

OEDIPUS' FUNERAL SONG: SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*

The *Oedipus at Colonus* is a play about ends. A blind, old Oedipus arrives at an unknown locale that will be his χώραν τερμίαν, his border-land or end place, a place where he will finally come to rest and end his days. Yet while an imminent end to Sophocles' tortured subject seems clear from the play's opening scene, Oedipus takes a long time getting there. Furthermore, Sophocles here deviates from other poetic versions of Oedipus' end. The epic tradition had Oedipus ending his days in his homeland of Thebes, as does Sophocles' own *Antigone*. With his *Oedipus at Colonus*, then, Sophocles is consciously rewriting Oedipus' end in a play about endings in a specific, yet simultaneously rather ambiguous place. Unlike other Sophoclean prologues, Oedipus repeatedly asks where he has come to and who resides in the place. The play asks its audience to consider this border-land, this limiting ground, this hallowed place as much the identity of its visitor.

In addition to human ends and limits, the *Oedipus at Colonus* at the same time speaks, or attempts a speech or song, of what ought not be spoken, to show what ought not be shown or cannot easily be shown: Oedipus' afterlife, so to speak. Unlike the εἶδωλα of dead mortals in Homer's Hades who are seen by visitors to Hades' halls such as Odysseus or by others in dreams (Patroclus' to Achilles), Oedipus' εἶδωλον (οἰκτίρατ' ἀνδρὸς Οἰδίπου τόδ' ἄθλιον / εἶδωλον· οὐ γὰρ δὴ τό γ' ἀρχαῖον δέμας 109-110) completely disappears from sight at the play's end.

This paper investigates the relation between a concern with ends and unseens/unknowns in a play about unseen and/or unrepresentable ends. The paper argues for Oedipus' preservation and presencing through the song of *Oedipus at Colonus* and in particular through the messenger's speech recounting the spectacle of Oedipus' end. Unlike other mortals who receive burial with a visual marker, or σῶμα, Oedipus leaves no physical marker, mound, or remains. All that remains of Oedipus at the play's end is song and speech, or memory.