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# ONCE MORE THE END OF SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*

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**Abstract:** This article challenges the conclusion of Kovacs (2009) that *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1468–1523 is an interpolation, arguing that the evidence he brings is insufficient (except possibly in regard to 1500–02), that his proposal regarding Sophocles' original conclusion to the play is unsatisfactory and that in 1468–1523 several significant features of the play's opening scenes are repeated or reversed.

In his recent article 'Do we have the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*?' David Kovacs (2009) argues, in effect, for the following four propositions.

(1) That Sophocles designed *Oedipus Tyrannus* to end, as its present text does, with Oedipus going into (what had been) his own palace, though 'the audience receive a clear impression that he will be exiled at some later time' ((2009) 58).

(2) That, contrary to the arguments of Dawe (2001; 2006), *OT* 1424–67 is Sophocles' work, possibly but not certainly with a lacuna between 1445 and 1446 ((2009) 54–59).

(3) That when Oedipus says (*OT* 1455–57) that the gods must have kept him alive for the sake of some 'terrible evil' (δεινὸν κακόν), he will be understood by the audience as unknowingly foreshadowing his curse against his sons (of whom he will be speaking immediately afterwards) and the War of the Seven[1] ((2009) 66–68).

(4) That Dawe was right to regard *OT* 1468–end as an interpolation, and that the interpolator grafted his new scene on to the play in place of what had originally been a short concluding passage in which Creon assented to the requests made by Oedipus in 1447–48 (burial of Iocaste) and 1462–66 (caring for Oedipus' daughters) and took him into the palace for an offstage reunion with Antigone and Ismene ((2009) 60–65).

I believe that Kovacs has succeeded in establishing the first three of the above propositions. It is, however, the main purpose of this paper to argue that the fourth proposition is false and that *OT* 1468–1523, with the possible exception of one short section, is the conclusion of Sophocles' drama.[2]

Kovacs' objections to 1468–1523 are partly linguistic ((2009) 60–62) and partly dramaturgical ((2009) 62–63). On the linguistic issues, Kovacs was able to take account of the arguments of Finglass ((2009) 47–54) against Dawe; on one point (1488 βιῶναι... πρὸς ἀνθρώπων) he fully endorses Finglass' defence, and on another (the sense and construction of προυξένησαν in 1483) he offers no substantive counter-argument to it. I deal now with the remaining 11 counts in this part of Kovacs' indictment (numbered as in his article; the two points mentioned above are numbers 9 and 6 respectively).

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[1] Kovacs might well have gone on to mention two further and highly relevant consequences: the grim death of Antigone (caused by Creon – whom in 1462–66 Oedipus will beg to care for her and her sister) and the subsequent sack of Thebes by the Epigoni, among whom Oedipus' grandson Thersander will be prominent. The former had already been the subject of a Sophoclean tragedy, and so probably had the latter – for we now know from a papyrus fragment (*POxy* 71.4807) that a passage of Sophocles' *Epigoni* was parodied in a comedy of 430 or 429 (Hermippus' *Moirai*: Hermippus *fr.* 47.5–7). Oedipus, who had saved Thebes from destruction by the Sphinx, will end by being the cause of its ruin and the progenitor of its destroyer.

[2] I have little doubt that 1524–end are spurious; see Dawe (1973) 266–73; and for the history of the deletion (first proposed by Jean Boivin in 1718) Finglass 2009 (55–59).

(1) On ἴθι (1468, 1469), Kovacs reports correctly Dawe's specification ((2001) 7) that this imperative (where it does not mean literally 'go' or 'come') should be 'accompanied' by another imperative (Finglass had said 'followed'). This enables him to reduce Finglass' two Sophoclean counter-examples to one (*Phil.* 733); but it also means that *OT* 1468–69 itself ceases to violate the principle, since it does have such an accompanying imperative (ἔασον 1467). This point had been made previously by Davies (1991) 4 and Budelmann (2006) 58.

(2) Kovacs' objection to 1469–70, which he says 'implies that the blinded Oedipus no longer has daughters', is valid only if ἔχειν is incapable here of bearing any meaning that can save the passage from being nonsensical. Interpreters have in fact had no difficulty in finding a sensible, and sensitive, meaning for it: using various phrases[3] many have homed in on the idea that Oedipus' meaning is that if he can touch his daughters he will have that *feeling of togetherness* with them that had formerly come from beholding them with his eyes.

(3) 'In 1475 λέγειν τι, "to be right", is... a colloquialism unattested elsewhere in Sophocles.' Such uniqueness is not in itself suspicious: equally unparalleled in Sophocles is (for example) τοῦτ᾽ ἐκεῖνο ('that's it') in *El.* 1115 (*cf.* Eur. *Tro.* 620; *Ion* 504; *Or.* 804). In that passage the colloquialism 'conveys Electra's sorrow' (Finglass (2007)); here too it intensifies the already strong pathos of the context, an effect further reinforced when the line, like two others just before it (1468, 1471), breaks off after three syllables (with this cf. *Phil.* 750, 804).

(4a) Creon says at 1477 that he knew how Oedipus had formerly delighted in the company of his daughters and expected he would still do so. Kovacs finds this 'odd' in view of Oedipus' earlier statement (1375–77) that he could never have desired to cast eyes on his children, born as they were born. But if 1477 is incongruous with that statement, 1466–67 (a passage Kovacs regards as genuine), where Oedipus begs to be allowed to touch his daughters, is equally incongruous with it. Oedipus, and the audience, have moved on; the thoughts of both are no longer focused on the horror that drove Oedipus to put out his eyes,[4] but on the anguish of a loving father who can no longer be of any service to his children, and who now knows, moreover, that merely by bringing them into the world he has done them irremediable harm.

(4b) Kovacs also finds the internal logic of 1477 defective: 'Oedipus' *present* delight cannot be the one he felt some time ago'. It can, however, be (a recurrence of) the *same* delight which he felt previously – just as one may say of a loved one that one feels the same pleasure in her company as one did when one first knew her.

(5) On 1478–79, Kovacs says that 'one could have a better fate than Oedipus' and still be miserable'. Shall we then delete *Ajax* 550–51?[5] So far as concerns Oedipus' prayer that the gods 'will guard Creon better than they have guarded himself', we may reflect that the gods *did* 'guard' Oedipus, by saving him from destruction as a baby – but in so 'guarding' him, they did him the reverse of a favour.[6] *Cf.* 1179–80, 1349–53 (both referring to the Corinthian shepherd), 1391–92 (apostrophizing Mount Cithaeron) and especially 1456–57. May they not be such scurvy guardians to Creon!

(7) If line 1486 is taken *au pied de la lettre*, it does indeed make nonsense, which Kovacs skewers with an amusing para-Housmanism.[7] It was well understood by Groeneboom (1921).

[3] For example, 'that they were with me' (Jebb (1893); also Vellacott (1971) 95); '[that] I had them with me' (Fagles (1984)); '[that] they were mine' (McCart (1999)); 'to have them with me' (Lloyd-Jones (1994a)).

[4] And that would have driven him to kill his mother as well as his father (1255–62) had she not already ended her own life.

[5] 'My child, may you be like your father, only more fortunate; then you would be no ignoble man.'

[6] Note that φρουρήσας is aorist: we are being invited to think of *one* occasion on which the gods guarded Oedipus, and there is little doubt which one we will think of.

[7] *Oculis aut uidemus aut lacrimamus; ego autem uos uidere non possum; illacrimo ergo uobis* ('we use our eyes either to see or to weep; but I cannot see you; therefore I weep for you'). *Cf.* Housman ((1903) xlii), pretending to reconstruct the reasoning of 'the modern conservative critic' ((1903) liii): *turpe ac miserum est nec cautum esse nec ingeniosum et tamen poetas*

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Oedipus longs to be able to look on his daughters with the pity[8] he feels for them; but his eyes no longer have the power to do this and can express that pity only with tears. The rigidly prosaic logic that Kovacs employs here would condemn countless other pregnant Sophoclean phrases.[9]

(8) If we are to suspect βιῶναι at 1488 because it is 'the sole instance in Aeschylus or Sophocles', we must logically also suspect βιώσεται at Eur. *Alc.* 784, since it is the sole instance of this verb in Euripides. In any case, how do we know that *trag. adesp.* 566a (ῥᾴιον γένηται καὶ βιῶι) is neither Aeschylean nor Sophoclean?

(10) Kovacs' case against the verb ἔπεφνε (1497) is not as sound as it seems. He dismisses the parallel of Eur. *Andr.* 655 because that and the next line[10] were deleted by Nauck (with whom Kovacs (1995) concurred).[11] But these lines are indispensable in their context. Their deletion leaves Menelaus' claim that Andromache 'has a share in the blood of [Peleus'] son' (654) to stand without any explanation whatever (see Stevens (1971)); the claim is absurd enough even when backed by 655–56 (Andromache's 'share in the blood' is that she is the *sister-in-law* of Achilles' slayer!), without these lines it will be scarcely intelligible. Hence we know that the verb was not completely avoided in tragic dialogue; like βιω- (see above), it is attested in the spoken verse both of Sophocles and of Euripides, and also in an unattributed tragic fragment (*trag. adesp.* 199 ἀργῆν ἔπεφνεν).

(11) Kovacs' objection to δηλαδή – that it is 'rare in Euripides and found nowhere else in tragedy' – is not particularly strong in itself (compare (3) above), though it is noteworthy that the adverb's two genuine appearances in Euripides are in very late plays (*Or.* 789; *IA* 1366).[12] There are, however, other grounds for suspecting that 1500–02 may be an interpolation. Finglass ((2009) 50–51) defends the repetition from 1493–95 of the idea 'who will marry you?', but, as he himself rightly points out, 1486–1502 is 'a single unit, in which Oedipus explores the future consequences of his disgrace for his daughters', and it therefore should not end by focusing solely on just one of these consequences, ignoring the other one highlighted earlier (1489–91), exclusion from festivals and other public gatherings. Rather, the structure of the passage will be: I pity you for what your future holds (1486–88), shut out from the life of the city (1489–91) and from marriage (1492–95) because you are the children of an incestuous parricide (1496–99).

(12) If one translates ὧδε... πάντων ἐρήμους (1508–09) as 'so destitute of all things', one may well find this expression 'odd'. But there are plenty of alternative ways of expressing the sense of these words in English that are not 'odd' in the least: 'destitute of all things, as they are' or 'utterly destitute like this', are two that come to mind,[13] both of which give ὧδε the strong demonstrative force appropriate to its position (at the head of the participial phrase, separated from the words to which it belongs grammatically).[14]

*Latinos edere uelle; ego autem ingeniosus non sum; sum ergo cautus* ('it is wretched and disgraceful to have neither circumspection nor flair and yet still want to edit the texts of Latin poets; but I have no flair; therefore I am circumspect').

[8] *Cf.* οἰκτραῖν, 'pitiable' (1462); οἴκτισον, 'have pity' (1508).

[9] One is reminded of a remark of Jebb ((1893) lvii): 'When [Sophocles'] instinct felt a phrase to be truly and finely expressive, he left the logical analysis of it to the discretion of grammarians then unborn'. Some of the latter continue to show more valour than discretion, whether as emenders or as deleters.

[10] Kovacs writes by a slip '655–66'.

[11] Diggle (1984) and Lloyd (1994) retain the two lines.

[12] In *Andr.* 856, where δηλαδή makes a surprising appearance in (astrophic) lyric, it disrupts an entirely dochmiac context and (together with the next word, πόσις) was already seen by Triclinius to be an interpolation ('a good example of an explanatory note incorporated in the text', Stevens (1971) 197).

[13] Cf. *Phil.* 227–28 ἄνδρα δύστηνον, μόνον, ἐρῆμον ὧδε κἄφιλον κακούμενον, 'an unhappy man, alone, afflicted like this without a companion or a friend' (tr. Lloyd-Jones (1994b)).

[14] For similar placement of ὧδε *cf.* 1023 (κἄιθ' ὧδ' ἀπ' ἄλλης χειρὸς ἔστερξεν μέγα; 'and then he cherished me *so greatly*, <having received me> from another's hand?') and *Trach.* 137 (ἐπεὶ τίς ὧδε τέκνοισι Ζῆν' ἄβουλον εἶδεν; 'for who has ever seen Zeus *so unmindful* of his children?')

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(13) It is true that trochaic tetrameters, which appear in *OT* 1515–30, are not otherwise found in any datable tragic text between 458 and *ca.* 417; and we should not use this one feature to determine a late date for *OT* when it does not show any of the other features (for example, monodies, actors participating in the *parodos*) characteristic of Sophocles' late plays (*Electra*,[15] *Philoctetes* and *OC*). But can we say with any confidence that Sophocles never used tetrameters during this period? Euripides' extant plays, and most of his fragmentary plays, are datable on metrical grounds even if there is no external evidence; so the absence of tetrameters from all plays of his (extant and fragmentary ones alike) datable before *ca.* 417 is clearly significant. But Sophocles' fragmentary plays are mostly not datable, and much less of their text is preserved than of Euripides'. One tetrameter survives from *Odysseus Akanthoplex* (Soph. *fr.* 461) and possibly another from an unknown play (*fr.* 807).[16] We cannot have any assurance that Sophocles and Euripides were in this respect marching in step. Perhaps Sophocles continued to use tetrameters occasionally throughout his career. Perhaps he abandoned them for a time, reverted later to using them on a small scale, and later still Euripides took up the practice and extended it enormously. We cannot tell.

Kovacs ((2009) 62–63) lays six charges against the dramaturgy of *OT* 1468–1523; I shall consider also a seventh charge, which he does not mention (and presumably does not consider to be valid) but which has been strongly made by others.

(1) It is, so Kovacs claims, unparalleled for 'an order [to be] given to extras without the use of words', as must have been the case if Creon, at some point not long before 1471, had sent a servant to fetch Antigone and Ismene. He adds that 'it is hard to see what would have led Sophocles to depart from the usual practice of Greek tragedy here'. He has, however, no difficulty in seeing 'what might have motivated an interpolator' – namely the desire to create pathos, since in this way Oedipus 'does not know that his request has been granted until he hears [the girls] weep'. Kovacs does not explain why it is permissible for an interpolator to break a convention of the genre for this purpose, but impermissible for Sophocles to do so. It is also possible (though, as far as I am aware, equally unparalleled) that Creon, rather than having a servant bring the girls from indoors, goes briefly inside himself[17] and brings them out; this was the solution adopted by Murray ((1911) 83), and Owen ((1933) 159–60) points out that the ὁδός for which Oedipus is grateful to Creon (1478) can then be taken to be the going and coming of Creon himself rather than (as Kovacs (2009) 60 assumes, a trifle uncomfortably) the coming of the girls.

[15] On the dating of *Electra*, see March (2001) 20–22. Finglass (2007) 1–4 does not address March's most important argument, which is that if *Electra* was produced earlier than Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris* it becomes an unexplained coincidence that whereas Chrysothemis is never mentioned in Euripidean plays produced before that time (*Electra, IT*) she figures as part of Agamemnon's family in both Euripides' relevant later plays – explicitly in *Orestes* (23) and implicitly in *IA* (1164) – despite having no role in the action. However, Marshall (2009) has now shown that *IT* may possibly have been produced as early as 419, so March's argument cannot establish a date later than 418 as an upper limit for Sophocles' play.

[16] Tetrameters are, in fact, almost equally scarce in the tragic fragments of Aeschylus; one survives from *Edonoi* (Aesch. *fr.* 60) and one from an unspecified play, possibly *Nereids* (*fr.* 296 Radt = 150a Sommerstein 2008). For Aeschylus, as for Sophocles, I leave out of account fragments that are certainly or very probably satyric.

[17] Presumably while Oedipus is speaking 1468–70. The solution favoured by Dawe in both his editions (1982; 2006) – that the girls had entered with Creon at 1422 – can be ruled out: (1) Creon has not come from the palace but from his own home, to which he departed at 677; (2) at the outset he is anxious for Oedipus to go inside as soon as possible, to be seen and heard only by his own kin (1424–31), and will hardly therefore have wanted to bring Oedipus' kin to meet him outside; (3) the presence of the girls will be completely ignored for some 40 lines (except by the bemused audience) and when they are first mentioned it will not be by Creon, who brought them on, but by Oedipus who does not know they are there. See Gellie (1986) 42, n.14.

(2) + (3) The failure of Creon to reply verbally to Oedipus' plea of 1503–14 is not well defended by Finglass (2009) 52).[18] After Creon's touching awareness of Oedipus' desire for the company and contact of his children, it would be intolerable if he were to leave Oedipus waiting in vain for an answer to his plea that he, Creon, take on the paternal role which Oedipus can no longer perform. Moreover, Oedipus himself clearly accepts that his plea *has* been favourably answered, since his sole condition for going into the palace is that he shall (later) be sent away into exile (1518). But what that implies is that, since Creon certainly does not answer in words, he must have answered by gesture – and that that is what Oedipus is asking him to do at 1510. The gesture must, of course, be to touch *Oedipus*, since Oedipus would not be able to perceive whether Creon was laying his hand(s) on the two girls. Such a gesture would have all the greater significance because Oedipus is a man polluted; and this special significance is a sufficient reason for Oedipus to request that assent be given in this manner.[19] I do not understand Kovacs' assertion that 'the context... suggests' that it is the daughters who are to be touched; it would be easy to have Oedipus turn towards Creon (i.e. towards the sound of his voice) and stretch out his own hand in Creon's direction.

(4) The 'apparent contradiction' between 1503–10 and 1521–22[20] does not exist. As we have seen, Creon must have made it clear to Oedipus, in the manner Oedipus had requested, that he was assenting to his plea. He has thus become the guardian of Oedipus' daughters and, as it were, their social father. But Oedipus is still their biological father and he still loves them as much as ever. He apparently takes it for granted that Creon will not prevent him from spending as much time in their company as he wishes, during whatever period remains to him before he finally departs from Thebes. He will eventually, he knows, have to part from them – indeed he has in effect asked for it – but he is not prepared to *be parted* from them by force or to live in the same house without being allowed contact. That will be understood by every parent, and so will his cry, 'Please don't take them away from me!'

(5) Kovacs' argument that 'the dialogue at 1518–20 reveals a pointless divergence of presuppositions between Oedipus and Creon' depends crucially on his assumption that when Oedipus says he is hated by the gods (1519), he means that the gods, because they hate him, will *deny* him exile. But not only would this, as Kovacs shows, render the whole dialogue ludicrously illogical; it would also go against everything we have heard in the play hitherto. Ever since Creon brought his report from Delphi (100–01) we have been given to understand that for the purification of the city, the killer of Laius must be (executed or) exiled. And more recently, Oedipus himself has repeatedly demanded that he be removed from Thebes (1340–46, 1410–11, 1436–37, 1449–54); one of his reasons for this has been precisely his perception that the gods hate him more than any other mortal (1345–46), and, when Creon decided to consult Delphi again on the question what should be done with Oedipus (1438–39), Oedipus reminded him that Apollo has already declared what his fate should be (1440–41) – death or exile (*cf.* Kovacs (2009) 55). Against all this, Kovacs brings two points ((2009) 63, n.25). The first is Oedipus' ἀλλά, 'but', in 1519; but Kovacs does not explain why this should compel, or even encourage, the listener to take Oedipus' words in the sense he claims they bear – and indeed Oedipus' previous objection to Creon's previous declaration of intent to consult Apollo again (1440), mentioned a moment ago, also began with ἀλλά! The second is that the οὖν, 'then, so', of 1520 makes it 'likely that... Oedipus is adopting Creon's position in preference to his own of 1519'. On the alternative (and usual) interpretation, Oedipus is indeed adopting Creon's position of 1519 – in preference *to Creon's*

[18] 'This is not problematic. In a technique identified by Mastronarde (1979, 82) as the "self-willed maintenance of one's own topic", Creon insists on Oedipus' going in and does not allow further delay.'

[19] Oedipus similarly asks to be touched, despite his pollution, at 1413–15 and at *OC* 1130–31 – though both times the touch does not in the end occur, once because Creon's arrival pre-empts it, once because Oedipus himself changes his mind and withdraws the request.

[20] Kovacs by a slip writes '1521–52'.

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*position of 1518.* Creon had initially said that it was not for him, but for the god, to grant Oedipus' request. When Oedipus replied, in effect, that it was obvious what Apollo's response would be, Creon said that, that being so (τοιγαροῦν), Oedipus could expect to get his wish soon.[21] Oedipus now tries to treat this prediction as a promise; 1520a means in effect 'Then your answer's "yes"?' (φημί is a common formula for giving an affirmative answer, found in Sophocles at *Trach.* 418; *Ant.* 443; *OC* 317). Creon confirms that it is; Kovacs is right that this is how 1520b must be understood, since Creon cannot be made to say, 'I am not the man to say what I do not mean' in the very act of going back on his own words of a moment before. But he also cannot be making an unconditional promise to Oedipus, since that would be to arrogate to himself a decision which he has twice said must be made by the god. Therefore, he is either merely repeating and confirming his prediction of 1519 or (perhaps preferably) he is promising that if Apollo does confirm that Oedipus should be exiled, his instruction will speedily (τάχα) be put into effect. This is the most that Oedipus could reasonably ask for, and it apparently satisfies him.

(6) Regarding Creon's words in 1522–23, in which Kovacs sees 'strained logic accompanied by pointless cruelty', the essential points were made by Finglass ((2009) 53–54).

(7) To several scholars, notably March ((1987) 149–50) and Hester (1992), Oedipus' major speeches in the final scene, and especially the last of them (1480–1514), have given the strong impression of being 'speeches of farewell', and it has seemed highly inappropriate that they should be followed up not by a final parting but by his return into the same building where he had been living when the play began, to dwell there for an indeterminate period along with his children and Creon, the addressees of these speeches. In reply to this, two points may be made. In the first place, from Oedipus' point of view, these *are* in one sense speeches of farewell. He is still determined to leave Thebes as soon as possible and, *after* making the speeches under discussion, he tries once again to force Creon to promise to let him go more or less at once (1517–20). But in the second place, at no time in the scene does Oedipus actually say, explicitly or by necessary implication, that he will be *physically* departing forthwith. What these speeches do assume is that henceforth he will be, as it were, *socially* dead, unable to do any of the things that it would normally be his right and duty to do as a Theban and as the head of his *oikos.* He should have been the one to bury Iocasta, whether as her husband or as her son. He cannot do this; so Creon must. He should have been the one to care for his daughters, maintain them up to a suitable age and then give them away in suitable marriages. He cannot do this; so Creon must. He is not departing immediately from the city, though he fain would; but he *is* departing immediately from his former social roles – indeed he has of necessity quitted them already.

Kovacs declares ((2009) 63) that he can find no features of the dramaturgy of *OT* 1468–1523 to 'set against' his six objections to it – by which he means features that are '*prima facie* Sophoclean' ((2009) 53). He offers an alternative conclusion to the play ((2009) 64–65) which presumably *would* be *prima facie* Sophoclean. In this, Oedipus' speech of 1446–67 would be followed by a brief, sympathetic, reply from Creon, in which he would invite Oedipus to enter the palace (where he can be reunited with his children)[22] and promises to care for the two girls and to see to Iocasta's burial; after this the chorus would chant some anapaests to accompany their own exit via one of the *eisodoi* and the exit of Oedipus, guided by Creon, into the *skene.*

[21] 'If Creon believes his own logic,' says Dawe, 'he should accept this as a reason for not consulting the god a superfluous second time.' Quite so; but as many have noted, a vital difference between Creon and Oedipus in this play is that Creon does *not* put absolute trust in his own logic and reasoning powers, or those of any mortal.

[22] Kovacs specifies only the daughters; but the sons are presumably also in the palace, they are also kin to Creon, and if the daughters are not to be brought on stage there is no reason why Creon should speak as if he did not care about their brothers. Oedipus in 1459-61 was not instructing Creon to neglect the boys, only emphasizing by contrast that the girls stood in greater need.

Such an ending requires the assumption that Oedipus 'has already agreed to re-enter the palace' ((2009) 64). According to Kovacs ((2009) 59) Oedipus did so at 1444, by putting a question ('Are you really going to inquire about so wretched a man as me?') which tacitly accepted Creon's decision not to commit himself to sending Oedipus into exile until he had consulted Delphi a second time. I do not see how such acceptance can be read into 1444, which on its face expresses uncertainty, almost incredulity, about whether Creon actually intends to consult the god; and any feeling we may have, either on the basis of 1444 or of something said by Oedipus in a lacuna (if there was one) after 1445, that perhaps he *is* implicitly agreeing to remain in Thebes for the time being, will be cancelled by 1449–54 where he demands to be sent away to wander and die on Mount Cithaeron, without the slightest indication that this should be done only if and when Apollo has indicated his approval. Nevertheless, one could rescue Kovacs by supposing that there was originally an extra line or so at the end of Oedipus' speech in which he did give indirect assent to Creon's plan.[23]

Such an ending would give Oedipus, for the time being, as much consolation as is possible in the circumstances. Creon is to seek confirmation from Delphi as to whether the ex-king should be exiled and Oedipus is morally certain that such confirmation will be given; meanwhile he will be maintained in the palace, gaining what pleasure he can from the company of his children, and his wife/mother will have an appropriate funeral. The audience, meanwhile, have been reminded by 1455–65 that the medium- and long-term future holds no consolation at all, being far darker for all the characters (and for Thebes itself) than any of them can perceive, though Oedipus does dimly forebode 'some terrible evil'; as Kovacs notes,[24] such a 'glance at the future' is typical of Sophocles' endings – indeed it occurs in every one of his surviving plays, though not always close to the end.[25]

All the same, do we lose nothing from the play by sacrificing lines 1468–1523? I do not need to repeat here things about this scene which have been well said by others;[26] instead, I will draw attention to a series of quite detailed connections between this scene and the opening of the play. In the prologue, Oedipus is in complete command of the city,[27] addressing the Thebans as his children (1, 6, 58, 142), showing the feelings of a loving father towards them;[28] and when they pray to the gods – Athena, Artemis, Apollo, Zeus, Dionysus – to save them from the plague (158–215), Oedipus tells them that what they ask for (ἃ.. αἰτεῖς) they can get from *him* by following his instructions (216–18). He says he has 'sent' Creon to Delphi (ἔπεμψα 71), and later he sends away his petitioners (142–43) and sends for the Theban citizenry (144–45). In the final scene all this is mirrored – that is, both repeated and reversed.

(i) Oedipus is again a loving father, this time to his actual children, whom he pities (and begs Creon to pity, 1508), for whom he weeps (1486), of whose potential future suffering he is acutely aware (1487–99) – but for whom he can do nothing;[29] Creon must take over his role as their protecting father (1503).

[23] For Kovacs, the last genuine sentence spoken by Oedipus is 1466b–67 ('And if possible, let me touch them with my hands and bewail their miseries'); one could imagine that it originally continued '...going into the house that was once mine' *vel sim.*

[24] Kovacs (2009) 68 (citing Roberts (1988) 178–79).

[25] *Trach.* 1219–51 (Hyllus and Iole will be the progenitors of the great Heraclid families); *Aj.* 1008–20; *Ant.* 1080–83; *El.* 1497–98; *Phil.* 1440–41; *OC* 1405–10, 1769–72.

[26] See Taplin (1978) 46 (citing Colin Macleod); (1982) 169–74; Davies (1982) 274–77; Gellie (1986); Foley (1993) (who, however, attaches too much importance to the plague, never mentioned in the play after the great turning-point constituted by Iocasta's first rhesis, 707–25); Budelmann (2006); Burian (2009).

[27] In the first words addressed to Oedipus he is called ὦ κρατύνων... χώρας ἐμῆς, 'you who rule my country' (14), and the Priest uses the root κρατ- in connection with him three times more (40, 54, 55).

[28] Pity (13, 58); compassion (60–64); tears (66).

[29] Except plead on their behalf – which he does very effectively (Gellie (1986) 40–41).

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(ii) It is Creon who now 'sends' people this way and that: he is asked to send Oedipus into exile (πέμψεις 1518), he sends (or perhaps escorts) Oedipus' daughters to him (ἔπεμψε 1474) and he sends Oedipus into the palace.

(iii) Where Oedipus had told the Thebans that he could give them the boons for which they were asking the gods, Creon tells Oedipus, who has asked *him* for a boon, that it can be granted only by a god (τοῦ θεοῦ μ᾽ αἰτεῖς δόσιν 1519).

(iv) In the scene's last words (1522–23), Oedipus is reminded (with two uses of the verb κρατεῖν in proximity to a negative) that he is no longer in command of anything – of the city, of his children, even of himself.

(v) Whereas the play had begun with Oedipus coming spontaneously out of his palace to meet his 'children', it ends with him going, on Creon's orders, into that same palace, no longer his, after being forcibly parted from his children (*cf.* Kamerbeek (1967) 269; Burian (2009) 107–08).

Of these five mirroring features, only (ii) is present in the ending Kovacs offers us – though (v) appears in a different (and much less disturbing) form, with Oedipus going into the palace to meet his children (whom, however, we never see). A very skilful and sensitive interpolator this must have been. Or else it was Sophocles.

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