

1530 Keep it secret always, and when you come  
To the end of life, then you must hand it on  
To your most cherished son, and he in turn  
Must teach it to his heir, and so forever.  
That way you shall forever hold this city  
Safe from the men of Thebes, the dragon's sons.

For every nation that lives peaceably,  
There will be many others to grow hard  
And push their arrogance to extremes: the gods  
1535 Attend to these things slowly. But they attend  
To those who put off God and turn to madness!  
You have no mind for that, child of Aegeus;  
Indeed, you know already all that I teach.

Let us proceed then to that place  
1540 And hesitate no longer; I am driven  
By an insistent voice that comes from God.  
Children, follow me this way: see, now,  
I have become your guide, as you were mine!  
Come: do not touch me: let me alone discover  
The holy and funereal ground where I  
1545 Must take this fated earth to be my shroud.

This way, O come! The angel of the dead,  
Hermes, and veiled Persephone lead me on!

*(He leads them, firmly and slowly, to the left.)*

O sunlight of no light! Once you were mine!  
1550 This is the last my flesh will feel of you;  
For now I go to shade my ending day  
In the dark underworld. Most cherished friend!  
I pray that you and this your land and all  
Your people may be blessed: remember me,  
Be mindful of my death, and be  
1555 Fortunate in all the time to come!

*(Oedipus goes out, followed by his children and by Theseus  
with his Soldiers. The Chorus lifts its arms to pray.)*

CHORAL POEM

*Chorus*

If I may dare to adore that Lady  
The living never see,  
And pray to the master of spirits plunged in night,  
Who of vast Hell has sovereignty;  
Let not our friend go down in grief and weariness  
1560 To that all-shrouding cold,  
The dead men's plain, the house that has no light.  
Because his sufferings were great, unmerited and untold,  
1565 Let some just god relieve him from distress!  
O powers under the earth, and tameless  
Beast in the passage way,  
1570 Rumbler prone at the gate of the strange hosts,  
Their guard forever, the legends say:  
I pray you, even Death, offspring of Earth and Hell,  
To let the descent be clear  
1575 As Oedipus goes down among the ghosts  
On those dim fields of underground that all men living fear.  
Eternal sleep, let Oedipus sleep well!

*(A long pause. A Messenger comes in, left.)*

SCENE 8

*Messenger*

Citizens, the briefest way to tell you  
1580 Would be to say that Oedipus is no more;  
But what has happened cannot be told so simply—  
It was no simple thing.

*Chorus*

He is gone, poor man?

*Messenger*

You may be sure that he has left this world.

*Chorus*

By God's mercy, was his death a painless one?  
1585

Messenger

*Heroic* That is the thing that seems so marvelous.

*passing* You know, for you were witnesses, how he

Left this place with no friend leading him,  
Acting, himself, as guide for all of us.

Well, when he came to the steep place in the road, 1590  
The embankment there, secured with steps of brass,  
He stopped in one of the many branching paths.

\* This was not far from the stone bowl that marks *heroic locality*  
Theseus' and Pirithous' covenant.

Half-way between that place of stone  
With its hollow pear tree, and the marble tomb, 1595

He sat down and undid his filthy garments;  
Then he called his daughters and commanded  
That they should bring him water from a fountain  
For bathing and libation to the dead.

From there they could see the hill of Demeter, 1600  
Freshener of all things: so they ascended it  
And soon came back with water for their father;  
Then helped him properly to bathe and dress.

When everything was finished to his pleasure,  
And no command of his remained undone, 1605  
Then the earth groaned with thunder from the god below; *Chthonian*  
And as they 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, 1610  
He 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 1615  
Makes all those difficulties disappear:  
That word is love. You never shall 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 1620

And wept, all three. But when they finally stopped,

And no more sobs were heard, then there was

Silence, and in the silence suddenly

A voice cried out to him—of such a kind

It made our hair stand up in panic fear: 1625

Again and again the call came from the god:

"Oedipus! Oedipus! Why are we waiting?

You delay too long; you delay too long to go!"

Then, knowing himself summoned by the spirit,

He asked that the lord Theseus come to him;

And when he had come, said: "O beloved one, 1630

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." 1635

And Theseus swore to do it for his friend,

With such restraint as fits a noble king.

And when he had done so, Oedipus at once

Laid his blind hands upon his daughters, saying:

"Children, you must show your nobility, 1640

And have the courage now to leave this spot.

You must not wish to see what is forbidden,

Or hear what may not afterward be 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, 1645

And then we came away with the sobbing girls.

But after a little while as we withdrew

We turned around—and nowhere saw that man,

But only the king, his hands before his face, 1650

Shading his eyes as if from something awful,  
Fearful and unendurable to see.

Then very quickly we saw him do reverence  
To Earth and to the powers of the air,  
With one address to both.

But in what manner

1655

Oedipus perished, no one of mortal men  
Could tell but Theseus. It was not lightning,  
Bearing its fire from God, that took him off;  
No hurricane was blowing.

1660

But some attendant from the train of Heaven  
Came for him; or else the underworld  
Opened in love the unlit door of earth.  
For he was taken without lamentation,  
Illness or suffering; indeed his end  
Was wonderful if mortal's ever was.

1665

Should someone think I speak intemperately,  
I make no apology to him who thinks so.

*Chorus*

But where are his children and the others with them?

*Messenger*

They are not far away; the sound of weeping  
Should tell you now that they are coming here.

(*Antigone and Ismene enter together.*)

CHORAL DIALOGUE

*Antigone*

Now we may weep, indeed.  
Now, if ever, we may cry  
In bitter grief against our fate,  
Our heritage still unappeased.  
In other days we stood up under it,  
Endured it for his sake,  
The unrelenting horror. Now the finish  
Comes, and we know only

1670

1675

In all that we have seen and done  
Bewildering mystery.

*Chorus*

What happened?

*Antigone*

We can only guess, my friends.

*Chorus*

He has gone?

*Antigone*

He has; as one could wish him to.

Why not? It was not war  
Nor the deep sea that overtook him,  
But something invisible and strange  
Caught him up—or down—  
Into a space unseen.

1680

But we are lost. A deathly  
Night is ahead of us.  
For how, in some far country wandering,  
Or on the lifting seas,  
Shall we eke out our lives?

1685

*Ismene*

I cannot guess. But as for me  
I wish that charnel Hell would take me  
In one death with our father.  
This is such desolation  
I cannot go on living.

1690

*Chorus*

Most admirable sisters:  
Whatever God has brought about  
Is to be borne with courage.  
You must not feed the flames of grief.  
No blame can come to you.

1695

*Antigone*

One may long for the past  
Though at the time indeed it seemed

Nothing but wretchedness and evil.  
Life was not sweet, yet I found it so  
When I could put my arms around my father.  
O father! O my dear!  
Now you are shrouded in eternal darkness,  
Even in that absence  
You shall not lack our love,  
Mine and my sister's love.

1700

*Chorus*

He lived his life.

*Antigone*

He did as he had wished!

*Chorus*

What do you mean?

*Antigone*

In this land among strangers

1705

He died where he chose to die.  
He has his eternal bed well shaded,  
And in his death is not un mourned.  
My eyes are blind with tears  
From crying for you, father.  
The terror and the loss  
Cannot be quieted.  
I know you wished to die in a strange country,  
Yet your death was so lonely!  
Why could I not be with you?

1710

*Ismene*

O pity! What is left for me?  
What destiny awaits us both  
Now we have lost our father?

1715

*Chorus*

Dear children, remember  
That his last hour was free and blessed.  
So make an end of grieving!

1720

Is anyone in all the world  
Safe from unhappiness?

*Antigone*

Let us run back there!

*Ismene*

Why, what shall we do?

*Antigone*

I am carried away with longing—

*Ismene*

For what,—tell me!

1725

*Antigone*

To see the resting place in the earth—

*Ismene*

Of whom?

*Antigone*

Oh, father's! O dear God, I am so unhappy!

*Ismene*

But that is not permitted. Do you not see?

*Antigone*

Do not rebuke me!

*Ismene*

—And remember, too—

1730

*Antigone*

Oh, what?

*Ismene*

He had no tomb, there was no one near!

*Antigone*

Take me there and you can kill me, too!

*Ismene*

Ah! I am truly lost!  
Helpless and so forsaken!

1735

Where shall I go and how shall I live?

*Chorus*

Don't be afraid, now.

*Antigone*  
Yes, but where is a refuge?

*Chorus*  
A refuge has been found—

*Antigone*  
Where do you mean?

*Chorus*  
A place where you will be unharmed!

*Antigone*  
No . . . 1740

*Chorus*  
What are you thinking?

*Antigone*  
I think there is no way  
For me to get home again.

*Chorus*  
Do not go home!

*Antigone*  
My home is in trouble.

*Chorus*  
So it has been before.

*Antigone*  
There was no help for it then: but now it is worse. 1745

*Chorus*  
A wide and desolate world it is for you.

*Antigone*  
Great God! What way is there?  
Do the powers that rule our lives  
Still press me on to hope at all? 1750  
(*Theseus comes in, with attendants.*)

*Theseus*  
Mourn no more, children. Those to whom  
The night of earth gives benediction  
Should not be mourned. Retribution comes.

*Antigone*  
Theseus: we fall on our knees to you!

« 154 »

*Theseus*  
What is it that you desire, children? 1755

*Antigone*  
We wish to see the place ourselves  
In which our father rests.

*Theseus*  
No, no.  
It is not permissible to go there.

*Antigone*  
My lord and ruler of Athens, why?

*Theseus*  
Because your father told me, children, 1760  
That no one should go near the spot,  
No mortal man should tell of it,  
Since it is holy, and is his.  
And if I kept this pledge, he said,  
I should preserve my land from its enemies. 1765  
I swore I would, and the god heard me:  
The oathkeeper who keeps track of all.

*Antigone*  
If this was our father's cherished wish,  
We must be satisfied.  
Send us back, then, to ancient Thebes,  
And we may stop the bloody war 1770  
From coming between our brothers!

*Theseus*  
I will do that, and whatever else  
I am able to do for your happiness,  
For his sake who has gone just now  
Beneath the earth. I must not fail. 1775

*Chorus*  
Now let the weeping cease;  
Let no one mourn again.  
These things are in the hands of God.

ἄλλ' ἀποπαύετε μὴδ' ἐπὶ πλείω  
θρήνον ἐγείρετε·  
πάντως γὰρ ἔχει κῦρος.

Now Let the  
Weeping Cease.