical ability to help and to harm is not an autonomic function of his blessed remains, but derives from an ongoing consciousness.

<sup>239</sup> Kitto 1954: 388

<sup>240</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1980: 278. While he acknowledges that time has taught Oedipus submission, Winnington-Ingram gives greater import to his ever growing θύμος as a link between his human past and his heroic future.

is not the means by which his heroization is attained. Such a transfigurative process is fundamentally beyond the scope of Oedipus' own power to achieve. Instead, it is a gift divinely given, with its reception first made possible through the loving mediation of Oedipus' φίλοĩ.

Not all scholars who embrace Oedipus' divinization recognize the gods' active role in bringing this to pass. In Whitman's eyes "the gods did nothing for Oedipus, he had to prove himself every inch of the way".<sup>241</sup> For Whitman, it is Oedipus' moral qualities that have made him a hero, rather than "a simple act of grace on the part of the gods, or as amends made by them for the sufferings which he has endured".<sup>242</sup> Aside from the role of oracular revelation in shaping the action, the appointed sign of the thunderbolt and the overt vocal invitation that calls Oedipus to his destiny, the gods are made present throughout in the play in the piety of those who raised Oedipus up from his utter passivity and enabled his burgeoning agency. His daughters are the very image of filial piety, made even more explicit by Ismene's sacrificial mediation to the Eumenides on her father's behalf. As for Theseus, his acceptance of Oedipus as a suppliant accords both with his reverence for the Dread Goddesses, and for Zeus as the god of hospitality to the stranger. The same principle extends to his urging that Oedipus ought to grant an audience to Polyneices, out of deference to Poseidon, whose altar Polyneices came to as a suppliant and from which Theseus himself is perpetually being called away from. Just as Oedipus has aligned himself with divine will by heeding the oracles rather than straining against them, so Antigone, Ismene and Theseus achieve a similar alignment through their unremitting reverence for the gods.

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<sup>241</sup> Whitman 1966: 213

<sup>242</sup> Whitman 1966: 213



There is no doubt that Oedipus is unable to achieve daimonhood without the assistance of his φίλοῖ, the same φίλοῖ whose own actions are guided by their personal piety and reverence for the gods. This does not mean that his heroization is "a simple act of grace"<sup>243</sup> Such a characterization would paper over the explicit benefit of his power to aid the Athenian πόλις. If it compensates the luckless man for his troubles, the compensation is not intended for Oedipus the erstwhile tyrant, or Oedipus of the awkward family tree, but Oedipus in his new relational identity as a citizen of Athens. To be sure, at the end of the play Oedipus is more than an ordinary citizen and his contribution to the city of Athens is commensurate with his stature. Where he once was the passive recipient of Theseus' beneficence, he now issues instructions to the city's ruler and leads him in both a physical and political sense through his secret words of guidance.<sup>244</sup> Oedipus' end (τέλος) is interwoven with his relation to the civic community and it is in this capacity that he is compensated for his prior grief.

Yet even a nuanced reading of Oedipus' divine status together with a recognition of the receptivity through which his status is gained does not fully determine how the play's ending ought to be understood. As we have seen, the Chorus asserts that Oedipus' life concludes happily (ὀλβίως). Yet Winnington-Ingram argues, "Oedipus is raised to power, not to happiness",<sup>245</sup> noting that honour and power are more suitable attributions for a chthonic hero than bliss. How are these two views compatible? The answer must be found in what is meant by happiness. Certainly the text gives no evidence to suggest that

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<sup>243</sup> Against Bowra (Bowra 1944: 314), Whitman warns against this view as a "grave mistake" which overlooks "the moral qualities which have made Oedipus a hero". (Whitman 1966: 213)

<sup>244</sup> *OC* 1518-20. As a citizen, Oedipus' participation in the political mechanisms of the city is limited to the role of protective hero that he takes on in death. Just as a good citizen contributes practically to the physical defense of the city and intellectually to its governance through the council, so Oedipus provides physical protection from Athens' enemies and aids in the city's governance through his counsel to Theseus.

<sup>245</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1980: 255

Oedipus' life is a happy one according to the modern English usage, nor are chthonic deities known for their jocundity. If, however, he means to convey a more ancient understanding of happiness, then it is fruitful to consider happiness, or blessedness as it is often translated, as an active state, rather than an emotion that is passively experienced.<sup>246</sup> In his detailed study of Classical Greek emotions, Konstan reminds us that there is not always a tidy Greek equivalent for English categories of emotion and vice versa. The tendency to assume perfect overlap between the two may cause us “to overlook or discount significant differences in the way respective sentiments are conceived and experienced in the two cultures”.<sup>247</sup> Further, “some sentiments that typically count as emotions in English fall outside the category of *pathe* in Classical Greek”.<sup>248</sup> This observation is meant to explain Aristotle's omission of sentiments such as sadness, loneliness and grief from his inventory in *Rhetoric*, responses that Konstan links to loss from natural causes, rather than the intentional social interactions that underlie anger, shame, hatred, fear and jealousy.<sup>249</sup> Notably, Konstan makes no effort to justify the exclusion of happiness, nor does he include it in his broader consideration of Greek literature. His quiet assent to the omission points towards a definition that transcends the passion and πάθος of emotional response.

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<sup>246</sup> Our first hint that Classical Greeks did not think of emotion precisely on our terms is their lack of a dedicated term for the concept. Konstan names πάθος (plural πάθη) as the most popular candidate, but this word carries several meanings, the most frequent of which is simply what happens to a person. Konstan writes, “insofar as pathos is a reaction to an impinging event or circumstance, it looks to the outside stimulus to which it responds”. (Konstan 2006: 4) The emotions Konstan investigates are extra-volitional responses to such external stimuli. Happiness, as we shall see, does not fit the bill.

<sup>247</sup> Konstan 2006: 4

<sup>248</sup> Konstan 2006: 40

<sup>249</sup> The preceding list appears to be overwhelmingly negative. Aristotle includes their opposites as well, treating calmness (πραότης) together with anger, confidence with fear and good-will with hatred. An emotion is necessarily a response to an external stimulus, not a disposition (ἕξις) or a trait of character (*Top* 125b18-27)

As for Oedipus, though the designation is striking for its seeming incongruence with his lived experience, he is nonetheless called blessed in the τέλος of his life. Sophocles provides no systematic analysis of happiness, nor would we expect one in a genre characterized by the downfall of its protagonists. It may be helpful, then, to shed our modern suppositions by considering Aristotle's understanding of εὐδαιμονία as a possible correlative to Sophocles' treatment of Oedipus in *OC*.

Perhaps the most obvious link between Aristotle's terminology and the language of *OC* are the oft-mentioned δαίμονες, invoked no less than twenty-one times in the course of the play. The etymological connection between δαίμων and εὐδαιμονία is clear. A man who is happy, or blessed, is a man who is led well by his δαίμων. "Whether he is happy or unhappy is not something which lies in man's control; the happy man is one who has a good δαίμων, εὐδαίμων, in contrast to the unhappy man, the κακάδαίμων, δυσδαίμων."<sup>250</sup> In Aristotle's account, the εὐδαίμων is prosperous, he enjoys good health, the social benefits of friendship and the supportive structure of a peaceful political community. Although his happiness is not made full on the basis of these external goods alone, their absence cripples a man's prospects of happiness, just as their presence affords the εὐδαίμων the supportive structure in which he may live a fully actualized life.<sup>251</sup>

There is no doubt that Oedipus arrives at Colonus amidst a tremendous scarcity of external goods. In his parentage, in his foreordained parricide and in his unholy marriage, Oedipus is a singularly unlucky man. Although his Theban life between his ascension to kingship and his infamous downfall bore a veneer of εὐδαιμονία, the illusion of a well-led life quickly fell away when he discovered the nature of his unwilling crimes.

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<sup>250</sup> Burkert 1985: 181

<sup>251</sup> *NE* 1099b1-7

Ordinary misfortunes will not dislodge a virtuous man from εὐδαιμονία, but these of course are no ordinary mishaps. Rather, Oedipus' life events belong more properly to the catastrophic suffering of Priam, whom Aristotle holds up as his exemplar of ruinous misfortune.<sup>252</sup> Men such as these cannot recover their blessed state quickly, but only by attaining “many splendid successes” over a protracted period of time. Clearly, this process is not underway in the years that precede *OC*. As εὐδαιμονία is understood as something essentially active,<sup>253</sup> Oedipus' utter passivity during his exile necessarily quashes the potential recovery of εὐδαιμονία during that time. Moreover, he remains bereft of the external goods that make a eudaimonic life possible, “for it is impossible – or not easy - to do noble acts without the necessary supplies”.<sup>254</sup>

In the *prologos*, and indeed, for much of his earlier life, Oedipus lacks the “necessary supplies” for noble acts.<sup>255</sup> Most of those goods that rob “happiness of its luster” if they are lacking, have long since flown from the luckless man, who reaches Colonus bereft of wealth, health, beauty, friendship, a political community or a respectable birth. A man who subsists without these goods is unlikely to be happy, though “a man would be even less likely if he had truly awful (πάγκακος) children or

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<sup>252</sup> πολλὰ γὰρ μεταβολαὶ γίνονται καὶ παντοῖαι τύχαι κατὰ τὸν βίον, καὶ ἐνδέχεται τὸν μάλιστ' εὐθηνόοντα μεγάλας συμφοραῖς περιπεσεῖν ἐπὶ γήρωσ, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς ἡρωϊκοῖς περὶ Πριάμου μυθεύεται τὸν δὲ τοιαύταις χρησάμενον τύχαις καὶ τελευτήσαντα ἀθλίως οὐδεὶς εὐδαιμονίζει. “For many changes and all sorts of mishaps occur throughout life, and it is possible that even the very prosperous may fall into great misfortune in old age, as is told of Priam in the Trojan Cycle; but no one who suffers such as these and ends miserably is called happy.” (*NE* 1100a5-8) Oedipus, of course, does not share Priam's pattern of a life of sustained good fortune that is overshadowed by a disastrous end. The important parallel in this case is the extremity of their misfortune and the insustainability of εὐδαιμονία in its wake.

<sup>253</sup> For Aristotle's definition of εὐδαιμονία as “an activity (ἐνεργεία) of the soul in accordance with virtue” see *NE* 1098a16 and 1100a14. Martha Nussbaum argues that “most Greeks would understand εὐδαιμονία to be something essentially active, of which praiseworthy activities are not just productive means, but actual constituent parts”. Nussbaum finds the usual English translation of 'happiness' misleading, since in modern speech that indicates an emotion, rather than “living a good life for a human being” or as John Cooper suggests, “human flourishing” (Nussbaum 1986: 6).

<sup>254</sup> ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ οὐ ῥάδιον τὰ καλὰ πράττειν ἀχωρήγητον ὄντα. (*NE* 1099b1)

<sup>255</sup> Indeed, at the outset of the play he lacks the equipment to act at all, whether nobly or otherwise.

friends”,<sup>256</sup> a plight that Oedipus’ past treatment at the hands of Creon and his sons effectively demonstrates. For these, at least, he has some recompense in the faithfulness of Ismene and Antigone, but even though he retains a loving relationship with two of the four children whom he sired, the fate of the good children who remain to him further works against Oedipus’ happiness. Aristotle suggests that the true estimation of a man’s εὐδαιμονία must take into account the circumstances of his surviving family, for even in death a man is thought to retain the same relation to good and evil as a man who is alive, but not aware of the good or evil that he experiences.<sup>257</sup>

It may hardly be claimed that Oedipus enjoys εὐδαιμονία during his lifetime. The hours following his acceptance by Theseus into political community are fraught with conflict and personal distress as Creon and Polyneices arrive to challenge Oedipus on Athenian soil. Fleeting moments of joy, such as Oedipus experiences when his kidnapped daughters are returned to him, do not outweigh the misery and indignation that thread through each episode. Nor does a brief span of happiness at the conclusion of his life qualify Oedipus as a blessed man, “for one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy”.<sup>258</sup>

Despite the apparent triumph of Oedipus’ elevation to a position of divine power, on a personal level, Oedipus fails to secure a happy future for his own οἶκος. Apart from his estranged sons, who are sons to him no longer, as a father, Oedipus is greatly

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<sup>256</sup> *NE* 1099b5

<sup>257</sup> *NE* 1100a20-1101b5 Similar vicissitudes of fortune imbue every Sophoclean consideration of the changing effects of time on human life and relations, as discussed earlier in relation to *OC* 607-28 and *Ai* 646-92. It is in part because of this inherent instability that Aristotle insists that although external goods are a precondition of εὐδαιμονία, the true measure must lie in something more continuous: the self-reliant activity of contemplative thought.

<sup>258</sup> μία γὰρ χελιδὼν ἕαρ οὐ ποιεῖ, οὐδὲ μία ἡμέρα: οὕτω δὲ οὐδὲ μακάριον καὶ εὐδαίμονα μία ἡμέρα οὐδ’ ὀλίγος χρόνος. Trans. W.D. Ross (*NE* 1098a18-20)

concerned for the well-being of his children. Yet as a δαίμων, it is the Athenians rather than his own flesh and blood that will benefit from his care. Quite aside from the audience's prescient knowledge of *Antigone*, *OC* does not end happily for Oedipus' daughters. They lack the overarching perspective to appreciate the communal benefit of their father's death to Attica, experiencing instead the keening pain of losing an intimate loved one.

For Oedipus' οἰκός, the ending is tragic indeed. They must be reminded that Oedipus' grave is sacred and prohibited in order to prevent them from rushing deeper into the sacred grove to mourn at his resting place.<sup>259</sup> With no further avenue to aid their cherished father, the sisters hope to assist their warring brothers, the last possible recipients of their perfect filial piety.<sup>260</sup> His daughters' impulse to return immediately to Thebes takes them beyond the regional power of their newly heroized father, and beyond the saving help of Theseus, their father's dearest Athenian ally.<sup>261</sup> Though Oedipus' heroization assures aid to Athens, he is unable to help the nearest of his φίλια. In the end, Oedipus attains the rest that he seeks and the power to help his friends and harm his

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<sup>259</sup> *OC* 1760-67

<sup>260</sup> Aside from the mythic tradition of Antigone's untimely death featured in Sophocles' own *Antigone*, it is clear from the *OC* itself that Antigone is bound to bury Polyneices in the aftermath of her brothers' mutual bloodshed. As the fourth actor, Ismene had no speaking role in that episode, but throughout the play she has matched her sister in her desire to serve family without regard for her own benefit. Certainly no one can doubt the capacity of these two women to love. As Blundell points out, their final scene is characterized by "abundant *phil*-language" expressing "not only their love for their father (1698, 1700) and each other (1718, 1724), but a bond of affection between them and the Chorus (1677, 1721, 1737)" (Blundell 1989: 232). It is entirely consistent with their characters that they should extend their friendship to their troubled siblings rather than seeking their own comfort and safety.

<sup>261</sup> Theseus promises that he would never "willingly betray" Oedipus' daughters, and that he will always fulfill everything "to their advantage, with good will" (*OC* 1633-35). Although the audience expects the girls to come to grief in their efforts to prevent their brother's murder, Theseus does not fail in his promise to Oedipus by allowing them to return home. It is fitting that Theseus, who struggled at first to understand why Oedipus did not wish to return to his native πόλις, would believe that reunification with one's city of origin would be an inherent good. Moreover, it is characteristic of Theseus, who views the world through a lens of unadulterated virtue, to fail to anticipate the ill-will of others.

enemies, but at the same time he leaves behind a house divided and children who are cursed by their birth if not from his own lips. As eager as he seems to meet his end, he plainly grieves to be parted from his daughters, so much so that the audible voice of a god must rebuke him for the delay as the family weeps together.<sup>262</sup> Make no mistake, this is the very outcome that Oedipus has sought.<sup>263</sup> Yet while the end of *OC* is a triumph for the larger political community, it does not end happily for Oedipus in his capacity as a father and the head of an individual οἶκος.

For those who believe that the play ends in triumph, Oedipus' divination is often viewed as compensation for the unjust suffering he has endured. While it is questionable whether a man's lot as set forth by the gods can properly be deemed an injustice in a Sophoclean worldview, the concept of unjust suffering does accord with the *OC*'s portrayal of Oedipus as unambiguously innocent of his infamous crimes. It does not, however, follow that unmerited suffering is the direct impetus of Oedipus' elevation to cult hero. Oedipus is not only a man who has suffered, he is a man whose radical estrangement from the ordinary rites of human community, including civic participation and the associated access to divine worship, has been bridged by an ordered series of mediations and Oedipus' own submission to alignment with the will of his φίλοι and with the gods themselves. In this way, Apollo's pledge to Oedipus is fulfilled,<sup>264</sup> but if it were meant as compensation for the sufferings of an individual, then that individual ought to be the primary beneficiary of the reward. Oedipus, however, is not made happy by his

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<sup>262</sup> *OC* 1620-28

<sup>263</sup> Blundell writes that in the end, Oedipus "gets exactly what he wants: revenge on his enemies, blessing for his friends, and an end to his own sufferings by means of a miraculous death that confirms his heroic powers." (Blundell 1989: 235) His ability to bless his friends, however, is limited to his newly forged civic connections. His daimonic power is unable to ensure a blessed life for his daughters.

<sup>264</sup> *OC* 87-95

noble end. His life is eudaimonic only in the sense that its summation leads to blessing for the πόλις, not for his own particular οἶκος or for the man himself.<sup>265</sup>

If *OC* ends with the promise of a blessed life, it is for the city of Athens. Theseus' people and their descendants are the true beneficiaries of Oedipus' tragic life and heroic transformation. To a certain extent, this benefit is made possible by the egregious sufferings of Oedipus and his kin, but this is only the material cause. The pious activity of Oedipus' φιλοῖ brings forth divine blessing, but this is less recompense than the redemption of what Oedipus has endured. By his personal journey he is uniquely positioned to serve as a passive conduit of divine blessing to Athens. This is not only because his long exile and fresh politicization made him an enemy to Thebes and a grateful friend to Athens, but also because he has learned the gentle art of passivity, the basis of his innocence, his restoration and his union with the divine. His heroic status does not erase the actions he suffered, but it does make them intelligible by placing them in their proper context.

Aristotle tells us that happiness as he defines it, “is something final and self-sufficient and the end of action”.<sup>266</sup> Although it does not characterize the aggregate of his personal experience, εὐδαιμονία is indeed the τέλος of Oedipus' action. It could be said that happiness comes to him at the moment of divine unity when his own action ceases and he is subsumed by a greater whole, but this is not the primary sense in which τέλος applies here. One might wonder whether a well led life can be poetically encapsulated in

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<sup>265</sup> This is not to say that Seaford is correct when he posits that the πόλις undermines the οἶκος or results in its inevitable destruction. Rather, the οἶκος as such is fully actualized as the building block of the larger civic unit. Within the πόλις, it is no longer the concerns of a particular οἶκος that take precedence, but the mutual benefit arising from the harmony of the whole. (Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis*) See also *Pol* 1253b2-3.

<sup>266</sup> *NE* 1097b21



the very moment when human life ceases, but in addition to Aristotle's admonition that a single swallow does not make a summer, a better definition of τέλος is the purpose of Oedipus' action, rather than its linear conclusion. There is no contradiction with Oedipus' τέλος and his own lack of εὐδαιμονία, the seeming conflict is resolved by recognizing that the subject of the well-led life in question is neither Oedipus nor his kinfolk, but the Athenian πόλις. Here we have the τέλος of Oedipus' life. The escalation of his renewed activity is directed not towards personal εὐδαιμονία, but that of the πόλις, a nobler and more blessed end by Aristotelean reckoning: "For while the good of an individual is a desirable thing, what is good for a people or for cities is nobler and more godlike".<sup>267</sup> By this measure, the Chorus is right to name Oedipus' end as happy or blessed; the scope of his aim and of his outcome in aiding Athens befit his nascent divinity. Oedipus' personhood is not denigrated by finding its τέλος in the good of the city, rather it is validated. Though he never personally attains the theoretical contemplation that Aristotle calls the perfect activity of the soul, he does contribute to the peaceful life and wise rule of Athens, which in turn allows its people to pursue the εὐδαιμονία that Aristotle describes.

As such, if Oedipus never achieves his own εὐδαιμονία, it may be said that through his heroization he achieves something greater. Through his cycle of loss and restoration, death and resurrection, Oedipus is empowered to give saving help to his friends, and the heavy ruin to his enemies that ultimately serves Athens' good as well. Is it necessary then for Athens' sake that Oedipus suffer as he did? There is no need to

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<sup>267</sup> *NE* 1094b While Oedipus' mortal life did not afford him the opportunity to practice noble or godlike habits, his daimonic agency both allows him to enact noble deeds on behalf of the city and creates a space in which the citizens of Athens are able to pursue nobler and more godlike acts of their own.

claim that the prophecy given Laius before the birth of his son was for the teleological purpose of delivering Athens from her future Theban enemies. It is enough to recognize that the reward promised by Apollo is not strictly for Oedipus' own benefit, but for a greater good. It is not Oedipus as Oedipus who stands to gain the most from the god's blessing, but Oedipus as the friend and protector of Athens, not as an individual man, but as an integral part of a vibrant whole.

The progression from passivity to activity not only reawakens the possibility of culpability, it restores his latent capacity for virtue. Oedipus is capable of beneficence toward the Athenians precisely because his agency is restored through the mediating work of his φίλοι. The restorative arc that Oedipus undergoes during the course of the play restores many external goods to him. In Colonus, he finds newfound φίλοι to replace his false Theban friends. His citiless status is amended and the exile who was long unwelcome in any community finds a place of belonging. His faithless sons remain estranged from him, but he is joyfully reunited with his daughters. His debilitating weakness and physical infirmity melt away as he races through the grove in answer to the thunder call. These externalities are not themselves responsible for Oedipus' eventual actualization as a cult hero, but without the supportive structure of household piety, true friends and citizenship, Oedipus would remain in the wretched state in which he first entered the grove. Yet despite the compacted theatrical timeframe, Oedipus' greatest successes are still to come at the time of his death. In life, there is no assuagement possible for the curse of Oedipus' birth. Only as a hero does his identity diverge from his

bloodline,<sup>268</sup> to find its actualization as a divine guardian of the city. The δαίμων who guides his own life's course from his ill-fated birth to his allotted end equips him with none of the external goods that make virtuous activity possible, but the δαίμων that he becomes will accomplish those very things for Athens. In this way, Oedipus, who does not attain εὐδαιμονία, actively transcends it.

Among the seven extant plays of Sophocles, *OC* is singular in its dramatic account of the protagonist's heroization. Two other plays treat the deaths of well-known cult heroes, but neither Heracles in *Trachiniae* or Ajax in his eponymous play are acknowledged as such within their respective dramas. One of Athens' ten tribes dating from Kleisthenes' reforms was named in Ajax' honour and surely every Athenian could tell of Heracles' ascension to Olympus, but *Trachiniae* closes with the anticipation of Heracles' imminent death and aftermath following Ajax' suicide is primarily concerned with Teucer's struggle to secure a decent burial for his disgraced brother's body. Although Oedipus' divinization occurs offstage and is related by a messenger, its inclusion in the body of the play speaks to its central importance to Oedipus' purpose and to *OC* as a whole.

Yet as Aristotle's investigation of εὐδαιμονία does not end with a metaphysical exposition of theoretical thought, but with a call to consider the practical elements of community that will foster these ends, Segal notes that *OC* carefully avoids ending "on the plane of divine knowledge only, in a pious stupor at a holy miracle, all passion

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<sup>268</sup> Segal writes that the act of barring Oedipus' daughters from the grave where a family would normally display their grief and make funerary offerings effectively underscores the shift in Oedipus' identity from belonging to the οἶκος to belonging to the city. "In withholding his place of burial from his children, Oedipus passes beyond the ties of family and blood... he becomes part of a larger order, beyond the family, an order which perhaps anticipates a different kind of civic life even as it shows the fifth-century πόλις in a final, transfiguring glory." (Segal 1981: 402)

spent”,<sup>269</sup> but rather returns full circle to a trophic emphasis with the plight of Ismene and Antigone. As a cult hero, Oedipus belongs not to his family, but to the land and the people that dwell therein. Though he no longer retains a personal tie to his kinfolk, his relation to them is expressed through his active care for the city to which he has entrusted them. With this in mind, Oedipus leaves behind his two supports, trusting that Theseus will do what he can for their advantage.<sup>270</sup> The family unit remains the essential building block of the political community, all while the piety of the πόλις preserves and protects the οἶκος that gave it life. The two manifestations of community remain reliant on one other, in a dance between benevolent agency and passive receptivity.

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<sup>269</sup> Segal 1981: 400 Segal insists that Oedipus’ daughters close out the action “not just to round out the legend”, but for the very purpose of returning the focus to the natural concerns of οἶκος and nurture.

<sup>270</sup> As Markantonatos notes, Chthonic Zeus seems to wait for Oedipus to finish his farewells to his daughters before urging him onward with a thunderclap at 1606 (Markantonatos 2002: 138). This behavior gestures both to the reverence for the οἶκος and the need for Oedipus to separate himself from these ties before moving onward to apotheosis. For Oedipus’ ongoing concern for his daughters’ wellbeing, see his exhortation to Theseus after the voice of the god calls out to summon him on to divinization: ὦ φίλον κάρα, δός μοι χερὸς σῆς πίστιν ὀρκίαν τέκνοις, ὑμεῖς τε, παῖδες, τῷδε: καὶ καταίνεσον μήποτε προδώσειν τάσδ’ ἐκόν, τελεῖν δ’ ὅσ’ ἂν μέλλης φρονῶν εὖ ξυμφέροντ’ αὐταῖς ἀεὶ. “Dear friend, give the faithful pledge of your hand to my children, and give yours, my children, to him. Promise that you will never willingly betray them, and that you will accomplish all that you are going to do always with good intentions for their advantage.” (OC 1631-35)

## Chapter VI: Conclusion

Though much of Oedipus' passivity is the result of hardships suffered, the passivity itself is not a disease to be remedied, but a necessary precondition of his renewed agency. The extremity of his physical weakness, social estrangement and political impotence make his dependence on the aid of φίλοι explicit, but even as these impediments fall away, a reciprocal dependency remains between Oedipus and the city of Athens.

As a protective cult hero, Oedipus is able to assist Athens in the kind of blessed life that remains beyond his earthly reach. The man who was "well-born, except for his δαίμων" transcends the human hope of εὐδαιμονία by becoming himself a δαίμων, one whose aid in warfare and counsel in pious governance secures for Athens the peace and stability needed to actualize its own potential. In turn, Oedipus' secret tomb will be venerated and safeguarded by his local hero cult. Though the performance of the cult is limited to Theseus and his political descendants, the Athenian people as a whole will enjoy the resulting collective benefits.<sup>271</sup>

Certainly not every man who learns to heed the prudent counsel of his friends and to gratefully receive their propitiatory aid is destined to become a δαίμων. This, however, is not the story of every man, but a singular man, an unhappy wretch who gains the power to help and to harm through his passive submission to his intimate friends and to the gods of the earth and sky.

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<sup>271</sup> Seaford 2000: 38

As Kitto writes, “there is no sudden revelation of a new Oedipus; Sophocles leads us step by step, almost insensibly.” The rhythm of Oedipus' transformation “must be created from the outside.”<sup>272</sup> It is not Oedipus' own deeds that prepare him for apotheosis, so much as the deeds he suffers, and the supple pliability they have taught him that is necessary for practical wisdom. Like Ajax, he has learned difficult truths about the mutability of human relationships and the inherent fragility of his earlier strength and prestige. The two men share a noble nature, the pivotal difference between the warrior, who is second only to Achilles, and the crippled outcast is that time and suffering have taught Oedipus to submit.

The extent to which Oedipus contributes to his eventual outcome is largely limited to his learned submission. His religious and civic estrangements are assuaged by his submission to Antigone's trophic aid, to Ismene's ritual mediation and to Theseus' political beneficence. Within these broader brush strokes, Oedipus encourages Antigone to make inquiries on his behalf, unashamed of the limitations of his personal knowledge, and is eager to receive the Chorus' practical advice on the religious customs proper to their land.

He begins the play a “pitiful phantom of a man”<sup>273</sup> and ends it a powerful spirit, but none of this originates by his own power. Apart from Apollo, whose long ago prophecy spoke the future into being, and the Eumenides, whom Oedipus credits with guiding him to their sacred grove, the impetus of Oedipus' eventual apotheosis is found in the attentions of his φίλοι, whose piety mirrors divine will. By their aid, Oedipus is propitiated to the Eumenides and made a citizen once more, though his participation in

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<sup>272</sup> Kitto 1954: 388

<sup>273</sup> *OC* 109

the political mechanisms of the city is limited to the role of protective hero that he takes on in death and the ἐξάγιστα that he entrusts to Theseus.

In keeping with the customs of hero cult, these sacred words are not to be uttered aloud, much like the voiceless prayer Oedipus is instructed to offer the Eumenides.<sup>274</sup> Knowledge of them is restricted only to the cult initiands, to the king of the city and to the προφεράται, the most eminent men of Athens who will one day rule in his place. The ruler stands above the division of civic concerns and blood ties, holding both together in a powerful unity. As Poseidon traditionally mediates between the upper and the lower realms, so Theseus will mediate on behalf of his people, ensuring the safety of his city through a balanced piety that revered both the Olympian and the chthonic gods. This wisdom is the gift of Oedipus to his adopted city, wisdom gained dearly through the process of utter estrangement and brokenness, and the sanctification and reintegration that followed.

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<sup>274</sup> OC 486-493

## Appendix A: Sophocles' Other Oedipus

In recognition that Sophocles' Oedipus plays are not simply two parts of a continuous whole, it is impossible to determine the status of Oedipus' culpability or innocence in *OC* without first understanding how closely the text of this play ought to be considered with that of *OT*. There are myriad arguments in secondary scholarship both for and against Oedipus' guilt in *OT*, but is this the same question of culpability that is treated in *OC*? Although *OT*, *OC* and *Antigone* are often discussed in modern scholarship as "The Theban Plays" or even "The Theban Trilogy" they are not a cohesive whole in the manner of Aeschylus' connected trilogies, three pieces of a single story. Certainly the three tragedies treat elements of the same myth, but they were neither written nor presented as a unit. As Knox argues, each of Sophocles' plays is an "independent whole" and "complete in itself".<sup>275</sup>

Nor are the tragedians limited in their artistic interpretations by their own body of work anymore than they are by the nuances of earlier mythic accounts. Euripides takes liberties with this treatment of the Orestes myth, altering the essential storyline as he sees fit from one play to another. Among the few extant works of Sophocles, we find Odysseus represented with significantly different character traits between *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, the action of which occurs in the same year of the Trojan War. It seems then that drawing on the same legend or even on the same characters does not necessitate representational continuity between independent plays.

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<sup>275</sup> Knox 1979: xxx; Knox 1964: 2



Whitman suggests that Sophocles wrote *OC* for the express purpose of settling the question of Oedipus' guilt or innocence, which Whitman imagines may have divided Athens into opposing viewpoints following the performance of *OT*.<sup>276</sup> This, however, assumes a necessary connection between the plays that is unsupported either by tragic conventions or by the texts themselves. Scholars are in perpetual disagreement over what an Athenian audience might reasonably be expected to recall from a play performed years prior. Mulroy opens his discussion of *OC* with a bald assertion that "*Oedipus at Colonus* presupposes knowledge of *Oedipus Rex*,"<sup>277</sup> without providing evidence for what the scope and limitations of this presupposed knowledge may be. In contrast, Dodds argues soundly that a play must be examined as a discrete work, depending only on the text of a given play to interpret its action and meaning. While this is a helpful tonic for the ill-advised impulse to demand universal consistency among tragic characters, examples of intertextual reference remain, whether the playwright depends with any surety on audience recognition or not.<sup>278</sup>

Twentieth century scholarship traces a mirror image of *OT* in both the general outline and the structural details of *OC*,<sup>279</sup> such as the brief speech of self-introduction

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<sup>276</sup> Whitman 1966: 203

<sup>277</sup> Mulroy 2015: xiii

<sup>278</sup> This may occur either between texts by the same poet, or the earlier work of his peers. There is, for example, an overt intertextual relation between Sophocles' *Electra* 1415-1416, and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1343, 1345) where Clytemnestra's death cries are drawn word for word from the mouth of her murdered husband. March notes "Clytemnestra's words are exact reiterations of Agamemnon's dying cries...serving as a reminder that his is indeed vengeance in kind, blood for blood, a murder for a murder and underlining the justice of this execution. (March 2001: 223)

<sup>279</sup> See Burian 1974: 429 n.48, Kitto 1954: 393, Whitman 1966: 203, Winnington-Ingram 1980: 248 among others. They have argued that the plays mirror one another both in general outline and in structural details. *OT* begins with an empowered, self-reliant Oedipus who receives the supplication of his people; *OC* begins with his complete dependency as he himself becomes a suppliant. The arc of progression in *OT* is decidedly downward from exultation to ruin; the progression in *OC* arcs upward from mendicancy to heroization. In *OT*, Oedipus curses himself in ignorance of his own identity; in *OC* he acquires prophetic knowledge and the power to curse others. *OT* ends with Oedipus blinded, an anathema among his fellow men; *OC* ends

that Oedipus opens each play with, “each 13 lines long and divided into units of 8 and 5 lines, with the division marked by *alla*” about which Burian strikes a suitable note of moderation when he cedes that “these parallels gain point because of the total reversal of situation, condition and attitude the speeches convey. It seems at least possible that the speech in *OC* is deliberately modelled on its predecessor”.<sup>280</sup> Given that *OC* is the last written and last performed of the Theban plays, and indeed of Sophocles’ career, coupled with the seemingly deliberate symmetry between *OT* and *OC*, it is not unlikely that Sophocles had in mind earlier works when he penned his final masterpiece. That said, we go too far if we attempt to limit his expression in *OC* by pointing to the details of his other plays.

Ahrensndorf asserts that “the common themes, and what Jebb himself calls ‘the finely wrought links of allusion’ among the Theban plays”<sup>281</sup> are sufficient grounds for studying the three plays together, but he does not take care to distinguish between finely wrought allusion and interdependent homogeneity. MacLeod finds fault with his inability to allow for deliberate differences between the plays, writing that “It is almost as if Ahrensndorf assumes these characters are historical people with lives separate from the plays.”<sup>282</sup> Mulroy makes a comparable error when he attempts to invalidate Oedipus’ assertion of innocence by highlighting apparent inconsistencies in his *OC* testimony with

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with Oedipus’ acquisition of spiritual sight and fellowship with the gods. Only then does he become the saviour he is wrongly believed to be at the outset of *OT*.

<sup>280</sup> Burian 1974: 429 n.48

<sup>281</sup> Ahrensndorf 2009: 86-87 n.4

<sup>282</sup> MacLeod 2013: 28-29 MacLeod further notes that Ahrensndorf’s treatment of the characters as fully realized historical figures “accounts for the sometimes mystifying comments we read about characters, such as Creon must have kept his political ambitions hidden from Oedipus in *O.T.* because his later career finds him driven by the desire for power.”

the text of *OT*.<sup>283</sup> The absurdity of holding a character in one play accountable for speech that is discordant with the action of another fails to recognize the freedom of the playwright to mould his present work into the image that suits his present vision. Sophocles is no more inhibited by the particular dialogue of *OT* in his creation of *OC* than he is by Ismene's lament in *Antigone* that their father died "hateful and infamous".<sup>284</sup> It is Sophocles' prerogative to diverge from his prior work as his art requires, just as it remains his prerogative to weave thematic and structural threads between his plays that demonstrate both the similarity and the difference between one work and another.

It is in that spirit that we must consider *OT*. A comparative analysis may illumine the shades of character and meaning present in *OC*, but it can in no way invalidate any aspect of the later work. The question of Oedipus' guilt or innocence is thematically linked to the action of *OT*, but conclusions may only be drawn from what is represented in *OC* itself. It seems certain that Sophocles intended to recall his earlier play through the carefully inverted structure and allusive references, but the purpose of this recall may be to highlight either the continuity or the difference between the two. Any method of analysis that prohibits the frank appraisal of the action and argument of a given play on

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<sup>283</sup> Mulroy 2015: xxx-xxxiv Mulroy argues that Oedipus' argument of self-defense in the death of Laius "seems unanswerable until it is juxtaposed to Oedipus' own description of the event from *Oedipus Rex* – before he knew that one of his victims was Laius". For Mulroy, the discrepancy between the earlier account of "gradually escalating violence" and the "sudden attack of Oedipus' later memory" is an indication that Oedipus struggles with the truth and is attempting to reframe the past to his own advantage. He further suggests that Oedipus deliberately omits any mention of Creon's intention at the end of *OT* to consult the gods regarding Oedipus' potential exile and to abide by their decision. Mulroy insists, "in the absence of contrary indications, it is fair to assume that that is what happened." The substance of both of Mulroy's complaints is dependent on a radical continuity between the two plays and the character of Oedipus that the evidence cannot support.

<sup>284</sup> *Ant* 50

its own merits denies the fundamental privilege of the tragedian to craft what he will from the familiar branches of mythic tradition.

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