OEDIPUS TYRANNUS: THE RIDDLE OF THE FEET

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Some works of art are so familiar that they are almost invisible. With Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* the problem is even greater, as the power of the myth sometimes draws our attention away from the specifics of the play. The wounded feet of Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* have heretofore been studied primarily in connection with references to his deformity in other versions of the story, for the purpose of uncovering an "original" folk-tale or myth.[1] The formidable legacies of Freud and of the structuralists have given rise to a sophisticated body of criticism focusing on the oral myth of Oedipus across time and culture.[2] By contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to the wounded feet of the king as a repository of poetic meaning for the play as a whole.[3] Why literary critics have shown so little interest in the titular theme of "King Swollen-Foot" is a riddle indeed. It is my intention to examine how Sophocles took the motif of the wounded feet and placed it at the center of his play as poetic image, plot device, and symbol, thereby forging out of traditional, folk-tale elements an elegant and coherent work of dramatic poetry.

In the first place we will consider vocabulary related to feet—words of walking, standing, stumbling, and tracking—which provide a ground of pervasive imagery in the play.[4] We must ask, to what end? On the level of plot, the scars on Oedipus' ankles definitively prove his parentage, and propel his recognition of himself. On the level of metaphor and symbol, the king's flawed feet are intimately connected with his flawed understanding of himself. They are the visible, dramatic representation of his spiritual defect. At the same time as they provide a clue to the resolution of the mystery of Oedipus' identity, his wounds embody a pain and a shame that drive him to avert his gaze. His is a willful blindness.

Of course, Oedipus' tragic destiny exists before, after, and well beyond his ignorance. By a kind of image-logic based on analogy and association, the scars of Oedipus' infancy point forward to his meeting with Laius at the crossroads, to his triumph over the Sphinx, to his forbidden marriage to Jocasta, and to his self-blinding and exile. In its overall pattern, Oedipus' life is an oscillation between progress and regress, a series of misdirected motions. As Charles Segal has written, "recast into its tragic mode, the myth is dominated by anxiety, uncertainty, mystery, lack of control, and the problem of self-knowledge . . . the hero can move forward only by reaching backward to the past."[5]

I.

The language of tracking begins in the prologue scene, as Oedipus and Creon discuss how to apprehend the murderers of Laius:

> οἱ δ' εἰσὶ ποῦ γῆς; ποῦ τόδ' εὑρεθήσεται
> ἴχνος παλαιᾶς δυστέκμαρτον αἰτίας;
> (108–09)

> Where in the world are they? Where shall the track of
> an ancient guilt, hard to make out, be found?[6]

An ἴχνος can refer to any print or trace left behind, but given the visual sense of εὑρεθήσεται, the primary meaning here must be "footprint."[7] The track of the killers is δυστέκμαρτον, hard to make out—but, if found, would prove to be a τέκμαρ, a certain or definitive proof, in the mystery of the old king's death. This aspect of logical proof is key to the riddle of Oedipus' feet. The track is indeed hard to make out—but in the end it is his feet that provide the certain and definitive evidence of his identity. Wordplay on feet continues throughout the detective scenes early in the play: the throne of Thebes "stumbles upon" disaster (ἐμποδών, 128); after the death of Laius, the Sphinx forces the people of Thebes to attend to what lies before their feet (τὸ πρὸς ποσὶ σκοπεῖν, 130).[8]

The Chorus, who typically have to access through imagery to truth they cannot fully clarify, use foot metaphors to approach the riddles of Thebes' past. The dramatic irony thus introduced is heightened when Oedipus himself takes on the task of solving the mystery. Oedipus appeals to the citizens of Thebes for any aid that they can give him in tracking the murderer:

> οὐ γὰρ ἂν μακρὰν
> ἴχνευον αὐτός, μὴ οὐκ ἔχων τι σύμβολον.
> (220–21)

> For I should not have gone far along the track alone,
> without some sign.[9]

Oedipus calls for a σύμβολον, which Dawe in this context explains as "not exactly a clue, but anything you may συμβάλλειν with anything else, when putting two and two together; a piece of evidence contributing to a proof."[10] The investigative skill that Oedipus will demonstrate consists in just such a "fitting together" of disparate pieces. The word σύμβολον also has another meaning, namely the "token" or "sign" left with a child exposed at birth to establish later proof of his identity.[11] The σύμβολον that Oedipus seeks to help him track the killer are his own feet, the "tokens" that bear witness to the truth of his parentage.

Images of feet significantly reappear in connection with the Erinyes during the confrontation between Oedipus and Tiresias.[12] At the peak of his anger Tiresias alludes to the curse of familial vengeance as he shouts to Oedipus:

> καί σ' ἀμφιπλὴξ μητρός τε κἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς
> ἐλᾷ ποτ' ἐκ γῆς τῆσδε δεινόπους ἀρά.
> (417–18)

> The two-pronged curse that comes from your mother
> and your father with deadly step shall one day drive
> you from this land.

Lowell Edmunds has discussed Oedipus' association with the Erinyes, which is present in nearly all of Oedipus' appearances in poetry, both epic and tragic.[13] Sophocles underscores this link through the shared vocabulary of feet: Tiresias' curse calls up a vision of the Furies, with their deadly step (δεινόπους), pursuing Oedipus, with his accursed and impaired step. The prophet goes

on to allude to Oedipus' future, where, like the three-footed creature of the Sphinx' riddle, "he will wander over a foreign land, feeling his way with a stick": ξένην ἔπι / σκήπτρῳ προδεικνὺς γαῖαν ἐμπορεύσεται (455–56).

The Chorus, who in their songs can use metaphor more freely, draw attention to lameness and gait in the first stasimon (463–511). In contrast to the contested authority of human knowledge in the exchange between Oedipus and Tiresias, the Chorus now offer a vision of the divinely speaking rock of Apollo. The ode invites us to connect the Delphic oracle given to Creon with what we have just heard from Tiresias, and also transcends the action of the play to comment on Cithaeron, the mountain where Oedipus was exposed to die as an infant. They describe the "unclear man" (τὸν ἄδηλον ἄνδρα, 475), the murderer of Laius, who must now "ply his foot in flight" (φυγᾷ πόδα νομᾶν, 468) to escape the hunters on his track (ἰχνεύειν, 476).[14] Like a wounded bull, the killer limps ahead of his pursuers with his miserable foot; the stuttering gait of the fleeing animal is expressed through a polyptoton (μέλεος μελέῳ ποδὶ χηρεύων, 479).

Why does Sophocles choose this distinctive image? A wounded bull is easy to track; he grows weaker as he walks, and his footprints are clearly marked. The bull is a symbol of strength brought low, of solitude, and also of sacrifice. In this metaphor the Chorus mysteriously combine bestiality and divinity, conflating Oedipus' wounded feet with his special position as victim of his own curse. At the end of the play the image will fit even more precisely, as Oedipus, the polluted outcast, asks to be expelled to Mount Cithaeron (1451–54; cf.1391–93, 1088).

The Chorus again resort to images of feet in the second stasimon (863–910), a prayer for justice, piety, and moral clarity. The first strophe invokes the timeless laws of the heavens—these laws are "high-footed" (ὑψίποδες, 866), incorruptible and divine.[15] Here the poet would seem to be creating a new class of spirits that walk or dwell in the upper regions of heaven, independent of both men and gods. For these personified laws have no author, but "their only father is Olympus," the divine atmosphere itself (867–68). Higher than human and divine will, they "will never be lulled to sleep by forgetfulness" (870–71). This is the highest level of causation, the unshakeable moral order that governs the universe; and Oedipus' life, from his wounded feet to his perverted marriage, is an offense against this order. By contrast with these permanent divine laws, human insolence rushes to the edge of an abyss "where its feet can do it no service" (ἔνθ' οὐ ποδὶ χρησίμῳ χρῆται, 878–79).[16]

Clear references to feet and gait are thus woven through the first half of the play. I have dwelt on these in some detail, because I believe that in their centrality and coherence as an imagistic pattern these allusions serve to set off and reinforce the central contradiction in the character of Oedipus, which can be expressed through a series of oxymorons: he is wise but ignorant, he is strong but weak, he is a stranger but a scion of the royal house, he is righteous yet polluted with crime. Through his choice of diction, Sophocles invites his audience to experience the physical and the moral worlds of the myth as one.

II.

Upon this ground of imagery are set explicit references to Oedipus' laming, as the king's wounded feet become a pivotal element in the unfurling of the plot. In the second episode, Jocasta seeks to calm Oedipus, troubled after his interview with Creon. She reveals for the first time the original oracle to Laius, that he was fated to die at the hands of his son, in order to disprove its validity. For, as she reminds Oedipus, Laius was killed by robbers, at the place where three roads meet (715–16). In three lines, she goes on to relate the fate of the child, how Laius first fastened his feet (ἄρθρα κεῖνος ἐνζεύξας ποδοῖν, 718), and then cast him out upon the trackless mountain (ἔρριψεν … εἰς ἄβατον ὄρος, 719).[17] Any emotion Jocasta feels at this story, which might be expected to cause her pain or shame, is concealed; she is determined to allay Oedipus' mounting fears.

But instead, some memory, long submerged, is stirred by her words and slowly rises to the surface of the king's mind:

> οἷόν μ᾽ἀκούσαντ᾽ἀρτίως ἔχει, γύναι,
> ψυχῆς πλάνημα κἀνακίνησις φρενῶν.
> (726–27)

> What a wandering of the spirit and a stirring of the mind is upon me, lady, since I heard your words just now!

As the scene continues, Oedipus reacts not to Jocasta's words about her infant son, but to the detail that Laius was murdered at the triple crossroads. He wrestles for the first time with the possibility that he may be the murderer of Laius. He has heard Jocasta's words about the child's ankles, but cannot or will not connect this injury with himself.

Oedipus begins to realize the truth of his parentage in the third episode, when the messenger from Corinth speaks of the telltale scars on his ankles. The fatal meeting with the old shepherd is still to come; but the recognition of his wounded feet proves that the exposed infant and the Theban king are one and the same. The scars bear witness to old wounds—the wounds inflicted on Oedipus by his mother and father, hidden but never fully healed.[18] The passage is brilliantly concise, each line a stab of light. The messenger, thinking to assuage Oedipus' fears about the prophecy, reveals that Polybus and his wife Merope were not Oedipus' real parents, and that he himself found the baby abandoned and alone on a mountainside. A well-staged modern production will highlight the mounting dramatic irony of the exchange, as the messenger prattles on, oblivious to the terrified comprehension growing in Oedipus' eyes:

> ΟΙ: ποιμὴν γὰρ ἦσθα κἀπὶ θητείᾳ πλάνης;
> ΑΓ: σοῦ δ', ὦ τέκνον, σωτήρ γε τῷ τότ' ἐν χρόνῳ.
> ΟΙ: τί δ' ἄλγος ἴσχοντ' ἐν χεροῖν με λαμβάνεις;
> ΑΓ: ποδῶν ἂν ἄρθρα μαρτυρήσειεν τὰ σά.
> ΟΙ: οἴμοι, τί τοῦτ' ἀρχαῖον ἐννέπεις κακόν;
> ΑΓ: λύω σ' ἔχοντα διατόρους ποδοῖν ἀκμάς.
> ΟΙ: δεινόν γ' ὄνειδος σπαργάνων ἀνειλόμην.
> ΑΓ: ὥστ' ὠνομάσθης ἐκ τύχης ταύτης ὃς εἶ.
> ΟΙ: ὦ πρὸς θεῶν, πρὸς μητρὸς ἢ πατρός; φράσον.
> (1029–37)

> OEDIPUS: So were you a shepherd, wandering around in your servitude?
> MESSENGER: Yes, and it was then that I saved you, my son.
> OE: What trouble was I suffering from when you took me in your arms?

ME: The joints of your feet would bear witness to it.
OE: Ah, why do you speak of that ancient wrong?
ME: When I released you, your ankles had been pierced through.
OE: It is a terrible shame that I have borne since I was in swaddling clothes.
ME: Yes, so that you were named by this stroke of fortune.
OE: Oh, by the gods, by my mother or by my father? Tell me that![19]

Oedipus' last line in this excerpt, ὦ πρὸς θεῶν, πρὸς μητρὸς ἢ πατρός; φράσον, Lloyd-Jones renders as, "By heaven, did my mother or my father name me? Tell me that!" The genitives μητρός and πατρός are clearly governed by the second πρός in line 1037. But what prompts the πρός? Because 1037 does not contain a verb, at least not until the imperative φράσον, we must assume that ὦ πρὸς θεῶν, πρὸς μητρὸς ἢ πατρός continues some thought from the previous line, as is often the case in Sophoclean stichomythia. Yet Oedipus' exclamation is far from syntactically transparent. The repetition of πρός, construed differently with its two accompanying noun phrases, seems to be an intentional ambiguity on Sophocles' part. The first words of the line, ὦ πρὸς θεῶν, must be a genitive of exclamation; the following πρός, which, as I have said, governs the genitives μητρός and πατρός, should be taken as a variation on ἐκ τύχης ταύτης in the previous line, making μητρός and πατρός genitives of agent. Lloyd-Jones and other translators have thus understood the phrase πρὸς μητρὸς ἢ πατρός as referring to ὠνομάσθης, which makes sense grammatically but has rather little dramatic impact. Oedipus at this juncture is not concerned with who named him, a rather mundane point, but who maimed him—that is, which parent cursed him with the shameful and mysterious scars that he has borne since his infancy.[20] Grammatically, then, line 1037 refers to the question of who named the infant Oedipus; notionally, however, the king's outcry asks a more profound question about the nature and origin of his sufferings.

Considered from the standpoint of rhetorical device, dramatic irony is the primary effect of Oedipus' question, and indeed of the whole exchange. For Oedipus is not really concerned with either his wounded foot or his distinctive name *per se*. His overriding interest since the Tiresias scene has been the identity of his parents. The king has just been told that Polybus and Merope adopted him in his infancy, which confirms his worst suspicions. In his frustration, he seizes upon every conceivable clue, not knowing which one will lead him to the truth. The Corinthian messenger provides just such a clue, and Oedipus, clutching at straws, concludes that it must have been one of his parents who named him. From our higher vantage point, we realize that his true parents probably refused to name him at all, especially in the light of Jocasta's remarks at 717ff., which suggest strongly that Laius had neither the time nor the motivation to name the infant, whom he ordered mutilated and exposed within three days of its birth. The child Oedipus was denied the gift of a name; Laius and Jocasta gave their son not a title by which he would be known, but a "terrible shame" by which he would be forever marked (δεινόν γ' ὄνειδος, 1035).

Returning to the passage above, what are we to make of Oedipus' exclamation at 1033, οἴμοι, τί τοῦτ' ἄρχαῖον ἐννέπεις κακόν? Maxwell-Stuart explains the line away as "sardonic humor"on the part of the king: "Oedipus is pursing a line of enquiry he still does not fully believe in."[21] Euripides, perhaps, would have drawn out the black comedy of the scene.[22] The irony in Sophocles' scene is indeed black, but it is dramatized without humor. The king's exclamation is one of horror. How does this rustic know about Oedipus' secret, his shameful wounds, which have never been fully explained to him? And what do these ancient wounds have to do with the unraveling mystery of his parentage?

Like the scar that betrays Odysseus to Eurycleia or the lock of hair that allows Electra to recognize Orestes, Oedipus' deformed feet propel the central recognition of the drama.[23] Yet we need not imagine Oedipus portrayed onstage as markedly lame or limping, which would detract from his kingly demeanor.[24] Likewise, the deformity of Oedipus' ankles was probably not emphasized, at least not noticeably enough for Jocasta to have become alarmed. And were such plot devices thrust too grossly before the eyes of the audience, there would be lost the subtle balance whereby we both know and yet must learn along with Oedipus, to our growing distress, what they portend. Oedipus' injury is hidden, as is his true heritage. Both are revealed in the same instant of dramatic recognition, as he is simultaneously recognized to be the legitimate heir, and, on several counts, archetypally unfit.

III.

We have established that images of feet and gait pervade the play, and that Oedipus' feet act as a token of his identity. We shall now turn to the connection that can be drawn between Oedipus' maimed form, his character, and the misery and shame of his life. Here we shall take a step back from the text of the play, and into the larger network of associations that would have been present in the minds of Sophocles' audience. The assertion that Oedipus' physical wounds signal his larger misfortunes is doubtless neither earth-shaking nor altogether new. All the same, it is hard to point out concrete proof of implicit thematic connections. Necessarily the following section will appear somewhat speculative.

The central riddle, "Who am I," which eventually exposes Oedipus to his own eyes, recurs at many levels in Sophocles' telling of the myth. Oedipus' αὐτοαναγνώρισις provides a covert connection to the riddle of the Sphinx, which exists only in the background of the play. The riddle has also required Oedipus to recognize himself, albeit in more general terms. The hero is to a degree self-aware answering the Sphinx's riddle, yet refuses self-awareness with regard to his twin crimes; the central paradox of the Oedipus story thus becomes the juxtaposition of great intelligence with equally great ignorance. Tiresias taunts the king in just these terms, the famous solver of riddles who cannot solve the most fundamental riddle of all, who does not even know who he truly is:

OI: ὡς πάντ᾽ἄγαν αἰνικτὰ κἀσαφῆ λέγεις.
TE: οὔκουν σὺ ταῦτ᾽ἄριστος εὑρίσκειν ἔφυς;
OI: τοιαῦτ᾽ὀνείδιζ᾽οἷς ἔμ᾽εὑρήσεις μέγαν.
TE: αὕτη γε μέντοι σ᾽ἡ τύχη διώλεσεν.
(439–42)

OE: How riddling and obscure in excess are all your words!
TI: Do you not excel in answering such riddles?

> OE: Yes, taunt me in matters in which you shall find me great!
> TE: But it is that very happening that has been your ruin.

Oedipus' marred feet mirror the errors of his understanding; at the same time, his deformity makes him particularly well suited to defeat the Sphinx.[25] The riddle and its answer depend upon our capacity for metaphorical understanding. The physical journey of man, on his varying feet, signifies his ontological journey through time; his biped, triped, and quadruped natures represent the changes that time inflicts on him.[26] Oedipus knows the answer to the riddle because in a sense he is the answer. He is ἄνθρωπος, and as such his life is an anomalous intersection of past and present, expressed through the repeated motifs of feet and movement.

Oedipus is intimately connected with the riddle not only because of his special relationship to feet and motion but also because of his shifting nature.[27] He moves at once backwards and forwards in time, to become the husband of his mother and the brother of his sons and daughters. As Terence Turner has written, Oedipus' true descent and heritage are obscure, and "the structural imperfection of his situation is symbolized by his crippled feet: he can walk, but not as well as a naturally 'whole' man."[28] Laius, by wounding his son's feet, repudiates his relationship to the child and marks him as a fatherless orphan in a patrilineal society. Oedipus' feet take on the character of stigmata, expressing his social incompleteness as a man.

Just as the human child, adult, and old man occupy different positions with respect to society, so too Oedipus changes his in his relationship to the rest of the πόλις, being first an outcast, then a ruler, and finally a wandering suppliant. It is Oedipus' fundamental nature always to be a riddle to himself, never to be reduced to a single, sure meaning. Since his birth all locomotion has been misdirected and blind.

There is another respect in which Oedipus does not travel straight: after his περιπέτεια, his maimed eyes, like his maimed feet, force him to walk an uncertain path. Indeed, Sophocles makes Oedipus' self-blinding a symbolic reenactment of his earlier wounding.[29] The messenger who relates the death of Jocasta describes how Oedipus struck out the "sockets" of his eyes; the word used, ἄρθρα, is the same word used for the "joints" of his ankles in both Jocasta's and the Corinthian messenger's accounts of his exposure.[30] Oedipus' self-blinding thus completes the tragic pattern that began in his infancy; the pierced sockets are foreshadowed by the pierced ankles. In the play Oedipus' two wounds, that of his infancy and that of his old age, come together in the middle of his life, in a manner both concrete and metaphorical.

Oedipus' physical flaws, his lameness and blindness, resonate with a deeper disharmony between the man and the fabric of the universe. This disharmony is perhaps closer to sympathetic magic than legal or moral concepts of crime and sin: it is, as it were, formal. Oedipus embodies the central paradox that deformed figures present to the unified Greek sensibility: how can intelligence and virtue reside in a flawed body?[31] The lame hero as a dramatic type marks a shift in emphasis from physical to mental triumph. Within this latter category we must also include equivocal triumph, involving self-sacrifice—for Oedipus does triumph, but his eventual apotheosis as a cult hero of Athens comes only at the end of a lifetime of suffering. Oedipus suffers terribly, as an infant and as a man, and his formidable intellect in life and his superhuman status after death are the rough return for these afflictions.

By way of conclusion we may state that Sophocles enhances our understanding of Oedipus' fate through a poetic heightening of imagery related to feet. The scars on the hero's ankles represent the inescapable marks of destiny: lameness is inflicted on the child, uncovered by the king in his maturity, and endured in old age as the emblem of all that he has undergone. Thematically, Oedipus' scars function as a physical representation of his essential limitation as a man. He is crippled not only in body, but in his understanding of himself. Oedipus' maimed feet thus become a symbol of man's wandering progress through life, as his maimed eyes are a symbol of his imperfect insight. The myth's paradoxes are embodied through Sophocles' poetry: the riddle-like ambiguities of language in the play, in particular the language of feet, express a deeper tragic uncertainty about the identity of man.

ENDNOTES

[*]I am grateful to Albert Henrichs, David Elmer, Richard Rutherford, and Helene Foley for valuable advice and feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

[1]The literature on the myth of Oedipus is immense. The first to trace the morphology of the Greek tale and its parallels in other Indo-European traditions was Robert (1915). More recently, Lowell Edmunds has explored the story in detail: cf. Edmunds (1981a), (1981b), (1985), and Edmunds and Dundes (1983), all with detailed references. March (1987) 121–59 offers a useful overview of the evolution of the myth, as does the entry for Oidipous in Gantz (1996) 492–501.

[2]Cf. Freud (1900, 1999) and (1905, 2000); Lévi-Strauss (1958, 2000); Vernant (1982). Informative for this study has been Turner (1969) 26–68.

[3]An elegant study of the play's literary qualites is Segal (2000). Since the monumental volume of Jebb (1885, 1958), the most substantial commentaries on *Oedipus Tyrannus* have been Kamerbeek (1967) and Dawe (1982), which is aimed primarily at undergraduates.

[4]Noted by Musurillo (1957), who discusses the metaphor of "hunting or tracking," which, however, is "soon dropped." The imagery of blindness and sight has in subsequent years received extended treatment, especially by Buxton (1980) and Seale (1982), whose methodologies I have adapted here. The persistence of foot imagery is noted, but not pursued, by Segal (2000) 32–37. In his line-by-line commentary, Dawe (1982) observes and often dismisses individual instances of foot imagery; his remarks are discussed below.

[5]Segal (2000) 50.

[6]All translations from Lloyd-Jones (1994), unless otherwise stated.

[7]Following the principle of *Sophocles per Sophoclem explicandus*, this is the way the word is used in the extant fragments of *The Trackers*, cf. Fr. 314 line 13. ἰχνοσκοπῶ. In the same fragment, lines 104–08, the language of tracking is used in conjunction with vocabulary of proof: σημαίνει, τοὐπίσημον. I thank the anonymous reviewer of *Classical Outlook* for encouraging me to "track'"the language in this way.

[8]Dawe (1982) ad 130 comments, "The tasteless possibility has presented itself to some minds that there is here some allusion to the 'foot' enigma, or, even worse, a connection with ἐμποδών (128). In itself the phrase means 'our immediate concerns' or 'what lay before us' (lit. at our feet)." I confess myself among the minds Dawe denigrates: the use of the phrase τὸ πρὸς ποσί, common and idiomatic though it may be, in such close proximity to ἡ Σφίγξ convinces me that this must be intentional punning on the part of Sophocles—whether it is tasteless or not, is surely a matter of subjective judgment.
[9]My translation.
[10]Dawe (1980) ad 220–1.
[11]Used in this sense by Euripides, *Ion* 1386. Segal (2000) 65–66 draws a connection with the "tokens" used for admission to Athenian law courts; thus "Oedipus' initial objective, the public task of 'tracking down' a killer by a 'clue' (*symbolon* in the juridical sense) turns into the personal and intimate task of finding the 'birth token' (*symbolon* in the personal sense) that proves his identity."
[12]Epithets for the Erinyes often refer to their feet or gait, e.g., ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς, *Iliad* 9.571; καμψίπους Ἐρινύς, *Seven Against Thebes* 791.
[13]Cf. Edmunds (1981) 225–27. Oedipus is connected with several locations in which the Erinyes received cult, and resembles the dread goddesses more generally in his dual function as a bringer of blessing and of destruction, of fertility and of sterility.
[14]Echoing his earlier comment ad 130, Dawe (1982) ad 467–8 denies any symbolic significance to φυγᾷ πόδα νωμᾶν, noting that "Greek, from Homer onward, seems to our taste oddly preoccupied with knees and feet."
[15]Cf. the description of Tiresias, who governs all things both speakable and unspeakable, those in heaven and those that "walk upon the earth" (χθονοστιβῆ, 301).
[16]Dawe (1982) ad 878: "There is no thematic connection with ὑψίποδες (866). The foot metaphor is so common in tragedy that at *Phil*. 1260 Sophocles can even write 'perhaps you may keep your foot clear of tears,' ἴσως ἂν ἐκτὸς κλαθμάτων ἔχοις πόδα." But of course Philoctetes is another character for whom feet are of primary importance! In the instance cited by Dawe, Neoptolemus is arguing with Odysseus, immediately before the reentrance of Philoctetes; the hero has recently cursed his own foot for causing him such misery (παπαῖ μάλ᾽, ὦ πούς, οἷά μ᾽ ἐργάσῃ κακά, 786).
[17]The word for casting out (ἔρριψεν, 719) is the same used for Zeus' casting out of Hephaestus at *Iliad* 1.591 (ῥῖψε ποδὸς τεταγών). This is not an uncommon verb, and I do not wish to make too much of its recurrence; but the similarity of the two scenes is striking. In the passage from *Iliad* 1 (584–94) Zeus, enraged by the alliance of son with mother against him, seizes Hephaestus by the foot and hurls him from the heavenly threshold; here Laius, anticipating a yet more dire union, yokes together the feet of Oedipus and hurls him from the palace. It may be argued that the original oracle given to Laius only foretold that the king's son would one day supplant him, and said nothing about the son's intercourse with his mother (cf. 713–14). Yet I am not convinced; we only know what the first oracle said because Jocasta reports it, and either she or Laius may have kept back the part that concerned her. In any case, the audience knows that, when Laius casts Oedipus out, the child is destined to sleep with his mother, whether Laius knows it or not.
[18]Turner (1969) 38 explains that Laius thrusts a spike through the child's feet to prevent its ghost from walking abroad to take vengeance.
[19]My translation.
[20]Jebb (1885, 1958) ad 1037 translates: "Was it at the hands of mother or father (rather than at those of strangers) that I received such a brand?" He continues, "the agitated speaker follows the train of his own thoughts, scarcely heeding the interposed remark. He is not thinking so much of his parents' possible cruelty, as of a fresh clue to their identity. The name—even if it could be conceived of as given before the exposure—is not the sting; and on the other hand it would be forced to take 'named' as 'doomed to bear the name.'"
[21]Maxwell-Stuart (1975) 40.
[22]Indeed, Euripides' preoccupation with limping or lamed figures became something of a running joke in antiquity, and with good cause. In the *Phoenician Women*, produced c. 410 B.C., Jocasta describes how Laius and Oedipus met at the crossroads (37–43):

καὶ ξυνάπτετον πόδα
ἐς ταὐτὸν ἄμφω Φωκίδος σχιστῆς ὁδοῦ.
καί νιν κελεύει Λαΐου τροχηλάτης,
ὦ ξένε, τυράννοις ἐκποδὼν μεθίστασο.
ὁ δ᾽ εἷρπ᾽ ἄναυδος, μέγα φρονῶν. πῶλοι δέ νιν
χηλαῖς τένοντας ἐξεφοίνισσον ποδῶν.

It is remarkable how many times, in these six lines, Euripides makes reference to feet. Most immediately, we have πόδα, ἐκποδών, and τένοντας ποδῶν; there is also the hooves of the horses, χηλαῖς. Even the verb εἷρπε points to feet. Euripides, who loves dramatic twists of this sort, has Laius symbolically reenact the violence he perpetrated on his infant son when they meet again as men. Oedipus' revenge is doubly determined—in killing his father, he is avenging himself for the slight on his honor and the bloodying of his feet, but also, as the audience will understand, for the wounds of his infancy.
[23]Contra Edmunds (1981) 233 n. 47, who writes that Oedipus' wounded feet only "confirm a conclusion already reached on other grounds." Edmunds is correct in noting that the scars have little do with Oedipus' discovery of his identity in earlier extant versions of the myth. We do not know what use Stesichorus may have made of the motif in his lyric poem, or Aeschylus in his Laius trilogy of 467. Cf. Aristophanes' *Frogs*, 1188–95, where the poet mentions both exposure in an *ostrakon* and swollen feet as misfortunes of Oedipus. Aristophanes may be conflating details for comic effect, but he does have the character Aeschylus pun quite explicitly on the name Oedipus, οἰδῶν τὼ πόδε, 1192.
[24]I note that in a recent production of *Oedipus* at the National Theatre in London (dir. Jonathan Kent, 2008–2009), Ralph Fiennes in the part of Oedipus chose to mark his first entrance with a hunched posture and a slight limp.
[25]Edmunds (1983) 147–73 has argued that the Sphinx is a secondary, perhaps sixth-century addition to the Oedipus myth, and in (1981) 18–20 states that "her riddle seems to bear no necessary relation to any detail of the legend." Bremmer (1987) 46f., with 55 n.1 and 57 n.26, is skeptical of this conclusion. Also against Edmunds' view is the relatively new evidence of a black-figure vase from around 520 that gives the text of the riddle in archaic language and suggests the antiquity of both the Sphinx and her riddle. Cf. Moret (1984) vol. 1, 40 and Planche 23.
[26]There are many slightly different versions of the riddle. The canonical hexametric text of Asclepiades of Tragilus comes from

the fourth century B.C., and is preserved in Ath. 10.456b (FGrH 12 F 7a Jacoby). A full apparatus discussing the textual variants can be found in Mastronarde (1988) 6f. West (1978) 293 notes other fifth century B.C. allusions to the riddle in comedy, tragedy (Aesch. *Ag*. 80–82, Eur. *Tro*. 275–77), and art. Turner (1969) discusses the thematic relevance of the riddle to the larger meaning of the myth.

[27]Katz (2003) argues that another link between Oedipus and the riddle is deviant sexuality, which turns on the sexual connotations of the word πούς in Greek literature. Cf. also Henderson (1991) 126, 129f., 138, 248.

[28]Turner (1969) 40.

[29]The Freudian explanation of blinding as "symbolic castration" is discussed enthusiastically by Devereux (1973). Devereux correlates eyes with genitals, and Oedipus' blinding with punishment for the crime of incest; his argument does not mention wounded feet. Buxton (1980) sensitively interprets Oedipus' action as the culmination of the image-pattern of sight and blindness, with implications for the correlating image-pattern of insight and ignorance. Oedipus is punished with blindness because he has transgressed, albeit in ignorance, a fundamental boundary of normal sexual behavior.

[30]Jocasta at 718, the Corinthian messenger at 1032, the second messenger at 1270.

[31]Plato in the *Republic* uses the metaphor of limping in his discussion of the qualities that distinguish a good ruler. The aspirant to philosophy must not limp in his industry (φιλοπονίᾳ οὐ χωλὸν δεῖ τὸν ἁψομενον, 7.535d ff.). Being deformed and lame in spirit is comparable to bastardy of the soul: he who is χωλός is a νόθος. Opposed to the νόθος is the γνήσιος, the legitimate son who resembles the father who has engendered him and carries on his direct and unswerving lineage. Vernant (1982) 210–12 discusses two texts that are relevant for the relationship between lameness and legitimate descent: Xenophon, *Hellenica* III 3.1–3 and Plutarch, *Agesilaus* III 1–9.

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