The Solitude of Tiresias. The Seer's Marginality and In-betweenness in Homer, Sophocles, Ritsos, and Pasolini

Spanoudi, Stefania

Universiteit Leiden

THE SOLITUDE OF TIRESIAS.

THE SEER'S MARGINALITY AND IN-BETWEENNESS IN HOMER, SOPHOCLES, RITSOS, AND PASOLINI

STEFANIA SPANOUDI S3244806

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LEIDEN UNIVERSITY, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

SUPERVISOR: PROF. DR. C.C. DE JONGE

SECOND READER: DR. C.H. PIEPER

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Introduction

Introducing the Topic and the Research Question

On World Music Day 2023, in a suffocatingly crowded stadium in Athens around the middle of the night, more than twenty thousand people were singing the lyrics of *Teiresias*. It is a modern Greek song written and performed by one of the most influential Greek songwriters of the twentieth-first century, Thanasis Papakonstantinou:[1]

> You wake up and disturb the mirror's lake
> roe deers surprised will jump out
> they'll flee to the woods and from your reflection
> the eyes and the fire will be missing.
>
> You'll search for your people, blind and frightened
> the time has come to find out who loves you
> but the city is empty and the seer Tiresias
> will leave his oracle in the foreign land, in a foreign land.
>
> Blind is also he who pretends not to know
> that he drinks from the dark well
> what is eating him up, he made it need
> or in the yard he hides it to be forgotten.
>
> At this time in the meadow, the fog falls upon
> the scarecrows, the rags you'll fear
> run and feel the creation, my dear,
> she stretches out her arm to hold on, to hold on.

Even though no explanation has been provided by the artist about the meaning of his song, it is plausible to suggest that Tiresias, a figure of ancient Greek mythology, becomes our guide through the arduous process of self-discovery. The blind prophet who leaves his oracle in a foreign land where no one is listening to him resembles the protagonist ("you") who searches for his loved ones in an empty city, lost and confused. Tiresias' blindness becomes a motif in the third stanza which speaks about voluntary ignorance and pretension. Beyond the darkness, however, hope gleams as the hero is urged to overcome his fear and feel the beauty of the world. It is thus evident that the mythical figure of Tiresias inspires the modern artist and becomes a symbol that reflects his existential concerns and personal beliefs. Even if the song's lyrics are quite obscure and the prophet's role within it remains ambiguous, the impact of *Teiresias* is unequivocally immense.

In extant Greek literature, Tiresias is first encountered in the eleventh book of Homer's *Odyssey* as a spirit that retains his mind intact in the Land of the Dead. He is better known, though, for his role in the Attic tragedies of Sophocles (*Oedipus Tyrannus, Antigone*) and Euripides (*Phoenissae, Bacchae*) and his prophecies for the Theban kings of the House of

[1] What follows is my translation of the original Greek song. All translations of primary and secondary sources in this thesis are my own. Papakonstantinou's song was released in 2002 as part of the album *Αγρύπνια.* The lead vocalist was another prominent Greek singer, Sokratis Malamas. From its first release, the song *Teiresias* was very well received by the audience.

Labdacids. When taking a closer look at his speech and appearance in these ancient texts, it becomes clear that the blind seer is neither a typical Greek hero, like Odysseus, nor a tragic powerful figure, like Oedipus. Yet, despite his exceptional status, he remains an understudied figure in the field of Classics and is often regarded as a secondary character whose role is limited to outlining the main hero's personality and motives.[2] Then, how and why can Tiresias inspire, more than two and a half millennia after his first literary appearance, a modern Greek composer to name his song after him resulting in more than twenty thousand voices singing it loud and clear?

Triggered by this seemingly inexplicable impact of the ancient prophet on a modern work of art, I shall examine in this thesis how the figure of Tiresias is (self-)presented and developed through different eras and genres. My purpose is to look in more detail at the seer's appearance and speech in case studies from antiquity until modern times in order to better understand his role and significance within and beyond each work's narrative. As I will indicate, Tiresias is an ambiguous character in both his ancient and modern representations. He possesses absolute knowledge and 'sees' beyond time and space. His main elements seem to be his solitude, marginality and in-betweenness. Nonetheless, in each phase of his reception through centuries, the prophet gains new characteristics as he reflects socio-political ideas and personal concerns of the writer or artist who uses him. Papakonstantinou's song appears then not as an exception but as one of the many occasions in which Tiresias still excites us and invites us to search for hidden meanings or forgotten truths in an otherwise "empty city".

Corpus

To support my arguments, I will analyze Tiresias' speech and appearance in four case studies, two ancient Greek texts and two modern works of art. More specifically, I will first investigate how the blind prophet is depicted in his first appearance in Greek literature, Homer's *Odyssey*. Moving on to fifth-century Athens BCE, Tiresias' role will be elucidated in Sophocles' well-known drama, *Oedipus Tyrannus*. As for the modern portrayals of the seer, two cases of classical reception will be explored. In particular, I will first study the modern Greek poem *Teiresias* (1964-1971) written by Yannis Ritsos during the years of a dictatorship in postwar Greece. Then, I will focus on a creative adaptation of Sophocles' play for cinema, the film *Edipo re* ("Oedipus Rex"), written and directed by the Italian intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini.

Throughout the centuries, Tiresias has been presented in many other texts and artworks, such as vase paintings from classical antiquity, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.316-338), Dante's *Inferno* (20.40 ff.), Guillaume Apollinaire's *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, and T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* (218-246).[3] However, a detailed analysis of all such cases would lie far beyond the scope of this thesis. Notwithstanding the limitations of space, however, the selected case studies (Homer, Sophocles, Ritsos and Pasolini) can provide valuable information about Tiresias' role in antiquity and the modern era. These four different genres (epic poem, tragedy, modern poem, film) of different historical periods (from the Homeric times to the twentieth century) share similarities in the way in which they treat Tiresias. Still, each one of them adds new dimensions

[2] Cf. sections 1.1 and 2.1 of this thesis.

[3] For many other examples of reception of Tiresias' myth in antiquity and modern era, see Headings 1958, 26-198 and Ugolini 1995, 225-248. Specifically for the iconographic evidence from antiquity dealing with the figure of Tiresias, see Brisson 1976, 116-134 and 167 ff., and Ugolini 1995, 249-257.

to the role of the prophet with regard to the historical context and the artistic vision of the writer/director. Studying two ancient and two modern representations of the seer provides balance and consistency in our argumentation. Furthermore, it is interesting to expand our research into other forms of art beyond literature, such as cinematography, and examine the innovative ways in which films such as *Edipo re* present the ancient prophet. Even if that could be challenging to a non-expert in film studies, it decidedly contributes to a more holistic approach in our study towards a better understanding of Tiresias' great impact on modernity.

Status Quaestionis **and Mythical Background**

Oddly enough, despite the various examples of reception of Tiresias' myth both in antiquity and the modern era, scholars have not yet fully appreciated the role of the prophet within and beyond each case's narrative. Even though his prophecies in the classical texts have been analyzed and his role in modern artworks has attracted critics' attention, especially from the field of gender studies, there are scant detailed specialized studies about the figure of Tiresias *per se.*[4] Among the most important contributions, we could place the dissertation of Philip Headings (1958), the short but illuminating article of Carlos García Gual (1975), the structuralist analysis of Luc Brisson (1976) and the more recent and detailed work of Gherardo Ugolini (1995).

All of them initially review the three main versions of Tiresias' myth which will be discussed briefly at this point, since our four case studies either implicitly refer to them or seem to consider them as already known to the audience. To be more specific, the first mythical tradition about Tiresias, which appears to be the oldest one, is widely known from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.316-338) and derives from *Melampodia*, a fragmentary work attributed to Hesiod. According to this, on Mount Cyllene of Peloponnese, Tiresias hit a pair of copulating snakes. Simultaneously, he was transformed into a woman. Seven years later, he encountered once again a pair of mating snakes and, as a result, re-obtained his male form.[5] When Zeus and Hera were arguing about which gender receives greater sexual pleasure during intercourse, they decided to ask Tiresias. He replied that "the man enjoys only one in ten parts, whereas the woman fills out the other ten gladdening her senses" (οἴην μὲν μοῖραν δέκα μοιρέων τέρπεται ἀνήρ, τὰς δὲ δέκ᾽ ἐμπίπλησι γυνὴ τέρπουσα νόημα).[6] Hera got enraged and punished Tiresias by depriving him of his sight, whereas Zeus pitied him and granted him the mantic art and longevity.

The second tradition survives through Callimachus' Hymn V, *Bath of Pallas,* and probably goes back to a lost work of Pherecydes of Athens (*FGrHist* 3 F 92).[7] In this story, Tiresias involuntarily saw the goddess Athena enjoying her bath naked. Athena immediately punished him by making him blind but also gave him clairvoyance and the ability to live for many generations. Finally, there is another lesser-known version of Tiresias' myth based on a lost Hellenistic poem, attributed to a man named Sostratus.[8] Our only source for this poem is the

[4] See below in this chapter for further information and examples.

[5] The seven-year span is mentioned only in Ovid.

[6] Hes. *Melamp*. fr. 275 in Merkelbach and West 1967, 134-135.

[7] Pherecydes' version is mentioned in Apollod. 3.6.7.

[8] Sostratus' identity cannot be determined with certainty. O'Hara 1996, 198-212 speculates about possible candidates and provides a well-grounded argumentation in favour of the *grammaticus* Sostratus of Nysa who lived in the first century BCE. Ugolini 2016, 143, n.1 suggests either Sostratus of Nysa or Sostratus of Alexandria (first century BCE).

commentary of the tenth book of Homer's *Odyssey* by the twelfth-century bishop Eustathius of Thessaloniki.[9] Prompted by the presence of Tiresias in the Homeric Underworld, Eustathius gives a short summary of the two abovementioned traditions of the seer's myth and adds Sostratus' version. According to this, Tiresias experienced seven transformations during his long life, six from female to male and *vice versa*, and a last one from human to mouse (!).

James O'Hara (1996) and Ugolini (2016) suggest that Sostratus' version contaminates many different myths, and elements from different genres such as elegy and epyllion. It also focuses on the cross-gender identity of Tiresias first attested in *Melampodia*. Interestingly enough, in Sostratus, the hero's sex change is not correlated with his prophetic ability and/or his blindness. Tiresias does not appear anywhere in the Hellenistic poem as being blinded by a goddess because he saw something 'forbidden', but he is rather presented as being punished by several deities for the transgressions he committs. The motif of blindness, the contrast between inner and physical sight, which prevails in the other two stories, is thus totally absent in this version. Nevertheless, as Brisson points out, Sostratus' story accentuates the intermediary role and marginality of Tiresias.[10] García Gual and Ugolini also allude to Tiresias' intermediary status in his mythical and/or literary representations.[11]

Each scholar, however, emphasizes in his work a different element of Tiresias. In more detail, Brisson mainly analyzes the three versions of the seer's myth, their variants and their fundamental characteristics. On the other hand, Headings dedicates most of his chapters to the reception of Tiresias from the Hellenistic times to the modern era. His main argument is that the prophet is portrayed in most cases as the "symbol of the poet himself, of the suffering with which he pays for his knowledge".[12] Following a different direction, the landmark book of Ugolini mostly explores Tiresias' role in his three mythical stories as well as the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides and dedicates a rather short chapter on the seer's reception in Latin, medieval and modern literature. Lastly, García Gual also provides information about Tiresias' three mythical traditions and briefly discusses the ambiguous way in which the seer is presented in ancient texts, such as Homer's *Odyssey* and the classical tragedies. He further quotes Marie Delcourt's assertion from her book about myths of bisexuality in classical antiquity, which links Tiresias' androgynous identity with his shamanic status.[13]

Other scholars, especially from the field of feministic studies, frequently refer to Tiresias as an androgynous figure of Greek mythology.[14] The seer's androgyny is indeed present in his modern representations such as Apollinaire's play (*Les mamelles de Tirésias*), Eliot's *Waste Land* or Bertrand Bonello's film *Tiresia* (2003), which narrates the story of a transsexual woman. One of the most influential works in film studies takes for granted the androgynous status of ancient Tiresias and further presents him as "the ideal reader of any text", as "a symbol for cultural theory today, which is also called upon to unite, juxtapose, and make sense of all things".[15]

[9] Stallbaum 2011, 389-390.
[10] In Brisson 1976, 82 Tiresias is depicted as a mediator between different sexes, identities and ages.
[11] García Gual 1975, 127-132, and Ugolini 1995, 28-29.
[12] Headings 1958, 194.
[13] Delcourt 1958, 63.
[14] See indicatively Dokou 1997, and Gabbertas 2021.
[15] Iampolski 1998, 3-4.

As Martin Winkler aptly observes, though, there seems to be a grave misunderstanding in this reasoning. "Nowhere in ancient sources is Tiresias an androgyne: simultaneously male and female".[16] Indeed, in all three mythical versions mentioned above, Tiresias is *either* a male *or* a female, not both at the same time. To be considered a mediator between male and female gender due to sexual change does not justify the characterisation of 'androgynous', namely, to have *both* male and female characteristics.[17] Moreover, in ancient texts like Homer's *Odyssey* or Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the sexual transformations of the seer are not mentioned anywhere, probably because they are considered irrelevant to the story. Therefore, without dismissing the usefulness of feministic readings concerning the myth of Tiresias, it should be noted that they seem more appropriate and valid for modern cases of study rather than the ancient texts themselves.

That being said, a broader approach to the representation of Tiresias in both ancient and modern case studies seems desirable if we want to better understand his complex role both within and beyond each story's narrative. Taking into account the significant studies of Headings, García Gual, Brisson and Ugolini, I will explore how an understudied figure of Classics, Tiresias, is presented and developed through time. Embracing the peculiarity of the prophet's appearance and speech in all case studies, I intend to decipher Tiresias' ambiguity in antiquity and modernity. The seer's role and impact will be analyzed in view of the socio-political context of each of the four cases of interest.

The marginality and in-betweenness that the prophet displays in both ancient and modern times will be central to our research. These characteristics, however, will prove to be the basis on which each author builds new interpretations of Tiresias' unique status. Especially the modern works of Ritsos and Pasolini, in which the figure of Tiresias has been scarcely studied, will cast new light on how the seer functions as a *persona* of the modern poet/director by reflecting his political ideology and existential concerns. These striking autobiographical elements may not exist in Homer and Sophocles. Yet, as will be suggested, even in the ancient texts, the prophet's obscure speech and imposing appearance leave considerable scope for new observations. Even there, Tiresias seems to function as the voice of the poet himself who reveals the content and form of his entire composition.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

Since this is a thesis about Tiresias' representation through different genres and eras, the main theoretical framework that will be followed is that of classical reception studies as defined by Charles Martindale, the pioneer of the field, in his 'manifesto', *Redeeming the Text* (1993). Martindale challenged the way in which classicists used to interpret ancient Greek and Roman literature and proposed a radical change of approach: the idea of understanding the ancient texts as "endlessly redescribable" and "rereadable in multifarious ways".[18] He argued that each text should be seen as a "mosaic of voices".[19] Its meaning is not something fixed and pre-determined as it is constructed every time by the reader and the general context. Reception studies were strongly influenced by reader-response theories that emerged in the 1960s.[20]

[16] Winkler 2017, 6.
[17] That would be the case of Hermaphoditus, another figure of ancient Greek mythology. Cf. LSJ s.v. ἀνδρόγυνος.
[18] Martindale 1993, 13.
[19] Martindale 1993, 30.
[20] Cf. the work of Hans Robert Jauss and Hans-Georg Gadamer in Martindale and Thomas 2006, 1-13.

According to these theories, each reader interprets the text in a unique manner depending on his/her own perspective and experiences.

Classical reception studies were developed since Martindale, but the main idea still remains the same. The existence of one and only, objective truth of a text is considered outdated while a shift of attention is noticed towards understudied periods and authors and marginalized or neglected characters.[21] Following this direction, I will analyze an understudied figure in four different genres from different historical periods aiming to provide a broad approach that might explain Tiresias' elusive role through time.

More specifically, in my thesis, I will follow the main methodology of reception studies, close analysis and examination of the broader context.[22] Thereby, I will perform a close reading of specific passages from Homer's *Odyssey*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Ritsos' *Teiresias,* and a close analysis of specific scenes from Pasolini's *Edipo re*. Selected words, phrases, symbols, and images used to describe the blind seer will be discussed, as well as visual and sound effects that accompany Tiresias' scenes in the Italian film. In addition, the theory of narratology will be applied to the two ancient texts, following the work of Irene de Jong.[23] Within the framework of classical reception, I will explore Ritsos' poem and his use of the 'mythical method', viz, his appropriation of persons and motifs from ancient Greek mythology with an emphasis on the myth's ordinary, material, and human aspect. Merging the mythical past with the modern present will also be detected in the other case of classical reception, *Edipo re*. There, I will discuss the director's innovative method of transforming the ancient sources. Concomitantly, I will take a closer look at the socio-political historical context of each case study, as I will inspect Tiresias' role within it.

Terminology

The terms 'marginality' and 'in-betweenness' will be frequently used in this thesis to explain Tiresias' special position in each case study. These concepts have been developed in the context of postcolonial literary studies and migrant literature.[24] More precisely, since the late 1980s, the term 'migrant literature' has been used to describe the literary output of authors who moved away from their native country and narrated their experience as migrants in their new place of living. The mobility of people who move across national or other kinds of borders results in non-linear ways of self-understanding and changeable identities mirrored in their literature. Scholars from postcolonial studies have demonstrated that migrant literature should be seen as a 'hybrid' product since it does not exist "*in* a specific place and time as *between* different places at once".[25]

According to the pioneer of the field, Homi K. Bhabha, 'hybridity' is used to define the ambivalent, in-between or 'beyond' space of migrants' cultural identities, pertinent to the non-binary relations between the colonialist Self and the colonized Other.[26] In particular, marginality and Otherness are constructed by the posited relation to a privileged 'imperial

[21] Bakogianni 2013, 2-3.
[22] Bakogianni 2013, 3.
[23] De Jong 2004.
[24] Important contributions in the field are the works of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989 and 2013, Bhabha 1994, and Lazarus 2006.
[25] Smith 2004, 245.
[26] Bhabha 1994, 1-6.

centre'. In this centre, a group or person determines selfhood in opposition to the racially or culturally 'different' Other.[27] For instance, the white, European Self may be contrasted with the non-white, non-European Other. As a consequence, the Self places the Other on the margins of society, the periphery.

However, postcolonial scholars underline that this privileged centre was soon abrogated in migrant literature as migrant writers openly rejected any centralizing normative notion of the 'correct'. They redefined concepts such as 'standard' language and actively engaged in cultural and political activities in their new habitat.[28] In this way, the dichotomy between centre and periphery was lifted and the 'marginal' in terms of race, gender, psychological condition, religious or political views, was validated as the 'real' creating a "complex, interweaving and syncretic accretion of experience".[29] The alienating process and repressive politics that migrants initially experienced were subsequently transformed into a creative energy and an uncentred, pluralistic perspective.

In this context, marginality and in-betweenness shall not be regarded as contradictory concepts but as inextricably connected notions. For postcolonial studies, being marginal or liminal means functioning in an interstitial or in-between space in which cultural identities are fluid, dynamic and subject to constant changes. Likewise, Otherness seems interdependent with the infinite process of self-questioning and alienation in today's world of cultural diversity and mobility.[30] Yet, Otherness is not conceptualized within an exclusively modern discourse of identity. On the contrary, the duality of Self/Other has been encountered as early as in many primitive communities and ancient mythologies all over the world. According to Nancy Aumais, people with perceived stable differences such as women, ethnic minorities, lower social classes and migrants have historically been regarded as Other.[31] On that account, postcolonial and feminist studies seek to shift the attention toward the rejection of this view, the destabilization of constructed binaries and the conceptualization of Otherness as a lived experience rather than a fixed category.[32] Under this perspective, giving voice to people typically regarded as Other in ancient and modern literature is critical.

In cinema, the experience of Otherness acquires new dimensions, since the viewer often identifies or opposes himself/herself with the characters of the film and the actors who incarnate them, even though he/she will probably never meet them in reality. As Professor Michael Richardson notices, the big screen projects images of people engaging in situations highly unlikely to happen in everyday life. Still, "we are able to make a form of identification with these alien images, the nature of which is fundamentally mysterious".[33] In cinema, therefore, Otherness indeed becomes part of a lived experience.

Even though the terms 'marginality' and 'in-betweenness' describe migrant contemporary literature, it has lately been argued that they can also be used for ancient literature. In particular, Casper de Jonge has recently applied the modern terminology of postcolonial

[27] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 1-13, and 102-103.
[28] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 37-38 and 103, and 2013, 3-4, where abrogation is seen as a political stance.
[29] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 103.
[30] Gaupp and Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021, 44.
[31] Aumais 2023, 20.
[32] Aumais 2023, 21.
[33] Richardson 2010, 5.

literary theory to the Greek literature of the Early Roman Empire.[34] While stressing that modern and ancient migrant literature is not the same thing, he argues that the modern terms of in-betweenness, ambivalence and polyphony could be applied to the work of migrant authors like Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Strabo of Amasia and Nicolaus of Damascus. Embracing this new perspective, I will further employ the terms marginality and in-betweenness in studying the figure of Tiresias in the ancient texts of Homer and Sophocles, but also in the modern examples of Ritsos and Pasolini. Even if this is not a study of migrant literature, the terms 'marginality', 'in-betweenness' and 'Otherness' will be used as intimately connected concepts. I will illustrate that Tiresias is often depicted as a non-normative Other, a liminal person who functions in-between different mythical traditions, time levels, kinds of vision, and identities in both ancient and modern cases.

Overview of Chapters

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will discuss Tiresias' speech and appearance in Homer's *Odyssey* (books ten to twelve). Most commentators stress the impact of the prophecy that Tiresias gives to Odysseus rather than the figure of the seer *per se.* [35] Nonetheless, I will draw attention to the prophet's unique status and intermediary role in the *Nekyia* as indicated both verbally and content-wise. As I will argue, Tiresias stands between humans and gods, the living and the dead, thanks to his special privilege of retaining his reason after his death. The honorary titles attributed to him will be analyzed as well as the motif of blindness, the contrast between physical and inner vision that runs the entire poem. Tiresias' warnings and prophecies will shed new light on how the speech of the seer reflects religious beliefs and moral concerns of the Homeric society.

Next, I will explore Tiresias' role in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus.* Despite the scholarly focus on Oedipus and the impact (or not) of Tiresias' speech on his attitude, I will elaborate on why the figure of Tiresias *per se* deserves our attention.[36] Trying to decipher what Karl Reinhardt calls "a walking enigma", I will examine how and why Tiresias' appearance and speech reverse the initial great expectations of both the chorus and the king.[37] Further developing the Homeric portrayal of the seer and the motif of blindness, Sophocles stresses the exceptional status of the prophet as signified by the use of the word μόνος ("alone") with both positive and negative connotations. Tiresias will prove to be a marginal, in-between character who reflects the political situation of fifth-century BCE Athens in the early years of the Peloponnesian War.

In the third chapter, I will move on to the modern poem *Teiresias* (1964-1971) composed by Yannis Ritsos. Even though it has been characterized by the poet himself as the "most philosophical" of his works, it has been barely studied.[38] Using his 'mythical method', Ritsos adds further dimensions to the prophet's role based on his political ideology and poetic vision. His modern Tiresias, who takes eight (slightly) different forms, is not presented as a godlike lord who defies Apollo, like his ancient predecessor, but rather as the diviner of the suffering people who fight the powerful. In spite of his warnings and struggle, however, he ends up

[34] De Jonge 2022.
[35] Cf. section 1.1 of this thesis.
[36] Cf. section 2.1.
[37] Reinhardt 1979, 104.
[38] Dokou 1997, 11. Cf. section 3.1.

being punished, embittered and completely alone. Yet, this sense of bitterness is paradoxically intertwined with optimism and the poet's faith in the recreational power of nature and the idea of inner freedom.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I will study Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Edipo re* (1967). The movie belongs to what the director himself called 'cinema di poesia' ("cinema of poetry") and seamlessly blends the mythical past with the modern present of Italy in the 1960s. The existing interpretations do not fully take account of the importance of Tiresias within and beyond the film's narrative.[39] Aiming to fill this gap, I will explore the role of the seer focusing particularly on the first scene where he appears. Taking into consideration the film's original screenplay, the visual and sound effects of the scene, and the movie's epilogue, I will argue that Tiresias is presented as a rather controversial, marginal character in-between who reflects – pessimistically– Pasolini's own concerns about the role of intellectuals in modern Italy.

[39] Cf. section 4.1.

Chapter 1: Tiresias in Homer's *Odyssey*

1.1 Introducing Tiresias in the *Odyssey*

"In the *Odyssey* there is hardly another figure who has less to do with Odysseus, and yet the whole of the rest of his fate is said to depend on him".[40] This is the blind prophet Tiresias. In the eleventh book of the Homeric poem, the so-called *Nekyia*, Tiresias is depicted as a prestigious old man in the Underworld, an infallible Theban seer who possesses the absolute truth and knowledge of the past, present, and future. Seemingly, a diviner from the Theban saga has no place in a poem about the Trojan legend. He is not mentioned anywhere in the *Iliad* and has no direct relation to Odysseus, in contrast to other figures in the Land of the Dead, such as Achilles or Anticleia. Yet, the main purpose of Odysseus' journey to the Underworld is precisely to consult Tiresias as per Circe's advice. Inevitably then, it is worth examining the prophet's role both within and beyond the Homeric narrative while trying to understand his vague speech that has been counted "among the most difficult passages" of the whole composition.[41]

Before analyzing Tiresias' complex role, it seems desirable to first contextualise the encounter of the prophet with Odysseus. Odysseus' initial purpose of his visit to the World of the Dead was to consult the seer about his "road and the length of the way to return home" (ὁδὸν καὶ μέτρα κελεύθου νόστον, 10.539-540). Following Circe's exhortations, the hero sails with his companions to the Land of the Cimmerians (11.1-22) and performs specific rituals to invite the souls of the dead to rise from Erebos (23-50). First comes the spirit of Elpenor (51-83) who pleads for an honourable burial to enter Hades properly. Next, Anticleia, Odysseus' mother, approaches the hero but he keeps her away to first speak with Tiresias.[42] The seer gradually emerges from darkness and instantly recognizes Odysseus. After drinking the blood from the trench, he tells him unerring truths about his future (90-137). He informs the hero how to communicate with the other souls and then leaves silently (138-151). Now, Odysseus can speak with his mother (152-224) and other heroes and heroines from the remote past (225-327), the Trojan War (385-567), and the mythical times (568-627). Finally, he rashly returns to his ship and sails back to Circe's Island along with his comrades (628-640). There, the sorceress provides him with detailed directions about his journey home (12.37-141).

Naturally, one may wonder: why does Odysseus venture into the Underworld only to return to Circe's Island and learn from her (and not from Tiresias as expected) about the stages of his journey home? This logical inconsistency has generated a great deal of scholarly debate about the authenticity and integral unity of book eleven and particularly, of Tiresias' speech, related to the notorious 'Homeric Question'.[43] Even though we do not know how the Homeric poems

[40] Reinhardt 1996, 105.

[41] Hansen 1972, 13.

[42] De Jong 2004, 275-276 explains how the scene with Anticleia displays the 'interruption' technique. Several commentators see Tiresias primarily as a mediator between Odysseus and Anticleia suggesting that Odysseus' decision to first consult the seer reflects the morality of the early Greeks who put the interest of the community above that of themselves as individuals. See further in Stanford 1959, 385, Besslich 1966, 59-60, Myrsiades 2019, 129-131, and Nortwick and Hardy 2022.

[43] In short, regarding the 'Homeric Question', the 'analytical' approach suggests that the Homeric poems were composed by different authors in different time periods. However, in the twentieth century the 'unitarian' approach, which supported the epics' uniform and consistent structure, gained significant ground. For further details about this debate and the main supporters of each theory, see Lesky 1963, 32-41, and Heubeck 1989, 75-77, and 82-83.

have been developed through time and whether different passages were composed at different times, most scholars now accept the unity of the epic narrative.[44] They study the texts as they have been preserved, leaving aside assumptions of pre-Homeric models or post-Homeric interpolations. Moreover, as Irene de Jong points out, the recurrence of specific topics (descent, death, family), as well as the use of catalogues and a narrative thread in book eleven create a sense of integral unity.[45] As for Tiresias' prophecy, we shall see that it corresponds closely to the form and content of other passages in the *Odyssey*, hence plays a pivotal role in establishing this unity. Tiresias may not provide detailed instructions to the hero about the exact stations of his *nostos,* as Circe does in book twelve, but he adds crucial information about Odysseus' life and death.[46]

However, critics have paid relatively little attention to the figure of Tiresias *per se*. The prophecy he utters to Odysseus has been analyzed, at least to some extent, but most commentators concentrate on the main hero and how he is affected by the seer's words rather than the seer himself.[47] Following the need for examining 'secondary' and understudied characters in classical works, I will draw attention to the representation of Tiresias in the Homeric Underworld.[48] In doing so, I will emphasize specific elements in the text that highlight the seer's unique status and contribute to creating a sense of literary unity. As we shall notice in the following chapters, the image of the blind prophet in the *Nekyia*, his obscure way of speaking and the motifs to which he alludes will be further developed in the work of later authors such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Evidently then, if we want to better understand Tiresias' later representations, we should first inspect his appearance and speech in the Homeric Land of the Dead.

1.2 Tiresias' Portrayal and Unique Status

To begin with, we first encounter the name Τειρεσίας at the end of the tenth book, where Circe informs Odysseus about the special position of the prophet in the house of Hades (10.490-495):

> ἀλλ' ἄλλην χρὴ πρῶτον ὁδὸν τελέσαι καὶ ἱκέσθαι,
> εἰς Ἀΐδαο δόμους καὶ ἐπαινῆς Φερσεφονείης,
> ψυχῆι χρησομένους Θηβαίου Τειρεσίαο,
> **μάντιος ἀλαοῦ, τοῦ τε φρένες ἔμπεδοί εἰσιν·**
> τῶι καὶ τεθνηῶτι νόον πόρε Φερσεφόνεια
> **οἴωι** πεπνῦσθαι, τοὶ δὲ σκιαὶ ἀΐσσουσιν.
>
> "But first you have to follow another route and arrive at
> the house of Hades and mighty Persephone,

[44] Indicatively, Peradotto 1990, 74-75, Ugolini 1995, 84, n. 5, and De Jong 2004, 272 defend the unity of the *Nekyia.*

[45] De Jong 2004, 271-272.

[46] For the 'division of labour' between the speeches of Tiresias and Circe, see further in Heubeck 1989, 82-83, and De Jong 2004, 277.

[47] For the scholarly focus on Odysseus rather than Tiresias, see for instance Jones 1988, 100, and Montiglio 2011, 90.

[48] As early as in the Hellenistic times, authors seem to be interested in 'minor' figures of the Homeric texts, such as Eumaeus and Euryclea. See, for instance, Skempis' 2010 analysis on how the literary representation of Callimachus' *Hekale* echoes the portrayal of some humble, 'everyday' people in the *Odyssey.*

to seek prophecy from the soul of Theban Tiresias,
the blind seer, whose mind remains intact;
because to him even in death, Persephone offered him a mind
which he **alone** has in full possession, while the others are gliding about like shadows."

The first word used to describe Tiresias is the adjective "Theban" (Θηβαίου). This word is used six times in the whole poem and always in reference to the seer (10.492, 10.565, 11.90, 11.165, 12.267, 23.323), as José Torres underlines.[49] The prophet descends from Spartans, the mythical founders of the city of Thebes, so he belongs to the old Theban saga that coexisted or even preceded the Trojan one. Then, why is a Theban seer present in an epic poem of the Trojan cycle? At this juncture, we should stress that the poet presents Tiresias without properly introducing him or giving any further details about him.[50] He simply mentions his Theban descent, his blindness, and his status as a prophet (μάντιος ἀλαοῦ) as something already known. Therefore, it can be assumed that the seer is not the poet's invention, but a character drawn from another tradition already familiar to the audience of the *Odyssey*. As Ugolini suggests, the *Nekyia* episode refers to a later stage of Tiresias' myth than that of Hesiod's *Melampodia* as there is no reference or explanation here about how the prophet got blind.[51] Probably, the poet chose specific elements from the already existing mythical traditions about Tiresias, and it seems that the story behind his blindness or his sex change was regarded as irrelevant.

Nonetheless, the poet adds a new important dimension to Tiresias, not to be found in his mythical tales (as described in the Introduction). He clarifies that Persephone gave to him, and *only* him, the privilege of "retaining his mind intact" (τοῦ τε φρένες ἔμπεδοί εἰσιν).[52] That explains why Tiresias does not have to drink the blood of the pit before he can recognize Odysseus or speak to him, as do the other ghosts in book eleven. He only drinks it "to tell unerring things" (νημερτέα εἴπω, 11.96). This major difference between the venerable prophet and the other dead who are "gliding about like shadows" places the former in a marginal, interstitial place between the gods and the humans. Tiresias may not be immortal, but he is certainly a distinctive mortal, who can retain his mind unimpaired in Hades and mediate between living and dead.[53]

The poet does not explain Persephone's decision to favour Tiresias over the other dead. However, I think that he implicitly refers to the uniqueness of this case by using the pronoun οἶος ("alone"). Interestingly enough, this specific word is used in reference to the seer two more times (10.524, 11.32) highlighting his exceptional status. In particular, when Circe explains the rituals that Odysseus should perform in the Underworld, she emphasizes that the hero must sacrifice a black sheep separately for Tiresias (10.524-525):

Τειρεσίηι δ' ἀπάνευθεν ὄϊν ἱερευσέμεν **οἴωι**
παμμέλαν', ὃς μήλοισι μεταπρέπει ὑμετέροισιν

[49] Torres 2014, 339. See also Ugolini 1995, 89.
[50] Valk 1935, 64-66, Stanford 1959, 385, and Heubeck, 1989, 69.
[51] Ugolini 1995, 90.
[52] Later authors refer to Tiresias' special advantage in the Underworld and allude specifically to Homer. See, for example, Plat. *Men*. 100a where Tiresias' uniqueness among the dead is paralleled with the ideal virtuous statesman among the living.
[53] Ugolini 1995, 90.

"To Tiresias, apart, you will sacrifice **only to him** a ram
wholly black, the best among your sheep."

In book eleven, Odysseus uses the exact same phraseology to narrate the rituals he performs (11.32-33). Sheep and goats were the most common victims of such sacrifices in ancient Greece.[54] The jugulation of a black animal, usually a sheep, was probably a regular procedure in these rituals. Yet, there is clearly an emphasis on the separate sacrifice of this animal particularly to Tiresias as testified by the words "apart" (ἀπάνευθεν) and "only to him" (οἴῳ). Odysseus has to offer the best sheep to the "best seer" (μάντις ἀμύμων, 11.99) as he himself calls him. The validity of the prophet is not in the least questioned by Odysseus but is rather presented as a well-established fact. The threefold repetition of the word οἷος in the Homeric text and its use by both Circe and Odysseus stress Tiresias' distinctive status in the Underworld. Although this textual element seems to have escaped scholars' attention, I think it is crucial for a better understanding of the seer's significance. By placing the best seer from the Theban legend and not just an arbitrary person or daemon in the Underworld to speak with Odysseus, the poet merges two mythical traditions and gives his Tiresias an unquestionable authority while adding a new complex dimension to his narrative.[55]

The poet does not only combine the Theban and the Trojan legend in the figure of Tiresias. His in-betweenness functions on many other different levels. In more detail, when Tiresias emerges from Erebos, he holds a golden scepter (χρύσεον σκῆπτρον ἔχων, 11.91). In the Homeric poems, kings, priests and soothsayers carry scepters as symbols of their authority.[56] One may also recall the "golden stick" (ῥάβδον χρυσείην, 24.2-3) which god Hermes holds in the so-called Second *Nekyia*, the last book of the *Odyssey*.[57] Nevertheless, the word that describes the scepter in both cases is not the same but similar (σκῆπτρον-ῥάβδον). Hence, it is verbally indicated that Tiresias may not be a god but certainly resembles one. Perhaps, that is why Odysseus calls him "excellent" (ἀμύμων, 11.91), an honorary epithet never used for gods, yet demonstrating the seer's excellence.[58] Tiresias' close relation to the gods is further indicated by the honorary title ἄναξ ("lord/master", 11.144 and 151), which often accompanies gods, especially Apollo (e.g., Hom. *Il*. 1.390) but also Poseidon (*Od*. 11.130).[59] Therefore, it seems that the poet has chosen specific words to describe his seer par excellence and undercover his unique position and function in-between humans and gods.

1.3 Tiresias' Speech and the Motif of Blindness

Another element that deserves our attention is the blindness of the seer which should be seen against the broader context of the motif of blindness that runs the whole *Odyssey*. Even if Tiresias' blindness does not particularly stand out in the Homeric text as mentioned only once in book ten by Circe (μάντηος ἀλαοῦ, 10.493) and not repeated in book eleven, I shall argue

[54] The procedures described in the Homeric text seem to be based on the typical offerings to the dead and the heroes within the various ancient Greek cults (Dosoo 2020, 273). For the role of animals in ancient Greek religion, see Jameson 2015, 198-231, and Kindt 2020.
[55] Valk 1935, 66-67.
[56] Bostock 2007, 58-59. Tiresias' scepter has an additional function: it helps him stand and walk since he is blind.
[57] Ugolini 1995, 90, n. 15.
[58] LSJ s.v. ἀμύμων.
[59] LSJ s.v. ἄναξ.

that the poet found alternative ways to implicitly refer to it in the *Nekyia*.[60] When Tiresias first sees Odysseus in the Land of the Dead, he wonders (11.93-94):

> τίπτ' αὖτ', ὦ δύστηνε, λιπὼν φάος ἠελίοιο
> ἤλυθες, ὄφρα ἴδηις νέκυας καὶ ἀτερπέα χῶρον;
>
> "What now, unhappy man, why have you abandoned the light of the sun
> and came here, to see the dead and this joyless place?"

Tiresias' opening is parallel to that of Anticleia's when she first speaks with her son (11.155-156): τέκνον ἐμόν, πῶς ἦλθες ὑπὸ ζόφον ἠερόεντα ζωὸς ἐών; χαλεπὸν δὲ τάδε ζωοῖσιν ὁρᾶσθαι. ("My child, how did you come beneath the murky road alive? Difficult it is for those who live to see this world."). Both Tiresias and Anticleia address the hero with sympathy or even pity (τέκνον ἐμόν, δύστηνε) as they see him alive in the netherworld. The similar phraseology of the two passages contributes to the unity of book eleven. Contrary to Anticleia, however, the prophet knows perfectly well the reason for Odysseus' journey, therefore his question is rhetorical.[61] Additionally, it seems that a slight irony lies here. The first thing that the blind seer has to say to Odysseus is to ask him why he abandoned sunlight. I wonder: how many years or even centuries have passed since the diviner enjoyed the sun? In other words, how much time has passed since the gods deprived him of the sun by making him blind, according to his mythical traditions?

I do not suggest that this is a case of *hybris* on behalf of Tiresias. The audience of the *Odyssey* would not expect an infallible seer to commit such a crime. The basis of Homeric religion was the reciprocal relationship between humans and deities.[62] If gods were duly worshipped, they would quickly respond to human needs. But if a human violated the laws of the gods and arrogantly exceeded the limits imposed by his/her mortal nature, then he/she would be overwhelmed by the feeling of shame (αἰδώς) and would eventually get punished. It is therefore highly unlikely that Tiresias, the venerable mediator between humans and gods, insults even implicitly the divine in the aforementioned passage. His question rather seems like an innocent complaint or even an indication of jealousy not only for the pleasure that the sun offers to humans but more importantly, for what the sun represents: Life. The place where Tiresias now exists is a "joyless" (ἀτερπέα) world, deprived of life.

That may remind us of Achilles' bitter complaint as expressed later in the *Nekyia* (11.489-491): "I would prefer to be attached to the soil as a servant of another, a man without land and any means of living, rather than being lord over all the dead who have perished." Tiresias and Achilles may have everything they need in the Underworld, the first as the perfect seer favoured by the gods and the second as the perfect warrior. Yet, they do not have what is the most important thing for human beings or even semi-gods. They are both dead, whereas Odysseus is still alive. The significance of being alive is thus highlighted by both the seer and the Trojan hero in book eleven, and that has probably a great impact on Odysseus' consequent attitude towards life and death. Before the descent into Hades, Odysseus had forgotten his homeland to such an extent that his companions were urging him to leave Circe's island (10.472-474). When the sorceress later informed him about the necessity of his journey to the

[60] Tiresias is described as a "blind seer" (μάντιος ἀλαοῦ) once again, in 12.267, where Odysseus recalls his prophecy about Helios' cattle (see below).
[61] Heubeck 1989, 82, and De Jong 2004, 276.
[62] See further in Jebb 1905, 50-55.

Underworld, Odysseus even proclaimed (10.497-498): “My heart no longer desires to live and see the light of the sun” (οὐδέ νύ μοι κῆρ ἤθελ᾽ ἔτι ζώειν καὶ ὁρᾶν φάος ἠελίοιο). This phrase is completely reversed in Tiresias’ speech as Odysseus is called “unhappy” (δύστηνε) exactly because he abandoned the bright light of the sun (11.93). Indeed, after book eleven, the hero seems to find once again his willingness to live and return to Ithaca.[63]

The motif of blindness is also implied in other parts of Tiresias’ speech. After drinking the blood from the pit, the seer informs the hero about Poseidon’s wrath (11.100-103):

> νόστον δίζηαι μελιηδέα, φαίδιμ᾽ Ὀδυσσεῦ·
> τὸν δέ τοι ἀργαλέον θήσει θεός· οὐ γὰρ ὀΐω
> λήσειν Ἐννοσίγαιον, ὅ τοι κότον ἔνθετο θυμῶι
> χωόμενος, ὅτι οἱ υἱὸν φίλον ἐξαλάωσας.
>
> “You seek for a honey-sweet return, glorious Odysseus;
> But god will make it painful for you; because I do not think
> that you will escape the notice of the Earth-striker, who has stored up wrath in his heart against you, angered because you blinded utterly his beloved son.”

As indicated above, Tiresias is perfectly aware of the purpose of Odysseus’ journey in the World of the Dead. That is why he begins his speech with the word νόστον (“return”).[64] The theme of *nostos* is dominant not only in book eleven of the *Odyssey* but in the entire poem. Therefore, the prophet sees far beyond the strict limits of the Underworld and has an overall view of the hero’s life and death. As Odysseus’ *nostos* will be anything but “honey-sweet” (μελιηδέα), Karl Reinhardt suggests that Tiresias’ tone here is ironical.[65] Rather than irony, feelings of sympathy and pity seem to prevail in the seer’s speech provoked by the acknowledgement of the hero’s “painful” (ἀργαλέον) destiny. This troubled fate is a fact and not a suspicion, hence Reinhardt is right to emphasize that the verb “think” (ὀΐω) expresses a certainty rather than a doubt.[66] Odysseus might have already suspected it, but now he hears it plain and clear; the cause of all his past and future suffering is Poseidon’s wrath. And the reason behind Poseidon’s indignation is that the hero “blinded utterly his beloved son”, Polyphemus.

Based on this, Tiresias advises Odysseus to reconcile with the god. First, he and his companions should avoid provoking the anger of another god, Helios.[67] But if Odysseus’ comrades disturb the cattle of Helios in Thrinacia, then they will be ruined (11.104-113). Tiresias is generally known as the ‘prophet of the doom’, and quite reasonably since both here and in the classical tragedies of fifth-century BCE, the seer predicts complete disaster.[68] “I foresee destruction” (τεκμαίρομ᾽ ὄλεθρον, 11.112), tells Odysseus. And further explains: If you survive, you will return to Ithaca alone on a stranger ship (113-115). There, you will have to confront Penelope’s suitors and kill them all (115-120). Even then, you must leave Ithaca again and undertake a last mission holding an oar in search of an inland place where people do not eat food with salt and confuse oars with winnowing fans (121-128). There, you should plant the oar (129) and “make good offerings to lord Poseidon” (ἔρξας ἱερὰ καλὰ Ποσειδάωνι

[63] See also Tracy 1990, 73-74.
[64] Carrière 1992, 32.
[65] Reinhardt 1996, 111.
[66] Reinhardt 1996, 111.
[67] For the doublet Helios-Poseidon and the motif of divine anger, see Fenik, 1974, 208-230.
[68] For Tiresias as the ‘prophet of the doom’, see Reinhardt 1996, 114, and Mitta 2012.

ἄνακτι, 130). Evidently, Tiresias, a human 'lord' refers to a divine 'lord', Poseidon, and mediates between him and Odysseus. The hero must offer sacred hecatombs to the other gods as well (132-134). The obscure speech of the seer ends with an oracle: gentle death will come to Odysseus far away from the sea, when he is very old, and his people are prosperous and happy around him (134-137).[69]

1.4 Comparison with Polyphemus' Curse

As commentators have pointed out, Tiresias' vague speech echoes Polyphemus' curse in book nine who begs his father to punish the blasphemy of Odysseus (9.528-535).[70] The striking similarities in terms of language and content between the two passages contribute to the unity of the whole poem. In particular, Tiresias' allusion to the episode of Thrinacia, the loss of the comrades and the return to Ithaca on a strange ship is similar, if not identical, to Polyphemus' curse. This becomes evident when putting together verses 11.114-115 and 9.534-535 where Tiresias and Polyphemus speak respectively:

ὀψὲ κακῶς νεῖαι, ὀλέσας ἄπο πάντας ἑταίρους, νηὸς ἐπ᾽ ἀλλοτρίης· δήεις δ᾽ ἐν πήματα οἴκωι.	ὀψὲ κακῶς ἔλθοι, ὀλέσας ἄπο πάντας ἑταίρους, νηὸς ἐπ᾽ ἀλλοτρίης, εὕροι δ᾽ ἐν πήματα οἴκωι.
"Late and distressingly you will go back, after losing all your comrades, in a stranger ship; and you will find troubles in your home."	"Late and distressingly he may come, after losing all his comrades, in a stranger ship; and he may find troubles in his home."

Despite the remarkable similarities, however, Tiresias' speech should not be regarded as a mere repetition, but rather as an allusion to Polyphemus' curse that adds further information.[71] Through the reference to the blinded son of the god, Tiresias inserts (again) into his narrative the motif of blindness. The blinding of Polyphemus along with the trick of false self-identification ("No one is my name", Οὖτις ἐμοί γ᾽ ὄνομα, 9.366) betrays arrogance and lack of restraint on behalf of Odysseus towards the son of a god. This *hybris* cannot and will not remain unpunished. Polyphemus is not blinded by divine agency; Odysseus blinds him deliberately and arrogantly. As Albin Lesky aptly suggests, in the *Odyssey*, far more than in the *Iliad*, humans are responsible for their own decisions.[72] In this direction, Tiresias alerts Odysseus to the repercussions of his behaviour. It is no coincidence that the seer also refers to the episode of Thrinakia and the suitors of Penelope, where a similar lack of self-control will play a significant role in the development of the plot.[73]

On that account, Odysseus' vanity becomes even more apparent when Tiresias implicitly refers to it. He is a blind seer who alludes to another (unfairly) blinded character. His advice

[69] For the elusive, oracular character of Tiresias' prophecy, see Besslich 1966, 59, Carrière 1992, 31, Reinhardt 1996, 113-114, and Ugolini 1995, 89. Odysseus' inland journey and death have raised many questions. Especially the phrase θάνατος ἐξ ἁλὸς has troubled Homeric scholars. I follow the translation "far away from the sea" instead of "from the sea" as it better fits the context of Tiresias' last verses. See further in Merkelbach 1951, 186-187 and 220-231, Heubeck 1989, 82-86, and De Jong 2004, 275-279.

[70] Heubeck 1989, 83-84, Morrison 2003, 104-105, and De Jong 2004, 55 and 277-278.

[71] Reinhardt 1996, 112.

[72] Lesky 1966, 73.

[73] See further in Bostock 2007, 62, and Nortwick and Hardy 2022.

to make peace with Poseidon becomes emotionally charged and gains more prominence because of the seer's own blindness. Furthermore, Polyphemus and Tiresias may share more common elements than scholars have detected so far. They both got blind because someone else decided to punish them. Both of them also allude to the god Poseidon. However, the Cyclops is acting against the hero and evokes Poseidon's anger, whereas the prophet tries to protect Odysseus, warn him against similar acts of arrogance in the future and reconcile him with the god. Two distinct poles inevitably emerge, a negative and a positive one, both of which have a huge impact on Odysseus' life.

Consequently, Tiresias' advice to Odysseus to reconcile with Poseidon corresponds to his function as a mediator between humans and gods. The need for Poseidon's atonement reflects on a deeper level the religious beliefs and moral concerns of Homeric society and, especially, the concept of *hybris-atis-nemesis-tisis*, the ancient moral law that required the punishment of the person who committed *hybris* in order to restore the natural order of *cosmos*. As Reinhardt rightly accentuates, "the speech of the seer is above all *religious* both in the form and content". [74] The prophet sees Odysseus' life and death as regulated by the gods and further exhorts him to recognize them and their rule.[75] Still, it is Odysseus' choice and sole responsibility to follow or neglect the seer's advice. From this perspective, Tiresias' speech adds a moral dimension to the fate of the hero and his companions.

1.5 Tiresias' Analeptic and Proleptic Function

Regarding the last part of Tiresias' prophecy, we should note that Odysseus' death in old age is not part of the epic narrative. Nonetheless, as De Jong asserts, it is an essential element of the seer's speech since it constitutes a Homeric motif, a recurrent theme in book eleven, a link to other episodes of the poem and a "natural closure" to Odysseus' hardships and Tiresias' prophecy as a whole.[76] Finally, the prophet's speech comes to a circular end since his last phrase τὰ δέ τοι νημερτέα εἴρω ("So, I told unerring things to you", 137) echoes the beginning of his speech (τοι νημερτέα εἴπω, "I will tell you unerring things", 11.96).

Therefore, the blindness of Tiresias does not prevent him from having a distant vision over the whole course of Odysseus' life.[77] He foresees but does not literally see, a paradox and a playful irony that will be further developed in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Furthermore, De Jong suggests that the seer's prophecy is an example of prior narration (narration in the future tense).[78] Ariadni Gartziou-Tatti further divides Tiresias' speech into two parts, each of which has a different function within the narrative.[79] The first forms an *analeptic* prophecy (11.100-103), where Tiresias speaks about the hero's past and the second is a *proleptic* prediction related to the hero's future.[80] This part can also be distinguished into two sections; an internal

[74] Reinhardt 1996, 112.

[75] Carrière 1992, 40. Cf. Odysseus' acceptance of his fate and inevitable death as pre-determined by the gods (11.139). See also Segal 1994, 42.

[76] De Jong 2004, 278. Cf. the parallel scene of Menelaos and Proteus in book four and the striking similarities between the two prophecies (of Tiresias-Proteus.) For this comparison, see Hansen 1972, 8-19, Carrière 1992, 36-38, and Reinhardt 1996, 105-110.

[77] See Snider 2008, 161-164.

[78] De Jong 2004, 277.

[79] Gartziou-Tatti 2010, 17-20.

[80] *Analepsis* is defined as a flashback, as the narration of events "which took place before the point in the story where we find ourselves". *Prolepsis* is defined as a flashforward, as the narration of events "which will take place later than the point in the story where we find ourselves". Internal *prolepsis*

prolepsis (104-120) with a series of conditional clauses ("if" (εἰ) + …) that ends with Odysseus' return to Ithaca, and an external *prolepsis* (121-137), where Tiresias informs the hero about his final mission and his gentle death at a very old age.

By employing the technique of both *analepsis* and *prolepsis* in Tiresias' speech, the poet implicitly shows that his prophet encompasses all three dimensions of time and bridges the distances between them. On this basis, we could argue that Tiresias functions as the voice of the poet himself, a poet who sympathizes with the hero's pain (ὦ δύστηνε, 11.93), reminds him of the beauty of life contrary to the misery of the Underworld (93-94) and advises him to respect and appease the gods (130-133).[81] The seer's speech covers the entire time limit of the *Odyssey* and even goes beyond it, thereby concealing the whole content and structure of the poem. In this way, Tiresias stands in-between the poet and the characters as well as between the poet and the listeners/readers since he functions both within and outside the epic narrative.[82] This interpretation adds a new dimension to the portrayal of Homeric Tiresias. His exceptional position does not only lie in his status as a seer but in his overall exceptional appearance and speech which seem to be carefully and meaningfully constructed by the poet.

1.6 Concluding Thoughts

To summarize, the figure of Tiresias *per se* has not been extensively investigated in the Homeric poem. In this chapter, I have proposed an interpretation that highlights the unique status of Tiresias within and beyond the epic narrative. The similarities between the prophet's speech and other parts of the poem, such as the opening of Anticleia's talk, Achilles' complaint to Odysseus, and Polyphemus' curse establish an inner connection between different episodes of the poem and create a sense of integral unity. As I have illustrated, Tiresias appears to be a distinctive figure of the Underworld who functions in-between different mythological traditions, levels of time, and kinds of vision. He is also a mediator between humans and gods, living and dead. Having been favoured by Persephone, he alone retains his cognitive and rational ability intact contrary to the other souls of the Underworld. In this respect, the prophet is presented to operate within a unique marginal interstitial space, which is evident both verbally (cf. the repetition of the word οἷος) and content-wise. On a deeper level, Tiresias seems to function as the voice of the poet himself. The blindness of the seer falls within the broader context of the motif of blindness that runs through the entire poem, reflects moral concerns and religious beliefs of the Homeric society, and is further developed in later authors like Sophocles.

refers to events "which fall within the time limits of the main story" and external *prolepsis* refers to events "which fall outside those time limits". See further in De Jong 2004, xi and xvi.

[81] See also Snider 2008, 163.

[82] However, at some points later in the poem, Odysseus seems to have forgotten Tiresias' prophecy (13.383-385, 15.347-348). Still, this logical inconsistency does not invalidate the seer's authority but should be rather seen as evidence of the arbitrary way in which oral poems were composed. See further in Jones 1988, 98-100.

Chapter 2: Tiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*

2.1 Introducing Tiresias in *OT*

In Aristotle's *Poetics* (1453b1-5), we read that a skilful tragic poet constructs his play in such a way that fear (φόβος) and pity (ἔλεος) result naturally from the premises of the plot without the need of exposing horrific actions onstage. This is the case of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[83] As Aristotle testifies and as critics have long established, Sophocles' drama was admired in antiquity (and beyond) due to its exemplary plot construction.[84] Feelings of intense horror and sympathy blended with tragic irony for the (mis)fortune of king Oedipus are provoked throughout the play. One of the most characteristic examples of this emotional tension can be found already in the first *epeisodion*, the scene with Tiresias.

This scene became a milestone for later authors who employed the figure of Tiresias in their work.[85] However, the scholarly focus in *OT* is centred primarily on the impact of the seer's speech and not on the seer himself. As in Homer, the prophet is regarded as a secondary figure whose role is limited to a better understanding of the main hero's personality and attitude. [86] Certainly, due to the dialogic form of the episode, it is fair to examine Tiresias in relation to Oedipus and whatever he represents. Nonetheless, some critics suggest that we should look at the figure of the seer *per se*; his divine and human traits, his oracular way of speaking, and his fearless challenge of the royal authority.[87]

In this chapter, I shall further discuss Tiresias' role within and beyond the plot of Sophocles' drama. In particular, I will explore the way in which he is presented in the text, taking into account the socio-political context of the play. As we shall notice, the prophet functions in a marginal, in-between space and reflects political ideas and concerns of the fifth-century BCE Athenian society. It will also become evident that Sophocles adopts and develops many elements and motifs related to Tiresias from Homer's *Nekyia*. In *OT*, however, the figure of the seer becomes much more elusive than in the *Odyssey*, to such an extent that some critics describe him as "a walking enigma".[88]

2.2 Tiresias' Portrayal and the Positive Connotations of μόνος

To understand Tiresias' complexity in Sophocles' *OT*, we should first inspect how he is described by the other characters. In line 316, the old blind prophet arrives at Oedipus' palace,

[83] For the sake of brevity, I will henceforth refer to Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* with its abbreviation (*OT*).
[84] Headings 1958, 23, Sicking 1998, 29, and Liapis 2012, 85-86.
[85] Ugolini 1995, 25 speaks about "Tiresias' *topos*" when referring to Tiresias' portrayal in *OT* and the other three classical tragedies.
[86] See, for example, Nortwick 2022 who compares Tiresias with Patroclus and argues that they are both complementary characters with whom the main hero "interacts in such a way as to highlight the shortcomings of his own perspective". Nortwick and Hardy 2022 suggest that "much of the dramatic power of the scene between Oedipus and the prophet comes from the contrast of the king's hyper-masculine bullying and Teiresias' inward, mysterious knowledge, which the Greeks would have associated with the feminine gender". However, as in Homer, nowhere in Sophocles' play the (trans)sexuality of Tiresias comes to light, probably because it is regarded as irrelevant to the plot. See Ugolini 1995, 188, and Griffith 2009, 484.
[87] Reinhardt 1979, 104-110, Moreau 1993, Ugolini 1995 117-139 and 186-195, Edmunds 2000, and Griffith 2009, 483-491.
[88] Reinhardt 1979, 104.

accompanied by a boy. He is urgently summoned and nervously anticipated (287-289) to save the city of Thebes from "the most hateful plague" (λοιμὸς ἔχθιστος, 28) and to confess whatever he knows about the death of the former king. The chorus affirm (284-286):

> ἄνακτ᾽ ἄνακτι ταῦθ᾽ **ὁρῶντ**᾽ ἐπίσταμαι
> μάλιστα Φοίβῳ Τειρεσίαν, παρ᾽ οὗ τις ἂν
> σκοπῶν τάδ᾽, ὦναξ, ἐκμάθοι σαφέστατα.
>
> "I know very well that lord Tiresias **sees**
> the same as lord Phoebus, and from him, my lord,
> one could learn these things most clearly if he examines him."

The first address of Tiresias in the play intimates his close association with Apollo as well as his relation to Oedipus. Scholars rightly accentuate the threefold use of the honorary title ἄναξ ("lord") for Tiresias (ἄνακτα), Apollo (ἄνακτι) and Oedipus (ὦναξ).[89] As I have argued in the first chapter, in Homer's *Nekyia* (11.151) the title ἄναξ is used for Tiresias to mark his clairvoyance, his religious role as a mediator between humans and gods and his distinctive position in the community. Yet, in Sophocles' text, another human lord appears next to Tiresias; king Oedipus. As P.R. Winnington-Ingram observes, "[t]he presence of two human *anaktes* in Thebes may suggest a potentially difficult relationship, a situation of rivalry which may, on the human level, govern the psychology of the scene".[90] The forthcoming analysis of the conflict between the two human lords will confirm this allegation.

Tiresias is also presented as a prophet par excellence who can "see" (ὁρῶντι) the exact same things as the god. The chorus is certain of Tiresias' ability as illustrated by the verb ἐπίσταμαι and the superlative adverb μάλιστα. On this basis, it is safe to assume that Tiresias must have demonstrated his skillfulness as the prophet of Thebes several times in the past, hence the chorus respects him and has faith in his mantic art. P.J. Finglass emphasizes the paradoxical use of the verb ὁρῶ for a blind seer like Tiresias.[91] Tiresias 'sees' in a deeper sense, he understands and knows the truth, whereas Oedipus may be able to actually see (at least at this point of the play) but is in a state of total ignorance about his past, present and future. In this way, the motif of blindness that was employed in Homer is further developed here as also throughout the play.[92] The antithesis between light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, memory and oblivion, is brilliantly inserted into the drama.

In addition, it is worth noting the participle σκοπῶν in the passage. R.D. Dawe alludes to the idea of sight that began with ὁρῶντ' of line 284.[93] Indeed, σκοπῶν has the meaning of 'looking to', but is also used in the sense of 'examining/inspecting'.[94] Therefore, it seems like an investigation will shortly take place. Oedipus will be the questioner and Tiresias the questionee. I shall return to the use of legal language and the consequent allusion to the political background of Sophocles' era below. For the moment, let us take a closer look at the expectations of Tiresias' arrival expressed both by the chorus and the king (298-304):

> Χορός:

[89] Kamerbeek 1967, 79, and Finglass 2018, 262-263.
[90] Winnington-Ingram 1980, 193, n. 43.
[91] Finglass 2018, 263.
[92] Cf. lines 302, 371, 389, 412-413, 454, and 1183.
[93] Dawe 2006, 100.
[94] Cf. LSJ s.v. σκοπέω.

τὸν θεῖον ἤδη μάντιν ὧδ᾽ ἄγουσιν, ᾧ
τἀληθὲς ἐμπέφυκεν ἀνθρώπων **μόνῳ**.
Οἰδίπους:
ὦ πάντα νωμῶν Τειρεσία, διδακτά τε
ἄρρητά τ᾽ οὐράνιά τε καὶ χθονοστιβῆ,
πόλιν μέν, εἰ καὶ μὴ βλέπεις, φρονεῖς δ᾽ ὅμως
οἵαι νόσῳ σύνεστιν· ἧς σὲ προστάτην
σωτῆρά τ᾽, ὦναξ, **μοῦνον** ἐξευρίσκομεν.

"Chorus:
They are already leading here the divine seer, in whom
alone among all humans the truth is implanted.
Oedipus:
Tiresias, you who grasp all things, those that can be taught
and those that are unspeakable, those of heaven as well as those treading the earth,
even if you cannot see, then you can still understand
from what sort of sickness the city suffers; of which you are the protector
and saviour, my lord, the **only one** that we can find."

The uniqueness of the seer is apparent in this passage. Tiresias is a divine prophet, presented almost like a god (θεῖον) by the chorus. His exceptional position among mortals is stressed by the adjective μόνῳ in verse 299, which is repeated shortly afterwards in the speech of Oedipus (μοῦνον, 304). This adjective seems to appear frequently in the context of religious praise.[95] Dawe argues about the exaggerated use of μόνος here and translates it as 'pre-eminently', 'in a class of one's own'.[96] I will keep the translation 'alone' since I think it expresses better the absolute reliance of the chorus and Oedipus on Tiresias while pointing to his unparalleled status with its both positive and negative (as we shall see) implications.

What's more, Dawe observes that μόνος is used several times in the text (304, 349, 389), always related to Tiresias.[97] As we have noticed in Homer's *Odyssey*, Tiresias' unique privilege to retain his reason after his death was denoted by the pronoun οἶος ("alone", 10.495), which was repeated two other times in reference to the seer (10.524, 11.32). This word was not uttered by the prophet himself, but by Circe and Odysseus to describe Tiresias' special position in the Underworld and the subsequent need for special treatment. Likewise, in Sophocles' play, the adjective μόνος is not used by the diviner himself, but by the chorus and Oedipus to indicate Tiresias' distinctive status among mortals. He *alone* seems to possess the ultimate truth. In the abovementioned passage, the seer's privilege is emphasized by the verb ἐμπέφυκεν (299). It is like Tiresias was born with the gift of divine knowledge.

Moreover, the prophet seems to be the only one who can save the city of Thebes. The accumulation of τε-καὶ in lines 300-301 and the pairs διδακτά-ἄρρητά and οὐράνιά-χθονοστιβῆ demonstrate the seer's intermediary role between gods and humans, between the known and the unknown. Additionally, the pairs implicitly refer to the forthcoming opposition between Tiresias' effort to leave things unsaid and Oedipus' wish to make the prophet speak.[98] But for now, Oedipus addresses the venerable prophet with the greatest

[95] Dawe 2006, 101-102, and Finglass 2018, 271.
[96] Dawe 2006, 101. Kamerbeek 1967, 82 anticipates Dawe's translation.
[97] Dawe 2006, 102.
[98] Finglass 2018, 270.

reverence, while stressing his universal authority and his inner sight (εἰ καὶ μὴ βλέπεις, φρονεῖς δ' ὅμως). He also calls him σωτῆρα and προστάτην of the city. Interestingly enough, the honorary title προστάτης is typically used for gods, such as Apollo (cf. Soph. *Tr*. 209).

This impressive accumulation of honorary titles for Tiresias may remind us of the play's prologue. There, the priest addresses Oedipus with ultimate respect by calling him "the first among men" (ἀνδρῶν πρῶτον, 33), "the greatest of all" (κράτιστον πᾶσιν, 40), and "the best among mortals" (βροτῶν ἄριστ[ε], 46). All citizens come "at your altars" (βωμοῖσι τοῖς σοῖς, 16), exclaims ambiguously the priest as if Oedipus is a god himself. While praising him for solving the Sphinx's riddle (35-39), the priest stresses that the king is the city's "saviour" (σωτῆρα, 48) as he can find a remedy for the plague (42). Accordingly, Oedipus and Tiresias are both presented in Sophocles' drama as having an exceptional if not divine status. That may explain why the two men are considered inextricably connected and why the conflict between them seems inevitable.

2.3 Tiresias' Silence and the Negative Connotations of μόνος

To be more precise, after all these titles attributed to Tiresias both by the chorus and the king, one would expect him to gladly assist Oedipus in deciphering the Delphic oracle and finding Laius' murderer. The interest of the king in his city is apparent in the tragedy, as the proleptic construction of line 302 demonstrates. "Save yourself and the city and save me", pleads later Oedipus (312).[99] But what about Tiresias? Does he also appeal to his civic duty? His defiant cry φεῦ φεῦ ("Alas! Alas!", 316) when he arrives on stage and his following persistence in leaving as soon as possible while disclosing the truth (320-321, 328-329, 333, 341, 343-344), despite Oedipus' surprise and consequent outburst of anger, is definitely not the best example of civic spirit. Is it because Tiresias wants to spare the city from the truth that would cause the end of Oedipus' reign or is it an indication of self-interest? The king believes the latter to be the case. For this reason, I argue that Oedipus uses the term μόνος in reference to Tiresias also with negative connotations to highlight the seer's marginality and seeming indifference to the city.

Obviously, Tiresias' silence and reluctance to help do not meet the expectations of Oedipus: "what you said, is neither lawful nor pleasing to this city, which nurtured you, since you are withholding this report" (322-323). And later: "but you think of betraying us and destroying the city?" (330-331). Oedipus starts accusing Tiresias of plotting against him with Creon and declares: "if you were able to see, I would have said that this deed [the murder of Laius] was yours **alone** (εἰ δ' ἐτύγχανες βλέπων, καὶ τοὔργον ἂν σοῦ τοῦτ' ἔφην εἶναι **μόνου**, 348-349). Here, the negative connotations of the term μόνος, emphatically placed at the end of the verse, are clear. The uniqueness of Tiresias, his blindness and his inner sight are now unequivocally turned against him. The same occurs in lines 387-390, where Oedipus claims that Creon conspired against him:

> ὑφεὶς μάγον τοιόνδε μηχανορράφον,
> δόλιον ἀγύρτην, ὅστις ἐν τοῖς κέρδεσιν
> **μόνον** δέδορκε, τὴν τέχνην δ' ἔφυ τυφλός.
> ἐπεί, φέρ' εἰπέ, ποῦ σὺ μάντις εἶ σαφής;
>
> "engaging secretly such a sorcerer and former of crafty plans,
> a deceitful beggar, one who has sight

[99] Cf. line 443, where Oedipus puts the common welfare above his own salvation (see also Finglass 2018, 311).

only for profit, but in his art is by nature blind.
But come and tell me, where have you shown yourself to be an unerring prophet?"

Oedipus' rage goes so far as to charge Tiresias with venality, question his mantic art and insult him personally via the motif of blindness. The use of the third person in combination with the accumulation of perojative epithets for the seer through the asyndeton strongly contrasts the deeply respectful language of the king's opening request (300-315). Furthermore, Finglass comments on the derogatory context of the terms μάγος and ἀγύρτης.[100] In ancient Greece, ἀγύρτης was called a priest who often requested money for his services.[101] Unlike the formal priest of the city, an ἀγύρτης was not part of the established religion but a member of marginal and foreign cults. Thus, according to Oedipus, Tiresias resembles these priests and their liminal status because he only cares for profit. He cannot be a true diviner, as he did not help the city at the time of the Sphinx (390ff.).

The seer's marginalization by the king is also indicated by the use of the adjective μόνος, placed at the beginning of line 389 and with negative overtones. Here, μόνος does not qualify Tiresias as a person, as in the previous three cases (299, 304, 349), but his sight (δέδορκε), thereby adding a new dimension. The seer is now presented not just as being 'alone', but as seeking *only* profit and being born blind in his mantic art. In this respect, the phrase τἀληθὲς ἐμπέφυκεν ἀνθρώπων μόνῳ uttered by the chorus (299) is now completely reversed and replaced by the relative clause ὅστις ἐν τοῖς κέρδεσιν μόνον δέδορκε, τὴν τέχνην δ᾽ ἔφυ τυφλός (388-389).[102]

In light of the above, it is evident that Oedipus regards Tiresias as an enemy of the state and, subsequently, places him (at least verbally) outside of the community. Later in the play, Oedipus discovers that he is the polluter responsible for the plague and expresses his desire to leave the city immediately.[103] Similarly, Jocasta after learning the terrible truth departs from the community and kills herself (1237-1250). Moreover, Oedipus predicts a dark future for their daughters, Antigone and Ismene, whose miserable fate is to remain unwedded and alone (1500-1502). Thus, Tiresias should not be considered the only marginal character in the play. On the contrary, marginality and separation from the community is rather a recurrent theme in Sophocles' drama, but it applies in different ways to each character. One may well recall the famous passage from Aristotle's *Politics* (1.1253a) that the human is "by nature a political being" (φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον). If someone is "by nature and not by fortune without a city" (ἄπολις), then he is either a beast or a god (ἢ *θηρίον* ἢ *θεός*). Would it be plausible to regard Tiresias as ἄπολιν in Sophocles' drama? And if so, would he be closer to a beast or a god?

[100] Finglass 2018, 293-295. For the negative undertones of the words μάγος and ἀγύρτης, see also Kamerbeek 1967, 98, and Jebb 2010, 85-86, and. An interesting interpretation of the term μάγος comes from Rigsby 1976, who argues that it refers to political conspirators ('king-makers') rather than religious frauds based on the analogous use of the term by Herodotus and Plato. The connection with religious charlatans seems to come after the fifth-century BCE, as attested in Euripides' plays (see also Finglass 2018, 294). This assumption is intriguing as it fits with the play's socio-political context (see below).

[101] Cf. Pl. *Rep*. 364b-c where these priests are presented to mock rich men for the sake of profit (see also Finglass 2018, 295).

[102] The phrase "τὴν τέχνην δ᾽ ἔφυ τυφλός" may also allude to the well-known opposition between τέχνη/νόμος and φύσις and the different views of sophists and philosophers in fifth-century BCE.

[103] Cf. lines 1340-1346, 1410-1412, 1436-1437 and 1449-1452 where Oedipus asks the chorus and Creon to lead him away from the city.

2.4 Tiresias' In-betweenness and Ambiguity

The antithesis between ὑψίπολις ("one who thinks highly of his city") and ἄπολις ("one without a city"), as it has been formulated in the first stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone* (370), had not been discussed in the context of *OT* until recently.[104] To be more specific, Efimia Karakantza proposes that the dichotomy of ὑψίπολις-ἄπολις resides in all the Sophoclean works and reveals the writer's preoccupation "to explore the dilemmas of characters from the perspective of their suitability as citizens in the discourse of the Athenian polis".[105] Characters like Oedipus, Antigone, Electra or Ajax can be regarded as *apolides* since they disrupt the order of their community and deliberately place themselves on the margins of community and civilization.[106] Considering the well-established connection between blind Oedipus and the prophet Tiresias, would it be reasonable to suggest that the latter also resembles the former regarding his final 'cityless' condition?

I think that Tiresias is neither ὑψίπολις nor ἄπολις. He does not disrupt the civic order *per se* but is rather presented as a marginal character in-between. How can a venerable prophet who has served Thebes for several generations so far (and will continue to do so even after Oedipus' fall) be seen as ἄπολις? On the other hand, he could have certainly displayed more interest in the city and its needs both at the time of the Sphinx and at the present, at least according to the king (322-323, 330-331). So, he cannot be called an ὑψίπολις either. Consequently, he should be placed somewhere in-between, both within and outside the community. This is attested, I argue, by the use of the term μόνος in Sophocles' text. As we have detected, this adjective is used four times in relation to the seer and his position, twice with positive (299, 304) and twice with negative meaning (349, 389). The first two references place the seer inside the community and, actually, in the highest position but the other two place him outside of the city.

Tiresias' function in a marginal, interstitial space is also illustrated by his ambiguous language.[107] In particular, in line 353, the prophet first mentions that Oedipus "is the profane polluter of this land", and then explicitly states: "you are the murderers and the men whom you search to find" (362). The seer points to the incest and the patricide but at the same time speaks vaguely: "and the curse from your mother and your father striking you at both sides with a dread foot will expel you from this land" (417-418), and then "this day will both give you birth and destruction" (438). Tiresias' ambiguity should not be seen as an expression of uncertainty, but rather as a deliberate choice. Certainly, the oracular character of his speech is in accordance with his status as a diviner and reminds us of the Homeric Tiresias and his obscure prophecy to Odysseus. Here, however, the use of ambiguous oracular language obtains new dimensions since the prophet intentionally wants to hide the truth which is "terrible to know" (φρονεῖν ὡς δεινὸν, 316). Thus, his speech stands between clarity and elusiveness, resulting in Oedipus' confusion and stressing the play's tragic irony.

In this context of ambiguity, Tiresias mentions his acquaintance with the king's parents; "but to your parents, who gave you birth, I looked prudent" (436). Immediately, Oedipus' curiosity is aroused, but due to the general tension of the conflict, this allusion is quickly forgotten. This reference, however, points to Tiresias' long-established presence in the city of Thebes. As the

[104] Karakantza 2020, 6-13.
[105] Karakantza 2020, 8-9.
[106] Cf. *Ant*. 508-511, *Aj*. 394-409, *El*. 189-192.
[107] Reinhardt 1979, 105, and Ugolini 1995, 129-131.

chorus has also implied (284-286), the diviner has served the city and the royal family for several generations. Due to his knowledge about Oedipus' past and his status as a prophet, Tiresias stands in-between different generations and kings, between Apollo and the people of Thebes. Evidently then, the pivotal role of Tiresias in Oedipus' self-discovery emerges, as the latter will start tracing his own origins and his real parents only after his encounter with the seer. Therefore, the answer to Oedipus' question to Tiresias "who is the murderer of Laius?" coincides with the answer to his other question, "who am I?", a long-forgotten and repulsed inquiry that runs the entire play and gradually leads to the tragic fulfilment of the old Delphic oracle.[108] From this perspective, as Ugolini highlights, Tiresias seems to be the link between the two intertwined themes of Sophocles' tragedy; the search for the killer of the former king of Thebes and the search for the identity of the current king.[109]

2.5 Political Dimensions of Tiresias' Speech and Appearance

Nonetheless, Tiresias does not himself allude to his intermediatory role between the city and the gods. Instead of bridging distances between Apollo and Oedipus, he increases this gap and clearly denounces that he answers neither to the king nor to the city but only to Apollo (408-410):

> εἰ καὶ τυραννεῖς, ἐξισωτέον τὸ γοῦν
> ἴσ᾽ ἀντιλέξαι· τοῦδε γὰρ κἀγὼ κρατῶ.
> οὐ γάρ τι σοὶ ζῶ δοῦλος, ἀλλὰ Λοξίᾳ·
>
> "Even if you hold the power, one must claim the equal right
> at least to reply at the same length; and I myself have that power too.
> Because I do not live as a slave for you, but for Loxias."

This is a well-known passage where Tiresias claims his equal right to speak as he has Apollo on his side.[110] The verbal adjective ἐξισωτέον shows an obligation and derives from ἐξισόω, a typically Sophoclean verb, according to Finglass, that is used in contexts of pain or suffering.[111] The pleonastic form of the phrase ἐξισωτέον τὸ γοῦν ἴσ᾽ ἀντιλέξαι alludes to the urgent need for political and juridical equality in opposition to the tyranny that Oedipus represents.[112] This juxtaposition inevitably evokes the democratic ideology of fifth-century Athens and the rights of ἰσηγορία ("equal right of speech") and παρρησία ("freedom of speech").

According to Kurt Raaflaub, the concept of *isegoria*, which appears earlier in literature, probably originated from the aristocratic opposition to tyranny.[113] More specifically, when tyrants came to power in sixth- and fifth-century Athens, members of the upper classes lost many of their privileges and demanded to regain their share in political power. Therefore, *isegoria* alludes more to the idea of equality within the circles of the elite rather than to actual democracy. Soon enough, a new right, *parrhesia,* granted every Athenian citizen freedom of expression. *Parrhesia* was a product of democracy in fifth-century Athens, therefore *isegoria*

[108] See further in Karakantza 2020, 61-69.
[109] Ugolini 1995, 192-193.
[110] Cf. lines 447-448. For Tiresias' portrayal as a representative of divine truth (ἀλήθεια) dealing with human delusion (λεληθέναι), see Kamerbeek 1967, 15, and Edmunds 2000, 52ff.
[111] Finglass 2018, 304-305.
[112] For the redundant wording, see Kamerbeek 1967, 101-102, and Jebb 2010, 88.
[113] Raaflaub 1980, 15, n. 43 and 2004, 45-51. *Isegoria* or the right "to speak freely" (ἐλευθέρως λέγειν) appears with political connotations in the early fifth-century BCE in Aeschylus' *Persians* 591-594, where after the fall of Xerxes' rule the people are presented as able "to speak freely" (ἐλεύθερα βάζειν, 593).

better fits the context of *OT* where monarchy prevails. Even if the word τύραννος may not necessarily mean 'absolute ruler', but just 'king', the verb τυραννεῖς in our text has definitely negative connotations. Tiresias presents himself as a representative of Apollo, a member of the elite Theban community, who faces recurring attacks and threats by a king-tyrant.[114] The legal terminology that Tiresias employs is a characteristic example of the language used in the first episode which we first detected in the participle σκοπῶν of line 286.[115] This anachronistic yet clear allusion to the political context of Sophocles' drama has been overlooked by many critics.[116]

Additionally, Finglass observes that "by denying that he is Oedipus' slave", Tiresias "implies that the king has treated him as if he were".[117] In ancient Greece, slaves, who were often non-Greek peoples, were not entitled to the right of political freedom of speech that belonged exclusively to Athenian citizens. As David Carter informs us, slaves and lower-class characters in Greek literature seem to be afraid of tyrants, hence not expressing themselves freely. Conversely, characters who are closer to the social status of the tyrant, thus higher in the hierarchy, speak more freely, as Tiresias here does.[118]

In this direction, taking into consideration the political situation of Athens at the time of Sophocles' play (429-425 BCE), the plague that torments the city of Thebes can be seen as parallel to the devastating plague in the early years of the Peloponnesian War (as described in Thuc. 2.47).[119] During these difficult years, men often called themselves diviners only for the sake of profit and without any real interest in the common good. As a result, the role of prophets was seen as ambiguous or even negative for the city by many intellectuals.[120] Thucydides seems hesitant to accept the validity of such prophets, as he ironically declares that the only oracle fulfilled during the Peloponnesian War was the one that predicted its time span (5.26.3). Similarly, in Aristophanes' comedies, diviners are ironically depicted as greedy frauds.[121] Such is the presentation of Tiresias in Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the seer is questioned by Creon for his validity.[122] Under these circumstances, it is no wonder why, unlike Homer's *Odyssey*, *OT* displays Tiresias as questioned for his trustworthiness by the main hero, like he is on trial.

Against this background, we could argue that the political situation of fifth-century Athens may have triggered some connections in the audience between the Theban prophet Tiresias and the Athenian 'fake' practitioners of prophecy during the Peloponnesian War. Tiresias seems to be depicted both as an Athenian and a non-Athenian citizen in the first episode. While he appeals to his right of *isegoria* and fearlessly resists the tyrannical oppression, his

[114] However, Oedipus' indignation towards the seer does not necessarily provide evidence for his tyrannical nature. It is rather a typical royal reaction to Tiresias' silences and obscure prophecies as presented in all classical tragedies (Ugolini 1995, 131-137).
[115] Knox 1998, 79-82.
[116] As Edmunds 2000, 46 notices.
[117] Finglass 2018, 300.
[118] Carter 2004, 212-213.
[119] See further in Jouanna 2018, 41-44.
[120] See Knox 1998, 44-47, Dillery 2005, Tell 2009, 27-31 (where we find an interesting comparison between prophets and sophists), and Jouanna 2018, 423-427.
[121] Cf. *Birds* 959-990, where an unnamed greedy fortune-teller comes to the recently founded Cloudcuckooland only to seek profit. Peisetairos mocks him and quickly sends him away. See also Smith 1989.
[122] Soph. *Ant*. 1055: "all the prophets are a greedy race" (τὸ μαντικὸν γὰρ πᾶν φιλάργυρον γένος).

seeming indifference to the city and his persistence in calling himself the slave of Apollo, cannot be considered typical Athenian characteristics. He appears to evade all connection to the city to such an extent that "he does not sound like the "seer of Thebes" at all", but rather resembles a liminal priest who seeks only profit (cf. ἀγύρτης).[123] On that account, Oedipus' treatment of Tiresias as someone inferior to him, a slave or even an enemy of the state, points to the portrayal of the seer as a non-Athenian barbarian Other.

2.6 Tiresias' Exit Speech and Function as an Analeptic and Proleptic Device

Returning to the text, we notice that in an outburst of anger, Tiresias explicitly reveals all the truth before leaving the stage. He fearlessly states that Oedipus is the one who murdered Laius (449-454) and further predicts his dark future; the king will become blind and poor and will wander in a foreign land after discovering the crimes he had committed (454-460). Oddly enough, the king, the most intelligent man of Thebes, the one who managed to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, does not seem to understand what the prophet first implies and then strongly affirms. This lack of verisimilitude was the main point of criticism against Sophocles' play.[124] Even though this debate is not yet settled, most commentators agree on the presence of Oedipus when Tiresias utters his ominous prophecy.[125]

Still, no answer is given to the seer, both he and the king depart, and the chorus quickly enters the scene and starts singing. In the first *stasimon,* the chorus calls Tiresias a "wise interpreter of omens" (σοφός οἰωνοθέτας, 484), thereby distancing themselves from Oedipus who expressed total contempt for the seer's mantic art and validity. Nevertheless, the chorus remain confused and deeply disturbed (483, 485-486) and conclude (498/9-502):

> ἀλλ᾽ ὁ μὲν οὖν Ζεὺς ὅ τ᾽ Ἀπόλλων ξυνετοὶ καὶ τὰ βροτῶν
> εἰδότες· ἀνδρῶν δ᾽ ὅτι μάντις πλέον ἢ ᾽γὼ φέρεται,
> κρίσις οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθής·
>
> "Well, Zeus and Apollo are certainly wise and aware of the mortals'
> affairs; among men, however, whether a diviner counts for more than I do,
> there is no certain means of judging."

Obviously, the chorus' deeply respectful language at the beginning of the episode (284-286, 297-299) is now completely reversed. Whereas Tiresias was initially presented as a godlike prophet (θεῖον μάντιν, 298) who possesses the truth like Apollo (284-285), now he is placed among the mortals whose knowledge is limited and potentially fallible. Gods are the only ones who are truly wise and flawless. Maintaining their faith in the king, the chorus questions Tiresias' validity due to a lack of evidence. In the second episode, Jocasta (705ff.) also expresses her serious concerns about the legitimacy of Tiresias' prophecies and assures Oedipus that "there is nothing mortal that possesses any of the mantic art" (708-709). Certain that the old Delphic oracle, which was given to Laius, had not been fulfilled, she goes so far as to totally condemn both oracles and diviners and concludes: "such are what the prophetic sayings have determined, to which you should give no regard" (723-724).

[123] Griffith 2009, 491.

[124] In modern times, Voltaire 1719 was the first to criticize the scene's incongruity. Later, Kock 1857, Carrière 1956 and Knox 1980 tried to explain the lack of verisimilitude by claiming that Oedipus leaves the stage before Tiresias' final speech.

[125] See indicatively, Kamerbeek 1967, 111, Bain 1979, Edmunds 2000, 60-64, Dawe 2006, 9-10 and 114, and Finglass 2018, 312-314.

Nevertheless, even if Tiresias is questioned and marginalized by Oedipus, Jocasta, and the chorus, the same does not happen with the audience.[126] Supposing that the viewers knew the play's plot in advance, Tiresias' exit speech should have provoked intense feelings of pity and horror for the unfortunate king. The apparent loss of self-control on behalf of Tiresias and his emotional outburst when he leaves the stage, what Alain Moreau aptly called "l' humanité de Tirésias", undermine his position and discredit his final words for the characters that do not yet know the truth.[127] But for those who know it, the seer's final speech is the perfect example of tragic irony. At the end of the tragedy, the king will indeed discover his identity and blind himself, as Tiresias predicted, but he will not leave Thebes by Creon's order. However, modern readers hear in Tiresias' prophecy an anticipation of Oedipus' situation in another Sophoclean drama, *Oedipus at Colonus*. This is certainly not the case with Sophocles' audience. But still, it would be evident even then that Tiresias has an overall view of the plot of Sophocles' *OT*, but also goes far beyond it.

Consequently, like in Homer's *Odyssey*, Tiresias in Sophocles' *OT* possesses the ultimate knowledge of the past, present and future and has a distant vision over the whole course of the main hero's life. Despite his blindness, he foresees the future and reveals the content and the form of the play. We can thus argue that in Tiresias' final speech, Sophocles employs the technique of both *analepsis* and *prolepsis*. As in the *Nekyia*, the seer refers to events that happened before and will happen after the drama. Hence, he opens the eyes of the viewers and bridges the distances between the poet and his audience. On that ground, Tiresias is placed both within and outside the narrative as he seems to function, on a deeper level, as the voice of the poet himself.[128]

2.7 Concluding Thoughts

Despite the doubts of Oedipus and the chorus about the validity of the seer, whatever happens after the first episode constitutes the fulfilment of Tiresias' prophecy. Although in classical Athens, politics was seen as the supreme art (cf. Aristot. *Nic. Eth.* 1094a2.6-8) and prophetic art was regarded with suspicion, in Sophocles' *OT* Tiresias' intuitive mantic power proves to be above all. And this possibly points to the religiosity of the poet himself.[129] In any case, Tiresias is certainly placed in a distinctive position within the drama, a position of divine wisdom and absolute knowledge. His silences, his solitude, his marginality and his in-betweenness are partly seen as negative characteristics by the other characters, but in the end, no one can dispute that the diviner is the only one (μόνος) who actually 'sees' everything.

[126] Kamerbeek 1967, 16.
[127] Moreau 1993.
[128] Edmunds 2000, 43 states that the seer "speaks as a mirror-image of the poet for the drama, as well as within the drama". He even argues that "Teiresias is the chief internal director/playwright in this tragedy" (63, n. 59).
[129] Cf. Jouanna's 2018, 428 statement that "Sophocles' originality consists in his steady and unbroken confidence in both the seer's prophecies and the god's oracles".

Chapter 3: Tiresias in Yannis Ritsos' homonymous poem

3.1 Introducing Tiresias in Ritsos' poem

"How we talk about the classical past, display it, teach it, adapt it, remember it and forget it […] has always been charged and political". [130] Edmund Richardson's allegation is unequivocally confirmed by the various cases of political use and abuse of Classics. [131] In twentieth-century modern Greece, for example, local and foreign authoritarian regimes often appropriated ancient Greek symbols and notions as a means of political propaganda. Conversely, prominent poets like C.P. Cavafy, George Seferis, and Yannis Ritsos frequently alluded to classical myths and (anti-)heroes to console themselves, criticize ironically the sociopolitical situation of their country and demythologize or modernize the legendary aspect of antiquity.[132] Such is the case of Ritsos' *Teiresias,* a long dramatic poem that will be examined in this chapter within the framework of classical reception.[133] As I will argue, the poet adopts many of the characteristics attributed to Tiresias in the ancient texts of Homer and Sophocles as well as his mythical traditions. However, it will become evident that Ritsos' modern Tiresias differs significantly from his ancient predecessor as he obtains new symbolic dimensions related to the poet's political ideology and broader existential concerns.

Before discussing Tiresias' appearance and speech in this modern poem, I will first introduce the poet. Yannis Ritsos (1909-1990) is considered one of the most acclaimed and prolific Greek authors.[134] He wrote over a hundred poetic collections, as well as several novels, theatrical plays, essays and translations. During the German occupation of Greece (1941-1944) and the Civil War (1946-1949), Ritsos became actively involved in politics and joined the forces of the Left as a member of the Communist Party. For his political activity and his rebellious writings, he was sent to concentration camps on isolated islands by local and foreign authoritarian regimes. Later, during the military dictatorship of the Colonels, also known as the Greek Junta (1967-1974), the poet experienced once again political attacks, bans, arrests and even exile and isolation.[135] His poetic work has been internationally awarded and repeatedly translated throughout the world. Some passages from his most well-known compositions have been set to music by Mikis Theodorakis, resulting in an even wider recognition and popularity of Ritsos' work.

In Ritsos' poetry, references to the classical past cannot be traced before the 1960s. At about that time, the poet started using the 'mythical method' (as T.S. Eliot first called it), thus incorporating in his work persons and motifs from ancient Greek mythology and creating an

[130] Richardson 2019, 15.

[131] Roche and Demetriou 2018 explain how classical literature and archaeology were manipulated in Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany to legitimate the policies of the dictators. In a different direction, Goldwyn and Nikopoulos 2017 analyze the appropriation of ancient Greek and Roman symbols by writers and artists of Modernism and the Avant-Garde.

[132] See further in Mackridge 1996 about the use of myth in modern Greek poetry. For the exploitation of the classical past by dictatorships in Greece, see, for instance, how Nelly's famous photographs of the Athenian Acropolis were used under Metaxas' regime to propagate a distorted image of Greece (Damaskos 2008, Panayotopoulos 2009, and Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou 2015).

[133] The first edition of the poem *Teiresias* was published in 1975 in the collected volume *Ποιήματα Δ΄ 1938-1971*. I follow the 1983 edition of the text.

[134] For further details about Ritsos' life and work, see Bien 1974, 11-38, and Gioti 2014.

[135] For the political situation in Greece during the Junta and the persecution of dissidents, see Van Dyck 2018.

interactive dialogue between the past and the present.[136] Ritsos chose to emphasize the ordinary, material, and human perspective of ancient myth. Concomitantly, he commented on his contemporary society and supported his political ideas, such as the freedom of the people against the powerful. His method has often been correlated to his Marxist ideology which can be detected effortlessly in his first poetic collections.[137] However, during the Regime of the Colonels (1967-1974), the political connotations of Ritsos' poetry gave way to deeper existential concerns. As Dimitris Tziovas highlights, priority was then given to "the parameters of ideological self-questioning and existential reflection" as outlined by ancient myth.[138]

Ritsos' mythical method is applied in his poem *Teiresias* (1964-1971) written during the poet's hospitalization in Athens and exile on the island of Samos.[139] The poem falls within the category of Ritsos' "αρχαιόμυθα" ("poems related to the ancient myth"), which means that its mythological context is not regarded as a meaningless background, but as an important element that contributes to its better understanding.[140] Surprisingly enough, although the poet characterized *Teiresias* as the "most philosophical of [his] works", it remains one of his least discussed poetic compositions.[141] The few critics who have stressed its significance have mainly focused on the androgynous identity of the seer as depicted in the poem.[142] Yet, I will argue that the importance of *Teiresias* should be further discussed, not only from the perspective of the prophet's cross-gender identity but more broadly, in the context of his marginality and in-betweenness as testified by his overall appearance and speech. These characteristics have already been denoted in relation to the Homerian and Sophoclean Tiresias but, as we shall see, Ritsos gives them new meaning and significance reflecting the historical era to which he belongs and his broader poetic vision.

3.2 The Poem's Place, Time, and Characters

To start our analysis of how the mythical seer is depicted in Ritsos, I will first consider the place, time, and characters as described in the poem's parenthetical prologue.[143] More specifically, the reader is transferred to the gates of an unknown city that could be identified with ancient Thebes right after the death of Eteocles and Polyneices, but might well be another city of a different era.[144] There, on the verge between day and night, at sunset, eight old men with ancient costumes and wigs discuss loosely with each other, "like ancient actors, who went up to the most upper stands of the theatre, after the end of the performance".[145] Their eyes are light blue, almost white, like blind. The four of them have beards, but the others do not so, according to the poet, they resemble the actors of ancient Greek theatre who used

[136] See Myrsiades 1978, Veloudis 1991, 113-116, and Tziovas 2017. As Pourgouris 2014, 287, n. 5 clarifies, T.S. Eliot first used the term 'mythical method' to describe James Joyce's technique in *Ulysses*.
[137] Bien 1974, 19-21 briefly analyses Ritsos' early collections, *Tractor* (1934) and *Pyramids* (1935).
[138] Tziovas 1996, 77.
[139] Ritsos suffered from tuberculosis and was regularly hospitalized. After the coup-d'état in 1967, the poet was sent to Samos under house arrest. In Savvas 1993, 238 and 245, Ritsos refers to his house detention: "From 1967-1971 even mention of my name was forbidden […]. It was the most sinister imprisonment of all".
[140] Akritidou 2012.
[141] As reported in Dokou 1997, 11.
[142] Dokou 1997, 223-275, and Pefanis 1998.
[143] Ritsos 1983, 9.
[144] Pefanis 1998, 317.
[145] My translation of the Greek text in Ritsos 1983, 9.

to play female roles. The sixth one holds a scepter that may remind us of Tiresias' appearance in Homer's *Nekyia*.[146] Seven of them speak separately or all together, but the eighth one always speaks alone, like the coryphaeus of an ancient chorus. His speech seems to compose all the different perspectives in one general view. As Pantelis Prevelakis reports, "The seven old men express the multiple experiences from their long life. The Eighth […] formulates a unified thought".[147] He has the longest beard and the whitest eyes and bears a silver caduceus with two entwined snakes, a chthonic symbol that points to the first mythical tale about how the seer became blind.[148] According to the insightful analysis of G.P. Pefanis, the two snakes further represent the doubleness of existence, the merging of opposites, and the cycles of nature, life, death, and rebirth.[149] All these themes will be elucidated below.

The identification of the eight men with the ancient prophet is made by the poet himself in the prologue: "Perhaps he [the Eighth] is Tiresias. Perhaps even all Eight of them, are the seven transformations of Tiresias".[150] With this statement, Ritsos alludes to the least known Hellenistic version of Tiresias' myth attributed to Sostratos, according to whom the seer experienced seven transformations throughout his life.[151] The poet further indicates that the four beardless old men correspond to the female forms of Tiresias, while the other four represent his male versions. Prompted by this reference, Christina Dokou detects two 'voices' in the poem; the 'feminine voices' of the beardless men who speak about death, love, fertility and endurance, themes stereotypically associated with the female gender, and the 'male voices' who have more rational thinking and handle thoughts on violence and treachery.[152] Therefore, it seems that Ritsos presents male and female gender in a rather sexist and stereotypical way while indicating his preference for the 'male' perspective, embodied by the wisest form of Tiresias, the Eighth. In addition, all eight Tiresiae are men as can be seen by the masculine suffix of their number/name (Πρώτος, Δεύτερος, …). Without dismissing the valuable feminist readings of the poem, I will follow a different approach and adhere to Ritsos' statement that all eight men are forms of the same person. For the sake of brevity, I will henceforth refer to these men as one.

3.3 Tiresias' Portrayal and Political Allusions

In the texts of Homer and Sophocles, one of the major characteristics of Tiresias is his close relationship with the gods. He is depicted as an "excellent prophet", a "lord", a "divine seer" "who sees the same things as Apollo".[153] By contrast, as we have mentioned above, Ritsos alludes to ancient figures with a desire for demythologization and humanization. On that account, his modern Tiresias does not resemble a godlike 'lord', but rather "a rebel […] who comes into contact with the powerful gods, is courted by them, but never gives in to their seduction":[154]

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[146] Cf. Hom. *Od*. 11.91.
[147] Prevelakis 1983, 451.
[148] As attested in *Melampodia*. Cf. section "*Status Quaestionis* and Mythical Background" in the Introduction for all three traditions of Tiresias' myth. See also below.
[149] Pefanis 1998, 318.
[150] Ritsos 1983, 9.
[151] In Ritsos' poem, there is no reference to Tiresias' final transformation into a mouse.
[152] Dokou 1997, 265-266.
[153] Cf. Hom. *Od*. 11.99 and 151, and Soph. *OT* 298 and 284-285 respectively.
[154] Dokou 1997, 241.

ΟΓΔΟΟΣ:
Χτυπήσαμε τ' ἀγκαλιασμένα φίδια μέ τή ράβδο μας·
— δέν τό μπορέσαμε
νά βλέπουμε τήν ἅγια πράξη τοῦ ἔρωτα καταμεσῆς τοῦ δρόμου
νά σούρνεται μέ τά ἑρπετά μέσα στή σκόνη
καί νά γεννοβολᾶ ἑρπετά. Νά ἡ ἀμοιβή μας:
ΟΙ ΕΦΤΑ:
Οἱ θεοί μᾶς χτύπησαν τά μάτια· ἡ ὅρασή μας στράφη
κατά μέσα,
στράφη στήν ἴδια μας τή ρίζα καί τό σπλάχνο μας — μποδάει
τά χέρια μας —
ΕΚΤΟΣ:
Κακή τιμωρία καί καλό ξεπλέρωμα —

"EIGHTH:
We struck the embraced snakes with our scepter;
— we could not bear it
seeing the holy act of love in the middle of the street
crawling with the serpents in the dust
and giving birth to serpents. Here's our reward:
THE SEVEN:
The gods struck our eyes; our sight turned
inward,
turned at our own root and our gut — obstructing
our hands —
SIXTH:
Bad punishment and good payback —"

In this passage, Tiresias alludes to his first mythical story as reported in the Introduction of this thesis. He was punished by the gods because he purposefully hit the mating snakes. He could not stand seeing them propagate "in the middle of the street". As a contemplation for his blindness, he received the gifts of prophecy and longevity which are described here as "bad punishment and good payback". Later in the poem, Tiresias refers to the second version of his myth related to the goddess Athena.[155] Moreover, as we have seen, the poet alludes in his prologue to the third version of Tiresias' myth, based on Sostratos. It seems, therefore, that, unlike Homer and Sophocles, Ritsos blends all three mythical traditions in his poem and places Tiresias in-between them.

As for the first version of Tiresias' myth quoted above, it is pertinent to note that in Ritsos' era, the serpent image could be perceived as an allegory for fascism.[156] Taking this symbolism into account as well as the fact that the poem was written during a dictatorship in Greece, we could argue that Tiresias here fearlessly attacks tyranny, but ends up being punished by the gods. These gods "do not give any sign; the gods do not accept sacrifices from our hands".[157]

[155] Ritsos 1983, 30.
[156] Bonnell 1999, 194-195 refers to Russian artists who represented fascists as serpentine creatures in propaganda posters during World War I and afterwards. The serpent/hydra thus became a typical allegorical image for fascists. Cf. Ingmar Bergman's 1977 film *The Serpent's Egg.*
[157] Ritsos 1983, 35.

Hence, they seem to represent an authority which is apparently at odds with the prophet. Tiresias cannot even trust the birds of omen, because they "squawk down to the plane tree's stream, FIFTH: as if to cover the murder that has been committed on the other side, SEVENTH: so that you will not see, not remember and not look at. SECOND: They cry out as if concerted with a foreign, distant power".[158] It is thus evident that the birds can no longer be perceived as carriers of divine signs that will help the city in solving a crime, as in the case of Sophocles' *OT* (310-311). On the contrary, they seem to deliberately keep the crime and the responsible ones from being noticed, thereby rendering the city helpless. From this perspective, the gods and their signs are regarded as useless or even misleading, whereas Tiresias is no longer the diviner of Apollo, but rather the diviner of the people.

References to the socio-political situation of Ritsos' era are scattered throughout the poem and Tiresias is often (self-)presented as the seer of the people. In particular, the prophet alludes vaguely to the mythical conflict between Eteocles and Polynices ("Their two spears stood facing one another, planted in the soil. THE SEVEN: Neither of them won nor was defeated.") and the historical events of the Peloponnesian War ("FOURTH: Greeks with Greeks slaughtered more than with barbarians? SEVENTH: Thebans with Argives? Spartans with Athenians?").[159] For a modern Greek reader, these remarks could evoke the tragedy of the Civil War (1946-1949), and the imposition of military dictatorship by George Papadopoulos (1967-1974).[160] In this respect, Tiresias seems to stand in-between myth and historical reality, the distant past and the recent present.

Poor people are killing each other, but "the great culprit always remains hidden".[161] The seer creates dark allegories when speaking of "birds full of blood and fleshes of brothers who have killed each other", hence reminding us of the ancient Tiresias presented as the 'prophet of the doom'.[162] Nonetheless, Ritsos' Tiresias adopts an optimistic (Marxist) view of the future. As the following passage reveals, the seer fights *for* and *with* the masses, while standing fearlessly between them and the 'lords':

> ΕΒΔΟΜΟΣ:
> Μόλις κάναμε
> νά δείξουμε μέ τό δάχτυλο, ὄχι τό φταίχτη ὀλόισα
> μά τά ἐφτά κυπαρίσσια καί τό ἴδιο μας τό νύχι
> πού μάκρυνε μονομιᾶς κακοσήμαδα, οἱ ἀρχόντοι
> σηκῶσαν κατά πάνου στ' ἄσπρο μας κεφάλι τή χρυσή τους
> ράβδο,
> στείλανε πίσω μας τά σκυλιά τους, τά σίδερα, τη **σιωπή**, το
> πουγκί τους —
> […]
> ΟΙ ΕΦΤΑ:
> Μόνο ἡ ὀργή τοῦ λαού, τά κλειστά πρόσωπα φωτι-
> σμένα ἀπ' τά μέσα,
> μόνο ἡ μεγάλη **βουβαμάρα** τοῦ λαοῦ κάτου ἀπό τά παλάτια,

[158] Ritsos 1983, 18.

[159] Ritsos 1983, 35-36.

[160] Patilas 2007, 266-267.

[161] Ritsos 1983, 43.

[162] Ritsos 1983, 34. For Tiresias as the 'prophet of the doom', cf. Hom. *Od*. 11.112 and Soph. *OT* 427-428.

τά μπαλκόνια,
τό στυλό μάτι πού ’ναι ἀπόφαση καί πράξη κιόλας

“SEVENTH:
When we tried
to point the finger, not straight to the culprit
but the seven cypresses and our own nail
that lengthened at once with a bad sign, the lords
lifted against our white head their golden
sceptre,
sent after us their dogs, the irons, the **silence**, their
purse —
[…]
THE SEVEN:
Only the rage of the people, the closed faces lit
from within,
only the great **silence** of the people below the palaces,
the balconies,
the steadfast eye that’s decision and action already”

Apparently, Tiresias speaks here on behalf of the people. He is not an aristocrat, a lord himself as in the ancient texts, since the “lords” (“ἀρχόντοι”) are perceived now as enemies, tyrants who punish the seer harshly after he reveals their identity. These men hold a scepter similar to his own, but golden which probably alludes to their corruption. They try to oppress the crowd by violent means (irons, dogs) and bribes (purse). The brutal means of the powerful and their devious “silence” contradict the righteous indignation of the suffering people who carry the light inside them and look silently and persistently at their rulers. Tiresias elsewhere declares: “It is not that I shine, but that I am light”, and then wonders: “How can we hide this light? How can we hide ourselves?”.[163]

3.4 Tiresias’ Silence, Bitterness and Marginality

Tiresias’ light may be an allegory for the inner truth that the seer possesses as well as an allusion to the motif of blindness and the contrast between physical and inner sight attested in Homer and Sophocles.[164] But in Ritsos’ case, this light may also constitute a symbol of people’s power to overthrow their oppressors. It is also evident that Tiresias here expresses his sincere interest and concern about the common good. Consequently, he differs from his predecessor in Sophocles’ *OT*, whose seeming indifference to common welfare did not meet the expectations of the king and the chorus. However, elsewhere in our poem, Tiresias’ optimism is reversed, and his truth is being challenged:

ΟΙ ΕΦΤΑ:
Δέ συχωρνᾶν τό τίποτα· τό ’χουν γιά κρυφοστόχαστο·
τό σκιάζουνται
σάν τή **σιωπή**, σάν τό πολύ, σάν τό ὅλα.
— «Λέγε», λένε.
— «Ξέχασα, ἀλήθεια λέω· δέν ξέρω τίποτα, δέν ἔχω τίποτα·

[163] Ritsos 1983, 33 and 46.
[164] Cf. sections 1.4 and 2.2 of this thesis for the motif of blindness in Homer and Sophocles respectively.

ξέχασα, ξέχασα, ξεχάστηκα».
— «Τί ξέχασες;»
— «Δέν ξέρω τί ξέχασα. Δέν ξέρω».
Κι ἀλήθεια
ΕΒΔΟΜΟΣ:
ξεχάσαμε τήν ἀλήθεια, χαμηλώσαμε, πικραθήκαμε·

"THE SEVEN:
They don't forgive the nothing; they take it for secret thought;
they are afraid of it
like the **silence**, like the much, like the everything.
— "Speak", they say.
— "I forgot, I am telling the truth; I know nothing, I have nothing;
I forgot, I forgot, I have forgotten".
— "What did you forget?"
— "I don't know what I forgot. I don't know".
And truly
SEVENTH:
we forgot the truth, we lowered, we were embittered".

The reported dialogue echoes the conflict between Tiresias and Oedipus in Sophocles' drama.[165] To be more specific, the silence of Ritsos' Tiresias inspires tremendous fear in those in power. Even though the prophet assures them he knows nothing, they keep questioning him like he is on trial and try to make him speak. Similarly, in *OT*, the seer is questioned by the king even though he initially declares: "Even if I knew these things well, I forgot" (ταῦτα γὰρ καλῶς ἐγὼ εἰδὼς διώλεσ[α], 317-318). In both cases, however, Tiresias has not forgotten the truth but probably does not want to reveal it.[166] For Ritsos' poem, I think we should take into consideration the historical context and the poet's political ideology. Tiresias' silence could point to the silence of political prisoners when questioned by police officers under oppressive regimes in modern Greece. Ritsos himself as a Leftist poet was imprisoned and tortured several times throughout his life.[167] On a second reading, we could assume that Tiresias chooses to remain silent so as to differentiate himself from his questioners and prevent their abuse of power against him. As Dokou rightly accentuates, "Teiresias, who carries a different kind of potent authority, must remain liminal".[168]

Furthermore, Tiresias' choice to remain marginal and silent seems to be related to his feelings of bitterness ("we were embittered"). His prophecies could not prevent the prevalence of evil. Elsewhere in the poem, the seer conveys his deep frustration, because his warnings were not heeded and, as a result, he ended up being heavily punished by the rulers, like Cassandra ("FOURTH: And the prophetess with her cries, what did she accomplish, tell me, what did she prevent? SEVENTH: Her head cut off from her body, hanging on the tree from her own

[165] Although allusions to Sophocles' drama can be detected in Ritsos' modern poem, Oedipus is not mentioned anywhere. Even in the reported dialogue, Oedipus is not necessarily identified with the questioners of modern Tiresias. That is because Ritsos' focus is clearly on Tiresias and his feelings, rather than the other characters mentioned in the poem.
[166] Cf. Soph. *OT* 328-329.
[167] Bien 1974, 30 and 35.
[168] Dokou 1997, 256.

hair").[169] This sense of bitterness is not a rare phenomenon in Ritsos' poetry. As Dimitrios Patilas observes, in a parallel poem from the collection *Κέρματα τηλεφώνου Ι* (1975), the poet expresses his desire to remain silent as his warnings have not been heard: "I don't want to speak further […]. Don't say that I haven't warned you, don't justify yourself. I have talked enough".[170]

On that ground, we could argue that the meaning of Tiresias' marginality and silence is much more elusive than first expected. It may also be related to the uselessness of the prophet's privileged knowledge in modern society: "All the prophecies, the announcements and the divinations, all fake, unintentionally and innocently fake", "It is now time to keep quiet. We collected the prophecy's paraphernalia", and elsewhere: "What art? What trick? What mantic [ability]? What meaning?".[171] In this way, Ritsos' Tiresias differentiates himself from his ancient predecessor who proclaimed his faith in the power and validity of prophetic art.[172] On a deeper level, Tiresias may also refer to the futility of human existence in general. "Neither victory nor defeat. Silence. […] Where can you find silence? It is only death", asserts Tiresias.[173] Such statements clearly contradict Ritsos' own confession that his poetry is bereft of feelings of bitterness and cynicism as he nurtured compassion for those who persecuted him.[174] The antithesis becomes even more intense when reading the following verses:

> Πικραθήκαμε ἀπ' τ' ἄδικο, πληγωθήκαμε πάλε, ὀργιστήκαμε
> γιά τήν κλεψιά, γιά τό σφετέρισμα. Καλοί συνεργάτες δέ
> γίναμε·
> δέν ξέραμε νά σκύψουμε το κούτελο, νά βοηθήξουμε
> στ' ἅρπαγμα, στό ξεγέλασμα, στό κρύψιμο· δέν μπορούσαμε
> νά μήν ἤμαστε λεύτεροι.
> **Ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι μόνη —**
> **μόνη, κατάμονη, μανταλωμένη, λεύτερη.**
> ΟΓΔΟΟΣ:
> Ὁ ἀληθινός εἶναι μόνος κι ἀνήμπορος, χιλιομαντα-
> λωμένος
> ἀπ' τά σινάφια τῶν σφετεριστῶνε. Δέ γλιτώνει κανένας.
> **Μονάχη λευτεριά μας ἡ μοναξιά μας λέω.**
>
> "We were embittered by the injustice, we got hurt again, we got enraged
> for the theft, for the usurpation. Good collaborators we didn't
> become;
> we didn't know how to bend the forehead, to help
> in the seizing, in the fooling, in the hiding; we could not bear it
> not to be free.
> **The truth is alone —**
> **alone, all alone, locked up, free.**

[169] Ritsos 1983, 37.
[170] Patilas 2007, 268-269.
[171] Ritsos 1983, 27, 36 and 14.
[172] Cf. Hom. *Od*. 137, and Soph. *OT* 461-462.
[173] Ritsos 1983, 11.
[174] Savvas 1993, 242.

EIGHTH:
The true one is alone and helpless, a thousand times locked
up
by the shoals of the usurpers. No one escapes.
The only freedom is our solitude I say".

Although Tiresias had previously identified himself with the suffering people and their fate, now he stresses his loneliness and proclaims his freedom. He refuses to become a collaborator of the tyrants and prefers to be all alone and helpless, but genuinely free. The phrase "The truth is alone" is repeated several times throughout the poem as a refrain emphasizing the solitude of Tiresias.[175] As we have seen in the previous chapter, the same word, μόνος ("alone"), is repeated four times in reference to the seer in Sophocles' *OT* with both positive and negative implications (299, 304, 349, 389). There, the prophet is first praised for his uniqueness and then marginalized due to his silence, but he also sets himself apart from the community. He answers only to Apollo (408-410) and despite the king's rage, declares: "I have escaped; because I nurture the truth that prevails" (πέφευγα· τἀληθὲς γὰρ ἰσχῦον τρέφω, 356). Similarly, in Ritsos' case, Tiresias' truth is presented as "all alone" and "locked up", but also inextricably related to a state of freedom and inner strength. Even if the rulers try to hide the absolute knowledge that the seer possesses, they cannot oppress his freedom, which resides in his solitude. This modern Tiresias does not answer to a god but only to truth itself.

Nevertheless, the prophet's solitude and marginality are not only a matter of personal choice but also come as a natural outcome of his social interactions with others: "One was bending down to another's ear; they laughed secretly. They had us outside their circle. They didn't talk to us".[176] Tiresias here is treated with disdain and confronted as an Other. As Vayos Liapis explains, this sense of non-belonging and Otherness is frequent in Ritsos' mythological compositions.[177] In addition, Chrysa Prokopaki suggests that "[w]ithin each poem of Ritsos coexist at least two contradictory positions each time. The characteristic element of this creation is the oscillation and the clash of the opposites".[178] In our poem, Tiresias seems to be in-between two (or more) opposing situations. He stands both within and outside the masses, he fights both with and without the people.

3.5 Tiresias' In-betweenness and Existential Concerns

His in-betweenness results in and from his solitude and the possession of his "white knowledge" ("ἄσπρη γνώση"), which is the realization of mortality: "The only thing we learned for sure is that we will die".[179] The seer gives a prophecy of death in Homer as well.[180] Here, however, the confrontation with inevitable death adds a deeply existential tone to the poem as Tiresias does not speak about the future of another hero, but about human fate in general. As Crescenzio Sangiglio clarifies, this emphasis on death constitutes one of the most characteristic elements of Ritsos' poetry.[181] Tiresias' knowledge comes as an aftermath of his

[175] Ritsos 1983, 27, 28, 33 and 46.
[176] Ritsos 1983, 65.
[177] Liapis 2014, For the depiction of Ritsos' mythical heroines as 'Others' in the poetic collection *The Fourth Dimension* (1972), see also Kotopoulos and Karasavvidou 2011.
[178] Prokopaki 1981, 10.
[179] Ritsos 1983, 13.
[180] Cf. Hom. *Od*. 134-137.
[181] Sangiglio 1975, 82-109.

mantic art and cannot be explained to others but can only be experienced.[182] I argue that this paradox can be explained by Tiresias' role in-between as he himself reveals in the following verses:

> ΟΓΔΟΟΣ:
> Ὅμορφος ἦχος, μυστικός, φιλικός, σμίγοντας ἥσυχα
> δυό ἄγνωστα σημεῖα — τήν ἀρχή καί τό τέλος. **Τό ἀνάμεσα**
> **εἶναι ὁ δικός μας χῶρος**, ἀνάλλαγος, χιλιόμορφος. Τοῦτον
> τόν ἦχο
> ἐμεῖς τόν εἴπαμε: ὡραῖο· ἐμεῖς τοῦ δώσαμε ὄνομα —
>
> "EIGHTH:
> Beautiful sound, secret, friendly, blending quietly
> two unknown points — the beginning and the end. **The in-between**
> **is our space**, unchanging, of a thousand forms. This
> sound
> we called it: beautiful; we gave it a name—"

The seer blends "quietly" the opposites and operates between the beginning and the end of all things. The adverb in-between ("ἀνάμεσα") is repeated ten times throughout the poem, mostly in relation to Tiresias and his interstitial space.[183] The seer's in-betweenness results in his solitude and silence but is "beautiful" and "friendly" at the same time. Even if it can take "a thousand forms", is actually "unchanging". Accordingly, the multiplicity or doubleness that Tiresias represents should be seen against the broader context of his unchangeable nature.[184] His in-betweenness thus differs substantially from the intermediary role of ancient Tiresias that mainly resided in his religious status.[185] As in our case there is no connection with religion, Tiresias' in-betweenness, as he himself describes it, is developed further, and obtains new political and philosophical dimensions.

On this basis, Ritsos seems to accomplish here what he defined as the purpose of 'good' poetry that deals with ancient myth: "the immediate event should be extended associatively and aesthetically to an indefinite time, a historical, mythical, internal time towards the before and the after".[186] Indeed, as we have noticed, contemporary political events are intertwined in this poem with ancient historical and mythical ones, thereby creating a well-intended vagueness and ambiguity. This feeling of timelessness and universality is attributed to the figure of Tiresias who harmonizes the opposites and represents totality with his in-betweenness.

With that in mind, we can better understand why in the parenthetical epilogue of the poem the eight old men take off their props (wigs and beards) associated with theatrical plays and disappear at once in the light of the moon, that marks the transition from sun to darkness. They leave behind the caduceus with the snakes and their final words: "What a simple thing

[182] Dokou 1997, 271, and Patilas 2007, 272-273.
[183] Ritsos 1983, 9, 19, 20, 22, 28, 38, 49, 55.
[184] Ilinskagia 1976, 180. Dokou 1997 and Pefanis 1998, 314 associate the seer's multiplicity with his androgynous identity. In this respect, Tiresias also stands between different identities and genders.
[185] Cf. sections 1.3, 1.5 and 2.2 of this thesis for Tiresias' role in-between gods and humans in Homer's *Odyssey* and Sophocles' *OT*.
[186] Ritsos 1991, 96.

is the death and the immortality".[187] With this statement, Tiresias comprises a harmony between death and immortality while reversing his former pessimistic view of the inevitability of death. The cyclical movement between life, death, and rebirth can be seen in other parts of the poem as well, where the adjective "καινούργιος" is used to signify the creation of something "new": "A taste of new beginning — unstoppable birth —".[188] On that account, Tiresias seems to stand in-between life, death, and rebirth while bridging the distances between them.

According to Pefanis, this idea of re-creation is not metaphysical, but rather a within-the-world rebirth, which liberates Tiresias from his existential agonies as well as from feelings of despair and bitterness.[189] The beauty of ordinary human life compensates and relieves the hero: "It is the joy of smelling, hearing, feeling".[190] This seems to be the remedy for every sorrow: "white salt for the great loaf of life, the loaf of the world" […] FIFTH: The wound burns with the salt and heals. FOURTH: And inside, works the health".[191] It thus becomes clear how Ritsos uses the mythical method to celebrate the ordinary aspect of human life and posit deeper philosophical questions.

3.6 Tiresias as the Poet's *Persona*

As I have intimated so far, Ritsos' Tiresias seems to function as the voice of the poet himself.[192] Liapis affirms that "[t]he concept of the mythological persona as a 'poetic mask' is one that Ritsos himself seems to have encouraged" and critics see it as "a key to unlocking the meanings" of the poet's long mythological compositions.[193] Although the seer of Ritsos does not utter any prophecy for the future, as in Homer and Sophocles, he does possess absolute knowledge of the past, present, and future, and has a distant vision over the whole course of human life.[194] He reflects political ideas and refers to mythical and historical events as counterparts that happened before and will probably happen again in an eternal circle of creation, destruction, and re-creation. Consequently, he functions as a mediator between the poet and the readers. Tiresias' knowledge embraces the whole universe, thus going beyond the poem itself, beyond myth and the poet's contemporary reality, extending to a deeper level of existential awareness.

3.7 Concluding Thoughts

From this perspective, the poet uses Tiresias as a *persona* to universalize his suffering and express his philosophical views. That may explain the use of the pronoun 'we' throughout the poem and the self-identification of the prophet with the poet but also, on a deeper level, with humanity's unchangeable face: "Many faces we changed, many, — not face masks. Behind a thousand faces we hid. We got mixed up with gods and myths, with other lightings, with other

[187] Ritsos 1983, 70.
[188] Ritsos 1983, 33. The adjective "καινούρ(γ)ιος" is repeated nine times throughout the poem.
[189] Pefanis 1998, 316-317.
[190] Ritsos 1983, 51. Dokou 1997, 242 further claims: "This Teiresias, unlike the stylized and remote prophet of the tragedies, is not afraid or disdainful of participating in life, of traveling, of falling in love like an ordinary human being".
[191] Ritsos 1983, 68-69.
[192] Ilinskagia 1976.
[193] Liapis 2014, 125. Ritsos 1991 identifies himself with the mythical figures of his poems. See also Prokopaki 2000, 9-10, and Alexiou 2009.
[194] Cf. sections 1.6 and 2.6 of this thesis for Homer and Sophocles respectively.

times to cover our face, the deep, the bitter, the unchangeable, the innocent, the punished face, ours only".[195] It is thus clear that the prophet transforms each time into different persons of different mythical or historical eras with similar concerns and experiences.[196]

Blind figures like Tiresias appear more than once in Ritsos' poetry, always in association with the poet himself.[197] Although more scholarly research is needed to explain the complex symbolisms of this poem, our analysis sheds new light on Ritsos' reception of ancient and mythical Tiresias. As I have argued, the modern Greek poet builds new interpretations and adds new dimensions to his Tiresias under the perspective of his own historical era, political ideology and deeper existential concerns. Using his mythical method, Ritsos blends myth with reality and portrays a marginal, in-between and humanized prophet who reflects his ideas and feelings towards an "unchangeable" world.

[195] Ritsos 1983, 17.

[196] Ilinskagia 1976, 180, and Dokou 1997, 260-262.

[197] The figure of a blind man who symbolizes the "Poet-Prophet" (as Sonia Ilinskagia 1976, 179 aptly calls him) appears, for example, in Ritsos' theatrical play *The Blind Men's Sticks* (1959) and his poem *The Return of Iphigenia* (1972). For these parallels, see Dokou 1997, 230-234, and Pourgouris 2014, 294-295 respectively.

Chapter 4: Tiresias in Pasolini's film *Edipo re*

4.1 Introducing Tiresias in *Edipo re*

"The language of cinema is fundamentally a 'language of poetry'".[198] This statement was made by one of the twentieth century's most salient and controversial Italian thinkers, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975).[199] Pasolini's innovative work as a poet, (screen)writer, journalist, translator, actor, and film director renders him an internationally renowned intellectual. Throughout his short life, though, the director endured constant personal attacks, arrests, and bans on some of his movies. Heavily criticized by his political enemies for his tumultuous life and open homosexuality, his Marxist views and atheism, as well as his straightforward opposition to fascism, Christian democracy, the new media, and the bourgeois consumerist culture emerging in Italy after the economic boom of the 1960s, Pasolini became a notorious, incendiary political figure. Even if the circumstances of his violent murder in 1975 remain a mystery, it is obvious that his beliefs and personality were regarded as heretical. His essays and films have long been the subject of scholarly debate, while his notion of 'cinema di poesia' ("cinema of poetry") has drawn critics' attention.[200]

While attempting to decipher Pasolini's 'cinema di poesia', Giacomo Manzoli argues that the director envisioned a new way of cinematic expression that would be equivalent to literary verse and would lay the foundations of a new philosophy.[201] According to Pasolini himself, even if cinema is inherently and profoundly poetic since it has the character of a dream and thus is full of mystery and ambiguity, not all films fall within the category of 'cinema di poesia'.[202] The fundamental difference is the choice of cinematographic style. If the style, i.e., the movements of the camera, the framing, the close-ups, the editing, the choice of landscapes, colours, music etc., resemble (at least to some extent) that of poetry and create a connection between the character's perspective and the director's personal view, then we can speak about 'poetic' films. The purpose of this cinema is to posit deeper existential questions and possibly restore to artists "a late humanistic function: the myth and the technical awareness of the form", enabling them to necessitate an "internal revolution" against capitalism.[203]

The use of classical myth intertwined with personal hopes and political demands can be detected in Pasolini's acclaimed movie *Edipo re* (1967), a modern adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Pasolini was not the first director to be engaged with the myth of Oedipus. In fact, almost since the advent of the medium of cinema, Oedipus' story has inspired endless adaptations and retellings.[204] The development of psychoanalysis and the prevalence of Sigmund Freud's theory of the 'Oedipus complex' contributed a lot to the popularity of the

[198] My translation of the Italian text in Pasolini 1972, 184.
[199] For Pasolini's biography, see the landmark book of Siciliano 1978, and the more recent work of Annovi 2017.
[200] See Greene 1990, 92-126, Siti et al. 1999, 1383-1391, Manzoli 2014, and Bazzocchi 2015 [2011].
[201] Manzoli 2014.
[202] Siti et al. 1999, 1390-1391.
[203] Pasolini 1972, 198.
[204] Cf. Tyrone Guthrie's 1957 movie *Oedipus Rex*, and Alfred Hitchcock's allusions to Oedipus' myth in his films, such as *The Birds* (1963). See further in Winkler 2008 and 2017, 46.

myth in the twentieth century.[205] Oedipus was presented as an Everyman, a victim of his tragic fate and the cruel gods.

Under the strong influence of Freud, Pasolini created a film that blends the ancient drama with modern society's anxieties and striking autobiographical details with socio-political matters. *Edipo re* is definitely not a mere imitation of the Sophoclean text, but rather its creative transformation. As Ritsos does in his poem *Teiresias* with his 'mythical method', similarly Pasolini uses cinema to humanize and demythologize the classical legend. He places the action of his movie both in ancient and modern contexts while trying to delve into the heroes' souls to express his own existential concerns.

Under the prism of the director's own comments, film critics understand *Edipo re* as a "kind of complete metaphoric – and therefore mythicized – autobiography" in which psychoanalysis is re-projected on the myth.[206] The film is built on the identification of Pasolini with Oedipus, as has been often pointed out.[207] The role of Tiresias has also been discussed, but mainly in relation to the main character and his tragic end, according to the Freudian theory of 'sublimation'. In particular, the director suggests that "[o]nce Oedipus has blinded himself he re-enters society by sublimating all his faults. One of the forms of sublimation is poetry".[208] As we shall see, Tiresias is innovatively depicted in the film as a prominent poet-prophet who plays the flute. Towards the end of the movie, Oedipus blinds himself, takes the flute and becomes a new Tiresias while trying (in vain) to re-enter society. In this way, the intimate relationship between the prophet and the king as presented in the Sophoclean text is now further developed. Still, as in Sophocles' drama, the scholarly analysis of Pasolini's film concentrates on Oedipus rather than the figure of Tiresias *per se*. Even the illuminating study of Fransesca Schironi, who underlines the importance of the seer in the film, primarily focuses on (blind) Oedipus and only briefly discusses Tiresias' appearance.[209]

However, I will argue that the first scene where Tiresias appears in the movie, which is brilliantly placed in the middle of *Edipo re* and lasts only one and a half minutes, is of exceptional importance towards a better understanding of the play's form and content. As I will indicate, Tiresias is presented as the archetypical poet-prophet whose flute becomes a polysemous symbol, and his intermediary role proves to be crucial both within and beyond the film's narrative. His in-betweenness and marginality evoke his representation in the ancient texts of Homer and Sophocles. Nonetheless, as in Ritsos' case of classical reception, Pasolini adds new dimensions to the prophet's portrayal, using his own cinematographic 'poetic' style and reflecting on socio-political matters and personal concerns.

[205] Paduano 1994.

[206] Stack 1969, 120. See also Fusillo 1996 and Pasolini's 2014, 11 own confession: "In *Edipo* I recount the story of my Oedipus complex. The little boy in the prologue is me, his father, a former infantry officer, is my father, and the mother, a teacher, is my mother. I recount my own life, mythicized, rendered epic by the legend of Oedipus." (My translation)

[207] Indicatively, see Greene 1990, 155, Mimoso-Ruiz 1992, Viano 1993, Fusillo 1996, Urbano 2000, and Lauriola 2017, 292-297.

[208] Stack 1969, 129.

[209] Schironi 2009, 488-490.

4.2 An Overview of *Edipo re*

Before analyzing Tiresias' role in the story, let me first provide an overview of *Edipo re*. The film is organized into four 'movements'; two modern parts (the prologue and the epilogue) and two mythic central parts that follow Sophocles' text.[210] Contrary to the ancient dramaturgist, however, Pasolini narrates Oedipus' life in a strict chronological order, from the moment of his birth to his tragic self-blinding, exile, and death.[211] The film starts by showing a sign with the name 'Thebes', hence placing the viewer within the mythical framework. However, the city of the prologue is not a reconstruction of ancient Thebes, but rather the northern village of Sacile in Italy, Pasolini's hometown in the 1920s.[212] In the first scene, a woman is giving birth to a child. Later, this woman (played by Silvana Mangano) is sitting loosely in a lush green meadow under the blinding sun, feeding her son and looking directly at the camera for almost one minute; first peacefully, then patently disturbed, and then serenely again (fig. 1).[213] The scene is framed by the music of Mozart, the First movement (*Adagio*) of the *Quartetto delle Dissonanze* (K 465), a classical piece that will become a *Leitmotif* in the film as the 'theme of the mother'.[214] Shortly after this scene, the child's father, an infantry officer, reveals his resentment towards his son and, one night, enters the child's room and grabs him by his ankles.

Figure 1 Oedipus' mother (Silvana Mangano) stares at the camera in the prologue (03:46').

Figure 2 Oedipus (Franco Citti) encounters the Sphinx in Morocco's desert (49:14').

An abrupt cut marks the beginning of the film's second part, shot in Morocco. There, a shepherd abandons the child in the desert hesitant to kill it. Soon, another man finds it and brings it to king Polybus of Corinth. He and his wife nurture him as their son and call him Oedipus. Years later, Oedipus (played by Franco Citti), prompted by a disturbing dream, goes to Delphi. After receiving the terrible oracle that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother, he wanders alone in the desert away from Corinth. There, he encounters Laius with his guards and in a frenetic mental state, kills them all, unaware of their identity. Only one slave manages to escape. Consequently, Oedipus arrives at Thebes and meets a boy named Angelo who informs him about the Sphinx that torments the city. On the road to the Sphinx,

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[210] Critics argue about the movie's structure either supporting a four-segment form or a threefold arrangement. More precise and balanced seems the first hypothesis. See further in Viano 1993, 173-174, and Lauriola 2017, 298, n. 474.

[211] Sophocles' drama, on the other hand, begins *in medias res*. For Pasolini's choice to narrate Oedipus' life chronologically, while focusing on the development of his character rather than the gradual discovery of his identity, see Urbano 2000, 177-179.

[212] Annovi 2017, 158.

[213] See Petkovic's 1997, 53 interesting suggestion that the mother's "set of reactions tells the viewer the entire emotional story" of *Edipo re* in advance. All figures in this chapter are screenshots from the film, taken by me.

[214] Fusillo 1996, 40.

they encounter Tiresias playing the flute. Afterwards, Oedipus confronts the Sphinx who does not pose any riddle for him to solve but rather ambiguously says that the hero's life is an enigma, and that the abyss is inside him (fig. 2). Oedipus kills the creature, becomes king of Thebes, and marries Jocasta.[215]

The film's third movement corresponds to Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* with some slight but significant changes. Perhaps, the most characteristic (and clearly Freudian) deviation from the Sophoclean text is that Oedipus is shown to have sexual intercourse with Jocasta *after* realizing the horrible truth. The last part of *Edipo re* takes the viewer back to twentieth-century modern Italy. Assisted by Angelo, blind Oedipus wanders around Bologna and Milan. The movie comes to a circular end, showing the hero arriving in the same meadow where his mother breastfed him. There, he can rest in peace (fig. 3).

Figure 3 Blind Oedipus arrives at the meadow of the prologue (1:42:54').

Despite their mythical context, the two central parts of the movie seem very realistic.[216] Yet, the choice of the Moroccan landscape, the music (Romanian folk songs and Japanese music) and the costumes (archaic-like clothes decorated with Aztec and Sumerian symbols) provoke the feeling of timelessness. Pasolini confesses that these "a-historical, a-temporal" elements allowed him to treat the myth as "no longer typical of this or that period of history", but as "meta-historical".[217] On the other hand, the autobiographical prologue and epilogue, even though seemingly taking place in the modern world, create an atmosphere of "a remembered dream".[218] In this way, the past is merged with the present to such an extent that seems difficult to distinguish the boundaries between them. As we shall see, the figure of Tiresias contributes significantly to creating this feeling of timelessness by merging the past and the present.

4.3 Tiresias' First Appearance as a Poet-Prophet

In more detail, the prophet appears only in two scenes in *Edipo re*. His overwhelming presence, though, is implied via his symbol, his flute, also in the film's epilogue. For the role of the seer, Pasolini chose the actor Julian Beck, widely known as co-founder and director of *The Living Theatre* in New York.[219] Beck adds a timeless, lyric dimension to Tiresias while emphasizing the "irrational, poetic, religious and prophetic" element of his character.[220] This

[215] For the role of the Sphinx and its Freudian implications, see Pasolini 1971, 9, Petkovic 1997, 59-60, and Winkler 2017, 48-50.
[216] See Greene 1990, 156.
[217] Stack 1969, 126-127.
[218] Greene 1990, 156. See also Pasolini's own explanation about his technique in Stack 1969, 127. Cf. Stravinsky's choice to use the 'timeless' Latin language for his opera *Oedipus Rex* (1927) as he considered it "a 'free' language which could be treated unconcernedly as verbal music" (Walsh, 1993, 94).
[219] For the choice of Julian Beck, see further Mimoso-Ruiz 1992, 59 and 66, Fusillo 1996, 103, and Annovi 2017, 198, n. 5. At first, Tiresias was supposed to be played by Orson Welles, but in the end, Julian Beck was chosen.
[220] My translation of Mimoso-Ruiz 1992, 59.

can be seen in both scenes where Tiresias appears. In the second scene, in the 'third movement', the prophet quarrels with Oedipus while Pasolini follows closely Sophocles' text. However, the humanized aspect of the seer and his apparent loss of self-control that discredit his final words in the Sophoclean drama do not seem to exist in Pasolini's version.[221] Here, only Oedipus gets completely out of control and even physically attacks the sacred prophet. Tiresias' sacredness is more evident the first time Oedipus (and the viewer) encounters him.

Figure 4 First appearance of Tiresias (Julian Beck). A little boy is lying in front of him while he is playing the flute (46:14').

Figure 5 Oedipus and Angelo in front of Tiresias (46:39').

On the road to the Sphinx, Oedipus and Angelo see Tiresias sitting alone, out of the city, silently and meaningfully looking into the void and playing his flute. A little boy is lying in front of his feet sleeping (fig. 4). When Oedipus approaches and stares at the seer, he immediately falls to his knees. He seems profoundly enchanted by the mournful sounds of Tiresias' flute and by his overall appearance. "This is Tiresias, the prophet", says Angelo. Then, an intertitle appears with Oedipus' thoughts:[222]

> Gli altri, tuoi concittadini e
> fratelli, soffrono, piangono,
> cercano insieme la salvez-
> za… E tu sei qui cieco e
> **solo** che canti…
> **Come vorrei essere te! Tu**
> **canti ciò che è al di là del**
> **destino**.
>
> "The others, your fellow citizens and
> brothers suffer, weep,
> search together the salva-
> tion… And you are here blind and
> **alone** singing…
> **How I would like to be you**! **You**
> **sing what is beyond**
> **destiny**."

[221] Cf. section 2.6 of this thesis.

[222] The technique of the intertitle, commonly related to silent films, is used for the first time in the prologue when Oedipus' father reveals his hate towards his son. See further in Casarino 1992, 38-41. Similarly, in Tiresias' scene, the viewer hears Oedipus' inner voice. The choice of intertitles in both scenes undercovers their importance (Schironi 2009, 488).

Tiresias' unique status is encapsulated in these few lines. Oedipus places the seer outside of the Theban community. While the others suffer, cry desperately and search "together" ("insieme") for a solution, blind Tiresias stands "alone" ("solo") and does nothing but sing "what is beyond destiny". He is thus presented as a non-normative Other who follows a different way of expressing his pain, separately from the crowd. His marginality evokes that of his Sophoclean predecessor but is now developed further and displayed in the most explicit manner without provoking outbursts of anger or feelings of despair and detest.[223] Instead, Angelo speaks quietly as if a god stands before him, while Oedipus kneels in front of the prophet with due respect and awe (fig. 5). The portrayal of Tiresias as a god-like seer who despite his blindness can see all things and beyond inevitably echoes the Sophoclean text and the accumulation of honorary titles attributed to Tiresias by both the chorus and the king.[224]

Nevertheless, in contrast to Sophocles, Tiresias' sacredness is not related to religion, but rather to his role as a poet-prophet, as we will see below. Moreover, Pasolini's Oedipus does not become enraged (at least for now) when dealing with Tiresias' silence. Instead, he even demonstrates his admiration (or is it jealousy?) for the seer's solitude and liminal status with the tragically ironic phrase "How I would like to be you!" (fig. 6). At this point, Oedipus cannot stay passive or neutral no matter how much he wishes it. He is after all the "son of Fate" (παῖδα τῆς Τύχης, Soph. *OT* 1080). And now, this fate compels him to deal with the Sphinx, kill it and become king of Thebes.

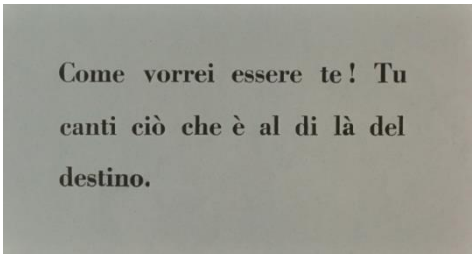

Figure 6 The technique of the intertitle: "How I would like to be you!" (46:51').

4.4 Possible Connotations of Tiresias' Flute

But what is the meaning of Tiresias' flute that sings "what is beyond destiny? I will suggest that this image, which is Pasolini's own invention, alludes to the ambiguous language that the prophet uses in Sophocles' play and his overall in-betweenness. This in-betweenness is more vividly denoted in the original script of the movie rather than in its final cut.[225] There, Pasolini describes Tiresias as "an old man, flabby, heavy" who stands "between two bushes".[226] The holy terror that the seer inspires is evident:

> Never, throughout the length of [Oedipus'] painful journey along the roads traced out by his **destiny**, **has anything affected him so profoundly and so mysteriously as this.** Why should this be? Is it perhaps a new sign his destiny has marked out for him, an allusion to that which awaits his fulfilment of the prophecies?

Whereas Sophocles focuses on Oedipus' intellectuality, determinism and willingness to discover the truth, Pasolini depicts a rather different Oedipus, "a person totally innocent" ("una persona del tutto innocente"), but at the same time ignorant, instinctive, and violent,

[223] Cf. section 2.3 of this thesis.
[224] Cf. Soph. *OT* 298, 300-302.
[225] Probably for the sake of brevity, the final cut of *Edipo re* presents a shorter version of Tiresias' first appearance than the original script.
[226] Pasolini 1971, 56.

someone who *does not want* to know anything about himself.[227] The Italian director presents Oedipus as bereft of any free will and incapable of escaping his own destiny. This dramatic destiny will lead the hero to the tragic identification with Tiresias and the "fulfilment of the prophecies" at the end of the movie. Evidently then, the prophet's appearance affects the main hero "so profoundly and so mysteriously" or, in psychoanalytic terms, so subconsciously. The seer stands in-between Oedipus' past, present and future since he knows his past and embodies his future. The scene is mystifying and silent, interrupted only by the funeral sounds of Tiresias' flute: "He touches the highest and purest notes; their pain is the pain of the world".[228]

In the script, the impact of Tiresias' flute on Oedipus's soul is immense. Oedipus starts crying and convulsing both horrified and consoled as if the message of the flute is "part of a sacred ritual".[229] Then, his inner voice appears in the intertitle:

> *He sings, but not about himself. Someone has burdened him with the duty of singing; he is blind, blind; someone has burdened him with the duty of seeing; […]* ***he is singing for me, he is singing about me****. He knows all there is to know about me, and his music is referring to this.* ***A poet****! You, a poet with your duty of gathering the pain others feel and expressing it, as if it were the very pain itself expressing itself… Destiny goes on beyond the realm of destiny.* ***I am listening to what is beyond my destiny.***

This passage clearly indicates that Tiresias is endowed with both clairvoyance and poetic skill. Like Oedipus, the prophet also seems unable to escape from a pre-destined world. Someone (Fate, the gods, someone else?) "burdened him with the duty" of inner sight. He mediates between those who gave him this responsibility and those who suffer and are unaware of what awaits them. Thus, his prophetic ability that is presented here as a burden inevitably brings to mind Sophocles' Tiresias who complains at the moment of his arrival on stage about his privilege of absolute knowledge.[230] The obscure, ambiguous language of the seer in the Sophoclean play is transformed into profound visual and sound elements in Pasolini's film; the image of Tiresias playing the flute alone in total

Figure 7 Tiresias is playing the flute while staring at the camera (47:05').

[227] Siti et al. 1999, 1364. In Stack 1969, 124, the director further explains that Oedipus "is the person who does not want to look into things, like all innocent people, those who live their lives as the prey of life and of their own emotions". See also White 1977, 34.
[228] Pasolini 1971, 56.
[229] Pasolini 1971, 56.
[230] Cf. Soph. *OT* 316.

silence (fig. 7).[231] He sings *for* and *about* Oedipus as he has an overall view of his life but also goes far beyond it as he understands the powers that determine it.

In addition, despite his seeming marginality, the prophet is a valuable member of the Theban community since he expresses the pain of all others. As in the original Sophoclean text, he should be regarded neither as ἄπολις nor as ὑψίπολις. He is rather placed somewhere in-between, both within and outside the city. Tiresias embodies the archetypical poet-prophet, an intellectual, whose role seems limited to expressing the suffering of others while acknowledging the futility of any action against destiny. His flute, the flute of a poet, "orders events in their cycles, and makes legends out of tragedies".[232]

Scholars have paid relatively little attention to Tiresias' flute.[233] I argue that the analysis of its symbolism is crucial to better understanding the role of the poet-prophet in Pasolini. In ancient Greece, *aulos*, the forerunner of the flute, traditionally accompanied Dionysian performances, orgiastic cults and frenetic choruses.[234] Furthermore, it was regarded as the instrument of lyric poetry, especially elegy.[235] Far away from Greece, in the eastern highlands of modern Papua-New Guinea, the anthropologist Gilbert Herdt notices that flutes have long been associated with male initiation sacred rituals and homosexual customs of the Sambian people.[236] Herdt observes that the sacred flutes are used as phallic symbols and are played exclusively by men dressed as women. Following a psychoanalytic approach, he explains that the flutes become a symbol of men's secret homosexual practices and violent rites of masculinization, also used to frighten women and children. Owned by different phratries and employed as potential weapons, flutes are further related to Sambians' political structure and kinship identities.[237] As Herdt's study was published long after *Edipo re,* it is rather unlikely that the director was aware of this symbolism. Nonetheless, the social aspect of the flutes and their use as phallic symbols in sacred rituals can be observed in many folk cultures all over the world.[238] Considering Pasolini's erudition and intellect, it is not totally implausible to suggest that the Italian director had in mind these specific allusions when writing his screenplay. "As if it were part of a sacred ritual", echoes Pasolini's own script.

The sexual connotations of Tiresias' playing the flute become even more probable when taking into consideration the presence of the little semi-naked boy in front of the seer's feet. Oddly enough, this little boy will not be seen again in the movie. Naomi Greene brings to light one of Pasolini's earliest poems which describes a flute player enchanting the young boys of a village into a cave, trapping them there and singing about "dark violence during nocturnal

[231] For Tiresias' ambiguity in Sophocles, see section 2.4 of this thesis. As mentioned above, the conflict between the seer and the king as described in the first episode of Sophocles' *OT* is presented in a slightly different way in Pasolini since Oedipus is the only one who gets out of control.
[232] Pasolini 1971, 100.
[233] Noguez 1973, 103, n.12 claims that the flute "if it symbolizes anything, it may simply be the artistic activity" (My translation). However, he also refers to the use of flutes by "the pederastic Virgilian pastors" but without further explanation. Schironi 2009 489-492 does not make any explicit reference to the symbolism of Tiresias' flute apart from its connection with poetry in ancient Greece.
[234] For the 'emotional significance' of flute-playing in ancient Greece, see Dodds 1951, 97, n. 95.
[235] Schironi 2009, 489.
[236] Herdt 1981.
[237] Herdt 1981, 282-284.
[238] Borders, Warner and Enrico 2021. See also Hill, Chaumeil, and DeMallie 2011 about the symbolism of indigenous ritual wind instruments in South America.

nakedness" ("delle trascorse nudità notturne la cupida violenza").[239] This rather disturbing poem is part of Pasolini's letter to his friend Franco Farolfi composed in 1941. The Italian author explains that "the flute player represents the secret transition, from ingenuity to malice, from impuberty to adolescence". The poem's meaning is "the regret of childhood and the exaltation of violent and sensual youth".[240] In our story, Oedipus' transition from a state of initial innocence to adulthood is marked by the violent murder of his father and the horrific wedding with his mother. Is this violent transition what Tiresias sings about or what the presence of the little boy implies? Interestingly enough, the prophet plays in the flute the *Adagio* of the *Quartetto delle Dissonanze* (fig. 8), 'the theme of the mother', first encountered in the scene of Oedipus' breastfeeding in the prologue, and next heard in the epilogue when Oedipus returns to the meadow of the prologue. According to the original script, this melody is a love song, "both older and younger than destiny".[241]

The association with love and Mozart's music may well remind us of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* (1791) and the theme of love magic. While referring to his film *Teorema* (1968), Pasolini highlights the importance of a specific role, the messenger, played by Ninetto Davoli (who also plays Angelo in *Edipo re*): "The actor impersonates a modern, desacralized version of the [ancient Greek] messenger" who brings the telegram "as if playing an invisible and joyous flute, the Magic Flute".[242] Thence, the flute either as a phallic symbol with sensual implications or related to Mozart's magic flute seems to be a recurrent symbol in Pasolini's work.

Figure 8 Tiresias is playing Mozart's Adagio *of the* Quartetto delle Dissonanze *(47:30').*

In light of the above, we may better grasp the meaning of the flute in *Edipo re*. Through this polysemous symbol, Tiresias functions as a mediator between the beginning and the end of the film, the past and the future of Oedipus, and between different cultural traditions, kinds of music, and themes in the movie. The flute also alludes to Tiresias' ambiguity, marginality and in-betweenness in the Sophoclean text with further implications. McDonald additionally asserts that the seer in *Edipo re* becomes a substitute for the Sophoclean chorus singing the illusion of human happiness.[243] Eventually, the serenity of the whole image could be a hint for Pasolini's own utopian dream of a return to a pre-industrial agrarian society, where humans live in perfect harmony with nature.[244]

[239] Greene 1990, 154-155. Pasolini's poem can be found in Naldini 1986, 27-31.
[240] My translation of Naldini 1986, 29.
[241] Pasolini 1971, 101.
[242] Coincidentally, Fusillo 1996, 69 argues that "the bond between anghelos/Angelo and the marginalized poet Oedipus is allusively homoerotic, rather than overtly homosexual: it is an ambiguous mixture of power and tenderness".
[243] McDonald, 2007, 323.
[244] See Carlà 2008, 94-104, and Schironi 2009, 494.

4.5 Tiresias/Blind Oedipus as Pasolini's *Persona* - Political Allusions

The director's political ideology and social demands can be better understood when examining Tiresias' first appearance in relation to the film's epilogue. There, blind Oedipus plays Tiresias' flute like a wise poet-prophet himself.[245] The seer's inner sight and poetic skill are thus transferred to Oedipus and Tiresias' flute becomes the link between different kinds of vision, identities, and functions. As in Sophocles' drama, the figure of Tiresias/blind Oedipus functions, on a deeper level, as a *persona* through which Pasolini reflects on the role of the intellectual in modern Italy and expresses his deep frustration on socio-political matters.[246]

To be more precise, in the epilogue, blind Oedipus first plays his music for the middle class of modern Bologna of the 1960s, only to realize that no one pays attention to him (fig. 9). They are all completely distracted by their consumerist individualistic culture. Embittered by the indifference of the middle class, Oedipus moves to industrialized Milan where he plays a Russian revolutionary song for the factory workers (fig. 10). Paradoxically enough, even the working class seems indifferent, leading Oedipus to the only place where he can find peace; his birth town and the shiny meadow where his mother fed him. As Schironi highlights, the end of *Edipo re* reveals Pasolini's own bitterness about his contemporary Italian society, both the bourgeoisie and the political Left, as can be seen in his collection of articles, *Scritti Corsari*. There, he concludes that no one really cares about listening to intellectuals and poets, therefore the hope of a revolution is irrevocably lost forever.[247]

Figure 9 Blind Oedipus plays for Bologna's middle class (1:39:20').

Figure 10 Blind Oedipus plays for Milan's factory workers (1:41:25').

The image of a poet-prophet who tries to awaken people's consciousness in vain reminds us of Ritsos' *Teiresias* and his similar feeling of bitterness.[248] Yet, in Ritsos' case, despite the general sense of disappointment, in the end, we can detect a certain optimism derived from the poet's political ideology and faith in the beauty of ordinary life.[249] Conversely, in Pasolini's film, the poet-prophet's mission ends in failure. Oedipus is marginalized by both the middle and the working class. The only solution seems to be the return to nature, a pre-industrial

[245] It is Angelo who brings Tiresias' flute to Oedipus. He was also the one who led the prophet to the king's palace in the third 'movement'. While Tiresias argued with Oedipus, Angelo took the prophet's flute and started playing. Therefore, Angelo's intermediary role should also be stressed, as Pasolini 1971, 9 himself highlights.

[246] Schironi 2009. Apart from Pasolini's identification with Tiresias/blind Oedipus, it should be noted that the director appears also as an actor in his movie. He plays a minor role in the third 'movement', the role of the high priest who asks Oedipus to save his city, following the Sophoclean text. In this way, he becomes "the author who presents the other author" and denotes the autobiographical character of his film. See further in Viano 1993, 176, Petkovic 1997, 57-58, and Annovi 2017, 153-158.

[247] Schironi 2009, 493-498.

[248] Cf. section 3.4 of this thesis.

[249] Cf. section 3.5.

society where capitalism had not yet emerged. This return can be seen allegorically as a return to one's first origins.[250] In this way, Pasolini refers to another Sophoclean drama, *Oedipus at Colonus* (*OC*):[251]

> I consider *Oedipus at Colonus* the least graceful of Sophocles' tragedies; in fact I think it's decidedly ungraceful. And yet it contains two or three fragments which can only be described as sublime. It is these I was referring to.

One of these "sublime" Sophoclean fragments to which Pasolini certainly refers is the end of the fourth episode of Sophocles' *OC*, where Oedipus reconciles with the gods and dies peacefully (1549-1550). There, Oedipus exclaims:

> ὦ φῶς ἀφεγγές, πρόσθε πού ποτ᾽ ἦσθ᾽ ἐμόν,
> νῦν δ᾽ ἔσχατόν σου τοὐμὸν ἅπτεται δέμας.
>
> "O light that is no light, before you were mine,
> but now for the last time my body grasps you."

Similarly, in *Edipo re*, the hero's last words are: "O light that I can no longer see and once you were mine, shine on me for the last time. I have arrived. Life ends where it begins". The motif of blindness and the contrast between physical and inner sight, so dominant in Sophocles, is further developed in the movie. Despite the relevance, however, the optimistic end of Sophocles' play and the new heroic status of Oedipus is unequivocally contrasted with the overtly pessimistic end of Pasolini's film. This pessimism derives from the hero's marginalization and the prevailing sense of futility. "Yes, this film is very pessimistic. By the time Oedipus gets to understand, it's no use to him", admits the director.[252] On that ground, Pasolini's political (and personal) frustrations could explain the fatalism that prevails in the movie and may seem bizarre to the modern viewer at first sight.[253]

4.6 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have shown how the new medium of cinema offers new ways of representing and interpreting Oedipus' myth. Pasolini's *Edipo re* brilliantly deploys these ways and presents a modern case of classical reception, the "most poetic retelling" of the Sophoclean drama.[254] Even though the film has been mainly discussed as a psychoanalytic, autobiographical story where Pasolini is identified with Oedipus, the significance of Tiresias both within and beyond the narrative is indisputable. Tiresias is depicted as a prominent, almost sacred, poet-prophet, a flute player who sings "what is beyond destiny" and deeply moves Oedipus' soul. His absolute knowledge goes "beyond" Oedipus' life, but also "beyond" the narrow limits of the film's story, as it reflects Pasolini's political concerns about the role of the modern intellectual. His in-betweenness and marginality are further stressed via his ambiguous symbol, the flute, which is passed to blind Oedipus, to acquire new complex dimensions. Indebted to Sophocles' *OT* and *OC*, yet clearly transformed into a new poetic story, *Edipo re* blends seamlessly dream and reality and offers us an unparalleled (pessimistic) version of Tiresias' role in modern society, a society that not only ignores but also persecutes its intellectuals.

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[250] But still, as Schironi 2009, 498 notices based on Pasolini's essays and interviews, "the hope of a dialogue with the peasant society is lost forever".
[251] Pasolini 1971, 8-9.
[252] Stack 1969, 124.
[253] For the fatalism of *Edipo re*, see also MacKinnon 1995, 117-119, and Urbano 2000.
[254] Winkler 2017, 47.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the literary and cinematic representation of the blind seer Tiresias, an understudied figure in the field of Classics. My aim was to decipher Tiresias' ambiguous role through different genres and eras, within and beyond the narrative of each of the four case studies, to better understand his significance in both antiquity and the modern era. Following the research of Headings, García Gual, Brisson and Ugolini and the theoretical framework of classical reception studies, I adopted an approach that would shed new light to the development of the seer's appearance and speech through time. As I have illustrated, each creator who employs the figure of Tiresias adds further dimensions to his typical characteristics reflecting on the socio-political historical context of his era and his own personal concerns.

More specifically, the portrayal of the Homeric Tiresias in the Underworld seems to be the literary basis on which later authors like Sophocles built new interpretations. I have argued that Tiresias' function goes far beyond the simple sketching of the main hero's personality and, also, beyond the limits of the epic narrative itself. In book eleven of the *Odyssey*, which is placed almost in the middle of the entire poem, the blind prophet emerges from Erebos and, quite paradoxically, opens the eyes not only of Odysseus but also of the audience that can now understand the content and form of the whole composition. Tiresias alludes to important facts of Odysseus' past, present, and future, and constitutes a positive character within the hero's troubled destiny. The close analysis of his imposing appearance and obscure speech reveals how the seer mediates between different mythological traditions, and themes in the poem, between humans and gods, living and dead. His unique status is emphasized by the threefold repetition of the word οἶος ("alone") that denotes his special privilege of retaining his mind intact after his death and the consequent need for special treatment. Odysseus and Circe refer to Tiresias with ultimate respect without marginalizing him or questioning his authority and the validity of his prophecies. The seer alludes to the motif of blindness that runs the whole *Odyssey* and contributes to a sense of integral unity. Lastly, Tiresias' advice to Odysseus to reconcile with Poseidon reflects the moral concerns and religious beliefs of the Homeric society.

The motif of blindness and the distinctive status of Tiresias obtain new meaning in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I have shown how the prophet initially inspires due respect to the other characters of the play, but when he dares to questions Oedipus' authority and identity, he is marginalized by both the king and the chorus. Tiresias is also self-presented as a marginal character who answers only to Apollo and intentionally uses ambiguous language to conceal the horrible truth. Furthermore, his in-betweenness resembles that of Oedipus as described in the play's prologue but is further emphasized with the repetition of the word μόνος ("alone") which, contrary to Homer's οἶος, has both positive *and* negative implications. The prophet's speech conveys political ideals and concerns of the fifth-century BCE Athens, while revealing the content and form of the entire drama but also going beyond it. Even if Tiresias seems to speak vaguely or in vain, he sows the seeds of doubt in Oedipus' mind and opens the eyes of the audience who are left to discover along with the protagonist the exact tragic confirmation of the seer's exit words.

The depiction of the prophet as a liminal, in-between character is further developed in Yannis Ritsos' modern Greek poem *Teiresias*. The poet uses his mythical method to humanize Tiresias

as well as to add further dimensions to his appearance and speech reflecting his political ideology and broader existential concerns. He employs the marginality and in-betweenness of the mythical seer and uses him as a *persona* to universalize his suffering and philosophical ideas. Ritsos' Tiresias is thus presented as the diviner of the people who struggles for freedom but ends up being alone and punished by the powerful. However, this feeling of bitterness is reversed and the poet's faith in the beauty of ordinary life prevails in the end. The seer merges the opposites and alludes to the poet's ability to transform into different roles and identities but also embodies the unchangeable, timeless face of the universe itself.

Ritsos is not the only one who re-reads the classical texts and gives his own perspective to the ancient Tiresias. Similarly, Pier Paolo Pasolini creatively transforms Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* in his *Edipo re* and adds a controversial, timeless, and lyric dimension to his poet-prophet who sings "what is beyond destiny". I have argued that the first appearance of Tiresias in the movie reveals his significance and ambiguous role both within and beyond the film's narrative. The image of the seer playing the flute alone outside the city walls precipitates the tragic end of Oedipus and further conveys the identification of the director with the prophet and, by extension, with blind Oedipus in the movie's epilogue. *Edipo re* is an example of what Pasolini called 'cinema di poesia' since it presents poetic sequences, dream-like images and complex characters who posit deeper existential questions and reflect the director's personal view on socio-political matters of modern Italy.

After a close analysis of these four case studies, we may better understand why Tiresias still captivates the interest of modern writers and artists. His unique status, marginality (from Sophocles onwards) and in-betweenness both within and beyond the narrative of each work give him the ability to transform into different identities and obtain new roles and meanings through different times and genres. Each author/intellectual we examined uses the mythical prophet to reflect on his own socio-political, religious, existential, or philosophical concerns and comment on his contemporary reality. In all of our four cases, Tiresias is presented as being alone. He operates in a marginal in-between space, even if that does not have negative connotations. Yet, he remains an understudied figure, an ambiguous *persona* whose appearance and speech are open to multiple interpretations. By studying his reception, we might thus be able to grasp the inner truth that *only* Tiresias seems to possess. As Thanasis Papakonstantinou's song brilliantly demonstrates, despite acting on the margins or the darkness, Tiresias is still –and probably will be– tremendously present.

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Table of Images

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