THE BANISHMENT OF OEDIPUS, AGAIN

Dr. Malcolm Davies has done me the courtesy of sending me a copy of the article ("Prometheus" 17, 1991, pp. 1-18) in which he argues against the theory of P. L. W. Graffunder ("NJPhP" 132, 1885, pp. 389-408), R. D. Dawe commentary (Cambridge 1982, pp. 245-7) D. A. Hester ("Antichton" 18, 1984, pp. 13-23) and J. R. March ("BICS" Supp. 49, 1987, pp. 148-154) that the ending of the *Oedypus Tyrannos* is spurious, and may have been altered to enable a posthumous joint performance with the *Oedipus Coloneus*. This is not an area in which certainly is possible, but I hope to be able to show that there is a better case for the theory than Davies supposes. I do not need to add to our previous bibliographies, merely commenting that I think he is rather hard on the scholars who have neglected E. Eicken-Iselin *Interpretationen und Untersuchungen der Sophokleischen Rheseis* (diss. Basel 1942) pp. 275 ff. or Graffunder; both are very hard to come by, and the former does not discuss the relevant (*O.T.* 1515 ff.).

There is no need to waste time on matters on which Davies and I agree, i.e.:

1. *Pace* Eicken-Iselin, 1419-1514 are genuine, at least for the most part;
2. *Pace* Graffunder, the permanent carceration of Oedipus is not in view;
3. *Pace* Graffunder, too much weight cannot be placed on Seneca's *Oedipus*;
4. 1524-30 are generally considered spurious.

The last point is noit absolutely clear; Davies says (p. 6): "Most scholars seem now united in regarding these lines as spurious... This in itself proves nothing either way about the authenticity of the preceding hundred or so lines". Proof, as I have already indicated, is not available; but surely, if we have concluded that the text has been tampered with, the questions of the extent of the interpolations, the identity of the interpolator, and the reason for the interpolation, naturally suggest themselves. Davies has in effect conceded that we have a right to ask these questions' even if he does not like our answers.

He argues that for the play to end with 'final uncertainty' is acceptable, and that such an ending is 'extremely Sophoclean'; he then compares the endings of the *Trachiniae*, *Electra*, *O.C.* and *Philoctetes*. Clearly, this al-

leged pattern merits discussion. I would like to distinguish between three
types of uncertainty:
1. Factual uncertainty: We do not know what has happened, or is immedia-
tely about to happen, to the main characters;
2. Oracular uncertainty: All five of the plays we are examining contain one
or more oracles; we do not know if they have been fulfilled;
3. Moral uncertainty: We are unable to make a moral evaluation of the major
characters.

Of factual uncertainty there is no trace in the other four plays. Events
have run their course; people have fulfilled their destiny. In every case, there
is an emphatic 'that's that', a note of conclusion or, at least, of transition to
something which is no part of this play. Deianeira is dead; Hyllus must burn
Heracles on the pyre and marry Iole; the will of Zeus has been fulfilled:

> λείπου μηδὲ σύ, παρθέν᾽, ἀπ᾽ οἴκων,
> μεγάλους μὲν ἰδοῦσα νέους θανάτους,
> πολλὰ δὲ πήματα ⟨καὶ⟩ καινοπαθῆ,
> κοὐδὲν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεύς (*Tr.* 1275 ff.).

Orestes and Electra have co-operated in the killing of the usurpers and
the reestablishment of legitimate rule:

> ὦ σπέρμ᾽ Ἀτρέως, ὡς πολλὰ παθὸν
> δι᾽ ἐλευθερίας μόλις ἐξῆλθες
> τῇ νῦν ὁρμῇ τελεωθέν (*El.* 1508 ff.).

Philoctetes has recovered his bow, and is departing with Neoptolemos
for Troy, where he will find healing:

> χωρῶμεν δὴ πάντες ἀολλεῖς,
> Νύμφαις ἁλίαισιν ἐπευξάμενοι
> νόστου σωτῆρας ἱκέσθαι (*Ph.* 1469 ff.).

Oedipus has come to his longed-for rest, and his grave will protect the
city that has welcomed him:

> ἀλλ᾽ ἀποπαύετε μηδ᾽ ἐπὶ πλείω
> θρῆνον ἐγείρετε·
> πάντως γὰρ ἔχει τάδε κῦρος (*O.C.* 1717 ff.).

Whatever doubts there may have been about oracles in the earlier parts of
the plays have been removed by the fulfilment of those oracles. Heracles,
slain by one who is no longer alive, has found the end of his labours in
death. Orestes has triumphed by deceit. Philoctetes and his bow will help
Neoptolemos to take Troy. Oedipus has ended his life where the oracle
foretold, a help to his friend and a bane to his enemies.

It is the moral status of the leading characters that Sophocles typically
leaves unresolved, as Davies correctly observes of the *Philoctetes*. There is
no apotheosis to justify Heracles; there are no furies to condemn Orestes; the

justice of Oedipus' vengeance is not evaluated. It is useless to look for any moral tag to point the deeper meaning of the play, and Aristotle was surely right in not attempting to introduce the concept of meaning.

If this is the pattern, how does the text of the *O.T.* as we have it fit? Very badly. Oedipus' destination is totally unclear. Most of the oracles have been fulfilled: Laius has been killed by his child, Oedipus has killed his father and married his mother; why, then, have the combined efforts of the Delphic oracle, Oedipus' own curse, and Teiresias' predictions failed to achieve Oedipus' exile? Are we to take it that Apollo has egg on his face, Jocasta was right after all, and the pleague is to continue? Only the absence of a moral solution to the problem of Oedipus' guilt or innocence fits the pattern.

Lines 1515-30 are therefore an unsatisfactory conclusion to the play as a whole. As an immediate sequel to 1446-1514 they costitute an impropriety of which, I am sure, Sophocles would not have been guilty; Davies, I believe, does less than justice to the arguments of March (pp. 149-51) on this point. Oedipus has made his dispositions and said what was clearly intended as a touching farewell to his daughters. (That Eicken-Iselin and Hester differ on how well the poet has fulfilled his intentions is hardly to the point). Eight lines after the farewell has been concluded, the effect is totally destroyed when Oedipus is led off to the same destination. Is this any less untragic than the alternative that Davies rejects as untragic: that his daughters should themselves lead him off? *Iliad* IV is not a helpful parallel. To start with, Hector does not intend to say farewell to Andromache. He sends her back to the palace, and says that his own fate will depend on destiny. There is no indication that he expects this meeting to be their last. "Scholars have long realized that, if one computes the relevant hours and days this cannot be their final farewell". One must concede that the bard's audience, who knows Hector's destiny, will tend to see it as such, but they have no visible characters whose movements they are watching, they aren't using their computers, and the leisurely progress of epic will ensure that when Hector eventually goes back to Troy the anomaly is not apparent. Andromache is not reintroduced eight lines later murmuring that she has forgotten her knitting, nor does Hector hurry after her because he has mislaid his spear.

On the actual text of 1515-30, and the many incongruities found there, I cannot improve on Dawe's arguments. Davies has another red herring on p. 6; it is no answer to Dawe's demonstration of the illogicality of Oedipus' 1519 to say that a logical reply would have occupied more space than the dialogue structure allows. The point is that Creon, who in 95-101 himself announced the text of the Delphic Oracle he was sent to get, now seems to totally ignore it, preferring to do precisely what the Oracle plainly said must not be done:

ἄνωγεν ἡμᾶς Φοῖβος ἐμφανῶς, ἄναξ,
μίασμα χώρας, ὡς τεθραμμένον χθονὶ
ἐν τῇδ᾽, ἐλαύνειν μηδ᾽ ἀνήκεστον τρέφειν.

Oedipus for his part, finding Apollo (for once) on his side, is quite unable to convince the pious Creon, who is (on Davies' view) anxious to oblige both of them.

If we have made a sufficient case that the generally conceded interpolation of the last seven lines is likely to extend back for another nine, the question 'who?' and 'why?' remain. It may be that we have no answers; but the second hypotesis of the *O.C.* offers a starting point: τὸν ἐπὶ Κολωνῷ Οἰδίπουν ἐπὶ τετελευτηκότι τῷ πάππῳ Σοφοκλῆς ὁ υἱδοῦς ἐδίδαξεν.

If we accept that Sophocles' grandson produced the *O.C.* posthumously, he had three options:
1. To produce the play by itself when other dramatists were offering four;
2. To follow the example of Euripides' son in putting on a group of three unrelated plays (schol. *Frogs*, Davies p. 14);
3. To revert to the custom of linked trilogies or tetralogies, as Euripides had probably and Sophocles had possibly recently done (refs. March p. 154).

Of these, option 1 is surely to be rejected, and 3 seems most likely if linkable plays were available, as, in the case, they were. Perhaps I am overinfluenced by having witnessed in Adelaide four ersatz dilogies: *O.T.*+ *O.C.*, *Agamennon* + *Electra* (Sophocles), *Trojan Women* + *Melian Dialogue*, *Helen* + *Thesmophoriazusae*; or is it only Downunderlanders who do this kind of thing?

To say that the plays could be linked is one thing; they were not written as a trilogy, and one link was especially difficult. In the *O.C.* Oedipus bitterly complains about being forced into exile. In the *O.T.* he begged for it. Heroic efforts were needed. In the later play they were certainly made. Lines 765-771 read:

πρόσθεν τε γάρ με τοῖσιν οἰκείοις κακοῖς
νοσοῦνθ᾽, ὅτ᾽ ἦν μοι τέρψις ἐκπεσεῖν χθονός,
οὐκ ἤθελες θέλοντι προσθέσθαι χάριν,
ἀλλ᾽ ἡνίκ᾽ ἤδη μεστὸς ἦ θυμούμενος,
καὶ τοὐν δόμοισιν ἦν διαιτᾶσθαι γλυκύ,
τότ᾽ ἐξεώθεις κἀξέβαλλες, οὐδέ σοι
τὸ συγγενὲς τοῦτ᾽ οὐδαμῶς τότ᾽ ἦν φίλον.

This very odd passage seems to have involved a simultaneous unmotivated change of mind by Oedipus and Creon in opposite directions. As I showed (pp. 17-18) it does not fit well in the context of its own play; it does, however, provide a possible link with the *O.T.* if that play which ends as it does in our mss. with a deferred exile. A link with a play wich ended

with an immediate voluntary exile was impossible. Is it not plausible that both plays have been altered by the same redactor to enable a common production?

A third play was required. March, feeling that the new play must come last, suggests (p. 154) *Aegeus, O.T., O.C.* I prefer to follow Graffunder in assuming *O.T., O.C., Antigone.* The link between *O.C.* 1414-1446 and *Antigone* is a good one. Perhaps the redactor has been at work here also, but as the passage creates no particular difficulties in its context such an assumption is not essential.

Were the alterations sufficient to make the new trilogy feasible? I can only say that our State Theatre Company's performance of *O.T.+ O.C.* was very well received. As Sophocles (senior) knew, you can get away with quite a lot of inconsistency offstage, where it is not forced on the attention of the audience. The question of how Neoptolemos' knowledge of the oracle evolves in the *Philoctetes* is a good example of what is inoffensive in practice. A touching farewell followed eight lines later by a reunion is tactless, even if the reunion is offstage; I don't think Sophocles would have perpetrated it, or *O.C.* 765-71. A lesser poet, anxious to preserve as much as possible of the original text, may have. Tidying up the time intervals was quite unnecessary, if Aeschylus, in the *Agamemnon*, could get away with the arrival in Argos from Troy of a beacon signal followed only 480 lines later by a messenger, the storm which wrecked the fleet having intervened. If you can keep attention firmly focussed on the visible there will not be too critical inspection of invisible illogicalities.

I have attempted to answer 'How much?' and 'Why?'. The remaining question is 'Who?'. The only answer for which there is any evidence is 'The younger Sophocles'. Of course the evidence is inconclusive and Graffunder's theory is not provable. But I believe it has a much better chance of being correct than Davies is willing to allow.

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