

Addressing a King: Direct Address in *Oedipus Tyrannus*

In the third episode of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the messenger from Corinth addresses Oedipus as $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}$, a striking designation for a servant to give a king. This play includes numerous instances of notable and unexpected direct address in addition to the predictable, and this abundance provides ample opportunity for analysis of the social and power dynamics which Sophocles explores in his *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I argue that the specific terms of address Sophocles chooses for his characters serve to reinforce attendant drama in the play and suggest movement in power dynamics which may not be immediately noticeable without isolating and studying forms of direct address.

Previous scholarship on Greek direct address has in a large part excluded analysis of tragedy from its focus, due to the unreliability of the genre as a representation of colloquial speech. Most notable are the works by Eleanor Dickey (1995, 1996) on Greek address, which focus on analysis of prose and comedy. Since Dickey's work identifies a plausible model of contemporary colloquial address, I utilize her findings as a sort of standard against which to measure when the usage of direct address in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* departs from these expected patterns in dialogue. In this paper, I will examine Sophocles' characterization of Oedipus based on his use of and designation by specific terms of address. In particular, I will discuss the terms of address used between him and Jocasta and the change in his status at the end of the play as reflected in terms of address.

First, I consider the patterns of address between Jocasta and Oedipus, indicating that Sophocles' Oedipus avoids addressing Jocasta both directly by her first name and by a patronymic. This contrasts with Jocasta's use of the first name address to Oedipus. I suggest that

Oedipus' alternative use of the designation γύναι emphasizes the irony evident to the audience in his prohibited relationship with his mother-wife, and I argue that Sophocles exploits this feature of the plot to achieve maximum discomfort in his audience. Next, I examine terms of address to Oedipus and to the chorus that suggest the existence of a period of instability in Oedipus' power and status leading up to and following his realization of his birth. This instability is introduced as early as the arrival of the messenger from Corinth, who addresses Oedipus alternatively as ἄναξ, παῖ, τέκνον, δέσποτε, and τᾶν. I suggest that this variation in terms of address from the Corinthian messenger reveals a new uncertainty concerning Oedipus' status and power and functions as a prelude to his ultimate downfall. Finally, I argue that forms of address in the final moments of the play indicate a dispersion of Oedipus' power to parties including the members of the chorus.

By focusing on forms of address in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, I attempt to identify useful trends in direct address that reinforce the play's portrayal of individual characters and their relationships. I identify notable patterns in address between Oedipus and Jocasta, which serve to highlight the unnatural relationship between the two over the extent of the play. I then move to consideration of Oedipus' power as apparent in how other characters address him. I argue that the varying level of respect implied in forms of address spoken by the Corinthian messenger suggests a period of instability in Oedipus' power. This instability is later realized as the play moves toward its conclusion, at which point esteemed forms of address directed to the chorus suggest a dispersion of Oedipus' failed power to parties including the chorus members.

Bibliography

Dickey, E. 1996. *Greek Forms of Address: From Herodotus to Lucian*. Oxford.

Ibid. 1995. "The Ancient Greek Address System and Some Proposed Sociolinguistic Universals." *Language in Society* 26: 1-13.