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Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex*. Revised edition

Sophocles., R. D. (Roger David) Dawe, *Oedipus Rex*. *Cambridge Greek and Latin classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. ix, 214 pages ; 23 cm.. ISBN 0521851777 \$31.99 (pb).

Review by

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What, exactly, is a revised edition? And how many revisions are necessary for a new edition to warrant publication? And, if the first edition received reviews that indicated various inadequacies, should not those criticisms at least be acknowledged? These are a few of the questions raised by this new version of Dawe's Cambridge "Green and Yellow" *Oedipus Rex*, which retains from its first incarnation a frustrating mixture of brilliant insights into a number of passages and general insensitivity to, and rejection of, essential literary and historical questions. In short, this revised edition is one that no serious scholar of Sophocles' masterpiece should do without, but one that is also inappropriate for the series' primary intended audience: undergraduate students.

Anyone familiar with the first edition of this commentary will find its essential nature unchanged. Dawe's sole interpretive foil remains a fairly straight-forward reading of the seminal passage on Oedipus in Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Many of the great Sophoclean scholars who have written (especially in English) on this drama over the past half-century are largely, if not totally, ignored in Dawe's introduction and notes. Indeed, I was reminded anew of my shock, two decades ago, when I realized that this commentary was published within a few months of Charles Segal's *Tragedy and Civilization*; these two works seem barely written in the same century or in the same scholarly universe. That there are minor changes with some modern bibliography in the Introduction suggests an ongoing willful refusal to engage with the central questions of Sophoclean tragedy, which one would think should be one of the main functions of any volume from a series of student commentaries. But enough of such concerns, for thus I would merely repeat a diluted version Michael Silk's fairly fierce assessment in his review of the first edition a quarter century ago (*G & R* 30 [1983] 210-11).

Dawe's justification for the new edition is misleading and somewhat disingenuous, thus cloaking the far-reaching changes he has made to the commentary from the first edition. He claims (viii) to have been prompted mainly by Mueller's doubts about the exodus (*RhM* 139 [1996] 193-224). Mueller's article then spawned Dawe's own lengthy study of interpolation in *OT* and *OC* (*RhM* 144 [2001] 1-21), on which Dawe's notes on 1424-1530 "draw heavily, often *verbatim*" (192). Indeed. Based on the Preface to the

second edition, one would conclude that only Dawe's commentary on 1424-1530 differs substantially from the first edition and that he has merely tinkered with the commentary; the introductions to both editions are, aside from the new doubts about the exodus, almost identical, with only one paragraph, the top of page 22 of the old introduction compared with the new one on the top of page 17, differing. Since Dawe has already had the opportunity to argue against the authenticity of the exodus, the new commentary seems, based on Dawe's stated reasoning, superfluous. However, a careful study of the commentary shows that Dawe has thoroughly rethought the play and his earlier comments on it, and thus he has deleted some notes, expanded others, and composed a number of entirely new ones. I count 139 meaningful changes, many of them substantial. It remains a mystery to me both why Dawe's initial statement of purpose is so incomplete and whether there are any guiding principles (other than suspected interpolation) behind the changes. I have observed, however, that many of the newly longer notes were expanded with more generous citations from other Greek texts for a broader linguistic context.

Since Dawe's own primary concern is with the authenticity of the exodus, I shall focus my attention there as well, though my awareness that this is not the appropriate forum for a complete examination of its problems will limit my own discussion. Dawe is bothered, and rightly so, by the inconsistencies in the exodus which begin with the arrival of Creon and culminate in the disjunction between the expectation that Oedipus will go into exile and his final exit into the palace. While discrepancies, whether seeming or real, can be explained, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the scene was rewritten later than its first performance, possibly, as Mueller and Dawe both argue, for a new production as part of a trilogy with *Antigone* and *OC*. Dawe does make telling arguments about the quality of the Greek in some lines (though he is more open about his aesthetic concerns in his earlier article), but taste does not make for an air-tight argument about authenticity. Moreover, aspects of Dawe's case that are based on the interpretation of the drama's content are less compelling. For example, his doubts about 1454 rest largely on the assertion that "the idea that turning out the helpless king onto Mt Cithaeron would make Laius and Jocasta his killers after all is highly artificial." Perhaps that is indeed the case, but "artificial" is a highly subjective term and simply cannot be imposed on student readers without some measure of explanation.

Of central concern in Dawe's dismissal of much of the exodus is (notes on 1458-60) "the unexpected appearance of the children . . . whose very existence in *Oedipus Rex* has been surrounded by all sorts of problems." Dawe argues that the daughters were inserted into the exodus at a later date in order to square *OT* with *OC*: "The male children are swiftly dealt with (1459-61). It is the girls who are paraded before us now, much as they are in the equally interpolated end of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. "Paraded" is an overly emotional word here, one that suggests Dawe's discomfort with the content of this scene. Let us unpack his logic. Dawe asks us to consider the earlier mentions of them at 261, 425, 1247-50, 1375-6. On 261, Dawe simply dismisses the reference to children there as "not conclusive." For 425, we learn that Otte deleted these lines in 1896 (retained, however, by most, including Lloyd-Jones and Wilson), but we do

not learn why, and Dawe rests his case largely on a sigmatism “more characteristic of Euripides than Sophocles.” The other two passages, of course, are in the exodus so mistrusted by Dawe, but, in any case, he makes no particular case against them. Even less convincing is how Dawe removes the earlier *Antigone* from his considerations of the role of the children in *OT*, for, while the Greek dramatists certainly did not subscribe to or represent a unitary conception of Greek myth, still it would surely have struck his audience as odd if Sophocles had produced a well known drama about the children of Oedipus and then, roughly ten years later, another drama about Oedipus himself in which the children not only played no role, but did not exist at all.

I return to the problem of the book’s audience. My concerns about the bolder aspects of Dawe’s textual claims would not be so pressing were it not for the very, at times aggressively, confident tone in which they are related to his readers. I refer again to his note at 1458-60 as an example: “But now everything from this point to the end of the play is spurious, and the voice of Sophocles is heard no more.” Such is the rhetoric of the scholarly article, but not of the student commentary, and such rhetoric appears too often for my taste. Beginning readers of *OT* need to see more about contrasting opinions, even, perhaps especially, about such important textual questions. Dawe simply does not provide them with a good discursive model for their own work. From reading this commentary, students would never know the modern, scholarly Sophoclean world.

In sum, this is a frustrating volume, and one senses a missed opportunity. The reviews of the first edition praised the commentary and criticized the introduction, and thus it seems a bit odd that the second edition presents the same introduction with a different commentary. However, I do not want to minimize in any way the author’s achievement with this revised edition. I continue to learn much from Dawe about Sophocles’ text, language and idiom, and I shall return to this volume regularly for my own work, but for my students I would not cast aside Jebb, dated as it is, and Rusten’s Bryn Mawr edition remains compelling. Following the truly outstanding and eminently useful Cambridge editions of Griffith on *Antigone* and Mastronarde on *Medea*, I had hoped for a completely new *Oedipus Tyrannus* (and not *Oedipus Rex*). But, as the old saying goes, *dum spiro spero*.