THE THIRD STASIMON OF THE *OEDIPUS TYRANNOS*

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THE usual view of the brief ode which serves as the third stasimon (1086–1109) of Sophocles' *Oedipus* is summed up by Webster's description of it as one of the "cheerful choruses."[1] Its sole function in the drama, standing as it does just before the scene in which the horrible revelations concerning Oedipus' birth are made, is "to make the depth of the fall more appalling,"[2] and in accounts of the play this lyric passage generally receives scant attention.[3] Nor does it call attention to itself. The audience knows what to expect in the following episode, and Sophocles has intentionally kept the ode brief in order to "shorten the interval of suspense" (Jebb). Even thought content is left at a minimum and the significant feature of the chorus is its "tone."[4] Indeed it seems generally agreed that the poet "has made a slight sacrifice of probability" (Jebb) in order to effect the desired contrast.

On the whole these views are correct, but they fall somewhat short of extracting from these lines the greater part of the significance with which Sophocles invested them, and they seem to give the playwright less credit as a dramatist than is usually accorded him. This is particularly strange in the case of a play which, whatever other scholarly disagreements it has provoked, is almost universally regarded as the most technically perfect work of a most technically proficient dramatist.

Two concepts have been introduced, however, in relation to the third stasimon, which attempt to make of it an integral and more significant element in the drama of which it is part: one is "dramatic irony" (Webster) and the other is "tragic illusion" (Bowra). (They are not unrelated; we may in fact regard them as objective and subjective aspects of the same phenomenon.) But, as we shall see, in the manner in which these concepts are used by their proponents, they do not go far enough. Webster's "dramatic irony" (p. 105) is applied to the ode under consideration only as a member of the class of "cheerful choruses." From Webster's discussion it is clear that the irony consists solely in the fact that the Chorus, in this play as in the *Ajax*, *Antigone*, and *Trachiniae*, say something which subsequent circumstances show to have been incorrect. If this is a definition of "dramatic irony," it is too broad to be of value in discussing any one of the cheerful choruses. Bowra's "tragic illusion" (p. 199) is slightly more helpful in that it recognizes the need for the ode to be justified and motivated within the limits of the drama. "The song must have its place in the psychological development of the play." But merely to say that the

1. T. B. L. Webster, *An Introduction to Sophocles* (Oxford, 1936), p. 105. The other "cheerful choruses" are *Ant.* 1115–54, *Aj.* 693–718, and *Trach.* 633–62. Other scholars compare these four passages, e.g., Jebb, Campbell (comparing *Trach.* 205–24 rather than 633–62), and Kamerbeek in their commentaries on *OT* 1086; Stanford on *Aj.* 693 (comparing both *Trach.* choruses); Kranz, *Stasimon* (Berlin, 1933), p. 213; and Schmid-Stählin, *Gesch. d. griech. Lit.* (Munich, 1934), I.2, 368.

2. A. Lesky, *Greek Tragedy* (Eng. trans., London and New York, 1965), p. 113.

3. M. Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature grecque* (Paris, 1891), III, 274; W. N. Bates, *Sophocles* (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 53; F. J. H. Letters, *The Life and Work of Sophocles* (London and New York, 1953), p. 211; S. M. Adams, *Sophocles the Playwright* (*Phoenix* Suppl. III, Toronto, 1957), p. 102; G. Méautis, *Sophocle* (Paris, 1957), pp. 125–26; G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1958), p. 200; R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (Baltimore, 1958), p. 99; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*[3] (London, 1961), pp. 165, 181, and *Poiesis: Structure and Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), p. 232; G. Müller in H. Diller (ed.), *Sophokles* (Darmstadt, 1967), p. 227; G. Ronnet, *Sophocle* (Paris, 1969), pp. 161–62. C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford, 1944), p. 199, is somewhat fuller and more sensitive.

4. Kirkwood, pp. 200–201.

Chorus "are bewitched" by the "irrational confidence" of Oedipus is not to understand the illusion into which they have fallen.

In order to understand the Chorus' frame of mind in the third stasimon it is necessary first to take a brief look at what has gone before, especially the immediately preceding episode. The third episode, which leads up to this stasimon, opens with Jocasta coming on stage to pray. The reason for her prayer is that Oedipus is overly excited and, "unlike a man of sense, does not judge the new by the old" (915–16). What she means, as the scholiast was first to point out, is that, if the oracle given Laius ("the old") is false, so Teiresias' accusation of Oedipus ("the new") is a lie. This appraisal of Oedipus' mind continues to hold true throughout the ensuing scene, although not in the sense Jocasta intended. Immediately the Corinthian messenger enters announcing to Oedipus the death of King Polybus. Both the oracle given Laius ("Your son will murder you and marry Jocasta") and also, it now appears confirmed, that given Oedipus ("You will murder your father and marry your mother") are false. The royal couple are accordingly relieved (964–87), but Oedipus is still uneasy and fears that he may yet marry his mother (988). Oedipus has gone through life with two great fears. One has been removed by news of his (presumed) father's death; the other disappears shortly when the messenger reveals that Merope and Polybus are not his parents. The second announcement should negate the effect of the first. But Oedipus is not judging the new by the old.

Throughout this scene the Chorus have been nearly silent, speaking only 927–28, 1051–53, and 1073–75. These passages are of no help in determining what the Chorus are thinking, but it is not difficult to reconstruct their feelings from the evidence of the play itself. It is sometimes said[5] that the Chorus are occasionally critical of Oedipus, but on the whole, throughout the drama, they have supported him and expressed confidence in him. Only at one point[6] do they rebuke Oedipus, and then only mildly and with good reason. During the scene of confrontation between Oedipus and Creon (616 ff.) and in the ensuing *kommos* (649–56), they caution Oedipus and ask him to relent in his treatment of Creon. Their reason is that the latter has laid himself under a curse (see Jebb's note on 656) and the charges against him rest upon an ἀφανὴς λόγος. In other words, in the eyes of the Chorus, Creon is in the same position vis-à-vis the accusation of Oedipus as Oedipus himself is vis-à-vis the accusation of Teiresias (for Oedipus too is under a curse, 224–72, esp. 249–51): Creon can no more be a plotter against the throne than Oedipus can be the murderer of Laius. In due course the Chorus express full confidence in their king (689–96), as they have before (504–12).

It is instructive here to contrast the Chorus' attitude toward Teiresias. Their first reference to the prophet is unambiguous (284–86). They call him ἄναξ and say that his vision is most like that of Phoebus himself.[7] And when they introduce Teiresias (297–99) their praise is equally abundant: "He is the sole man in whom the truth resides." But when the divine and infallible seer accuses their beloved Oedipus, there is no doubt whose side they take (498–512). Until they see proof (ὀρθὸν ἔπος, 505), the Chorus can believe no ill of Oedipus, and no proof

5. E.g., by Bowra, p. 199.

6. It is impossible to regard the famous second stasimon (863–910) as specifically critical of Oedipus. See Kirkwood, pp. 212, 267–68; and B. M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven, 1957), pp. 99–100.

7. Kamerbeek's notes on these lines are particularly good.

is forthcoming until after the third stasimon. It must be remembered that the Chorus believe Laius to have been killed by "wayfarers" (292), and they have no reason to think that the lone eyewitness was not telling the truth. The confrontation between Oedipus and Teiresias shows us how deep is the Chorus' feeling for Oedipus. In their eyes he can do no wrong and is, indeed, almost divine. We must imagine this feeling to have developed over the long period of time in which Oedipus was their blameless king. It is therefore not in the least surprising that, when it turns out that Oedipus is not the son of Polybus and Merope but a foundling, the Chorus break into ecstatic song celebrating his possible Olympian parentage. Not only is he sprung from a god, but he is native to Thebes!

What purpose, then, does the ode itself serve within the play? A careful examination shows that the third stasimon contains irony, but not merely because the Chorus are mistaken. Rather, while the words of the Chorus are, on the surface, at odds with reality, a closer analysis reveals that they in fact reflect the truth. Not, *pace* Mr. Vellacott, because they knew the truth all along,[8] but because, had they judged the new (what they say here in the third stasimon) by the old (what they know to be the case on the evidence of what has gone before in the play), they should now suspect the truth. It is this contrast between "should" and "is" which marks the depth of the illusion, not the contrast between the "wild hopes" of the Chorus and the "bitter disillusion that follows" (Bowra, p. 199).

What the third stasimon does is to parade before us the clues, the scattered pieces of the puzzle, which have accumulated throughout the play and which only we (and Jocasta) know how to piece together. If we judge the new from the old, we shall see clearly through the delusion of the Chorus, and the surest signpost is the very words which the Chorus choose to use. In fact, nearly every noun, verb, and adjective in the third stasimon is significant in this respect: if we examine each word and judge it against its earlier occurrences in the play, we find that the Chorus themselves provide the evidence with which to prove false their own assertions in the third stasimon.

To begin at the beginning, the Chorus open the third stasimon with, "If I am a prophet . . ." The word for prophet (*mantis*) and words from the same root occur twenty-four times in the *Oedipus Tyrannos*, our passage being the last appearance in the play. The early occurrences of these words are respectful and show the Thebans' dependence upon prophecies (21, 149, 243) and prophets (298, 311). The contexts directly link Teiresias with Apollo. After the prophet's accusation of Oedipus, however, we see these words used more and more frequently in contexts in which the validity of prophecies and the worth of prophets are either questioned or denied outright. At first Oedipus uses the word *mantis* and words from the same root in a tone of disrespect because of his anger toward Teiresias (390, 394, 556 sarcastic, 705), and the Chorus concur (500, contrast especially 499–501 with 1086). Then Jocasta reveals her distrust of prophecies in a speech intended to reassure Oedipus (709, 723), but the effect is, for the moment, just the opposite. Oedipus expresses the fear that perhaps "the *mantis* might see" after all (747), but eventually Jocasta

8. See "The Guilt of Oedipus" (*G and R*, 2nd Ser., XI [1964], 137–48) and "The Chorus in *OT*" (*G and R*, 2nd Ser., XIV [1967], 109–25). The necessary antidote is provided by E. R. Dodds ("On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*," *G and R*, 2nd Ser., XIII [1966], 37–49) and A. J. A. Waldock in his chapter on "The Documentary Fallacy" (*Sophocles the Dramatist* [Cambridge, 1951], pp. 11–24).

(857, 946, 953) and Oedipus (965) agree that there is no need to trust in prophets or oracles. By this point in the play *manteis* and *manteumata* have been so thoroughly discredited (and the content of the Chorus' ode here shows that they too are by now unbelievers, since a divine birth for Oedipus is inconsistent with the prophecy related at 793) that it would be almost ludicrous to take seriously any statement prefaced by "if indeed I am a prophet."

The Chorus continue: "If I am a prophet and wise with respect to *gnōmē* . . ." *Gnōmē* is another of those words which, although not rare, cease appearing in the play after this stasimon. Kamerbeek is right to state that "κατὰ γνώμαν implies a certain contrast between the Chorus and a 'real' μάντις," especially in view of 397–98, where Oedipus explicitly draws the contrast between his own *gnōmē* and Teiresias' inability to subdue the Sphinx.[9] By using the word here, the Chorus again show that they are at odds with Teiresias, whom they earlier described as the lone man in whom the truth dwells.

Several of the following words in the strophe (ἴδρις, ἀπείρων, αὔριον, πανσέληνος) do not occur elsewhere in the play, but the two proper names, Olympus and Cithaeron, occur and are significant. Olympus appears once elsewhere (867) in the play, in the first strophe of the second stasimon. There Olympus is said to be the father of the *nomoi*, just as, in the third stasimon, one of the gods is to be father of Oedipus. But in the second stasimon the dilemma had been posed: either the prophecies must come true or the gods lose their claim to respect. Applying this to the situation in the third stasimon, we see the absurdity of the Chorus' position. If the prophecies are true, Oedipus is destined to pollution; if false, Oedipus is the son of one of the gods, who are now disgraced and dishonored.[10] The irony of the situation lies in the fact that the Chorus at 1089 invoke the begetter of those laws which, if upheld, will bring their prayer (or prophecy) to naught. Cithaeron, which will figure prominently in the last third of the play (1127, 1134, 1391, 1452), has been mentioned only twice before the third stasimon. At 421 Teiresias had predicted that Cithaeron will resound with Oedipus' cries; at 1026 the Corinthian messenger reveals that he found Oedipus on Cithaeron. The Chorus (and Oedipus), who, unlike Jocasta, are not judging the new by the old, do not realize that Oedipus' birth on Cithaeron is cause, not for rejoicing, but for lament.

The Chorus proclaim that the mountain will be celebrated as "fellow-countryman and nurse and mother" of Oedipus.[11] On one level this confused enumeration of relationships is significant of the tangle of family connections which will later be shown to exist in the house of Laius (see 1249–50, 1256–57, 1406–7). But two words are of interest from the point of view of the present discussion. πατριώτης occurs nowhere else in Sophocles, but words from the same root meaning "native land" have appeared three times earlier in this play. And in each instance the context refers to banishment. In the parodos (192) the Chorus pray that Ares "turn his back in flight from the fatherland." Later Creon complains to Jocasta (641) that Oedipus threatens to "cast me out of the fatherland or kill me." And Oedipus

9. See Knox, pp. 20, 124.

10. Olympia, the oracle in Elis, is mentioned once in *OT*, also in the second stasimon (900). Probably Sophocles intends no connection. At any rate, it is one of the temples (Delphi is another) the Chorus will avoid if the divine prophecies turn out false.

11. There is no need to alter the MS text with Jebb (*Οἰδίπουν*) or Blaydes (σ' *ἐμὲ*, adopted by Pearson). See Kamerbeek.

himself regrets (825) that he "cannot set foot in his own fatherland" (i.e., Corinth) for fear of fulfilling the prophecy regarding marriage with his mother. And now the Chorus declare that not Corinth but Thebes is Oedipus' "fatherland," but they are blind (as is Oedipus) to the implications of this new statement taken in conjunction with the old.[12]

"Cithaeron, you shall not fail to be celebrated in song by us, since you are pleasing to our *tyrannos*" (1093–95). The verb χορεύειν occurs only once elsewhere in the play, also in choral lyrics. There (896) the Chorus had asked, "If such acts (not revering the divine) are in honor, why should I dance?" In other words, unless the prophecies are vindicated, the Chorus feel no need to join in song and dance in worship of the gods.[13] Their song here proclaims the very death of the prophecies, and yet they sing and dance. It is almost as if the Chorus had transferred their worshipful allegiance from the gods to Oedipus. But without their knowing it, the Chorus immediately undercut the effect of their expressed confidence in Oedipus by addressing him as *tyrannos*. Although the word[14] and words from the same root occur fifteen times in the play, the only other appearance in the mouth of the Chorus is 873: ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον. Not only is the word here another signpost pointing back to the ominous second stasimon; the reference is particularly devastating when we consider that the central thought in the ode under consideration is the question, "Who engendered you, Oedipus?"

To close the strophe the Chorus appeal to Apollo, invoking him as ἰήϊε Φοῖβε. The epithet occurs three times in the preserved plays of Sophocles, all three appearances in the *Oedipus Tyrannos*. The two instances outside the third stasimon are both in the Chorus' parodos (154, 174). In its earliest occurrence it is again an epithet[15] for Apollo, but it is Apollo Paian, for whom the cry ἰή is one of grief. At 174 the word appears as an adjective in the phrase ἰηίων καμάτων, which Jebb translates "the pangs in which (the women) shriek." Thus, the two occasions on which the word is used in the parodos associate it with (1) plague, and (2) childbirth, both of which are, unknown to the Chorus, in fact appropriate at 1096. For Oedipus is the cause of the plague, and he is so on account of his birth. But invoking Apollo at all at this point is an absurdity, since he can bring about what the Chorus ask only at the cost of contradicting his own earlier pronouncements. In fact, if we examine the pattern of references to Apollo earlier in the play, we see that the appeal to him here is absurd on another count. In the first half of the play Phoebus is honored and respected: he is prayed to for help (149, 162, 204), he is referred to as an authority (71, 96, 133, 242, 279, 305, 377, 603), and he is invoked to pursue Laius' murderer (470). But lately the Chorus have seen the authority of Apollo under attack (720, 788–89, 965), and they see that, if the oracles remain unfulfilled, "nowhere is Apollo glorified with honors" (909 in Jebb's translation). And the only time a prayer has been addressed to Apollo since the first stasimon is for what may

12. The three words πατριώταν, τροφόν, and ματέρα (1091–92) echo μητρός, πατέρα, and ἐξέθρεψε in the two lines immediately following 825.

13. See Knox, pp. 47 with n. 98; 262, n. 59.

14. For the word *tyrannos* in this play, see Knox, pp. 53 ff. It and words from the same root do not occur again after the appearance in the third stasimon of *tyrannos*.

15. The meaning is "invoked with the cry ἰή," which cry is either one of grief or joy, depending upon circumstances. For the connection with Apollo Paian, see Aesch. *Agam.* 146 with Groeneboom's note.

well appear a specious reason.[16] Although by now the prestige of Apollo is held in little esteem, the Chorus address him in prayer (1096–97) and will shortly (1102) suggest him as a possible candidate for Oedipus' father.

The antistrophe of the third stasimon speculates about the parents of Oedipus, and several of the words used point back to other contexts, especially to the earlier choral lyrics, which by implication show the shallowness of thought in the third stasimon. The antistrophe reveals an interesting shift in time in relation to the strophe. While the strophe concerned itself with the future ("Cithaeron, you shall not fail to know . . ."), the antistrophe deals with the past ("Who bore you, Oedipus?"). This shift parallels the movement of the play as a whole, which opens with concern for the present (the plague) and successively focuses on events of the past (Laius' murder) and the remoter past (Oedipus' birth). This movement is also illustrated by the pattern of usage of the word with which the Chorus address Oedipus at the beginning of the antistrophe of the third stasimon, *τέκνον*. The play had opened with Oedipus addressing the citizens of Thebes as his children (1, 6); then Teiresias predicts (425) that a mass of evils will make Oedipus equal to himself and to his own children; later the Corinthian messenger, like the Chorus at 1098, colloquially addresses Oedipus as *τέκνον* (1030). Oedipus has begun as *pater patriae*,[17] but now interest is directed at him as child. The extravagant genealogy which the Chorus proceed to prepare for Oedipus ("Your mother was one of the Nymphs, your father Pan or Apollo or Hermes or Dionysus") reminds us that the Chorus have earlier been interested in genealogies, sometimes of the metaphoric type more characteristic of Aeschylus than of Sophocles. In fact, this interest is absent from none of the Chorus' lyrical passages. Taken in connection with these other passages, the third stasimon appears to set Oedipus on a level with "immortal Phēmē" (child of golden Hope, 157), divine Athena and her sister Artemis (daughters of Zeus, 159), Apollo (son of Zeus, 470), and the Laws (whose sole father is Olympus, 867).[18] But if the Chorus are right, they are not exalting Oedipus but debasing these divinities; for, as they themselves have stated, the prestige of the divine rests upon the fulfillment of the oracles which the Chorus' song implicitly rejects. Another fanciful genealogy has been mentioned above: at 873 Hybris begets the tyrant.

To resume our investigation of the individual words of the chorus and their earlier associations: the verb *πελάζω*[19] occurs only once elsewhere in the play, and there also in the mouth of the Chorus and in the aorist passive (213). Dionysus is there asked to "draw near" as an ally against "the god unhonored among gods," the bringer of the plague. (This mention of Dionysus is the only reference to the god outside the third stasimon.) The Chorus continue to speculate and suggest that perhaps Apollo himself was the father of Oedipus. But Sophocles intentionally chooses to refer to Apollo by the title most associated with the god as giver of oracles, Loxias, even though the epithet Nomios is the one appropriate here. By doing so he underlines the absurdity

16. 919 Jocasta: "I approach you, Apollo, as suppliant, *because you are closest*." See Knox, p. 176.

17. Bowra, p. 186.

18. This passage is further linked to the third stasimon by the appearance in both of the striking form *ἔτικτε* (see Jebb on 870). In both passages the Chorus deny mortal parentage, once for the laws and once for Oedipus. Otherwise, the verb has appeared only twice before 1099, in both cases as participles (985, 999) used as nouns.

19. The MSS have *προσπελασθεῖσ'* at 1100, but Lachmann's *πατρὸς πελασθεῖσ'*, accepted by Jebb, Pearson, and Kamerbeek, is preferable.

of the Chorus' vain imaginings. For the three other passages in which the epithet Loxias occurred (a) stressed the connection between Teiresias, who accused Oedipus of killing Laius, and Apollo (410); (b) related a prophecy of Apollo which Jocasta "proves" cannot have been fulfilled (853); and (c) reminded us that, according to Apollo, Oedipus is to murder his father (994). And one hundred lines after the last passage the Chorus suggest that Loxias is Oedipus' father.

Apollo had been suggested because (1103), "to him are all the upland pastures dear," and the Chorus are wondering who would have been most likely to engender Oedipus on Cithaeron. Jebb is right in paraphrasing πλάκες ἀγρόνομοι "highlands offering open pasturage," but we are well reminded that, for the ancient Greeks, "the mountains were the wilderness."[20] And we may be intended to recollect the description, in the first stasimon, of the murderer of Laius roaming ὑπ' ἀγρίαν ὕλαν (476). Indeed, Oedipus will fulfill this vision of the Chorus when, after he has put out his eyes, he asks to be conducted to Cithaeron to live out his days apart from society (1452). Words dealing with mountains occur throughout the third stasimon and are of interest in this connection. The adjective ἄκρος, although used over twenty times by Sophocles, occurs in the *Oedipus Tyrannos* only twice. Here (1106) reference is made to Dionysus, "living upon the mountain tops." The other occurrence (876) is in the hybris-begets-the-tyrant strophe of the second stasimon: "hybris . . . having mounted to the highest peak (?), rushes to a sheer doom."[21] The word for mountain itself (ὄρος) has occurred three times before its appearance in 1106. In the parodos (208) the Chorus had called upon Artemis, who "darts through the Lycian mountains," to assist in driving the plague from Thebes. In the two remaining occurrences, Jocasta reveals that the son of Laius was exposed on a mountain (719) and the Corinthian messenger that Oedipus was found on a mountain (1028). Even so innocent-seeming a word as δέχομαι (1107) has rather extraordinary associations. The word and a single compound occur six times in the play, evenly divided between references to "receiving" the infant Oedipus (1107 of Dionysus, 1163 of the herdsman, 1391 of Cithaeron) and associations with the curse on the murderer of Laius. The citizens are to "welcome" the words of Oedipus' proclamation regarding the murderer (217); no one is to "admit" the murderer into his house (238); and Oedipus himself, when he learns that he may be the murderer, says that no man can be more miserable than he, "whom no one is allowed to receive into his house" (818, quoting 238).[22]

It is hoped that the foregoing has shown, beyond the possibility of chance and coincidence, that Sophocles carefully chose the words he used in the third stasimon to effect a particular kind of irony. In general, the Chorus use words which have, in the course of the first two-thirds of the play, acquired associations which point to the truth which the Chorus are unable to see. Nor can we blame them or charge them

20. Lattimore, p. 98. See also Knox, p. 112 with n. 15.

21. The text is not certain. Wolff's ἀκρότατα γεῖσ' ἀναβᾶσ' (adopted by Jebb and Pearson; see also H. A. Pohlsander, *Metrical Studies in the Lyrics of Sophocles* [Leyden, 1964], p. 102) is ingenious and attractive. Another possibility is to introduce the word ὄρος (approved by Kamerbeek and by T. Gould, in his translation and commentary [Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970]). ὄρος also finds favor with Lattimore, pp. 93–97. If it is correct, mountains have been a consistent theme of the Chorus, running through the parodos (208), first (463, 475) and second (877) stasima, and coming to a climax in the third stasimon (1090, 1100, 1103, 1104, 1105, 1108, see further below). But Wolff's conjecture is certainly paleographically superior.

22. For the word εὕρημα and its associations, see Knox, pp. 128 ff., esp. p. 131 (with n. 85): "the prospect of Oedipus not as discoverer but as discovered."

with being "either stone deaf or imbecile"[23] for not perceiving the truth. The Chorus are certainly intellectually inferior to Oedipus. Because of his past performance, they have come to rely on his wits to such an extent that now, when his temper prevents his mind from operating properly and from "judging the new by the old," they make the same mistakes he does. The irony and tragic illusion consist in the fact that, although they have the facts and recite them continually, their confidence in Oedipus is so great and so *well founded* that they refuse to believe what would otherwise be conclusive proof.

One final example of this form of irony may be mentioned. Three mountains—Cithaeron, Cyllene, and Helicon—are named in the course of the third stasimon. The first is, of course, the subject of the ode, but the appropriateness of the other two is not immediately apparent. In fact, Wilamowitz attempted to oust Helicon from the text by means of an unnecessary conjecture.[24] But the clue to the relevance of all three comes in Jebb's note to line 1104: "Cyllene . . . is visible from the Boeotian plain near Leuctra, where Cithaeron is on the south and Helicon to the west, with a glimpse of Parnassus behind it." (Jebb does not mention that Parnassus is the only other mountain referred to by name in the text of the play, at 475.) But why does Sophocles mention, in this ode, three mountains which are "visible from the Boeotian plain near Leuctra"?

The stage for the *Oedipus Tyrannos* is set in Thebes, and all the action of the play takes place there. But all the events reported in the play and all the antecedents of the plot take place within view of one or more of these mountains. And the two peaks, Parnassus and Cithaeron, seem to be twin poles between which the thread of the drama is suspended. The bright voice which flashed forth from snowy Parnassus, in the form both of the oracle to Laius and of the response to Oedipus' two enquiries, is the instigator of the action. Cithaeron is the site of the activities which preserved Oedipus for the fulfillment of his destiny. And on the road which stretches between the two occurred the overt act which, as it were, tied the knot binding the twin oracles—that Laius' son would kill him and that Oedipus would kill his father. It is these dark facts that the Chorus unknowingly recite for us in the third stasimon. Within days of his unfortunae birth, Oedipus went from Thebes to Corinth by way of Cithaeron. Later, on his journey to Delphi he will have passed over Cithaeron again. Coming down the pass he will have found himself in the Boeotian plain near Leuctra. To his left is visible, across the Corinthian Gulf, the peak of Cyllene, on the Peloponnese to which he will never return. Further along, he will pass in the shadow of Helicon, with Parnassus in the background. These two mountains will still be in view a short while later when, on his return, Oedipus will meet and murder his father.[25] These natural landmarks (and their demonic inhabitants) the Chorus think are friendly to their king. In fact, as we know and the Chorus are soon to find out, they are the silent witnesses to the most horrible crimes.[26]

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23. *G and R*, 2nd Ser., XIV (1967), 113.

24. Cf. Kamerbeek *ad* 1108: "We must grant to v. Wilamowitz that the relevance of the Nymphs of the Helicon is not self-evident in this context and so his conjecture ἑλικωπίδων . . . may be right." But why, then, is "the lord of Cyllene" not equally suspect?

25. For the geography, see Jebb on 473, 733, and 1104. If Oedipus *sailed* from Corinth to Delphi, the above still holds good and the same mountains—Cithaeron, Cyllene, Helicon, and Parnassus—will have been in view.

26. The author would like to thank the anonymous *CP* referee for valuable help and suggestions in the preparation of this paper.