

Illuminating a Tragic Miasma in Shepard's *A Particle of Dread*

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Abstract

Sam Shepard was a playwright who used a variety of stories and styles to explore and understand the country he called home, The United States of America. This thesis launches the process of understanding how Greek tragedy had influenced the work of Shepard in his explorations by looking at Shepard's final play before his passing, *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*. Using the concept of miasma that has been established as important to Greek tragedy to analyze *A Particle of Dread* and its primary source work, *Oedipus Rex*, this thesis reveals the extent of the ancient tragic form's presence in Shepard's last play. To do so, I approach the work in a combination of theory and practice. I first use dramaturgical analysis of *Oedipus Rex*, to explain what tragic role miasma has in Sophocles' play. This is followed by a mirrored dramaturgical analysis of *A Particle of Dread* to uncover and compare what place miasma (and therefore tragedy) has in Shepard's play. Following this is the review and analysis of five performance workshops exploring scenes of Shepard's play which used a combination of performance and lighting to physicalize that dramaturgical work so as to further it and hopefully reveal new aspects through their embodiment. This dramaturgical and practical work results in the discovery of how and to what end Shepard has chosen to use the Grecian content style to analyze and commentate on Western society. The work also offers the chance to compare how the engagement with pollution has changed from the characters of 5th Century BCE Greece to 2014 America, and what that might mean for 2020 onwards.

Preface

The thesis that you are about to read heavily relies on the concept of *miasma*, a Grecian term centered on pollution, and its relation to an American adaptation of the Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*. With the submission of this thesis in August 2020, it is likely that anyone reading it within the near future of its issuing will not fail to connect such a discussion of pollution, including physical plague, to the world's experience with COVID-19. As well, later readers may well see the date of issuing and assume a connection or inspiration between this thesis' topic and COVID-19. It should be noted that the preparation and majority of conduction for this thesis was completed before COVID-19 was known to exist, certainly before it reached North America, and so the work was not purposefully based or connected to COVID-19. The choice of a specific thesis topic was made in the later months of 2018, and the final proposal was submitted in April 2019, while COVID-19 was not named until January 2020. The practical work that is discussed anon took place between January 17th-February 29th, 2020, during which time the COVID-19 epidemic continued to develop, including Canada announcing its first case of COVID-19 on January 25th¹. In writing the thesis from February to August 2020 following the practical work, the current situation was kept in mind, but the attempt was made to look at the scripts and work done, separately from the pandemic.

¹ <https://www.devex.com/news/covid-19-a-timeline-of-the-coronavirus-outbreak-96396>

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Introduction

Throughout his career as playwright, screenwriter, poet, director, and actor, the late Sam Shepard existed as a persona which Bonnie Marranca describes as having been, “grounded in the image of a cool, laid back cowboy, an outsider, a man in control of things” (17), writing scripts and portraying characters centered in the American Midwest and their search to exist as a modern-cowboy. However, Marranca goes on to write that, “if you look at the plays, they suggest [...] an author who views life melodramatically by magnifying an ordinary event until it attains the proportions of a disaster” (17) and, in these magnifications, one finds characters who, “have not lost faith in the promise of a return to innocence, they still mourn their fall from grace” (Marranca 17). Though Marranca does not once refer to the world of Greek tragedy in her writing, her latter definitions cannot help but exist in relation to the Greek form. With these descriptions of Shepard’s work, one imagines the lonely American cowboy who lost at a rodeo, suddenly existing in the boots of a disgraced leader, perhaps exiled by his own people, or a farmer’s poor crop existing at the magnitude of a city’s deadly plague. And in a later interview with Beth Whitaker, Shepard said of a particular Greek tragedy, “if you strip it away in a certain way it’s very American [...] it certainly speaks to the horror of contemporary life” (16); the work in discussion was Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, a play which, in 2014, Shepard adapted into *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*.

The work of Sam Shepard has been produced and examined endlessly throughout both his lifetime and the three years since his passing, analyzing both his earlier one-act plays at the peak of the off-off Broadway avant-garde movement and his better-known/more-produced family plays. These examinations have often been akin to those of his dramatic predecessors such as O’Neill and Miller, though, unlike them, his works have not yet been extensively studied through

a lens crucial to the development of Western drama—that of the Greek tragedy—even with his last play, *A Particle of Dread*, having the subtitle of *Oedipus Variations*.

Themes and Objectives

Admittedly the least observed and produced play of his later career, *A Particle of Dread* was Shepard's only (direct) adaptation of a Grecian play, and one of very few adaptations of any sort. *Particle...* is based around the story of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, but—akin to Shepard's earliest plays—in an extreme complexity that results in a quasi-murder-mystery play, part Grecian quest for discovery (e.g. the blind prophet offering hints), part American cop-show (e.g. chorus represented as two investigators), where the mystery is to be found in deciphering the play itself. If findings such as those by Marranca indicate the potential of a tragic stylistic influence in Shepard's canon, then his choice of adapting *Oedipus Rex* (along with his commentary on the matter) certainly inspire the need for a proper investigation into the influence of the Greek tragedians on Shepard and his works. Furthermore, with *A Particle of Dread* being his (unknowingly) final play², and subtitled *Oedipus Variations*, it offers a look at the culmination of his canon and an already established tragic connection. So, this thesis seeks to examine both *Oedipus Rex* and *A Particle of Dread* to understand how the form and themes of Sophocles' tragedy have been used and transformed by Shepard, and what that produces in terms of a presence of tragedy in *A Particle of Dread*³.

In my initial attempts at dramaturgically analysing these plays and their potential tragic connections, there were a plethora of similarities found in plot and character, as is common in an

² Sam Shepard passed away at the age of 73 on July 27th, 2017, due to “complications of [...] Lou Gehrig's disease” (Brantley).

³ As Dobozy suggests, there are some connections to be found between Shepard's play and *Oedipus at Colonus*, but for the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the links to *Oedipus Rex*, as it is obviously the major and most important source, as I will demonstrate through this thesis.

adaptation. But, with research on tragedy and further analyses, a Grecian concept crucial to the theatre of Ancient Greece proved to be particularly significant to both versions of this tragic story, to the extent that it became the focus of my work. When one hears the term tragedy either in regard to news or fiction, one imagines suffering, be it physical, emotional, or psychological; in a theatrical genre that has survived since theatre's very origins, there has been a common root for that suffering: *miasma*, "meaning 'pollution' [...] a noun derived from the verb *miainein*, meaning 'pollute'" (Nagy 525). With the severity of its presence discovered, *miasma* became the lens for my thesis' dramaturgical work.

The findings developed through dramaturgy were further investigated by creating a practical setting for exploration. This research took the form of workshops, which were intended to create an environment in which certain aspects and scenes of the play could be explored in a closed laboratory setting; these culminated in a staged-reading which would allow the results of these explorations to be shared, and further explored, in an open space. The goal of these workshops was to take the dramaturgical understanding of *A Particle of Dread*, including its relation to Greek tragedy and the presence of *miasma*, that I had been developing over the last year, and embody that understanding so as to supplement the previous work and expose new aspects through their performance.

Ultimately, the goal for my thesis was to explore the presence of the tragic in Shepard's adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*, *A Particle of Dread*, both theoretically and practically, focusing specifically on the Greek theme of *miasma*, which appears to be at the core of the tragic dimension of Shepard's play. Furthermore, the format and findings of this search can hopefully be used in examining others of Shepard's works throughout his career.

The Oedipi of Sophocles and Shepard: A Case Study

Shepard's interview with Beth Whitaker was the only interview found in which Shepard offered an in-depth discussion on *A Particle of Dread*, and seemingly the play has been written about academically only once prior to this thesis' writing, in a faculty paper by Wilfrid Laurier professor, Tamas Dobozy, titled, "Sam Shepard's 'Body' of Tragedy" (2019). In this paper, Dobozy observes the place of disease in the play and its primary source, *Oedipus Rex*, along with Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* in which Dobozy also finds several connections, but seems to be less focused on using it to recognise the dramaturgical connections between Shepard's and Sophocles' works. Instead, he uses it as an inspiration to observe how the plays' material (centered around a plague) and structure may have been influenced by Shepard's developing Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis⁴. After looking through how *Particle...* compares to the development of Shepard's canon, and commenting on quotes in the work that discuss the idea of paralysis and medical suffering, the author concludes that for Shepard, the creation of this play may not have been about understanding Oedipus or America, but instead a vessel for the writer to self-reflect on his condition. Primarily, Dobozy proposes that Shepard used this play to come to terms with his potentially recent diagnosis of ALS, and what that might mean for his future. Dobozy offers that, as Shepard also saw the end of his work as an artist, he questioned his own work as a playwright in a fragmented form. As will be found throughout this thesis, disease is crucial to my own argument as it was for Dobozy, but with miasma at the centre of my own thesis, as a concept focused on pollution and contamination. It is used as a point of dramaturgical comparison for Shepard's and Sophocles' plays, as opposed to a viewpoint of Shepard's personal experiences with sickness.

⁴ Abstract to Tamas Dobozy's paper: Sam Shepard's play, *A Particle of Dread (The Oedipus Variations)*, is haunted by a biological inevitability pointing to Shepard's own death from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in 2017, one

Outside of Dobozy's paper, while the subjects of Greek theatre and Sam Shepard have appeared in conjunction in previous books and essays before, it has been to minimal extents, and consistently in reference to his quintet of 'family plays' such as in Peter Hays' "Child Murder and Incest in American Drama" (1990) and Michael Taav's *The Father-Son Plays of Sam Shepard* (2000)⁵. The most extreme extents of comparing or connecting the plays to tragedy are found in a PHD dissertation by Steven Fetcher, *Impossible Love: A study of the Incest Theme in the Plays of Ibsen, O'Neil, and Shepard* (1993)⁶. Fetcher's essay includes a chapter on *Buried Child*, analysing "the importance of mythic motifs" (Fetcher 197) and what place incest has in its family; this includes comparisons of the mother, Halie, to the Clytemnestra of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, and the similarities in connection between the men in the family to those in the house of Oedipus. Though these references have offered an inspiration for a preliminary analysis of such a connection, the tragic narrative connections to *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)* are clear enough that further analysis is called for than just noting similarities in plot. Such analysis, as one finds in this thesis, requires a more in-depth and distinct understanding of both Grecian tragedy and Shepard's work are required, to then be amalgamated and filtered through Shepard's adaptation in their analysis. With those understandings developed, *Oedipus Rex* and *A Particle of Dread* can then be analyzed through a tragic lens, the former for its fulfillment of the tragic style, the latter for how it exists in the combination of a tragic source and Shepard's modern style.

characterized by precisely the progressive degeneration of muscles and mobility, ultimately leading to paralysis, that guides the form of his last published play (403).

⁵ Hays making brief connections to *Oedipus Rex*'s plot, Taav at one point utilising Freud's thoughts on Oedipus' story to understand some of Shepard's characters.

⁶ Fetcher's abstract describes the focus of the essay as: "One of the most pervasive and least understood themes in modern drama is the theme of incest. Three predominant dramatists of modern drama who have used the incest theme extensively in their works are Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill, and Sam Shepard. Examining a selection of their plays illuminates the complex nature and far-reaching influence of this theme, both in text and in performance." (iv)

When developing a dramaturgical understanding of what tragedy was to the Greeks, I have relied primarily on Aristotle as found in his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, offering what tragedy meant to both artist and audience, what tools were used, and what effects were sought. For an understanding of Shepard, I relied on several sources. Carol Rosen's *Sam Shepard: A "Poetic Rodeo"*, offered a foundational appreciation of Shepard's dramaturgy, and its relation to performance, while Marranca's, "Alphabetical Shepard: The Play of Words" observes the style and dramaturgy of Shepard's earlier one-acts which are more relatable in its abstract style than to his later family plays. Laura Graham's, *Sam Shepard: Theme, Image and the Director*, offered a foundation in crafting a comparative approach for Shepard's work, in that she frequently observes Shepard's canon in its connection to myth, and how myth was used to comment on the society of the plays' audience. These theoretical writings on Shepard's work were supplemented by three interviews with Shepard throughout his career: a 1983 interview with Amy Lippman for *Harvard Advocate*, in which Shepard discussed his thoughts on myth; a 1987 *Rolling Stones* interview with Jonathan Cott, in which Shepard discussed his dramaturgical views on 'fate'; and a 2014 interview with Beth Whitaker for *Signature Stories*, published soon after *A Particle of Dread* was first performed, and seemingly the only published interview in which Shepard extensively discusses his final play. For the purpose of this thesis, these various understandings of Greek tragedy and Shepard's work have been brought together and used to analyse *A Particle of Dread* and the presence of tragedy within it.

Miasma: A Theoretical Lens

In "Patterns of Tragedy in Sophocles and Shakespeare" Michael Ewans writes:

One of the most common ways of shaping a tragic story (both ancient and modern) is to show a pattern of disorder rectified, but at terrible cost; for this reason, several Greek

tragedies begin with a *miasma*, a literal and psychic pollution which indicates that the community has in some way violated the normal order of the world and incurred the displeasure of the gods. (441)

This idea of a *miasma*, the pollution of a people as punishment, proved to be present and meaningful in the Oedipal stories of both Sophocles and Shepard, and thus served as the lens of analysis for this thesis.

In *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Robert Parker explores what *miasma* meant to Ancient Greece, and not just the eponymous religion, but in its society, its anthropological structures, its politics, and its theatre (all admittedly connected with religion). Initially, he breaks down the word to its most basic level, explaining that, “the basic sense of the *mia*- words is that of defilement, the impairment of a thing’s form or integrity” (3), going on to explain that the word itself, as noun or adjective, refers to the condition that causes one to be, “ritually impure, and thus unfit to enter a temple: it is contagious: it is dangerous, and this danger is not of familiar secular origin” (3). He goes on to explain that this affliction of impurity and the suffering it deals can mean something different depending on the source of reference, and the causes for it, but of particular interest in the discussion of tragedy—particularly one containing a story such as that of Oedipus—is the meaning of “*miasma*” when it has to do with bloodshed. In such a scenario, “the basic conception remains the same [suffering as punishment for ill deeds], but emphasis shifts from the image of the slow-grinding mills of god to that of a pollution which has tainted the stock” (Parker 199); with this description comes the idea that it is not just those with blood on their hands that are afflicted with such suffering, but that it is a pollution that spreads throughout the community that this culprit occupies. It is this idea of *miasma* as a contaminating pollution, “a dangerous dirtiness that individuals rub off on one another like a

physical taint” (Parker 8), that became the focus of this exploration and demonstration of tragedy in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, and Shepard’s *A Particle of Dread*.

The theoretical understanding of miasma is found in Parker’s book which focuses more on its meaning to Greek society but gives the most in-depth definition of the term, accompanied by G.E.R Lloyd’s *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination*, which looks at how Greek society explored this concept through their art and culture. For the place of *miasma* in tragedy, the main sources were Fabian Meinel’s *Pollution and Crisis in Greek Tragedy*, which observes miasma across all Grecian tragedies, Gregory Nagy’s, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, which analyzes the place of miasma specifically in *Oedipus Rex*, and Jennifer Cooke’s *Legacies of Plague in Literature, Theory and Film*, which was useful in analyzing how the characters of these works engaged with the pollution, particularly in their attempts to cure it. In *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, Rush Rehm observes what suffering in tragedy meant to the artists and audience in Greek theatre in comparison to the modern one, and it is this work that supports the comparison of Sophocles’ to Shepard’s views on pollution.

Lighting a Tragic Performance: Methodology

Carol Rosen defines Shepard’s plays as, “theatrical vehicles, the engine of which is performance”, arguing that all of his works are meant to be experienced as “compositions of time, space, and action energized by actors on stage” (204). This idea that Shepard’s plays are meant to be experienced by practice inspired the choice to take the literary reviews and analyses of miasma that offered insight into the dramaturgical connections between the works and extend those findings through practical exploration and experimentation. In the case of this thesis, that meant workshops of select scenes from *A Particle of Dread*. These workshops took place between January 17th, 2020 and February 28th, 2020, with three undergraduate students in the

University of Ottawa Theatre Department, experimenting with scenes from *A Particle of Dread* in various performance styles and scenarios. Ultimately the work relied on a combination of performance and lighting, viewed through a semiotic lens.

In discussing the semiotic power of light, Erika Fischer-Lichte writes, “nearly every culture [...] has developed a rich store of light symbolism which, in its earliest origins, can probably be traced back to the juxtaposition of night and day, light and shadow” (111). At the same time, light is an incredibly malleable art-form, allowing an almost instantaneous switch in exploration between one culture and light’s meaning to it, to another. This ability light has to evoke a range of emotions and depict a variety of events is particularly useful in this thesis’ work that involved evoking a cultural style (Greek tragedy) in the work of a different culture (Shepard’s American theatre). In the time of Greek theatre, lighting was already critical in working in association with the playwright, as the sun above the open-air theatre rose and fell with the plays’ story. With the introduction and advancement of electrical lighting available to Shepard and myself, lighting is not as necessarily crucial to the plot but its flexibility and ability to exist as obvious or subtle (as needed) works well with Shepard’s dramaturgical tendency to vary course and emotion. Also, the mysticism and symbolic power of light was useful in trying to visualize the (at times) rather ethereal concepts of miasma. Both styles of theatre seem to invite an exploration via lighting.

As well, of any design, except perhaps sound, lighting is not automatically associated with nor reliant on the performer, in comparison to the set the performer interacts with and the costumes which they inhabit. This meant that, as I looked to compare two styles of theatre, a separation could exist where lighting and performance could at times mirror each other’s world, but at other points exist as clear juxtapositions, performer existing in an ancient style while

lighting tries to elicit Shepard's world, or vice versa. It was these capabilities in mind, along with a personal comfort with the form, that led me to use lighting in my exploration in a way particularly akin to Jo Mielziner's, "tradition of creating poetic landscapes defined through light which created a tension between the physical constraints of the setting and the psychological states of the characters" (Palmer 139)⁷.

The work with lighting, in these workshops, was led generally by Yaron Abulafia's 'dramaturgy of light', which adapts Adolph Appia's writings on semiotics and lighting, now through the lens of modern capabilities and thoughts of theatrical lighting, to craft 'light-images' so as to create an "overall visual concept of light in the performance" (119). In my work of comparison and contrast, this idea of 'light-images' and their ability to help understand—at times even to dictate—what world, time, or place a scene being explored might exist in, was key. In my attempt to create and utilise such light images, Palmer's analysis of Appia and others' work with lighting was fruitful for this project in that it analyzes how these past theories and approaches to lighting have (or have not) proven to be relevant and beneficial to modern practice. With this array of theories presented, I was able to pick and choose what best suited my exploration. As Fischer-Lichte notes, the semiotic power of lighting started with the contrast of, "night and day, light and shadow" (111); but, as cultures and lighting control evolved, colour became an equally important element and that is why, even without referencing light, Goethe's *Theory of Colours* is important to this thesis' work. Goethe's writing on both the viewer's semiotic reception of several colours, and the emotional and/or psychological impact of those colours and their variants, was used here to appreciate how an audience might interpret the

⁷ Mielziner's philosophy of lighting seemed even more pertinent to this exploration of Shepard as his approach was accepted and heavily encouraged by both Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller (Palmer 140), foundations for Shepard's work.

choice of colour in a light image for an appreciation of that moment or its design, and how colour was used in various experiments for, “certain moral and aesthetic ends” (Goethe 350). Finally, the rendering and analysis of the lighting in practice is supported by Richard Pilbrow’s writing on the objectives and tools of lighting, which have remained central from the time of his writing, even if the instruments have changed.

The performance theory came primarily from Claude Calame’s “Vision Blindness and the Mask”. In this work, he discusses how performance may originally have been intended to interact with the text of Ancient Greek theatre to create for the audience a response of fear and pity. He frequently refers to Aristotle to understand, “the specific nature of tragedy” (17). The theories of Aristotle and Calame were accompanied by the practical experience of engaging with Greek tragedy that I gained in the summer of 2019, participating in the Epidaurus Lyceum. The Lyceum is an educational program conducted as part of the Athens & Epidaurus Festival in Greece. Held in collaboration with the University of Peloponnese, it looks to familiarize young artists with a spectrum of modern directorial approaches to ancient drama, including the chance to perform in the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus, the focus of 2019’s program being: “Reinventing Ancient Drama on the contemporary stage”⁸.

Thus, with these understandings of lighting and performance, we can explore miasma as the primary piece of the puzzle for finding the influence of Greek tragedy on Sam Shepard, particularly in *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*.

Chapters Structure

The structure of this thesis follows the route of research conducted in its creation. The first chapter demonstrates the presence and importance of miasma on Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*,

⁸ Further information on the Epidaurus Lyceum can be found here: <http://greekfestival.gr/epidaurus-lyceum/?lang=en>

according to previous theoreticians' work, and my own dramaturgical analysis, forming a groundwork for the analysis of Shepard's work to follow. The second chapter analyzes the presence and demonstrates the importance of miasma in Shepard's *A Particle of Dread*. This is achieved by using others' writings on Shepard and his interviews combined with the findings for *Oedipus Rex*, which are integrated with my own dramaturgical analysis of the play. The third chapter presents the practical component of this research. It describes each workshop that has been done and particularly significant findings, followed by the synthesis of those findings into four distinct themes. Each theme observed involves a comparison of at least two experiments, and the interpretation of what the practical work has proven in regard to Shepard's tragic influence. Through the practical work conducted, these comparisons repeatedly exhibited the dramaturgical importance of miasma in the experience of either individual characters or the community, also finding that ancient and modern dramaturgies tend to focus on either the communal or the individual experience respectively.

Following the conclusion of the thesis are two Appendices. Appendix 1 offers a scene-by-scene plot breakdown of both *Oedipus Rex* and *A Particle of Dread*, primarily offering a clearer understanding of Shepard's play when needed due to the complex and fluctuating form of its multiple narratives, and the chance for the reader to compare plots. Appendix 2 consists of a timeline of the workshop process from preparation to completion, addressing any significant moments or changes throughout the process, along with notes on the time, locale, and content of each workshop and the final experiment. The latter appendix could be particularly useful as its finer detail shows the course of how the findings discussed in the third chapter were determined.

With the passing of Sam Shepard and consequently the completion of his canon, his work demands a new period of study. Greek tragedy has been thoroughly analyzed in the work of his

predecessors, and some contemporaries. Between this fact and his last work being an adaptation of the epitome of Greek tragedy, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the start of this new period can justly be based in understanding his influence in a way rarely done before. Starting this phase is the dramaturgical analysis of both *Oedipus Rex* and *A Particle of Dread*, and the practical analysis to emerge from the latter. All of this work results in the discovery that, in both writers' tragic iterations of Oedipus, miasma is found to be present and important throughout their plays, resulting in suffering of all kinds and felt by all, steadily leading their plays towards their tragic ends and concurrently establishes the presence and influence of Greek tragedy in the work of Sam Shepard.

Chapter 1- Tragedy and Miasma in *Oedipus Rex*

In the story of Oedipus, the first connection one makes to Parker's definition of miasma as pollution⁹ is the plague afflicting Thebes, described by the Priest:

Thebes is dying. There is a blight on the crops of the land, on the ranging herds of cattle, on the stillborn labor of our women. The fever-god swoops down on us, hateful plague, he hounds the city and empties the houses of Thebes. The black god of death is made rich with wailing and funeral laments. (Sophocles 6)

And from these sterilities of women and crops, the polis is inspired to fill its city with, "the smoke of burning incense, with hymns to the healing god, with laments for the dead" (Sophocles 5).

However, introducing a work that looks at plague throughout the history of Western cultures, Cooke writes, "disease is never merely medical" (1), and this holds true for Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In the play, one finds other, less tangible, forms of pollution that spread throughout the city, contaminating its people and leaders. It is these other forms that culminate in the physical plague. In the story of *Oedipus Rex*, the physical miasma is paired with two metaphorical pollutants (though ones that produce very physical results): a *cursed fate*, and *fear*. Though each pollution exists and is spread differently and to different people, all are connected and either provoke, establish, or amplify the conflict of the play. And, as will be found, within this play these pollutants are felt throughout the community of Thebes, be they ruler, farmer, family, or otherwise.

⁹ "a dangerous dirtiness that individuals rub off on one another like a physical taint" (Parker 8).

Through the course of the play, the audience is exposed to the physical plague¹⁰, followed by the fear of its victims, and finally the reveal of fate's role in the suffering (refer to Appendix 1 for a plot breakdown). However, the fabula of Oedipus' and Thebes' narrative occurs in the inverse course, beginning with a cursed fate, stemming fear, and resulting in plague (an order further explored in this thesis), and this latter course structures the argument to come.

Polluted Fate

In discussing pollution in Greek tragedy, Fabian Meinel writes that, "the scenarios most commonly associated with pollution, and which require purification, include birth, death and murder" (9) and it is found that the physical plague in *Oedipus Rex* is sparked by the killing of Laius. However, this 'scenario of murder' is not the first to have been found in the history of Thebes' royal family. Parker notes that, in these myths, "sooner or later Zeus punishes all wrongdoers, and if they escape themselves, 'their innocent children pay for their deeds, or their descendants afterwards'" (Parker 199). It is these 'scenarios' that may have condemned the fate of Laius and his children long before their time, as passed on through their polluted bloodline, supposedly dating back generations to the original misdeeds of their ancestors¹¹.

This list of misdeeds and curses eventually leads to Laius being cursed and the prophecy that he, "was fated to die by the hand of his son" (Sophocles 41), the curse and prophecy thus swearing Laius' fate and, by extension, Oedipus', to one of suffering. When this ladder of curses finally reaches Oedipus, resulting in the chaos of murder and incest he is destined to (as

¹⁰ "Oedipus' dramatic structure requires that the play's opening, the plague narrative, be discussed first. For the themes of 'understanding' and 'coping' and the nature of the connection to these of the ritual nexus of pollution and purification are first laid out here, as an overture, before they are developed, in a different key, in the story of Oedipus' self-discovery." (Meinel 49)

¹¹ Fainlight and Littman in their introduction to *The Theban Plays*, outline the evolution of these misdeeds through the generations of Thebes' leaders (serving as the muse for this play) and the resultant curses, starting with Cadmus' curse by Apollo in the founding of the city, leading up to Laius' raping of Chrysippus, breaking the rules of hospitality (xxvi).

exhibited and described in the play), Rehm's statement on the ancestral path of doom¹² is exhibited as true.

For stories such as that of Oedipus, these fates are frequently exhibited by their results throughout *Oedipus Rex* but, to appreciate that such effects are linked to fate, it requires the work of an oracle or seer such as the Oracle of Delphi or Tiresias. Though the Oracle of Delphi goes unseen in the play, we hear of three different prophecies that were offered by him or his priests on behalf of Apollo. We are told by Jocasta that, long ago, the priests of Apollo conveyed to Laius that he was, "fated to die by the hand of his son, a son born to him and to me [Jocasta]" (41), which led to the abandonment and supposed death of that son. Oedipus explains that, in his search for his parents, the oracle did not answer him but instead, "foretold a dreadful, calamitous future for me- to lie with my mother and beget children men's eyes would not bear the sight of- and to be the killer of the father that gave me life" (45), leading him to run away from his home, supposedly avoiding such a fate. These fates having been (unknowingly) fulfilled at the start of the play, leading Oedipus, at this point king, to send Creon to the Oracle to discover the cause of Thebes' suffering. Creon returns with:

Here is what I was told by the god Apollo. He ordered us, in clear terms, to drive out the thing that defiles this land, which we, he says, have held and cherished. We must not let it grow so far that it is beyond cure. [...] Banishment-or repaying blood with blood. We must atone for a murder which brings this plague-storm on our city. [...] It is to *his* [Laius] death that Apollo's command clearly refers. We must punish those who killed him- whoever they may be. (9)

¹² "Doom moves across generations, linking parents to their children and ancestors to their descendants" (Rehm 58)

Though each of these prophecies addresses the cursed fate of a different person or people, by the end of the play it is discovered that all three curses are connected. Jocasta and Laius' birthing of Oedipus begins to fulfill their curse and commences the course of their son's. Once the prior two are actualized, the curse is spread from the royal family to the city of Thebes, requiring them to fulfill Apollo's edict. Meinel writes that, through *Oedipus Rex*, the term *miasma* is frequently associated "with prophetic voices: it is an oracular word" (62), and though the translation of *Oedipus Rex* used for this thesis does not contain the exact word "miasma", when observing the path of these curses and prophecies offered by Delphi, it appears as a course of contamination throughout a city and its royal family, waiting to be cured.

To understand the prophecy offered to Thebes, Oedipus and his city go to the seer Tiresias who first prophesises Oedipus' imminent future, that:

Without knowing it, you are the enemy of your own flesh and blood, the dead below and the living here above. The double-edged curse of your mother and father, moving on dread feet, shall one day drive you from this land. You see straight now but then you will see darkness. You will scream aloud on that day; there is no place which shall not hear you [...] which will not ring in echo, on that day when you know the truth about your wedding, that evil harbor into which you sailed before a fair wind [...] this present day will give you birth and death. (25)

The seer goes on to then prophesise the long-term future of Thebes' pollutant, who he previously labelled as Oedipus:

The man you are trying to find, with your threatening proclamations, the murderer of Laius, that man is here in Thebes. He is apparently an immigrant of foreign birth, but he will be revealed as a native-born Theban. He will take no pleasure in that revelation.

Blind instead of seeing, beggar instead of rich, he will make his way to foreign soil, feeling his way with a stick. He will be revealed as brother and father of the children with whom he now lives, the son and husband of the woman who gave him birth, the murderer and marriage-partner of his father (27).

With Oedipus' growing knowledge, blinding, and banishment, Tiresias' words prove to be true. Tiresias states that, "what is to come will come, even if I shroud it in silence" (Sophocles 20), meaning that Oedipus' fate would be sealed regardless of Tiresias' speaking, he also says that, "wisdom is a dreadful thing when it brings no profit to its possessor. I knew all this well but forgot. Otherwise I would never have come here" (19). With this, it seems Tiresias offers that one's fate, or curse, will happen whether or not it is known, and yet the sharing of that will only lead to further harm. This could mean that the contamination that a polluted fate offers is not just passed through bloodline, but also by its telling to others. This proves true because, with the oracle's and seer's telling of such fates and prophecies, comes possibly the most dangerous article they can offer—knowledge—and, from the knowledge found in those words, spreads a new pollution: fear.

Pollution of Fear

According to Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, the words of a Grecian oracle, fictional or otherwise, produced a fear that, "may be defined as a pain or disturbance arising from a mental image of impending evil of a destructive or painful sort" (107). In the case of *Oedipus Rex*, the aforementioned prophecies describe just such an impending evil, serving as an initial provocation of that fear, one that continues to spread and grow to epic proportions and tragic results as more prophecies are revealed, histories told, and accusations made.

In *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, Rush Rehm states that the observation of such a tragic fear and its importance must, “keep the realities of ancient warfare in mind” (42). Warfare certainly occupies the “impending evil of a destructive or painful sort” that Aristotle describes as being at the core of fear (*Rhetoric* 107) along with the fear-bolstering power of war’s irremediability (109). While Rehm acknowledges that the Greeks had many words for fear, the most common was *phobos* which, “from Homer onward, its principal meaning was something like ‘panic flight’, the emotional surge that compels men in battle to turn and run away” (Rehm 40). And this fear that has its origins in battle was, “frequently ascribed to politics and political rule generally” (48), thus occupying the major topics of Greek tragedy: war and royalty.

This idea of fleeing is seen from the start of Oedipus’ story with his departure from Corinth in fear of bringing disaster to his family. It appears even earlier in his story if one considers his abandonment by Laius and Jocasta, also sparked by an oracle’s prediction, to be the equivalent of them fleeing their fate (but easier to run a child away from its people than it is to have an entire city flee a child, perhaps a logic in line with that of the *pharmakos* ritual to be explained anon). Within the play itself, fear is seen to be experienced by all characters and chorus on varying scales, which Rehm breaks down to fears for/of the individual, and fears of the polis (48).

The individual fear is seen growing and shifting between the members of the royal family who have survived up to the start of the play. Initially this individual fear exists in Oedipus’ fear for his own wellbeing in that, “whoever killed Laius might decide to raise his hand against me [Oedipus]” (Sophocles 12). This is followed by a fear that there is a conspiracy against him by Tiresias and Creon, fulfilling the claim in *Rhetoric* that, “men fear those who compete with them

for things which both parties cannot possess at the same time” (Aristotle 109), i.e., the role of King. This fear contaminates Creon, who, though resilient, begins to fear his accuser, Oedipus, who, “claims the right to inflict dreadful punishments on me [Creon]. He will choose between banishing me from my fatherland and killing me” (37). Eventually, with the reports of a Shepherd and a Messenger, fears shift from being directed towards others, to become a fear of oneself. For Oedipus, this shift is first triggered by Jocasta who, as she describes the reported death of Laius, mentions its location to have been at, “a place where three highways meet” (41). This leads Oedipus to reply, “Jocasta, something I heard you say has disturbed me to my soul, has unhinged my mind” (41), as it was at just such a place that Oedipus had gotten into a fatal argument with travellers himself. This new fear that an unknown truth may be revealing itself and condemning Oedipus to shame and suffering in turn contaminates Jocasta by his reaction and reflections, leading her to tell him that, “to look at you makes me shudder, my lord” (43). As more conflicting reports are given, Oedipus and Jocasta’s fears rise and fall until the extent of their individual histories’ connection is revealed and they cannot endure it, leading to Jocasta’s suicide and Oedipus’ blinding. For Oedipus, he says that even if his fate brought him to this point, it was Oedipus himself that committed the blinding, seemingly spurred on by self-fear¹³.

Surrounding these individual fears throughout the play are the fears of the polis, as exhibited by the Chorus. Initially their fear is of the plague and suffering experienced by their herds, wives, and children—and what this might lead to—prompting the aforementioned, “branches of supplication [...] smoke of burning incense, with hymns to the healing god, with laments for the dead” (Sophocles 5). Within the play, the fear is shown spreading from the work of oracles, as the Chorus’ first declaration of their own terror occurs when they hear the reported

¹³“It was Apollo, friends, Apollo, who brought to fulfillment all my sufferings. But the hand that struck my eyes was mine and mine alone.” (Sophocles 75)

prophecy by the Oracle of Delphi that the root of the plague, Laius' killer, lives. With this knowledge, the Chorus', "fearful heart is stretched on the rack and shudders in terror" (Sophocles 13) pleading every god to save them. Next, when told by Tiresias that the murderer is to be found within their own city, they are left in fear and chaos, confessing that, "the wise prophet's words have brought me terror and confusion. I cannot agree with him, nor speak against him. I do not know what to say. I waver in hope and fear; I cannot see forward or back" (28). This communal fear is two-pronged in that partly they fear that they will not find the culprit and the plague will continue; but they also fear the fact that it is one of their own that is guilty which leads to the confusion that is paired with this dread, as the idea of fearing one's (collective) self is threatening. Eventually, their terror again becomes apparent in the realisation of just how tainted their brilliant king and his royal house are, which is referred to with, "the horrors we knew about before were burden enough" (71).

Physical Plague

While it is found that the pollutions of fear for the individuals of the play stem from the actualizations of their fates, it can be noted that, for the community, the fear stems particularly from a third source of pollution: the physical plague¹⁴. The destruction and suffering produced by this plague is a miasma in that it both literally spreads between people and animals, infecting them, and in that, from the experience of it, the communal fear occurs; Cooke notes that, "the addition of plague lifts the tragedy out of the individual sphere and into that of the polis" (90).

One of Aristotle's first statements in discussing a tragedy's plot is that, "a well-constructed plot, then, will neither begin at some chance point nor end at some chance point"

¹⁴ "Thebes is dying. There is a blight on the crops of the land, on the ranging herds of cattle, on the stillborn labor of our women. The fever-god swoops down on us, hateful plague, he hounds the city and empties the houses of Thebes. The black god of death is made rich with wailing and funeral laments." (Sophocles 6)

(Aristotle 12) and such is the case with *Oedipus Rex* and its Theban plague. We start the play with the plague having reached a scale of destruction that the polis have finally come to their ruler who has just recently sent for help from the Oracle of Delphi; this is not the start of the plague, it is the start of the search for its reason. The Oracle, through Creon, reveals the cause of this plague to be a, “thing that defiles this land which we, he says, have fed and cherished. We must not let it grow so far that it is beyond cure” (9), the aforementioned defiler being the murderer of King Laius. With this pollution comes, “the need for purification [...] not only for the body but also for the body politic” (Nagy 535). It is eventually found that Oedipus, by his own description, was the one to be, “vile, utterly unclean” (Sophocles 46), this pollution brought about by the patricide and incest of his past and present. Nagy suggests that the severity of these sins was so great that, “the fact that the actions of Oedipus were unintended did not mitigate the fact that these actions- killing the father and having sex with the mother- caused him to become polluted” (525).

This discovery of Oedipus, “the pathogen, the pollutant who has contaminated his children, and made them too much in his own image” (Gumpert 44), as being at the root of this plague that resulted in the spoiling of all his city, leads him to be labelled as *pharmakos* by the city. According to Jennifer Cooke in *Legacies of Plague in Literature, Theory and Film*, the *pharmakos* (meaning either the Ancient Greek ritual or its eponymous citizen), “involved the death of a person chosen to carry the pollution of plague outside the walls of the polis” (Cooke 74). This individual is often referred to as a scapegoat, as the suffering of an entire city was put upon the shoulders of an individual to carry away and, depending on the time, culture, or creative work that this ritual occurred in, the *pharmakos* may or may not have been considered the true

cause¹⁵. In the case of *Oedipus Rex*, in the polis' and family's search for who to blame, Oedipus is revealed to be the cause of the plague and so his expulsion and (presumable) death should cure Thebes of the plague as ordained by Apollo:

Creon: Here is what I was told by the god Apollo. He ordered us, in clear terms, to drive out the thing that defiles this land, which we, he says, have fed and cherished. We must not let it grow so far that it is beyond cure.

Oedipus: What is the nature of our misfortune? How are we to rid ourselves of it- by what rites?

Creon: Banishment- or repaying blood with blood. We must atone for a murder which brings this plague-storm on the city. (Sophocles 9)

In later Greek society it was a healthy body used, as a metaphorical embodiment of impurity, whose literal death was meant to be the death of the plague as well. A cultural difference is seen in Cooke's comparison of the Grecian pharmakos to the Judaic scapegoat, in that, among other differences, "the Judaic ritual is a response to sin; the Greek ritual to a city crisis such as plague" (82). Regardless of culture, Cooke states that, in such a ritual, "the pharmakos is both carrier of plague and cure" (77), the ritual naming them as both pollutant and purifier. This naming potentially just serves as a source of blame to satisfy the ritual and thereby the population, a concept it will be found that Shepard latches onto.

In *Oedipus Unbound*, René Girard asserts that, "the plague is not a mere backdrop to the front-stage quarrels of princes and sages. The foreground and background are inseparable from each other" (42). Such is the case for *Oedipus Rex*, as the course of the plague dictates the story's

¹⁵ For further definition and history of the ritual, see Todd Compton, "The Pharmakos in Archaic Greece" *Victim of the Muses: Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History* (Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard Univ. Press, 2006).

arc; it is not ultimately the gods who bring us to the denouement, but it is by the discoveries of its characters that the plague of Thebes is finally understood (Aristotle 20-22). And, with the resulting expulsion (though conducted to appease Apollo), the plague is relieved, ending the story for Thebes' people; Oedipus is expelled, entering the next phase of his story.

The potential relevance of this physical pollution to its original audience, outside of dramaturgy, is offered by G. E. R. Lloyd and his book, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination*, in which he explores what the Greeks thought about sickness and its causes, symptoms, or solutions, and how that appeared throughout their culture in poetry, theatre, and philosophy. First mentioned in his discussion of *Oedipus Rex*, is that around the time of the play's writing, Athens had experienced a plague and, though it cannot be certain to have happened beforehand (as opposed to during or soon afterwards), Lloyd believes it likely that the play was written afterwards, meaning the audience, "cannot have failed to see the connection between the evils that afflict Thebes in the tragedy, and the actual disease that decimated their own contemporaries" (85).

Conclusion

Parker's initial definition of *miasma* is a state of contagious 'ritual impurity' (3), that, when stemming from bloodshed, shifts, "to that of a pollution which has tainted the stock" (199). Having examined not only the plot and text of the blood-ridden *Oedipus Rex*, but also what *miasma* and the *pharmakos* meant to the audience's society, it is clear that a spectrum of such *miasma* with its contaminants and resulting pollution is to be found throughout the Grecian tale of Oedipus on every scale from an individual's thoughts, to a cursed family, up to the fear and suffering of an entire city. The pollutions of fate, fear, and plague, each offer their own suffering, yet it is also found that all three are consequences of each other (to an extent) as word of the

cursed fate produces the fear that instigate the actions that start the plague; furthermore, all have long-reaching effects whether through family or city, yet the cause and cure may be found in one individual's actions or removal.

While understandings of the era and its work can be achieved within the modern mind, and connections made, a dramatic retelling of the story placed in the modern day requires adaptation. And, considering that Western society's understandings and relationship with medicine, emotion, and religion have significantly changed in the more than two thousand years since Sophocles' work, an analysis of a new telling of Oedipus' story requires a contemporary viewpoint (though, this update in viewpoint is not to say that connections will not be made between either work or their respective societies). However, there is one aspect of pollution that stays ever present according to Lloyd:

[The plague's] sudden onset, often unexplained, often inexplicable, maybe irremediable, captures, in so many respects as, the very essence of the human predicament, serving as not merely analogous to, but itself a key example of, human vulnerability. (97)

This last generality of a "human vulnerability" aligns more with Parker's observation of the "convergence between the consequences of pollution and of disgrace", that results in "social stigma" (317). And it is this convention of social stigma that permeates Sam Shepard's placement of Oedipus and his story into the American Midwest, as he unravels the epic story and the pollutions throughout it to reveal a malady at the core of his nation (and humanity's) eponymous *dread*: the need to blame.

Chapter 2- An Oedipal Pollution in *A Particle of Dread*

Introduction

In an interview by Beth Whitaker in a publication of *Signature Stories*, Sam Shepard discussed what was to be his final play, *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*, including its potentially classical influence; this play was his first foray into a classical story, though, as might be expected of Shepard, not in a typical style of engagement. Although Shepard stated that he had originally intended for the work to be a direct adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, he also shared that, "I was really having a hard time adapting it, and finally I decided I didn't want to adapt it, I just wanted to do variations on the themes that were in the play" ("Signature" 14); that is how the mashed-up nature of *Particle...* with its *Oedipus Variations* was formed. The play really is a series of variations on *Oedipus Rex*, as what one finds in *Particle...* is the juxtaposition of the various storylines in *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, and the Oedipal myth in general, through differing modern and classical lenses. Each scene explores a different aspect or event of the tale and is placed in a different scenario, be it the depiction of husband and wife attempting child-birth against the advisement of a butcher (free-lancing as an oracle), two policemen in search for a murderer, or a man just trying to discover his past. There is not a particular order of these scenes, except for those that exist in the same storyline that appears on and off (i.e., an investigation by the police into a drug-kingpin named Langos' murder, which, whenever it is depicted, follows the investigation's development)¹⁶. Referring to Bonnie Marranca's analysis of Shepard's other works in *Alphabetical Shepard*, one finds that this style is not particular to just *Particle...*, but that all of Shepard's work exhibits this, "open realism [that] exists in a dramatic field composed of events not scenes, of explosions and contradictions,

¹⁶ For a breakdown of these scenes and their scenarios, refer to Appendix 1.

not causes, of the overall effect, of gestalts” (10), as opposed to “conventional realism”, which is, “only interested in the similarities of things” (10).

An aspect of the variations not familiar to Shepard’s other works, is *Particle...*’s character structure, as the variations are found not only in the scenes and their scenarios but also in the collage of characters that Shepard creates or adapts for this story. For instance, in *Oedipus Rex*, the character of Laius (referred to but not seen) occupies two important functions: he is the victim whose murder is said to be the cause of the plague (and thus the focus of a renewed investigation by the city), and also the father of Oedipus who, along with his wife, Jocasta, was supposedly told by the Oracle of Delphi not to have children as it would lead to his death (these two functions are eventually revealed to be linked). In *A Particle of Dread*, Laius appears as a character in two variations. First, the drug kingpin Langos, whose murder investigation is at the centre of one the play’s storylines. Second Laius appears in the form of Lawrence, the husband of Jocasta, who goes to the Oracle to understand why he and his wife fail to have a child and is then seen coping with the prediction that their hypothetical child would kill his father and marry his mother. In these two forms, Laius’ story is seen to be split in two aspects, but that meet at the point of abandoning a son, Lawrence showing a husband looking to have a child with his wife and reportedly abandoning the child upon its birth¹⁷, and Langos as a king who has succeeded in having a child, but abandons it and bears the consequences, serving as the victim¹⁸.

In *Particle...* Oedipus’ place in the story is also split in two, occupied by Oedipus and Otto. Shepard’s Oedipus is mostly similar to the source text in his search for the origin of his city’s plague, as he looks for information from his people, promising to punish anyone even if they are in his own family, and is then seen contending with the knowledge that he himself was the

¹⁷ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scenes 2 and 3.

¹⁸ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scenes 15 and 6.

murderer. Otto exists in a more modern scenario using a wheelchair (indicating he too has a ‘swollen foot’), and again looking into a murder, but this time more out of curiosity and a faint memory than a kingly duty, which grows once he visits the crime scene. Along with symbolizing Oedipus’ role as investigator, he also exists as a father figure, which does not significantly occur in *Oedipus Rex* until Oedipus’ final moments when he begs to see his daughters. For Otto, this appears in the time spent with his daughter Annalee as he attempts to support her in the early days of her journey as a single mother.

Both Oedipus and Otto are seen at the same crime-scene in search of something from their past. Though the crime-scene has been acknowledged as the spot of Langos’ murder, Oedipus, having already been referred to as the child of Lawrence—thus occupying a different time—is still shown being interrogated by Randolph and Harrington as to what seems to be Langos’ murder. This results in Oedipus’ confession that he killed his father. Though this crossover presents confusion, it seems possible that this crime-scene has been a point of importance throughout the history and various iterations of the family, potentially meaning that both Oedipus and Otto go to this scene at different points looking for information on different murders. Although the published text, which offers the casting of the premiere production, lists the Maniac of the Outskirts as being portrayed by a different actor than that of Oedipus and Otto, it can be found that the Maniac occupies part of Oedipus’ individual story, as he describes himself as being a hitchhiker, coming from powerful lineage, blamed for a murder¹⁹. This is also how Shepard’s Oedipus describes himself and the murder he committed: a hitchhiker who got in an argument, and someone coming from powerful lineage. Though the link between the two is not further explored, Scene 27 shows the Maniac speaking at Oedipus, describing the pitiful nature

¹⁹ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scenes 7 and 11.

of his own life in comparison to Oedipus', but also betting that with Oedipus' recent revelation, he would much prefer to trade. A potential connection to be made is that, as the Maniac exists in the "Outskirts", he represents a future Oedipus, post-exile, who has lost himself but remembers his suffering.

Jocasta exists in two forms, Jocasta and Jocelyn. Her first version is very similar to the Sophoclean Jocasta, first as a wife looking to become a mother with her husband, Lawrence (i.e., Laius), and who, regardless of the prophecy, has the child, Oedipus, and eventually marries him. Then, accompanying him through the investigation, her dread of the growing knowledge deepens until she hangs herself. Jocelyn, wife of Otto and mother of Annalee (their Antigone), is seen only in the middle step of Jocasta's arc, as the wife accompanying her husband in the search for knowledge. Here she exists more as a typical house-wife and the search existing at what seems like much lower stakes. We are not told of any prior marriages or childbirth by Jocelyn, nor do we see any horrible revelations, her hesitancy in this case just being a fear of the Mexican border.

Antigone's role is seen primarily as Annalee, who exists in the same 'modern' world as Otto and Jocelyn's daughter. She accompanies Otto in his search for his memory and is shown dealing with the knowledge of her father's incestuous history, something we know Antigone will have to do after the events of *Oedipus Rex*, present in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, but not seen in this play. In a moment unseen in *Oedipus Rex*, Annalee also epitomises the family curse, as she too is seen attempting to abandon her child in the wilderness (seemingly at the same spot Langos was killed), this time offering it to the Traveller, supposedly to help prevent the child from growing up with the horrible memories of its past²⁰.

²⁰ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 16.

In my analysis, I have come to find that in each storyline occupied by these characters, the discussion and search of pollution's source is to be found, mostly in regard to the plague seemingly brought over from Sophocles' play, but also in some individuals' stories, be they a fear and investigation of self-pollution by guilt, a fear for their families' well-being, or as to the purity of their society.

In my analysis of these searches for pollution, I have found an idea that Shepard has grasped onto for this play: the need to blame. I believe that, as a writer who examined the American life and culture, for better and worse, Shepard has seen the importance of blame in the tragic story of Oedipus and chosen it to find the modern relevancies. While Sophocles' may have exhibited such a need in his own people with *Oedipus Rex*, I believe and hope to prove that to be at the core of Shepard's play and this story: America's need to blame.

With that intention developed, pollution, which the Greeks sought to cure through the pharmakos ritual²¹ (seemingly the epitome of 'blame' in Greek culture, and an act found also in *Particle...*), becomes a productive lens to look at the play's exploration of the need to blame. As was done in the examination of Sophocles' work, it has been found in my analysis that pollution appears primarily in three forms, and thus will be demonstrated and explored with those three focal points: the curses passed on through an ill-fated family, a spreading fear, and a physical plague. And, through further exploration, it is found that all three areas carry with them traits similar to those of the Greek understanding of pollution, and the effects that follow.

Polluted Fate

When Shepard's pair of chorus-like detectives, Randolph and Harrington, are arguing in *A Particle of Dread* on the murder they are investigating, Randolph assures his partner that,

²¹ "The death of a person chosen to carry the pollution of plague outside the walls of the polis" (Cooke 74).

“everything has a history, doesn’t it? I mean, this stuff didn’t come out of thin air” (Shepard 23). Though discussed by the modern forensic investigator, the idea of such connections—whether they be between people, events, locations, or otherwise—is akin to the utterances of the Ancient Greek oracle. As explained in the previous chapter, in Sophocles’ Oedipal tale, the action of the play stems from three prophecies by the Oracle of Delphi, and the divinations of the seer Tiresias. The first two prophecies of a predicted fate are made by the Oracle (mentioned in retrospect), first an unseen foretelling of Laius’ and Jocasta’s fate (whose child is predicted to murder his father and marry his mother), leading to their abandonment of that child in the mountains, and next a prediction for Oedipus that he will commit those same atrocities, though at the time he does not know that. Within the play, the communal and individual fears first strengthen when Creon reports that the Oracle has stated that Laius’ killer still resides within the city and is the source of the physical plague. These fears escalate when the seer Tiresias informs Oedipus that he is the pollutant of his own city. All of these prophecies and their realisations are due to each characters’ fate, as passed on through their polluted bloodline, that supposedly dates back generations to the original misdeeds of their ancestors.

When considering the adaptation of a story that relies on fate into the style of a modern American drama, set in a culture in which fate is much less prevalent, it may be wondered how much, if at all, fate would still play a role and, if it does not, then how might the other pollutions (both physical and fearful) be caused or passed on. With the varying nature of *Particle...*, one finds that there are scenes occupying a more classical world in which fate is clearly discussed and plays a role, along with scenes in which other pollutant sources must be found.

The first sort is justified by Shepard in an interview with Jonathan Cott in the middle of his career, in which Shepard discussed his first interactions with fate as a plot-device. This occurred

when he went to England and read/engaged with classical works such as Marlowe and the Greeks, which he discovered to be, “all about destiny! That’s the most powerful thing. Everything is foreseen, and we just play it out”, and that, while someone may be able to shape his own destiny, “first you have to know what your destiny is” (Shepard, “Rolling Stone”). In *Particle...*, this classical idea of fate is embodied in one character, Uncle Del. Though depicted in the modern (blood-soaked) dress of a butcher, Del uses practices seemingly familiar to the Oracles of Ancient Greece, primarily the reading of animal skins, and the rolling of knucklebones, all presumably obtained through the use of sacrifice. It is with these devices that we find out the prophecy that will lead to the downfall of Lawrence, Oedipus, and their family, and the cities surrounding them. His divination of a polluted fate first appears in Scene 2 with Lawrence’s interaction with Del and later in Scene 29 by his counterpart Langos’ who, when reflecting on the abandonment of his own son, describes how he reacted to the Oracle’s prediction: “I thought I could dodge the implications. Run around it somehow. Avoid my fate the way you would a falling tree. You hear it cracking long before it hits the ground. I stole the baby from its mother. Tore it from her breast [...] It was not a son to me. Just an enemy. A demon in disguise. Terror drove me to it. Only terror. It wasn’t me” (95). But, with both men their destiny catches up with them in a way that Laura Graham describes of a different Shepard-ian character in *Buried Child*: “in Shepard the quest is abortive, unsuccessful or abandoned- the Hero is predestined to fail. Like Oedipus, he seeks to avoid his Fate, but that denied fate will then simply seek him out- the Hero’s fate entails his very attempts to avoid it. Unlike Oedipus, he does not transcend but is neglected” (117).

At the very end of *A Particle of Dread*, Oedipus confesses what led him to his self-blinding, concluding with, “I am sick. Sick in daily life. Sick in my origins. Take me away” (115). This

proclamation suggests that it was the cursed family, or sickly ‘origins’, that he was born into that brought about his ruin. Following this, Shepard shows that it is the Theban royal family’s fate that those origins will continue to pollute it. This is proven in that, after Oedipus is revealed to be the murderer of Langos, and Jocasta’s dead body is seen in silhouette hanging from a rope, it is not Oedipus who returns blind, but Annalee (Antigone in this instance) who comes out, “*with a long, crooked walking stick, tapping it as she goes, as though blind. She seems almost catatonic as she wanders on, chanting the word ‘Mama’ in a kind of incantation*” (Shepard, “Particle” 114). Yet, while that happens, Oedipus quickly returns, first, seeing Jocasta’s body (both in silhouette), moaning in terror and grief, and then coming on stage, “*his eyes streaming with blood*” (114); at this point, we see both Oedipus and Antigone wandering around the stage blind. Oedipus having declared his sickly origins to be the core of his ruin, we see him in the midst of his blind ruin accompanied by his daughter experiencing a similar fate, proving that the cursed bloodline that brought about his suffering is, or will be, the fate of his daughter.

As for how else one’s own fate may be polluted by another’s curse (likely through ancestry), while Rush Rehm does not provide an answer, he does offer a starting point, claiming that, “what has changed from the time of Greek tragedy involves the reason why such repetition [of crimes and suffering through lineage] occurs” (59). An answer to finding a modern equivalent may be seen in Annalee’s earlier storyline in *Particle*... which consists of her attempted abandonment of her own child (as presumably was done to her own father). Her actions harken back to the role of pharmakos—though perhaps on a more selfish level in this sense. When defining the pharmakos, Cooke notes that, by other cultures’ definitions, the pharmakos need not be the true cause of the plague, but simply a scapegoat (82); this concept is seen in Annalee’s attempt to deal with Shepard’s seemingly modern equivalent of fate, memory. In the attempt, she comes across a

Traveller who interrogates her on why she wishes to abandon her son (supposedly because she doesn't want him growing up after what he's seen), eventually accusing her of doing so because, "maybe it's just *you* who can't take it. [...] The pictures in your mind. The imagery [...] Your husband bumping the babysitter. Maybe it's only you. Killing your baby won't fix that" (58). In this sense, it seems she is trying to abandon her son to purify her household of its ills by removing the last witness of it, though Annalee's drastic response to Otto's questioning about a fear of guilt maintains her assured presence of a polluted bloodline, eventually saying, "my kid's marked for life [...] Scarred. Branded", and Otto responding with, "Oh. His ankle?" (44). As Otto is seen at the time in a wheelchair and having previously been proven by Shepard to be a counterpart of Oedipus, it can be assumed he has had trouble with his own ankle in the pinning of his feet. So, this idea that his grandson/nephew could have the same scar leads one to think that, just as the aforementioned blinding has been seen to afflict Oedipus' daughter, so too will such a pain/mark be passed on.

Pollution of Fear

As was found with *Oedipus Rex*, the power and danger of fate may not even be found in its actualization, but simply in the fear of its prediction, and this play too offers that, "it's all about panic" ("Particle" 26). But, where the communal nature of *Oedipus Rex* meant that those predictions produced a fear in the idea of being the source of others' suffering, the modern nature of this story finds characters more inclined to fear for themselves. In this play, as predictions and findings are made, it is mostly a fear of being blamed that 'taints' the various characters who spread such pollution amongst each other (though Otto maintains a moral-based fear of an uncertain self-guilt). That is why, at the end of Uncle Del's monologue in Scene 5, in which he describes the disgusting image of the city's physical plague (to be explored anon), it concludes

not with an advisement of communal support, but with the question: “But who among you fears they’ll find him [the killer and plague’s source] in their own dark kitchen?” (Shepard, “Particle” 19). But why would the idea of (a connection to) blame promote such fear? Parker explains that, in Greek society, the person given the label/role of *pharmakos* would be cast out of the city (likely leading to its death); in American society, those convicted for murder are (supposedly) doomed to prison, possibly execution. In either situation the results are fearful. Fear can also be considered the most interesting of pollutions according to Shepard as, in an interview with Amy Lippman written long before *Particle...*, he shared that the power of a myth [such as Oedipus] is that “it’s the communication of emotions, at the same time ancient and for all time” (Shepard, “Rhythm” 356). When such a myth is put into stage form those emotions are not just felt and shared between the characters, but with the audience, turning Aristotle’s “mental image [...] of a destructive or painful sort” (*Rhetoric* 107), into a physicalized one, thus achieving Shepard’s (and Aristotle’s) goal of affect.

In the first chapter’s discussion of fear in *Oedipus Rex*, the fear was two-pronged: one sort was for and by the city, the second being for and by the individual. In Shepard’s play, it is primarily the individual’s (or couple’s in the case of Lawrence/Jocasta) fear that is displayed, perhaps due to the removal of a chorus who, in *Oedipus Rex* and other Greek tragedies, often represented the common people. As the chorus role is supposedly replaced by Randolph and Harrington, fear is not shown on the audience’s behalf, as the two cops seem jaded towards crime (and sure that it is not themselves that are guilty). Instead, the fear is seen entirely in the individual characters, and this refers back to the concept of blame, particularly, a fear of self-guilt. A sense of self-guilt appears much earlier in Shepard’s version when compared to Sophocles’ play, particularly in Oedipus/Otto’s engagement with the late king(pin)’s murder. In

Oedipus *Rex*, the titular king's fear is seen as a fear for his own life in that, "whoever killed Laius might decide to raise his hand against me [Oedipus]" (Sophocles 12), eventually developing into a fear of guilt that, "has unhinged my mind" (41), whereas in *A Particle of Dread*, Otto's fear seems to be from the start that he may have been guilty, with the fear being enhanced by the uncertainty of that guilt. He most clearly discloses this to his daughter Annalee due to a dream he has had, asking her, "did you ever have this dream- this nightmare where you thought you might have killed someone?" (43), following with, "I've had that nightmare myself. I'm not sure who the victim was. I'm not even sure why" (43). Later on, when Langos (victim of a different murder in the play) reflects on the abandonment of his son, we discover that it too was out of fear (perhaps the original source of the pollutant) as he describes how he reacted to the Oracle's prediction: "I thought I could dodge the implications. Run around it somehow. Avoid my fate the way you would a falling tree. You hear it cracking long before it hits the ground. I stole the baby from its mother. Tore it from her breast [...] It was not a son to me. Just an enemy. A demon in disguise. Terror drove me to it. Only terror. It wasn't me" (95). But the avoidance of this potential blame and the frightful future it would bring founds the physical suffering of Langos' murder, and the plague that it sparks, along with Oedipus' pollution through that misdeed.

This other description of fear—the idea of avoidance and dodging—recalls Rehm's description of Ancient Greece's primary word for fear, *phobos*, "as something like 'panic flight', the emotional surge that compels men in battle to turn and run away" (40), a sort of fear paired in Shepard's play with that of self-guilt. This is first described in Scene 1 of Shepard's play when Oedipus recalls the faint memories of his abandonment and his parents being, "full of fear as you were. Trembling, running, hauling me across your back [...] your breath, panting like a bull calf

born". It is next explored by Randolph and Harrington, as Randolph uses the evidence to recount the murder to Harrington, and how large a role panic had to play in the murder (20-27).

In Shepard's play that seems entirely flippant in its use of both ancient and modern stories, Rehm's discussion about the difference between the tragic fear of the ancient polis to a modern, more individual, fear, proves that *Particle...* does operate on a middle ground in this stylistic timeline, as the objectives of each scene change between a communal or individual goal. Rehm states that, "to risk a crass generalization, fear in modern drama tends toward the private and inner, the kind of angst that carries little political significance or public impact" (Rehm 48), as opposed to the fear of classical tragedy that, "were as basic to the life of the Athenian *polis* as they were to tragic protagonists", and one that, "tragedy frequently ascribes to politics and political rule generally" (48). This switch of pollution from body politic to an individual and their family is seen in the difference between the story following Langos' murder (led by what Shepard labels as his play's Chorus) and that following Otto/Oedipus. In this adaptation where characters have different names/iterations depending on the situation, it seems that Uncle Del is the crossway between the two stories of pollution from that of the individual to that of the *polis*. After first seeing him engage with Lawrence, telling him the fate of his family should they have a child, we next have him address the audience, supposedly standing in for the polis, explaining, "what started this curse on our city" (Shepard 18).

This multiplicity of fears begins to resemble *Oedipus Rex* and its fear within both community and 'hero', *Particle...*'s propagation of fear being found in both the search for Langos' killer and the individual fear in Otto's search for his past. Although the representatives of the community in this play are found only in two men, Randolph and Harrington, as opposed to a full Grecian chorus of Theban Elders, the policemen do their work on behalf of the community attempting to

cure the people's fear. That communal fear is explored in a more complex manner in the pair's discussion of potential guilt, Harrington looking at illegal immigrants, Randolph relying on facts to discover the killer²². Though the policemen are seen to have found the source of the pollution in their eventual interrogation and arresting of Oedipus, they themselves are not the pharmakos (as they are not the ones cast out), but they are connected to the role as they find the guilty party who will supposedly serve that function. And, though more time is spent with Otto and Oedipus' individual quests, an interview with Shepard by Amy Lippman explains why the communal experience was important to his and other dramatists' work in that, "you can snare emotions that aren't just personal emotions, not just catharsis, not just psychological emotions that you're getting off your chest, but emotions and feelings that are connected with everybody" (Shepard, "Rhythm" 356). So, by seemingly focusing on the stories of the various Oedipal characters, he "starts with something personal and see how it follows out and opens to something that's much bigger", the ensuing reveal of their place in the murders and plague. This puts the Oedipal characters in the role of pharmakos, eventually resulting in the "hooking up with feelings that are on a very broad scale" (Shepard, "Rhythm" 356). This quest of Shepard's that he seems to have carried on from the time of that interview (1984) through to this play, his final work, sees the use of portraying ancient and modern fears to exemplify the contrast and complement of fears in both the stories and realities of the ancient and modern world.

Physical Plague

With Shepard's collage of storylines and characters, comes a collage of conflicts—one that remains relatively unchanged is that of Oedipus' dealing with a plague that rages over Thebes.

This plague is akin to the Theban plague in *Oedipus Rex* that Sophocles describes as:

²² This difference of approach is discussed later in the chapter in regard to real-world relevancies, and further explored in Chapter 3.

A blight on the crops of the land, on the ranging herds of cattle, on the stillborn labor of our women the fever-god swoops down on us, hateful plague, he hounds the city and empties the houses of Thebes. The black god of death is made rich with wailing and funeral laments” (Sophocles 6).

However, in Shepard’s play, the plague is only directly described once in the middle of the play, when Oedipus, shown with his eyes already blinded, delivers a monologue in a scene to himself describing the destruction:

The air reeked from corpses piling up. The sky black with vultures. Dogs skulked around in bony packs dragging ragged legs and arms. Fights broke out over every tiny morsel. Eyeballs. Noses. Ears. Shanks of hair and lips. The haunted faces of naked citizens seeing their death before them. Picking through scraps and burning heaps of carnage. Smoke streaked the sun. (“Particle” 38)

This description parades the suffering experienced by those afflicted with the actual plague, by those who witness such agony, and even by the animals and environments surrounding this destruction. Considering that throughout the play, when Oedipus appears (with that name), he generally seems to exist in the story that Sophocles’ made, it can be assumed that the plague he describes is literal and derives from the same cause as decreed in the source work: the murder of Laius. But even if the plague is only described once in *Particle...*, the physical *results* of the plague—along with the suffering and decay it brings with it—are both seen and heard of throughout the work, particularly in a form found in the story of both Sophocles’ and Shepard’s plays (one that is all but absent visibly in the former, abundant in the latter): blood.

As referenced in the previous chapter, Robert Parker claims that it is with the presence of bloodshed that miasma’s meaning narrows in on one of, “a pollution which has tainted the stock”

(Parker 199). This may be in the literal livestock of a city as believed by the Greek citizens, or in terms of a city's people experiencing death and disease, as Parker claims to be the case in the majority of Greek tragedy. If it is by blood that the concept of communal pollution appears, then *Particle of Dread* is ripe with it. First of all, blood appears in the physical plague described in Oedipus' aforementioned monologue ("the air reeked from corpses..."), though it is not only in the suffering of this plague that blood materializes, but throughout the different storylines. For instance, the opening scene (portrayed on the cover of the play's publication) depicts Oedipus mopping up the pool of blood that falls from his seemingly recently-gouged eye sockets. Or, in the first scene within the somewhat convoluted timeline of the play, as Uncle Del shares his predictions to Lawrence, he is surrounded and filled with blood, primarily from his oracular devices, such as animal skins that are dripping with blood, and the knucklebones. Finding that it is by these predictions and devices that their fate (and the miasma involved) is foretold and trouble begins, it is seen that blood sparks the spill of blood.

Just as blood is seen in the original prediction of the miasma, it is seen and discussed again in the play in the attempt to discover the source of plague and death. In Scene 14 of *A Particle of Dread*, when Randolph and Harrington, are seen trying to uncover the culprit of Langos' grisly murder, Randolph deciphers and relates to him the entire story of the murder through the analysis of blood, much to the shock and skepticism of Harrington. According to Annalee's recounting to her father Otto of a different investigation (the killing of the baby-sitter by Annalee's husband), we are told of blood's revealing qualities of a different sort of pollution, that being guilt. She explains to Otto that the "overwhelming" evidence was, "something they found in the mess. [...] they say they found a tinge of rage in the blood²³ [...] Rage in his. Terror in hers" (Shepard,

²³ The importance of this rage was a major reveal in the workshops, as described in Chapter 3.

“Particle” 46-47). After further conversation about the murder, Otto asks, “How’d they tell it was rage, by the blood?” to which Annalee replies, “Color, I guess. They have all kinds of ways of testing these days”, describing his rageful blood as “Pinkish” and the terrified babysitter’s as “deep red” (49); though this refers to a different murder than that of Langos, it can be assumed that, by Randolph’s promise of using blood to uncover the truth, the same or similar practices were used in both investigations to lay blame. And, if such an analysis of guilt-polluted blood was used to uncover the culprit of Langos’ murder, the source of the city’s plague, then it is seen that a study of pollution, a spreading violence, was used to uncover and hopefully cure a more literal pollution (the plague).

Prior to Annalee’s explanation of blood’s investigative purposes, it is also by blood that Annalee finds her father Otto because, when she is asked by her father how she found him to chat after she accuses him of being elusive, she replies that she managed to find him after she, “just followed your [his] trail of blood” (40). Although it is unclear in this situation whether this implies that the trail is made by Otto’s bleeding or the blood he produces from others, it still gives the sense of a stench arising from the suffering that follows him. In this case that stench may not come from a literal disease as much as a trail of violence. This reinforces the sentiment found in the aforementioned depiction of blood in this play as Oedipus, in Shepard’s janitorial depiction, is seen mopping up the pool of blood that falls from his eyes, also offering a reference to the Grecian role of pharmakos. If blood is to be considered the embodiment of physical pollution in *Particle...*, then this image that shows Oedipus, “*mopping up blood from the stage floor. The blood is dripping down from his eyebrows, but Oedipus pays no attention to its origins; he just keeps mopping up the constant flow of blood as he speaks*” (Shepard, “Particle” 5), embodies Cooke’s definition of pharmakos as, “both carrier of plague and cure” (77). And, as

found in Chapter 1, Oedipus fills this role first in his murder of Laius, second in his ruling Thebes and leading the investigation into its suffering resulting in his being blamed and expelled from the city. This process appears in *Particle...* though split between Otto and Oedipus; first, Otto is seen reading a report of Langos' murder and deciding to check out the crime scene as he feels a connection to it and it sparks memories of "guts on the highway" (35), prompting him to go check out the crime-scene. Eventually, this leads to Oedipus being interrogated by Randolph and Harrington who discover him to be the killer of Langos and source of the plague, thus being able to confirm his blame, and presumably solve the plague.

After all of these sufferings, predictions, actions, and results, the play is still concluded by the Oracle (previously appearing as Uncle Del), who comes on stage and shares this epilogue:

The whole city went back to being what it had always been- just a place where people came and went; births, lives, deaths. On the surface they seemed returned to health and self-confidence, but a distant memory still persisted, a shadow that never left. Something had been torn apart from the inside out. A ghost of something close at hand yet far enough away and so terrible as to pretend it never happened. (116)

This speech describes the salvation of the city but noticeably mentions that the shadow of pollution remained. If this involves the idea of destiny that Shepard so respected, perhaps this is because we do not see or hear of the actual expulsion of Otto or Oedipus, leaving the fate unfulfilled; or perhaps a pharmakos ritual of memory stays incomplete. Regardless, *A Particle of Dread* and its pollution fulfill Graham's prediction of all Shepard's plays that:

It is the Hero in myth who, through trial and sacrifice, must show society the way to this rebirth. Again, in Shepard's plays, the "tragedy" proceeds from the protagonist's awareness of this necessity and attempts to achieve rebirth in a family and society which

blocks this rite of passage and refuses the birth of the new [...] in the end, the protagonist's sacrifice and even his willingness to sacrifice are made worthless. (116)

A Miasmatic Truth?

Besides discussing Shepard's stylistic use of myth, Laura Graham also comments on the societal power of Shepard's ability as, "a mythic imagist", to use an established story or style, "a simple mythic formula", and from that make, "major and clear statements about modern man individually and culturally as he relates and is ultimately alienated from his environment, the Other, and himself" (114). It is with this ability that Shepard takes a 2500 year-old story and finds that, as he said to Beth Whitaker, "if you strip it away in a certain way it's very American [...] it certainly speaks to the horror of contemporary life" (16). After analyzing the collage of *A Particle of Dread*, it has been found that the core of this play is just such a horror, permeating Shepard's America (among other societies currently), the need for blame.

In all of these storylines that Shepard adapts and shapes, there appears to be a search for blame, just as Sophocles' Thebans looked for a scapegoat. The investigators Randolph and Harrington are seen not only looking for the guilty culprit of Langos' murder, but also arguing over who is to blame for forgetting to bring the water to the desert²⁴, and whether or not it is the supposedly egotistical Randolph and his fellow forensic investigators that are to blame for the diminishing role of traditional investigation as conducted by the likes of Harrington. Or, as Annalee (Shepard's Antigone) is caught by a Traveller as she attempts to abandon her child, she tries desperately to lay the blame of the need for this abandonment on her boyfriend, though it is her that's doing it²⁵. With Langos' murder being branded the cause of the pollution—as is done in *Oedipus Rex* with his equivalent—the labelling of his supposed killer(s) is putting on them the

²⁴ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 19.

²⁵ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 16.

role of pharmakos as they will presumably be arrested and possibly executed. Their bleak future is referred to by “The Maniac of the Outskirts” who exists solely as an unjustly accused homeless man wishing for the old days that found people to be generous and not surrounded by, “Paranoia! Suspicion! Accusations of the most heinous kind” (“Particle” 39)). There are also those in the play who are aware of their own or another’s blame but choose to ignore it such as in Scene 25, in which Annalee seemingly reflects on the discovery of Oedipus’ dual connection to her:

I never thought of him as my brother. I don’t now. They say he is. They’ve all told me. The world knows, but I don’t. He’s my father and always will be. I’ll stick with him ‘til his last days on earth. I’ll hold his hand. I’ll guide him. I’ll be his eyes. I love him. I always will. I know what he’s done- what they say about him. It doesn’t matter. I love him still. It’s a love that knows no bounds. No boundaries. He will live in me forever.

(83)

Regardless, almost every scene depicts a character engaging with blame, be he or she taking it, denying it, laying it, or dismissing it. This focus on blame is so readily accepted by Shepard’s adaptation of Oedipus’ story because, as has been described, the search for the source of the plague and Laius’ killer, and the attempts to deny and place it on others, is what drives the conflict of the original story and play.

Throughout his career, Shepard had another keen interest, this one in America’s fear of, and search to cure, plague and pollution. Particularly, he studied and discussed the Native-American medicine show, as found in a quote of his in Carol Rosen’s *Poetic Rodeo*: “I’ve researched a lot of it [medicine shows] [...] it says something about Americans. There’s a cure somewhere and the cure resides in some kind of magic potion, a miracle. The gullibility of it is

incredible” (Rosen 234)²⁶. And from this American reality that Shepard sees, comes, “the pervasive imagery of healing and cleansing and natural forces” (Rosen 163) that Rosen finds in his work. This reality is revealed in *A Particle of Dread* through the searching of its characters to cure the disease, fears, and curses, of their pasts, presents, and futures.

Though a fear of godly pollution may not be as all-encompassing to the modern American theatre audience as it was to those of Ancient Greece²⁷, the search for a pharmakos to cure the city in *A Particle of Dread* still satisfies Aristotle’s urging for a lack of improbability in its correspondence to the surrounding society’s seemingly constant search for a culprit to blame. In a more political aspect, there are multiple instances in the ‘American’ scenes, of a different, yet long-lingering, issue, fulfilling the role of pharmakos in the play and its cultural setting: illegal immigrants. It is around this topic in the play that connections to the pharmakos are further developed in relation to Cooke’s statement that, at some points in Greek society, the citizen given that label of pharmakos was not necessarily considered “culpable for the arrival of disease” (Cooke 82) but chosen simply because someone had to be, as blame was the cure of miasma. Such accusations are put upon Mexicans multiple times in the play, first by the investigator Harrington, and then by Jocelyn in discussion with Otto about the murder when they hear about it on the news. The broadcast leads Jocelyn to explicitly state that, “I told you I never wanted to live this close to the border” and, even though Otto replies with, “we’re nowhere near Mexico”, Jocelyn assures him that it is, “near enough” (Shepard, “Particle” 32). Otto’s final reply that, “it’s all in your mind, Jocelyn. Mexico is far, far away. It’s all in your mind” (32),

²⁶ The gullibility Shepard refers to was in the very popular idea of extravagant shows selling ‘cure-all’ elixirs by, “so-called Indian [Native American] doctors-many of them white practitioners of what was loosely termed ‘Indian medicine’ or ‘medicine according to Indian theory’” (McNamara 432).

²⁷ *At the time of the play’s writing in 2014. As noted in the preface, at the time of writing this thesis, COVID-19 was developing and spreading, to a scale and fatality rate that forced all societies to reevaluate their various understandings of ‘pollution’. These developments are further explored in Chapter 3 and Conclusion.

leads to the connections that Shepard told Lippman to be more of his interest—those not found in society but in the emotions throughout it—such as fear, and other “mythic emotions” (Shepard, “Rhythm”). Such emotion cause a play to, “move in a direction we all know, regardless of where we come from or who we are. It starts to hook up in a certain way”, as opposed to “the similarities between social neuroses in American society [which] really don’t mean much in the long run because they’re always going to change” (Shepard, “Rhythm”). So, while the pollutions found in *A Particle of Dread* relate to this specific modern time by their placement in a current American society, they relate as well through “mythic emotion” which are, according to Shepard, “at the same time ancient and for all time” (“Rhythm”).

Conclusion

In his discussion with Lippman, Shepard describes the quest of his work to be, “hooking up with feelings that are on a very broad scale” (Shepard, “Rhythm” 356), a quest that he seems to have carried on from the time of the interview (1984) through to this final work. This conclusion of that quest sees the use of rendering pollutions, both ancient and modern, be they physical, fearful, or of fate. The result exemplifies not only the timelessness of such dramatic tragedies, but the particular poignancy of *Oedipus Rex* and its characters’ search for who to blame to both the stories and realities of the ancient and modern world.

While dramaturgical analysis as found in these first two chapters can begin to expose the similarities and differences in these plays, this thesis presented the opportunity to further this dramaturgical work into one of practice, if limited. As will be found in the proceeding chapter, I seized this opportunity to test and further explore my dramaturgical findings in the form of practical workshops in January-February, 2019.

Chapter 3- Enlightening Work on *A Particle of Dread*

Objective

In my dramaturgical study of Shepard's script preceding the workshops, I found that the notion of pollution was important to the play's plot and its characters' experiences. This pollution was exhibited in not just the suffering of a physical plague, but also a spreading pollution of fear, the pollution of a cursed fate, and the search for their cure, all akin to the Greek idea of miasma.

As referenced by Rosen²⁸, reading does not suffice in appreciating Shepard's work; it must exist as, "compositions of time, space, and action energized by actors on-stage" (204), and so further work had to be conducted to test the interpretation from my previous dramaturgical analysis, and more fully understand *A Particle of Dread*. Having taken part in the Epidaurus Lyceum with the theme of "Reinventing Ancient Drama on the contemporary stage", a program based in the exploration of tragedy through performance²⁹, I was inspired to extend my previous work into one of experimental exploration.

This extended research took the form of workshops, which were intended to allow for an environment in which certain aspects and scenes of the play could be explored in a closed, laboratory setting for further scrutiny of this tragic presence of pollution. The practice also would culminate in a staged-reading which would allow the results of these explorations to be shared, and further explored, in an open space. This final reading was not meant to be a polished performance, nor was it treated as such in the workshops prior; the reading was treated as a final

²⁸ "To approach Shepard's plays on their own terms, we need to recognize their essential nature as theatrical vehicles, the engine of which is performance. To sight-read Shepard's plays – that is, to experience them as compositions of time, space, and action energized by actors on-stage – textual analysis alone does not suffice." (Rosen 204)

²⁹ See *supra* pp. 11-12

workshop, those leading up to it not existing as ‘rehearsals’ but experimental workshops, each looking to develop and expand the findings that occurred in my previous work as described in Chapters 1 and 2. With the choice to conduct practical work made, I then had to develop the work using the resources available to me. Ultimately, I decided to choose two theatrical mediums to use as tools in my investigation, allowing the available time and means to be properly devoted to those two approaches: performance, and lighting.

Though practice followed dramaturgy, the goal of the prior dramaturgical work was not solely a preparation for this practical work, nor were these workshops conducted with the goal of a final product or answer. Just as my dramaturgy was an analysis and exploration of Shepard and Sophocles’ work with a particular lens of miasma, so too were the workshops an exploration, followed by analysis, of Shepard’s work in this case with the tools of lighting and performance. Overall, the objective of this practical work of exploration and presentation, was to further illuminate, or put forward, the tragic miasma I had found to be at the core of the play, using actors and lighting.

This chapter is structured in three sections: first is a section on the hypothesis and methodology of the overall approach in these experiments. Second is a study of select experiments looked at individually as to what question they were looking to answer, the test conducted, and each result. The third section is « Interpretation », in which the assorted experiments and their results are brought back to the previous chapters’ analyses and compared to each other in different contexts of particular import.

Hypothesis and Methodology

When formulating what exactly this practical exploration would consist of, the hypothesis of this work became: a practical exploration of scenes from *A Particle of Dread* in a workshop environment can embody the dramaturgical findings re: tragedy in the form of miasma, to be present and powerful in the play, and will extend the results towards understanding to what effect Shepard has used this tragic material.

The first medium, lighting, was chosen for both theoretical and practical reasons. Lighting, as with any medium, carries with it a variety of possible symbols and, with the experimental nature of the work being done, lighting worked well because with a single change in colour or level, a new visual can be made. This meant that the same scene could be seen differently easily, eliciting different understandings or emotional reactions to the scene with it. It seemed particularly applicable when working with a Greek story as their theatre was determined by the sunlight which was, “able to be employed by the playwright as an aesthetic, atmospheric element of the drama and plays were organised to take advantage of specific lighting conditions during the day” (Palmer 22). As well, it is the design I am most familiar with as an artist; with my prior experience with lighting, I could use it with an ease that allowed it to exist purely as a tool, not the primary academic focus of my research and thesis.

Performance, the second medium, was an integral tool to utilize in this exploration as it allowed for the text to be given voice and the actors’ delivery of the text could be experimented with in a way of focusing on different aspects by different styles of performance, an approach I had developed from my participation in the Epidaurus Lyceum.

Several semiotic theories were applied to develop and analyze the use of lighting, as collectively the chosen theories cover the gamut of lighting analysis from the specifics of

semiotics, to an analysis of lighting's practicality and interaction with the work it is exhibiting. My lighting work in these experiments was generally inspired by Yaron Abulafia's 'dramaturgy of light', which adapts Adolph Appia's writings on semiotics and lighting, now through the lens of modern capabilities and values of theatrical lighting, to craft 'light-images' so as to create an "overall visual concept of light in the performance" (119). Abulafia claimed that these light-images were meant to satisfy Appia's goal to, "liberate the theatre from the narrow horizon of older conventions of representation". This liberation results in making it, "light's exclusive role to unify the entire scene and to emphasize the plasticity of the performers and their space, but also to change the ways in which spectators perceive every object in the performance" (Abulafia 20). In applying Abulafia's adaptation of Appia's work to my workshops, my explorations involved experimenting with Appia's various forms of lighting, particularly the interchanging of, 'Helligkeit'³⁰, which primarily allowed for visibility, with 'Gestaltendes Licht'³¹, also known as, "Creative/Formative Light", which was Appia's primary approach to lighting (Abulafia 20).

Goethe's *Theory of Colours* has been important to this thesis' workshops as he writes about both the viewer's semiotic understanding of several colours, and the emotional and/or psychological impact of those colours and their variants. He explains colour's importance to "the series of elementary phenomena" (and thus semiotics) in that, "its effects are at all times decided and significant, and that they are immediately associated with the emotions of the mind" (304). This work and importance are utilised here to appreciate how an audience might interpret the choice of colour in a light image for an understanding of that moment or its design, and how colour was used in various experiments for, "certain moral and aesthetic ends" (Goethe 350).

³⁰ "the diffused and soft illumination of the stage, simultaneous and symmetrical from various directions and sources" (Abulafia 20)

³¹ "directional and concentrated light beams highlighting performers and other three-dimensional objects, casting their clear shadows in the space and creating contrast between light, shade and background" (Abulafia 20)

Finally, the conduction and analysis of the lighting in practice was supported by Richard Pilbrow's writing on the objectives and tools of lighting, which have remained central from the time of his writing, even if the instruments have changed. Pilbrow explains that the tools of the lighting designer (and thus the tools of these experiments) consist of, *intensity*³², *colour*³³ *distribution*³⁴, and *movement*³⁵. These four tools are applied to lighting to achieve four objectives, which Pilbrow lists as: *selective visibility*, *revelation of form*, *composition*, and *mood*. *Selective visibility* ensures that what is meant to be the focus, "almost all of the time [...] the actor's face", appear as the brightest or most evident thing on stage (15). *Revelation of form* allows for an object to be seen, "correctly [3D], or they may be distorted, their shape flattened or revealed" all through "form-revealing light", created by "the distribution of light and shade" (15). *Composition* consists of the combination of "intensity, colour, and distribution", resulting in a, "visual design in space and in time" (16), covering or surrounding both setting and actor. Finally, *mood*, which Pilbrow adds "should, in fact, be the result of having successfully achieved the first three objectives", can be affected through the manipulation of lighting and its attributes, "appropriately increasing the dramatic effect the playwright [and creative team] intended" (16). In developing and conducting the experiments to follow, these objectives varied in their import, though mood remained ever present with its centrality to tragedy³⁶. And with that variance, the tools of lighting were utilised at different times, some being used from the start, others being used when the desired effect was not yet being achieved.

³² "The brightness of light" (Pilbrow 12)

³³ "The product of the colour of light and the colour of every object" (Pilbrow 13)

³⁴ "Al light has form and direction, ranging from a soft shadowless diffusion to a stark sharp shaft of light" (Pilbrow 14)

³⁵ "Each of the first three properties [...] may be altered or changed either quickly or slowly" (Pilbrow 14)

³⁶ In explaining Aristotle's thoughts on tragedy, Calame writes, "The essence of the poet's art is to arouse fear and pity in the audience" (18)

But lighting and its semiotics were not the only approach in the practical work. As referenced by Rosen, performance was an integral tool to utilize in this exploration as it allowed for the text to be given voice and the actors' delivery of the text could be experimented with in a way of focusing on different aspects. The performance theory came primarily from Claude Calame's "Vision, Blindness and the Mask", which discussed how performance may originally have been intended to interact with the text of Ancient Greek Theatre to create for the audience a response of fear and pity.

In determining how a text and its performance can be defined as tragic, Calame refers to "Aristotelian terms" to define, "the specific nature of tragedy" (17) and how, even if text was the primary tool in provoking an audience response, "the images called into being by words should thus coincide with [...] the emotions evoked by the gestures and performance of the actors" (19). This idea of evoking emotions through performance was integral to the workshops and required significant time spent in development, as the tragic nature of a story was being looked for in a non-Grecian text. This choice of material meant words whose semantics did not particularly encourage a tragic level of emotion in their delivery. That development was based around the six Aristotelian elements that make tragedy: "plot, character, thought, diction (or delivery), song, and, finally, the element Aristotle calls *opsis*, which covers everything to do with vision and sight, and which in English is generally translated as, 'spectacle'" (Calame 17). Of these six elements, the participants and I experimented primarily with diction and *opsis* as well as song in the sense of rhythm of performance, though all were kept in mind. Each element varied in importance depending on the experiment and is referenced throughout the analysis as applicable. With these theories of Aristotle and Calame along with the experience of my time in Greece in mind, the actors worked in the search for a tragic form during the workshops.

In this process, five workshops were conducted exploring a selection of scenes from *A Particle of Dread* through the use of colour in terms of lighting and tragic emotion in terms of performance. In these workshops, this thesis' search for the influence of the tragic form in *A Particle of Dread* continued by attempting to embody the moments of tragic miasma that had been found central to the tragic nature of the play in the dramaturgical work.

Experimentation

The workshops (now referred to as WS#1-5) took place between January 17th, 2020 and February 28th, 2020, consisting of four three-hour workshops, one hour-and-a-half workshop, and a final experiment in the form of a performance offered to an invited audience on February 29th, 1:00pm-2:00pm³⁷.

Each workshop worked toward this goal of tragic embodiment, but had its own focus point, often attributed to one of the three forms of miasma previously found to be most prominent and akin to those of *Oedipus Rex*: plague, fear, and fate, or how its characters experienced and interacted with these pollutions. In retrospect, each miasmatic form had its own difficulties in practice: physical plague proved to have simple connections to colour but needed more interesting approaches, whereas fear relied heavily on the performers to offer the emotion, or even could not be found in the selected scene, and fate, the least tangible of concepts, needed to come mostly from the text.

In the initial scene selection, the choices were made by the scenes' direct references to pollution and/or light and colour, but, as my dramaturgical work continued leading up and into the workshop process, the scene choice changed so as to look at a smaller portion of the story, focusing only on the storyline of 'Oedipus' (as opposed to 'Otto'), being sure that the selected

³⁷ Refer to Appendix 2 for further logistical details on the workshops.

scenes exhibited at least one of the three forms of pollution, and the search for their source and who to blame in each case. These choices also resulted in an assortment of scene-styles, including monologues and larger scenes, so pollution could be explored on an individual and communal scale. Each workshop and scene offered a variety of revelations about a tragic presence, and what follows is a selection of the more intriguing experiments, the individual questions that were their stimuli, the tests specific to each experiment, and the results each offered when observed in regard to their individual questions.

Further information on all experiments can be found in the Appendices. For a description of each scene and its context in the play, refer to Appendix 1. For more details on scene choice, workshop content, and semiotic descriptions, refer to Appendix 2.

Workshop #3, Scene 6³⁸

Question: How can the actors and the use of lighting emphasize the similarities and differences in emotional reactions in front of a disaster (miasma) between ancient Greek and modern times?

Test: Considering Harrington's references to archaic concepts such as, "blood dripping down the altar steps", as opposed to Randolph's references to the power of science, we tried to fulfill Calame's claim that, in tragedy, "the images called into being by words should thus coincide with [...] the emotions evoked by the gestures and performance of the actors" (19). This meant embodying Harrington with a scale of emotion and performance that one relates to the archaic, while Randolph exhibited the impassive presence we relate to science, enhancing the distinction between the two time periods these characters seem to relate to.

To achieve this semiotically, we chose to use two different masks, a classic white theatrical mask for Harrington and a modern medical mask for Randolph. Harrington's mask

³⁸ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 6.

referred to Ancient Greece and the immense, perhaps excessive, emotion in both performance and how one engaged with societal issues (such as pollution) whereas Randolph's mask referred to modern society's scientific approach to problem-solving. The medical mask was particularly relevant at the time of the workshops which took place in the early stages of COVID-19, at which point the importance of masks and gloves were being constantly reiterated by scientists and medics to stop the spread of the disease. Simultaneously, the stage was split in design style, covering Harrington's side with a full red-wash, akin to the blood-soaked altar, thus using one of Goethe's 'powerful' colours and fulfilling Appia's choice of "Gestaltendes Licht (Creative/Formative Light)", and Randolph's side with plain lighting, aimed at "Helligkeit" (intended just for visibility), using lighting to try to both differentiate and dictate the performance style of both characters.

Along with the semiotics of costume and lighting, the actors were asked for a style of performance akin to the societies they were in reference to. For Harrington, this meant asking for an emotive performance by the actor with a spectacular performance with affecting diction and slow rhythm, enhancing the gravity of his text, matching the graphic description of "blood dripping down the altar steps". For the actress portraying Randolph as he defends the power of science and logic, this meant a realism-based performance, with what could be considered 'normal' diction and rhythm, and a performance with minimal spectacle.

Result: The masks clearly indicated the intended time-period of each character. Upon encouraging the actors to further amplify the level, or lack thereof, of emotion in their performance, the split in performance style also became clearer, aligning with both the text and the style of lighting surrounding either. These choices led to exhibiting Harrington in Greek mask but heard [in modern language] blaming the Mexicans for the death and modern science

for the loss of his job at an emotive scale in which one would not be surprised to hear him calling for the expulsion of citizen to cure the curse of the gods, while Randolph remained a source of logic. However, when enlarging the emotions being felt with performance and lighting, it was not the spreading fear that came out, but a tragic level of anger to the point of rage. This rage was not only in Harrington, the admittedly angry old detective—it clearly spread towards Randolph who had previously been presented as a clever, calm, investigator, eventually feeling the rage that Harrington had to offer. When it became clear that rage was the emotional pollutant being spread as opposed to fear, this was further explored through lighting, primarily in the spreading of the red wash, initially just covering Harrington’s half of the stage, to include Randolph. With the red wash first stemming from the pool of blood centerstage, formed by Oedipus’ rageful act against Laius/Langos it was clear that the red was powerful in two forms as both the blood and the emotional pollutant of rage that spread from it, fulfilling Goethe’s claimed use of red to, “disturb rather than enliven” (312).

Workshop #4, Scene 10³⁹

Question: How can a polluted fate be embodied on stage, and how can the character be shown as engaging with it?

Test: Focusing on selective visibility and revelation of form, a light image was tested to embody the idea of fate, which meant having the actress stand in a small white circle aimed straight down from above, using a style of diction and movement that showed the actor looking up, speaking as one who is begging the gods. During this, colour was used to exhibit the fate’s pollution, changing it according to the description, primarily to red, existing in another of Goethe’s definitions of red, as a colour that “conveys an impression of gravity” (314).

³⁹ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 10.

Result: When asked if the actress felt like she was speaking to the gods, she said that she had, but lost it at times when speaking about the citizens and their “land and dogs”; we then decided that, as king, that land would be his own, which helped clarify for her what her commitment was to the scene as Oedipus. As well, further lighting work would be required to ‘embody fate’, perhaps using haze to make the source of light (representing source of fate) more recognizable. Otherwise, the process relies primarily on the actor’s performance to indicate the engagement with an ethereal but important concept which, without the other scenes offering context as to how and why fate and the gods are being questioned, remains ethereal to the viewer.

Workshop #3, Scene 31⁴⁰

Question: How can three forms of miasma found within one scene be shown as interrelated with each other?

Test: In creating one or more comprehensive light image(s), as Randolph and Harrington interrogate Oedipus while the king accepts and processes the fact that he was his father’s murderer, each form of miasma was allotted its own lighting characteristics of colour, distribution, and movement⁴¹. The actors interacted with these three styles to various extents in their movement and emotional arc: Oedipus primarily with the beam of light for fate, Randolph and Harrington more so with the growing-coloured washes of plague and fear. With lighting levels and blocking strategies, the focus points on character and version of miasma were also experimented with, exploring the primacy of one or another.

Result: When conducting the test, the interrelations between the forms of miasma were shown, but the connections between the three seemed ready to offer more if further explored. This was achieved in later attempts by, among other things, the addition of a face-mask being worn by

⁴⁰ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 31.

⁴¹ For specific description of the characteristics, see Appendix 2, “Final Experiment”.

Oedipus, as this one costume piece at one point or another engaged with each pollution. It was worn at the start of the scene, again bringing to mind the idea of the physical plague. He removed it later in the scene at the moment he realizes he is the source, and thus is seen accepting his fate; as his acceptance in the scene is meant to spark fear in others towards him, the action of removing the mask simultaneously served as a trigger for a reaction of terror by the other members in the scene. As well, observing this experiment, one saw not only how the forms of miasma interacted—which they did—but also how the characters of Oedipus, Randolph, and Harrington all interacted with the forms differently, an aspect further explored in the Interpretation section.

Final Experiment, Scene 5⁴²

Question: How does the effect that miasma evokes in a scene differ when relying on spectacle compared to just the actors' performance of the text?

Test: Approximately half-way through the workshop process, the choice was made for the final experiment to present each of the five chosen scenes in two different styles. The two versions were not necessarily intertwined, but mostly allowed for more work done in the previous workshops to be shared and explored with an audience than one version of each scene would allow for. In the case of Scene 5, the two versions offered a juxtaposition of two distinct performance and semiotic styles, the first relying on Aristotle's *opsis* (spectacle) (Calame 17) in the lighting, with a neutral performance by the actor as Uncle Del (recalling the passivity of one who only observes), the second using two performers in perpetually more emotive performances to affect, though with a lack of spectacle. In the first case, the lighting operated as Appia's "Gestaltendes Licht", using a variety of intensities, colours, distribution, and movement, all

⁴² Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 5.

looking to create an impressive composition with the intent of affecting the audience's mood in the depiction of the plague, though this spectacle was developed from the text (embodying the destruction and suffering described therein). This was paired with a performance by the actor that can be described as using a subdued, passive diction, further subdued by the *selective visibility* of dimly lighting said actor in the corner of the stage. In the second case, the lighting served only as "Helligkeit", to illuminate the actors, allowing for the audience to focus on the text being spoken. Those actors were shown steadily walking towards each other, alternating lines of the monologue, increasing the emotion in their diction. This was an attempt to fulfill Aristotle's claim in *Rhetoric* that, "when it is desirable that the audience should fear, the speaker must bring them into the right frame of mind so that they shall take themselves to be the kind of people who are likely to suffer" (110). In this second version, the power was put upon the *speaker(s)* and their text to affect the audience, as opposed to the intensity of spectacle in the first version.

Result: Individually, the two versions had different results. The first version clearly depicted the plague, though the distinction between spectacle of lighting and subduction of performance by Uncle Del was not especially noticeable. The second version did emphasize the text being spoken and did show the actors reaching a heightened scale of emotion, but both aspects maybe could have reached further affect upon more time spent with the actors.

Final Experiment, Scene 17⁴³

Question: How can two different semiotic styles be applied to the same scene to compare the effects of a pollution attributed to the community versus to the individual?

Test: In this scene, Oedipus condemns the as-of-yet unknown murderer of Laius and any of

⁴³ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 17.

those concealing his or her identity. In the first version presented, we tried to examine Oedipus' inner-processing of this suffering and his potential place in it. As an actress stood centre-stage with another actress circling, they alternated lines of the monologue. This saw the latter actress attempting to speak in the role of a guilty conscience, prodding on the former's anxiety and embodying the tragic tool of thought, as the first actress increased a sense of terror in her diction. During this, the light-image used primarily distribution and movement to indicate Oedipus struggling with these thoughts, as a light circled the first actor in the opposite direction, narrowing in, so as to disorient the primary speaker. In the latter version, we hoped to examine Oedipus as leader of his community, searching for the answer, not for his own sake, but for his people's sake while in the public eye. An actress stood centerstage delivering in a style of diction akin to a political leader speaking to their people. During this latter version, the lighting occupied two roles: in one case, colour and movement were used to indicate the course of a day, from dawn to dusk to dawn, over the course of the speech, in the hope of emphasizing the external nature and Grecian connection of this speech; in the other, it used direction for the purpose of revelation of form, as two lights shone from the floor directly at the actor, flattening them into the back wall as if on a screen, emphasizing the fact that Oedipus' performance is as a leader, speaking to the people watching.

Result: The semiotic and performance choices made did differentiate Oedipus' struggle as both a (potentially guilty) individual and as leader of a suffering people but, in review, both versions focused specifically on the pollution of fear and its differences in those two roles. In the first version showing Oedipus' inner turmoil, we saw the increasing fear accompanying his developing sense of guilt. The second version did show Oedipus as leader of a community, though seeming more akin to a *modern* political leader speaking to their people in a time of

trouble. The latter version did also maintain a Grecian tone in the lighting following the course of daylight through the speech (naturally revolving through Goethe's powerful⁴⁴, soft⁴⁵, and splendid⁴⁶ colours) with the emotional arc of the speech following it, as was done in Ancient Greek performances, recalling the place of Greek theatre and politics being in the public sphere.

Interpretation

Through these experiments and over the course of all the workshops, the intention was to discover how certain semiotic and dramaturgical choices could enhance the tragic presence in Shepard's play via the focus of miasma. In review, the majority of experiments could be considered productive in either forming new connections between the play and its tragic origins or emphasizing the importance of those connections already found. Such discoveries were seldom singular, in that work on other scenes—whether in the same workshop or a later one—offered support or new findings towards a similar idea. With this in mind, below I have selected different pairs of experiments whose results touched upon a similar theme important to this thesis. Having compared the results, I then refer back to the dramaturgical work of the first and second chapters, to interpret the findings and what they mean for my understanding of *A Particle of Dread* and its tragic nature.

The *Pharmakos*

In the previous research and dramaturgical analysis, I had conducted leading up to the workshops, the role of pharmakos⁴⁷ had appeared and been used several times. But, while conducting the experiments with lighting and acting choices described above, I discovered that

⁴⁴ “Attained by yellow, yellow-red, and red” (Goethe 340)

⁴⁵ “Produced by blue, violet, and red” (Goethe 340)

⁴⁶ “The harmonious effect [...] only takes place when all the colours are exhibited together in due balance” (Goethe 341)

⁴⁷ A ritual involving, “the death of a person chosen to carry the pollution of plague outside the walls of the polis” (Cooke 74).

the role of pharmakos and the act of blame associated with it were even more important to *A Particle of Dread* than I thought. This was true in its connections to both its source play and also the society surrounding Shepard when he wrote this work. With this discovery, I realised that certain choices throughout the workshops made it possible to better show the importance of the pharmakos to this play, simultaneously emphasising the tragic nature of blame in both the play and the world.

In the case of Scene 6, the connection between the urge to blame and Harrington's antiquated approach to detective work had already been found in text work. However, the idea and relevancy of pharmakos was amplified in WS#3, by choosing to show Harrington 'blaming the Mexicans' while wearing a classical mask and performing with diction at the intensity of a Greek declaration, in that the act carried much more gravity than just a distaste for the Southern neighbours. And, though Harrington's text at that moment is not particularly grand, hearing it spoken soon after his description of "blood dripping down the altar steps" and at the intensity those lines and the mask provoked in the actor, the power that the blame was advocated for suggested that for some modern Americans, they really do feel like Mexico is the primal source of their suffering, and that the expulsion of its people will be their country's salvation.

The importance of the pharmakos to the play appeared again later in that workshop when looking at Scene 31. The scene had an actor performing as Oedipus in 'desert lighting' with a gradual focus on Oedipus and increase in intensity and colour. Said increase was meant to be in line with the decrease of Oedipus' apathy towards the police investigation, gradually understanding his place at its centre, and the centre of the plague, realizing Mielziner's search for, "tension between [...] the setting and the psychological states of the characters" (Palmer 139). Starting with his defence as a hitchhiker, "who has every right to be there, not them

[Langos and his people] [...] eradicated from the face of the earth”, and furthering with, “it’s a big country, there’s room for everyone”, hearing these references to the rights, territory, and destruction in a desperate search for redemption began to sound similar to discussions by members of modern society on blame and people’s urge to destroy those they disagree with or consider enemies.

Regardless of whether this was Shepard’s intention or not with either scene, the exhibition of both accuser and defender of the accused by American society definitely brought the idea of a *pharmakos* to mind and fulfilled Calame’s understanding of tragic performance by which, “the pathemic [emotion or suffering] of the dramatic action provokes, therefore, corresponding emotions among those who are watching [...] which make up, for Aristotle, the essence of tragedy’s purpose” (26).

Pollution of Rage

Later work on Scenes 6 and 31 in the same workshop also addressed the emotional pollutant of *Particle...* which was further shown to at times be rage more than fear. In the case of Scene 6, as described in its result, when eliciting an emotional response from the actors by fulfilling Calame’s idea that, “the images called into being by words should thus coincide with [...] the emotions evoked by the gestures and performance of the actors” (19), rage came more easily than fear, which was further explored in the lighting by using red as both a symbol of the spreading rage and the pool of blood as its source. Parker explains this to be a strong source of any *miasma* in tragedy and thus appropriately paired with a colour that Goethe labels as ‘powerful’. In the same workshop, the rage was later shown to be interrelated with the physical pollution during the exploration of Scene 31. As each *miasma* had its own lighting

characteristics⁴⁸, one saw the narrowing of the ‘plague’ light to be labelling Oedipus as its source, while the ‘rage’ light spread larger to those around him and intensified. When paired with the text and performance of the scene, these images proved that the clearer it was revealed that Oedipus was to blame for the physical plague, the further the rage of his citizens increased.

With these two results in mind, I recall Rehm’s definition of fear in ancient times as *phobos*⁴⁹. The rage exhibited in these scenes, stemming from the blood, led to the discovery that another approach to a source of suffering is still tied to the battle that Rehm references (though not in ‘panic flight’ and thereby expulsion), a rage that leads one towards the battle, resulting in the punishment of imprisonment or death⁵⁰—perhaps what can be called the modern pharmakos ritual. The now frequent choice of imprisonment over banishment also suggests the modern equivalent of the pharmakos in that it calls back to the comparison of the Grecian idea of community versus the modern preference for the individual (further explored below); the Grecian role of the pharmakos, who was marked for abandonment, was done so in the attempt to cure the entire city of the plague, giving the ‘accused’ also the label of cure. In the case of the modern imprisonment or death, though the idea is partly to save the city from further misdeeds of the accused, it is mostly seen as the discipline of the accused. Foucault clearly describes this goal in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* as, “the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise”, making the point of the ‘ritual’ one of punishing or *transforming*⁵¹ the individual more than saving the city.

⁴⁸ See Appendix 2, “Final Experiment”

⁴⁹ “Something like ‘panic flight’, the emotional surge that compels men in battle to turn and run away” (Rehm 40)

⁵⁰ A modern (in the sense of occurring within the last century) punishment that Foucault claims to “maintain a trace of ‘torture’ in in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice- a trace that has not been entirely overcome” (16)

⁵¹ In discussing the modern prison, Foucault writes, “prison is also based on its role, supposed or demanded, as an apparatus for transforming individuals”. (233)

Power of Spectacle

Working on Scene 5 in the final experiment addressed the potential for tragic effect through choice of performance and semiotic style. As detailed in the experiment, the first version presented followed Shepard's plot in which Del narrates the plague in retrospect, using the spectacle of Appia's "Gestaltendes Licht" and various lighting tools as described by Pilbrow to exemplify both the intensity of the physical plague and indifference of the Oracle. The spectacle of this version produced a feeling of horror in its excessive presentation of the physical plague. In the second version, the emotion being sent back and forth between the two actors, growing as they discuss the plague, their performance alone recalled Parker's definition of miasma as, "a form of defilement impairment of form or integrity [...] People rub off one another like a physical taint" (8). This constructed a representation of the second sort of miasma to be found in *Particle...: rage*. I found in this latter version that the physical plague being described was not of the utmost importance; instead, the focus was on the actresses' emotional deployment of rage being sent towards one another and instilling a sense of pity.

Seeing these two versions one after the other showed that, in both cases, the affect was achieved through excess. In the first version it was the use of spectacle in the light-images depiction of the physical, whereas the performance of text alone in the latter version offered the emotional pollution of rage and fear, supported by an excess in diction and mood.

As for the third pollutant explored in this work, fate, the work on Scene 10 in WS#4 and onwards proved that such a pollution requires a further amalgamation of both approaches, to an extent unreachable with the time and resources available during this process. Following the primary attempt at this during WS#4, and subsequent approaches to the scene, the production of fate did not seem to offer any comment on the tragic nature of the work, except a continued

proof that this ancient concept is present in the text. Whether this bore further exploration with increased resources and time spent with the actors, or if the concept is just too ethereal, was not clear at the time—possibly because the scenes selected did not contain Uncle Del, Shepard's oracular equivalent.

In further retrospect, I believe the reason that neither lighting nor performance could produce fate is that fate has been proven through the dramaturgical work of both plays to be the starting point of the spreading of the other two pollutions, whether through actual curse or the knowledge of it. And, while one is often inclined to express feelings of fear or rage, and a plague is hard to ignore, one's fate and memories are inherently personal struggles, even if they lead to visible results. This idea is strengthened when reminded that Workshop#4's engagement with Scene 10 involved the first direct discussion of the characters' potential awareness of the colour changes occurring around them which depicted the evolution of the character's fate. This was a thought process that was difficult to embody in the actress' performance with the time available, which aligns with the idea that one struggles with fate internally.

So, if the purpose of these experiments was how to embody the idea of miasma and tragedy, if fate is not something meant to be embodied in general, it can be accepted as difficult to do so in experimentation and considered as not a failure. Instead, it can serve as a furthering of understanding, and the idea of its essence as a contaminant can be accepted as proven in its sparking the spread of the other two pollutants.

Community versus the Individual

Though both versions of Scene 17 in the final workshops focused on the emotional pollution of fear⁵², when put next to each other, they brought to mind Rush Rehm's idea that,

⁵² The first version examined Oedipus' processing of his role in the suffering surrounding him, visibly engaging with his guilty conscience (represented by a second actress sharing lines of the monologue). The second version

where societal fear in Ancient Greece was for the people as a whole (such as the leader speaking to their people), the modern fear is instead of and about the individual (such as someone debating with their conscience) (Rehm 48). The second version, more in line with Shepard's intention in that there was only one performer of the speech, seemed to easily occupy both a sense of ancient and modern, bringing to mind a comparison of how the Greek leader speaking at the agora might have dealt with the fear and suffering of their people as opposed to the modern one on TV. Both forms continued to bring to mind the concept of a pharmakos in that, whether for the sake of his community or himself, Oedipus was in search of the killer—again referring to the idea that the purpose of the 'modern pharmakos' might be one of an individual's punishment rather than a communal salvation.

With the presentation of this scene, in which Oedipus condemns the as-of-yet unknown murderer of Laius and any of those concealing his or her identity, came a further connection to modern society. In the version resembling a political leader's speech, one found a mixture between the experience of watching political debates and rallies, and a noble Grecian declaration. At times, the actor's inclination was towards the Grecian aspect, allowing the rage that Oedipus was experiencing to release, but with my encouragement for semi-self-restraint, one recalled the performance of a politician that is holding back emotion though not entirely successfully.

Finally, the eventual viewing of all scenes together solidified this comparison of the communal to individual. This aligned with Shepard's variations between ancient and modern, but at the same time revealed a new connection: through the workshops, the fact that the chosen

looked at Oedipus as a leader, searching for the salvation of his people, the actress delivering the monologue as if she was a political leader giving a televised speech (this version also included the lights indicating the course of a day).

scenes were part of one storyline⁵³ did not seem significant, mostly just simple. But in the final experiment in which, for the first time, all five scenes were explored one after the other, a discovery was made as to how an individual pollution can also serve as a point of connection to a community. For instance, Scene 5 describes the suffering of a whole city; Scene 6 showed the community's engagement with said suffering through the embodiment of Randolph and Harrington; while 10 allowed for an observance of Oedipus' handling his own polluted fate. Then, Scene 17 showed either Oedipus' handling of the plague for his own place in it or as leader of his people. The significance is found in the last scene presented, Scene 31, which showed the culmination of both the individual's and community's journeys through their respective sufferings. What this final scene reveals is that, these distinct dealings with pollutions are interconnected and that the acts and experience of one individual, Oedipus, can affect an entire people, intertwining an individual with their community, even in modern times.

Conclusion

Following Carol Rosen's labelling of Shepard's canon as "theatrical vehicles, the engine of which is performance" (204), the purpose of these workshops was to use performance and lighting to further investigate the previous dramaturgical findings in *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)* in regard to its influence by Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, and the Greek culture's concept of *miasma*. This practice allowed the workshop participants and myself to examine the presence of tragic *miasma* throughout the work, whether it be through exhibiting a mixture of fear and rage from the actors' use of their performative tools, or through experimentation with light-images and spectacle producing the horror of plague. Admittedly, I had difficulties constructing the idea of fate on stage and therefore it became harder to explore,

⁵³ The scenes chosen only followed the story of Oedipus, excluding any reference to Otto.

though this difficulty does not seem particular to the embodiment of Shepard's play, but rather is a concept that relies more on plot than anything to show on stage in a production. This meant, for instance, that if the scenes chosen did not expressly exhibit fate in the presence of Uncle Del, the plot did not offer the chance for its embodiment, and has been accepted as an interior struggle of the mind, leading to exterior results.

What the practical work *did* offer of particular import was an exhibition of the relevancies in Shepard's choice of the tragic material to his modern audience, particularly that of his home country and the play's setting, America. This was helped by having chosen to explore scenes with the character labelled as Oedipus, removing the barrier of seeing the scene just as Greek in comparison to the Otto scenes, and offered the opportunity of exhibiting the "Greek" character with modern scenarios, such as political rallies and forensic investigations, along with the timeless existential crisis.

In *A Particle of Dread: Oedipus Variations*, Shepard has taken Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as a source text and placed it in the American South. In physicalizing these scenes, we have seen that of particular significance to Shepard in his attempts to compare and connect the story to his home has been observing how a society deals with a pollution, particularly in relation to the ritual of the *pharmakos*. With this work, one observes a shift from a Grecian story of community to that of an individual, thus emphasizing the need to blame 'the other' to be everlasting, but particularly fatal for his country's society.

Conclusion- 2020, Was Shepard Right?

With an author such as Sam Shepard whose works covered an array of stories and styles, there is always something new to be found; this thesis has sought to prove that there is also something old to be found, in uncovering the influence of Greek tragedy on Shepard's final work, *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*. Michael Ewans writes that throughout the history of dramatic literature, tragic stories are often built around the idea of "disorder rectified, but at terrible cost"⁵⁴, which the Greeks often represented with a *miasma*, "a literal and psychic pollution which indicates that the community has in some way violated the normal order of the world" (441). So, when needing a lens to conduct this search I had set out on, the idea of *miasma* soon proved to be significant in understanding of both *Oedipus Rex* and *A Particle of Dread*, and thus served as the lens for the dramaturgy and practical explorations for thesis.

Review

The dramaturgical work on *A Particle of Dread* and its basis, *Oedipus Rex*, described in this thesis proved that the tragic concept of *miasma*, "a pollution that has tainted the stock", has indeed been crossed over from Sophocles' work into Shepard's. It also proved that Jennifer Cooke was right when she wrote, "disease is never merely medical" (1)⁵⁵, as the pollutions were found to exist not only in the physical plague but also in a variety of cursed fates and intense feelings of fear and rage that spread throughout the individuals and communities within these plays. It was found that, where a pollution of fate is seen in *Oedipus Rex* in the literal curse spreading through the royal family tree⁵⁶, in *A Particle of Dread*, the cursed fate remains in some

⁵⁴ Ewans' quote first appears in this thesis as an introduction to the idea of *miasma* and has been a foundation for this thesis' understanding of the topic (pg. 6).

⁵⁵ Cooke's statement also appeared when introducing the different forms of pollution that have been examined (pg. 13).

⁵⁶ A curse that results in Laius' destiny to be killed by his son Oedipus and condemning Thebes to plague.

aspects of the fragmented stories, but in others, the ‘curses’ of a family were potentially found just in the memories of their relatives’ misdeeds. The fear in *Oedipus Rex* was found to originate in an individual’s knowledge of such fates and their potential impact on those they love, then spreading through the family and into the community. In *Particle...* modern fear exists strictly as a fear for oneself, particularly of being blamed, a fear of guilt for some, and has little public impact (or at least was not worried to be as such). Finally, the physical pollution of *Oedipus Rex* exists as a plague in Thebes and that plague remained central to the story of ‘Oedipus’ when transferred to *Particle...*, while another physical pollution was seen in the story of his modern counterpart Otto, in this case existing more so in the spreading of violence and blood to be used to find people and answers.

This dramaturgical work was followed by practical workshops of select scenes from *Particle...*, in an attempt to strengthen and further the previous findings of tragedy in *Particle...*. This involved working with three actors, experimenting with performance theory and lighting techniques, occupying both classical and modern approaches in style. Having conducted and reviewed the workshops, not many more connections were found from the Greek play to the modern in practice. But Rosen’s statement that Shepard’s plays are, “theatrical vehicles, the engine of which is performance” (204), was fulfilled nonetheless when the workshops, almost unknowingly, surpassed the question of *how* Shepard’s work was influenced, into *why* Shepard may have chosen to adapt this story into a time and place that the constituents of his modern American audience could relate to, the modern American Midwest. This meant that the scenes of this Grecian story set in America operated not so much as a major reveal to the writer’s tragic influence as was intended, but as mirrors to modern (North) America. This offered a picture of

how the extreme tragic concepts and anthropological structures of Ancient Greece society and myth have been maintained and adapted into modern society, for better or worse.

Generally, these findings saw the societal shift from a focus on the community to the individual in how they engaged with pollution. Though the pharmakos did appear in the search for a murderer, in watching the detectives' search, it did not seem to be for the purpose of curing the community, but with the sole aim of laying blame and punishment on that individual (in a manner reminiscent of Foucault). This is referred to by Shepard's "Maniac of the Outskirts" who exists solely as an unjustly accused homeless man wishing for the old days that found people to be generous and not surrounded by, "paranoia! Suspicion! Accusations of the most heinous kind" ("Particle" 39). And while the idea of expulsion stayed in their minds, here it is transformed into a cop's and wife's unsubstantiated distastes for those different from them, particularly Mexicans and illegal immigrants.

Next, the fear in *Oedipus Rex* seemed to be mainly that either a cure would not be found, or towards the idea that one's self could be the source of the community's suffering. But, when that emotion was embodied in the telling of this modern story, it was clear that the fear was exclusively for one's own safety and innocence. Even more than fear of guilt, there came rage at the idea of being blamed, or at least towards the source⁵⁷. Overall, it was clear that the inhabitants of Shepard's modern city cared much more for their own wellbeing and happiness than for their city's, as opposed to the people of Sophocles' Thebes all of whom sought to discover the source of their city's miasma and how it could be cured. As well, the idea of blame, which is central to the Grecian pharmakos ritual, has expanded in Shepard's play from what was to the Greeks a ritualistic solution, into a societal problem of an entire people. These workshops

⁵⁷ Refer to Appendix 1, *A Particle of Dread* Scene 11.

fulfilled Laura Graham's review of Shepard's ability as, "a mythic imagist", to use an established story or style, "a simple mythic formula", and from that make, "major and clear statements about modern man individually and culturally as he relates and is ultimately alienated from his environment, the Other, and himself" (114), be it through blaming the Other, or fearing oneself.

Fast-forward

As noted in the preface, the choice of this thesis' focus as the tragic concept of miasma and the pharmakos was made over a year before COVID-19 was known to exist, let alone to have reached the extent of international crisis it has by the time of this thesis' submission. Nor were the sociopolitical movements towards discrimination at the height they are at currently, the activism surrounding racial injustice recently having been defined by political science professor Daniel Gillion in August 2020, as, "some of the most widespread and contentious racial protests in America in decades" (Gillion, Np).

Yet even if Shepard's attempt to observe the modern West in comparison to Greek tragedy was created in 2014, the importance of tragic pollution in the "major and clear statements about modern man individually and culturally" (Graham 114) of Shepard's final play beg to be extended and compared to the present, six years from the play's writing. Seeing the variations of the Oedipal stories in modern dress during the workshops, even face masks, and hearing them in American colloquial dialogue, immediately brought to mind how the search for Laius' killer, and thus the source of the plague, is found in the political and day-to-day actions of North America (and around the world) at a scale that Shepard was not even aware of at the time of his writing. With the understandings of tragedy and miasma developed and ascribed to the theatre and society of both Ancient Greece and the America of Shepard's lifetime, I feel that one can continue this tragic comparison to observe how modern America is grappling with a pollution

whose scale has been unknown for centuries, while simultaneously confronting its social contaminations to an extent unseen before, particularly if its approach has (d)evolved since Shepard's passing.

Fabian Meinel writes that, "More than any other tragedy, *Oedipus Tyrannus* is about human efforts to 'make sense' and, in turn, about coping with what is made sense of" (48), something found in *A Particle of Dread* in the various searches for identity, a cure, or what to do with a child doomed to a jaded life. And, when discussing the stigma that came with miasma in Ancient Greece and the horror at Oedipus when he returns blinded and ready to accept his place as pharmakos, Parker writes:

It is perhaps not frivolous to point out that similar revulsion, with similar consequences, is far from unknown in modern western society. Unease before phenomena that threaten the order and normal assumptions of a given culture can still overrule purely moral forms of assessment. (317).

Society is now seen in the midst of attempting to 'make sense' of multiple pollutions, both new and old. It is seen trying to survive a literally physical pollution the likes of which have not been seen in centuries and the fear and uncertainty that spreads with it. But, at the same time, one sees the search for how to finally acknowledge the experiences of fear, rage, and viral stigma that have been felt by people of different races and genders or sexual identities; these emanate from the discrimination, violence, and blame exhibited by the world since its origins, engaging with this spreading knowledge and awareness of memory not in fear and blame but in positive action as society is being asked to acknowledge its failures.

Most significantly, one looks at the general, societal approach to COVID-19 and sees a return to an Ancient view of pollution, in that many are willing to accept that this is a global pandemic

and not the fault of one person or place (also the attempts to counteract it with the idea of quarantine resembles the ritual of pharmakos in that it involves removal). But with this Ancient view comes a potential progression, in that it is also understood generally that to get through this suffering requires the help of every individual *within* that community working towards a goal, and not just one king. With this understanding of the individuals' role, the impulse is not to find another individual or culture to blame, but to instead combine the approach of community and the individual in a productive way.

Though the choice of analyzing Shepard's play, which is subtitled "Oedipus Variations", for its connections to Greek tragedy might seem an inconsequential analysis with the play's eponymous connection, the format and findings of this search can hopefully be used as inspiration for further dramaturgical, practical, and societal work. The proven dramaturgical connections can be used as a basis for examining Shepard's other works throughout his career, even if they do not contain an eponymous connection to Greek tragedy. In the use of practice and especially lighting to enhance these understandings, a method of dramaturgical exploration through practice has begun to be established by amalgamating a variety of theories and practices, a practice to be taken up and extended by other dramaturges and lighting designers in future. And, now that the lens of miasma has been shown as practical in finding the tragic nature of a work, it can be used on works outside of Shepard's canon as needed. Shepard brought a tragic scale of pollution to his modern society to see how they would react, and this comparison has been briefly extended to the world's current state of affairs reaching a dramatic scale akin to the Ancient story. With the first comparison made, one can see how society had or had not evolved until Shepard's passing, and using the analysis model, it has and can be further applied to how

one might seek to understand the currently unfolding response to the medical and sociopolitical miasma sweeping America, North America, and the Earth.

Appendix 1- Scene Breakdown

What follows are plot summaries of both *Oedipus Rex* and *A Particle of Dread*, the former broken down by episode, the latter by scenes. The hope is to offer a clearer understanding of Shepard's play due to the complex and fluctuating form of its multiple narratives, and the chance for the reader to compare plots.

Oedipus Rex

| Episode | Summary |
|----------|---|
| Prologue | Oedipus listens to the laments of a Priest on behalf of a suffering Thebes and is asked to help cure that suffering. Oedipus replies that he has already done so by sending Creon to the Oracle of Apollo to find out the source. Creon then returns and reports that the Oracle has said the cause of the plague is the murder of the former king Laius, and that it will be cured once his killer is found and exiled from Thebes. Oedipus vows to find the killer and banish him, both to save the city and himself. |
| Ep. 1 | Oedipus condemns anyone with knowledge about Laius' killing who chooses not to speak, and curses the killer to a painful life, even if he is in Oedipus' own family. By the Chorus' suggestion, he calls for the seer Tiresias for guidance of where to find the killer. Tiresias appears and chooses not to speak as he thinks it will bring pain to him and Oedipus. Oedipus thinks he is hiding something and threatens Tiresias. Eventually, Tiresias speaks, saying that Oedipus is Laius' killer. Oedipus believes this is a lie that Creon made Tiresias say and, after further argument, sends Tiresias away. |

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| Ep. 2 | <p>Creon enters, angry at having heard that Oedipus accused him of trying to take the throne. He and Oedipus argue, Creon explaining why it does not make sense for him to plot against Oedipus. Jocasta then enters, scolding the two men for arguing in public. She then tells Oedipus that she does not trust oracles after being told that her dead husband Laius would be killed by their son, yet they left their son on a mountain-side to die, and Laius was eventually killed by many men, so this prophecy could not have been true. This story worries Oedipus as it follows his actions, except for the story that Laius was killed by many men. They call for a Shepherd who reportedly saw all of this to come and answer their questions.</p> |
| Ep.3 | <p>Jocasta enters in supplication to the gods and is interrupted by a messenger in Corinth who reports that Oedipus supposed father, Polybus is dead by natural causes, meaning Oedipus could not have fulfilled the prophecy of killing his own father. Though Oedipus confesses fear remains that he will marry his mother, the messenger tries to reassure him by reporting that the king and queen of Corinth were not actually his parents, but adopted him, when, after the messenger was given the child by the Shepherd (soon to appear), he gave the child to the couple. With this news, Jocasta becomes nervous and discourages the continuance of this search, eventually declaring she hopes Oedipus never finds out his true past, and leaves. Oedipus chooses to persist in the search.</p> |
| Ep.4 | <p>The Shepherd enters and speaks with Oedipus and the Corinthian Messenger. The Shepherd tries to avoid answering questions once realising the context of the situation. Under the threat of torture, the Shepherd reveals that he was given the child by Laius to dispose of and instead gave it to the Messenger in the hopes that</p> |

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| | the child could survive and be taken away to avoid its fate. When Oedipus hears this, he realizes that he has indeed fulfilled his prophecy of patricide and incest, and leaves. |
| Exodos | Another messenger enters, announcing that Jocasta has killed herself and Oedipus then blinded himself with her brooches. Oedipus then enters, blinded, and laments the discovery of his ill-fate. Creon enters and tries to bring Oedipus inside the palace. Oedipus asks Creon to expel him from Thebes, but first to let Oedipus be with his daughters, Ismene and Antigone, one more time. Creon allows this, and then he, Oedipus, and the daughters exit into the palace. |

A Particle of Dread

| Scene | Summary |
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| 1 | Oedipus is seen in overalls, continually mopping up blood that streams from his gouged eyes, with a swollen foot. While doing this, he tries to describe the memory of the moment when as a child he had a spike driven through his feet and was left for dead. |
| 2 | Lawrence is speaking to Uncle Del, a butcher/Oracle, asking why it is he (Lawrence) and his wife are not able to conceive a child. Del lists a number of different sex positions they could try. Del then describes different prediction techniques he is seen using, including rolling knuckle bones and reading animal skins. Del then tells Lawrence that it might be best he stay childless, as if Lawrence has a child he will, “turn out to be your killer and the husband of his mother” (13) |
| 3 | Oedipus enters, asking Lawrence why Lawrence abandoned him. |

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| 4 | Jocasta is seen caged, asking Lawrence why he has caged her, asking if it was because Del said something about them having a child which she doesn't believe. She tries to seduce Lawrence, who lets her out of the cage and they then kiss passionately. |
| 5 | Uncle Del speaks directly to the audience, explaining the origins of the plague, describing a grisly murder scene including "the king". He then says that until the murderer is found, the city will continue to suffer. |
| 6 | Harrington and Randolph explore the murder scene described by Del, as detective Harrington criticizes forensic investigator Randolph on how he thinks 'he knows everything'. Randolph then recounts the murder of drug kingpin Langos and his men, supposedly by a hitchhiker, including, to Harrington's further disbelief, what they were feeling and saying, and what music was being listened to. They do not know who the killer is. |
| 7 | "Maniac of the Outskirts" argues with his own shadow and/or the audience, threatening them and asking if they know who he is, particularly of his powerful lineage including his father's major Chevy dealership. He ends by reminding them that, "I am <i>not</i> anonymous [...] I will live forever. Don't forget that" (29) |
| 8 | Otto, in a wheelchair, reads a newspaper's police report to his wife Jocelyn, sounding similar to the scene described by Randolph in scene 6, including the victims being Langos and his associates. Jocelyn replies with her fear of living so close to the Mexico border. Otto says that is silly and wants to go look at the crime scene. He then says he is briefly reminded of something, primarily, "guts on the highway" (35). |

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| 9 | Lawrence describes how important his father was, always carried by slaves so as to never touch the ground or walking on silk tapestries. Jocasta then walks by, pregnant, who he follows offstage. |
| 10 | Oedipus, in his overalls and blinded, describes in retrospect the joy felt when being told the reason for the city's plague was the murderer remaining, who must be found and killed. |
| 11 | Maniac laments to the audience about his having been blamed for a murder, supposedly just because he was a homeless hitchhiker that society hates that just happened to pass through the murder scene. |
| 12 | Annalee pushes her father Otto in his wheelchair around the stage, as they discuss her situation including having a child whose father is in prison for killing the babysitter. Otto asks if she's ever dreamt that she might have killed someone, which upsets her. Otto says he has had such a dream, and Annalee pleads him to stop talking. She then says her kid is "marked for life", and Otto asks, "his ankle?" (44) |
| 13 | Uncle Del stirs a steaming bucket while speaking to the audience, asking why people are so desperate to know the truth from him, even when he is sure they already know. |
| 14 | Annalee and Otto further discuss her husband's trial and imprisonment, Annalee explaining that the evidence was in the colour of blood of the husband and the babysitter, the former showing rage, the latter terror. |
| 15 | Langos speaks to the audience, remembers the abandonment of his son (who he does not name), who was left hanging in a tree. He wonders what happened to him, whether he was eaten by animals or found and adopted. He then recounts how one |

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| | day he drove out to visit that place and nothing was there except a hitchhiker whose one foot was bigger than the other. |
| 16 | Traveller is sitting on the ground and Annalee enters with her baby. She asks if he would take her baby, he thinks she is trying to abandon or kill it. She explains that the baby saw its father/her husband rape and kill the babysitter, and she does not want the baby to grow up with that memory. Traveller offers that maybe she wants to abandon her baby because she just doesn't want to be reminded. He offers to kill the baby for her for a price, and she leaves to get the money. |
| 17 | Oedipus enters, blinded, with Jocasta following him. It seems he was just told that the killer is in the city, and, speaking to the audience, says that if anyone knows who the killer might be, they should come forth and will not be harmed, but only banished. As well, that the killer must be exposed and exiled for a life of evil, even if the killer has somehow become a part of Oedipus' own family. He vows to lead this investigation of the king's murder as if the king were his own father. |
| 18 | Annalee describes the memory of walking around with her eye-less father, as he seemed to search for something. |
| 19 | Harrington and Randolph are back at the scene of Langos' murder, as Randolph gets mad at Harrington for not bringing any bottled water since the crime scene is in the desert. Eventually, the two leave to drive into town to buy more. |
| 20 | Otto and Jocelyn enter the crime scene, as Otto is searching for something that the report reminded him of. After arguing about if they should be there, they find a piece of cloth and lift it, revealing it to be "the yellow blanket Annalee had wrapped to baby in" (72), shown in Scene 16. Jocelyn then lays the blanket across Otto's lap. |

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| 21 | Annalee sings in the dark, “In tears I was born/In tears I will die/And life in between/Is the history of tears” (73). |
| 22 | Langos walks around the stage on the phone, seemingly being told by an anonymous caller that it has been discovered that his son that was hung on a tree with a spike through his ankle is not dead. And, apparently the son is now coming after Langos, which Langos refuses to believe. |
| 23 | Annalee charges downstage, reciting a sort of meta-theatrical verse condemning the genre of tragedy and the work of Sophocles (“Oh, tragedy, tragedy, tragedy, tragedy./ Piss on it./Piss on Sophocles’ head./ I’d rather be dead.” (76)). She wonders what good can come from revealing the story’s ‘truths’ besides catharsis for the audience, as it leaves her and the other characters suffering from the revelations. |
| 24 | Oedipus interrogates Traveler who is said to have knowledge of the murderer (the victim remains unnamed). After being threatened and accused, the Traveler tells Oedipus that he is the killer and the cause of the plague, and that the knowledge of his parent’s identity will lead to Oedipus’ exile. ⁵⁸ |
| 25 | Annalee reflects on the recent knowledge that her father is also her brother, which she says she will never accept and will love and stay with him always. |
| 26 | Jocasta shows Oedipus his own reflection, asking whether he resembles a murderer, which Oedipus agrees is not the case. As Oedipus continues to worry about a prophecy he heard, he starts to remember more, including murders and destruction in the streets. As Jocasta tries to calm him, Oedipus eventually says that it was he |

⁵⁸ This exchange mirrors the exchange between Oedipus and Tiresias in Ep.1 of *Oedipus Rex*.

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| | who ran over ‘a king’. Jocasta threatens that the knowledge he is in search of will be his own end. |
| 27 | Maniac speaks at Oedipus, describing the pitiful nature of his own life in comparison to Oedipus’, but also betting that with Oedipus’ recent revelation, he would much prefer to trade. |
| 28 | Jocasta continues to discredit prophecies and warn Oedipus of the dangers of truth, and reminds Oedipus that it was reported the king was killed by many people, not an individual. When Oedipus says he sees an image of the highway in his mind, he asks to see the man that reported this, who worked for the king but was sent away. ⁵⁹ |
| 29 | Langos reflects on being told that his son would kill him, describing how he took the child from its mother, bound and pierced its feet and hung it from an olive tree out of terror. |
| 30 | Harrington and Randolph describe their findings at the crime scene to Oedipus and Jocasta, including that there was only one killer, with a swollen foot (all of them look at Oedipus’ also swollen foot). This leads Jocasta to panic and leave. |
| 31 | Randolph continues to recount the murder as the tension increases between the detectives and Oedipus, particularly when Oedipus mentions facts that the detectives did not, such as the killer being a hitchhiker. As Randolph continues the story, Oedipus starts to defend the murderer and offer more parts of the story. Eventually, Oedipus takes over and describes the murder in the first person, accepting that it was his father that he killed by running him and his people over in their car. He then exits followed by the sound of smashing china and the silhouette of Jocasta hanging |

⁵⁹ Scenes 26 and 28 mirror the exchange between Oedipus and Jocasta in Ep.2 of *Oedipus Rex*, in the argument over the validity of prophecies, and the importance of the fact that the king was supposedly killed by many people.

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|----|--|
| | herself. Antigone then enters with a walking stick as if blind. Oedipus then enters with blood streaming from his eyes. |
| 32 | Oedipus laments Jocasta's death. He is then led away by Antigone. |
| 33 | The Traveler (now labelled as Oracle), describes what happened to the city after all of this, primarily a happy life but with a lingering shadow of a memory of suffering. |

Appendix 2- Workshops

What follows is a timeline of the workshop process from preparation to completion, addressing any significant moments or changes throughout the process, along with notes on the time, locale, and content of each workshop. Concluding this Appendix is a written draft of the speech I gave to the invited audience before the final workshop.

Preparation

Auditions

- Auditions took place on December 4th, 10:00am-4:00pm, consisting of the reading of a speech from *A Particle of Dread*, and a brief interview.
- Acknowledging that both lighting design and the abstract style of Shepard would be unfamiliar to most students, part of the interview included a discussion of colour, lighting, and their emotional response to it, along with Shepard's style in both *A Particle of Dread*, and the plays from his early career which were more abstract.
- It was also explained that the actors would not only act and follow direction, but also engage with a conversation of the work being done, contributing to the discussion and choices being made, and their response to those choices. To explain this, they were asked questions such as, "Have you participated in a theatrical workshop before?", and, "Are you comfortable discussing your work as a performer?".
- With this groundwork, the hope was that the actors would be prepared and eager to make their own observations and connections to the work going on, which would allow my thesis to have the insight of both observer and participant.
- Ultimately, my team consisted of Aisling Murphy, Al Hamameh, and Emma-Lee Bernais.

Scene Selection

- Going into WS#1, the chosen scenes were 5, 6, 10, 11, 14, 24, and 31. Each scene served various purposes for the intentions of the workshops at that time, either referencing plague and destruction (5-11, 31), the importance of colour and light (10, 14), or the need to blame (6, 11, 24, 31).
- After reviewing WS #1 and #2, it became more important that the scenes be more thoroughly explored in the workshops, and more focused on the concept of miasma, requiring a smaller and more finite selection of scenes.
- Going into WS#3, the scene selection was changed to 5, 6, 17, and 31, these scenes focusing on or relating to only the aspects of *Particle...* with the character of Oedipus, as opposed to Otto. With the variant nature of *Particle...*'s scenes, this focus on the storyline seemingly closest to that of the source play allowed for clearer exploration.

Space

The selection of workshop and performance space was important to this work according to both practical and semiotic work as explained by Aston and Savona:

Such configurations are governed by the practical conditions of space and the dramatic and theatrical codes governing its use. An intimate scene in Greek theatre, for example, would be intimate relative to the scale and sheer size of the theatre, requiring a greater proxemic distance between actors to signify intimacy than that of a love scene played on the nineteenth-century, picture- frame stage. (115)

If the spaces were drastically different from each other, entirely new dynamics would occur when changing workspace, interrupting the work's development.

- The first three workshops were conducted in a studio space in LabO, resembling a black-box theatre, which contained moveable tables and chairs, along with music stands and plenty of space, allowing for both table-work and practical exploration with the participants in a multitude of possible configurations.
- The space also had a lighting grid, accessible by small ladder, and multiple LED lighting fixtures, meaning that, as opposed to changing lighting gels whenever a change in colour was of interest, the light could be changed digitally to any colour desired, through various combinations of red, green, and blue (the standard primary colours of theatre lighting).
- This space allowed for a rehearsal setting similar to where the final workshops and performance would take place, LabO Theatre.
- LabO Theatre was a black-box theatre with proscenium seating, lighting grid accessible by catwalk, and an assortment of lighting fixtures and devices available for use, including a cyclorama.

Workshops

The workshops took place between January 17th, 2020 and February 28th, 2020, consisting of four three-hour workshops, one hour-and-a-half workshop, and a final experiment in the form of a performance offered to an invited audience on February 29th, 1:00pm-2:00pm.

Workshop #1

Workshop #1 (Friday Jan. 17, 7:00pm-10:00pm in the studio) was about introducing the team to the project, play, and scenes, as well as providing the background information necessary for future work, mainly the idea of miasma and the semiotics of lighting.

- Start of workshop spent introducing participants to each other and to my thesis topic, including a brief introduction to the work of Sam Shepard and *A Particle of Dread's*

place in his canon, as well as the idea of miasma and what it meant to Ancient Greece.

Also briefly discussed semiotics and the works of Kowzan, whose ideas of performance signification was at times being used as a framework for my observation of their work.

- Conducted readthrough of the chosen scenes
- Reviewed each scene one at a time to ensure a communal understanding of their content and discuss first impressions about tragic influence and pollution.
- Brief introduction for group to lighting (history of stage lighting and its current uses). Company had minimal experience with lighting. Also discussed colour, including Goethe's Theory of Colour, followed by the actors' relationship(s) to colour. After this discussion, lighting and colour were introduced to the room by putting actors' favorite colours on stage, then altering them to determine what that does to the colour, whether it be strengthening, weakening, romanticizing, etc..
- We then chose a colour palette for the scenes from their themes. Attempted to differentiate the feelings and colours of the characters from the environments and events around them
 - Example: it was decided that the characters in Scene 5 experienced detachment and clarity, which the team envisioned as white and light-brown spotlights, while the environment exhibited destruction and anarchy, envisioned as a bright purple and dark yellow wash.

Workshop #2

Workshop #2 (Friday Jan. 31, 7:00pm-10:00pm in the studio) was spent exploring the prepared designs, half of which I developed from Workshop #1's discussions, and half of which I developed myself. For the designs developed myself, there became a particular emphasis on

attempting to picture the give and take between blood and plague within the scenes, as I had found from the last workshop's readings and further analysis that blood was particularly important semiotically.

- Halfway through workshop, I found that the team was having trouble fully engaging with the work being done as seen in a lack of ideas being offered. We paused to discuss this, and I was told that it was due to their feeling a lack of understanding of the scenes.
- Time was spent reviewing each scene to increase their confidence. As well, I continued to encourage their ability to 'fail' in the work, reminding them that they were partaking in workshops, not rehearsals. After that, more and better work was done in that workshop and the ones to follow.
- There were times where a stark difference in performance was required by two actors to allow for a juxtaposition of text within a scene, such as in Scene 6 with Randolph and Harrington. To help the actors embody this contrast, I had actor as Harrington, read a speech from *Oedipus Rex* by the chorus on tragic destruction, while Randolph read a complex mathematic equation. In returning to scene both actors fulfilled their style of character stronger, finding Harrington to revel more in the destruction, and Randolph to have further distance from it.

Workshop #3

Workshop #3 (Friday Feb. 7, 7:00pm-10:00pm in the studio) was spent, discussing the change in scene choice, and then exploring the different designs of the scenes involving Randolph and Harrington (6 and 31).

- As mentioned in Scene Selection, going into WS#3, the choice of scenes narrowed in on those relevant to the pollutions that I found to be at the core of the play though still exploring a variety of styles.
- Also, the smaller selection of scenes (in number and length) gave the opportunity for more extensive exploration, which took the form of developing two styles of lighting for each scene to be paired with two styles of performance.
- This meant that, going into the workshop, we did not have to choose just one approach to the scene and experiment with that, seeming much more like a rehearsal than workshop; instead, we could choose two aspects and explore both, seeing if one seemed more powerful or pertinent. This was particularly fitting for Shepard's work which, as found in Chapter 2's introduction, is not the clearest in terms of plot and character structure, so the doubling allowed for more time spent potentially failing at the attempts to find and increase an understanding.
- With each design, I showed the actors a brief version of the scene's progression, to then be experimented with in tandem with their performance.

Workshop #4

Workshop #4 (Tuesday Feb. 25, 7:00pm-10:00pm in the theatre) focused on the selected scenes consisting of monologues (5,10,17).

- This was the first workshop in LabO Theatre (the space in which the final experiment would take place), allowing for, among other things, a larger working space and more complex lighting cues.

- It was decided during this workshop that, for the final workshop, both versions of the scenes would be presented to the audience, posing multiple viewpoints for their consideration.
- The monologues explored were either performed individually (as written) or split between two actors.
- Work on Scene 10 involved the workshops' first direct discussion of the characters' potential awareness of the colour changes occurring around them, specifically when exploring concept of fate and the actress as Oedipus speaking to the gods, both the stage wash and the circle of light around her changing, determining that she was aware of the change in wash around her, reflecting on the fact that she is their source because of her fate.
- During this workshop, the difficulties of finding how to show fate (while still properly lighting the individual) were first discovered.

Workshop #5

Workshop #5 (Friday Feb. 28, 5:00pm-6:30pm in the theatre) was half the length of the others and primarily served a dress-rehearsal for the final experiment taking place the next day, including practicing my introductory speech and acquainting the lighting operator with the space.

- Scenes 6 and 31 were introduced to the space for the first time.
- This importance of space became clear in this workshop when working on Scene 6, again focused on comparing ancient and modern qualities of Harrington and Randolph. The point of this version's design was to elicit a strong, passionate performance from Harrington akin to the kind that would fill the Theatre of Epidaurus, in comparison to a more subdued, factual performance by Randolph. In Workshop#3, which took place in

the studio, the actor as Harrington was not fully engaging in the performance meaning he couldn't reach the scale of grandeur being sought. But, when returning to this version of the scene in WS#5, the actor had both a larger space and stronger lighting. With this increase in scale, he was then able to produce the strength of performance that was being sought, filling the theatre with his voice, reaching an emotion that Calame might find worthy of the brutal ancient murders that Harrington describes, and Randolph seem much more diminished, a scale of performance akin to the neutral black-box and realistic lighting surrounding her.

Final Experiment

On February 29th, 1:00pm-2:00pm, the work from the previous five workshops was brought together for a presentation of scenes 5,6,10,17, and 31 for an invited audience, presenting the two versions developed of each scene. This was the first time that the scenes were worked on in front of an audience larger than myself and my two supervisors, particularly significant to this play in which several scenes are indicated to be performed “*directly to the audience*” and, in a search for the tragic, one is reminded by Calame that the audience is integral to the genre.

Below is an analysis of each scene of *A Particle of Dread* explored in the workshops, starting with a summary of the scene in and of itself as well as in the context of the story, followed by a detailed semiotic description and analysis of the two versions created and presented in the final workshop. At the end is a copy of the introduction spoken by me before the scenes' presentation.

Scene 5

“What began it all, that's the question. [...] This disease. Plague. Epidemic.” (Shepard 18). Scene 5 consists of a monologue by Uncle Del, previously described as a blood-covered butcher serving as this play's Oracle of Delphi, answering the above question, “*directly to the*

audience” as explained in the stage direction, the audience seemingly standing in for the city’s people. His answer is “Murder. Plain and simple”. Uncle Del then describes the grisly murder scene of the king (not specifically named, but supposedly Laius as he is the only literal king in the play) and his men in the middle of the desert, their bodies, “all in pieces”. He also notes that the murder was reportedly committed by a “band of bandits”, though others say it was one person. Regardless, Del says that the source of the plague is this murder, and it will continue to afflict the city until the murderer is revealed. He concludes the speech with, “But who among you fears they’ll find him in their own dark kitchen”, indicating that, with the culprit unknown, he could be anyone, even a family member.

Version #1

Version 1 followed Shepard’s plot in which Del narrates the plague in retrospect and, using spectacle, both tragic plot and the tragic role of Oracle were exemplified. As Del sat in a corner of the stage, the description he offers of the plague was played out in front of him, as the image of daylight turning to blood and then plague was shown through change of vivid colour on the cyc, and the tearing apart of Laius and his being put back together was shown in the movement of lights on the downstage (DS) floor. During this morbid description and depiction, Del was to be seen sitting in the corner of the stage, in dull lighting; according to Pilbrow, this uses the lighting tools of *selective visibility*, ensuring that what is meant to be the focus appears as the brightest or most evident thing on stage, and *revelation of form*, which allows for an object to be seen “correctly [3D], or they may be distorted, their shape flattened or revealed” all through “form-revealing light”, created by “the distribution of light and shade” (Pilbrow 15). Together, this accomplishes the goal determined in WS#4, which was to show the passivity of the ancient

oracle who would view the events from a mountain. The resulting light-images offer the visual and emotional affect of the physical plague that centres the plot of the play and its source.

Version #2

Version 2 sought to fulfill Aristotle's claim in his *Rhetoric*, that the goals of tragedy, instilling fear and pity in the audience, can be achieved by just the speaker, in that, "when it is desirable that the audience should fear, the speaker must bring them into the right frame of mind so that they shall take themselves to be the kind of people who are likely to suffer (110). And such is the case in the second version of Scene 5, in which two actors in Appia's Helligkeit (general lighting, in this case a wash of pale blue light), approached each other alternating the lines of the monologue, with an increased intensity of terror in their delivery. In this emotion being sent back and forth to each other, growing as they discuss the plague, their performance alone recalls Parker's definition of miasma as, "a form of defilement impairment of form or integrity, ritually impure and unfit to enter a temple. People rub off one another like a physical taint" (8), constructing a representation of the second sort of miasma to be found in *Particle...* but more so its source play, fear.

Scene 6

The scene takes place at a murder scene on "*Highway 15*" (Shepard 20), an interstate highway that joins, "the [Mojave] desert southwest with the intermountain west", running from the U.S.-Mexico border [...] towards the U.S.-Canada border ("Interstate 15."). It consists of detectives Randolph and Harrington investigating the scene; Randolph relies on forensics, Harrington on gut-instinct (primarily, to blame the Mexicans). Randolph retells the murder, following evidence including blood-spatter and footprints, while Harrington describes "the old-days" of murder, consisting of "disembowelling, hearts torn out, drawn and quartered, heads

rolling. Blood dripping down the altar steps” (Shepard 23). To Harrington’s disbelief, Randolph also looks at the colour of blood to determine what emotions were being felt by culprit and victim(s), along with the music being listened to and what was said. The scene ends with Randolph having fully recounted the murder and both detectives still unclear as to the identity of the culprit.

Version #1

In the first version during which plot was the focus, Shepard’s setting it in the desert is honoured in the spectacle, as the scene shows the skyline of a desert on the cyc; simultaneously this honours the ancient Greek cultural nature in that the scene is shown to take place over the course of the day. As the investigation goes on, the lighting is shown to begin at dawn, go to high-noon, and carry on to dusk, night, and dawn once more, during which the brightness aligned with emotional arc as the peak brightness, and the desert heat that would go with it, aligned with Harrington’s rage, while the darkness seemed to align with Randolph’s frustration in that the forensic investigator was unable to see the problem. This pairing of daylight to emotional arc recalls Erika Fischer-Lichte’s note that lighting is important to theatrical semiotics in that, “nearly every culture [...] has developed a rich store of light symbolism which, in its earliest origins, can probably be traced back to the juxtaposition of night and day, light and shadow” (111), obviously true to the Greeks, whose theatre was determined by the sunlight. As this creation of the scene focuses on the ‘reality’ of their investigation, one finds the miasma to be seen in the investigation of the plague’s source, while fear and fate go unseen.

Version #2

The second version looked toward finding the tragic source of the scene’s characters and their thoughts, following Appia’s statement that, “the spatial dimension should not be a

materialized replica of the real world; rather, its formalism [...] should enhance the presence of the performers in the space and support them in representing their innermost mental states” (Abulafia 18). This consisted of a split in the stage between Randolph and Harrington, symbolizing their division between modern and ancient character. For Harrington, diction was used to match these tragic characteristics and also matched with spectacle, which in this case relied not just on lighting but also costume, in that Harrington wore a large white mask, recalling that of Ancient Greece, while Randolph wore a medical face-mask which is eponymous with our modern struggles with COVID-19. With the red wash of lighting covering whichever character was in the peak of rage then crossing to the other, the emotional arc elicited recalls Goethe’s claim that “colour occupies so important a place in the series of elementary [...] they are immediately associated with the emotions of the mind” (Goethe 304). As the red of rage expanded during the discussion of the murder, the spectacle also fulfilled Parker’s description of miasma as a pollution that spreads in that, when the rage began to afflict either character the circle of red-light DS, representing the murder scene, began to shimmer as if it is activating the pollution at its core to then spread. In both versions of this scene, the spectacle that strengthens the tragedy comes from the lightings *composition*, defined by Pilbrow as the combination of, “intensity, colour, and distribution”, resulting in a, “visual design in space and in time” (Pilbrow 16), covering or surrounding both setting and actor.

Scene 10

Scene 10 consists of Oedipus, with his eyes “*gouged out, dripping blood*” (18), recounting to the audience the experience of hearing the Oracle (or butcher’s) prophecy that the cause of the plague was the death of Laius, and that it will only be cured if the murderer is expelled from the city or killed. The monologue also contains further description of the state of

the city (at the time of hearing the prophecy), not only in the plague's effect on the people, but the chaos that follows the suffering, such as "the sky black with vultures" and dogs, "skulked around in bony packs" (18).

Version #1

As the first version looked at the plague and fear experienced by Oedipus' people that he wants to save, Oedipus' placement centre stage surrounded by other actors wandering the stage in fear, and his reaching out to his citizens showed Oedipus' existence as a leader who cares for his people, fulfilling the tragic character. A light-image using a very dark red wash representing the blood and vultures that the plague brought and that are seen by the obviously fearful citizens creates, again stimulates, "our unconscious emotions, conscious feelings, associations and ideas concerning the separate images..." (Abulafia 119), this time offering an image and emotional response akin to what those citizens supposedly felt. This combination of an intense description of suffering and destruction, with both an imagining of that destruction, and depiction of those citizens' suffering, might have led to a sort of catharsis for the audience. And though a Grecian concept, catharsis is an experience that Shepard seems to work toward in various scenes but was not always readily accessible in the workshops.

Version #2

The second version of this scene ultimately existed in an embodiment of the ill-destined family fate in a combination of thought, character, diction, and a lessened spectacle. As described of the workshops, fate was the hardest miasma to construct, while also the hardest to find within Shepard's script. In the speech's thought, there are certainly traces of a self-referentiality in a discussion of the source by Oedipus, but this required a strengthening which was found in the actor's performance. With a much more subdued spectacle in this version, using

Pilbrow's *selective visibility* to ensure that little was seen except the speaker (15) resulting in the single beam of light on the actor with diminished red in and around it, diction was crucial. As Oedipus looked up towards the light, the actor spoke the words as one who is begging the gods to reveal the cause of the plague and to satisfy the curse upon their family.

Scene 17

Scene 17 is another monologue by the blinded Oedipus "*direct to audience*" (60), again discussing the prophecy that Laius' killer is not only the source of the plague, but is still in the city, this time discussing news in the present. Primarily, he describes his hatred of the unknown killer and disgust at the idea that he may have crossed paths with him unknowingly. He then declares that anyone with the knowledge of the killer's identity must come forward with the information and will not be hurt for having kept the information, only banished. Finally, Oedipus says that these punishments apply "no less to me, should it turn out that somehow he has conned his way into my company" (61), stating that he now leads this search for the killer not just as leader of the city but also as if he were a son to Laius, "as though the king were my own blood father" (which he was).

Version #1

The first version focused on the speaker Oedipus' place in this search and Rehm's idea of the modern, individual, fear. This resulted in the actress as Oedipus standing centre-stage, with a second actress circling around her speaking the occasional line in the role that seemingly occupies a mix of conscience and fear of guilt. This was performed with the intent of prodding on the primary speaker and their growing anxiety, also embodying the tragic tool of thought. During this, the spectacle consisted of a light circling Oedipus in the opposite direction of the 'conscience' actress, in this case representing the search for the culprit, gradually circling tighter

around Oedipus. As the end of the speech found the light directly over Oedipus, he is shown to be the predicted guilty party, and likely to be labelled *pharmakos*, which is eventually the case for the character in the plots of *Particle...* and *Oedipus Rex*.

Version #2

In the latter version of the scene, which in the WS#4 was found to offer incredibly modern connections to politics, Oedipus stood centerstage, acting as a leader speaking to their people. As the thought of the text was centered on the tragic leader offering to be a point of strength and comfort for the people, thus existing in Rehm's concept of the ancient fear of polis and individual, the spectacle offered both tragic and modern elements to the scene. The cyc behind Oedipus again occupied a daylight transformation during the speech, consistently matching with its emotional arc, and had a yellow wash on the actress offering a classical effect which Goethe labels as a colour that, "carries with it the nature of brightness [...] a strong yellow has a magnificent and noble effect" (306). However, the spectacle of lighting was modern in the front lighting, illuminating how this politician's seemingly televised declaration of who might be guilty could be Shepard's equivalent to a Grecian declaration.

Scene 31

Scene 31 continues Randolph and Harrington's retelling of their findings to Oedipus started in Scene 30, Jocasta having just left, unable to deal with the distress of realizing what Oedipus is about to find out. As more is revealed, Oedipus says and reacts to certain findings in a way that indicates he might know more about the murder than anyone thought, though no one says so. Eventually, his rage increases to the point of defending the 'unknown' killer and retelling the murder which he describes in a third-person perspective. Towards the end of the scene, Oedipus accepts the truth and switches to a detailed and graphic first-person reliving of

the murder, justifying his act as one of warranted rage towards poor driving and intimidation.

After his speech, he exits the stage, immediately followed by a crashing sound effect paired with the silhouette behind a curtain of Jocasta falling as if hung.

Version #1

Version 1 concentrated on the psychology of Oedipus as individual, which is admittedly not very ancient, but the miasmatic ideas of the fear he experiences in the recollection and the polluted fate/observing Oedipus' acceptance of it, have ancient qualities. The version focused on Oedipus' growing understanding and acceptance of the murder, including the pollution of fear as Oedipus realised what was going on and his place in it. As Oedipus continued to relate the story to the investigators, the actress' performance and diction strengthened, carrying with it more fear as she returned to the scene of the crime in her thoughts. This was paired with the fading of lights around Oedipus, using selective visibility to show his brain becoming obsessed with remembering the murder but generating the emotional effect through the text. As well, the small circle that has been used previously to indicate fate; with its return, while Oedipus discusses killing his father, it shows that this is a retelling of how Del's prophecy came to be, fulfilling the polluted fate.

Version #2

Version 2 was based more in spectacle, and further considered the role of Randolph and Harrington in the scene and play. The scene beginning with the cyc and stage covered in a green wash representing the plague that supposedly covers their city, the characters are also filled with fear at the top of the scene as exhibited in all three actors' diction, being spread and increased between them, as well as wearing medical face-masks previously used by the actress as Randolph in Scene 6, picturing their acknowledgement (and fear) of the plague. This fear

eventually appears in spectacle as the pink colour of terror spreads into a wash, mixing with the plague green on the cyc but leaving Oedipus in solely the green wash, depicting that the pollution of fear spreads out from the physical pollution. When the story reaches a point of rage in Oedipus killing Laius, the colour changed to red, and Oedipus' diction carried with it stronger emotion. When Oedipus fully remembers the murder and his place in it, the actress removed her mask, showing the king's acceptance of his place as source of the pollution, both physical and emotional, and seemingly accepting the role of pharmakos. The stronger colouring throughout this version aligned with the heightened emotions of fear from start to finish, making for stronger and more affecting performances.

Presentation Introduction

Below is the speech I wrote and spoke before the presentation at the final workshop offered here to help understand the context of the presentation that was the culminating moment of this thesis.

Hello and thank you all for coming.

With my thesis, I looked to bring together the theatrical works that have to this point been most engaging to me as artist and academic, Greek tragedy and Sam Shepard. Shepard's final play, *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)* was his first adaptation of said genre. *Particle...* is based around the story of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, generally set in the American South in and around the Mojave Desert. In an interview surrounding the play, Shepard said that, "I was really having a hard time adapting it, and finally I decided I didn't want to adapt it, I just wanted to do variations on the themes that were in the play" ("Signature" 14). And this is why one finds each scene of the play exploring a different aspect or event of the tale and is placed in a different scenario. Each primary character has two to three versions, such as the Grecian king Oedipus and

the janitor Otto. Or, there is the king Laius, along with the father Lawrence and drug kingpin Langos. All of this results in a quasi-murder-mystery play, part Grecian quest for discovery, part American cop-show. The purpose of this thesis and workshops has been to attempt to decrypt this combination of ancient and modern story and story-telling, to reveal the extent of the ancient tragic form in *Particle*, which I have been lucky enough to explore with my supervisors Louise Frappier and Tibor Egervari, and the actors whose work you will be graced with today, Al Hamameh, Emma-Lee Bernais, and Aisling Murphy.

With tragedy's infamous scale, and excess of theories around it throughout history, I found myself having to choose a lens through which to find these connections. What I settled on is the Grecian concept of miasma. Robert Parker defines miasma as a form "of defilement, the impairment of a thing's form or integrity" (3), causing one to be, "ritually impure, and thus unfit to enter a temple: it is contagious: it is dangerous, and this danger is not of familiar secular origin" (3). A dirtiness that, "individuals rub off on one another like a physical taint" (Parker 8). Particularly interesting was one of the primary solutions found for such miasma and its physical plague, the Grecian idea of the pharmakos which involved the expulsion and/or death of a citizen chosen to carry the pollution of plague outside the walls of the polis. This made the pharmakos carrier of both plague and cure. These concepts of pollution and cure seemed to naturally fit the world and culture that Shepard had set these stories in; one in which there is a common fear and distaste for neighbours to the south, or any neighbors with a different name, and one whose people seem to be in constant search for someone to blame or vilify. In further analysis of both *Oedipus Rex* and *A Particle of Dread*, I found there to be 3 primary veins of pollution: a physical plague, a spreading fear, and the curses passed on through an ill-fated family, and these are the ideas on which I chose to focus.

After my dramaturgical work, I sought for how to explore these connections further through an embodiment of them. Luckily, *Particle*'s place in modern theatre allows for a device that was not available to the Greeks to the same degree of manipulation: lighting. And so, this presence of pollution has been explored in a mixture of scenography, and performance of Shepard's work. Over the past 2 months, we have conducted 5 workshops in which we experimented with modern lighting techniques paired with a mixed scale of performance between Grecian to modern realist, in order to uncover and illuminate the presence of a Grecian miasma and tragic dramaturgy in Sam Shepard's *A Particle of Dread*. And what you will see today is the results of those workshops, in the presentation of 5 scenes, each conducted in 2 different styles of design and performance. For the purpose of this presentation, Al, Ali, and Emma-Lee will be alternating between characters, and said breakdown can be found in the program handed to you. With that, I say, please make sure to turn off any phones you have and enjoy!

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