

Dramatic Use of Imagery

Imagery:

In a dramatic work, and especially in verse drama, appeals to the sensuous experience or memory of the reader or auditor through repeated references to sight, sound, and other reminders of the physical world. A great deal of attention has been focused on the images and patterns of imagery in Shakespeare's plays, since a study of imagery often reveals the deeper meaning or unconscious motivations of the dramatist.

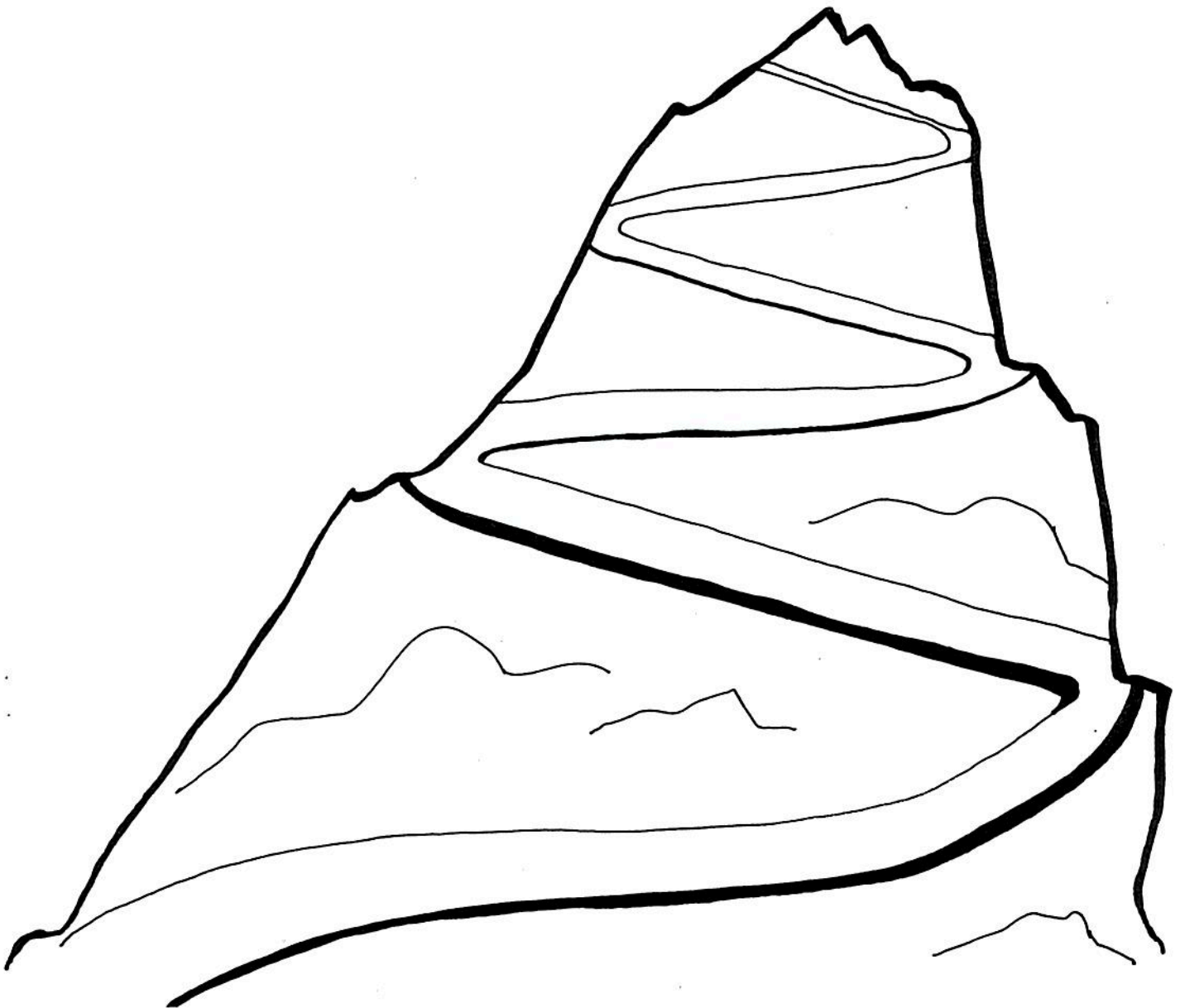
Dominant "image-clusters" often underscore and reinforce the action of a drama in ways of which the reader may be only marginally aware. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* (1594-95) one finds repeated imagery concerned with light and darkness, including lightning, sunlight, stars, flashes of light, violent and brief explosions, and so on. All these images cumulatively suggest the direction of the plot itself. The brief flash of light that is the love between Romeo and Juliet cannot survive in the encompassing darkness of the Montague-Capulet feud. In *King Lear* (1605-6) the dominant imagery is of animals of prey engaged in rapacious acts. Wolves, vipers, foxes, serpents, and others are described as tearing, rending, biting, scratching, and clawing victims. The imagery clearly underscores the violent and rapacious behavior of the offspring (Goneril, Regan, and Edmund) against their helpless fathers (Lear and Gloucester). Imagery, whether used consciously or instinctively by the dramatist, is a powerful device for embodying the very essence of a dramatic action in the language of the play and of making a strong sensory appeal to the reader or auditor.

Use of imagery, especially of recurring imagery, was an essential technique employed by Sophocles in *Oedipus the King*. In particular, those recurring images serve to reveal "deeper meanings" of the dramatist.¹

- I. Mount Kithairon
 - A. What is Mount Kithairon?
 - B. What is the connection between Mount Kithairon and Oedipus?
 - C. Review the text of the play. Identify all passages in which Mount Kithairon is mentioned. Leave room to add to your list as you complete your reading of the play.
 - D. In Greek literature, a mountain climb symbolized a tragic hero's unattainable quest for perfect existence, a point at which the perfect blend of mind and spirit makes man like unto a god. In light of this information, what might Mount Kithairon symbolize with regard to Oedipus' situation?

¹ Vaughn, *Drama A to Z*, 97-98.

- E. Create your own personal Mount Kithairon. Using the sketch below, indicate the mountain climb to your own level of self-awareness. Mark hazardous locations along the way which caused you to stumble in your journey. If you believe you have already experienced a fall from the heights, indicate the point at which you fell and remark upon the subsequent denouement--what you learned from the experience.



Birth _____