

MACIEJ GRELKA

Instytut Filologii Klasycznej Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza
ul. Fredry 10, 61-701 Poznań
Polska – Poland

ON THE QUESTION OF KNOWLEDGE AND BLINDNESS IN SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*

ABSTRACT. Grelka Maciej, On the question of knowledge and blindness in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

The article presents comments on the question of knowledge and blindness in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The author suggests that part of the lexical data may support the hypothesis of Parmenidean inspiration of the tragedy. He claims that it is reasonable when Oedipus charges Teiresias and Creon of conspiracy. He also suggests that Oedipus' loss of eyes on one hand and the king's other experiences on the other move him away from the category of human beings to the borderland between the worlds of the mortals, the dead and the world of divinity. The author of the article also claims that among various interpretations of the tragedy, the knowledge-oriented one seems to find the most support in lexical data.

Keywords: Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus, knowledge, visual perception, blindness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Oedipus Tyrannus, the most famous work of Sophocles, is at the same time one of the most thoroughly studied Greek tragedies. The problem of knowledge and ignorance, seeing and blindness was analysed comparatively broadly and precisely in this context. This article is an attempt at giving some additional observations and remarks on these well-studied questions.

2. PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

Already in archaic literature we find emphasised distinction between gods and human beings as far as the quality of the knowledge possessed is concerned – there are some examples for instance in Homer and other early poetry.¹ Then,

¹W. Allan, *Tragedy and the Early Greek Philosophical Tradition*, [in:] J. Gregory (ed.), *a Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 2005, p. 77.

we can learn from the Presocratics that there is a fundamental difference between two kinds of knowledge: *the divine knowledge* (that is in fact the only true one) and *the human knowledge*. The crucial distinction can be found in the philosophy of Parmenides, who is considered by many scholars as the inspiration for the Sophocles: namely, Parmenides distinguishes between *the perception* and *the reasoning*. This distinction is based on the assumption that our senses may be deceived by the things perceived/experienced,² whereas *the reason* grasps the very essence of reality. Such a point of view was, as W. Allan claims, something new and revolutionary for the Greeks.³

After Teiresias and Oedipus meet we can see in practice how insignificant the sensory perception is in terms of knowledge acquisition: blind Teiresias possesses the real knowledge, while Oedipus is deluded not even by the gods, but by his own senses. The consequence of such a situation is the fact that Oedipus does not even know who he actually is, which is generally the most basic information every human usually possesses. For Parmenides *the divine knowledge*, thus *the real knowledge*, was the only one that has any significance and at the same time the only one that is relevant in terms of wisdom, reasoning and existence. If we assume that there was any Parmenidean inspiration in Sophocles' works, then this radical tone can be found in every part of the tragedy.

As an argument for the Parmenidean inspiration some scholars point out that there are some parallels between Parmenides' philosophy and Sophocles' tragedy. Namely, Parmenides depicts our world as the universe where the mortals are immersed in some kind of space that is created out of sensory stimuli. These mortals are εἰδότες οὐδέεν. Whereas Oedipus, while speaking against Teiresias, depicts himself as the one who solved the riddle of Sphinx despite being μηδὲν εἰδώς⁴ (396–397):

[...] ἀλλ' ἐγὼ μολών,
ὁ μηδὲν εἰδώς Οἰδίπους ἔπαιυσά νιν.

Admittedly one could say that this is such a widespread or even conventional phrase that it would be unreasonable to look for analogies here, but even if there are no truly parallel expressions we could still try to search through the text for some examples of this particular participle. Thus besides μηδὲν εἰδώς of Oedi-

² Which of these terms we choose depends on the assumed concept of functioning of the senses. Some of them can be found for example in: F. Frontisi-Ducroux, *Oko, wzrok, spojrzenie – kilka greckich wyobrażeń*, transl. W. Michera, [in:] W. Lengauer, L. Trzcionkowski (eds), *Antropologia antyku greckiego. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, Warszawa 2011.

³ W. Allan, op. cit., pp. 77–78.

⁴ M.W. Champlin, *Oedipus Tyrannus and the Problem of Knowledge*, "The Classical Journal" vol. 64, n. 8, 5, 1969, p. 344.

pus, we can find οὐδέν εἰδῶς concerning the servant who run away from the place, where Laios was killed (118–119):

θνήσκουσι γάρ, πλὴν εἷς τις, ὃς φόβῳ, φυγῶν
ὦν εἶδε πλὴν ἔν οὐδέν εἶχ' εἰδῶς φράσαι,

then the messenger's οὐκ εἰδῶς on Oedipus

ὦ παῖ, καλῶς εἰ δηλὸς οὐκ εἰδῶς τί δράεις (1008),

and finally servant's εἰδῶς οὐδέν describing the messenger:

λέγει γὰρ εἰδῶς οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἄλλως πονεῖ (1151).

And on the other hand we have Teiresias describing himself as εἰδῶς (317–318):

[...] ταῦτα γὰρ καλῶς ἐγώ
εἰδῶς διώλεσ'· οὐ γὰρ ἄν δεῦρ' ἰκόμην,

and gods who are εἰδότες in the words of the choir:

ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν οὖν Ζεὺς ὅ τ' ἀπόλλων ξυνετοὶ καὶ τὰ βροτῶν εἰδότες (499).

Parmenidean or not, this regularity in connotations seems at least interesting, as regards above-mentioned questions.

3. TEXTUAL REMARKS

R. Chodkowski distinguishes two main ways of interpreting *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as far as the main theme of the tragedy is concerned.⁵ The first one could be marked “the tragedy about infallibility (S. Srebrny) or power (C. M. Bowra) of divinity”.⁶ The second one could be labelled “the tragedy of arriving at the truth” (B. Knox, S. Said, M. Maślanka-Soro). We are less inclined to accept the first interpretation and in the subsequent parts we will adduce some arguments supporting the second one, but we will also offer some general remarks on the question of human and divine knowledge and its acquisition in Sophocles' tragedy.

⁵Sofokles, *Król Edyp*, transl., intr. and comment. R. Chodkowski, Lublin 2009, pp. 64–65.

⁶In the broader sense, which means that this idea contains both all the divine beings and the Oracle.

3.1. HUMAN KNOWLEDGE. OEDIPUS HIMSELF

The sources of the human knowledge acquisition are indicated neither by Oedipus himself nor by the context (his ignorance):⁷

φήμην ἀκούσας εἶτ' ἀπ' ἀνδρὸς οἴσθ' αὐτοῦ (43).

When the priest is uttering these words he deprives them of any markedness that they would undoubtedly have if Oedipus spoke them. Oedipus relies on the knowledge acquired by means of visual perception and this knowledge provides him the illusion of control over the situation, but at the same time he actually has no reliable information about his own life. It is even more paradoxical in the face of the fact that he accuses other people of ignorance.⁸ The allegation can be brought because the one who brings it possesses all the sensory faculties (especially the visual ones) – Oedipus is deeply convinced of the superiority of the knowledge acquired by means of visual perception.

Moreover, we can say that Laius was killed by Oedipus not because he did not know who he see and in what circumstances they actually are, but because he insisted on acting as if he did know, as R. L. Kane points out.⁹ Thus, metaphorical blindness is much worse than true blindness, and analogically, the scholar continues, “intelligence exercised in a perceptual vacuum can be worse than mere ignorance”.¹⁰ Actually, the essence of the tragedy is in the fact that human knowledge “cannot compensate for the gaps in man’s flawed perspective”.¹¹

And from this point of view we think that when C. M. Bowra says that irritated Oedipus is “incapable of a truly balanced or rational judgement”,¹² he is wrong because the problem is not in judgement itself, but in the knowledge on which the reasoning is based. Namely, the knowledge of Oedipus is insufficient to judge the situation right, but at the same time is sufficient to bring allegations of conspiracy (regardless of their veracity).¹³

Certain ironic phrases of Oedipus seem to be particularly significant as regards the question of perception and knowledge: the one where he claims that he knows Laius because he has heard about him, but he has not seen him himself.¹⁴

⁷ Cf. Similar thought in M.W. Champlin, op. cit., pp. 337–338.

⁸ W. Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Princeton 1968, p. 117.

⁹ R.L. Kane, *Prophecy and Perception in the Oedipus Rex*, “Transactions of the American Philological Association”, vol. 105, 1975, p. 190.

¹⁰ R.L. Kane, op. cit., p. 208.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² C.M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy*, Oxford 1944, p. 193.

¹³ The same when A. Waldock says that Oedipus is precipitate – we suppose that taking Oedipus’ knowledge into consideration such conjectures were reasonable, even if eventually not true – A.J.A. Waldock, *Sophocles. The Dramatist*, Cambridge 1951, p. 144.

¹⁴ There are some places in the text that, according to F. Ahl, could show that Oedipus knows about Laius more the he actually said he know (for example vv. 265–268):

ἔξοιδ' ἀκούων· οὐ γὰρ εἰσεῖδόν γέ πω (105),

or later, where he said that he has heard about the murder, but noone has seen the men who has seen it:

ἤκουσα κάγώ. τὸν δ' ἰδόντ' οὐδεὶς ὄραϊ (293).¹⁵

Another clue that we should understand Oedipus' ignorance in terms of blindness we can find in the very conclusion of the tragedy, where the choir says that “noone can be seen happy” (1528–1530, the key word here, and in the whole tragedy, as we will show later, is *ιδεῖν*):

ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίην ἰδεῖν
ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν' ὀλίβιζειν, πρὶν ἂν
τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεινὸν παθῶν.

Unfortunately, such a significant sentence (at least as far as the lexis and the place in the whole tragedy is concerned) is often more or less deprived of this “visual” connotation after having been translated, like, for example in these two interpretations, the older one by David Greene:¹⁶

Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy till
he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain.

and the newer one by David Mulroy:¹⁷

Thus we learn how necessary seeing the final day is for judging mortals blest.
Hapiness means ending life without being crushed by pain.

A valuable remark of C. M. Bowra, that from the legal perspective Oedipus would be regarded as innocent because he acted in ignorance,¹⁸ seems to support

ὑπερμαχοῦμαι, κάπῃ πάντ' ἀφίξομαι,
ζητῶν τὸν αὐτόχειρα τοῦ φόνου λαβεῖν,
τῷ Λαβδακείῳ παιδί Πολυδώρου τε καὶ
τοῦ πρόσθε Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαϊ τ' Ἀγήνορος.

but we did not know from where this knowledge has come, F. Ahl, *Oedipus and Tiresias*, [in:] H. Bloom (ed.), *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Oedipus Rex*, New York 2007, p. 110. M. W. Champlin says Oedipus “wishes to, give the impression of a man as watchful as Argus” – M.W. Champlin, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

¹⁵Codd.; R.D. Dawe accepted *lectio*: ἤκουσα κάγώ. τὸν δὲ δρῶντ' οὐδεὶς ὄραϊ.

¹⁶Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, transl. D. Greene, Chicago 1991. Translation first published in 1942.

¹⁷Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, transl. D. Mulroy, Madison 2011.

¹⁸C.M. Bowra, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

the “knowledge” interpretation as well: in such a case the centre of gravity is moved from the question of guilt in general to the problem of guilt in terms of divine law.¹⁹ But later C. M. Bowra makes a supposition that Oedipus was punished not for the homicide itself, but for being generally arrogant and proud,²⁰ which seems to be too simple an explanation for such a complicated and context-rich case.

But on the other hand, a particularly convincing argument against the interpretation in terms of guilt in general is given by C. H. Whitman. He said that “if Sophocles had wanted us to consider the problem of right and wrong, he would have dramatized the scene at the crossroads. Instead he has dramatized the search for the murderer”, and thus the action of the tragedy is “devoted to the effort to draw truth out of the uncertainty and ignorance”.²¹

As regards the question of guilt, it is also worth pointing out that blinding was in ancient times a punishment for an infringement of the laws concerning sexual sphere,²² and on the other hand, a punishment for the men who have come into possession of the forbidden knowledge (for example regarding some sacred mysteries).

3.2. DIVINE KNOWLEDGE. OEDIPUS AND TEIRESIAS.

In Greek literature there are two groups of people that are recurrently mentioned in the context of blindness: poets and prophets²³: Teiresias is probably the most famous among blind prophets and he could be the *sui generis* archetype example of this group. But before talking about Teiresias we will start with some more general remarks on the interdependence of blindness, prophecy and divine knowledge.

On one hand, blindness, especially connected with old age, was described in terms of helplessness and dependence. For example *Oedipus at Colonus* is an impressive picture of an old, blind, helpless man. But on the other hand it was an element of conventional wisdom that there are things visible for the blind

¹⁹In other words, from the question of guilt in terms of human-instuted law to the question of guilt in terms of natural law.

²⁰C.M. Bowra, *op. cit.*

²¹C.H. Whitman, *Sophocles. A Study of Heroic Humanism*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1951, p. 125.

²²Plato, for example, regarded incest as “the most shameful of shameful things” and add that it would be right for Oedipus to wish to kill himself – C.M. Bowra, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

²³R.G.A. Buxton, *Blindness and Limits: Sophokles and the Logic of Myth*, “The Journal of Hellenic Studies”, vol. 100, Centenary Issue, 1980, pp. 23–24. Very often these two categories were embodied in one and the same person. It is also very interesting that from among all gods only Themis was usually depicted as unseeing (but probably not blind) and only Plutus was sometimes described as blinded by Dzeus.

that are invisible to the people who can see. Avoiding “distracting” influence of the eyesight they developed memorising skills and dialectics better than the seeing ones, hence widespread belief that they had supernatural prophetic abilities. That was one of the reasons why the position of blind people in Greek society was significantly better than that of the people with other kinds of physical disability.²⁴

We can also count among these prophetic capabilities the assumed unusual ability of identifying mental states of other people. This supposed ability would be especially well noticeable in the scene of the encounter of Teiresias and Oedipus: the prophet, although also vexed, skillfully manipulates Oedipus without being able to see the king’s face, solely by taking advantage of his knowledge (320 and sqq.).

But this compensational dependence is twofold mutual. Namely, gift of prophecy compensates the blindness, but simultaneously if one has the gift of prophecy, can not have the ability of seeing.²⁵ And from another point of view, the compensation may be regarded as something positive, as it was generally considered above, but also as something threatening: firstly, the eye was considered as not only a passive receptor, but also as an active organ²⁶ (it is of course true that the blind do not see, but that does not mean that their disabled eyes cannot cast a spell on somebody). Secondly, people who have gained the divine knowledge are often hard to understand, which can cause anxiety, like in the case of Oedipus:

Ὡς πάντ' ἄγαν αἰνικτὰ κάσαφῆ λέγεις (439).

But the blindness itself can also be regarded as something threatening, only because of the association with the divine intervention and gods’ punishment:²⁷ in *Oedipus at Colonus* blinded Oedipus unintentionally frightened the elders’ choir, because they fear gods’ wrath (150 and sqq.):

Ἐή, ἀλαῶν ὀμμάτων
ἄρα καὶ ἦσθα φυτάλμιος; δυσαίων
μακρῶν θ', ὅσ' ἐπεικάσαι.
'Ἄλλ' οὐ μὲν ἔν γ' ἐμοῖ

²⁴E. Wesołowska, *Antyczna postać ślepcy*, [w:] I. Mikołajczyk (red.), *Sapere aude. Księga Pamiątkowa dla prof. Mariana Szarmacha*, Toruń 2004, p. 317. Another major reason, why position of the blind was relatively good in Greece, was, as I think, the fact that blindness is not as conspicuous as other physical disabilities: humans tend to mark as more peripheral these elements of the category “human”, who are physically more distinguishable from the others.

²⁵Similar thought in: F. Frontisi-Ducroux, op. cit., p. 428.

²⁶Ibidem, pp. 427–429.

²⁷Sofokles, *Tragedie. Tom I*, transl., intr. and comment. R. Chodkowski, Lublin 2009, p. 418, n. 10.

προσθήσῃ τὰσδ' ἄρας,
etc. [...].

At this point I would like to apply the information from the previous parts of this paper to the issue of prophecy. Let us begin by stating that human knowledge is acquired in an active, intentional way. Human knowledge is an achievement of the intellectual force of the human being, as Ch. Segal points out. The true, divine knowledge is acquired unintentionally, is unpredictable, it “happens”.²⁸ And as many unexpected things, it is connected with misfortune or even with calamity. And so it happened in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

In the culminating point of the tragedy (1369 and sqq.) Oedipus acquired the true knowledge, but at the cost of losing the ability to see. This could be interpreted twofold, taking acquisition of knowledge or physical blinding as a starting point for the interpretation. On one hand Oedipus gained true divine knowledge having been isolated from the visual side the external reality (similarly to Teiresias) and became disinterested²⁹ in human knowledge once he had the true one.

What is more, while it is true that the very tragedy of Oedipus is in some ways distinctive and very unique,³⁰ it is Oedipus himself, being “no more than, and no less than, a man”, as R. Buxton writes,³¹ that could be an incarnation of human blindness in general.³² I would like to add some remarks to this interpretation.

First of all we think that the above-cited claim would be applicable only when describing Oedipus before he realised who he was and what he has done. The moment his eyes were speared out is a caesura: there is physically³³ virtually the same Oedipus on both sides of this line, but qualitatively, there are two relatively separate beings (or qualities). The act of spearing out is symbolical and at the same time constitutive for this distinction.

Oedipus before the caesura is sagacious, proud (or arrogant), relying on sensual perception, in short: entirely human, in general: typical of Sophoclean trage-

²⁸Ch. Segal, *Life's Tragic Shape: Plot, Design, and Destiny*, [in:] H. Bloom (ed.), *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Oedipus Rex*, New York 2007, p. 120.

²⁹Simultaneously or not, depending on personal interpretation.

³⁰Like, for example, in G.M. Kirkwood: “[tragic] irony [in *Oedipus Tyrannus*] might almost better be called Oedipodean than Sophoclean, so exclusively it is applied to the verbal irony of this one drama” – G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama*, Ithaca 1958, pp. 247–248.

³¹R.G.A. Buxton, op. cit., pp. 23–24.

³²Expressed indirectly by W. Kaufmann op. cit., p. 20. The same idea is expressed more explicitly by M. Maślanka-Soro (M. Maślanka-Soro, *Sofokles i jego twórczość dramatyczna*, [in:] H. Podbielski (ed.), *Literatura Grecji starożytnej*. Tom I: *Epika–liryka–dramat*, Lublin 2005, pp. 741–746).

³³Or *quantitatively*, analogically to the mentioned below term *qualitatively*.

dy³⁴. What have the encounter with Teiresias and the act of spearing out changed in his life? They not only made Oedipus conscious and equipped him with the true, divine knowledge but also distanced him from the world of human beings.

Seeing in Greek world connotes living, deprivation of eyesight automatically means separation from the human world³⁵. This separation is carried out twofold: horizontally and vertically. Horizontally it means literal separation: Teiresias lived away from inhabited areas³⁶ and so will do Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Vertical separation has a more metaphorical reading. It is also carried out twofold, but this time in two separate directions: downwards and upwards.

Downwards direction means becoming closer to death and as such it is associated with the problem of guilt: as T. Zieliński says, deprivation of eyesight is a punishment more terrible than the death itself; it is the deprivation of the source of all *joies de vivre* – the daylight³⁷. Upwards direction means becoming closer to divinity. Throughout the literature, Teiresias is often characterised as “divine” prophet, despite the fact that he is only a human and he does not even meet the requirements of the Greek ideal of a divine being. Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* is explicitly associated with the divine power because his tomb protected the entire Attic land (1760–1767):

ὦ παῖδες, ἀπεῖπεν ἔμοι κείνος
 μήτε πελάζειν ἐς τοῦσδε τόπους
 μήτ' ἐπιφωνεῖν μηδένα θνητῶν
 θήκην ἱερὰν ἣν κείνος ἔχει.
 Καὶ ταῦτά μ' ἔφη πράσσοντα κακῶν
 χώραν ἕξειν αἰὲν ἄλυπον.
 Ταῦτ' οὖν ἔκλυεν δαίμων ἡμῶν
 χά πάντ' αἴων Διὸς Ὀρκος.

And last but not least, the most obvious divine aspect of this situation: having a share in the true divine knowledge (extended in case of Teiresias to the prophetic powers).

But there is one more factor related to the question at hand. If we assume that every human experience makes a human being closer to the centre of the “human being” cognitive category we can readily admit that each tragic experience also makes Oedipus closer to the aforementioned centre and somewhat closer to the idea of “everyman” (which would be in agreement with some of the interpretations mentioned above, n. 31). But something essentially different happens in the tragedy: after the “critical mass” of experiences is reached, the

³⁴As A. Waldock says, “it is the very mark of Sophoclean drama that the conflicts it presents are human” – A.J.A. Waldock, op. cit., p. 150.

³⁵F. Frontisi-Ducroux, op. cit., p. 428.

³⁶T. Zieliński, *Sofokles i jego twórczość tragiczna*, Kraków 1928, p. 150.

³⁷Ibidem, p. 161.

person affected by them is more or less instantly moved to the periphery of the category of “human beings”. Moreover, to the particular periphery where the categories “human beings”, “divine beings” and “dead beings”³⁸ permeate through each other. Thus, paradoxically, what moves the character to the divinity is the entirety of his human-typical experiences.

4. LEXICAL REMARKS

The name Oedipus is never mentioned in the tragedy together with the verb from which it probably originates – οἰδέω, except for the one etymological suggestion (1035–1036):

ΟΙ. Δεινόν γ' ὄνειδος σπαργάνων ἀνειλόμην.
ΑΓ. Ὠστ' ὀνομάσθης ἐκ τύχης ταύτης ὅς εἰ

But, as was pointed out among others by B. Knox or C. Calame, it appears relatively often with the root *-φιδ-*,³⁹ common for the many words from the semantic field of seeing-knowing,⁴⁰ represented by two verbs: εἶδον, which means “I see”, and οἶδα, originally *perfectum* of εἶδον: “I have seen”, later reinterpreted as “I know”.⁴¹ In the Polish language verbs *widzieć* (“to see”) and *wiedzieć* (“to know”) became formally independent and nowadays they are etymologically transparent for the native speakers. But it seems that in the Greek language these two forms were probably perceived as strongly related, at least among the people who, like Sophocles, had superior linguistic competence. If that is true, we could consider *Oedipus Tyrannus* an excellent example of skillful usage of these two verbs in a single context.

If we interpret *Oedypus Tyrannus* as a conflict between the divine knowledge and the human knowledge acquired by the senses, lines of particular characters in the tragedy should be differentiated in terms of words used or semantic fields from which the words were drawn. And so it is if we analyse the tragedy itself:

³⁸We think that in fact categories “divine beings” and “dead beings” are quite closely related, at least from the point of view of the mortals.

³⁹W. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, p. 112; C. Calame, *Vision, blindness and mask*, [in:] M. K. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the tragic: Greek theater and beyond*, Oxford 1995, p. 24.

⁴⁰P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, Paris 1968, p. 317. In the Polish language semantic field of *widzieć-wiedzieć* sounds much better because of the common origins of these stems.

⁴¹It is necessary to say that there are also hypotheses that originate these verbs from two different PIE roots, but it is not the topic of the article and I will assume the common origin of these verbs especially, that this point of view is definitely dominant among scholars.

	Priest	Teire- sias	Choir	<i>Exan- gelos</i>	<i>Ange- los</i>	Servant	Oedi- pus	Jocasta	Creon
ὄράω	30	2	2	7	4		14		1
εἰσοράω	5	1			2	1	1		
εἶδον	17		5				10	1	1
εἰσειδον	6		2	1			3		
ὄπάω + εἶδον	47	2	2	12	4		24	1	2
εἰσοράω + εἰσιδδον	11	1		2	3	1	4		
οἶδα	47	1	2	9	2	9	2	15	7
ἔξειδα	3	1					2		
σύνοιδα	3						2	1	
κάτοιδα	5					2	3		
λεύσσω	2		1	1					
γινώσκω	11		2	1			4	1	3
σκοπέω	7		2				3	1	1
βλιέπω	12		2				7	2	1
ὀφθαλμός + ὄμμα	10			1			7	1	1

Throughout the text, *-φιδ-/ορα-* words are overrepresented, and it is usually Oedipus who utters them. There are numerous examples where others direct them at Oedipus as well. The fact that the ambiguous root *-φιδ-* is much more prevalent than the other words from the seeing-knowing semantic field (*βλέπω*, *σκοπέω*, *λεύσσω*, *γινώσκω*, *ἐπίσταμαι* etc.) does not seem accidental. The choir also employs these words rather frequently – it is not surprising if we realise that the choir represents both the divine and the human knowledge⁴² in tragedy. What seems more significant is that Teiresias' utterances, even though relatively lengthy and numerous, contain few seeing-knowing words.

Comparing this table with *Oedipus at Colonus*' frequency statistics can lead us to some interesting conclusions:

⁴²R. L. Kane, op. cit., p. 93. The halfway position of choir is visible often when he hesitate what is true, like in 483 and sqq.:

Δεινὰ μὲν οὖν, δεινὰ ταρασσει σοφὸς οἰωνοθέτας,
οὔτε δοκοῦντ' οὔτ' ἀποφάσκονθ' ὅ τι λέξω δ' ἀπορῶ
πέτομαι δ' ἐλπίσιν οὔτ' ἐνθάδ' ὄρων οὔτ' ὀπίσω.
[...].

	Polyni- ces	Antigo- ne	Choir	The- seus	Mes- senger	Ismene	Oedi- pus	stran- ger	Creon	
ὄράω	31	2	4	6	2	1	3	8 ⁴³	1	4
εἰσοράω	7	1		1			5 ⁴⁴			
εἶδον	9		4	4				1		
εἰσεἶδον	0									
ὄπάω + εἶδον	40	2	8	10	2	1	3	8	1	4
εἰσοράω + εἰσιδδον	7	1		1			5			
οἶδα	34		3	2	7	1	1	13 ⁴⁵	2	5
ἔξειδα	7				2	1	4			
σύνοιδα	1									1
κάτοιδα	2						1	1		
λεύσσω	5		1	2		1		1		
γιγνώσκω	10		1	1	2			3		3
σκοπέω	3			1	1		1			
βλέπω	7	1				1	1	3 ⁴⁶	1	
ὄφθαλμός + ὄμμα	16		8	2	1	1	3			1

The high correspondence may be interpreted in two ways. Either *Oedipus at Colonus* is as much oriented on the questions of knowledge and seeing as *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which is, in our opinion, less likely, because this problem is brought up noticeably less often in the context of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Or maybe these words simply were not as frequent as we think, which seems especially probable once we consider the frequency of words from this small table:

	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i> (1530 vv.)	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> (1779 vv.)	<i>Electra</i> (1510 vv.)	<i>Antigone</i> (1353 vv.)	<i>The Trachiniae</i> (1278 vv.)
ὄράω	30	31	35	23	26
εἶδον	17	9	28	11	22
οἶδα	47	34	40	38	30
γιγνώσκω	11	10	6	6	3
βλέπω	12	7	5	5	6

⁴³ Mainly second- or third-person narration or phrases like: φωνῆι γὰρ ὄρῳ (138), λείπομαι γὰρ ἐν τῷ μὴ δύνασθαι μῆδ' ὄραν, δυοῖν κακοῖν (495–456).

⁴⁴ There is no first-person narration.

⁴⁵ Rare first-person narration.

⁴⁶ Lack of first-person narration.

We suppose that the high frequency of seeing-knowing words in the case of Oedipus is simply a result of Oedipus dominating the tragedy. The frequency of seeing-knowing words is relatively high in all the above-mentioned works of Sophocles and it may be a cultural difference: concentration on the visual perception and high appreciation of eyesight are both characteristic of the ancient Greek culture or more generally of the Indo-European cultures.⁴⁷

But it still does not change the fact that the question of the acquisition of knowledge in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is one of the main (if not the main at all) topics of that exceptionally interesting work: the reason for this, as far as the lexis is concerned, is not the frequency throughout the text, but the frequency in culminating points of the tragedy: 1371 and sqq.:

Ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐκ οἶδ' ὄμμασιν ποίοις βλέπων
πατέρα ποτ' ἄν προσεῖδον εἰς "Αἰδου μολών,
οὐδ' αὖ τάλαιναν μητέρ', οἷν ἐμοὶ δυοῖν
ἔργ' ἐστὶ κρείσσον' ἀγχόνης εἰργασμένα.
Ἄλλ' ἢ τέκνων δῆτ' ὄψις ἦν ἐφίμερος,
βλαστοῦσ' ὅπως ἔβλαστε, προσλεύσσειν ἐμοί:
Οὐ δῆτα τοῖς γ' ἐμοῖσιν ὀφθαλμοῖς ποτε
[...]

Τοιάνδ' ἐγὼ κηλῖδα μηνύσας ἐμὴν
ὄρθοις ἔμελλον ὄμμασιν τούτους ὄραν;
[...].

and the above-mentioned ending, 1524–1530:

Ὡ πάτρας Θήβης ἔνοικοι, λεύσσειτ', Οἰδίπους ὅδε,
ὃς τὰ κλείν' αἰνίγματ' ἤιδει καὶ κράτιστος ἦν ἀνὴρ,
ὅστις οὐ ζήλωι πολιτῶν καὶ τύχαις ἐπιβλέπων,
εἰς ὅσον κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς ἐλήλυθεν,
ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίην ἰδεῖν
ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν' ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἄν
τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεῖνόν παθῶν.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- Parts of the lexical data may support the opinion that there are Parmenidean inspirations in Sophocles' tragedies.
- Oedipus relies on the knowledge acquired by means of visual perception

⁴⁷There is an enormous disproportion between the number of reconstructed common IE roots for eyesight and for other senses (D.Q. Adams, J.P. Mallory, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Indo-European World*, Oxford 2006, p. 349).

and this knowledge gives him the illusion of control over the situation, but at the same time he is ignorant of basic facts about his own life. He is so deeply convinced of the superiority of this kind of knowledge (called “human knowledge”, as opposed to true “divine knowledge”) that he accuses Creon and Teiresias of conspiracy. But in contrast to some scholars, we believe that from the Oedipus’ perspective these allegations are reasonable.

- Oedipus acquired the true knowledge, but at the cost of losing the ability to see. Loss of his eyes on one hand and his other experiences on the other move him away from the category of human beings to the borderland between the worlds of the mortals, the dead and the world of divinity.
- Among various interpretations of the tragedy, the knowledge-oriented one seems to find the most support in lexical data, however not by means of high frequency of lexical items concerning seeing and knowledge throughout the text, but by high concentration of them in culminating points of the tragedy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Sophocles, *Tragoediae I*, ed. R. D. Dawe, Leipzig 1975 (*Oedipus Rex*).
- Sophocles, *Tragoediae II*, ed. R. D. Dawe, Leipzig 1979 (*Oedipus Coloneus*).
- J.P. Mallory, D.Q. Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Indo-European World*, Oxford 2006.
- Allan W., *Tragedy and the Early Greek Philosophical Tradition*, [in:] J. Gregory (ed.), *a Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 2005.
- Bowra C.M., *Sophoclean Tragedy*, Oxford 1944.
- Buxton R.G.A., *Blindness and Limits: Sophokles and the Logic of Myth*, “The Journal of Hellenic Studies”, vol. 100, Centenary Issue (1980).
- Calame C., *Vision, blindness and mask*, [in:] M. K. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the tragic: Greek theater and beyond*, Oxford 1995.
- Champlin M.W., *Oedipus Tyrannus and the Problem of Knowledge*, [in:] “The Classical Journal”, vol. 64, n. 8 (5, 1969).
- Chantraine P., *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, Paris 1968.
- Frontisi-Ducroux F., *Okno, wzrok, spojrzenie – kilka greckich wyobrażeń*, transl. W. Michera, [in:] W. Lengauer, L. Trzcionkowski (eds), *Antropologia antyku greckiego. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, Warszawa 2011.
- Kane R.L., *Prophecy and Perception in the Oedipus Rex*, “Transactions of the American Philological Association”, vol. 105, 1975.
- Kaufmann W., *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Princeton 1968.
- Kirkwood G.M., *A Study of Sophoclean Drama*, Ithaca 1958.
- M. Maślanka-Soro, *Sofokles i jego twórczość dramatyczna*, [in:] H. Podbielski (ed.), *Literatura Grecji starożytnej*. Tom I: *Epika–liryka–dramat*, Lublin 2005.
- Segal Ch., *Life’s Tragic Shape: Plot, Design, and Destiny*, [in:] H. Bloom (ed.), *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: Oedipus Rex*, New York 2007.
- Sofokles, *Król Edyp*, transl., intr. and comment. R. Chodkowski.
- Sofokles, *Tragedie. Tom I*, transl., intr. and comment. R. Chodkowski, Lublin 2009.
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, transl. David Mulroy, Madison 2011.
- Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, transl. David Greene, Chicago 1991.

- Waldock A.J.A., *Sophocles. The Dramatist*, Cambridge 1951.
- Wesołowska E., *Antyczna postać ślepcy*, [w:] I. Mikołajczyk (red.), *Sapere aude. Księga Pamiątkowa dla prof. Mariana Szarmacha*, Toruń 2004.
- Whitman C.H., *Sophocles. A Study of Heroic Humanism*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1951.
- Zieliński T., *Sofokles i jego twórczość tragiczna*, Kraków 1928.