

## A Seer most like Apollo, Teiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*

My paper will argue for the possibility of considering Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as an apologetic attempt to shore up Apollo and his oracular seat in Delphi. Sophocles' version of the story of Oedipus has long been accepted as a fifth-century Athenian innovation. My argument will seek to show how Sophocles innovatively uses the Oedipus story in honor of the god Apollo. The tragedian appears to want the audience to see a progression from doubts about Teiresias' expertise in prophetic art (which is expressed by Oedipus) to doubts about oracles and divination in general, but ultimately those doubts are resolved, and Apollo is proved right through the affirmation of the oracle about Oedipus. This tragedy reveals an Oedipus who seeks to refute Apollo by proving the Delphic oracle about him wrong. Ostensibly, he is undertaking an investigation for the purpose of finding Laius' slayer, however, the investigation turns into an *elenchus* of Apollo's words concerning Oedipus' fate as a parricide and his own mother's husband.

In his article, written long time ago, Arthur Fairbanks argues that Herodotus could have been selected by some priests as a special apologist of the Delphic oracle, and suggests that Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* could be termed a "miracle play" in honor of the Delphic Apollo (Fairbanks, 1906). Fairbanks, however, does not explain how *Oedipus Tyrannus* works as a "miracle play" in honor of Apollo. Another scholar, Steven Lattimore acknowledges that Teiresias' truthfulness is vindicated in the tragedy but considers the exchange between Oedipus and Teiresias to be more about the anger of both men rather than the seer's prophecy (Lattimore, 1975). I would argue that the character of Teiresias who refers to himself as Loxias' slave (*OT*.

410) is employed in the tragedy to demonstrate how Apollo holds sway over Oedipus, and by extension every mortal.

#### Bibliography

Fairbanks, Arthur. 1906. "Herodotus and the oracle at Delphi." *The Classical Journal* 1: 37 – 48.

Lattimore, Steven. 1975. "Oedipus and Teiresias." *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 8:  
105 – 111.