

director, who until then had been so careful, overestimated his audience. The daemonic passion of the African, the satanic malice of his ensign, the cruel slaughter of the innocent Desdemona, all exceeded by far what the nerves of the men of Hamburg and even more those of the women of 1776 Hamburg could bear. The closer the performance approached the catastrophe, the more uneasy the audience grew. 'Swoons followed upon swoons,' reports an eyewitness. 'The doors of the boxes opened and closed. People left or when necessary were carried out; and (according to trustworthy reports) the premature miscarriages of various prominent Hamburg women were the result of seeing and hearing the overly tragic play.'

When the play was next performed on December 4th, it was called 'Othello with Changes'. There were not only deletions and rewritings of crass expressions and scenes but most important a happy ending was added. 'Both Othello and Desdemona remained alive; and Hamburg's coming generations were preserved from theatrical accouchements.'

The eighteenth-century parallel does not assure the historicity of the Aeschylean anecdote. It does prove that the historicity of the anecdote cannot be dismissed on the grounds of intrinsic absurdity. A modern European audience reacted just this way to a frightening stage presentation.

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<sup>7</sup> That Secretary Schütze would have read Anonymus, *Vita Aeschyli* and invented history to agree with it is what the late Sir Denys Page would have called 'the remotely conceivable alternative'.

#### CONINGTON'S FIRST EMENDATION

Aesch. *Eum.* 483

φόνων δικαστὰς ὀρκίων αἰδουμένους  
θεσμόν.

Page's apparatus: 483 αἰδου- Prien: αἰρου- codd.

C. Prien, *Rh. Mus.* 6 (1848), 192f.: '...so habe ich vor Jahren schon vermuthet [but not published, apparently] ὀρκίων γ' αἰδουμένους mit Vergleichung der Stellen V. 650 [= 680] ὀρκον αἰδεσθε und 680 [= 710] αἰδουμένους τὸν ὀρκον, ohne sie für evident ausgeben zu wollen.'

W. Linwood, *Aeschyli Eumenides* (Oxford, 1844), Corrigenda et Addenda p. 200: 'αἰδουμένους pro αἰρουμένους conjicit juvenis ingeniosus: nec male fortasse.'

*Dictionary of National Biography* iv (1908), 938f. CONINGTON, JOHN (1825–1869), classical scholar, born 10 Aug. 1825... On 30 June 1843 Conington matriculated at University College, Oxford... He went into residence in October 1843, and in the Lent term of the following year carried off the Hertford and Ireland university scholarships... It is curious that his judgment... drew him in the direction of Cambridge... To Oxford, however, he went, and read with the eminent scholar Linwood, who had the same passion for Greek plays as his pupil...

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#### THE FINAL LINES OF SOPHOCLES, *KING OEDIPUS* (1524–30)

ὦ πάτρας Θήβης ἔνοικοι, λεύσσειτ', Οἰδίπους ὄδε,  
ὃς τὰ κλείν' αἰνίγματ' ἤδει καὶ κράτιστος ἦν ἀνὴρ, 1525  
οὐ τίς οὐ ζήλω πολιτῶν ταῖς τύχαις \*ἐπέβλεπεν,  
εἰς ὅσον κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς ἐλήλυθεν.  
ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἰδεῖν  
ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν' ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἂν  
τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδέν' ἀλγεινὸν παθῶν. 1530

1526 ὅστις οὐ ζήλω πολιτῶν καὶ τύχαις ἐπιβλέπων codd.: ὃν τίς οὐ ζήλω πολιτῶν τῆς τύχης ἐπέβλεπεν; Musgrave. Unde ἐπέβλεπεν mutuatus cum Martini coniectura οὐ, Ellendtii ταῖς coniunxit Hartung, ut ita legat: οὐ τίς οὐ ζήλω πολιτῶν ταῖς τύχαις ἐπέβλεπεν; quod recepit Nauck, Jebb. 1528 ὄντα κείνην scripserat pr. manus in L; corrector ε ante κ addidit.

The article 'Parting Words: Final Lines in Sophocles and Euripides' by Deborah H. Roberts, *CQ* 37 (1987), 51–64, raises again the question of whether or not the final lines of Sophocles, *King Oedipus* (that is, lines 1524–30) are genuine.

These lines were indeed rejected as spurious – together with all the other six endings of Sophocles' plays – by Ritter in 1861<sup>1</sup> and by Teuffel in 1874.<sup>2</sup> In recent times they have also been strongly attacked by Dawe on two separate occasions.<sup>3</sup> But Roberts' article demands that the question be reassessed and this note, in providing that reassessment, argues that lines 1524–30 are in fact genuine.<sup>4</sup>

We may begin with two of Roberts' observations about what she terms the coda of a tragedy; 'by its familiar form and content it marks the end all plays must have'; 'timeless generalization is to be found in a number of codas containing gnomic statements'.<sup>5</sup> Given the truth of these two observations and the fact that such timeless generalization is present in the coda, the final lines, of Sophocles, *King Oedipus*, the next step is to consider the function of such gnomic statements at the end of a Greek tragedy. Roberts holds that, in bringing the play to the end that must come, on the one hand the gnomic coda presents a simpler view than the play's complexities warrant and that, though thematically inadequate, it is part of the requisite finality; and that on the other hand the gnomic coda claims universality, even though only one particular, selected story has been treated in the play.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, we must remember that these final lines are spoken by the Chorus and that this is appropriate because it is the 'retailer *par excellence* of gnomic wisdom'.<sup>7</sup>

Moving on now to examine the final lines of *King Oedipus*, we note immediately that they are spoken by the Chorus and their metre is trochaic tetrameter catalectic – as is also the case with the final lines of Euripides, *Ion* (1619–22). The Chorus begins with a command, as it does also at the end both of *Philoctetes* (1469) and of *Oedipus at Colonus* (1777–8). This is a command to the inhabitants of Thebes, the city where the entire action of the play has taken place, to contemplate the fate of Oedipus, who has just obeyed Creon's order to let go of his daughters and proceed into the palace (1521–3). The command is therefore part of the whole process of closing the play: Oedipus has gone off-stage and, while it is true that in the last scene he has regained much of his old imperiousness,<sup>8</sup> it is nevertheless now time to attempt an overall consideration of what has happened to him.

What these Thebans are enjoined to contemplate is the disaster that has overwhelmed Oedipus, and the catalogue of horrors – of parricide and incest, of Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-blinding – is referred to, in an appropriate and vivid metaphor, as a wave of disaster, κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς; it is as though Oedipus went into the sea and succeeding waves engulfed him. But this metaphor is

<sup>1</sup> F. Ritter, *Philologus* 17 (1861), 422–36, esp. 424–8.

<sup>2</sup> W. Teuffel, *RhM* 29 (1874), 505–9.

<sup>3</sup> R. D. Dawe, *Studies on the Text of Sophocles*, i (Leiden, 1974), 266–73; id., *Sophocles, Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge, 1982), 247.

<sup>4</sup> Also argued for by W. M. Calder III, *CPh* 57 (1962), 224–7; E. R. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford, 1973), 77; D. A. Hester, *Antichthon* 7 (1973), 11–12 (who reverses his view at *Antichthon* 18 (1984), 12–23).

<sup>5</sup> Roberts, pp. 57, 58.

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, pp. 59–60.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> M. Davies, *Hermes* 110 (1982), 268–77; G. Gellie, *Ramus* 15 (1986), 35–42.

not simply appropriate in itself: it also picks up what Oedipus himself has said in the Exodos, at lines 1411–12 towards the end of the play. There he asks the Chorus to hurl him into the sea; now, at the very end, the Chorus note that he has, metaphorically, arrived there.

Lines 1525–6, which characterise Oedipus before he reached this series of disasters, are also appropriate. Oedipus is first referred to as a man of knowledge, as the solver of the riddle of the Sphinx, and this is in keeping with the fact that the theme of knowledge, including self-knowledge, is obviously crucial to the play. Then Oedipus is called a very powerful man, *κράτιστος*,<sup>9</sup> that is the king of Thebes, who is now reduced to being a powerless beggar. It was indeed precisely because of his knowledge that Oedipus became king and precisely because he was king that he had to preside over the investigation into the murder of Laius.

It is true that the transmitted text at line 1526 must be corrupt, but has been emended in a satisfactory manner by Hartung (followed by Jebb), as printed above.<sup>10</sup> In the past every citizen of Thebes, the Chorus says, used to look on the good fortune of the knowledgeable and powerful king with envy, but now, all that has changed because of the disasters that have overtaken Oedipus. And we remember that earlier in the Exodos the Chorus affirms that ‘I cannot look at you’ (1304), so that, here again, the Chorus is echoing a theme dealt with previously in the play.

So the statements of the Chorus that are specifically about Oedipus are certainly appropriate at this point. These statements do not, it is true, address questions such as *why* these things happen to Oedipus – but neither does Sophocles anywhere in the play – nor do they examine the complexities of Oedipus’ duality.<sup>11</sup> But they do clearly deal with the *peripeteia* that has occurred and in a way that is not excessively simplistic.

The last three lines spoken by the Chorus, which are also the last of the play, move on from the specific case of Oedipus to general, gnomic conclusions about the human condition. The basic point is that the example of Oedipus is such that no man can be called happy until he has died and done so without suffering. Which the Chorus, like Greek popular tradition (*Women of Trachis* 1–3), but unlike Aristotle (*EN* 1.10), clearly regard as an *adynaton*. So the pessimism is really of the same order as that in the famous assertion of the Chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus* (1225): *μὴ φῦναι ἅπαντα νικᾷ λόγον*. And so it is entirely fitting that mortal men should constantly keep their eye fixed on that final day of death towards which we are all progressing,<sup>12</sup> a notion that contains another vivid metaphor in the concept of a man crossing the end of life (1527–30).

These lines again relate to what has taken place earlier in the play, in the Fourth Stasimon (1186–1222). Indeed it is hardly excessive to regard these last three lines of the play as a more concentrated redaction of what the Chorus has already said in this choral ode. For in both statements of the Chorus Oedipus is a paradigm for what can be asserted about mankind in general – ‘I call no man blessed’ (1194–5); both refer to Oedipus’ solving of the riddle of the Sphinx and his power as king of Thebes; and both use sea-imagery to describe his disastrous fall, the choral ode referring to Jocasta’s womb – from which he came into the world and to which he returned in

<sup>9</sup> Dawe’s translation at p. 247 of his edition (n. 3) – ‘an excellent fellow’ – obscures this point.

<sup>10</sup> For the detail see R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus* (Cambridge, 1883), *ad loc.* and pp. 309–10.

<sup>11</sup> For this duality see J.-P. Vernant, *New Literary History* 3 (1978), 475–501.

<sup>12</sup> For the interpretation of this see Jebb (n. 10), *ad loc.*

sexual intercourse – as ‘a harbour’ (1208). Thus the summary of what has happened that the Chorus provides in the Fourth Stasimon is neatly re-enacted at the very end of the play.

So, far from constituting ‘demented balbutience’,<sup>13</sup> these final lines of King Oedipus complete the process of closure in a way that is extremely appropriate, if not profound. As another great dramatist, Yeats, realised when he closed his version of Sophocles’ play as follows:<sup>14</sup>

Make way for Oedipus. All people said,  
‘That is a fortunate man’;  
And now what storms are beating on his head!  
Call no man fortunate that is not dead.  
The dead are free from pain.

Anyone who heard the Chorus pronounce these words at the end of the recent production of Yeats’ *King Oedipus* by the Druid Theatre Company in Galway could be in no doubt that they constitute a fitting conclusion to the play.<sup>15</sup>

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### Appendix

Those who regard the final lines of Sophocles, *King Oedipus* as spurious make much of the supposed similarity between these lines and three passages in Euripides: *Andromache* 100–2, and *Phoenissae* 1687–9 and 1758–63.

The lines from *Andromache* can be easily and swiftly dealt with: the general similarity of theme – Andromache is bemoaning the death of her husband Hector and her own enslavement to Neoptolemus, and drawing gnomic conclusions from these events – is such that coincidences of expression are bound to occur and, significantly, the concept of *τέρμα τοῦ βίου* is absent from Euripides.

Somewhat more problematical is the *Phoenissae*. But again the supposed correspondences between lines 1687–9 of that play and the final lines of *King Oedipus* are not at all striking, and are of the kind that could scarcely be avoided, given that the subject matter in question is the fall of Oedipus.

Lines 1758–63 of the *Phoenissae* do indeed seem similar to the final lines of *King Oedipus*, but we have to remember that, on the one hand, this is a late and very self-conscious play of Euripides, so that a reference to Sophocles cannot be ruled out, and, on the other, that the whole Exodos of the *Phoenissae* (and, in particular, lines 1737–end) is suspect, so that interpolation cannot be ruled out either.<sup>16</sup> In either case the authenticity of Sophocles, *King Oedipus* 1524–30 is not in question.

<sup>13</sup> Dawe at p. 247 of his edition.

<sup>14</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Collected Plays* (London, 1982), 517.

<sup>15</sup> Production opened August 12, 1987. Director: Frank Conway. Chorus: Michael Ford. For an assessment of this production see B. Arkins, *Theatre Ireland* 14 (1988), 22–3.

<sup>16</sup> For the *exodus* of the *Phoenissae* see D. J. Conacher, *Phoenix* 21 (1967), 92–101; C. Mueller-Goldingen, *Untersuchungen zu den Phoenissen des Euripides* (Stuttgart, 1985), 226–66. In questioning the authenticity of lines 1737–end of that play Conacher notes (95; 100–1) that lines 1758–63 constitute either a direct interpolation or an imitation of *King Oedipus* 1524–30; Mueller-Goldingen (262–6) regards *Phoenissae* 1758–63 as an interpolation, asserting (262) ‘Dass auch die Trochaen 1758–63 zu athetieren sind, duerfte sicher sein’.