



September 1991

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Margaret J. Downes

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### Recommended Citation

Colby Quarterly, Volume 27, no.3, September 1991, p.174-183

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*Benediction of Metaphor at Colonus:  
William Blake  
and the Vision of the Ancients*

by MARGARET J. DOWNES

ALTHOUGH he is of two minds about the praiseworthiness of the ancient Greeks, William Blake greatly admired the roots of their literature. "Let it here be Noted," he writes in "A Vision of the Last Judgment," "that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & Real Visions. . . . The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age" (K605).<sup>1</sup> However, Blake does not tell us just which works of classical antiquity best evidence for him the sparks of those ancient fires of liberated imagination.

Blake read Greek and Latin and comments, sometimes with praise and sometimes with disdain, on a number of the ancient authors—Homer, Aristotle, Euripides, Plato, and Virgil, for example. In general he admires their capacity for inspiration but rebukes them for perverting that divine quality in the service of war or tyranny, whether political or mental. In analyzing their worth as artists Blake is of course inevitably reacting to the neoclassical propensity to view the ancients as models of reason and decorum, and this at times causes him to rage against them. "Rome & Greece swept Art into their maw & destroy'd it," he says; "a Warlike State can never produce Art" ("On Virgil," K778). Yet as he states in a letter to John Trusler his goal is " . . . to fulfill the purpose for which alone I live, which is . . . to renew the lost Art of the Greeks" (16 Aug. 1799, K792). How are we to understand, then, his judgment of the art of these civilizations? And is there any one work which he grants, or would grant, more wholehearted praise?

The glories of the ancients' Golden Age are only imperfectly reflected in the authors Blake names; that is, the "lost Art" which Blake would like to restore was a shadow not only by his time, but, he believed, in Homer's and Aristotle's as well.

Thus most of the Greek epics and dramas, wise though they may be, are too reasonable, too bound to the ground, too empirically correct to have inspired dramatically the Romantic visionary. It is difficult to find close kinship there with Blake's particular wisdom. There is, however, one work, the last play of Sophocles, which strikingly resembles the thought and spirit of William Blake's poetry, particularly his later prophecies. The *Oedipus at Colonus* is peculiar and

1. References to Blake's writings are given by abbreviated title and page in Keynes's edition of Blake's *Complete Writings*.

difficult; it is also its creator's culminating masterpiece, his last plea for society's spiritual (and concomitant political) reform. Studying it together with Blake's capstone prophecy, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, illuminates both works and helps us to understand Blake's admiration of the Greeks' vision. Of those ancient works of imagination, *Oedipus at Colonus* best exemplifies the mature vitality of Organiz'd Innocence,<sup>2</sup> which Blake believes gives value to literature and life; the play typifies on a grand scale that which Blake admired in glorious bits and pieces in other Greek writings. The two works' substantial similarities, particularly those concerning the metaphysics of love and blessing, help clarify the essence of each author's intent and genius in light of the convictions and art of the other.

Because students of Blake are not necessarily students of Sophocles, a brief review of the content of these two works may be in order before more detailed analysis of their correspondences.

Sophocles' play continues the story of King Oedipus many years after he has left Thebes, blind and desperate. He arrives at Sophocles' own birthplace, Colonus, in Athenian territory, where Theseus (King of Athens) welcomes him and promises protection to Oedipus and his faithful daughters. Selfish King Creon of Thebes pursues Oedipus to the sacred grove at Colonus, tries to drag him away, and kidnaps his daughters; Theseus intervenes to rescue them. At the end of the play Oedipus gives a blessing of love to Theseus for the protection of Athens, a blessing that, he says, "will count more for you / Than many shields and many neighbors' spears" (ll. 1524, 1525).<sup>3</sup> He then miraculously passes from earthly life "to be established in the holy ground as a guardian spirit of Athens" (Fitzgerald, in Grene and Lattimore, 109). The play ends with the protagonist uplifted and redeemed, joyously united with the ultimate powers, detached at last from the earthly concerns which had so depressed his soul.

In *Jerusalem Albion*, Blake's Universal Man, has fallen into "the Sleep of Ulro"—a state which Blake equates with "single vision." In that narrowed condition Albion thinks that reason is his ultimate power and believes in reason's limited perception that all aspects of reality are separate and conflicting. Albion's mental faculties (Zoas) war with each other for predominance. (Of the four Zoas, Urizen [Reason] is the most cantankerous and pushy; the other three—Luvah, Tharmas, and Urthona [Emotion and Physicality, led by Imagination] object strenuously to Urizen's reign, but have great trouble cooperating.) Ultimately, Albion is saved by the power of divine love (Jesus) which allows and encourages him to be continually sacrificed and resurrected in the ongoing but glorious struggle of his Imagination against the rule of Selfhood and Fear.

Paralleling the fall and rise of Albion, Los (Blake's Poet-Artist) is in the first part of the poem beset by inner conflicts which finally are resolved in mildness and serenity in the poem's "Song of Los." This song, which echoes the "Song of the Savior" in *Jerusalem*, begins the second main movement of the poem, which

2. "Unorganiz'd Innocence: An Impossibility," a note written on a page of *The Four Zoas* (K380).

3. References to the *Oedipus at Colonus* are given by line number in Robert Fitzgerald's translation in Grene and Lattimore, *Greek Tragedies*, Vol. 3.

then accelerates toward Albion's full awakening. The two "Songs" are celebrations of *Jerusalem's* central points: first, the saving and unifying power of love and forgiveness, and of self-sacrifice; and, second, the joyous reintegration of all human activity with the life of imaginative perception. This higher life is one of "fourfold vision"<sup>4</sup> wherein all mental faculties function coordinately, conducted by Imagination into Jerusalem, the golden city of redemption. At the end of the poem Albion sacrifices himself and is transfigured:

So Albion spoke & threw himself into the Furnaces of affliction.  
 All was a Vision, all a Dream: the Furnaces became  
 Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine.  
 .....  
 Then Albion stood before Jesus in the Clouds  
 Of Heaven, Fourfold among the Visions of God in Eternity. (K744)

This poem, the last and lengthiest chapter in Blake's lifelong prophetic work upon human salvation, is very like *Oedipus at Colonus* in, first, its ultimate optimism, which is obtainable only as a result of long and continuous struggle; second, in its message of redemption and blessing; and, third, in its dependence upon human growth beyond selfishness, through love, toward a promise of salvation attained by the power of self-sacrifice and a blessing of love. Both Blake's *Jerusalem*, which at once consolidates and expands that poet's lifelong pilgrimage toward mental redemption and social salvation, and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* preach faith in two things: first, that an ultimate reality exists upon the bridge between subject and object—a reality of metaphor; and, second, that social as well as personal redemption is possible through a blessing delivered at the moment of the protagonist's freely willed self-sacrifice. That is, both protagonists gladly sacrifice the visible, empirical entity of self for the higher, invisible, metaphorical, and bonded entity of self-and-other. Albion's and Oedipus' pilgrimages toward selfless love and their faith in their ability to transmit this renewing, cleansing, and protective love to society through a blessing are the focal points of the two dramas.

The fabric of "Spiritual Mystery and Real Visions" underlies all of Blake's work, most intentionally and apparently *Jerusalem*; Sophocles' last play is made of the same material. A spiritual, mystical, and visionary Golden Age finally is attained by the two authors' protagonists, Albion and Oedipus, only after they undergo the extended struggle and suffering necessary to achieve mental balance and, as Blake puts it, "full waking." Their Golden Age is, in fact, attained only at the moment of joyful self-sacrifice which each experiences. More striking, however, is the fact that both Albion and Oedipus are able, at that moment of sublime mental transport, to transmit their newly created self-realization as a blessing to their societies, which they at that moment recognize as their extended selves. Essentially, both *Jerusalem* and *Oedipus at Colonus* call for the redemption of society through the redemption of exceptional individuals who can alter reality by developing their imaginations.

4. See letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802 (K818).

This altered reality is a higher reality, discovered in an imaginative sharing of self, which is found to exist metaphorically: that is, it creatively links with “the other” rather than isolating and binding; it is efficacious rather than impotent. In Blake’s metaphysics the Imagination can coordinate the mental faculties to attain unification both within the mind, and between the mind and all that exists outside it. The change in mental condition from separateness to unity is signalled by a character’s ability to express a selfless love, which can then create a blessing for society.

Such power depends upon what Blake terms a fourfold vision of reality—that is, an understanding that all objects perceived contain the fully realized potential of the perceiver’s mind. (We can, for example, see a heaven in a wildflower.) This state of higher and clearer vision invites an identification of “this” with “that”: it invites a conviction that reality is metaphorical. Only when people hold this conviction—that is, that reality exists between and among people and things in a deeper sense than it exists in the individual, isolated mind—only then are selfless love and blessing possible. Blake urges us toward this realization throughout his writings, most comprehensively in *Jerusalem*; Sophocles urges us toward this same realization in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

This basic similarity is emphasized and clarified when we realize that both *Jerusalem* and *Oedipus at Colonus* are versions of the archetypal myth most popularly expressed, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in the story of Jesus the Christ. That is, a savior who has endured the trials of life (Blake’s Realm of Experience) passes into the realm of Redeemed (Organiz’d) Innocence, where he then is able to share his illumination with society through a blessing concomitant with his own self-sacrifice and miraculous transformation. The paradigm expresses our Western conviction concerning ideal or “saintly” human activity: the saint, having passed through the valley of the shadow, has a power of vision which enables him or her to perform beneficent, superhuman actions aimed at societal salvation. *Jerusalem* and *Oedipus at Colonus* follow this model. (As Blake states, “Antiquity preaches the Gospel of Jesus” [*Desc. Cat.*, K579]—as, of course, does Blake himself.) Three elements are essential to the recounting of this myth in *Jerusalem* and *Colonus* as elsewhere. First, the accounts focus upon belief in a higher, visionary, mental reality—a Golden Age, or a Heaven, or a New Earth. Second, they give us a protagonist who, by persevering through prolonged agony, becomes an embodiment of wisdom and love able to deliver the societal blessing which can bring about that redeemed reality.<sup>5</sup> Third, and underlying the first two elements, these narratives emphasize a conviction that this state is metaphorical, realized in the bonds between and among isolated physicalities limited by time and space. The protagonist’s vatic appreciation of that higher existence makes possible (perhaps even inevitable) the love which characterizes the Golden Age—the love which, by erasing barriers between self and other, leads to atonement, blessing, and the hero’s own glorious transformation.

5. It is interesting to note here the etymological relationship, albeit an unattested one, between *bless* and *blood*, both derived from Common Germanic *blotham*, “blood.”

Yet, fully human and thus fallible saviors both, Albion and Oedipus have lost their psychological balance through rigid belief in the efficacy of force and rationality. Both have fallen from Innocence and its delicate complacency—Albion, in the disturbance among his warring Zoas, which he erroneously attempts to control through Urizen's power; and Oedipus, in the inevitable and overwhelming clash which occurs between his powerful and proven reason and the horrible fact of his unwilling sins. Referring back to that desperate time Oedipus says, "At first, / My mind was a boiling cauldron" (ll. 433, 434). Like Blake's Albion, he seethed with mental turmoil caused by striving "to know" strictly for the sake of immediate utility. Both men at this early stage want to know truth quickly, flatly, logically, reasonably. Oedipus needs to remove the plague raging in his city; Albion wants to organize his aching mind. Yet both fail to save themselves and others until they learn to seek knowledge on a higher, multi-dimensional plane. In *Oedipus Rex* hubris kept the King from succeeding. Like William Blake's Zoa Urizen, the logical and rational faculty which has usurped power in Albion's mind, this hubris is not "evil" per se. Yet in both heroes it has been encouraged to the point where the other mental functions are deprived, thus causing imbalance and distorted vision. (In *Oedipus Rex* this intellectual shortsightedness is ironically doubled, paralleled, and symbolized by Oedipus' blinding of himself at the end of the play.) Hence, in Sophocles' earlier *Oedipus* play, Oedipus dwells under a cloud of darkness—in an intellectual hell, by the play's end, which he himself has constructed. Similarly, Albion finds himself in a mental wasteland where "the Sun is shrunk: the Heavens are shrunk / Away into the far remote, and the Trees & Mountains wither'd / Into indefinite cloudy shadows in darkness & separation" (*Jerus.*, K703). What Albion is within himself imposes upon his outward observations.

However, as Oedipus and Albion come to realize, such hell necessarily precedes growth toward a more mature and fruitful innocence. At times of anguish (or other equivalently extreme emotion), both Sophocles and Blake realized, objects outside our physical selves take on symbolic meaning most easily; they are perceived in our excited state as meaningful extensions of ourselves. In these moments of more acute perception we realize life on the bridges of metaphor, knowing things not only through our reason but also most potently with our other faculties—through our physicality, our emotions, and our imagination. We see and feel our interconnectedness with "the other" multidimensionally—with Blakean fourfold vision. Hence, both Blake and Sophocles subject their protagonists to terrible psychological turmoil before these characters are able to understand and accept reality. As Blake writes in his "Annotations to Swedenborg's Wisdom of Angels": "Understanding or Thought is not natural to Man; it is acquir'd by means of Suffering & Distress i.e. Experience" (K89). The extreme difficulties, sorrows, and failures of Albion and of Oedipus lead them to discouragement, and then to wonder; their wonder leads them to revelation. Their *anagnorisis* then allows them to envision truth in far less restricted ways than they otherwise could have. At the point of highest

wisdom (*sophia*), according to Aristotle, one clearly sees the interconnectedness of all things.<sup>6</sup> In the same way, Blake knows that we are able “To see a World in a Grain of Sand” only when we can make real the metaphorical connection between the grain and the world—when we can accept the “this is that” of all “Minute Particulars.” “Mental Things are alone Real,” says Blake (*VLJ*, K617). This acceptance of a universal unity and the wisdom that follows comes, finally, to Oedipus, as it does to Albion. At that point they are at last prepared for joyful self-sacrifice as the way to redemption not only for themselves but also for their extended selves—their society, all humanity, and all nature, which is transformed along with the heroes at the moment of self-sacrifice.

Such transformation takes a long time. First, of course, Oedipus and Albion must be redeemed from what Blake calls “the Sleep of Ulro,” the entrapment in arrogant single vision, at which point the confusion in their mental realms is made apparent to them. Their sin must be revealed before they can forgive themselves.<sup>7</sup> This must be accomplished through mental reorganization, balancing, and clarification. Both Blake and Sophocles apparently realize that these noble and tormented *agathoi* need first to fall if they ultimately are to be redeemed. It is these heroes, humanity’s saints and saviors, who alone have the strength to maintain themselves through the confusions of what Blake terms “Eternal Death.”

Their forgiveness of themselves is accomplished by their decision to sacrifice themselves for others. When Oedipus, for example, realizes that “One soul . . . often can make atonement / For many others” (ll. 498, 499)—that his agony can be transmuted into a blessing for others—he is no longer haunted by guilt and fear. He can then proclaim “. . . how was I evil in myself?” (l. 270). Like Albion’s, Oedipus’ illusion of guilt is erased by his decision to bless: “For I come here [to Colonus] as one endowed with grace / . . . and I bring / Advantage to this race,” he says (ll. 287-89). Mentally renewed by their decision to incorporate self with other, both figures at that point attain the control which permits them to internalize the Golden Age. And, once this incorporative, all-inclusive condition of redeemed vision awakes within, all that was otherness comes to be known as the self: the pathway of efficacy is established, and blessing is possible. As Blake emphasizes in *Jerusalem*:

. . . however great and glorious, however loving  
And merciful the Individuality, however high  
Our palaces and cities and however fruitful are our fields,  
In Selfhood, we are nothing, but fade away in morning’s breath. (K675)

Therefore, he directs us, “. . . turn your eyes inward: open, O thou World / Of Love & Harmony in Man: expand thy ever lovely Gates!” (K675). Once this feat is accomplished the Creative Imagination presides, coordinating all aspects of the mind and thereby permitting the intimate contact between mental self and

6. See Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* I.ii. passim.

7. See Blake’s concept of the “Covering Cherub,” *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, passim.

external world. Reality becomes metaphysical—a Golden Age of fourfold vision best expressed by the ability and willingness to bless and love.

Albion's and Oedipus' benedictions are followed by their own physical transformations, as well as a transformation of all nature, and by the opportunity for the transformation of the political state. For the Attic audience this is, of course, Athens—the hub of the world for Sophocles, who envisions his city's redemption as Blake envisions a New Jerusalem emerging in England's green and pleasant land.

How is such miraculous alteration to be accomplished? For both authors a blessing empowered by love is the means. For Blake, as for Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus*, all causation is mental. To give a blessing affirms faith in this principle—an ultimate act of faith, if the blessing involves self-sacrifice, as it does for Oedipus and Albion. The transformative blessing of Oedipus (and of Albion) is made potent by love, the incorporative mental power which, as Oedipus proclaims in his final speech, “. . . makes all . . . difficulties [of death, of all earthly burdens] disappear” (ll. 1615, 1616). It does so by affirming the existence of a higher reality between apparently individual manifestations of being than can exist in each being in isolation. There is, then, no burden which is not greatly dissipated by being shared—a metaphysical improvement essential to both love and blessing.

Furthermore, for Oedipus as for Albion the love which provides the possibility and the efficacy of blessing is identified with divinity. Opposition to love—the putting off of God, as Sophocles expresses it—is, he tells us, extreme arrogance, which is reified in acts of war: “The gods . . . / Attend to these things slowly. But they attend / To those who put off God and turn to madness!” (ll. 1535–37). The ultimate divinity, therefore, for Sophocles and for Blake, is non-madness or sanity (literally, mental wholeness), humility, and nonviolence, attainable only through the willingness to love and bless rather than to hate and scourge, and to identify the other as the self rather than to perceive the other as alien and repugnant to the self.

Hence we find that an outstanding motif in both *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Jerusalem* is the never-ending struggle between wrath, which divides and disturbs, and love, which bonds and redeems. We note this most obviously in the protagonists' mental turmoil, but it permeates most other aspects of the dramas as well. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, the sons of Oedipus are symbolic figures of war and hatred, of revenge which, by perceiving barriers between self and other, sets up equivalent barriers among aspects in the individual mind. As Blake affirms, “. . . they became what they beheld” (*Jerus.*, K662)—tension and disturbance abound in and around Polyneices and Eteocles. Oedipus' daughters, on the other hand, are figures of love, willingly sacrificing themselves to aid their parent. Their sacrifice for him is a small reflection of the life-sacrifice which Oedipus makes for Athens, which must itself struggle if it is to maintain the peace that Oedipus offers it. Similarly, we note the kindness of Theseus engaged in a tug of war with the cruel rationality of Creon as they vie for possession of Oedipus and his daughters.



In *Jerusalem* the dislocation of the Zoas is mirrored at multitudinous levels as the characters reproach and forgive, dismiss and seek each other, divide and unite. All creation is involved in these tensions: "... in the Forests," for example,

The Oak frowns terrible, the Beech & Ash & Elm enroot  
Among the Spiritual fires; loud the Corn-fields thunder along . . .  
.....  
... the whole Creation . . . groans to be deliver'd. (K636-7)

Paradoxically, however, in all instances in these dramas—not just for Albion and Oedipus—the victory of love over hatred inevitably involves some apparent lessening, perhaps even sacrifice, of the self. (We would anticipate this in versions of the savior-myth.) As Blake explains in *Jerusalem*, "... every kindness to another [is] a little Death / In the Divine Image" (K743). In words found in another of his prophecies, yet in complete accord with the message of *Jerusalem*, Blake calls for "... Self annihilation [of] all that is not of God alone, / To put off Self & all I have, ever & ever. Amen" (*Mil.*, K530). In *Colonus* Oedipus and his daughters accept these truths; thus, unlike Oedipus' sons, they are saved and can save. This is the reason that Athens too can be saved if its rulers and citizens preserve Oedipus' blessing by avoiding war and wrath, which they can do if they remain cognizant of themselves in others. Athens must struggle continually, Oedipus admonishes, to maintain "the sacredness of Colonos"—that is, mental completeness and the ability to reconcile with opposites.

The setting of *Oedipus at Colonos* as of *Jerusalem* suggests this struggle, fluctuating among various levels of empirical and symbolic realities as the fight to establish the reign of love goes on. John Jones has pointed out that in Greek drama nature is used to transmit, reinforce, and mirror mental states. "Nature," he says, "is the medium of the mental intent, as sound is carried by material" (215). The scenes in *Colonus* bear this out, although not to the extent which we observe in Blake's Romantic vision. What we are shown in each drama is, however, notably odd, yet most appropriate objective correlative to Oedipus' or Albion's emotions.

For example, in *Jerusalem* Blake uses description of landscape in combination with symbolic figures to describe the tortures of the human emotions (the Zoa Luvah) by the Sons of Albion:

Bowen & Conwenna stood on Skiddaw cutting the Fibres  
Of Benjamin from Chester's River: loud the River, loud the Mersey  
And the Ribble thunder into the Irish sea as the Twelve Sons  
Of Albion drank & imbibed the Life & eternal Form of Luvah;  
Cheshire & Lancashire & Westmoreland groan in anguish  
As they cut the fibres from the Rivers; he sears them with hot  
Iron of his Forge & fixes them into Bones of chalk & Rock. (K736)

In *Oedipus at Colonos*, too, the landscape is metaphor, mirroring and reinforcing characters' mental conditions. The details of description in both works are presented as, in Blake's terms, "Infinite Particulars which will present themselves to the Contemplator" (letter to Dr. Trusler, 16 Aug. 1799, K792).

Only in contemplation and imaginative thought can we make sense of those mundane particulars described. For example, Oedipus fully actualizes his mental potential at Colonus, the birthplace of Sophocles, and thus the source of purity to which both character and author return as old men to be reborn in Redeemed Innocence. Oedipus, the symbolic image of his author, is made whole at the spot where Sophocles began his journey and where, therefore, his own potential was conceived. The grove at Colonus where Oedipus ends his wandering symbolically represents this wholeness: it is dedicated to the Furies, but is also Apollo's vale, where "... ever through the shadow goes / Dionysus reveler" (ll. 678, 679); Poseidon, ruler of the oceans, is patron of Colonus; Zeus and Athena guard the sacred olive which flourishes there. Prometheus, too, transmitter of divine power to humanity, influences Colonus. The spot is sacred, therefore, because it is macrocosmic, incorporating the beneficent presence of the several diverse and conflicting aspects of divinity which, as Blake reminds us, all reside in the human breast. The dynamic tension and coexistence of these deistic forces make Colonus a place of wisdom.

H. D. F. Kitto suggests that classical tragedy traditionally expresses as gods all that is permanent in the world (314). And for Sophocles in this play, as for Blake in his poetry, the Golden Age can be maintained only through vital and eternal intercourse of opposites. The dynamic tensions suggested by the particular collection of deities worshipped at Colonus represent the only kind of mental wholeness and reconciliation which earth can offer—a Golden Age which is a fluctuational absolute.

And when the dynamism is destroyed, the Golden Age crumbles as well. Indeed, as Sophocles points out in his play, the sacred grove is "the buttress of great Athens" (l. 58). Therefore, if the city loses its capacity to recognize the worth of each of the deities to whom Colonus is sacred—that is, to worship them and give them each their due in her mundane dealings, including her political dealings—then her refusal will make Athens unable to continue to receive Oedipus' blessing. The spell will be broken. The maintenance of the healthy tension among the wide range of divine forces at Colonus (like that among the Zoas in *Jerusalem*) is what enables Athens (like Albion) to be superior. Her desecration of the holy place by permitting imbalance among these diverse reigning deities (the Sophoclean parallel to Blake's Zoas) would lead—as of course it did—to Athens' defeat.

In *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles revived and continued the myth of Oedipus to make a final, resounding plea for a return to wisdom. The path had been lost, he realized, but only within the restraints of time and space, in the dark desperation of Experience. Like William Blake, he believed that the individual—that a society—that all humankind—could and should be transformed and redeemed after long struggle. They shared this conviction because they shared a fourfold vision which convinced them that redemption, like all reality, is ultimately mental, shared, ongoing, and metaphorical.

Blake never mentions Sophocles or his play. If, however, as he informs his brother James, he could "... read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar" (letter,

30 Jan. 1803, K821), then he surely could have had access to the *Oedipus at Colonus*. A very important edition of the play (in Greek) by Elmsley, published by Oxford, appeared in 1823—late in Blake's life and later than his publication of *Jerusalem*; but other editions had appeared in Britain from the sixteenth century to 1822. English translations, too, were available: at least three were published in Britain before 1800.

"We do not want either Greek or Roman Models," Blake tells us, "if we are but just & true to our own Imaginations" (*Mil.*, K480): both Blake and Sophocles are so, unquestionably. And yet the similarities between the two authors' wisdom and artistry are at the very least intriguing and could in fact indicate that Blake was familiar with Sophocles' last play. Of all ancient Greek literature the *Oedipus at Colonus* comes closest to restoring the lost Golden Age Blake envisioned. It best exemplifies the mature vitality of that Organiz'd Innocence which Blake believed gave value to art and to life, and it typifies on a grand scale that which Blake admired in glorious bits and flashes in other classical writings. The *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Jerusalem* are, by whatever means, kin: both draw from the same fountain for their energy and their meaningfulness. Sophocles' last work may well have encouraged Blake's faith that he could, indeed, express truths of the Imagination which he knew to be ultimate and eternal.

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