NEW VOICES IN CLASSICAL RECEPTION STUDIES
Issue 2 (2007)

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS AND *OYEDIPO AT KOLHUNI:* THE 'TRAGIC' WORLDS OF SOPHOCLES AND SOYINKA

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> *Unless Greek texts are performed with the same kind of energy as in the age when they were originally performed, it becomes difficult to revive them successfully*. (Suzuki 1988: 31)

PROLOGUE

Classical criticism looks to analyse and define the 'kind of energy' tragedy once generated in classical Athens and its approach is necessarily culture-specific. Meanwhile, Greek tragedy has been embraced and adapted in numerous forms world-wide. Lorna Hardwick (2003b) comments that:

> Greek drama in performance […] acts as an agent of transformation enabling us to experience simultaneously and in tension, different cultural perspectives and aspects of being. This capacity is partly a function of Greek drama's creation of critical distance between ancient and modern and between early modern, modern and post-modern traditions. However it is also a consequence of the ways in which modern performance is mediated by non-western translation, adaptation and especially staging—for example in Japanese and African performance.

Adaptors such as Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka and Japanese director, Tadashi Suzuki, find parallels between Greek theatre and their own 'sacred spaces' of performance. In their adaptations, the Greek text interacts with their own cultural and mythic backgrounds, and their individual performance culture. Their 'revival' of a Greek theatrical energy stems, however, as much from the dialectic between their performances and a modern audience as it does from a retrospective interaction with the text they are adapting.

Soyinka and Suzuki's adaptations have been called 'intercultural' but interculturalism supposes separate voices and distinct cultural positions without integration or harmony (Allain 2002: 9). Both Soyinka and Suzuki employ cross-cultural casting, multilingual performance and international collaboration. They blur both cultural and temporal boundaries: 'integrating traditional consciousness into modern sensibilities, continuing and reinventing historical traces.' (ibid. 153). But where the Suzuki Method aims at a trans-cultural theatre that can be explored in its own right, Soyinka is concerned with the actual process of integration, exploring both separateness and harmony.

While Soyinka's plays themselves can cross and blur boundaries, the defining habits of Soyinka as critic, continually creep back in. In his note to the producers of his 1973 adaptation *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*,[1] Soyinka acknowledges his debt to his own poem *Idandre*: 'a Passion poem of Ogun, elder brother to Dionysos.' (Soyinka 1973: 234). For Stanley Macebuh,

Soyinka's need to contextualize the god Ogun is characteristic of the once-colonized writing in English: Soyinka cannot assume a direct link between the conceptual assumptions of the language he writes in and the conceptual framework from which he derives his myths (Macebuh 2001b: 31).[1] Throughout this article, through parallels and comparisons, I accentuate this limitation by inserting Soyinka's adaptation into a European critical context, a process of recolonization, as it were.

But Soyinka and his work resist limitation. Classically educated in Nigeria and England and resident in America, he has no single cultural context and his frame of reference bridges boundaries. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka (1976: 37) contrasts Western compartmentalism of thought with an African sense of interconnectedness. As his note on the *Bacchae* demonstrates, the intertextuality of his theatre questions the kind of compartmentalism that regards Greek or Yoruba tradition as prior. Hardwick (2004) observes: 'classical referents are a sign of a double consciousness which recognises both the assimilationist impact of classical texts on colonised peoples … and also the capacity of writers to use the texts and referents to create new works.' Their impact transforms 'double consciousness into a more pluralistic and multi layered awareness.'

On 7 July 2002, I attended the first performance of Soyinka's adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus* for the XI International Meeting in Ancient Drama, at the European Cultural Centre at Delphi. I interviewed Soyinka after a poetry reading in London in November 2002 and he kindly lent me a copy of the unpublished script for the purposes of this article. Set on a container ship crewed by a Yoruba Chorus which is beached on the fictional Australian island of Kolhuni, Oyedipo is a blind Afghan Mullah, exiled from his tribe, seeking from the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Kolhuni asylum for himself and his daughter Nahrisa. Oyedipo is descended from the Zanj, African slaves who worked the salt mines of Iraq and revolted between 869–83 CE (see Brunson and Rashidi 1987: 207–20; Popovic 1999). He is pursued by his brother, the Regent, and his own son Fawzli who has colluded with the Taliban. Both want him to return to Afghanistan as a puppet leader to exercise power over a shaky coalition of Afghan warlords and are aided in their separate attempts by a hostile Australian immigration officer. Based on events aboard the Norwegian cargo ship, 'The Tampa' in September 2001, the play has contemporary resonance while adhering to Sophocles' plot and structure.

Soyinka's play is perhaps most interesting where Soyinka interprets the figure of Oedipus in a way that diverges from Sophocles. Soyinka denies that *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Oyedipo at Kolhuni* are tragedies in the Greek sense of the word, and claims instead that although they fulfil the Yoruba definition of tragedy: 'the return of negative energies after death back into the community' they are essentially joyous plays.[2] However, this article explores how *Oedipus at Colonus* is a tragedy on a human scale, in both Greek and Yoruba terms, and how elements of Soyinka's play, seen in the light of an interpretation of *Oedipus at Colonus* that Soyinka himself does not share, become, ironically, deeply resonant of the play he is adapting.

Soyinka's and Sophocles' explorations of divinity and cult, their depictions of communal strength, civic identity and nationalism, the obligations imposed by bonds of blood and the roles of justice and pity when they are broken, are also examined. The final section explores their presentations of death and the afterlife, and, inherent in that, their conceptions of tragedy.

THE SOPHOCLEAN CONFLICT

Soyinka is not alone in positing a 'joyous' interpretation of *Oedipus at Colonus.* Segal (1996: 157–8) articulates a 'joyous' reading:

> … purifying ritual, miraculous indications of the larger community between gods and men, and the rites of burial bring a lonely sufferer and outcast at the margins of the city symbolically within its community and protection … the communal ritual at the end produces a formal closure to the play and also indirectly refers to and includes the audience's emotional experience of release as a dimension of the closing effect.

As Segal explores, the death of Oedipus is intensely beautiful in its mystery. We are left with the reported image of an image: Theseus shades his eyes as if in terror, and then simultaneously salutes earth and sky at Oedipus' passing (1652–5).[3] Von Schlegel (1964: 610) also describes Oedipus' passing as a: 'journey to the placable gods in a light so bright that he leaves us with a sense of gentle emotion, and nothing more.' episkion [shading] at 1650 as Theseus raises his hand to his eyes, certainly suggests light.

But if we resist the urge to retroject a parallel with Christ's Assumption, an examination of the text must conclude that there is no indication that Oedipus is taken into the company of the 'placable gods'. Nor, despite Segal's assertion, is there communal ritual at his passing, and the lamentation of his daughters is cut short 'before its ritual culmination' (Easterling 1996: 176). Antigone's frustrated desire to lament her father's death precedes the girls' return to Thebes (1766–72), and intensifies the shadow on the play of *Antigone,* Sophocles' tragedy of at least thirty years earlier. Oedipus' death will be a boon to Athens, to whom he promised χώραν ἄλυπον ['a country free from pain'] (1765) if his final resting place is kept inviolate, but this very phrase recalls the language used of the grove of the Eumenides at the beginning of the play (39–40), muddying any optimistic reading. The 'emotional experience of release', Segal's interpretation of Aristotelian *catharsis*, is blurred by the return of the play's focus to Oedipus' beloved daughters, coupled with the parallels between Oedipus and the Eumenides, prominent in his cursing of Polyneices. As Easterling comments: 'pinning down closure and catharsis proves to be extremely difficult.' (ibid.)

Produced posthumously in 401 BCE, after the end of the Peloponnesian War in a decimated Athens, *Oedipus at Colonus* is one of a few extant tragedies set at or near Athens, and contains one of the most beautiful odes ever written about the city (668–719). Sophocles relocates Oedipus' traditional resting place from Thebes to Colonus, his own deme[4] and it is a play that examines in detail the relationship between deme and city, the two most important levels of religious organization in the second half of the fifth century in Greece (Parker 1987). Colonus was a cult centre of the Knights, the Athenian cavalry, where they sacrificed to Poseidon Hippios,[5] and hence the assembly of the Council of the 400 was held at Colonus in 411 BCE. Against this historical background, Lowell Edmunds (1996) has suggested there is an apologetic element to the play, but Sophocles' integration of deme and city, cavalry and non-cavalry, Poseidon as god of *thetes* and horsemen (*OC* 899; 1494) looks forward as much as back. Sophocles' play was written and performed in times of division and stasis at Athens (Thucydides 8; Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1 and 2) but it explores in detail the workings and strengths of a city when it stands united. It is a play deeply concerned with Athenian identity and self-conception, both dramatic and contemporary, and it is

interesting to re-examine it in the light of an adaptation that creates a similar axis between characters and audience.

SOYINKA AND SOPHOCLES

Soyinka plays on his original and its accompanying mythology from a position not unlike that of the tragic poets themselves, free both to refer to and adapt mythology and previous tragic works. He calls his a 'mythologizing consciousness' (Soyinka 2002) and many of Sophocles' themes have long been of personal interest to Soyinka: 'the issue of sanctuary—closure, borders, ultra nationalism, immigration and the plight of refugees.' (ibid.) But he elevates these contemporary themes through dense poetic diction, alienating and ennobling his subjects. Soyinka incorporates the prophetic and cultic elements of Sophocles' play through his Chorus of Yoruba boatmen, whose ranks are gradually augmented as the play progresses by the Kolhuni tribesmen from the island where they land. Choruses dance at Yoruba festivals for the ritual masked ceremonies of the *egungun* (masquerade of the ancestor cult), and it is from these performative rituals that Yoruba theatre developed. The chorus in *Oyedipo at Kolhuni* is drawing simultaneously on Yoruba and Greek choral institutions. The chorus can be seen as a symbol of the incorporation of the individual into ancient Greek civic society (Plato, *Laws* 645 a–b; Wilson 2000). In this play, Soyinka's Chorus comes to symbolise unity between the Yoruba boatmen and the Kolhuni,[6] and the unity of the Yoruba and the Greeks.[7] The masked dance of the *egungun* allows ancestral spirits to move again, possessing the masked dancers; possession by the spirit world is explored in Soyinka's adaptation where it references both his Yoruba heritage and the notion of past in present, inherent in any act of 'representation' in theatre.

Soyinka's play opens with the Priest of Ifa,[8] Atona, a passenger aboard 'The Tampa', casting his *opele*:[9]

> Seek no convertites—thus admonishes
> Orunmila, father of divination. Every being
> Finds his way, guided by the portion that was his
> Even from conception—guided but not ruled. (*Oyedip at Kolhluni*[10])

Oedipus' gradual comprehension of the implications of Apollo's oracles in the *OC* (85f.) is represented in terms of Oyedipo's possession by spirits on Kolhuni. Atona explains to the Chorus:

> [dark spirits] throw dice
> To decide who invades his mind. The bigger ones
> Sit on his head and then the smaller, like *Esu*, perch on the tip of his nose.

Esu, one of the *orisha,* the Yoruba religion's minor gods, is the sole messenger of the gods who interprets the will of god to man. He is a lopsided, liminal figure, with feet in the divine and human worlds. Known as the 'divine trickster' of Yoruba mythology (Gates Jr. 1988), he is the guardian of crossroads. Indeterminacy is central to him and he embodies such misinterpretation of divine oracles central to the legend of Oedipus.[11] Soyinka coined the term *Esu-tufanaalo* [one who

unravels the knots of Esu'] for black literary criticism, replicating the relationship between Hermes and hermeneutics. Wisdom evolves through interaction with Esu. In Soyinka's play, Oyedipo's route to wisdom involves the crossing of spirit-world boundaries, just as Sophocles' Oedipus gains wisdom through his gradual insight into the nature of the gods. As they land, Nahrisa asks her father: 'How will you know [the land that was promised by the gods?]'

Oyedipo replies, as though possessed:

> My spirits will quicken. Like a long caged bird suddenly
> Released to sun and wind. I shall hear sounds from worlds
> Unmapped, unknown to man. …
>
> *[He stops in confusion and when questioned by his daughter he explains:]*
>
> I … I did not know what I was saying. I stopped
> Because I heard my voice, but it was not mine.
> How do I know these things?

At first Oyedipo is hesistant but gradually he learns to incorporate and accept his visions and when they reappear towards the end of the play as he advances towards his death, he is no longer speaking as another person but as a man who has integrated his contact with the spirit world into a deeper conception of self:

> Come. I see a flock of pilgrims, a procession,
> like the feast of Nawroz[12] with the festival of lamps.
> But a mottled crowd, from all corners of the world
> A rainbow throng in homage to the One Ancestor.

Oyedipo gradually surmounts religious barriers and at the end of the play departs into the 'universality of ancestors' in what Soyinka calls a 'joyous finale'. The Chorus bids Oyedipo farewell: 'Pace gently towards your new incarnation.' Sophocles' closing emphasis, however, is on Oedipus as a living principle to be absorbed into the city, and one who evokes responses that have implications for this world, not another.

As Easterling (1967) explores, I would suggest that Sophocles presents a human figure, and there is no suggestion in the play that he will have in death a consciousness different from that of other dead men. There is only one mention of Oedipus' *post mortem* existence, as he talks about the strife his sons will wreak from Thebes **in' oumoj eudwn kai kekrummenoj nekuj yuxroj pot' autwn qermon aima pietai,** [then shall my dead body, sleeping and buried, cold as it is, drink their warm blood] (621–2). Hester (1977) suggests this 'blood' will be a libation poured to Oedipus and this prophecy anticipates his hero cult, but as Edmunds (1996: 97) explores, the possible hero cult of Oedipus is deliberately blurred by Sophocles. The final scene of the *OC* turns attention back to his daughters, as they return to Thebes, and it is through them and their brothers that Oedipus and his curses live on, not in Soyinka's divine realm.

OEDIPUS/OYEDIPO AND CIVIC IDENTITY

Soyinka's major departure from Sophocles is the introduction of a hostile Australian Immigration Officer who repeatedly threatens Oyedipo and colludes with the Regent in his attempt to return the 'illegal immigrants' to Afghanistan. The Immigration Officer is described by the Priest of the Kolhuni as: 'a functionary of government. They live by forms and regulations', and he continually invokes the letter of the law: 'that's the law, and there's no exception. Quarantine, then deportation … rules are rules. There will be no exception … ' The character brings to mind Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*[13] and Athol Fugard's *The Island*[14] in which Creon's adherence to rules and regulations is used to justify apartheid. Both plays examine the dangers and weakness inherent in such inflexibility. The Immigration Officer insists that: 'this government will defend its sovereignty and reject external interference in its internal affairs. 'This inflexibility is continually criticized in *Oyedipo at Kolhuni* by the Priest of the Kolhuni and by Oyedipo himself.

This criticism picks up on Sophocles' observances in the first 550 lines of the *OC*. In the *OC*, the Chorus learns of Oedipus' identity and orders him to flee the deme (233). It condemns Oedipus on behalf of the whole polis and at 256–7 appear 'uncompromisingly pious' (Slatkin 1986). Its response at 229–30: **oudeni moiridia tisij erxetai w propaqh to tinein:** [fate punishes no man who is avenging what he has first suffered] betrays what Balogh (1943) calls: 'the innate belief that the fate of the individual is directed by justice.' Unlike Antigone at 237, Oedipus does not respond to their hostility with a plea. He challenges the Chorus at 258f: **ti dhta dochj h ti klhdonoj kalhj / mathn reoushj wfelhma gignetai** [What help comes from fame, or from a fine reputation that flows away in vain?] He forces them to re-examine their moral perspective, defending his innocence,[15] and asserts his worth as **ieroj eusebhj** [sacred and reverent] (287) bringing **onhsin** [advantage] (288) to the city. He points to the contradiction between Athens' reputation as qeosebestata [most reverent to the gods] and their recent hostile actions towards **ton kakoumenon cenon** [the afflicted stranger] (261) that negate this reputation. He draws a distinction between the chorus, onoma monon deisante" [simply fearing my name] (265), and his guiltless fusi" [nature] (270) and warns the city against **ergoij anosioij** [unholy action] (283). He counters their reactionary piety by arguing that to reject him would be to forfeit Athens' claim to advantage from the gods.

Slatkin (1986: 125) sees in ll. 277–9: 'a radical critique of the failure of conventional social and religious sanctions to relate the gods' purpose to human experience.' Oedipus is challenging Athens to re-examine her religious orthodoxy whilst testing her political integrity; her self-definition and klhdono" kalh" [fine reputation], is under threat. This 'radical' challenge associates Oedipus with the form of enlightened democracy that he is offering to safeguard at 288. He is evoking the Aeschylean idea of democracy in need of continuous self-renewal, and offers the Athenians an opportunity to validate their values by accepting him. Oedipus is asking Athens to live up to values: 'standard in imperial encomia' (Mills 1997: 166, n.23). They can prove themselves to be an open, inclusive, compassionate society by choosing to integrate a man who has acted and suffered in accordance with the principles of *xenia* and *philia*. Ismene on arrival confirms that accepting Oedipus will bring Athens power after his death, but Oedipus' influence on Athens is not only external to the city. It is connected to an active and continuing recognition and acceptance of Oedipus. His final words to the Chorus at 1554–5 bid them: **kap' eupracia / memnhsqe mou qanontoj eutuxeij aei.** [and in prosperity remember me when I am dead for your success for ever!].

He is akin to the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides:*[16] he evokes fear but is to be incorporated in the city for its own strength and advantage.[17] Ismene at 389–90 explicitly states the oracle's pronouncement that Oedipus: **se toij ekei zhthton anqrwpoij pote** / **qanont' esesqai zwnta t' eusoiaj xarin.** [that you shall one day be sought by the people there in death and in life for their preservation's sake].

Oedipus wins over the demesmen of Colonus before the arrival of Theseus. As a mini-polis, each deme had its own pantheon and heroes, through which the deme asserted its specific identity and interests without declaring independence from the larger Attic or Greek world. Athens provided military protection for the demes, as we see when Creon kidnaps Ismene and Antigone, but demes operated with a large degree of religious autonomy. Oedipus challenges the Colonans and the challenge is met by deme and city, reinforcing Athenian identity and self-representation on an individual and corporate level. The mysteriousness of Oedipus' death and the unspecified location of his tomb reinforce the implication that it is not only the acceptance of the corpse of Oedipus into the city itself that matters, but the incorporation of the polluted suppliant that holds significance for Athens.

As Mills explores (1997: ch. 5), Theseus embodies Athenian virtues in the *OC*, but Sophocles is careful to display these virtues simultaneously in the Chorus of demesmen, exhibiting Athens' virtue at every level of its civic structure.

Oedipus is the strangest of Athens' suppliants and is thus her greatest test. Through accepting him, the Chorus is risking war with Thebes, divine displeasure at the presence of the most polluted of men, as well as the risk of divine displeasure if it does not honour a suppliant. Risk is a central motif of Athenian identity and it is rewarded. Similarly, Aeschylus' *Eumenides* examines how Athens risked incorporating the potentially dangerous powers of the Erinyes into the city and was rewarded with a guarantee of safety. In the *OC* the Erinyes retain this function and are called **dhmouxoij** [goddesses of the deme] (at 458), a word also used of the Chorus at 1087. The fearful principle, once incorporated, safeguards the city and the very act of incorporation endorses Athens' virtue. Thus, the magnificent ode in praise of Colonus (668f.) immediately follows Oedipus' reception into the community.

Similarly, the refusal of Creon or Polyneices to accept Oedipus back into the city and to accommodate the polluted innocent indicates the sickness and self-interest of the warring rulers of Thebes. Sophocles is careful not to make Thebes the anti-Athens, and Theseus at 919 and 929 explicitly asserts that Creon's behaviour is uncharacteristic of Thebes. Creon is an individual offending against universal laws. It is the Athenian/non-Athenian contrast that is important, not an Athens/Thebes axis. Creon behaves like a tyrant, in contrast to Athenian democracy, and violently breaks the laws of the gods, in contrast to Athenian piety. He appeals to a cowardly, unbending piety (946f) in contrast to the active piety of the Athenians that accepts Oedipus.

Soyinka similarly differentiates between different codes of behaviour, as opposed to national characteristics, by allying the Customs Officer with Creon/the Regent's cause. On arrival, the Regent addresses the Customs Officer: 'Ah, I see your honourable self arrived before me. My task is made easier.' Soyinka further blurs the question by casting a black actor as a racist white Australian, emphasizing the priority of behaviour over nationality/race. Creon and the Customs Officer are contrasted with the Yoruba boat crew and the islanders who both accept Oyedipo. As he comments: 'the laws of hospitality are universal.'

Sophocles' Creon is offending against panhellenic laws of the gods and suppliants. His transgressions provide a striking contrast with Athens which is thus presented as the prototype of Hellenic virtue.[18] Sophocles extends the Athenian moral sphere to encompass all Greece, universalizing Athenian virtue. In the orators and *Epitaphioi* (Loraux 1986), the pre-eminence of Athenian virtues serves as the foundation stone for Athenian empire. Such imperial overtones could not be further from Soyinka's programme. The details of the Colonus ode are deeply Athenian—the olive in particular symbolizes everlasting Athenian civilization: the civilization of Athens is unique and the olive is said to grow best in Athens, not Asia or the Peloponnese (694f.) It is **egxewn fobhma daiwn** [a terror to the spear of enemies] (699), both for its physical properties and metaphorical implications as the symbol of Athens.

The competitive civic pride that emphasizes Athens' uniqueness is parodied in Soyinka's adaptation. The Chieftain of the Kolhuna asserts:

> there is substance to our claim that this island is the navel of the world.
>
> *Atona*: (*discreet cough*) … Claims to be the naval of the world? That would be
> Impiety on the part of the children of Oodua. We know humanity
> Was spawned on our soil, in a place called Ile-Ife.
>
> *Retainer*: We remain neutral … as long as no one
> Disputes that the Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan
> Are suspended as the roof over the world.

The location of the performance at Delphi, the *omphalos* of the Greek world, pulled the audience into Soyinka's ridicule of competitive nationalism. His use of the word 'barbarian', mentioned above, continues this train of thought: 'the rules of hospitality are universal/Even barbarians accept them.' He is gently satirizing certain values of Sophocles' world; Soyinka's hero is descended from the Zanj, barbarian slaves, the antithesis of King Oedipus/Theseus in the moral world of the slave-owning Greeks. But a thousand years later, Oyedipo has been a 'lord' and is now a beggar, like Oedipus. Sophocles' play endorses Athenian self-conception as pre-eminent. Soyinka's play, by uniting the disparate worlds of Australia, Africa and central Asia questions any form of national superiority. His elucidation of the virtues of hospitality seeks to transcend, not endorse, nationality.

MAN AND GOD

Soyinka concentrates heavily on the gradual daemonization of Oedipus and is deeply interested in an afterlife; his play, though based on Sophocles, is framed by Yoruba and Islamic conceptions of the afterlife. Oyedipo describes his gifts in terms of a 'healer's wand', a present from the gods for his suffering that will assuage the famine and fire raging in the lands of the Kolhuna. Summoned by the thunderbolt, Oyedipo describes in opaque terms the 'fructification' that will follow the 'season of dearth' as a result of the Kolhuna's treatment of Oedipus. He also promises protection from the acquisitive Australian government threatening the ancient lands of the Kolhuni. This emphasis on famine is absent in Sophocles. Sophocles promises no such concrete benefits for Athens. Sophocles is deliberately mysterious about Oedipus' tomb and what will follow his death. Sophocles is concerned with cult, but his main focus is on Athens' and the implications of Colonus' reception of the living Oedipus.

Easterling (1967: 41) insists that: 'Sophocles throughout the play takes pains to present Oedipus *as a man* (sic),' just as the heroism of *Oedipus Tyrannus* lay in acceptance of the horrors of mortal life, alien to the gods. Oedipus' knowledge is limited and he does not foresee Antigone's fate. The miracle of his death and the specific summons from the gods result from Oedipus' human suffering and the insight stemming from his forbearance. Soyinka's Oyedipo is transfigured, hinted at from the beginning of the play by the Yoruba priest Atona: 'I know what god he calls to mind, the dawns's red/ Turban wrapped around his troubled head, that staff / Before him like the double-headed axe of thunder'.[19] Soyinka describes Oyedipo's departure into the 'universality of ancestors', a conception of the after-life derived from Yoruba but widened by Soyinka's own conception of religious commonality. Oyedipo's departure is not to the Islamic afterlife, but to the communion of sprits that bears no relation to worldly denominations, a communion that can be accessed on earth through spirit possession, through the *Egungun*, or in less formalized settings. Soyinka comments that: 'the *Egungun* masquerade is an ancestral masquerade. It is one of the devices for reconciling society and individuals to the trauma of death. The *Egungun* continues the line between the living and the dead.' (Jeyifo 2001a: 80). In contrast to the protestant perception of possession as a demonic activity (Thomas 1971), in this context, possession is empowering and redemptive, a communion with the gods. The blind Oyedipo reacts tentatively to his first visions as he arrives on Kolhuni:

I have leapt up from a dream. A dream? More like a sea delirium.
A nightmare that I cannot tell apart from visions. …
Just now, it was as if I had become the very dream, as if I was
Living the dream. Something took possession of me.

As the play proceeds, this tentativeness disappears, and barriers between dream/illusion and vision disappear. When towards the close of the play the blind Oyedipo throws away his staff and authoritatively summons the chieftain to follow him to his death: 'Come!' he cries, he is emphatic that he 'sees clearly' the image of the 'spout in the earth' leading him to his death. He recognizes that he is being assumed into the divine realm: 'Remember, the gods also die', and the Chorus responds: 'When gods embrace, mere mortals/ Avert their gaze'.

It is as an 'ally' that Oyedipo calls on Ogun in heaping curses on his son Fawzli. Oyedipo issues forth the wrath of Ogun from his own mouth, and his own authority. It is not as a man and as a father that he curses his son, but as a divine figure, divine through acceptance of the Dionysiac, Yoruba and Greek. Soyinka's *choragus* (his own spelling) closes the play after Oyedipo's departure:

Purified, he dares the immortal lair whose key
Is the time-worn staff of wisdom, a secret chamber
Before whose doorway, longing falls away
Like the scales of a moulting snake
Like the rags of the mendicant god at his hour
Of epiphany. Oh Obatala,[20] be kind to me
And mine. May my hands be unclenched in that hour
Of rain, that your largesse does not pass me by
My nostrils flared that I may inhale

The rare breath of your wisdom, and acceptance.

This final choral response recognizes the wisdom and insight Oyedipo gained by self-knowledge and his acceptance of suffering, but also through his acceptance of the spirit world. This communion with the 'universal harmony' results in natural verdance; the land gives forth milk and honey; on Kolhuni, famine is replaced by fertility. Oyedipo is embraced by the gods and the play ends in 'joy'.

This transfiguration of Oyedipo forms the finale of Soyinka's adaptation, but is nuanced by Sophocles in his final scene of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Oedipus recognizes the thunder crash as a sign from Zeus, contrasting strongly with Antigone's questioning and the Chorus's terrified uncertainty at 1464f. Antigone again questions his certainty: **pwj oisqa; tw de touto *sumbalwn exeij*;** [how do you know? What leads you to this knowledge?] (1474). Oedipus does not explain but replies with finality: **kalwj katoid'** [I know it well]. Oedipus is anxious that Theseus arrive quickly because, in his clarity of vision, he feels his mind slipping away from him:

ar' egguj anhr; ar' et' emyuxou, tekna, /
kichawrai **mou kai katorqountoj frena;**

[Will he find me still living, and of sound mind, my children?] (1487).

Theseus, like Antigone, questions Oedipus' confidence concerning his death and he replies: **autoi qeoi khrukej aggellousi moi,** ['the gods themselves are the heralds who announce it to me'] (1511). The constant questioning reinforces the gulf between those around him and his own conception of his fate. He announces forcefully to Theseus: **xwron men autoj autik' echghsomai,** / **aqiktoj hghthroj,** ou me **xrh qanein.** [I myself, with no guide to lay a hand on me, shall now show you the place where I must die] (1520–1).

Oedipus transcends his fear of death through self-knowledge. Like Teiresias this is emphasized by the dichotomy between sight and blindness. Shields (1961) notes ten references to sight and blindness in *OC* 1–42 alone, and sight symbolism, as in the *OT*, emphasizes the connection between darkened physical vision and intellectual insight.

The audience shares in this self-knowledge by witnessing the conclusion of his life, but they also see that even Oedipus' knowledge is limited—namely that he may conceive of his own death fully but he does not foresee that of Antigone. He has made Theseus *kurios* ['guardian'] of his daughters (1148f); and Theseus invites the girls to stay on in Athens, but they decide against it and they return home to Thebes. Antigone's hope of what she can accomplish in Thebes: **ean pwj** / **diakwluswmen ionta fonon** / **toisin omaimoij.** [so that we may prevent the slaughter that is coming to our brothers] (1770–3) is deeply pathetic but Theseus, lacking the privileged position of the audience, is unaware of the dramatic irony and he returns Antigone to Thebes and the hands of Creon. Her death is caught up in Oedipus' curse against Creon at *OC* 869 where Oedipus wishes upon Creon that **Hlioj doih bion** / **toiouton oion kame ghranai pote.** [therefore may the all-seeing Sun grant that our old age is like mine], an old age Sophocles had already written for Creon in the final scene of *Antigone*.

The three 'Theban' plays of Sophocles are not a trilogy akin to the *Oresteia*, and are dramatically and morally independent wholes. As Jebb (1907) comments: 'The Creon of the

Antigone is indeed an essentially distinct character from the ruthless villain of the *Coloneus*; the *Coloneus* describes the end of Oedipus in a manner irreconcilable with the allusion in the *Antigone*' (50). But that is not to deny that Sophocles, by connecting *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone* with 'finely wrought links of allusion',[21] recognized a tragic circularity or chain of retribution, not unlike that explored in the *Oresteia*, though one that denies the seeming closure of the *Eumenides*. *Oedipus at Colonus* is not a play that concludes with 'reconciliation' and 'resolution', but with the recurring themes of vengeance and retribution that appear throughout the Oedipus legend.

There is pessimism at the end of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, rescued perhaps by the tragic 'pleasure' of self-knowledge (see Nuttall 1996). It is this reading at the end of the play which is markedly at odds with Soyinka's joyous ending, an ending he creates by omitting Antigone's final interchange with Theseus, and by concentrating instead upon the departing figure of Oyedipo. Dramatically, Sophocles was at liberty to end his play with the death of Oedipus and it is telling he chooses not to do so.

FATHER AND SON

I will turn now to Oedipus' treatment of his son, a deeply problematic element of the play. It has been suggested that we are mistaken to expect Oedipus to demonstrate Christian values of piety and forgiveness, and that these virtues were alien to the ancients. Given the predominance Sophocles grants to Theseus' pleas for mercy, and to Antigone's entreaties, this seems simplistic.

The breakdown, explored by Sophocles, of the father–son relationship was highly pertinent at the end of the fifth century. Nicias, in his speech on the Sicilian Expedition, portrays the expedition's supporters as primarily young men, and the opposition primarily old (Thuc. 6.12.2–13; 18.6; 24.3.) Despite the historical inaccuracy of Nicias' presentation, it illustrates the Athenians' sensitivity to generational difference, as Aristophanes recognizes in his *Clouds* and *Knights*, and Euripides in *Hippolytus*. After the Sicilian Expedition, Thrasymachus advocated a return to the *patros politeia* and *Athenaion Politeia.* 29.2 describes the legislative commission of 411 BCE seeking to re-establish the *patrioi nomoi* of Cleisthenes and Solon. The *probouloi* were created in 413 BCE whose purpose was to stabilize and check activities and provide council in the post Sicily period (Thuc.8.1.3). Sophocles was a *proboulos* at approximately 84 years. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*: 1419a, 25–30). Solon's law designated that if someone did not look after his parents he would be disgraced and lose his civil rights as an Athenian. Sophocles makes sustenance and disgrace concepts fundamental to the Oedipus/Polyneices interchange.

Linforth (1951) emphasises the importance of the repeated contrast between daughters and sons in their behaviour towards Oedipus. At 343 Oedipus describes his sons as parqenoi [maidens], sitting at home in Egyptian fashion and allowing their consorts to provide their biou trofeia [necessities of life]. trofh [care] linked with pono" [toil], recurs throughout the scene with Ismene (324f). At 351–2 Oedipus describes the trofh Antigone provides for her father: the child reverses roles and cares for her parent, eliciting love and gratitude, contrasting with Oedipus' bitter attitude to his sons. At 446f. Oedipus declares: trofa" ecw biou [I have my sustenance for life] from these two parqenoi [maidens], while his sons choose qronou" kai skhpra [to wield the sceptre and be monarchs], over their duty to their father (Easterling 1967). This picks up the key words from the previous passage. The emphasis on the royal regalia stresses the short-sighted self-interest of the sons' ambitions, contrasting with Oedipus' tender gratitude to the daughters who sustain him.

The choral ode of 1211 follows Antigone's and Theseus' appeals to Oedipus regarding his son, and elicits pity for the old man immediately prior to his meeting with Polyneices. He is battered from all sides by storms at 1241 and the repetition of ai men and ai de, at 1245–8 place Oedipus at the centre of a world whose waves attack him from all four corners.

But Polyneices is also treated sympathetically, in marked contrast to Sophocles' depiction of Creon. Taplin (1997: 84) has suggested he enters from the opposite *eisodos* to Creon, a suggestion reinforced by a vase painting depicting Creon and Polyneices on opposite sides of Oedipus. When he arrives he is weeping (1251). He bears witness (1265) to his inadequacies regarding the τροφη (1265) of his father and appeals to Aidw" [Mercy]. In the face of silence, he begs for a response. He appeals to his sisters to intercede: **wj mh m' atimon, tou qeou ge prostathn, outwj afh' me** ['so that he may not send off without honour me who am protected by the god'] (1278).

atimon [disgraced] picks up atimo" [disgraced], in Solon's law, and introduces the concept of reciprocity to father/child relationships. This sense of reciprocity negates Antigone's argument of 1186f that, as Polyneices' father, it is not right for Oedipus to return evil for evil. Antigone, like Polyneices, appeals to mercy at 1192. The scene is tense, and Sophocles' sympathetic treatment of Polyneices blurs the obvious justice of Oedipus' attitude to his sons. We come to the clinching speech of Polyneices, in which Polyneices, as Easterling (1967) explores, effectively damns himself. He appeals to Poseidon, and next Theseus, thanking him who: **didouj emoi / lecai t' akousai t' asfalei sun ecod**w [granted me the right to converse and a safe-conduct back] (1287–8). Polyneices' description of Thebes is immediately prefaced by the figure of Theseus, the embodiment of the good governance of Athens, who affords freedom and safety to the stranger. This serves to highlight further the chaos of rule created by the brothers and their uncle, and undercuts Polyneices' request for mercy.

Polyneices aligns himself with his father in the declaration that he has been driven ek patrow" [from his fatherland], but undercuts this connection by describing his longing for panarch [full power] (1293). His anger that Eteocles did not beat him in argument, or test him in strength or action but 'persuaded the city' (at 1298), further widens the gulf between Polyneices' tyrannical impulses and democratic Athens. He blames his father's Erinus (an avenging deity) at 1299, evoking pity while denying full responsibility for the consequences of his actions. Polyneices is damned for actions far less severe than his father's, but the essential difference is that he was fully aware of his crimes while his father was not (266ff.; 510ff.; 969ff.). The catalogue of warriors Polyneices has gathered is listed to impress Oedipus, but is part of an army he wishes to lead against his own brother and his own city. Polyneices is generating *stasis*, the great fifth-century threat to civic stability, according to Thucydides (3.83.1).[22] Polyneices asks Oedipus to renounce his mhni" [wrath] (1328) and join in exacting vengeance against his brother. He appeals to Oedipus as a fellow beggar, since they both live on the charity of others. This reference refocuses attention on Oedpius' exile at the hand of his selfish sons, self-interest reiterated in Polyneices' speech. At 1339, Polyneices explicitly asks for Oedipus to stand at his side so that he can 'destroy' his brother. The last line of Polyneices' speech is both misguided and pathetic. He asks for Oedipus' help so that he can 'boast' of victory (1345), while emphasizing that, without Oedipus, he will not be saved. He is asking for his father's help to destroy his brother, Oedipus' own son, and Oedipus' curse grants that request, not through pity but through retributive punishment.

Oedipus replies with vehemence, returning at 1354 to the θρονους και σκηπτρα ['to wield the sceptre and be monarchs'] of 448. He rounds on Polyneices for exiling him when the regalia of power were in his hands, regalia now held by Polyneices' xunaimo" ['shared blood'], a word that

equates Polyneices with the brother he detests, and emphasizes how both brothers have destroyed the blood-bond by their actions. Oedipus calls Polyneices his murderer at 1361 for denying him his rightful trofh, undercutting Polyneices' attempt to unite father and son as beggars, and equating them instead as patricides. Oedipus returns to his daughters and the trofh they have provided him at 1365, further emphasizing Polyneices' failings. He calls his daughters **andrej, ou gunaikej,** [men, not women], returning to the role inversion of the earlier passage. They endure the pono" [toil] (1368) of supporting him, and Oedipus cuts the blood ties between himself and his sons (1369). Oedipus curses his sons: **in' aciwton touj futeusantaj sebein** [so that you two may learn respect for your begetters] (1377) and not dishonour them, in perhaps the clearest link to the contemporary Athenian policy of a return to respect for elders. Polyneices has appealed to Aidw" [Pity], seated beside Zeus (1268). Oedipus unseats Pity at the side of Zeus in favour of Dikh [Justice], at 1382, a god to whom Polyneices has no recourse. Oedipus' decision is just, and Sophocles' dialogue lays out expertly the firm logical grounds on which it stands, but it is harsh, and is met with the pleas of Antigone.

Oedipus refers to the **arxaioij nomoij** [the ancient laws], at 1382, in conjunction with Δικη, before continuing to invoke, amongst others, the powers of the Eumenides against his son. His words recall the Aeschylean choral ode after the acquittal of Orestes where the Erinyes demand reverence for the altar of Justice (*Eumenides*, 539f.) At *Eum.* 544, the Erinyes cry: pro" [Dikh] ti" tokewn seba" eu protiwn [In the name of Justice may he who reveres his parents be honoured.] Linforth (1951: 94) denies any connection between Oedipus here and the Erinyes but there are verbal and visual links. Both are δεινον [dread inspiring]. In the *OC* (84, 141), the Eumenides are Oedipus' allies and associated with Athens (106–7, 457). *OC* (621) and (631) mention Oedipus' goodwill.

Aeschylus presents the fear central to such retributive punishment as essential to the good governance of Athens at *Eum*.976. The Erinyes ward off *stasis*, and pray that:

> mhde piousa koni" melan aima politan
> di organ poina"
> antifonou" ata"
> arpalisai polew"
>
> ['The thirsty dust shall nevermore / Suck up the darkly streaming gore /
> Of civic broils, shed out in wrath / And vengeance, crying death for death!']
>
> (*Eum*.980)

The central question is not whether Sophocles is deliberately echoing Aeschylus. The importance lies in their shared emphasis on the essential fear of Dikh, and its relationship to good rule. In these terms, Oedipus' terrible cursing of Polyneices, emphasizing the reciprocity inherent in kinship, has an important role to play in the well-governed city, and the benefit Oedipus brings to Athens lies in recognition of this principle, one that links back to Sophocles' previous emphasis on the importance to the city of incorporating the terrible suppliant.

In a similar tone, Soyinka's adaptation bids us accept the terrible realities of the righteous anger of Ogun. But, through Antigone, Sophocles includes a note of dissension in his closing scene, absent in Soyinka's adaptation. Sophocles deliberately depicts Polyneices as misguided but

sympathetic, reinforcing the undeniable horror inherent in Oedipus' 'just' curse. Antigone begs her father 'piqou moi' [pity me], and asserts at 1189:

> **efusaj auton: wste mhde drwnta se / ta twn kakistwn dussebestat', w pater, / qemij se g' einai keinon antidran kakwj.**
>
> [You are his father, so that even if he had committed against you the most impious crimes of any villain, it would not be right for you to return evil with evil!]

Antigone's plea for pity is an essentially human reaction to the harshness of Δικη. Oedipus has gained insight and wisdom and thus is a figure set apart in the *Oedipus at Colonus*. He departs to a death that he does not fear, and the audience feels no regret. He has achieved the death he desired after a life of suffering. But where Justice and divine favour form the finale of Soyinka's play, in Sophocles, it is pity for Antigone that survives her father's death, pity at the retributive justice of Zeus that will envelop the beloved daughter with the hated sons.

SOYINKA AND SOPHOCLES: ORDER AND CHAOS

In Soyinka's pantheon, Shango, the Yoruba god of Thunder, primarily stands for retributive justice while Ogun represents: 'transcendental, humane yet rigidly restorative justice (Quayson 2001). It is in Ogun's name that Oyedipo damns Fawzli. Gates Jr. (2001: 74) describes Soyinka's tragic sense turning upon: 'a dialectic between retributive and restorative justice and order.' Gates contrasts: 'the tragedy of the individual first defined by Aristotle and, in essence, reiterated by Hegel, Nietzsche, and even Brecht' with Soyinka's: 'tragedy of the community' where Soyinka's protagonists stand as: 'embodiments of the communal will' (ibid.) Soyinka summarizes this relationship between the individual, the community and the cosmos:

> Thus it is that good and evil are not measured in terms of offences against the individual or even the physical community, for … offences even against nature may in fact be part of the exaction by deeper nature from humanity of acts which alone can open up the deeper springs of man and bring about a constant rejuvenation of the human spirit. Nature in turn benefits by such broken taboos, just as the cosmos by the demands made upon its will by man's cosmic affronts. Such acts of hubris compel the cosmos to delve deeper into its essence to meet the human challenge. Penance and retribution are not therefore aspects of punishment for crime but the first acts of a resumed awareness, an invocation of the principle of cosmic adjustment.
>
> (Soyinka 1975a: 68–9)

Soyinka's tragedy stems from a metaphysical conception of the world, a world in which justice and order operate, and disintegration and descent into the abyss are restorative elements. This contrast between the justice of Shango and the justice of Ogun parallels the dual elements in the δ**ike** of the Eumenides. Their justice is retributive and terrifying, but within a civic context it plays a positive, restorative role. But if both plays mark the incorporation of the fearful and terrifying into the city,

there is a marked contrast between the joyous processional end of the *Eumenides* and Antigone's departure in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Taplin (1996) suggests that, post-Aeschylus, tragedy was strong enough to abandon closure and leave 'open, cracked' endings.

For Taplin, Euripides' *Bacchae* epitomizes tragedy's refusal to take the easy or comforting way out of the terrors it enacts. It is indicative of Soyinka's tragic conception that in his own *Bacchae* he omits Dionysos' final prophecies concerning Cadmus, and the general exit from the stage that concludes the play. Instead, Soyinka's play culminates in a communal ritual as Tiresias, Cadmus and Agave drink the blood/wine of Dionysos from the fountain:

> Slow dream like, they all move towards the fountain, cup their hands and drink. Agave raises herself at last to observe them, then tilts her head backwards to let a jet flush full in her face and flush her mouth. The light contracts to a final glow around the head of Pentheus and Agave.[23]

His final scene in *Oyedipo at Kolhuni* returns to the Chorus and its communal desire for wisdom, inspired by the death of Oyedipo. Soyinka inserts a degree of dramatic closure absent from Sophocles. The restorative elements of Soyinka's tragedy are internalized in his plays while in the Greek theatre it is the communal audience, witnessing the denial of closure, that experiences the restorative power of tragedy (Easterling 1996: 178).

Soyinka's *Oyedipo at Kolhuni* continues a theme found in his earlier work. In *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975b), Soyinka explores how the King's horseman approaches his ritual obligation to accompany his recently dead king to the next world by willing himself to die. Distracted by desire for a young woman, the horseman fails but his son kills himself on his father's behalf, a sacrifice on behalf of the community intended to restore the cosmic order, threatened by his father's inability to die at the appointed time. Soyinka's earlier plays, such as *A Strong Breed,* and *Madmen and Specialists,* contain a deep ambivalence about such communal sacrifice, omitted in his later plays. As Birbalsingh (1982: 209) notes, Soyinka gradually develops his 'faith in self sacrifice' and in his *Oyedipo at Kolhuni*, that faith is at its firmest.

Macintosh (1994: 20) highlights the dangers inherent in this emphasis on sacrifice, dangers that Soyinka's earlier plays recognize: 'If living becomes a synonym for an encounter with death, the realities of death and destruction get lost amidst a conceptual haze which can grant to notions of sacrifice a spurious respectability, and can translate death into a national panacea.' In fifth-century Athens the funeral oration endorsed the respectability of death on behalf of the community (Loraux 1986: 232), but the final scene of Sophocles' play refuses to endorse Oedipus' death so unequivocally.

THE ROAD

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche offers a metaphysical presentiment of the neo-Platonic 'primordial unity' afforded by tragedy that underlies the world of phenomena (Geuss and Speirs 1999: 117ff.) Soyinka's conception of the tragic is defined by interaction with this universal 'abyss'. In *The Road,* produced in Nigeria in 1969, his central figure of the Professor endlessly searches for the profound meaning of existence, 'the Word'. The whole play turns on the idea of death as a form of revelation upon life. The Professor is both a quack and a madman, outside the norms of society, moved by the force of an inner vision. He lives in a dream world that extends to the universe of myth, and gains an insight into the world beyond the visible through his relationship with Murano, the dead Agemo cult masquerader; the interconnectedness of life and death emphasizes their

essential unity. The imagery of the road is fused with the Yoruba belief in the transitional stage between life and death expressed in the Agemo cult.

Segal (in Silk 1996: 368) calls the road 'the single most important spatial metaphor' in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Antigone tells her father: **makran gar wj geronti proustalhj odon.** [For an old man you have travelled a long road] (*OC* 20) Oedipus is rounding the turn of his talaipowro" bio" [long-suffering life] (91). The whole long road of the hero's life is now nearing its final destination. The bronze-footed threshold near the grove with its crossing of three roads (1590–3) is the resting place for a journey begun at another crossroads (*OT* 733) and marks the descent to the underworld. In Hesiod (*Theogony* 748–50, 811–13), a brazen threshold marks the limit between the cosmic worlds. Hades is marked by a calkeo" oudo" [a bronze threshold], in the *Iliad* (VIII.15). Pausanias 1.30.4. (Jones 1918) describes a hero's shrine at Colonus that marked the site of Theseus' descent and return from Hades, and the Messenger refers to Theseus' journey to bring up Perithous through a hollow in the earth (*OC* 1593–4). Oedipus' death occurs at the brazen threshold, near the marker of Theseus' descent to Hades. The 'many branching paths' recalls the Phocian 'three wagon-roads' of *Oedipus Tyrannus* 716, and intimates a circularity in Oedipus' death to which Soyinka responds. In Yoruba, *orita,* or crossroads, are the favoured locale for ritual sacrifice, the liminal arena where the spirit world and the real world meet.

Soyinka's Oyedipo departs towards the volcano, a threshold of the underworld: 'a phoenix rising from the bowels of earth.' The volcano is the 'womb of the earth ... a huge gate … propped on the wings of unearthly birds' who would 'lift the earth skywards to join their company/ flying in from the ends of the earth.' The volcano unites the infernal with the ether; the birds are symbols of migration, boundary crossers. Early in the play, Oyedipo describes to his daughter his innate perception of the land promised by the gods:

> My spirit will quicken … like a long caged bird suddenly
> Released to wind and sun … A world exploding.
> Then peace. A gentle sough of wings as if
> The very sky were a canopy of wings, nothing else.
> Only black wings—a cascade of feathers drifting
> From one end of the horizon into unending space.

Birds reappear in his final visions as he sees 'a flock of pilgrims, a procession'. The anonymity of a flock, the individual subsumed into a mass, disparate groups converging together 'in homage to the One Ancestor' all evoke Soyinka's conception of the Nietzschean 'primordial unity'. The journey of the birds parallels the road. It is a symbol of human experience, life as trial and progression searching for fulfilment and revelation. For the Yoruba, this is a transitional phase in the single and vast movement of the spirit. For Sophocles, by contrast, Oedipus' death is a process, a gradual transformation to another form and essence down the long road of life;[24] but the focus remains unerringly with those who survive him, the living.

Soyinka's Dionysiac is a descent to the abyss, centre of rupture and disintegration. Oyedipo's visions are a corollary of his physical absorption into the volcano. Unlike Soyinka, Sophocles declines to answer unanswerable questions about death and an afterlife and to provide a concretized alterior world. Hence the ambiguous salute of Theseus and the return of focus to those Oedipus leaves behind. Soyinka has argued that *Oedipus at Colonus* is not a tragedy in the Greek

sense of the word, but a joyous play. It is ironic that such an interpretation omits Sophocles' emphasis on pity in the face of 'justice' and his final focus on the living, and chooses instead to close the play with death.

So, Soyinka's dramatic heroes gradually come to accept, and even embrace, deaths that will bring great benefit to the community. The bounty that Oyedipo promises Kolhuni, and the joy that greets his passing, tidies away unresolved strands left hanging by Sophocles. Soyinka's adaptation opens a conversation on death and tragedy not only with Sophocles but also with Soyinka's younger self, just as Sophocles' play draws not only on older tragedians but also on his own work, *Antigone*, written decades earlier but whose action *Oedipus at Colonus* precedes. As Soyinka (2002: 78) writes: 'every adaptor/director commences the journey anew—backwards into an unrecoverable community, or forwards into the present and future.'

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[1] Commissioned by the National Theatre and performed at the Royal Court, the play explored Greek, Yoruba and Christian ritual and imagery.

[2] Soyinka in discussion at the European Cultural Centre at Delphi, (7 July 2002).

[3] All line references to *Oedipus at Colonus* are from Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990).

[4] Aeschylus *Septem.* 914, 1004; Sophocles *Ant.* 899–902; Hom. *Od*. 11.271–80, *Il*. 23.677–80; Hes. frags.192–3 locate his death at Thebes. Euripides' *Phoen.* 1703–7 is the only other fifth-century reference to Oedipus' grave at Colonus but the passage is generally considered spurious. Van der Valk (1985: 44–6), however, defends it.

[5] Edmunds (1996); Aris. *Knights,* 551; Thuc. 8.67.2; *OC* 887–9.

[6] At first both groups maintained their individual patterns of dance and stage areas but they gradually began to share in each others' patterns of movement, culminating in a single Chorus that combined both traditions.

[7] Soyinka had originally intended Nigerians to play in his Chorus, as Sophocles' fellow demesmen had participated in his.

[8] Ifa is the holy title for the Yoruba god Orunmila, to whom Oludumare (equivalent to Zeus as all-powerful god of the Yoruba pantheon) gave the power to know the destiny of living beings. His priests are diviners and cast *opele* [pine nuts], interpreting events from their configuration.

[9] 16 pine nuts cast on a divining tray.

[10] All quotations from Soyinka's text are from an unpublished manuscript and therefore line references would serve no purpose.

[11] Oedipus misinterprets Apollo's oracles in *OT* and so flees his home, which leads him to accomplish what he dreads.

[12] *Nawroz* [New Day] is celebrated on 21st March and is one of the four solstices/equinoxes of the solar year. It is believed to be the day on which God created creatures and light and marks the first day of spring. See Al Shareef (1991).

[13] For Creon's pride in *nomos* see *Ant*.191; for Antigone's denial of the validity of his *nomoi* appeal to the greater laws of the gods and Creon's reaction see *Ant.* 451, 481, 663.

[14] First performed in 1973 at the Space Theatre in Capetown, South Africa.

[15] (*OC* 271) Oedipus pleads ignorance—a lack of intent to commit his crimes. He repeats this claim in his speech against Creon (964f). Draco's homicide law was republished in 409/8 BCE as a decree of the newly restored democracy and demanded exile for murders committed in ignorance with subsequent readmittance should the Ephetai agree. (IG 1 115.) Oedipus is testing the detailed legal fabric of Athens.

[16] See Aesch. *Eum*. 990–1 (Lloyd Jones: where the Eumenides, like Oedipus, offer a *mega kerdo"* to the citizens of Athens.

[17] Henrichs (1983) examines Oedipus' ritual reconciliation with the Semnai in preparation for his subsequent adoption as a citizen by Theseus.

[18] Lysias 9: Athens cannot tolerate a Greek who violates a Hellenic Law, thus subsuming Hellenic virtues into Athenian self-conception.

[19] Shango, Yoruba god of Thunder carries the double-headed axe.

[20] Obatala is another name for Oludumare, the omniscient Yoruba god (see note 8 above).

[21] e.g. *OC* 1405–13, 1770–2

[22] See Loraux (2002).

[23] Stage direction for *Bacchae:* Soyinka (1973: 307).

[24]For the ancient Greek conception of death as a process see Macintosh (1994: ch.3).