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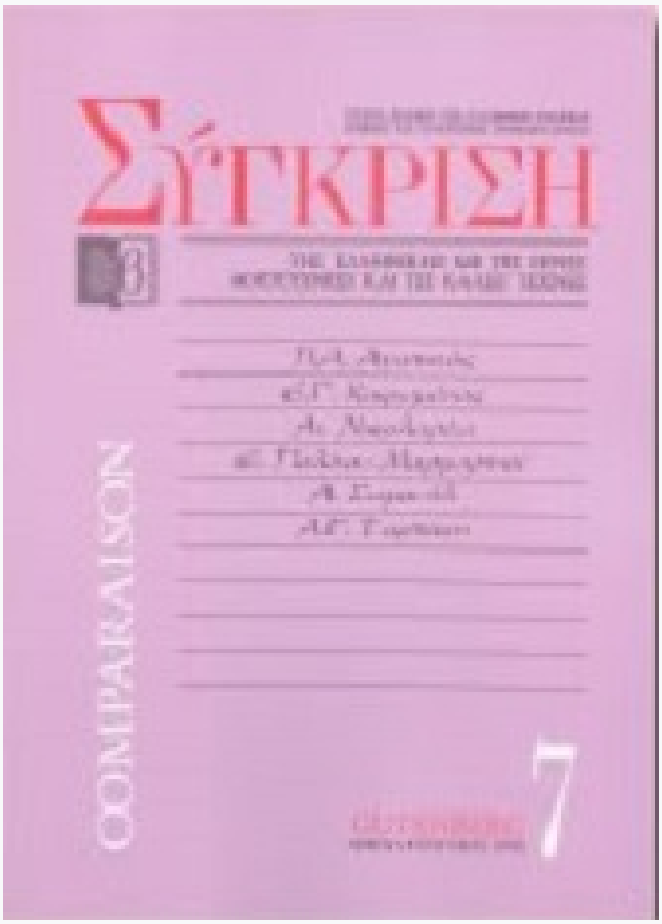

The Penguin Editions of Sophocles' Oedipus the King and their Significance for the Reception of this Tragedy by the English Public since 1947

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EKATERINI NIKOLAREA

The Penguin Editions of Sophocles' Oedipus the King *and their Significance for the Reception of this Tragedy by the English Public since 1947**

Introductory Remarks

THIS STUDY IS ONE OF THE FIRST ATTEMPTS TO EXAMINE SOMETHING that is not frequently mentioned in the classical and translation studies: the construction of notions classical Greek tragedy and the tragic in the English-speaking world through translations and theatrical performances. Its scope, however, is far more limited since it deals *only* with Sophocle's *Oedipus the King* and how this drama was perceived and constructed by one British and one American translator in the second half of the twentieth century. This paper discusses how the Penguin editions of two English translations of *Oedipus*, made by classical scholars and poets such as E.F. Watling and Robert Fagles, helped —each in its own way— in the reception and appreciation of this Greek tragedy from the British and American target systems (TSs).

Pengin Editions of *Oedipus*: Watling's *King Oedipus* (1947-1984) and Fagle's *Oedipus the King* (1984-up to the Present)

In 1982 a new translation of Sophocle's *Oedipus* appeared in the North American and British markets simultaneously: Robert Fagles' *Oedipus The*

* I am especially thankful to The Killam Trusts in Canada and the Graduate Scholarship Committee of the University of Alberta who awarded me a Pre-doctoral Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship and to the Calgary Institute for the Humanities, The University of Calgary, who awarded me a Post-Doctoral Fellowship and, thus, enabled me to start, carry out and accomplish this kind of study. My thanks are also due to my friends the University Professores E.D. Blodgett and M.V. Dimić (University of Alberta) who read and made valuable comments on an earlier version of the manuscript; neither of them, however, is responsible for any errors of interpretation in this study.

King.[1] This translation was destined to be one of the most influential translations of *Oedipus the King* in English since it was first published by the Penguin Classics in 1984.[2] Up to that year, among the most influential translations of *Oedipus* was Watling's *King Oedipus* which was first published by the Penguin Classics in 1947.[3] But why had Penguin Books, one of the most important publishing houses in translated literature, decided to change the translator and translation of this Sophoclean tragedy after almost fifty years of publishing Walting's *King Oedipus*? To understand the change in the process of publishing, we shall start with a textual comparison between these two different editions and then venture to define the term "a successful translation". In conclusion, we shall have the opportunity to explore how certain patterns emerging from the popularity of these translations of *Oedipus* with the British and North American TSs can show the interrelationship between the process of canonization of *Oedipus*, as a cornerstone of the Western treatrical and dramatical tradition, and the variability of a wider English TS.

1. Textual Differences between Watling's *King Oedipus* (1947) and Fagles's *Oedipus the King* (1984)

Let us now turn our attention to the beginning of the texts of Watling's *King Oedipus* and Fagles's *Oedipus the King*, and see how each of these scholars rendered the introductory speech delivered by Oedipus. The opening speech of Oedipus (vv. 1-13) in the texts under discussion appears as follows:

Watling's *King Oedipus*

OEDIPUS: Children, new blood of Cadmus' ancient line
What is the meaning of this supplication,
These branches and garlands, the incense filling the city,
These prayers for healing of pain, these lamentations?
I have not thought it fit to rely on my messengers
But came here to learn for myself — I, Oedipus,
Whose name is known afar.
(*To the* PRIEST) You, reverend sir,
In right of age, should speak of all of them.
What is the matter? Some Fear? Something you desire?
I would willingly do anything to help you;
Indeed I should be heartless, were I to stop my ears
To a general petition such as this.

Fagles's *Oedipus the King*

Oh my children, the new blood of ancient Thebes,
why are you here? Huddling at my altar,
praying befor me, your branches wound in wool.
Our city reeks with the smoke of burning insense,
rings with cries for the Healer and wailing for the dead.
I thought it wrong, my children, to hear the truth
from others, messengers. Here I am myself —
you all know me, the world knows my fame:
I am Oedipus.
Helping a Priest to his feet
Speak up, old man. Your years,
your dignity — you should speak for the others.
Why here and kneeling, what preys upon you so?
Some sudden fear? some strong desire?
You can trust me. I am ready to help,
I'll do anything. I would be blind to misery
not to pity my people kneeling at my feet.

At first glance, one difference, although superficial and quantitative, becomes obvious; whereas Watling's translation has 13 lines, Fagles's consists of 16; stil there are some similarities between these two excerpts. First, both passages present Oedipus coming unexpectedly on stage, thus forming our first view of Oedipus: a man in the public eye, a beloved ruler who is sought by his people. Second, both Watling and Fagles's renderings provide the visual relationship between the "solitary" figure of Oedipus and the large group of the suppliants which is immediately reinforced in a very striking way: "῾Ω τέκνα..." "Children..." (Watling), "Oh my children..." (Fagles). This is the very first word of the tragedy and shows Oedipus' role at this point: he is the leader, the protector and the patriarch of this people. Yet the similarities of these passages end here.

Perhaps the first and the most evident difference between the English translations of *Oedipus* is Watling's "Children" an Fagles's "Oh my children". The former sounds more abrupt, carries imperative overtones and also signifies Oedipus' effort to draw the immediate attention of this assembly (including the audience) to himself; the latter, instead, is an exclamation of surprise and pity at the same time. In contrast with Watling's more demanding and abrupt "Children", Fagles's "Oh my children" represents better the concern of a leader for his people as well as his sympathy for them. This mixture of concern, sympathy and pity is not only expressed by the rest of speech but also by the repetition of the same word "τέκνα" (6) which is omitted in Watling's but rendered as "my children" by Fagles.

The opening word "῾Ω τέκνα" is also of great importance because, on the semantic level, it connotes something more: that the speaker has an intimate relation with his interlocutors. The intimacy between Oedipus and the first assembly of people is also coupled by Oedipus' "ὦ γεραιέ, φράζ" (9). In this phrase, the exclamatory "ὦ γεραιέ" (oh old man) conveys not only intimacy but also respect and softens down the imperative "φράζ" (speak up). This simple phrase, which is, however, a carrier of many denotations and codes of social behaviour, is translated as "[y]ou, reverend sir ... should speak" by Watling and as "[s]peak up old man" by Fagles. The fundamental difference between these two renderings is that in the former there is no such intimacy in Oedipus' address to the Old Priest, and there is nothing of the swifteness and the expectancy of the original. In contrast, Fagles's "[s]peak up old man" conveys not only the intimacy between Oedipus and the Old Priest but also the expectancy and impatience of Oedipus to hear why this group of people has gathered in front of his palace and what they expect from him.

The difference in social codes and behaviour between these two rendering is striking, and we may wonder why. At this point we may conjecture that this difference is the result of differentiated British and American TSs and of two different periods. We should not forget, on the one hand, that Watling was a classical scholar who was brought up in England, where monarchy is one of the traditional aspects of British constitutional life. Moreover, he wrote his version for a wider, mainly British public in the late 1940s. If we think in these terms, it is not strange that there is a social distance between Oedipus and the suppliants. On the other hand, Fagles is a classical scholar who has been raised in the USA, which is a republic. Furthermore, he wrote his *Oedipus the King* for a wider English public of the early 1980s, a public which was further removed from Greek studies than that of England in 1947. This is one of the reasons why the translated text in Fagles' translation of *Oedipus the King* always seems longer, more explanatory and specific than Watling's *King Oedipus*. One of the most characteristic examples of this attitude is the rendering of the initial situation at Thebes; whereas Watling translates in into "...this supplication / These branches and garlands...", Fagles renders it into "[h]uddling at my altar, / praying before me, your branches wound in wool". In Fagles's rendering we are able to see two different dynamics; first we can perceive the horror of the full scene more visually and vividly than in Watling's. Second, we discern a conscious effort on behalf of Fagles to make the text of his translation longer in order to facilitate our understanding of *Oedipus* and, thus, "compensate" us with passages that will help us feel closer to the original. A better example of this mechanism used by Fagles is his effort to avoid using "Cadmus" or any other Greek mythological name in the rest of his translation which may mean nothing to an average contemporary reader; instead, he employs "ancient Thebes".

2. Position of Watling's and Fagles's versions of *Oedipus* in English

2.1. *A Wider Readership*

2.1.1. Watling's *King Oedipus*

As mentioned earlier, both Watling's *King Oedipus* and Fagles's *Oedipus the King* can be considered two of the most popular translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus* in the English-speaking world since 1947 and 1984 respectively. On the one hand, Watling's *King Oedipus*, from its first publication in Penguin Classics in 1947 until its last in 1980,[4] has been reprinted in 1949, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1958, 1959 (twice), 1960,

1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965 (twice), 1966, 1967 (twice), 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973 (twice), 1974, 1975 (twice), 1976, 1977, 1978 (twice), 1979, 1980 (Watling 1980, 6). The constant reprinting of this version of *Oedipus* by Penguin Classics signifies a very high circulation of this rendering on both sides of the Atlantic, a circulation which can be attributed to two different but interrelated factors. First, once published by the Penguin Classics, Watling's *King Oedipus* became accesible to a broader readership because of its wider distribution and cost-effectiveness. Second, this translation started being used mostly by an ever-growing university population in North America, especially by students of the Departments of Classics, Comparative Literature and Theatre/Drama departments.[5] It is worth noting, however, that Watling's *Oedipus* was never published in any anthology at all!

2.1.2. Fagles's *Oedipus the King*

On the other hand, Fagles's *Oedipus the King* has been of great importance for a wider English TS since 1984. Its importance lies primarily in certain dynamics operating within the British and North American TSs. Besides the fact that it was repeatedly reprinted by the Penguin Books in "1985, 1986 (three times), 1987, 1988",[6] Fagles's *Oedipus* was published in various anthologies.[7] First, and only one year after its publication by the Penguin Classics, Fagles's *Oedipus* appeared in the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (1985), where it has been published ever since. Second, it was repeatedly published in anthologies of literature, such as: *Classics of Literature* (1988), *An Introduction to Literature* (1988), *Adventures in World Literature* (1990), *Introduction to Literature* (2ed ed., 1990), *Introduction to Literature* (5th ed. and short ed., 1990), *Discovering Literature* (1992), *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* (1993), *Literature: The Human Experience* (1994), *Readers and Writers: Exploring Literature* (1994) and *Literature: Fiction, Poetry Drama, and the Essay* (1995). Third, it was circulated through theatre or drama anthologies, such as: *Eight Plays for Theater* (1988), *Types of Drama* (1988), *Anthology of World Drama* (1990), *Introduction to Drama* (1991). Fourth, it was also reprinted in anthologies of Western thought or Humantities like: *Classics of Western Thought: The Ancient World* (1988), *Variations on Humanities* (1991), *Reading in Western Humanities* (1992). Fifth, excerpts from the same version have also been used in various books like: *Ancient Greek Ethics: An Introduction* (1991) and *Theatre as Sign-System. A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (1991) and *The Character Dimension of Leadership* (1994).

Although it may be too early to draw definitive conclusions, we can affirm that Fagles's *Oedipus the King* has been one of the most popular translations of *Oedipus* in English since its first publication in the Penguin Classics in 1984 and in the *Norton Anthology* in 1985. We can also assert that this translation has been considered suitable for different kinds of readers; for example, a diverse readership oscillating between average non-Greek readers and students and scholars in the departments of Classics has benefited from the Penguin Classics edition of *Oedipus the King*. Second, students and scholars of English and Comparative Literature, who have employed either the various editions of the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* or some other anthologies, have been able to read and comprehend Sophocle's *Oedipus the King* thanks to Fagles's contemporary English idiom. Third, Fagles's rendering of *Oedipus* have been used by students and scholars in many theatre or drama departments since this translation was also published in various drama anthologies. Finally, another kind of sophisticated readeship has benefited from Fagles's *Oedipus the King* theatre semioticians or philosophers.

2.2. *A Wider Theatrical Audience*

2.2.1. Watling's *King Oedipus*

When he made his version of *King Oedipus* in 1947, Watling was primarily aiming at a wider readership as well as a theatrical audience. Yet, there is no evidence whether this rendering has ever been used in actual theatrical performances. Of course, this lack of evidence raises more questions than it answers, especially when there is a plethora of data about contemporary performances of Fagles's *Oedipus the King*.

2.2.2. Fagles's *Oedipus the King*

As discussed earlier, Fagles's *Oedipus the King* has been very popular with a wider English readership for it has repeatedly been published in Penguin Classics as well as in a great variety of anthologies. Yet such success could deceive and lead us to wrong assumption that this translation has remained only a printed text, if we had not been provided with very important additional information. Therefore, it is our intention in this sub-section to show that Fagles's *Oedipus the King*, besides its popularity with a wider English readership, has been an equally successful script when produced in theatre, and broadcast in radio and television.[8]

Upon its first publication in the USA (1982) and in the UK (1982 and 1984),

Fagles's *Oedipus the King* has been performed at least eighteen times in the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia, broadcast by the BBC Radio and by The Royal National Institute for the Blind and produced for a TV program in Maryland. Looking closer at Works Cited ("FAGLES, Robert"), we can elicit two major categories in the theatrical performances of Fagles's *Oedipus* in North America and Great Britain. Whereas this version was produced primarily at colleges or universities by students of theatre/drama in North America, in the UK the same translation was produced mainly by professional companies.

These two categories in the thearical performances of Fagles's *Oedipus the King* also point to a substantial differentiation between the perception of Greek tragedy in general and *Oedipus the King* in particular by the North American and the British publics. On the one hand, of eight productions of Fagles's *Oedipus* in the USA, five were realized by theatre students and only two by professional companies.[9] This situation shows that, after most of theatre of drama departments were established in North America in the late 1940s, a slow proccess of canonization of *Oedipus the King*, as one of the most important plays in the Western tradition, was activated within this target system (TS).

On the other hand, of eleven productions of Fagles's *Oedipus the King* in England nine were run by professional companies[10] and only two by university students.[11] We may now wonder why these has been such an explosion of theatrical productions of *Oedipus the King* by professional companies in the UK since the mid-1980s. An answer to this inquiry comes indirectly and only from another theatrical context. Commenting on the importance of Greek tragedy and *Oedipus the King* for the contemporary British public, Michael Kustow claims that *The Thebans*, the most recent translations and theatrical productions of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone* in England[12] are, "[t]he newest addition to the edifice of productions, translations and critical re-readings which over the past decade has set Greek drama at the heart of our [British] theatrical and, in the most fundamental sense, our political concerns. Can it be a coincidence that this has occured during a massive shift in the world-view of rich nations from the public realm to private interests; the collapse of Communism and the disclosure of the cruel mechanics of its power; the even harsher conflicts that have followed; and the spread of reportage and news values as our chief means of comprehending these upheavals?"[13] The importance of this statement for the present study lies in that it draws our

attention to one of the principal reasons[14] for the popularity of Greek tragedy in general and *Oedipus the King* in particular with a British and a wider European public since the mid-1980s. In Kustow's opinion, political circumstances, such as massive changes in Europe have created a tremendous shift in the reading, interpreting and performing Greek drama and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in the UK. It is also in Kustow's statement that we can partly find an explanation why Fagles's *Oedipus the King* has been performed eleven times in England since its first publication by the Penguin Classics in 1984.

Concluding Remarks

The above discussion leads us to the conclusion that the Penguing editions of the translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* made by Watling and Fagles have played a vital role in the reception of this tragedy by the British and American TSs at particular times. Nevertheless, the inquiry of this article points to the fact that the influence of these editions upon the British and American publics has varied and resulted in different perception and reception of this play by these TSs, a difference which can be attributed to the systems themselves.

Although *Oedipus the King* has been considered as one of the most important classical tragedies to be translated, read, taught and performed, a wider North American public, on the one hand, has received this tragedy through Fagles's translation whose treatrical performances were realized primarily by students of theatre/drama departments. On the other hand, a wider British public has received the same play through the same translation with one big difference: the treatrical performances of this translation were run primarily by professional companies.

Finally, this study shows that the impact of the Penguin editions of particular translations upon the reception of Greek tragedy and *Oedipus the King* by the British and American TSs during particular periods can be a gold-field for translation, theatre and comparative studies, a field whose only a very small part has been explored in this article.

Notes

1. Robert FAGLES, *Oedipus the King.* *Sophocles: The Tree Theban Plays*, introduction and notes by Bernard Knox (New York: The Viking P, 1982) 112-232, and

Oedipus the King. Sophocles: The Tree Theban Plays, introduction and notes by Bernard Knox (London: Allen Lane, 1982); the 1982 edition is out of print.

2. Robert FAGLES, *Oedipus the King: Sophocles. The Three Theban Plays*, introduction and notes by Bernard Knox (London: Penguin Books, 1984) 129-251; any quotations will be taken from the 1988 edition and referred to as Fagles.

3. E.F. WATLING, *King Oedipus, Sophocles: The Theban Plays* [The Penguin Classics L3] (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books 1947) 23-68; any references are taken from this adition and referred to as Watling.

4. E.F. WATLING, *King Oedipus. Sophocles: The Theban Plays* (Middlessex: Penguin Books, 1980) 25-68; hereafter this publication will be referred to as Watling 1980. To the best of my knowledge, this is the last edition of Watling's translation of *Oedipus* by the Penguin Classics before the same publishing house introduced Fagles's *Oedipus the King* in 1984.

5. In another study, I pointed out that the establishment of many Theatre/Drama departments and various departments of Comparative Literature in North America in the late 1940s and the mid-1950s respectively created a wider and more sophisticated audience. See Ekaterini NIKOLAREA, *A Communicative Model for Theatre Translation: Versions of* Oedipus the King *in English* (Diss. U of Alberta, 1994) 172-73 and 248-49; hereafter this study will be quoted as Nikolarea.

6. Robert FAGLES 4.

7. I am deeply obliged to Professor Robert Fagles (Department of Comparative Literature, Princeton University) who so kindly offered me most of the information used in this section. I should also recognize that without his support and encouragement, I would not have been able to complete this part of my study. For references to various editions of FAGLES's *Oedipus the King* see Works Cited appeaded to this article.

8. I am deeply grateful to Robert Fagles (Department of Comparative Literature, Princeton University) who so kindly offered me such valuable information about the performances of his *Oedipus*. Needless to say, that without his help, I would not have been able to develop this section or, worse, I could have drawn the wrong conclusions.

9. We refer to The Robinson Players (Bates College, Maine, 1990) and The King's Players (The Winnipeg Festival, 1993); see Works Cited.

10. Althouth two of these productions took place at the University Theatre, Manchester, and at the Alton College, Alton, Hamshire, they were realized by the professional companies named The Contact Theatre Company and The Turning Theatre Company respectively.

11. One was at the Corpus Christi at Oxford University (1980) and the other was at the Wilson's School, Mollison Drive, Wallington, Surrey (1990).

12. See Timberlake WETRENBAKER, *Oedipus Tyrannos. The Thebans* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992) 1-45. This translation was directed by Adrian Noble and performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company first at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1991, and them an the Barbican Theatre, London, in 1992. For a discussion of this translation and its productions see Nikolarea 208-17.

13. This quotation is taken from the programme of the 1992 performances of *The Thebans*. Michael KUSTOW, "Chorus or Camera, Microphone or Mask", *The Programme, Sophocles' Oedipus Plays*, 1992, n. pag.

14. Some other reasons have been: new theatre criticisme (Oliver Taplin), various discourses, such as structural anthropology, psychoanalysis, linguistics and feminism, the re-reading and re-writing of some Greek tragedies by creative writers, like Tony Morrison.

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Περίληψη

Αικατερίνη ΝΙΚΟΛΑΡΕΑ, *Οι Εκδόσεις Penguin του* Οιδίποδα Τυράννου *και η Σπουδαιότητά τους για την Πρόσληψη αυτής της Τραγωδίας από το Αγγλικό Κοινό από το 1947*

Αυτή η μελέτη είναι μια από τις πρώτες προσπάθειες για την εξέταση του πώς η αρχαία Ελληνική τραγωδία γενικότερα και ο *Οιδίπους Τύραννος* του Σοφοκλή ειδικότερα έχουν προσληφθεί από ένα ευρύτερο αγγλικό (βρετανικό και αμερικανικό) κοινό μέσω δύο μεταφράσεων κατά το δεύτερο ήμισυ του εικοστού αιώνα. Αυτό το άρθρο παρουσιάζει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο δύο μεταφράσεις του *Οιδίποδα*, που έγιναν από τον Watling και τον Fagles και εκδόθηκαν από τον εκδοτικό οίκο Penguin το 1947 και το 1984 αντίστοιχα, επέδρασαν στην καλύτερη πρόσληψη και κατανόηση αυτή της τραγωδίας από το βρετανικό και αμερικανικό κοινό.