Gherardo Ugolini

Φόβος φυτεύει τύραννον: The Tyrant's Fears on the Attic Tragic Stage

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Φόβος φυτεύει τύραννον: The Tyrant's Fears on the Attic Tragic Stage

Gherardo Ugolini

In *jedem* begabten und ehrgeizigen Griechen wohnte ein *Tyrann*.
("In every capable and ambitious Greek dwelt a tyrant")[1]

The Attic tragic stage teems with tyrants: veritable τύραννοι, who use the word in referring to themselves or are labeled as such by other characters in the play; or rather characters who can be defined as "tyrannical" in a more general sense, figures who exercise a violent, autocratic, and often illegitimate power.[2] Such cases are plentiful in tragic works throughout the fifth century BCE, ranging from the tyrannical couple in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (458), Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, the violent usurpers of Agamemnon's kingdom in Argos,[3] to Lycus in Euripides's *Heracles* (probably performed in 416), another usurper who flaunts his despotism and ἀσέβεια (impiety) to the point of becoming an overly schematic version of the theatrical tyrant doomed to end in defeat and death.

Between these two chronological extremes, numerous other tyrants appear on the Athenian stage, the most significant of which undoubtedly include Creon in Sophocles's *Antigone*, Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*, and Eteocles in Euripides's *Phoenician Women*. There are also cases of tyrants who do not actually appear on stage in the Dionysian theatre but are so constantly evoked as to become a decisive factor in the dramatic action. A prime example is Zeus in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. Setting aside the issue of the play's authenticity and date, as well as problems of interpretation arising from the loss of the other two parts of the Promethean trilogy, there is no doubt that Zeus is portrayed as possessing

all the features of the tyrant. Moreover, the power newly gained by usurping his father's place is explicitly defined as tyrannical with such a frequency that cannot be considered accidental. Zeus rules as a "harsh monarch not subject to control" (*Prometheus* 324; τραχὺς μόναρχος οὐδ' ὑπεύθυνος κρατεῖ) who makes use of "new laws" he himself has established arbitrarily (149-50; νεοχμοῖς δὲ δὴ νόμοις / Ζεὺς ἀθέτως κρατύνει; 403; ἰδίοις νόμοις κρατύνων). He also exhibits other characteristics typical of the tyrant: a tendency to anger (ὀργή) that makes his mind "inflexible" (164; ἄγναμπτον νόον),[4] violence (βία), rejection of dialogue, and diffidence ("It is a disease that is somehow inherent in tyranny to have no faith in friends," declares Prometheus in 224-25).[5]

A similar case in point is Euripides's *Suppliants* (422), where no tyrant is physically present, but the specter of tyranny is conveyed in the dialogue between the Theban herald and the Athenian Theseus, the representative and defender of an isonomic and democratic system founded on the citizens' freedom, on their equality before the law and participation in managing power.[6] The heated exchange in lines 399–583 readapts traditional clichés of the tyrant who surrounds himself with contemptible men and uses violence against women, the city, and so forth. While the scope of this article cannot include a complete survey of tyrants in fifth-century Greek tragedy, some of the most cogent conclusions of past studies on the subject will help to trace an outline of the topic:[7]

1. There is clearly no stereotype of the tyrant, but rather a model easily recognized by the audience, developed in a variety of ways with different functions. Each tyrant in the tragic theatre shares characteristics with his fellow tyrants but has personality and behavioral traits specific to himself.

2. The traits which serve to portray a tyrannical character on the stage—and which are to be found in all particular cases, albeit with different modulations and degrees—are the same as those mentioned both in the historiographical tradition (Herodotus) and in philosophical theories (Plato, Aristotle):

- violence (*hybris, bìa*), that is, the murder of enemies, and even family members and friends;
- little respect for tradition, whether laws or ancestral customs;

- tendency toward impiety (*asèbeia*), that is, the abuse of rituals, when not actual blasphemy;
- greed (*kerdos, pleonexìa*), that is, coveting wealth, voracious pursuit of profit and using money to acquire and wield power;
- lack of respect for laws not enacted by the tyrant himself (*anomìa, paranomìa*);
- tendency to easily lose control and thus a propensity to fits of wrath (*orghé*);
- self-referentiality;
- inclination to satisfy every instinct and urge, leading to lust and licentiousness (*akolasìa*);
- conspiracy syndrome, or fear of plots threatening his power.

3. On stage, the tyrant is portrayed as an antithetical figure to Athens's democratic system (in fact tyrants are generally projected against the mythical background of cities such as Argos or Thebes). He epitomizes everything normally condemned by public morals in the Athenian polis: arrogance, impiety, irrationality, and so forth. An absolutely negative model, the tyrant represents a world turned upside down and perhaps also a way of exorcising latent urges in the Athenian social body (see Jakob Burckhardt's comment quoted in the epigraph above).[8]

4. On the more strictly political plane, the tyrant in tragedy lies at the center of a series of functional oppositions: now, he is the antithesis of the good sovereign; now, of democracy; and then again, of both. He is a negative paradigm inversely defining democracy and/or enlightened monarchy, the exact opposite of their positive aspects; this is why tyranny was vilified by all the political factions in Athens.

5. Finally, the most important point in an analysis of this kind is that the tyrant developed by the fifth-century tragedians is not the dramatic portrayal of an actual social figure, and on the whole, historical and theoretical references should be avoided as much as possible. We are concerned here with a literary construct, which first of all responds to dynamics of dramatic development and focalization and which functions according to its own rules.

This essay focuses on a specific and recurring motif—"fear"—that characterizes tyrannical characters in order to establish how it functions in the tragedian's psychological creation of such figures as well as to define the dynamics it produces in the dramatic action. Studies on the typology and phenomenology of tyrants in Athenian tragedy have generally concentrated on psychological and personality traits or on similarities or differences with tyrants who had actually existed in Greek territory; or, they sought to correlate their portrayal on the stage with the theories of the causes of tyranny developed by historians like Herodotus and Thucydides and by philosophers like Plato and Xenophon.

Little attention seems to have been devoted to the subject of "the fear of the tyrant," despite the fact that it appears to be a recurrent idea with significant implications in terms of both meaning and dramatic composition. We should not forget that *phobos* is one of the most typical emotions that can be elicited by rhetorical and poetic language. The concept is generally emphasized in all of ancient Greek thought[9] and culminates in the great value Aristotle ascribes to it in the *Poetics*, where *phobos*, alongside *eleos*, is raised to the category of poetic discourse, indicating one of the effects aroused in the viewer or reader of a tragedy with a specific psychagogic and gnoseological function.[10] The discussion on the extent to which Aristotle's hermeneutic categories of the fourth century are useful in understanding the dramatic mechanisms of classical tragedy in the fifth century remains open, especially with reference to the crucial notion of *kàtharsis*. Even a brief treatment of the question cannot be undertaken here; however, it is important to note that many of the tragedies that have survived do in effect arouse *phobos*. Fear is undoubtedly a fundamental ingredient in both the composition and fruition stages, since the spectator experiences emotions provoked by the author and the spectacle during the performance. A figure like that of the τύραννος must have seemed perfectly functional to this end, easily lending itself to the purpose of intensifying the degree of terror to be aroused in the audience.

Fear of the tyrant is a syntagm that must be defined in its dual grammatical meaning: in the sense of an objective genitive (the fear the tyrant actively produces in his immediate interlocutors and in the citizens of his polis) and in the sense of subjective genitive (the fear the tyrant feels in the course of the dramatic action). A careful analysis of the tyrannical

figures in fifth-century dramas will show that the element of fear related to the tyrant's power is consistently present, in both the active and passive sense. In some cases, it is one of the many elements that contribute to defining the character's personality and behavior, establishing specific relational dynamics with the other characters and the dramatic action. In other cases, the playwright maximizes the fear-of-the-tyrant motif in order to dramatize the transformation of characters who in the beginning were not or at least did not appear to be tyrannical. The arousal of fear (in the subjective sense) initiates the process of *metabolè* (change, alteration), a trajectory that leads first to a clear accentuation of the despotic traits and subsequently to the inevitable personal and political catastrophe. This occurs with Creon in *Antigone* and Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*, to which I will return shortly.

Before specifically analyzing some cases of how fear in tragedy influences the tyrant's action, I wish to consider another aspect related to the topic: the historical background of Athens in the fifth century. We may well ask: how is it that the theatre of the time insists so much on the figure of the tyrant, when there was no actual tyranny during the period? What is being alluded to? It is an established fact that after the end of the Peisistratids until the close of the fifth century there had been no historically documented attempt at tyrannical insurgency in Athens (it was not until 411 that an episode of anti-democratic insurgency occurred with the coup by the Four Hundred). And yet, during the years of the Peloponnesian War above all, the tyrant was a real obsession, a constant presence looming on the political scene: tyranny is continually being spoken of, alluded to, and railed against. The criticism of tyranny and its pernicious effects—a motif of aristocratic thought (Alcaeus, Sappho)—was regenerated in Athens in the form of an anguished concern that one individual might assume absolute power and was accompanied by the widespread fear of loss of freedom and a possible catastrophe for the polis.

To understand this widespread fear of tyranny, one should bear in mind that the democratic polis resulting from the reforms of Cleisthenes founded its identity on the memory of its liberation from the Peisistratids and on the idea of a radical antithesis to tyranny, perceived not as a political option but as something completely negative, totally "other" with respect to the civic space in which the city's normal life was carried on. The Athenians had raised a statue in the agora to honor the two tyrannicides

Harmodious and Aristogeiton, and developed forms of civic cult devoted to them,[11] granting them and their descendants tax exemptions and other benefits.[12] Liberation from the tyrants as the founding act of the democratic polis was a myth created *a posteriori* and was probably untrue historically, but for generations it worked as a factor of collective identity.[13]

Ostracism, according to authoritative ancient sources, was introduced after the expulsion of Hippias (511–510) specifically to prevent one individual from concentrating too much power and influence in his own hands and being tempted to establish personal and despotic rule.[14] It was a pre-emptive instrument and one of the most frequent accusations leading to its implementation was precisely that of seeking to establish a tyranny. The issue is open to debate, but it is likely that in fifth-century Athens, preventive anti-tyranny legislation actually existed: we know that a decree in 455 in the allied city of Erythrae established the death penalty for anyone promoting a tyranny.[15] And as Demosthenes tells us in his oration *Against Timocrates*,[16] the oath taken by the heliasts required them to pledge "never to vote for the instauration of a tyrannical regime or an oligarchy" (καὶ τύραννον οὐ ψηφιοῦμαι εἶναι οὐδ' ὀλιγαρχίαν).

The contraposition between "living in a democracy or under a tyranny" (δημοκρατέεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ τυραννεύεσθαι), which Herodotus anachronistically adapted to the constitutional debate among Persian notables (4, 137, 2), in Athens took the shape of a nightmare so terrifying that Aristophanes was able to lampoon it (see *The Wasps*, 488: ὡς ἅπανθ' ὑμῖν τυραννίς ἐστι καὶ ξυνωμόται; How is everything for you tyranny and conspirators). "Smelling the scent of Hippias" is the stinging phrase used by the comedians to encapsulate and denounce a fear which had turned into a real mass psychosis.[17] Thucydides offers authoritative testimony when he recalls the climate of terror and suspicion unleashed among Athenian inhabitants in the spring of 415 on the eve of the expedition against Syracuse: the scandal of the mutilation of the Herms and profanation of the mysteries sparked a violent reaction as many became convinced that an attempt to restore tyranny was imminent (6, 53).

Before concluding this point, one important observation remains to be made. As different studies have highlighted, the fear of tyrants is not just a cohesive element helping to define and reinforce the collective identity of the Athenian polis; it is also a common ideological denominator binding

the city's different political factions. Fear and rejection of tyranny was not, in fact, the exclusive prerogative of the democrats but could also be used for argumentative and propaganda purposes by exponents of the aristocracy hostile to the democratic regime. Tyranny could be used as a bogey alluding to the possible evolvement of oligarchic regimes (the democrats denounced the tendency of aristocratic groups with oligarchic inclinations to form a minority tyrannical group: hence the expressions "tyranny of the Four Hundred" and "Thirty Tyrants" for the reforms in 411 and 401). However, the same allusions could also be directed at democratic-radical regimes. In fact, the oligarchs perceived the power of the *demos* as a form of tyranny because it undermined ancestral traditions; for this reason, the democratic leaders—Pericles, Cleon, Hyperbolus, Cleophon—were accused of tyranny. This ambivalence allowed the notion of anti-tyranny to serve as a unifying element for the entire political community.[18]

Leaving aside the Athenian collective obsession with tyranny, we will now consider the tyrant's fear motif in the surviving tragic plays. We must limit ourselves to some brief examples, but an overall examination shows that in all cases of tyrannical characters on the tragic stage, the *phobos* motif surfaces with great clarity in both its active and passive meanings.

That the tyrant instills fear in those around him is quite evident and even obvious. But his existential dimension is intrinsically connected to the fear of losing power: hence the tyrant's suspicion and diffidence toward family members and friends alike. We have already seen that the greatly feared Zeus in Aeschylus's *Prometheus* suffers from the fear of conspiracy to the point of being unable to trust even his friends.[19]

Within the tragic imagination, the tyrant's condition is far from being a happy and fortunate one: εὐτυχία (good luck) is not compatible with the *status* of tyrant. It is above all in Euripides that the tyrant's anguish and disquietude is underlined. The *topos* of the tyrant forced to eliminate the best of his subjects for fear that they might plot against him returns in the *Suppliants,* where Theseus includes among the worst tendencies of the tyrant his hatred of the young and his killing of the best among them lest they pose a threat to his power (443-46; Καὶ μὴν ὅπου γε δῆμος εὐθυντὴς χθονὸς / ὑποῦσιν ἀστοῖς ἥδεται νεανίαις·/ ἀνὴρ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐχθρὸν ἡγεῖται τόδε, / καὶ τοὺς ἀρίστους οὕς <τ'> ἂν ἡγῆται φρονεῖν / κτείνει, δεδοικὼς τῆς τυραννίδος πέρι; Where the people hold the power

of the land, they rejoice in having a reserve of youthful citizens, while a king considers the young as enemies and kills the best of them fearing for his power).[20]

A similar situation is found in *Heracles*, when the old Amphitryon scornfully rebukes the usurper tyrant Lycus for his intention to kill Heracles's children for fear of their vengeance (207–9). Lycus's every decision appears to be dictated by his desire to preserve and defend the power he has obtained, and the elimination of the Heraclids is motivated explicitly by fear. In the lost *Peliades*, one of Euripides's earliest plays, tyranny is defined in a line quoted by Stobaeus (4.8.9)[21] as the most miserable state for mortals since it induces the tyrant to despoil his own friends and to kill them, so natural is the tyrant's fear of being the victim of conspiracy.[22]

The *topos* of the tyrant's unhappiness, crushed by his fears, is developed by Plato in the *Republic*, and it also becomes a guiding thread in Xenophon's *Hiero*.[23] In Euripides's dramas, it has a strong gnomic value but does not seem to influence the dramatic action. Conversely, Sophocles makes considerable use of the tyrant's fear in *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*. Both tragedies clearly deal with tyrannical protagonists, but in the beginning, neither Creon in *Antigone* nor Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* appear to be characterized as tyrants, although they do turn into tyrants over the course of the dramatic action. And it is on this "transformation" that the tragedian focuses his attention. In the initial scenes of the two tragedies, Creon and Oedipus speak and act in a manner that is not at all despotic and in no way similar to what the Athenian collective imagination conceived as being characteristic of the tyrant. But at a certain point, as their action encounters obstacles (Antigone's resolute opposition, the threatening prophecies of Tiresias), a bent for tyranny emerges, with all the negative traits on the psychological, ethical, and political planes which the Athenians considered characteristic of the tyrant (ire, impiety, transgression, lack of restraint, rapaciousness, greed, mental inflexibility, incapacity to communicate, and so forth). In both cases, it is fear which triggers the process of transformation of the two characters into tyrants.

Let us take the case of Creon in *Antigone*. At the beginning, he embodies a model of power which cannot easily be identified with tyranny. From the long *rhesis* pronounced by Creon at 162–210, in which he also announces that Polynices will be denied burial (198–206), there emerges an image of

the wise ruler concerned about the public interest, pious and respectful of tradition. Some essential traits clearly define his notions on the government of the polis:

1. First, absolute loyalty to the city, whose government he has taken on legitimately (173ff.) and for which, being its leader (εὐθύνων πόλιν, 178), he has the duty to make the best decisions (178–81) so as to ensure its greatness and its advancement (191; τοιοῖσδ' ἐγὼ νόμοισι τήνδ' αὔξω πόλιν; With such laws I shall enlarge this city);[24]

2. Supremacy of the polis over every other value, starting with loyalty due to friends and relatives (182ff.): a principle close to what Pericles expresses in *Thucydidis Historiae* 2, 60, 2–4, where it is asserted that the prosperity of the polis is much more important than the prosperity of the individual;

3. The requirement that personal relations be cultivated within the polis (see 187–88; οὔτ' ἂν φίλον ποτ' ἄνδρα δυσμενῆ χθονὸς / θείμην ἐμαυτῷ; never would I make a friend of a man who is an enemy of the homeland);

4. The fundamental distinction between patriots and traitors: this is the basis on which Creon determines that Eteocles, "who died fighting for the homeland" (ὅς πόλεως ὑπερμαχῶν / ὄλωλε), will receive burial rites, while Polynices, because of his betrayal in bringing war to his city, will instead be denied burial (192ff.);

5. The exercise of "public office and the laws" (ἀρχαῖς τε καὶ νόμοισιν) are the essential test for understanding and measuring the worth of a person (175–77);

6. Religious feeling as the compass for political action, since it was the gods who had saved the polis in the war against the Seven and had "lifted it up again firmly" (163ff.; ἀσφαλῶς θεοὶ / …ὤρθωσαν πάλιν). Creon's attitude toward the gods is always closely anchored to his political actions, so that he rejects as intolerable the idea expressed by the Chorus in 278ff. that the symbolic burial of Polynices is the work of divine intervention (282ff.).

It is difficult to believe that in this "speech on good government" the audience may have perceived a despotic and tyrannical ruler. Creon's declaration of principles and his arguments must on the contrary appear "totally compatible with the feelings of a good citizen of the polis,"[25] not unlike the positions held in those years by Pericles or other exponents of Athenian democracy. It is true that from the beginning, Creon inspires fear in the other characters: in Ismene, who fears greatly for the fate of her sister (82; οἴμοι, ταλαίνης ὡς ὑπερδέδοικά σου; Alas, how I fear for you, unhappy one), and in the guard who hesitates to tell him about the attempted burial for fear of being punished (223–36 and 249–77). But fear of the law and the authorities was not in itself exclusive to tyranny: on the contrary, they were important elements in the democratic conception of the polis (πειθαρχία, the principle of obedience to the political authorities as a guarantee of public order). There is no doubt that in the first part of the play, a centralizing tendency emerges in the way Creon wields power, along with a notable harshness that we can readily perceive in the resentful and menacing words addressed to the Chorus of Theban Elders in 280ff. when they speculate that the attempted burial of Polynices is a sign of divine will (Παῦσαι, πρὶν ὀργῆς κἀμὲ μεστῶσαι λέγων, / μὴ 'φευρεθῇς ἄνους τε καὶ γέρων ἅμα; Cease, before you fill me with rage with your words; do not show yourselves to be foolish as well as old). But this harshness is not sufficient for us to say that here we have before us a ruler who behaves like a tyrant.[26] At most, a latent tyranny may be perceived, ready to explode at the first opportunity.

Creon's tyrannical aspects emerge gradually over the course of the drama, starting when the guard informs him of the anonymous attempt to bury Polynices (245–47 and 249ff.) and he reacts with a harshness that must have surely seemed excessive to the audience.[27] It is fear, as already noticed, which is the determining factor in this change. On the one hand, the fear he instills in his interlocutors is intensified because of his dictatorial behavior, as Antigone explicitly states, speaking specifically of φόβος generated in the citizens at 504–5 (τούτοις τοῦτο πᾶσιν ἁνδάνειν / λέγοιτ' ἄν, εἰ μὴ γλῶσσαν ἐγκλῄοι φόβος; All would say that they approved my act, if fear had not stopped their tongues) and adding at 509: "These people also see it, but before you they shut their mouths" (ὁρῶσι χοὖτοι· σοὶ δ' ὑπίλλουσι στόμα). On the other hand, Creon begins to manifest his own fear, and his state of mind conditions his actions and words. His fear of

losing power raises his suspicion that an organized opposition group in the city does not want to obey his orders (289–92)[28] and that his guards have allowed themselves to be bribed with money (304–14). Fear gives rise to irascibility (ὀργή) and violence, elements traditionally ascribed to the tyrant in Greek thought. Most significantly, it breeds compulsive suspicion, an obsession with plotting that leads him to think that any action he believes subverts his power is the result of conspiracy or deception.

It is above all after Antigone's capture that Creon's tyrannical face is shown in all its ferocity. The fear of being challenged dominates him, and the ideology of the public good, while always being declared necessary, gives way to a defense of his personal power. The tyrannical traits are intensified, as demonstrated by Creon's suspiciousness, leading him to consider Ismene a participant in the plot (488ff.), and by his proclivity for violence, whose measure is given by the fury with which he wants Antigone to be punished (the savage method of execution is emphatically repeated at several points: 577–79, 655–58, 760ff., 773–80 and 883–91). In the long scene where Creon shows his total lack of communication with the external world, Haemon too speaks of the fear the tyrant's gaze instills among the citizens (690; τὸ γὰρ σὸν ὄμμα δεινὸν ἀνδρὶ δημότῃ; your look rouses fear in the common man). The fear of being identified as culpable triggers impiety—another typical trait of the tyrant—underscored in the scene with Tiresias (988ff.). Clearly, the seer's denouncement of the incompatibility between Creon's power and the regular exercise of the rites of worship is tantamount to challenging the authority of the sovereign. At that point, fear first drives Creon to make offensive accusations against the prophet, starting with the imputation of having joined in the plot against him, and then causes him to feel utterly bewildered, the prelude to his moral collapse and surrender, even while the decision to free Antigone (1111ff.) and acknowledgement of the divine laws (1113ff.) are revealed to be belated and futile. The catastrophe thus becomes inevitable.

A similar pattern may be found in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, albeit with some differences. In Creon's case, the democratic ruler and the tyrant appear at certain points to co-exist, whereas the involutional process is more markedly evident in Oedipus. In the prologue and in the first episode, at least until the scene with Tiresias (297ff.), there is nothing of the tyrant in Oedipus: on the contrary, he appears as the wise ruler who has a direct relationship with the citizens whom he addresses in a fatherly way calling

them "children" (1, 6; τέκνα; 58, 142; παῖδες).[29] He does not wish to use mediators when it comes to hearing the voice of the citizens (6ff.); in the same way, he desires that the Delphic response reported by Creon should not remain restricted to the sovereign and his circle, and he wants it to be disseminated publicly throughout the city (91–94). The esteem he enjoys among the citizens is enormous: they acclaim him as "the first among men" (33; ἀνδρῶν δέ πρῶτον) and "the best among mortals" (46; βροτῶν ἄριστ[ε]). They are grateful to him for having liberated Thebes from the Sphinx (35ff.), "uplifting their lives" (39); they recognize his extraordinary intelligence and therefore see him as the only man capable of putting an end to the pestilence plaguing the city (40-43, 51). The power exercised by Oedipus over the city—granted to him by the polis after his triumph over the Sphinx—is legitimate (383ff.), and there is no trace of abuse. The terms used in the initial part of *Oedipus Rex* to refer to his rule are all neutral, without the least negative connotation (14; κρατύνων…χώρας; 54; ἄρξεις; 54; κρατεῖς). Oedipus's bond with Thebes is one of total dedication bordering on identification as shown by the fact that he personally takes on the collective suffering of the people. In fact, he suffers more than all the other citizens for the epidemic that has struck the polis (59–61) and is extremely diligent in his attempt to "save the city" (72; τήνδε ῥυσαίμην πόλιν). When he is told the response of the Delphic oracle (the need to get rid of contamination by banishing Laius's killer), he does not hesitate for an instant to start the search, and he himself personally takes the lead in investigating the death of the previous king (108–46). "But I myself will bring this all to light from the beginning," he declares at 132, making it clear that he is ready to "do everything possible" (145; ὡς πᾶν ἐμοῦ δράσοντος) to save Thebes. Being a good ruler, Oedipus is ready to put his words into effect—that is, to transform the oracle's instructions into a political proclamation, which he himself announces "as one citizen among citizens" (222; ἀστός εἰς ἀστοὺς). The proclamation establishes that the person discovered to be guilty of the crime will be barred from physical and verbal contact with the citizens and excluded from the rites of worship, the measures being expressed in 224ff. according to traditional methods and formulae. Oedipus's interdiction contains no inequity and no aggressiveness: the invitation to informers to come forward (224–26),

the promise of no punishment aside from banishment for a spontaneous confession (227–29), the reward for useful information (230–32), and the curses against the guilty one (246–48) and against those who refuse to collaborate (269–72) are all traditional institutional tools, which can in no way be seen as indicators of arrogance or irascibility. A further positive element defining Oedipus's exercise of his power is religious feeling: there is no trace of impiety in this initial phase of the drama; Oedipus has diligently taken steps to ask for divine help, first by sending Creon to Delphi to consult the oracle (69–72) and then by summoning the seer Tiresias (287–89), even before the Chorus suggest doing so. He shows his readiness to obey the will of Apollo and on more than one occasion utters words of deference toward the divinity (80ff., 146 and 280ff.).

Nevertheless, starting with the consultation of Tiresias, as the investigation proceeds and the truth begins to come out, the characteristic signs of the tyrant begin to surface. And here too, *phobos*, put into play with great dramatic skill, reveals itself to be decisive. The initial reticence of the *mantis*, followed by the enigmatic words whose meaning he cannot decipher, stir Oedipus to the depths of his soul, bringing out all the doubt, anguish, and fear that he had kept hidden.[30] It is fear that drives him to angrily mistreat the seer and fuels suspicion of a dynastic conspiracy against him (380–89; 399ff.). Oedipus becomes a victim of the plot syndrome and is convinced that his brother-in-law Creon wants to supplant him, as he openly accuses him of doing in the following scene (532–37). The sovereign feels threatened in his role and reacts impulsively and hastily, until he takes on an attitude of evident impiety (mistreatment of Tiresias, contempt for the oracular prophecies), turning into an arrogant, unjust, irascible, and authoritarian despot. Slowly, he assumes all the psychological connotations and behaviors considered typical of the tyrant, so that, to paraphrase the famous verse of the second stasimon (873), we may say that in this case *phobos*—rather than *hybris*—is the element that φυτεύει τύραννον (generates the tyrant).[31]

From this point onward, the ruler of Thebes moves on the cusp between fear and knowledge: he feels, on the one hand, an extraordinary desire to investigate and understand reality, and on the other, fearful anguish about a future that he seeks in vain to avoid. It is true that "ruling

among fears" (585; ἄρχειν…ξύν φόβοισι) is the natural condition of the person who occupies the pinnacle of power, as Creon explains in his attempt to defend himself from the accusation of plotting for the crown of the polis. But Oedipus is crushed by the inexorable accretion of his fears. During the dialogue with Jocasta, the fear of a conspiracy against him is replaced by a new, even more devastating terror: the fear that the oracle received from Apollo at Delphi may be fulfilled and that he is therefore the murderer of Laius. This new anxiety bursts forth with Jocasta's account of the oracle received by Laius and the abandonment of the newborn child, and immediately becomes an uncontrollable obsession.[32] In the second part of the tragedy, expressions pointing to the semantic field of fear proliferate from the mouth of Oedipus or, in any case, referring to him. The ruler tells how in the past he had stayed away from Corinth for fear that the prophecy be fulfilled, and even when he receives the news of Polybus's death from a messenger, he says that he is wary of returning to Corinth for fear of carnal union with the woman he considers to be his mother (Merope): "I was misled by fear" (976; ἐγὼ δὲ τῷ φόβῳ παρηγόμην); "How could I not fear my mother's bed?" (974; καί πῶς τὸ μητρὸς οὐκ ὀκνεῖν λέχος με δεῖ;); "This, exactly this, is my perpetual terror" (1013; τοῦτ᾽ αὐτό,…τοῦτό μ᾽ εἰσαεί φοβεῖ).

But Oedipus's fear of the oracle is notoriously deceptive, for the prophecy has in effect already been fulfilled. When in the fourth episode the definitive revelation of the deed occurs and Oedipus fully apprehends his fate, his *phobos* suddenly dissolves. The effect of fear, as Aristotle teaches us, is given from the expectation of evil (προσδοκία κακοῦ),[33] but once the wait is over, fear disappears. At that point, Oedipus realizes that his fear of the future was unfounded because what he feared had in actual fact already happened. This *anagnorisis* (recognition) has a liberating effect: the fear manifested by Oedipus and the fear he instills become one and, so to say, reciprocally cancel each other out. Fear had turned Oedipus into a tyrannical ruler: the end of fear sanctions the annihilation of his power.

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Notes

[1] Jacob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin: Spemann, 1898), 1:178. If not otherwise stated, all translations of ancient and modern quotations are mine.

[2] On the semantic development of the term *tyrannos* from the Archaic era, when it was essentially a synonym of *basileus,* to fifth-century Athens, when it tended to take on the negative meaning of illegitimate autocrat, see the exhaustive overview by Victor Parker, "Τύραννος. The Semantics of a Political Concept from Archilochus to Aristotle," *Hermes* 126 (1998): 145–72.

[3] It is Orestes who defines Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as a "the double tyranny" (*Choeph.* 973; τῆν διπλῆν τυραννίδα) after he has the couple executed. All quotations from Aeschylus's plays are taken from Aeschylus, *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoediae*, ed. Denys Page (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). On the construction in the *Oresteia* of an image of the tyrant joining the male and female dimensions, see Julián Gallego, "Figuras de la tiranía, lo femenino y lo masculino en la *Orestía* de Esquilo," *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua* 18 (2000): 64–90. Xerxes in the *Persians* (472) also embodies a model of despotic royalty not required to account for its actions to the political community: "not subject to public accountability" (213; οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει). This reference concerns oriental despotism rather than native Greek tyranny, although the two models often tend to overlap.

[4] Regarding Zeus's obstinacy and inflexibility, see also 34: "Διὸς γὰρ δυσπαραίτητοι φρένες" (the mind of Zeus in fact is inexorable); 184–85: "ἀκίχητα γὰρ ἤθεα καὶ κέαρ / ἀπαράμυθον ἔχει Κρόνου παῖς" (the son of Cronus has an inexorable character and an unyielding heart); 333: "Πάντως γὰρ οὐ πείσεις νιν· οὐ γὰρ εὐπιθής" (In truth you will not persuade him at all: he is not one who lets himself be persuaded easily).

[5] "ἔνεστι γάρ πως τοῦτο τῇ τυραννίδι / νόσημα, τοῖς φίλοισι μὴ πεποιθέναι." On the analogies between the Zeus of this tragedy and the tyrant of the historical and literary tradition see Giovanni Cerri, *Il linguaggio politico nel "Prometeo" di Eschilo: Saggio di semantica* (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1975), 15–25; Vincenzo Di Benedetto, *L'ideologia del potere e la tragedia greca: Ricerche su Eschilo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), 50–63; Suzanne Saïd, *Sophiste et tyran, ou le problème du "Prométhée enchaîné"* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1985), 284–323; Martin L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1990), 62–64; Christian Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 108–12; Anthony J. Podlecki, trans. and ed., *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound* (Oxford: Aris and Phillips, 2005), 34–27.

[6] In *Suppliants* 384, the herald mentions the "reverend tyrant" (σεμνῷ τυράννῳ) of Thebes, that is, Creon.

[7] The most exhaustive study on the subject remains Diego Lanza, *Il tiranno e il suo pubblico* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977). See also Giovanni Giorgini, *La città e il tiranno*: *Il concetto di tirannide nella Grecia del VII–IV secolo a. C.* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1993) and Richard Seaford, "Tragic Tyranny," in *Popular Tyranny: Sovereignty and its Discontents in Ancient Greece*, ed. Kathryn Morgan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003): 95–115.

[8] "Tyanny is the screen on which to project what is, or what one wishes were extraneous; but it is also the highest form of individualistic aspiration, that which is endowed with an attractive power and lurks in ambush in a corner of the personality and the social body." Carmine Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe. Per un'archeologia del potere nella Grecia antica* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1996), 3.

[9] The *eleos/phobos* (fear/pity) pairing already appears in Gorgias, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz (1903; repr., Berlin: Weidmann, 1985), frag. 2 B 11.9.

[10] In the *Poetics*, Aristotle classifies the different degrees of the terrifying and the pitiable in tragedy according to plot type, qualities of the protagonist, and the relation between knowing and acting. See Aristotle, *De arte poetica liber*, ed. Rudolf Kassel, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1452b30–1453a12, 1453b14–1454a9. In Aristotle's view, moreover, it is preferable for the effect of fear to be produced by the "composition of events" (1453b1–7; σύστασις τῶν πραγμάτων) rather than by artificially spectacular elements. In the reflection on rhetoric, fear was from the beginning of time one of the *pathe* ("emotions, passions") which the word can arouse so as to influence the opinion of the audience and its judgment. See Aristotle, *Ars rhetorica*, ed. William David Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 1382a–1383a. See also Dafne Maggiorini, "Funzioni retoriche della paura," in *Peurs antiques*, ed. Sandrine Coin-Longeray and Daniel Vallat (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2015): 129–34.

[11] Aristotle, *Athen. pol.*: *Aristotelis Atheniensium Respublica*, ed. Frederic George Kenyon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 58, 1; Plato, *Symp.*, *Platonis Opera*, vol. 2, ed. Ioannes Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 182c; Pausanias, *Pausanias: Graeciae Descriptio*, ed. Maria Helena Rocha-Pereira (Leipzig: Teubner, 1989), 1.29.15.

[12] *IG* I^3.131. *Inscriptiones Graecae*, ed. David Lewis, vol. 1, *Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994), and Demosthenes, *Demosthenis Orationes*, ed. Mervin R. Dilts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002–2009), 19.280; 20.127–28. Thucydides's account of Harmodious and Aristogeiton's assassination of Hipparchus, *Thucydidis Historiae*, ed. Henry Stuart Jones and Johannes Enoch Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 1.20.2; 6.54–59, aimed at redefining its importance and ascribing it to private rather than political reasons, testifies that there were different traditions regarding the event and that the Athenian tyrannicide was utilized by different political factions to gain approval among the citizenry. Herodotus (6.123) credited the Alcmaeonids with the fall of the Peisistratids rather than Harmodious and Aristogeiton; Cleon's propaganda encouraged his own identification with the city's liberators. All quotations from Herodotus are taken from Herodotus, *Herodoti Historiae*, ed. Nigel G. Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). See on this point Michael W. Taylor, *The Tyrant Slayers: The Heroic Image in Fifth Century B.C. Athenian Art and Politics* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer, 1991), 77ff. On the cult of the tyrannicides and its political implications, see Anthony J. Podlecki, "The Political Significance of the Athenian 'Tyrannicides' Cult," *Historia* 15 (1966): 129–41; and Charles W. Fornara, "The Cult of Harmodius and Aristogeiton," *Philologus* 114 (1970): 155–80. On the features and limitations of privileges granted to the descendants of the tyrannicides, see Ida Calabi Limentani, "Armodio e Aristogitone. Gli uccisi dal tiranno," *Acme* 29 (1976): 9–27. On the myth—created after the fact—of the liberation of Athens from the tyrants, see the reconstruction offered by Brian M. Lavelle, *The Sorrow and the Pity: A Prolegomenon to a History of Athens under the Peisistratids, c. 560–510 B.C.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993).

[13] See Herodotus, *Herodoti Historiae,* 5.66.1: "Athens, already great, once liberated from the tyrants became greater still" (Ἀθῆναι, ἐοῦσαι καὶ πρὶν μεγάλαι, τότε ἀπαλλαχθεῖσαι τυράννων ἐγένοντο μέζονες).

[14] Arist. *Ath. pol.* 22.3; Androtion, in *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. Felix Jacoby (Berlin: Weidmann; Leiden: Brill, 1923–1958), 324 F 6; Philochorus, in *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 328 frag. 30; Diodori, *Diodori Bibliotheca historica*, ed. Friedrich Vogel, Curt Theodor Fischer, Immanuel Bekker, and Ludwig August Dindorf (Leipzig: Teubner, 1888–1906), 11.55.1–3. On the problems connected with the introduction of ostracism (dating, functioning, purpose, and so forth), see Jérôme Carcopino, *L'ostracisme athénien* (Paris: Alcan, 1935) and Rudi Thomsen, *The Origin of Ostracism: A Synthesis* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972).

[15] *IG* I^3.14. The legislation against tyranny in Athens goes back to the times of Draco and perhaps even earlier: see Martin Ostwald, "The Athenian Legislation against Tyranny and Subversion," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 86 (1955): 103–28, and Michael Gagarin, "Thesmothetai and Athenian Tyranny Law," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 111 (1981): 71–77.

[16] Dem., *Or.* 24.149.

[17] Cf. Ar. *Lys*. 619: "Above all I smell Hippias's tyranny" (καὶ μάλιστ' ὀσφραίνομαι τῆς Ἱππίου τυραννίδος). All quotations from Aristophanes's plays are taken from *Aristophanis Fabulae*, ed. Nigel G. Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[18] On the fear of tyranny common to all social classes and political parties in Athens, thus acting as an ideological glue, see Lanza, *Il tiranno*, 62–64; Bruno Gentili, "Polemica antitirannica (Pind. *Pyth.* 11; Aesch. *Prom*.; Herodt. 3, 80–81; Thuc. 2, 65, 9)," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 30 (1979): 153–56; Giovanni Cerri, "Antigone, Creonte e l'idea di tirannide nell'Atene del V secolo (Alcune tesi di V. Di Benedetto)," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 39 (1982): 137–55; Vincent J. Rosivach, "The Tyrant in Athenian Democracy," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 59 (1988): 43–57; Giovanni Cerri, "Inverosimile e verosimile nella tragedia: L'*Edipo re* di Sofocle e la tirannide," in *La storia sulla scena*: *Quello che gli storici antichi non hanno raccontato*, ed. Anna Beltrametti (Roma: Carocci, 2011): 171–85.

[19] Aeschylus, *Prometheus*, 224–25: "ἔνεστι γάρ πως τοῦτο τῇ τυραννίδι / νόσημα, τοῖς φίλοισι μὴ πεποιθέναι" (It is a disease that is somehow inherent in tyranny to have no faith in friends).

[20] All quotations from Euripides's plays are taken from *Euripidis Fabulae*, ed. James Diggle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–1994). The idea is documented in Herodotus as well in the section dedicated to Periander, tyrant of Corinth (Herodotus, *Herodoti Historiae,* 5.92): Periander asked Thrasybulus, tyrant of Miletus, for advice on how to make his power more stable, and the latter suggested—using the metaphor of cutting the tallest ears of wheat—that the citizens who enjoyed the greatest prestige should be eliminated. See also Aristotle, *Politica*, ed. William David Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 1284a26–33, where the roles are reversed and it is Periander who advises Thrasybulus.

[21] Richard Kannicht, ed., *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. vol. 5. *Euripides* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), fr. 605.

[22] "τὸ δ' ἔσχατον δὴ τοῦτο θαυμαστὸν βροτοῖς, / τυραννίς—οὐχ εὕροις ἂν ἀθλιώτερον· / φίλους τε πορθεῖν καὶ κατακτανεῖν χρεών, / πλεῖστος φόβος πρόσεστι / ἡ δράσωσί τι." (As for this highest state that men so admire, tyranny—you could find no sadder one. The tyrant must ruin his friends and put them to death; he lives in very great fear that they will do him harm.) Translation quoted from *Euripides, Fragments*, ed. and trans. by Christopher Collard and Martin Cropp (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 69. See also the ending of *Hippolytus*, where the protagonist addresses his father Theseus with a spirited peroration of his beliefs (983–1035), saying that he prefers a life of devotion to the gods and based on friendship instead of tyranny, considering the great number of dangers lurking in it. A similar idea is also found in *Ion* (621–28): the struggle to become a tyrant is a sad thing, since the fate of the tyrant is to live in terror and suspicion. It is better therefore to live the life of a simple and honest citizen rather than a tyrant constantly plagued by fear. See on this Jacqueline De Romilly, "Il pensiero di Euripide sulla tirannia," *Dioniso* 43 (1969): 175–87.

[23] In Plato, the tyrant, on the one hand, instills fear in the citizens so that in no polis do the people complain and weep as in the one governed by a tyrant (*Resp.* 578d–579b). On the other hand, the tyrant finds himself facing fears that as a private citizen he did not know: he cannot travel because he is at risk of attempts on his life, and he is forced to shut himself up at home. The tyrant is thus doomed to be "full of terror for his entire life" (579e; φόβου γέμων διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου), to the point of having to eliminate the best citizens for fear that they will conspire against him (576 b–c), and thus he becomes "the unhappiest" (ἀθλιώτατος) of men. See Olof Gigon, "Die Unseligkeit des Tyrannen in Platons *Staat* (577c–588a)," *Museum Helveticum* 45 (1988): 129–53 (140–41). In Xenophon's view as well, the tyrant is more to be pitied than envied. *Hiero* contains an imaginary dialogue between the tyrant of Syracuse, Hiero, and the poet Simonides in which the absolute existential misery of the tyrant is shown. His life is a ceaseless war against everyone and there is never a truce between him and his subjects. Not even in his own home can he feel secure

for fear of being poisoned or assassinated. The feeling of fear dominates the soul of the tyrant, irremediably affecting his social relationships: he cannot have ties of friendship or love because such feelings would be conditioned by the other person's fear of him. On the other hand, he himself feels fear because he suspects that his fellow citizens and even his closest relations might be plotting against him. This leads to a situation of absolute unhappiness and great existential instability. On the characteristics of the tyrant's fear in *Hiero*, see Ennio Biondi, "La peur du tyran dans le *Hiéron* de Xénophon: un cas de psychanalyse qui ne dit pas son nom," in *Peurs antiques*, 163–72. On the gnomic *topos* of unhappiness as an existential trait typical of the tyrant in Euripides up to Menander, see Pola Ingrosso, "L'infelicità del tiranno. Declinazioni di un *topos* da Euripide a Menandro," *Lexis* 30 (2012): 379–95. The anecdote about Damocles's sword at the court of Dionysis I of Syracuse (Cicero mentions it in *Tusculanae* 5.61–62, Max Pohlenz, ed., *Tusculanae disputationes* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1918], but it was widespread in antiquity and already known to Timaeus of Tauromenium) perfectly illustrates the vulnerable existential condition of the tyrant, forced to live in constant fear of being attacked.

[24] All quotations from Sophocles's plays are taken from *Sophoclis Fabulae*, ed. Alfred Chilton Pearson (1924; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

[25.]Vittorio Citti, "Strutture e tensioni sociali nell'*Antigone* di Sofocle," *Atti dell'Istituto veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, Classe di scienze morali, lettere ed arti 134 (1975–76): 477–501 (490).

[26] Nor can the announcement (κήρυγμα) of the prohibition to bury Polynices, which appears in the foreground right from the initial dialogue between Ismene and Antigone, and which Creon repeats in the first person at 192–206, be interpreted as a sign of tyrannical behavior. Even though in Herodotus's typology a characteristic trait of the tyrant is "subverting the customs and traditions handed down by the forefathers" (Hdt. 3.80.5), Creon's decision to leave the traitors without burial is perfectly compatible with the customs and laws of the democratic polis.

[27] See Gherardo Ugolini, *Sofocle e Atene: Vita politica e attività teatrale nella Grecia classica* (Roma: Carocci, 2000): 126–29.

[28] See what Creon says at 289–92: "There are some men in this city who have long not endured it and growled against me and secretly shake their heads. They do not duly bow their necks to the yoke to please me." (ἀλλὰ ταῦτα καὶ πάλαι πόλεως / ἄνδρες μόλις φέροντες ἐρρόθουν ἐμοὶ / κρυφῇ, κάρα σείοντες, οὐδ' ὑπὸ ζυγῷ / λόφον δικαίως εἶχον, ὡς στέργειν ἐμέ.)

[29] The fact that Oedipus does not display the typical traits of the *tyrannos* has been underlined by many scholars—for example, Bernard M.W. Knox, "Why is Oedipus Called Tyrannos?," *Classical Journal 50 (1954):* 97–108; and Giuseppe Serra, "Edipo il tiranno," in *Edipo: Il teatro greco e la cultura europea*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale, ed. Bruno Gentili and Roberto Pretagostini (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1986), 275–88—but it is necessary to identify the dramatic dynamics which in the course of the action lead the character to assume the autocratic and self-referential traits he did not have in the beginning. On the type of tyranny incarnated by the figure of Oedipus in Sophocles's drama, with reference to different ideological models (Panhellenic and Athenian), see Lowell Edmunds, "Oedipus as Tyrant in Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus," *Syllecta Classica* 13 (2002): 63–103.

[30] See Martin Vöhler, "Die Verunsicherung des tragischen Helden: Zum Oedipus Rex von Sophokles," in *Irritationen—Rhetorische und poetische Verfahren der Verunsicherung*, ed. Ramona Früh, Therese Fuhrer, Marcel Humar, and Martin Vöhler (Berlin-München-Boston: De Gruyter 2015), 277–96, who interprets the dramatic action of *Oedipus Rex* as a process of increasing "Verunsicherung" (uncertainty, self-doubt, hesitation) with emotional and cognitive consequences that impact the protagonist in his investigation to find out the truth about Laius's murder and his own identity.

[31] On the gradual transformation of Oedipus's rule into a despotic and "tyrannical" form, see Ugolini, *Sofocle e Atene*, 129–36 and Cerri, "Inverosimile e verosimile," 181–84. See also Lanza, *Il tiranno*, 144: "It is fear that triggers the process of rapid transformation, it is fear that provokes anger, the vehicle of every other degeneration."

[32] On the various types of fear suffered by the characters (Chorus, Tiresias, Jocasta, and above all Oedipus) in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, see Diego Lanza, "La paura di Edipo," *Aut Aut* 184–85 (1981): 25–34.

[33] "It is clear that we fear fearful things, and these are, to put it plainly, evil things. Therefore people define fear as expectation of evil." (φοβούμεθα δὲ δῆλον ὅτι τὰ φοβερά, ταῦτα δ' ἐστὶν ὡς ἁπλῶς εἰπεῖν κακά· διὸ καὶ τὸν φόβον ὁρίζονται προσδοκίαν κακοῦ.) Quoted from Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 1115a7–9.