

## Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos* 446: Exit Oedipus?

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THE PROBLEM raised by the concluding speech of this great scene is as follows: towards the end of it Tiresias prophesies that the murderer of Laios (whom he has already twice, at 353 and 362, identified as Oedipus) will shortly be revealed not only as the killer of his father but also as the father of children by his own mother (457–60):

*φανήσεται δὲ παισὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ ξυνῶν  
ἀδελφὸς αὐτὸς καὶ πατήρ, καὶ ἥς ἔφυ  
γυναικὸς υἱὸς καὶ πόσις, καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς  
ὁμόσπορος τε καὶ φονεὺς . . .*

Tiresias had alluded darkly to these horrors before (337–38, 366–67, 414ff, 422–25) but in terms which Oedipus clearly did not understand, for he complained (439): “Everything you say is too riddling and obscure.” In this final tirade, however, Tiresias speaks with unmistakable clarity, for his use of the third person rather than the second does not disguise the fact that the prophecy is aimed at his interlocutor. Moreover, the two most terrifying items of this prophecy correspond exactly to what the Delphic oracle had predicted to Oedipus long ago as his own destiny (790–93):

*καὶ δεινὰ καὶ δύστηνα προῤφηνεν λέγων,  
ὥς μητρὶ μὲν χρεῖή με μειχθῆναι, γένος δ'  
ἄτλητον ἀνθρώποισι δηλώσοιμ' ὄραν,  
φονεὺς δ' ἐσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός.*

Yet Oedipus asks no questions (as he did before when Tiresias mentioned his parents, 437); he makes no reply, though his reactions up to this point have been quick and violent; he goes off in silence, as if defeated, an impression emphasized by the fact that Tiresias, in his last words, is in effect ordering the king into the house: *καὶ ταῦτ' ἰὼν | εἴσω λογιζοῦ.*

Why does Oedipus accept in silence this clearer version of a prophecy which he had greeted with fury when its first riddling

version was flung at him (414ff)? We learn, two scenes later, that he does not recognize the terms of Tiresias' final lines as identical with those of the prophecy given to him before. And this fact is even more difficult to explain than Oedipus' failure to react to Tiresias' speech. It is one of the improbabilities which inspired Voltaire's famous comment: "Cet Édipe qui expliquait les énigmes n'entend pas les choses les plus claires . . ." <sup>1</sup> Voltaire, of course, can be easily dismissed as a carping rationalist, who applied Cartesian logic to a highly conventional dramatic form; but it should be remembered that he was also a working, highly successful dramatist, whose theater was, if anything, even more conventional than Greek tragedy. And when he tried to adapt the Sophoclean play for his own *Édipe*, he found a real difficulty here.

At least one German scholar of the nineteenth century advocated heroic measures—to excise Tiresias' speech as a "spurious addition" ("unechten Zusatz"). <sup>2</sup> And, from the opposite point of view, Philip Vellacott proclaims its genuineness and insists on its importance since it supports his ingenious theory that Oedipus knew the whole truth from the very beginning of the play. "The relentless clarity of these fourteen lines," he says, "is presented to a man who heard Apollo's prophecy at Delphi seventeen years ago and has not forgotten it." <sup>3</sup> (This would of course explain his abject, silent exit at this point, but the idea that Oedipus knew the truth all along becomes harder to maintain as the play moves on.)

Most critics, however, have claimed that the problem does not exist in the first place. "The audience finds the riddles easy to solve,

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres sur Édipe* III (Paris 1859) 16. In his own version the exchange between Oedipus and the 'Grand Prêtre' follows fairly closely the Sophoclean model for most of its course, but the Grand Prêtre's final speech combines 438 and 413ff and ends with a reference to the incest which, unlike that of Tiresias, is Delphic in its obscurity:

Savez-vous seulement avec qui vous vivez?  
O Corinthe! O Phocide! exécration hyménée!  
Je vois naître une race impie, infortunée,  
Digne de sa naissance, et de qui la fureur  
Remplira l'univers d'épouvante et d'horreur.  
Sortons.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Schöll, *Sophokles Werke verdeutscht* I (Stuttgart 1856) 92–101. I have not been able to find this work; it is cited from Franz Ritter, *König Ödipus* (Leipzig 1870): "Ad. Schöll . . . hat mit grossem Geschick diese dritte Enthüllung des Teiresias als unechten Zusatz zu erweisen versucht . . ." (169).

<sup>3</sup> Philip Vellacott, *Sophocles and Oedipus* (Ann Arbor 1971) 114, 124, 161.

but Oedipus does not," says Oliver Taplin.<sup>4</sup> Another line of defense maintains strongly that the audience is not likely to wonder about Oedipus' lack of immediate reaction: "to pause to wonder that Oedipus is slow to work out the implication of these utterances and connect them with his situation is tantamount to wondering why Apollo has delayed so long in demanding expiation for the murder of Laios."<sup>5</sup> I am always made uneasy by statements that something is tantamount to something else, and this one too conceals a certain rhetorical exaggeration, but the point may be conceded that Sophocles does not in this passage draw attention to the Apolline prophecy which was made to Oedipus many years ago. Nevertheless, two scenes later, he does. Oedipus recites the terms of a prophecy which was delivered to him personally at Delphi; they are exactly the same as those of the prophecy Tiresias flung at him not long before and yet he fails to notice this startling fact. It is as if he had not heard what Tiresias had said. Perhaps he did not; perhaps he started to move towards the stage door at 446 and was inside the *skene* building before Tiresias' speech was finished.

It is true that the text gives no hint of an exit at 446. Taplin (28) quotes with approval Fraenkel's dictum: "In ancient dramatic literature it is never allowable to invent stage directions which are not related to some definite utterance in the dialogue," and I am in general agreement with that statement and with Taplin's dismissal of many superfluous entrances and exits that have been proposed by modern scholars. But Taplin goes too far when he says: "I do not know of a single stage action in Greek tragedy which is essential to the play and yet has to be assumed without any indication from the text" (30). For instance, it is 'essential to the play' that Creon leave the stage area for the *skene* building at *Antigone* 326, as soon as he finishes his threatening speech to the sentry. It is essential to the play because if he had heard the sentry's sarcastic reply he would have had to take notice and in fact some action, which he does not. Yet there is no 'indication from the text' that Creon has left; quite the contrary, for the sentry addresses him directly—"You won't see me coming back here" (329). But no one

<sup>4</sup> *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1978) 91 n.1 [cited hereafter by author's name alone].

<sup>5</sup> David Bain, *Actors and Audience* (Oxford 1977) 75 [cited hereafter by author's name alone].

has ever doubted that Creon starts his exit at 326, and I cannot see why the end of the Tiresias scene is any different. If Oedipus stands silent, listening to everything Tiresias says, then it is implausible that he should not betray some uneasiness when he hears Tiresias launch at him the same prophecy he had heard from Apollo, and still more implausible that two scenes later he should tell Jocasta the details of the Delphic prophecy without remembering what Tiresias said to him a short while before. All these difficulties vanish at once, if he left the stage before he heard it.

Like almost every solution proposed to a problem in classical philology, this suggestion is hoary with age; it probably goes farther back, but I can trace it only as far as 1857 when Theodor Kock proposed it in a laconic footnote to his *Sophokleische Studien* II.<sup>6</sup> Gustav Wolff adopted it in his influential school edition of the play (Leipzig 1870) and Ludwig Bellerman, who revised Wolff's edition in 1876, 1893, and 1908, retained the stage direction in his commentary.<sup>7</sup> Wecklein explained the passage along similar lines in his 1892 edition of the play, though he later, without comment, omitted the stage direction. The English scholars, with a fine disregard for Germanic scholarship, proceeded, as usual, independently. Jebb is apparently unaware of the suggestion (or the problem) and Sheppard, who rejected it in his fine edition of the play,<sup>8</sup> apparently believed, together with an anonymous correspondent in *Classical Quarterly* who raised the point, that the suggestion had first been made by Sir George Young (presumably in his *The Dramas of Sophocles rendered into English . . . Verse*, Cambridge, 1888).<sup>9</sup> The suggestion fell out of favor in Germany; the influential school edition of Schneidewin-Nauck revised by Bruhn<sup>10</sup> ignored

<sup>6</sup> *Sophokleische Studien* II *Ein zusammenhängender Commentar zum König Oedipus* (Guben-Berlin 1857) 25: "Oedipus . . . zieht sich in seinem Palast zurück [n.66: Wohl schon nach v. 446]. Der blinde Greis, in der Meinung, er sei noch anwesend, wiederholt . . . seine früheren Verkündigungen aber seine Worte erreichen den Herrscher nicht mehr."

<sup>7</sup> N.447f: "Dass Oedipus dies noch mit anhöre, ist sehr unwahrscheinlich; die Andeutungen sind zu stark als dass ein Missverstehen noch glaubhaft bliebe. . . . Auch stimmt es wenig mit sonstigem dramatischem Brauch, dass der Held nach Anhörung solcher rede schweigend abtreten soll. Vielmehr ist anzunehmen, dass er bei 446 unbekümmert um den Seher ins Haus geht."

<sup>8</sup> J. T. Sheppard, *The Oedipus Tyrannos of Sophocles* (Cambridge 1920) 132.

<sup>9</sup> CQ 27 (1913) 37.

<sup>10</sup> E. Bruhn, revising F. W. Schneidewin and A. Nauck, edd., *Sophokles* II (Berlin 1910): Teiresias "behält . . . das letzte Wort: schweigend kehrt Oedipus im Haus zurück." But on 460 Bruhn notes: "Er [Teiresias] hört wohl, wie der König ins Haus geht." This is evidence of a certain confusion, since in order to go into the house at 460, Oedipus must have started

it, but it found a later convert in no less a person than Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. In his 1917 translation<sup>11</sup> there is no sign of such a stage direction, but evidently he changed his mind later: the posthumous edition (which the editor assures us is "Fassung letzter Hand")<sup>12</sup> contains a stage direction printed immediately before the beginning of Tiresias' last speech: "Oedipus turns away, does not listen to the speech and goes slowly to the door."<sup>13</sup> Recently Jean Carrière in France (without reference to either English or German discussions) has made the same suggestion.<sup>14</sup> And Errandonea in Spain adopted the stage direction for his text, attributing the idea to Carrière.<sup>15</sup>

But it is still generally ignored or summarily dismissed. Those who do not ignore the problem entirely deny that it exists and also object to the proposed solution on technical and aesthetic grounds. Taplin for example (91) finds the simultaneous exit of Oedipus and Tiresias at the end of the scene dramatically significant; the theory that "Oedipus has gone at 446 and that Tiresias' speech is made into thin air destroys this tense moment." In a later discussion<sup>16</sup> he objects to the spectacle of Tiresias speaking to "thin air" as "a theatrical trick . . . unlike the straightforward technique of Sophocles," one that "would serve no purpose beyond its own ingenuity." Bain (74) finds the suggestion that Oedipus does not reply to Tiresias' speech because he has already left the stage "absurd . . . Tiresias' predictions would be cast into empty air. The effect would be grotesque (because the speaker is blind) and pointless."

Opinions may differ, of course, as to what is 'grotesque', but in any case the time during which Tiresias speaks 'into thin air' is very short. "Some scholars," says Taplin, in his recent rebuttal of the proposed exit, "have conjectured that Oedipus must go off at

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moving earlier, which is not easily reconciled with the idea that he listens to what Tiresias says.

<sup>11</sup> *Griechische Tragödien* I (Berlin 1917) 46.

<sup>12</sup> Ed. K. Kappus (Berlin 1939) 168.

<sup>13</sup> "Oedipus wendet sich ab, hört nicht auf die Rede und geht langsam auf die Tür zu." Yet he notes on 462: "Teiresias wird von einem Knaben hinausgeführt: Oedipus mit seinem Gefolge in das Haus." Oedipus must have indeed moved *sehr langsam* if he was not in the house until 462.

<sup>14</sup> "Ambiguïté et vraisemblance dans Oedipe-Roi," *Pallas (Annales Toulouse)* 4 (1956) 5-14.

<sup>15</sup> I. Errandonea, *Sofocles, Tragedias* I (Barcelona 1959): "me parece muy atinada la sugerencia del Prof. J. Carrière . . . que hace a Edipo retirarse al 447. . . ."

<sup>16</sup> *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978) 43.

446”); but such haste is not necessary, nor even possible. The actor would not vanish instantaneously—he has to get from stage center to the *skene* door. I do not see anything grotesque in the following scenario. At 446, after delivering his contemptuous dismissal of Tiresias as a nuisance (*ὄχλεις*), Oedipus turns to go. He pays no attention to Tiresias’ opening words *εἰπὼν ἄπειμ’ ὦν οὐνεκ’ ἦλθον*, which are, as Carrière points out, ambiguous and could be taken to mean: “I have said what I came to say and I will go.” Then, followed by his attendants, Oedipus makes a slow progress to the stage door. He should be going through that door at 457, just as Tiresias begins to speak of the coming revelation of incest. Such a staging does not show Tiresias making a speech ‘into thin air’ until his last lines; up to that point he is speaking, like many another actor on the tragic stage, to the retreating back of a fellow actor who does not listen to him.

There is, however, another argument against an early exit for Oedipus. Both Bain and Taplin claim that his silent exit after the delivery of Tiresias’ speech is essential to the meaning of the play. Taplin (310) lays down the principle that “a character of high status will normally have the last word when he goes off . . . ; and if two important characters go off together, then the dramatically dominant tends to speak last.” Oedipus’ silent exit at 462 together with Tiresias would produce the result described by Bain (74): “By giving the seer the last word in this scene, by having Oedipus exit silently, Sophocles has, so to speak, made Tiresias a victor and Oedipus the loser in this confrontation. The first shadows have been cast over Oedipus.” An Italian editor, Schiassi, puts it more dramatically: “the scene must end with the divine message; Oedipus listens and remains silent as if annihilated.”<sup>17</sup>

But of course it is much too early in the play for such a collapse on the part of the principal character. In the next scene, in fact, Oedipus comes out of the palace with his self-confidence not one whit abated; his assault on Creon is not that of a man who has been annihilated, not even of one over whom the first shadows have been cast. This confidence does indeed break down later, and the process is marked by Sophocles at each stage in the action with clear speech: his reluctant concession to the chorus and Jocasta at 669ff, his fearful address to Zeus at 738 (*ὦ Ζεῦ, τί μου δράσαι . . .*), and Jocasta’s description of his loss of control (915ff). To suppose

<sup>17</sup> G. Schiassi, *Sofocle, Edipo Re* (Bologna 1967) *ad loc.*: “La scena deve chiudersi col messaggio divino: Edipo ascolta e tace come annihilato.”

a psychological recovery off-stage after a silent perturbed exit at 462 is an unnecessary and misleading complication.

Taplin's justification of the silent exit is more subtle: "The point is that Tiresias is speaking in riddles. . . . Tiresias often couches the truth in more or less enigmatic words. The audience interprets him easily; some of his speeches are plain enough and all are transparent to someone who knows the truth. But Oedipus does not take him at face value precisely because what the seer says is so monstrous that he assumes it cannot be literal—it must be all riddles. . . . Oedipus stands in silence and goes in silence at 447–462 because he cannot yet make any sense of Tiresias' paradoxes—for if one cannot see the solution to a riddle then it remains nonsense, and there is nothing to be said."<sup>18</sup>

It is true that Tiresias' statements in the early part of the scene are obscure and riddling; Oedipus finally tells him so (439). But in his last speech what Tiresias says is clear as day; he might have prefaced his remarks, like Cassandra, with an announcement that he will speak "no longer from under veils." He tells Oedipus that the murderer of Laios is in Thebes (he has already told him plainly twice that he is the murderer himself), that the murderer is thought to be an alien immigrant (Oedipus had so described himself earlier, 222) but will be revealed as a native Theban, that he will leave Thebes blind, a beggar, and leaning on a stick. We can agree with Taplin that Oedipus' reaction to all this (and the audience will indeed think of his reaction if he is standing there on stage listening) will be simple outraged disbelief. There seems to be, as Taplin rightly says, "little evident contact with reality." But the next few lines, which predict the murderer's unmasking as a patricide and incestuous husband and father *do* have an evident contact with reality; they are identical with the terms of the oracle given to Oedipus by the most authoritative divine voice in the Greek world. Earlier in the scene (437) he was goaded into alarmed curiosity by the mere mention of his parents; how can he fail to react to this extraordinary coincidence? In fact, Taplin's scenario, that Oedipus finds the seer's words too fantastic to bother about, is best served by an exit which allows him to hear everything up to line 456 but nothing beyond it.

It may be objected that though the audience knows what Apollo foretold to Oedipus and knows that he must know, Sophocles does not draw any attention to it here and so the coincidence of the two

<sup>18</sup> *Supra* n.16: 44ff.

prophecies does not function as a live dramatic element. This seems to me a weak objection, for Apollo's prophecy was so well known that the audience could not help thinking of it when they heard Tiresias deliver lines 457ff; this prophecy of Apollo is vital to the basic story since without it Oedipus would have had no reason to go towards Thebes and so meet Laios. But even if this objection be allowed, no such excuse can be made for Oedipus' insensitivity two scenes later where Sophocles *does* draw attention to the Apolline prophecy by making Oedipus recite it to Jocasta. This adds one more psychological improbability to a scene which has already made huge demands on the audience's willingness to suspend its disbelief. It has to accept that Oedipus has never before heard the story of Jocasta's first marriage and the birth of her son, that he has never before told Jocasta the story of his life previous to his arrival at Thebes, that Jocasta can mention the detail that her child was exposed on the mountain with its feet "bound together" (suppressing what she knows perfectly well—that pins were driven through the child's feet) in apparent unconsciousness of the scars on her husband's feet, that Oedipus does not connect the Apolline prediction that he would murder his father with what Jocasta has just told him Apollo predicted for her own son—all this we are prepared to disregard, suppress, forget, because Sophocles does not draw attention to it; it is ἔξω τοῦ δράματος. But when he *does* draw attention to the identity of Tiresias' pronouncement and Apollo's by making Oedipus tell Jocasta what he heard at Delphi, he can hardly expect the audience to believe that Oedipus is sublimely unconscious of what is so obvious. It seems much simpler to have Oedipus off-stage by 457.<sup>19</sup>

Such an exit would not of course be unparalleled stage technique; remarks addressed by actor or chorus to an actor who is on his way off stage are in fact a cliché of the Attic theater. They have even acquired a semi-technical designation—'address to a departing back'—and Taplin has given a useful list of them.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes the departing actor may be supposed to hear what is said (especially in the case of good wishes, for example at Eur. *Med.* 759ff). But often the situation makes it clear that he does not. Taplin lists

<sup>19</sup> It may be added that when Oedipus realizes that Tiresias may indeed be able to see (747) he is thinking only of the murder of Laios, and even after he tells Jocasta what Apollo prophesied for him (791–93) he still feels anxiety only because of the possibility that he may be the killer (813ff). He even mentions again the details of Apollo's prophecy (825–26) without connecting them with the words of Tiresias.

<sup>20</sup> *GRBS* 12 (1971) 42 n.39.



“insults, threats and taunts” as “the most frequent use of the device” and Tiresias’ remarks to Oedipus certainly come under this head. But the device is often used for something closer to the situation which, in fact, an early exit on the part of Oedipus would produce: an unheard prophecy of disaster. Pentheus, on his way to the side exit and the mountains, does not hear the menacing prophecy Dionysos calls after him (Eur. *Bacch.* 971–72), still less the god’s call to Agave and her sisters to be ready for the victim. Lycus (Eur. *HF* 726ff) goes into the stage building with his attendants but must not hear Amphitryon’s threatening ambiguities which soon become plain statement. And Clytemnestra, as she goes into Electra’s cottage to the accompaniment of sarcastic apologies for its poverty (Eur. *El.* 1139–41), certainly does not hear the five-line prophecy of imminent death which follows (1142–46).

Vellacott, the only critic who realizes that the speech may be understood as ‘an address to a departing back’, is at great pains to counter that thesis, for *his* Oedipus knows the full truth from the beginning. Vellacott characterizes the phrase “And I tell you . . .” (*λέγω δέ σοι*) as “theatrically awkward if addressed to a retreating back.” He finds the reversion to second person in 460, after the third person statements of 449–60, “still more improbable if Oedipus is not there.” And finally, since “the chorus cannot help hearing and understanding Tiresias’ speech” it would be “an intolerable feebleness in the plot” for “the elders to hear crucial words which, through an accident of timing, were unheard by Oedipus.”<sup>21</sup> These objections are not well based. Second-person address to a retreating character who does not hear is common: the sentry’s direct address to Creon, quoted above, is every bit as emphatic as *λέγω δέ σοι* (*cf.* also Eur. *El.* 1142, *HF* 727). The reversion to second person after the third person statements of the prophecy presents no difficulty, especially if (as suggested below) it is provoked by the sound of the *skene* door closing. It may be added, against Vellacott’s formal objections, that prophecies of disaster are a common feature of this type of address (so Eur. *HF* 726ff, *El.* 1142, *Med.* 625). As for the chorus, they obviously hear what Tiresias says but they cannot understand it the way Oedipus could and must, if he hears it—they do not know of the prophecy made to Oedipus at Delphi. To them the prophecy of Tiresias is disturbing but fantastic; hence in the second part of the following stasimon they reject the prophet.

<sup>21</sup> *Supra* n.3: 170–71.

There is however one feature of Tiresias' address to a departing back which *is* unparalleled: the fact that he is blind. Tiresias cannot see that Oedipus is leaving and so presents us with an actor who is apparently addressing a departing back without realizing it and who, by line 457, is addressing an empty stage. This, as we have seen, has been dismissed as 'grotesque' (though it might in fact be theatrically impressive and apparently was so in the French and the Greek productions discussed in Carrière's article); Friis Johansen, in his influential survey of work on Sophocles 1939–59, found it ridiculous. He quotes Carrière—"Tiresias is blind . . . so he cannot know the king has left . . ."—and continues, "If we accept this naïvely pedantic way of arguing, we might well ask if Tiresias' attendant is blind too? And what about the chorus? Presumably they are just laughing at the old fool."<sup>22</sup>

Personally I do not see what is 'naïvely pedantic' about the argument that because the prophet is blind he cannot know that the King has left, but I do think it ignores stage effect. Tiresias cannot see, but he can hear. Oedipus can hardly turn his back and, accompanied by the usual two attendants, walk to the door of the *skene* without making a certain amount of noise; for that matter, it would be easy to arrange that he made noise enough for the audience to realize Tiresias could hear it. Tiresias, in other words, is delivering his prophecy to a departing back in the normal manner (and would have done so even if he had not been blind); the difference which makes this a subtly effective variation on the usual pattern is not that Tiresias is blind but that he *wants* Oedipus to hear what he is saying and Oedipus is deliberately refusing to do so.

There is no reason to think that noisy movement on the Attic stage was anything unusual.<sup>23</sup> A wooden stage platform in front of the *skene* could of course be made to resound by heavy steps or grounded spear butts, but even the earth floor of the orchestra could produce sounds heard all over the theater, as anyone who has heard a coin dropped by the guide in the orchestra at Epidauros can testify. Such sounds are mentioned and used dramatically more than once in extant tragedy. When one half-chorus of the *Ajax*, for example, comes looking for the hero on the shore, they hear foot-

<sup>22</sup> *Lustrum* 7 (1962) 231: followed by J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles* IV (Leiden 1967) 111.

<sup>23</sup> Taplin 71 n.3 cites C. Dedoussi, *Hellenika* 18 (1964) 6ff; H. Petersmann, *WS N.F.* 5 (1971) 91ff.

steps of the other half-chorus before they see them: *δοῦπον αὖ κλύω τινά*, 871 (*δοῦπος* is the word used in Homer to describe the measured tread of infantry). In Euripides' *Orestes* (136ff), Electra is afraid the chorus will awaken her sleeping brother by the sound of their footsteps; "step gently," she says, *ἡσύχῳ ποδὶ χωρεῖτε*, "don't make a sound" *μὴ ψοφεῖτε μηδ' ἔστω κτύπος*, and the choral dancers exhort each other to step lightly: *λεπτὸν ἴχνος ἀρβύλης τίθετε*. Both of these passages refer to a body of dancers, but later in the play (1311ff) the chorus announces that they can hear the footsteps of one person, Hermione, approaching: *ἡσθόμην κτύπου τινός | κέλευθον ἐσπεσόντος ἀμφὶ δώματα*. Of course not everything mentioned in the text is necessarily seen or heard on stage, but these passages suggest, what one would in any case expect, that actors in heavy costumes, and especially kings accompanied by armed attendants, would enter and exit with a certain amount of noise.

There is one noise very well attested for the tragic (and even more for the later comic) stage: the sound of the stage door.<sup>24</sup> When Ion, in Euripides' play, asks where Xuthus is, the chorus replies: "Still in the building, stranger; he has not yet crossed the threshold of the temple. But it sounds as if he's coming out, we can hear the noise of these doors—here he is; you can see our master now": *ὡς δ' ἐπ' ἐξόδοισιν ὄντος, τῶνδ' ἀκούομεν πυλῶν δοῦπον* (515–16). There is a similar passage in Sophocles' *Electra* (1322ff). Evidently the stage doors made a noise when opened; it is to be presumed that they did the same when they were shut.<sup>25</sup> And it may be added that the noise made by the doors would have provided the cue for Tiresias' closing line: "Go inside and figure this out . . ." *ταῦτ' ἰὼν εἴσω λογίζου*—a remark which is often cited as incontrovertible proof that Oedipus must still have been on stage.

To sum up. The exit of Oedipus at 447, besides eliminating the problem of Oedipus' failure to react at once and his later apparent obtuseness in the Jocasta scene, would maintain his dominant mood (necessary for his aggressive reentry at 532) and would be recognizable as a variation on a stage convention, the 'address to a retreating back'. It would of course be a very bold variation;

<sup>24</sup> W. W. Mooney, *The Housedoor on the Ancient Stage* (Baltimore 1914).

<sup>25</sup> N. Wecklein's 1892 school edition, *Die Tragödien des Sophokles II* (Munich 1892) *ad loc.* contains the stage direction: "462 ff. Tiresias leaves; Oedipus has already gone back into the palace before the end of the speech and the doors were opened and closed noisily so that the blind seer knew he had gone."

the character who delivers the address is blind and cannot see that his interlocutor is leaving. But he can hear him, so that the real subtlety of the variation lies in the fact that, in a reversal of the usual situation, the address is meant to be heard, but the departing actor refuses to listen and enters the stage door just before the delivery of the lines which, if heard at all, would have compelled his attention and provoked a reaction.

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