THE USE OF THE DEMONSTRATIVES ὁδὲ, ὁὕτος AND ἑκεῖνος IN SOPHOCLES

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1. In his otherwise valuable Syntax of Sophocles Moorhouse (1982: 153) claims that in Sophocles’ plays the pattern of the tripartite system of the demonstratives is not always maintained. Thus reference is made to Ajax, who is absent from the stage, by (ἕ)κεῖνος, ὁδὲ and ὁὕτος (Aj. 1–80), ‘all without any sense of distinction’. In my opinion, however, referential identity of different expressions does not imply neutralization of the semantic values of the expressions in question: βασιλεὺς ‘king’ has not the same semantic value as the personal name Δαρεῖος, though both nouns may refer to the same person.

In this connection Moorhouse (155) does not agree with the opinion of Kühner-Gerth that in some passages ὁδὲ refers to what is especially prominent in the speaker’s mind. Kühner-Gerth’s observation is as follows (I: 644):

So kann ferner ὁδὲ von Gegenständen gebraucht werden, die sich räumlich auf die zweite oder dritte Person beziehen und daher dem Bereiche des Redenden ferner stehen, die aber der Redende in lebhafter Auffassungsweise in seine unmittelbare Sphäre herüberzieht und als seine eigene Person berührend anschaut. [. . .]. Auch können beide Pronomen: ὁδὲ und ὁὕτος auf einen und denselben Gegenstand hinweisen, ὁδὲ denselben emphatisch vergebenwürdigend, ὁὕτος auf denselben blass hinweisend. [my italics]

Kühner-Gerth’s opinion is corroborated by phenomena observed in living languages. I quote Lyons (1977: 677):

In conclusion, we would draw attention to what we will call emphatic deixis and its role in anaphoric reference. It frequently happens that ‘this’ is selected rather than ‘that’, ‘here’ rather than ‘there’, and ‘now’ rather than ‘then’, when the speaker is personally involved with the entity, situation or place to which he is referring or is identifying himself with the attitude or viewpoint of the addressee. The conditions which determine this emphatic use of the marked member of these deictically opposed demonstratives and adverbs are difficult to specify with any degree of precision. But there is no doubt that the speaker’s subjective
involvement and his appeal to shared experience are relevant factors in the selection of those demonstratives and adverbs which, in their normal deictic use, indicate proximity. [my italics]

In this connection one may also think of the English idiomatic use of *this* instead of *a certain* in sentences like *Then I met this girl*, without previous mention of the girl in question: telling a story, the speaker relives the scene in question, so that he has the girl before his mind’s eye, a girl who is going to play an important role in the continuation of the story.

In sum, I am convinced that Kühner-Gerth are right, and I will argue that Sophocles uses the pronouns ὁδὲ, ὁτος, and ἕκεινος in the way indicated by Kühner-Gerth.

2. Let us consider the following sentence:

(Oedipus to Jocasta, relating his encounter with Laius:)
στείχον ὣ̇ ἰκνουμαί τοῦσδε τοὺς χῶρους, ἐν οἷς
σι τὸν τύραννον τοῦτον ὀλλοθίκει λέγεις. (ΟΤ 798–799)

On my way I came to *this* region, in which according to you that king perished.

Kamerbeek explains the use of τοῦσδε as follows: ‘the locality is before his mind’s eye’.¹ He adds that the same use is found in τριπλῆς/ ὥτ’ ἐκλευδοθὲν τῆςδ’ ὀδοπορὸν πέλας, ‘When I was on my way near this three-forked road’ (800–801). The use of τοῦσδε in fact suggests that Oedipus relives with anxiety the scene he describes, fearing that he might turn out to be Laius’ murderer. Instead of emphatic τοῦσδε, Oedipus might have used the neutral anaphoric pronoun τοῦτος, as he did in the expression ὁ χῶρος ὁτος (732), or even κεῖνος with the connotation ‘that region faraway’. Though τοῦτος and κεῖνος were metrically impossible in 798, the selection of τοῦσδε with its emphatic force is entirely adequate in the context: a great poet like Sophocles always makes a virtue of metrical need.

This interpretation of τοῦσδε is corroborated by the use of the historical present ἰκνουμαί, which suggests the ‘vivid’ report of crucial events by an eye-witness. After ἰκνουμαί, Oedipus uses four other historical presents: παίω (807), ὀρδε (807), ἐκυκλίνδεται (812), κτείνω

¹ He was preceded by Campbell (1879): ‘The cross-road is vividly present to his imagination; hence the pronoun ὁδὲ is used’.