

Translating a *paradeigma* in Sophocles: *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1193

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I am at present preparing a translation of the tragedies of Sophocles for publication in the Oxford World's Classics series – thanks to the time liberated by reaching retirement! In attempting the lyric passages I have tried to follow the sentiment of Joseph Brodsky, who, reviewing versions of Mandelstam, wrote in the *New York Review of Books* for 7 Feb, 1974: 'Translation is a search for an equivalent, not for a substitute ... A translator should begin his work with a search for at least a metrical equivalent of the original form.' The verse-forms that I have used, even employing rhyme, are (of course) specific to English, and might well not be at all suitable for other languages. I hope that, nonetheless, they may be of some interest.

The word *paradeigma* is used of Oedipus by the chorus in *Oedipus the King*, at line 1193. So a draft of the choral ode, lines 1186–1223, which is surely one of the greatest in Sophocles, seems an appropriate offering for Øivind Andersen. Here it is, with no further prevarication:

Human generations,
in my calculations
your whole life-sum, worked out,
comes to nothing, naught.
Who can add up, after all,
happiness in total
reaching more than seeming,
and decline from seeming?
With your fate before me,
paradigm before me,
yours, Oedipus, I boast
nothing human blest.

Your arrow-shot, so certain,
won you happy fortune;
you brought down the maiden
of the clutching talon;
stopped her riddling power,
shielding as a tower
death-blows from my country.
So we called you mighty
king, and heaped upon you
all the highest honours,

and you ruled as lord
of this great Theban land.

Now, though, what a different story!
Who is housed with wilder grief,
who sunk in deeper misery,
with this changing of your life?
All-too-famous Oedipus,
you have made the voyage twice
into one engrossing harbour:
as a child you grew there,
then you plunged in as a husband,
coming back as groom there.
How could they, your father's furrows,
mauled in marriage by your plough,
how endure so long in sorrow,
never crying out aloud?

Time all-seeing has uncovered,
and, despite you, lit on you,
showing that the selfsame mother
bore you and your children too,
wretched son of Laios.
Oedipus incestuous;
judged your union no union.
How I wish I'd never met you –
never set my eyes upon
you, as I now lament you,
from my mouth keen sorrow pouring.
I tell you the bitter truth:
you gave back my breath, restoring,
and you've closed my eyes in death.