

Whittaker Chambers and Oedipus at Colonus**--Epigraphs--**

“**Weariness**, Bill — you cannot yet know what it means. I wish no time would come to you when you do know, but **the balance of experience** is against it. One day, long hence, you will know **true weariness** and will say: 'That was it.' My own life of late [in early April of 1961, **only four months before the Berlin Wall** would begin to be built on 13 August 1961] has been full of such realizations....There's a kind of pathos about it — a rather empty kind, I'm afraid; the understanding comes too late to do even the tardy understander much good.

“**Our kind of weariness**. History hit us [my generation] with a freight train. History has long been doing this to people....But we (my general breed) tried...to put ourselves together again [and even to become **a Witness** to some painful truths]. Since this meant **outwitting dismemberment**, as well as resynthesizing a new life view..., the sequel might seem rather more remarkable [and fruitful] than what went before [after we left Communism]. **But at a price — weariness**. People tend to leave Oedipus [in Sophocles' Tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*], shrieking with the blood running down his cheeks — everybody nicely purged by pity and terror [the tragic catharsis], and so home to bed. But I was about 23 [in 1924] when I discovered, rather by chance, that Oedipus [20 years later, as in Sophocles' drama, *Oedipus at Colonus*] went on to Colonus [from Thebes to a sanctuary only one mile to the northwest of Athens]. But each of us, according to his lights, was arrested in time by the same line [to be found in Sophocles] — the one which Oedipus, **looking out from [his] precarious sanctuary after [a] long flight [and the “weariness”]**, sums up: '**Because of my great age, and the nobility of my mind, I feel that all will be well.**' [Scene I: 'Suffering and time, vast time, have been instructors in contentment, which kingliness teaches too.' (Robert Fitzgerald)] **That is the Oedipus largely overlooked**. Of course I can say nothing of the nobility of my mind...; and I realize, too, that **Oedipus spoke at a grateful moment of rescue**. [Oedipus, old, blind, bearded and ragged, is led by his daughter Antigone as the Play opens: Oedipus: 'My daughter — daughter of the blind old man — Where have we come to now Antigone? What lands are these, or holdings of what city? **Who will be kind to Oedipus this evening And give alms to the wanderer? Though he ask little and receive still less, It is sufficient.**' (Robert Fitzgerald)]. (Whittaker Chambers, “*Il Faut le Supposer Heureux*,” in *Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?*--*American Conservative Thought in the Twentieth Century* (an anthology edited by William F. Buckley) (Indianapolis & New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 531-533—my bold emphasis added; and Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle: Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969, 1977—English Versions by Dudley Fitts & Robert Fitzgerald), pp. 81-82—my bold emphasis added.

“**Oedipus** [speaking to his two daughters, Antigônê and Ismene, who had been taken away from him while at Colonus, and who were now being returned with the help of Theseus, the ruler of Athens then who had saved them]:

“My sweet children!....I have [now] what is dearest to me in the world. To die now would not be so terrible, Since you are near me. Press close to me child [Antigônê], Be rooted in your father's arms; rest now From the cruel separation, the going and coming; And tell me the story as briefly as you can: A little talk is enough for girls so tired.” (Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*—Scene V, the Robert Fitzgerald translation, p. 140)

“**Oedipus** [saying a final farewell to his two beloved daughters, as it was poignantly, and with noble restraint, reported by the Messenger in Scene VIII]:

“Then the earth groaned with thunder from the god below [Hades himself]; And as they [Antigônê and Ismene] heard the sound, the girls **shuddered**, And dropped to their father's knees, and began wailing. Beating their breasts and **weeping as if heartbroken**. And hearing them cry out so bitterly, **He [Oedipus] put his arms around them, and said to them:**

'Children, this day your father is gone from you. All that was mine is gone. You shall no longer Bear the burden of taking care of me — I know it was hard, my children. — And yet one word Frees us of all the weight and pain of life: That word is love. Never shall you have more from any man than you have had from me. And now you must spend the rest of life without me.'

“That was the way of it. **They clung together And wept, all three**. But when they finally stopped, and no more sobs were heard, **then there was Silence....** Then, knowing himself summoned by the spirit, He [Oedipus] asked that lord Theseus come to him; And when he had come, said: **'O my prince and friend, Give your right hand now as a binding pledge To my two daughters; children give him your hands. Promise that you will never willingly Betray them, but will carry out in kindness Whatever is best for them in the days to come.'**

“And Theseus [the King of Athens] swore to do it for his friend, With such restraint as fits a noble king [with Oedipus, too, the former King of Thebes]. And when he [Theseus] had done so, **Oedipus at once laid his blind hands upon his daughters**, saying: **'Children, you must show your nobility, And have the courage now to leave this [sacred and secret] spot. You must not wish to see what is forbidden, Or hear what may not be afterward told. But go — go quickly. Only the lord Theseus May stay to see the thing that now begins.'**

“This much every one of us heard him say. **And then we came away with the sobbing girls.**” (Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*—Scene VIII, the Robert Fitzgerald translation, pp. 161-162—my bold emphasis added)

Not long before he was to die on 9 July 1961, at sixty years of age, Whittaker Chambers unknowingly wrote what was to be his final letter to his friend William F. Buckley. Dated 9 April

1961, this letter of a longsuffering man and courageous public witness to uncomfortable truths was meditative and quite candid about his protracted sufferings and his own growing weariness; and he gave some of the reasons why. (“**For it is not sympathy that the mind craves, but understanding of its purposes.**”¹) Thankfully, Chambers has also conveyed to us in this brief, but compact, letter, his final glimpses and brief tastes of peacefulness, and he thus becomes poignantly allusive.

Chambers eloquently alludes to Oedipus' own protracted sufferings and his final consolations—especially with his two daughters (Antigonê and Ismene) — as Sophocles has so movingly depicted these combined consolations in his own final play, *Oedipus at Colonus* (406 B.C.). The village of Colonus, located only one mile to the northwest of Athens, was also the village where Sophocles himself was gratefully born and raised. Near the end of his own long life, Sophocles also presents a final homecoming.

Not only was Whittaker Chambers a former Communist and spy, with all of the burden of guilt that resulted from his break with Communism and its networks; he was also a largely pessimistic Protestant Christian who had loyal love and tried to be more faithful in a country — in the United States as he saw it — that was becoming, not only increasingly secular and materialistic, but gravely indifferent to God.

When Whittaker Chambers died in that summer of 1961, I was an 18-year-old cadet at West Point and then also intensely engaged in the summer combat-commando training at Camp Buckner. However, I did not then even know who Chambers was, much less did I know of his protracted courage and enduringly heroic moral character under sustained ridicule and arbitrary injustice, which essentially started in 1948. That is to say, after his formidable personal testimony before the U.S. Congress (the House Un-American Activities Committee) concerning Communism, to include active Communists then known to him, especially the prominent elite figure, Alger Hiss.

It was only in Graduate School in the early autumn of 1971 — ten years after Whittaker Chambers' death — that historian Sam Francis (Dr. Samuel Todd Francis) thoroughly told me about Chambers' own life and tragedy, and about his published writings. He earnestly recommended that I first read, in their entirety, two of Chambers' books: *Witness* (1952), especially Chambers' own poignant “**Foreword in the Form of a Letter to My Children**”; and, secondly, *Cold Friday* (1964 —

1 Whittaker Chambers, *Cold Friday* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 68—my emphasis added. This line comes from Chambers' intimate chapter, entitled, “The Direct Glance.”

posthumously published), especially the third chapter entitled “**The Direct Glance**” (67-88).² These books, like those of James Burnham (*Suicide of the West* (1964) and *The War We Are In* (1967)), have enabled me abidingly to grasp many inspiring and formative truths, for which I could never be grateful enough to Dr. Francis (R.I.P.). For, Burnham and Chambers — both of them former Communists — had also been colleagues together at William Buckley's *National Review*.

Although Chambers often made learned and stirring references to ancient classical literature — such as Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* or to Sophocles Oedipus Cycle (*Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigonê*) — he had a special place in his heart, I believe, for Sophocles himself and for Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*.

These various elements or components of Chambers' versatile and profound thought, courageous actions, and his noble moral character, still present for our inspiration and gratitude a nourishing challenge, especially to a professed Roman Catholic. Chambers himself, I regret to say, never entered the Catholic Church. He remained a Protestant Christian, and consciously so — a fact that adds another tragic note to our sense of his life and abiding pessimism, especially for us who are of the Catholic Faith. (James Burnham (d. 1987) himself returned home to his Catholic Faith near the end of his life.)

It is nonetheless now fitting that we consider the noble and poignant paganism of Sophocles (d. 405 B.C.) and his final play, *Oedipus at Colonus*. We propose to consider them now somewhat closely, before we return to Chambers' 9 April 1961 letter to his longtime Catholic friend, “Bill” Buckley.

The excellent edition, commentary and English translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* done by Robert Fitzgerald was first published in March of 1941, and then again (slightly revised) in March of 1956. Whittaker Chambers may well have read Fitzgerald's work: not only Fitzgerald's own honored text and English translation of the play itself, but also Fitzgerald's perceptive 10-page Commentary.

In Robert Fitzgerald's Commentary we are grateful to receive his own thoughtful and wholehearted insights, to include some important framing facts and historical context to aid our own greater understanding of the play. For example:

The profound myth of Oedipus gave Sophocles material for three plays: *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigonê*. Unlike the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, they were composed independently of each other; but like the *Oresteia* they form a coherent trilogy. Though less familiar nowadays than the other two, *Oedipus at Colonus* **has perhaps more significance and is no less beautiful. It completes the tale of**

² See Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952), 808 pp.; and Whittaker Chambers, *Cold Friday* (New York: Random House, 1964), 327 pp.--my bold emphasis added in the above passages and citations.

Oedipus' life, and immediately precedes the action of *Antigonê*....

Oedipus at Colonus is reckoned on ancient authority to have been **the last of more than one hundred plays by its author**. It was **composed probably in 406 B.C.**, when Sophocles was **eighty-nine years old**. Some of the play's peculiar interest lies in **this fact**, and in **various matters implied by this fact**. **At the time of its composition the Peloponnesian War [431-404 B.C.] between Athens and Sparta had been in progress for more than a quarter of a century**. To Colonus, where he was born, and to the great and **hard-pressed city** of which he was a beloved citizen, Sophocles paid his tribute in this play. **Though Athens was still undefeated [until 404 B.C.] her lands had already been laid waste, and the verses about the olive trees may well have moved their first readers or auditors to tears** [because of the recent irreparable devastations]. **The play was not produced in the theater until 401 B.C., four years after the death of Sophocles and three years after the starvation and capitulation of Athens**. *Oedipus at Colonus* is therefore one of the last considerable works known to us from the period of Athenian genius.

Like the six other extant plays of Sophocles, it is the work of a mind in the highest degree orderly, penetrating and sensitive, and enlightened mind aware of the moral issues in human action, and a reverent mind aware of the powers that operate through time and fortune on human affairs. But it is first of all **the work of an artist, a maker of plots and poetry**, and it is only from the ever-ambiguous expression of art that we may divine his thought or his theme. Accordingly we have here no such lucid a revelation of Athenian intellect as we find in the history of Thucydides or the dialogues of Plato. For its original audience the play **shimmered with implications** that are lost to us. Yet even we cannot fail to see in it **the last, long reach toward truth** of an artist who was formed by his great epoch and who perfectly represents it. (The Robert Fitzgerald Text and his accompanying Commentary on *Oedipus at Colonus*, pp. 171, 173-174—my emphasis added³)

Robert Fitzgerald also graciously conveys the sufferings and humiliations of Oedipus in a presentation that would have deeply touched Whittaker Chambers, were he to have read it. (Chambers also knew some ancient Greek, which would have added to his appreciation of any English translation.) Remembering that it was twenty years of exile and wandering from Thebes before Oedipus would finally arrive in Colonus, Fitzgerald then says:

It would be hard to imagine any tribulation more severe than that endured by Oedipus, king of Thebes. **At the summit of his power** he discovered himself damned, **by his own pertinacity** discovered that he had horribly offended against the decencies by which men must live. **In one day he fell from sovereignty and fame** to self-blinded degradation, and later he was **driven into exile**. He comes on the stage **a blind beggar led by a girl** [having arrived at Colonus some twenty years later, after

3 Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle: Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigonê* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969, 1977), pp. 171 and 173-174—my emphasis added. All further page references to this text will be up in the main body of the essay, in parentheses.

Thebes]. The Athenians had no romantic notions about vagabondage or exile; in their eyes Oedipus had been reduced to the worst extremity, barring slavery, that a noble man could suffer.

But the atmosphere of the place [Colonus] to which the old man comes is **an atmosphere of shadiness [gracious shade], blessedness and peace**; and the contrast between Oedipus in his rags **and the beauty of Colonus** is an effect of which we are at once aware, an effect not unlike that of Odysseus' awakening in the pretty island of Phaeacia [and his then receiving an especially warm and gracious hospitality there]. Only here **the poet's purposes** are not so simple. For this is a grove sacred to the Furies, and the Furies are those spirits of retribution by whom sinners, murderers especially, and Oedipus in particular, have been pursued. It is furthermore well known to Sophocles' audience that in the *Eumenidês* of Aeschylus, years before [in the *Oresteia* trilogy], these spirits were persuaded by Athena to reconcile themselves to the superior rule of Athenian law. Thus gentled, so to speak, in Attica, they have nevertheless great intrinsic power, and must be treated with tact. And they are indeed, as we see here symbolized, the divinities with whom Oedipus must make his peace. (174-175—my emphasis added)

Fitzgerald will then discuss, at some length, the complexity of Oedipus' character, especially his abidingly fiery intensity and alert intelligence, up to the end. “The dignity of Oedipus is never in doubt” (175), but it is with a “fighting alertness” and, at times, even “with a scornful and artful wit” (175), “by contrast with the calm of the Athenian hero [Theseus].” (175) Fitzgerald thus asks the searching questions: “In what, then, is his dignity? Why is he not merely an obsessed and vindictive old man?” (175-176) In part, the proposed answer is, as follows:

During the years in which Oedipus has probed his own guilt he has come to terms with it. Though innocent of willful murder or incest, **he has made expiation for what he recognized as his share of responsibility in those acts....** Yet Oedipus is not penitent, for he has also recognized that the powers controlling life have, in a sense, chosen him as their example and instrument.

Thus it is not alone through passive suffering that the spirit of Oedipus attains power and blessedness. His rage and sternness in his last hours are the means of an affirmation, the most profound this poet could make. We recognize Oedipus' right to pass sentence **on Creon** [the arriving king of Thebes, himself a base abductor of Oedipus' own two daughters] **and on his son** [the perfidious and subversive ingrate Polyneicês], **though by our first and easy standards** neither would seem to deserve the curse pronounced on him....**In the larger context of Oedipus' fate, however,** we may discern that their sins of meanness, of avarice, of irreverence are no less grave than the sins of passion for which Oedipus was punished [to include his fiery anger, and his passionate and too often imprudent high intelligence]: that **in condemning them** [Creon and Polyneicês] to the **merciless justice** soon to descend [upon them], **Oedipus acts thoroughly in accord with a moral order which his own experience has enabled him to understand.** (176—my emphasis added)

Now, after such a consideration of the character of Oedipus, we come to Robert Fitzgerald's view

of the play's ending:

And this [character depiction and concordant moral order] **may clarify for us the beautiful ending of the play.** Oedipus has indeed endured his **suffering with courage**, but it is not until he has acted, and acted as the **agent of divine justice**, that the passionate man is fit to embody and to symbolize human divinity [sic]. Only then the Furies [*Eumenidês—the “Gracious Powers”*] stand at his side; only then the gods receive him. **And only then is bitterness lifted from him. His farewell to his daughters is the final word of Oedipus and of the tragedian** [Sophocles himself]. For, as a **great Polish writer** [unnamed, and unknown to me] has written, “**suffering is the lot of man, but not inevitable failure or worthless despair which is without end — suffering, the mark of manhood, which bears within its pain a hope of felicity** [of beatitude] like a **jewel set in iron...**” (177—my emphasis added)

Let us imagine Whittaker Chambers slowly reading and savoring such words, and then awakening alertly from his burden of **weariness** and from the all-too-alluring temptation to deadly **spiritual sloth**. For, he also had two children (daughter and son, Ellen and John) as well as his beloved wife Esther to protect, to think of, and to love abidingly. Loyal so, and more and more intimately, to the end.

Sophocles shows us how Oedipus was especially honored and personally protected by the great king of Athens — Theseus — which was also a great consolation to the blind former king of Thebes who had arrived in rags; and a further support to his courageous integrity and fiery sense of justice. The final consolations of Oedipus at Colonus — though modestly limited and completed amidst a great final mystery in his veiled death — deeply touched the heart of a man such as Whittaker Chambers.

In the remainder of Chambers' letter to William Buckley, he lightly touches upon what appears to be one of Buckley's own desolations after closely reading the dark existentialist book, *Man's Fate* [*La condition humaine*, 1933] by the cultured French Leftist, André Malraux. Chambers characteristically notes some details full of moment:

One cannot pretend to live at that height [Sophocles' depiction of Oedipus at Colonus]. And yet, to reach it even at times is something [although it is not plenitude]. One must have got rid of **great loads of encumbering nonsense** and irrelevance to get there; must have learned to travel quite light — one razor, one change, etc.And there remains **the price — the weariness I mentioned** which none of us complains about, but should take good care not to inflict [weariness] on other people's lives. I did and I'm sorry about it. We're grateful too [for that “something” we've been given].

Something quite different which struck me — what seems to be **your desolation** by *Man's Fate* [about the 1927 Communist Insurrection in Shanghai, China, lasting only 22 days]. **But** [amidst all the horror and death, the Belgian technology dealer, in his humanity as but a minor figure, so called] **Hemmelrich goes back (supreme**

tenderness) to close door left too hastily open on the bodies of his murdered wife and son. Tchen [the revolutionary assassin], about to throw himself and bomb under the automobile believes Pei [his assistant assassin] (**spared to life** because Tchen acts alone) will be able to write more meaningfully by reason of Tchen's [merciful and considerate] act. Kyo [the commander of the Communist Revolt] takes the cyanide with the sense that the concept of man's dignity enjoins control of his own death. Katow [the Soviet Emissary to Shanghai against Chiang Kai-shek], surrendering even that ultimate [choice and “dignity”], divides his cyanide with those [two Chinese men] less able to bear man's fate; and [he himself then] walks toward the locomotive [and death] through a hall of bodies from which comes something like an unutterable sob — the strangled cry. It [the expressed Faith and Fate of a Christian Man like Dante] may also be phrased: “**And the Morning Stars sang together for joy.**” It [Katow's glowing Revolutionary's zeal] may also be phrased: “*Il faut supposer Katow heureux,*” as [Albert] Camus wrote [about the brief moment of happiness to be found in the Myth of Sisyphus]: “*Il faut supposer Sisyphes heureux.*” (William Buckley's Epilogue on “The Spiritual Crisis,” in *Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?* (1970), pp. 532-533—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

One must suppose that Katow himself, as well as Sisyphus, both have a measure of happiness, a brief happiness though it be.

Whittaker Chambers always tried to understand, with deep empathy, what motivated the sincere and zealously dedicated revolutionaries of his time, as is to be seen also in *Cold Friday* (1964). Chambers, in his characteristic justice, never wanted to trivialize nor caricature those motives (as well as their varied consequences). He wanted to understand their purposes.

As Chambers himself revealed in *Cold Friday* — in his unforgettable chapter entitled “The Direct Glance”:

André Malraux, the author of *Man's Fate*, wrote me: “**You are one of those who did not return from Hell with empty hands.**” I did not answer him. How is one to say to another [even Sophocles]: “Great healing spirit”? **For it is not sympathy that the mind craves, but understanding of its purposes.** I do not know, it is not even for me to say, what value may be set on those scraps and tatters of experience that I brought back with me. They, too, are issued for time to judge. I do not know how they may serve, or whether [like Sophocles] they have any power to prevail against the many voices in the West today [as of 1952-1961] that say, “These are scraps and tatters,” and deny them any further meaning.”⁴

CODA

This essay, entitled “Whittaker Chambers and Oedipus at Colonus,” might also have been called “Whittaker Chambers and Robert Fitzgerald's Understanding of Sophocles' Final Play, *Oedipus at*

4 Whittaker Chambers, *Cold Friday* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 68—my emphasis added. This passage comes from Chambers' memorable third chapter, entitled “The Direct Glance,” a witness which should be read again and again.

Colonus.”

As I wrote this appreciative essay, I found myself hoping that Chambers (1901-1961) and Fitzgerald (1910-1985) might somehow have known of each other, at least through their writing and common bond with Sophocles. And I found myself wishing that they had met in person somewhere as “a gift from we know not where.”

That last formulation is the grateful title of Robert Fitzgerald's invited May 1984 Commencement Address presented at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland. It was largely about his experiences in life, as they were especially connected with his long-sustained translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Professor Fitzgerald was to die on 16 January 1985, eight months later; and he was to die of cancer.

One of Robert Fitzgerald's close friends — a Classics Professor then teaching at Bard College (in New York State on the Hudson River north of West Point) — poignantly told me a few years later (in the late 1980s) that, at the time of his Commencement Address, Robert Fitzgerald knew that he was dying of cancer, but no one else in that audience knew of this certain fact, except for his close friend who was there in person at St. John's to hear his dear friend's beautiful talk and to behold his serene dignity and integrity. Moreover, Fitzgerald's close friend told me that Robert Fitzgerald was a Roman Catholic and a faithful one, an additional fact that gave great joy to me. It still does.

Can you not imagine what it would have been like to see Chambers and Fitzgerald together, and what might have happened, under Grace, and might have matured? Both men certainly loved great literature and they also intimately knew several foreign languages and their nuances, also in poetry.

In conclusion, we shall present a few words and special insight from Robert Fitzgerald's May 1984 Commencement Address in Annapolis:

A just expectation of life may include an expectation of moments that seem mysterious gifts from we know not where. These need not be full-scale epiphanies or blasts of revelation. As instances of what I mean, I may mention two incidents in my own life that were not hard to explain, in a way, but were at the same time **teasing implications far from ordinary.** Both occurred during the several years when I worked on putting Homer's *Odyssey* into English verse. After I had lived with the poem for some time, **I felt closely involved not only with Odysseus but also with his patroness, the great goddess Athena, who now and then appeared to him in human guise to put heart into him in time of need. Once [she] even appeared [to him] as a little girl with braided hair.** Then, one October, I had a chance to visit Greece **for the first time**, for a week or so....[T]he tawny land, the brilliant sun, and limpid air at once **seemed to me a divine brew**, a medium from which a god might step in at any moment.

While in Athens, I took it into my head to fly over to Crete for a night....At Heraklion [modern Iraklion], I found a room in a small hotel [for the night]. I did not and do not understand modern [demotic] Greek. They had no English at this hotel, so I had to get by in my poor French. I managed to have some dinner and then wandered out into the streets of Heraklion, where **I felt more and more grievously that particular loneliness** that comes of not knowing a soul and not speaking or understanding the local language. I found myself at last halted in front of a shoe shop, looking at the display, **very disconsolate**, when a voice said, “Good evening, sir!”

What a joy! My heart leaped with pleasure. **I looked up and saw a little girl**, eleven or twelve, **with long pigtails**, standing in the doorway and smiling. “Good evening to you!” said I. “How good it is to hear someone speak English! What is your name?” and she said: “Oh, I'm Athena.”

Well. Of course, it turned out that she had grown up in Camden, New Jersey, and had come over to help her grandmother run the shop [the shoe shop], and had thought me an American because of my suit, and so on — all perfectly plausible. **But did not the goddess always have a good story too?** That girl didn't say her name was Athena — she said she **was** Athena. **Just a few minutes of talk with her put heart into me again.**

Now Robert Fitzgerald modestly moves on to the second representative encounter, and **as if** he were still in full and vivid good health, without any known metastasizing disease growing within him:

The second incident occurred some years later when I was engaged on the second part of *The Odyssey*, which is set, you will remember, on Odysseus' home island of Ithaka. I had contrived another brief visit to Greece in late July and decided to return to Italy by steamer from Piraeus [the port of Athens], stopping over at Ithaka on the way....The mayor [of “the port of Vathi”] produced an interpreter for me in the person of a fifteen year old boy who had grown up in South Africa....On that day [the second day, after considering further the putative island “cult of Odysseus as a demi-god” day] we took one of the decrepit Ithakan taxis to go up the island to the little cove where they say the Phaiakians put Odysseus ashore in his sleep [for his final homecoming—after 20 years away-- to his loyal wife Penelope and their fine son Telemachus, who was then in his early twenties]. Here, near the water, was a grove of tall eucalyptus trees....I walked up the shore a bit to take in the scene and then walked back...As I came abreast of the eucalyptus trees, **one old fellow got up and shuffled toward me**. He stopped and spoke to me **in perfect English, Oxonian English**. He said: “You know, *we* say, that he never died. *We* say he still turns up now and then, looking like a soldier or a sea captain...or...just a stranger.” **He paused and looked serenely at me. And there** in the burning heat [“in the late July heat”] **I shivered from head to foot**. I could not say a word. I bowed my head and walked on.

Just a coincidence, of course — **that an old Ithakan** capable of saying **that** to me in my language, without any preamble, **should have been there on that particular afternoon when for the only time in my life I came to that spot**, and came from **years of companionship**, almost of identification, **with the hero whom he did not have to name**....But that is how the gods used to appear to mortals **out of the radiant Aegean air**, or **how the messengers of heaven [angels] appeared to men in**

another mythical [Christian] landscape, and can we be sure that these were dreams or fantasies? As I began with an outward glance [cf. “the direct glance”] of the larger world, let me conclude....**Openness to expectation**, at any rate, we can encourage in ourselves in one another, **so that the mysterious gifts of experience**, strange exhilarations and **wonders, gifts from we know not where, will not be lost on us.**

May Whittaker Chambers also have retained an “**openness to expectation**” — and thus an **openness in hope** (like the Blessed Mother) — despite his encroaching weariness and “battle fatigue” — so that he would still nobly endure his suffering while freshly preserving his “faculty of intention” and sustained alertness, so as to bear witness about the manifest and then-growing “spiritual crisis” in the West — to include the moral and strategic implications of the Berlin Wall itself; and, especially, the intrinsic disorders in all Religious Liberalism and even (in 1961) the then-still-inchoate disorders of Neo-Modernism and False Ecumenism and Relativizing Situation Ethics seeping more deeply already into the cultural immune system of the Catholic Church, just before the October 1962 opening of the professedly Pastoral Second Vatican Council.

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