

## Student and Teacher: The Use of διδάσκω in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

With some notable exceptions (Wilson), most scholars recognize the suppliant motif as one of the central themes in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (see especially Burian, Grethlein, and Tzanetou). As Burian in particular has argued, Oedipus is both suppliant and saviour, completely dependent on the Athenians' acceptance and defence but nonetheless able to offer in return the numinous protection of his hero's grave. The suppliant motif highlights Oedipus' evolving identity in the play as he is gradually distanced from Thebes and received in stages by Athens and, ultimately, the Eumenides. This widely accepted assessment of the supplication motif in the *OC* fits into a larger pattern of identities in tension that define Oedipus not only in this play but also in the earlier *Oedipus Tyrannus*: beggar and king, polluted and innocent, blind and sighted.

In this paper, I propose another dichotomy central to Oedipus' identity that, to my knowledge, has not yet been fully explored: student and teacher. Education has certainly been recognized as an important theme in the Sophoclean corpus (see Gregory), but scholars to date have emphasized youthful students. My examination of Oedipus' identity as both student and teacher in the *OC* reveals that the theme of education is just as relevant for understanding the elderly Oedipus and the evolution of his character in this play. Like the suppliant/saviour dichotomy, the underlying tension between Oedipus' presentation as both student and teacher is an important mechanism by which his shifting identity is signalled, facilitating the play's movement toward its dénouement. References to teaching and learning in the play collectively plot Oedipus' movement away from Thebes, toward Athens and, especially, toward the Eumenides, about whom he initially needs instruction but emerges as an expert by the end of the play.

My analysis of the student/teacher motif focuses on the verb διδάσκω for several reasons. This verb occurs more frequently in the *OC* than in any other Sophoclean play; it is distributed throughout the dramatic events of the *OC*, tracing Oedipus' path from the beginning of the play to the end; unlike other similar verbs, it always refers to present events rather than those of the past or future; finally, it is the only verb of teaching or learning that implicates Oedipus directly each time it is used (by contrast with παίδευω, μανθάνω, and πυνθάνομαι). The substance of my argument rests on the use of διδάσκω as a lexical means of tracking Oedipus' transformation over the course of the play in much the same way that Burian uses the supplication motif to the same end.

The use of this verb at the beginning of the play casts Oedipus as a novice who is in need of instruction about the place he has come to and the goddesses who live there (8, 23, 468). Oedipus' emerging identity as expert and teacher is signalled by four uses of διδάσκω in his initial encounter with Theseus (560, 575, 594, 654). The first three unexpectedly involve Theseus asking Oedipus to instruct him, belying the apparent authority of the Athenian king. Theseus' fourth use of διδάσκω, however, is a sharp rebuke, reminding Oedipus that he does not yet possess the expertise to instruct Theseus in all matters. Two subsequent occurrences of διδάσκω reveal further adjustments to Oedipus' evolving identity. His sarcastic and insincere use of διδάσκω with Creon (969) emphasizes his growing distance from Thebes. His request that Theseus teach him about what is later revealed to be the arrival of the suppliant Polyneices (1154) highlights Oedipus' growth since their last conversation, as he is now willing to learn from the king, and places Oedipus in a role formerly occupied by Theseus. Oedipus' unquestionable authority in instructing Theseus about his own imminent death (1518, 1539)

reveals that he has transcended his identity as student. Oedipus' complete transformation from student to teacher, like that from suppliant to saviour, brings definitive resolution to his story.

### Bibliography

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