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Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments

*With Critical Notes, Commentary and
Translation in English Prose*

VOLUME 1: THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS

EDITED BY RICHARD CLAVERHOUSE JEBB
SOPHOCLES



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THE PLAYS AND FRAGMENTS.

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THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS.

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SOPHOCLES

THE PLAYS AND FRAGMENTS

WITH CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTARY, AND
TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH PROSE,

BY

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

PART I.

THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS.

EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

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NOTE.

IT is intended that in the present edition of Sophocles each play should form a separate volume. While the volumes subsequent to the first will necessarily contain occasional references to the earlier portion of the work, care will be taken to render each volume, in all essentials, an independent book, available for the use of readers who possess no other part of the edition.

The *Oedipus Coloneus* will follow the present volume at as short an interval as may be found possible. Of the remaining five plays, the *Antigone* will be the first. An eighth volume will contain (1) the Fragments: (2) short Essays on subjects of general interest in relation to Sophocles: (3) a General Index, for all the volumes, of 1. Greek, 2. Matters, 3. Authors quoted.

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PREFACE.

AS long ago as 1867, I contributed to the *Catena Classicorum* a commentary on the *Electra* of Sophocles, followed in 1868 by one on the *Ajax*. At that time I already meditated a complete edition of Sophocles on a larger scale,—a design which I have never abandoned, though various causes have delayed its execution.

One of these causes may be briefly noticed here. In the course of preparing the commentaries on the *Electra* and the *Ajax*, I had been led to see more clearly the intimate relation which in certain respects exists between Greek tragic dialogue and Greek rhetorical prose, and to feel the desire of studying more closely the whole process by which Greek oratory had been developed. The result of this study was a treatise on the historical development of Attic prose style, which in 1876 was published under the title of *The Attic Orators from Antiphon to Isaeos*. The reception accorded to it has been most gratifying, and has more than repaid the labour which it had cost. It was, however, as a preparation, in one department, for the task of editing Sophocles that the special studies embodied in the *Attic Orators* had originally been undertaken: and, though they necessarily extended beyond that immediate scope, I do not regard the time bestowed on them as lost to the pur-

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poses of the present work. I may say this here, because,—if I can at all judge from my own feeling in such a case,—it is sometimes of interest for readers to know that works not obviously related to each other have been connected, in the writer's own mind, by a definite unity of purpose. However much he may have failed of his aim in either task or in both, at any rate the point of view from which he approached each may thus be more clearly suggested.

In offering to the public the first part of a new edition of Sophocles, the editor may reasonably be expected to state the general characteristics which he intends to be distinctive of it. In this case, they are chiefly two.

1. First, I aim at showing fully and exactly how the work of Sophocles is understood by me, both in its larger aspects, and at every particular point. For this purpose, the first requisite is a translation, the principle of which shall be absolute fidelity to the original; not to the letter of the original at the cost of the spirit, but to the spirit as expressed in the letter. And, for this end, prose has two advantages over verse, even though the verse be that of a poet. (i) Metre will often exact sacrifices precisely at those points which test the higher fidelity of translation—fidelity to light touches by which the genius and art of the original are most delicately marked. (ii) A modern verse translation has necessarily a more or less modern spirit of its own, due to its very form, and to the associations with which the form is invested. Thus, however little he may desire it, the metrical translator is unavoidably placed in competition with his original.

The value of verse translations as substantive literary works is not here in question. Translation is here being considered solely from the stand-point of the *commentator*, as an indispensable instrument of lucid interpretation. In supplement to a prose translation, a commentary has a special part to perform,

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though this is only one of several functions which a commentary ought to aim at discharging. There are places where a translation, although in prose, cannot combine literal with essential accuracy. A version which subordinates the letter to the spirit will sometimes involve a mental process of which the result bears no visible trace. If the version is sound, this process is not only morally sensitive, but has also a scrupulously logical march. A version which, while brilliant, is unsound, is one which seizes on a smooth compromise or a glittering resemblance, which may imply an unconscious misrepresentation or an undetected fallacy. 'This rendering, I can see, is not literal'—we may suppose a reader to say. 'In what sense, then, and *why*, is it equivalent to the Greek?' Here—supposing the translation to be sound—is the opportunity of the commentary. It comes in to show that there is no flaw in the process by which an advance has been made from a literal rendering to one which, though less literal, is more faithful.

This, then, is the first object for which I have striven—the vivid exposition of my own mind in relation to Sophocles; so that, even where my understanding of him is defective or mistaken, at least it may seldom be ambiguous. This is an endeavour which appeals more directly to classical students: it is by them, if any of them should use this book in their work, that the measure of failure or success will be most correctly judged.

2. The second object which has been proposed to this edition regards educated readers generally, not classical students alone. It is my hope—whether a vain one or not, I hardly know—that the English version facing the Greek text may induce some persons to read a play of Sophocles as they would read a great poem of a modern poet,—with no such interposing nightmare of *τύπτω* as at Athens came between Thackeray and his instinctive sense of what was admirable in the nature

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and art around him,—but with free exercise of the mind and taste, thinking only of the drama itself, and of its qualities as such. Surely that is, above all things, what is to be desired by us just now in regard to all the worthiest literature of the world—that people should know some part of it (the quantity matters much less) *at first hand*,—not merely through manuals of literary history or magazine articles. Summaries, when the work of scholars, may be valuable as introductions and as retrospects; but only the breath of the great literature itself can make the dry bones live. Any one who had read thoroughly and intelligently a single play such as the *Oedipus Tyrannus* would have derived far more intellectual advantage from Greek literature, and would comprehend far better what it has signified in the spiritual history of mankind, than if he had committed to memory the names, dates, and abridged contents of a hundred Greek books ranging over half-a-dozen centuries.

‘Explanatory notes ought to be written in one’s own ‘language, critical in the Latin.’...‘The traditionary Latin of ‘scholars’ has ‘created in a manner a vocabulary of its own.’ This is the principle laid down by Shilleto in the preface to his edition of Demosthenes *On the Embassy*, and it could not have been better exemplified than by his own practice in that celebrated book. He felt, as everyone must, the occasional difficulty of drawing the line between ‘critical’ and ‘explanatory.’ But the fact is that the difficulty becomes serious only if we try to make the line a hard-and-fast one. Practically, it can nearly always be solved by a little exercise of discretion. When both sets of notes are on the same page, no real inconvenience can arise in cases where either department slightly overlaps the other.

In a later part of this edition, when dealing in short essays with other matters of general interest in relation to Sophocles,

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I propose to give an outline of Sophoclean bibliography, with some attempt to estimate the distinctive excellences of the principal works. The subject is a large one, as a single fact may serve to show. In 1874 Dr Hermann Genthe, the reviser of Ellendt's lexicon, published an index to writings illustrative of Sophocles which had appeared, chiefly in Germany, since 1836. The index, a book of 134 pages, does not include editions, whether of single plays, or of all; yet the author can enumerate 801 books, dissertations, or critical articles, all published between 1836 and 1874, and representing upwards of 430 writers. Even in 1874 it would have been possible to make numerous additions to this catalogue from English sources, which Dr Genthe had left nearly untouched: now, in 1883, the increment from all sources would be very considerable. Here, I must be content to mention those editions which, out of a larger number, have in this play been my more constant companions. They are those of Hermann, Wunder, Dindorf, Schneidewin (as revised by Nauck), Blaydes, Campbell, Kennedy. Other editions, commentaries, and writings of various kinds will be found cited on particular points in the critical notes, the commentary, or the appendix.

It is a particular pleasure to me here—and all the greater, because on a few points I have ventured to differ from its interpretations—to commend to all students of this play the edition of Professor Kennedy, in which, as it is unnecessary for me to say, they will trace the hand of the master.

Nor can I mention the most recent English edition of Sophocles without saying how far it is alike from my anticipation and from my desire that the present edition should divert a single reader from the work, in so many senses admirable, of Professor Campbell. The high place which he has justly won among the English scholars who have deserved well of Sophocles is one from which no successor could remove

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him, and which every worthy successor will most earnestly desire that he should retain. Students will find in his work much which the present does not give,—much which it could not give; they will also recognise the impress of personal qualities which are not more appreciated by his friends than they are significant of the best graces which humane studies can impart to the mind and character.

In the Metrical Analysis I notice my obligations to Dr J. H. Heinrich Schmidt's *Kunstformen*, and more especially to the fourth volume of that work, the *Griechische Metrik*; also to the aids given by the translator of Schmidt's *Leitfaden*, Dr J. W. White, Assistant Professor of Greek in Harvard University, in his able edition of this play.

To the Librarians of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the Biblioteca Mediceo-Lorenziana, Florence, the Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, I desire to express my thanks for the courtesy with which every facility was afforded to me for consulting manuscripts of Sophocles.

The proof-sheets of the commentary and of the appendix have been read by Mr C. A. M. Fennell, editor of Pindar, and formerly Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge; whom I have to thank, not only for the care with which a laborious office was performed, but also for several valuable suggestions made during the progress of the work.

I should be very ungrateful if I closed this preface without recording my sense of the combined rapidity and precision which, in printing a volume of somewhat complex form, have sustained the well-known repute of the Cambridge University Press.

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- PAGE 8, lines 5, 6. For 463—511, read 463—512 (as also in p. 97, l. 3 from bottom, and p. 98, l. 14 from bottom): and for 512—862 read 513—862 (as also on p. 106, l. 11 from bottom).
- „ 82, critical note, l. 2. For γέ μου read γ' ἐμοῦ.
- „ 102, line 6 of Greek text. Transfer the second ἦ to the beginning of the next line.
- „ 115, bottom line. After 'cp.', insert 133.
- „ 164, crit. note, l. 2, *first word*. For ἀποτμον read ἀπότομον.
- „ 169, crit. note, l. 1, for θεῶ read θυμῶ.
- „ 176, crit. note, l. 2, insert που after τέθηκε.
- „ 203, crit. note, l. 1, for *de monstrare* read *demonstrare*.
- „ 225, bottom line, for περιστύλον read περιστυλον.

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§ 1. THE *Oedipus Tyrannus* is in one sense the masterpiece of Attic Tragedy. No other shows an equal degree of art in the development of the plot; and this excellence depends on the powerful and subtle drawing of the characters. Modern drama, where minor parts can be multiplied and scene changed at will, can more easily divorce the two kinds of merit. Some of Voltaire's plays, for instance, not first-rate in other ways, are models of ingenious construction. The conditions of the Greek stage left less room for such a result. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the highest constructive skill is seen to be intimately and necessarily allied with the vivid delineation of a few persons.

Here it is peculiarly interesting to recover, so far as we can, the form in which the story of Oedipus came to Sophocles; to remark what he has altered or added; and to see how the same subject has been handled by other dramatists.

The essence of the myth is the son slaying his unknown father, and thereby fulfilling a decree of fate. The subsequent marriage, if not an original part of the story, seems to have been an early addition. The central ideas are, (1) the irresistible power of destiny, and (2) the sacredness of the primary natural ties, as measured by the horror of an unconscious sin against it. The direct and simple form in which these ideas are embodied gives the legend an impress of high antiquity. This might be illustrated by a comparison with the story of Sohrab and Rostum as told in Mr Matthew Arnold's beautiful poem. The slaying of the unknown son by the father is there surrounded with a pathos and a chivalrous tenderness which

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have no counterpart in the grim simplicity of the Oedipus myth, as it appears in its earliest known shape.

Homeric
Poems.

§ 2. The *Iliad*, which knows the war of Polyneices and his allies against Thebes (4. 378), once glances at the tale of Oedipus—where Mecisteus, father of Euryalus, is said to have visited Thebes in order to attend the funeral games which were celebrated after the death of Oedipus (23. 679 f.) :—

ὅς ποτε Θήβασδ' ἦλθε δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο
εἰς τάφου,—

—‘who came to Thebes of yore, when Oedipus had fallen, to his burying.’

The word *δεδουπότος* plainly refers to a violent death in fight, or at the hand of an assassin ; it would not be in accord with the tone of epic language to understand it as a figurative phrase for a sudden fall from greatness. But more than this the *Iliad* does not tell. The poet of the 23rd book imagines Oedipus as having died by violence, and received burial at Thebes, in the generation before the Trojan war.

The *Nekyia* in the *Odyssey* gives the earliest sketch of an integral story (II. 271 ff.) :—

Μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἴδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,
ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν αἰδρείησι νόοιο
γῆμαμένη ᾧ νιέει ὃ δ' ὄν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίζας
γῆμεν ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.
ἀλλ' ὃ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχω
Καδμείων ἤνασσε θεῶν ὀλοῦς διὰ βουλᾶς·
ἣ δ' ἔβη εἰς Ἄϊδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀρ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου,
ᾧ ἄχει σχομένη τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελεύουσιν.

‘And I saw the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epicastè, who wrought a dread deed with unwitting mind, in that she wedded her son ; but he had slain his father ere he wedded her ; and presently the gods made these things known among men. Yet he still ruled over the Cadmeans in lovely Thebes, suffering anguish by the dire counsels of the gods ; but she went to the house of Hades, the strong warder, when she had fastened a noose on high from the roof-beam, possessed by her pain ;

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and to him she bequeathed sorrows full many, even all that a mother's Avengers bring to pass.'

With regard to this outline in the *Odyssey*, it is to be noted that it ignores (*a*) the deliverance of Thebes from the Sphinx—though this may be implied in the marriage with Epicastè: (*b*) the self-blinding of Oedipus: (*c*) the expulsion of Oedipus from Thebes—herein agreeing with the indication in the *Iliad*. It further seems to exclude the notion of Epicastè having borne children to Oedipus, since the discovery followed 'presently' on the union,—unless, indeed, by ἀφάρ the poet merely meant 'suddenly.'

§ 3. Lost poems of Hesiod may have touched on the story of Oedipus; but in his extant work there is only a passing reference to the war at Thebes (between Polyneices and Eteocles), in which heroes fell, 'fighting for the flocks of Oedipus.' Hesiod knows the Sphinx as the daughter of Echidna and as the pest of Thebes¹. Other epic versions.

But the story of Oedipus was fully treated in some of those lost epics which dealt with the Theban cycle of myths. One of these was the '*Oedipodeia*,' *Οἰδιπόδεια* (ἔπη). According to this, the four children of Oedipus were not borne by Iocasta, but by a second wife, Euryganeia. Pausanias, who follows this account, does not know the author of the poem². It will be observed that this epic agrees with the *Odyssey* in not making Iocasta bear issue to Oedipus. It is by Attic writers, so far as we know, that she was first described as doing so. Poets or logographers who desired to preserve the favour of Dorians had a reason for avoiding that version. There were houses which traced their line from the children of Oedipus,—as Theron, tyrant of Acragas,

¹ Hes. *Op.* 162: war slew the heroes, τοὺς μὲν ἐφ' ἑπταπύλῳ Θήβῃ...μαρναμένους μῆλων ἔνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο. The Sphinx: *Theog.* 326, ἡ δ' (Echidna) ἄρα Φικ' ὀλοῆν τέκε, Καθμείουσιν δλεθρον. The hill near Thebes on which the Sphinx sat was called Φικειων ὄρος. References in lost Hesiodic poems: schol. on *Il.* 23. 680.

² He speaks merely of ὁ τὰ ἔπη ποιήσας ἡ Οἰδιπόδεια ὀνομάζουσι (9. 5. 11). But the inscription known as the 'marmor Borgianum' refers it to Cineaethon, a Lacedaemonian poet who treated epically the Dorian family legends, and who is said to have flourished about 775 B.C. Pausanias, however, who quotes Cineaethon on several points of genealogy, certainly did not regard the *Oedipodeia* as his work.

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claimed descent from Thersandros, son of Polyneices¹. To represent these children as the offspring of an incestuous union would have been to declare the stream polluted at its source.

We learn from Proclus that in the epic called the *Cyprian Lays* (Κύπρια), which included the preparations for the Trojan war, Nestor related 'the story of Oedipus' (τὰ περὶ Οἰδίπου) in the course of a digression (ἐν παρεκβάσει) which comprised also the madness of Heracles, as well as the story of Theseus and Ariadne. This was probably one of the sources used by the Attic dramatists. Another source, doubtless more fertile in detail, was the epic entitled the *Thebaid* (Θηβαΐς), and now usually designated as the 'Cyclic Thebaid,' to distinguish it from a later epic of the same name by Antimachus of Colophon, the contemporary of Euripides. Only about 20 verses remain from it². The chief fragment relates to the curse pronounced by Oedipus on his sons. They had broken his strict command by setting on his table the wine-cups (ἐκπόματα) used by Laus; and he invoked a curse upon them:—

αἴψα δὲ παισὶν ἐοῖσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπαρὰς
ἀργαλέας ἡράτο· θεὸν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἐρινύν·
ὡς οὐ οἱ πατρῷ' ἐνηεῖη φιλότητος
δάσσαιντ', ἀμφοτέροισι δ' ἔοι πόλεμος τε μάχαι τε.

'And straightway, while his two sons were by, he uttered dire curses,—and the Avenging goddess failed not to hear them,—that they should divide their heritage in no kindly spirit, but that war and strife should be ever between them.'

This *Thebaid*—tracing the operation of a curse through the whole history of the house—must have had an important share in moulding the conception of the Aeschylean trilogy.

Pindar.

§ 4. Pindar touches on the story of Oedipus in *Ol.* 2. 35 ff. Destiny has often brought evil fortune after good,—

ἐξ οὐπερ ἔκτεινε Λᾶον μόριμος υἱὸς
συναντόμενος, ἐν δὲ Πυθῶνι χρησθὲν
παλαίφατον τέλεσσευ.

¹ Pind. *Ol.* 2. 35.

² See the Didot ed. of the Cyclic fragments, p. 587.

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ἰδοῖσα δ' ὄξει' Ἐριννυδῶν
ἔπεφνέ οἱ σὺν ἀλλαλοφονία γένος ἀρήιον—

‘—from the day when his doomed son met Laius and killed him, and accomplished the word given aforetime at Pytho. But the swift Erinnys beheld it, and slew his warlike sons, each by the other's sword.’

Here the Fury is represented as destroying the sons in direct retribution for the parricide, not in answer to the imprecation of Oedipus. A fragment of Pindar alludes to the riddle of the Sphinx, and he uses ‘the wisdom of Oedipus’ to denote counsel wrapped in dark sayings,—since the skill which solves riddling speech can weave it¹.

§ 5. The logographers could not omit the story of Oedipus The logographers. in a systematic treatment of the Theban myths. Hellanicus of Mitylene (circ. 450 B.C.) is mentioned by the scholiast on the *Phoenissae* (61) as agreeing with Euripides in regard to the self-blinding of Oedipus². The contemporary Pherecydes of Leros (usually called ‘Athenian’ since Athens was his home) treated the legends of Thebes in the fifth of ten books forming a comprehensive survey of Greek tradition³. According to him, Iocasta bore two sons to Oedipus, who were slain by the Minyae: but, as in the *Oedipodeia*, his second wife Euryganeia bore Eteocles and Polyneices, Antigone and Ismene. This seems to be the earliest known version which ascribes issue to the marriage of Iocasta with Oedipus.

§ 6. However incomplete this sketch may be relatively to The dram- the materials which existed in the early part of the fifth century atists. B.C., it may at least serve to suggest the general conditions under which Tragedy entered on the treatment of the subject. The story of Oedipus, defined in its main features by a tradition older than the *Odyssey*, had been elaborated in the epics of later poets

¹ Pind. fr. 62 αἶνγμα παρθένου | ἐξ ἀγριῶν γνάθων: *Pyth.* 4. 263 τῶν Οἰδιπόδα σοφίαν. Pindar's elder contemporary Corinna had sung of Oedipus as delivering Thebes not only from the Sphinx but also from τὴν Τευμησσίαν ἀλώπεκα—a fox from the Boeotian village of Teumessus: but we hear no more of this less formidable pest. (Bergk, *Poet. Lyr.* p. 949.)

² Müller, *Frag. Histor.* I. 85.

³ Müller, *ib.* I. 48.

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and the prose of chroniclers. There were versions differing in detail, and allowing scope for selection. While the great outlines were constant, minor circumstances might be adapted to the dramatist's chosen view.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides agree in a trait which does not belong to any extant version before theirs. Iocasta, not Euryganeia, is the mother of Eteocles and Polynices, Antigone and Ismene. They agree also in connecting the doom of the two brothers with a curse pronounced by Oedipus. Neither the scanty fragments¹ which alone represent the *Oedipus* of Euripides, nor the hints in the *Phoenissae*, enable us to determine the distinctive features of his treatment. With regard to Aeschylus, though our knowledge is very meagre, it suffices at least to show the broad difference between his plan and that of Sophocles.

Aeschylus. Aeschylus treated the story of Oedipus as he treated the story of Agamemnon. Oedipus became the foremost figure of a trilogy which traced the action of an inherited curse in the house of Labdacus, even as the *Oresteia* traced the action of such a curse in the house of Pelops. That trilogy consisted of the

¹ Nauck *Eur. Fragm.* 544—561, to which Unger adds *Soph. fr. incert.* 663, Meineke *adespota* 107, 309, others *adesp.* 6. Almost all the verses are commonplaces. From fr. 546, 547 I should conjecture that the Creon of Eur. defended himself against a charge of treason in a passage parallel with *Soph. O. T.* 583—615. One fragment of two lines is curious (545): ἡμεῖς δὲ Πολύβου παῖδ' ἐρείσαντες πέδῳ | ἐξομματοῦμεν καὶ διόλλυμεν κόρας. Quoting these, the schol. on *Eur. Ph.* 61 says: ἐν δὲ τῷ Οἰδίποδι οἱ Λαῖου θεράποντες ἐτύφλωσαν αὐτόν. This would seem to mean that, after the discovery, the old retainers of Laïus blinded Oedipus—for the schol. is commenting on the verse which says that he was blinded by *himself*. But the tragic force of the incident depends wholly on its being the king's own frantic act. I incline to suspect some error on the scholiast's part, which a knowledge of the context might possibly have disclosed.

From the prologue of the *Phoenissae* it appears that Eur. imagined Oedipus to have been found on Cithaeron by the ἱπποβούκοι of Polybus, and taken by them to the latter's wife. The Iocasta of Eur. herself relates in that play how, when the sons of Oed. grew up, they held him a prisoner in the palace at Thebes—that the disgrace might be hidden from men's eyes. It was then that he pronounced a curse upon them. When they have fallen, fighting for the throne, Iocasta kills herself over their bodies, and Creon then expels Oedipus from Thebes. The mutilated ὑπόθεσις of the *Phoenissae* does not warrant us in supposing that the *Oenomaus* and *Chrysisippus* of Eur.,—the latter containing the curse of Pelops on Laïus—formed a trilogy with his *Oedipus*.

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Laius, the *Oedipus*, and the extant *Seven against Thebes*; the satyric drama being the *Sphinx*. From the *Laius* only a few words remain; from the *Oedipus*, three verses; but some general idea of the *Oedipus* may be gathered from a passage in the *Seven against Thebes* (772—791). Oedipus had been pictured by Aeschylus, as he is pictured by Sophocles, at the height of fame and power. He who had delivered Thebes from ‘the devouring pest’ (τὸν ἀρπαξάνδραν κῆρα) was admired by all Thebans as the first of men. ‘But when, hapless one, he came to knowledge of his ill-starred marriage, impatient of his pain, with frenzied heart he wrought a twofold ill’: he blinded himself, and called down on his sons this curse, that one day they should divide their heritage with the sword. ‘And now I tremble lest the swift Erinnys bring it to pass.’

Hence we see that the *Oedipus* of Aeschylus included the imprecation of Oedipus upon his sons. This was essential to the poet’s main purpose, which was to exhibit the continuous action of the Erinnys in the house. Similarly the *Laius* doubtless included the curse called down on Laius by Pelops, when bereft by him of his son Chrysippus. The true climax of the Aeschylean *Oedipus* would thus have consisted, not in the discovery alone, but in the discovery followed by the curse. And we may safely infer that the process of discovery indicated in the *Seven against Thebes* by the words ἐπεὶ δ’ ἀπίθρων | ἐγένετο...γάμων (778) was not comparable with that in the play of Sophocles. It was probably much more abrupt, and due to some of those more mechanical devices which were ordinarily employed to bring about a ‘recognition’ on the stage. The *Oedipus* of Aeschylus, however brilliant, was only a link in a chain which derived its essential unity from ‘the mindful Erinnys.’

§ 7. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles was not part of a Sophocles. trilogy, but a work complete in itself. The proper climax of such a work was the discovery, considered in its immediate effects, not in its ulterior consequences. Here the constructive art of the dramatist would be successful in proportion as the discovery was naturally prepared, approached by a process of rising interest, and attended in the moment of fulfilment with the most

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astounding reversal of a previous situation. In regard to the structure of the plot, this is what Sophocles has achieved. Before giving an analysis of his plot, we must notice two features of it which are due to his own invention.

(1) According to previous accounts, the infant Oedipus, when exposed on Mount Cithaeron, had been found by herdsmen, and reared either in Southern Boeotia, or at Sicyon, a place associated with the worship of the Eumenides. Sophocles makes the Theban herd of Laïus give the babe to the herd of Polybus, king of Corinth, who rears it as his own. Thus are prepared the two convergent threads of evidence which meet in the final discovery. And thus, too, the belief of Oedipus concerning his own parentage becomes to him a source, first of anxiety, then of dread, then of hope—in contrast, at successive moments, with that reality which the spectators know.

(2) The only verses remaining from the *Oedipus* of Aeschylus show that in that drama Oedipus encountered and slew Laïus at a meeting of three roads near Potniae, a place in Boeotia, on the road leading from Thebes to Plataea. At the ruins of this place Pausanias saw ‘a grove of Demeter and Persephone’¹. It appears to have been sacred also to those other and more terrible goddesses who shared with these the epithet of *πότνιαι*,—the Eumenides (*ποτνιαδες θεαι*, Eur. *Or.* 318). For the purpose of Aeschylus, no choice of a scene could have been more fitting. The father and son, doomed by the curse in their house, are brought together at a spot sacred to the Erinnyes:—

*ἐπῆμυν τῆς ὁδοῦ τροχίλατον
σχιστῆς κελεύθου τρίοδον, ἔνθα συμβολὰς
τριῶν κελεύθων Ποτνιαδων ἡμείβομεν*².

‘We were coming in our journey to the spot from which three high-roads part, where we must pass by the junction of triple ways at Potniae.’

But for Sophocles this local fitness did not exist. For him, the supernatural agency which dominates the drama is not that of the Furies, but of Apollo. He transfers the scene of the encounter from the ‘three roads’ at Potniae to the ‘three roads’

¹ ἄλλος Δήμητρος καὶ Κόρης, 9. 8. 1.

² Aesch. fr. 167 (Nauck).

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near Daulia¹ in Phocis. The 'branching ways' of Potniae can no longer be traced. But in the Phocian pass a visitor can still feel how the aspect of nature is in unison with the deed of which Sophocles has made it the theatre². This change of locality has something more than the significance of a detail. It symbolises the removal of the action from the control of the dark Avenging Powers to a region within the influence of that Delphian god who is able to disclose and to punish impurity, but who will also give final rest to the wanderer, final absolution to the weary mourner of unconscious sin.

§ 8. The events which had preceded the action of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* are not set forth, after the fashion of Euripides, in a formal prologue. They have to be gathered from incidental hints in the play itself. It is an indispensable aid to the full comprehension of the drama that we should first connect these hints into a brief narrative of its antecedents as imagined by Sophocles.

Laius, king of Thebes, being childless, asked the oracle of Apollo at Delphi whether it was fated that a son should be born to him. The answer was, 'I will give thee a son, but it is doomed that thou leave the sunlight by the hands of thy child: for thus hath spoken Zeus, son of Cronus, moved by the dread curse of Pelops, whose own son (Chrysippus) thou didst snatch from him; and he prayed all this for thee.' When a son was indeed born to Laius of Iocasta his wife, three days after the birth he caused it to be exposed in the wilds of Mount Cithaeron. An iron pin was driven through the feet of the babe, fastening them together,—that, if perchance it should live to be found by a stranger, he might have the less mind to rear a child so maimed; from which maiming the child was afterwards called *Oedipus*³.

The man chosen to expose the babe received it from the hands of the mother, Iocasta herself, with the charge to destroy it. This man was a slave born in the house of Laius, and so belonging to the class of slaves whom their masters usually treated

¹ *Daulis* was the Homeric form of the name, *Daulia* the post-homeric (Strabo 9. 423).

² See the note on verse 733.

³ The incident of the pierced feet was evidently invented to explain the name *Oιδίππος* ('Swellfoot,' as Shelley renders it). In v. 397 ὁ μῆδ' ἐν εἰδῶς Οιδίππου suggests a play on οἶδα.

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with most confidence. He was employed in tending the flocks of Laïus on Mount Cithaeron, where they were pastured during the half-year from March to September.

In the glens of Cithaeron he had consorted with another herdsman, servant to Polybus, king of Corinth. Seized with pity for the babe, the Theban gave it to this herdsman of Polybus, who took it to Corinth. Polybus and his wife Meropè were childless. They reared the child as their own; the Corinthians regarded him as heir to the throne; and he grew to man's estate without doubting that he was the true son of the Corinthian king and queen.

But one day it chanced that at a feast a man heated with wine threw out a word which sank into the young prince's mind; he questioned the king and queen, whose resentment of the taunt comforted him; yet he felt that a whisper was creeping abroad; and he resolved to ask the truth from Apollo himself at Delphi. Apollo gave him no answer to the question touching his parentage, but told him these things—that he was doomed to slay his father, and to defile his mother's bed.

He turned away from Delphi with the resolve never again to see his home in Corinth; and took the road which leads eastward through Phocis to Boeotia.

At that moment Laïus was on his way from Thebes to Delphi, where he wished to consult the oracle. He was not escorted by the usual armed following of a king, but only by four attendants. The party of five met Oedipus at a narrow place near the 'Branching Roads' in Phocis; a quarrel occurred; and Oedipus slew Laïus, with three of his four attendants. The fourth escaped, and fled to Thebes with the tale that *a band of robbers* had fallen upon their company. This sole survivor was the very man who, long years before, had been charged by Laïus and Iocasta to expose their infant son on Cithaeron.

The Thebans vainly endeavoured to find some clue to the murder of Laïus. But, soon after his death, their attention was distracted by a new trouble. The goddess Hera—hostile to Thebes as the city of her rival Semelè—sent the Sphinx to afflict it,—a monster with the face of a maiden and the body of a winged lion; who sat on a hill near Thebes (the *Φίκειον ὄρος*),

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and chanted a riddle. 'What is the creature which is two-footed, three-footed, and four-footed; and weakest when it has most feet?' Every failure to find the answer cost the Thebans a life. Hope was deserting them; even the seer Teiresias had no help to give; when the wandering stranger, Oedipus, arrived. He solved the enigma by the word *man*: the Sphinx hurled herself from a rock; and the grateful Thebans gave the vacant throne to their deliverer as a free gift. At the same time he married Iocasta, the widow of Laius, and sister of Creon son of Menoecus.

The sole survivor from the slaughter of Laius and his company was at Thebes when the young stranger Oedipus ascended the throne. The man presently sought an audience of the queen Iocasta, knelt to her, and, touching her hand in earnest supplication, entreated that he might be sent to his old occupation of tending flocks in far-off pastures. It seemed a small thing for so old and faithful a servant to ask; and it was readily granted.

An interval of about sixteen years may be assumed between these events and the moment at which the *Oedipus Tyrannus* opens. Iocasta has borne four children to Oedipus: Eteocles, Polyneices, Antigone, Ismene. Touches in the closing scene of the play forbid us to suppose that the poet imagines the daughters as much above the age of thirteen and twelve respectively. Oedipus has become thoroughly established as the great king, the first of men, to whose wisdom Thebans turn in every trouble.

And now a great calamity has visited them. A blight is upon the fruits of the earth; cattle are perishing in the pastures; the increase of the womb is denied; and a fiery pestilence is ravaging the town. While the fumes of incense are rising to the gods from every altar, and cries of anguish fill the air, a body of suppliants—aged priests, youths, and children—present themselves before the wise king. He, if any mortal, can help them. It is here that the action opens.

§ 9. The drama falls into six main divisions or chapters. The following analysis exhibits in outline the mechanism of the plot, which deserves study. Analysis of the plot.

I. *Prologue*: 1—150. Oedipus appears as the great prince whom the Thebans rank second only to the gods. He pledges

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himself to relieve his afflicted people by seeking the murderer of Laïus.

Parodos: 151—215. The Chorus bewail the pestilence and invoke the gods.

II. *First Episode*: 216—462. Oedipus publicly invokes a solemn curse upon the unknown murderer of Laïus. At Creon's suggestion he sends for the seer Teiresias, who refuses to speak, but finally, stung by taunts, denounces Oedipus himself as the slayer.

First Stasimon: 463—512. The Chorus forebode that the unknown murderer is doomed; they refuse to believe the unproved charge brought by the seer.

III. *Second Episode*: 513—862. Creon protests against the suspicion that he has suborned Teiresias to accuse Oedipus. Oedipus is unconvinced. Iocasta stops the quarrel, and Creon departs. Oedipus then tells her that he has been charged with the murder of Laïus. She replies that he need feel no disquietude. Laïus, according to an oracle, was to have been slain by his own son; but the babe was exposed on the hills; and Laïus was actually slain by *robbers, at the meeting of three roads*.

This mention of *three roads* (v. 716) strikes the first note of alarm in the mind of Oedipus.

He questions her as to (1) the place, (2) the time, (3) the person and the company of Laïus. All confirm his fear that *he* has unwittingly done the deed.

He tells her his whole story—the taunt at Corinth—the visit to Delphi—the encounter in Phocis. But he has still one hope. The attendant of Laïus who escaped spoke of *robbers*, not of one robber.

Let this survivor—now a herdsman—be summoned and questioned.

Second Stasimon: 863—910. The Chorus utter a prayer against arrogance—such as the king's towards Creon; and impiety—such as they find in Iocasta's mistrust of oracles.

IV. *Third Episode*: 911—1085. A messenger from Corinth announces that Polybus is dead, and that Oedipus is now king

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designate. Iocasta and Oedipus exult in the refutation of the oracle which had destined Oedipus to slay his sire.

But Oedipus still dreads the other predicted horror—union with his mother.

The messenger, on learning this, discloses that Polybus and Meropè were not the parents of Oedipus. The messenger himself, when a herdsman in the service of Polybus, had found the infant Oedipus on Cithaeron, and had brought him to Corinth. Yet no—not *found* him; had *received* him *from another herdsman* (v. 1040).

Who was this other herdsman? The Corinthian replies:—He was said to be one of the people of Laïus.

Iocasta implores Oedipus to search no further. He answers that he cares not how lowly his birth may prove to be—he will search to the end. With a cry of despair, Iocasta rushes away.

Third Stasimon: 1086—1109. The Chorus joyously foretell that Oedipus will prove to be a native of the land—perchance of seed divine.

V. *Fourth Episode*: 1110—1185. The Theban herdsman is brought in¹.

‘There,’ says the Corinthian, ‘is the man who gave me the child.’ Bit by bit, the whole truth is wrung from the Theban. ‘The babe was the son of Laïus; the wife of Laïus gave her to me.’ Oedipus knows all, and with a shriek of misery he rushes away.

Fourth Stasimon: 1186—1222. The Chorus bewail the great king’s fall.

VI. *Exodus*: 1223—1530. A messenger from the house announces that Iocasta has hanged herself, and that Oedipus has put out his eyes. Presently Oedipus is led forth. With passionate lamentation he beseeches the Chorus of Theban Elders to banish or slay him.

Creon comes to lead him into the house. Oedipus obtains

¹ The original object of sending for him had been to ask,—‘Was it the deed of several men, or of one?’—a last refuge. But he is not interrogated on that point. Voltaire criticised this as inconsistent. It is better than consistent; it is natural. A more urgent question has thrust the other out of sight.