

Creon

Do not seek to be master in everything,
for the things you mastered did not follow you throughout your
life.

(As Creon and Oedipus go out.)

Chorus

You that live in my ancestral Thebes, behold this Oedipus,—
him who knew the famous riddles and was a man most masterful; 1525
not a citizen who did not look with envy on his lot—
see him now and see the breakers of misfortune swallow him!
Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy till
he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain. 1530

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS¹

Translated by Robert Fitzgerald

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1. *Sophocles: Oedipus at Colonus*, an English Version by Robert Fitzgerald, copyright 1941,
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CHARACTERS

Oedipus

Antigone

A Stranger

Ismene

Theseus

Creon

Polyneices

A Messenger

Chorus

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Long after he had left Thebes, the blinded OEDIPUS came with ANTIGONE to the Attic deme of COLONUS, where the oracle of Apollo had prophesied that he was to die.

SCENE: Like the theatre, is in the open air. In the background is the grove of the Furies at Colonus in Attica, about a mile northwest of Athens. A statue or stele of Colonus, a legendary horseman and hero, can be seen stage left. Stage right, a flat rock jutting out among the trees of the grove. Downstage, center, another ridge of rock.

TIME: Early afternoon of a day about twenty years after the action of King Oedipus.

SCENE I

(Oedipus, old, blind, bearded and ragged, but carrying himself well, enters stage right, led by Antigone.)

Oedipus

My daughter—daughter of the blind old man—
Where, I wonder, have we come to now?
What place is this, Antigone? What people?
Who will be kind to Oedipus this evening
And give the wanderer charity?

Though he ask little and receive still less,
It is sufficient:

Suffering and time,
Vast time, have been instructors in contentment,
Which kingliness teaches too.

But now, child,
If you can see a place where we might rest,
Some public place or consecrated park,
Let me stop and sit down there.
And then let us inquire where we may be.

5

10

As foreigners and strangers we must learn
From the local people, and do as they direct.

Antigone

Father, poor tired Oedipus, the towers
That crown the city still seem far away;
As for this place, it is clearly a holy one,
Shady with vines and olive trees and laurel;
Snug in their wings within, the nightingales
Make a sweet music.

Rest on this rough stone.

It was a long road for an old man to travel.

Oedipus

Help me sit down; take care of the blind man.

Antigone

After so long, you need not tell me, father.

Oedipus

And now have you any idea where we are?

Antigone

This place I do not know; the city is Athens.

Oedipus

Yes, everyone we met has told us that.

Antigone

Then shall I go and ask?

Oedipus

Do, child, if there is any life near-by.

Antigone

Oh, but indeed there is; I need not leave you;
I see a man, now, not far away from us.

Oedipus

Is he coming this way? Has he started towards us?

(*The Stranger enters, left.*)

Antigone

Here he is now.

Say what seems best to you,

Father; the man is here.

Oedipus

Friend, my daughter's eyes serve for my own.
She tells me we are fortunate enough to meet you,
And no doubt you will inform us—

Stranger

Do not go on;

First move from where you sit; the place is holy;
It is forbidden to walk upon that ground.

Oedipus

What ground is this? What god is honored here?

Stranger

It is not to be touched, no one may live upon it;
Most dreadful are its divinities, most feared,
Daughters of darkness and mysterious earth.

Oedipus

Under what solemn name shall I invoke them?

Stranger

The people here prefer to address them as Gentle
All-seeing Ones; elsewhere there are other names.

Oedipus

Then may they be gentle to the suppliant.
For I shall never leave this resting place.

Stranger

What is the meaning of this?

Oedipus

It was ordained;

I recognize it now.

Stranger

Without authority

From the city government I dare not move you;
First I must show them what it is you are doing.

Oedipus

Friend, in the name of God, bear with me now!
I turn to you for light; answer the wanderer.

50

Stranger

Speak. You will not find me discourteous.

Oedipus

What is this region into which I've come?

Stranger

Whatever I can tell you, I will tell.
This country, all of it, is blessed ground;
The god of the sea loves it; in it the firecarrier
Prometheus has his influence; in particular
That spot you rest on has been called this earth's
Doorsill of Brass, and buttress of great Athens.
All men of this land claim descent from him
Whose statue stands near-by: Colonus the horseman,
And bear his name in common with their own.
That is this country, stranger: honored less
In histories than in the hearts of the people.

55

60

Oedipus

Then people live in the land?

Stranger

Yes, certainly,

The clan of those descended from that hero.

65

Oedipus

Ruled by a king? Or do the people rule?

Stranger

The land is governed from Athens, by Athens' king.

Oedipus

And who is he whose word has power here?

Stranger

Theseus, son of Aegeus, the king before him.

Oedipus

Ah. Would someone then go to this king for me?

70

Stranger

To tell him what? Perhaps to urge his coming?

Oedipus

To tell him a small favor will gain him much.

Stranger

What service can a blind man render him?

Oedipus

All I shall say will be clear-sighted indeed.

Stranger

Listen, stranger: I wish you no injury;
You seem well-born, though obviously unlucky;
Stay where you are, exactly where I found you,
And I'll inform the people of what you say—
Not in the town, but here—it rests with them
To decide if you should stay or must move on.

75

80

(Exit Stranger, left.)

Oedipus

Child, has he gone?

Antigone

Yes, father. Now you may speak tranquilly,
For only I am with you.

Oedipus (praying)

Ladies whose eyes
Are terrible: Spirits: upon your sacred ground
I have first bent my knees in this new land;
Therefore be mindful of me and of Apollo,
For when he gave me oracles of evil,
He also spoke of this:

85

A resting place,
After long years, in the last country, where
I should find home among the sacred Furies:
That there I might round out my bitter life,
Conferring benefit on those who received me,
A curse on those who have driven me away.

90

Portents, he said, would make me sure of this:
Earthquake, thunder, or God's smiling lightning;
But I am sure of it now, sure that you guided me
With feathery influence upon this road,
And led me here into your hallowed wood.

95

How otherwise could I, in my wandering,
Have sat down first with you in all this land,
I who drink not, with you who love not wine?

100

How otherwise had I found this chair of stone?
Grant me then, goddesses, passage from life at last,
And consummation, as the unearthly voice foretold;
Unless indeed I seem not worth your grace:
Slave as I am to such unending pain
As no man had before.

105

O hear my prayer,
Sweet children of original Darkness! Hear me,
Athens, city named for great Athena,
Honored above all cities in the world!
Pity a man's poor carcase and his ghost,
For Oedipus is not the strength he was.

110

Antigone

Be still. Some elderly men are coming this way,
Looking for the place where you are seated.

Oedipus

I shall be still. You get me clear of the path,
And hide me in the wood, so I may hear
What they are saying. If we know their temper
We shall be better able to act with prudence.

115

(Oedipus and Antigone withdraw into the grove.)

CHORAL DIALOGUE

(The Chorus enters from the left. Here, and throughout the play, its lines may be taken by various members as seems suitable.)

Chorus

Look for him. Who could he be? Where
Is he? Where is the stranger
Impious, blasphemous, shameless!
Use your eyes, search him out!
Cover the ground and uncover him!
Vagabond!

120

The old man must be a vagabond,
Not of our land, for he'd never
Otherwise dare to go in there,
In the inviolate thicket
Of those whom it's futile to fight,
Those whom we tremble to name.
When we pass we avert our eyes—

125

Close our eyes!—
In silence, without conversation,
Shaping our prayers with our lips.
But now, if the story is credible,
Some alien fool has profaned it;
Yet I have looked over all the grove and
Still cannot see him;
Cannot say where he has hidden.

130

135

(Oedipus comes forward from the wood.)

Oedipus

That stranger is I. As they say of the blind,
Sounds are the things I see.

Chorus

Ah!
His face is dreadful! His voice is dreadful!

140

Oedipus

Do not regard me, please, as a law-breaker.

Chorus

Zeus defend us, who is this old man?

Oedipus

One whose fate is not quite to be envied,

O my masters, and men of this land;
That must be evident: why, otherwise,
Should I need this girl
To lead me, her frailty to put my weight on?
Chorus
Ah! His eyes are blind!
And were you brought into the world so?
Unhappy life—and so long!
Well, not if I can help it,
Will you have this curse besides.—
Stranger! you
Trespass there! But beyond there,
In the glade where the grass is still,
Where the honeyed libations drip
In the rill from the brimming spring,
You must not step! O stranger,
It is well to be careful about it!
Most careful!
Stand aside and come down then!
There is too much space between us!
Say, wanderer, can you hear?
If you have a mind to tell us
Your business, or wish to converse with our council,
Come down from that place!
Only speak where it's proper to do so!
Oedipus
Now, daughter, what is the way of wisdom?
Antigone
We must do just as they do here, father;
We should give in now, and listen to them.
Oedipus
Stretch out your hand to me.
Antigone
There, I am near you.

Oedipus
Sirs, let there be no injustice done me,
Once I have trusted you, and left my refuge.
(*Led by Antigone, he starts downstage.*)
Chorus
Never, never, will anyone drive you away
From rest in this land, old man!
Oedipus
Shall I come further?
Chorus
Yes, further.
Oedipus
And now?
Chorus
You must guide him, girl;
You can see how much further to come.
Antigone
Come with your blind step, father;
This way; come where I lead you.
Chorus
Though the land is strange, newcomer,
You've weathered much; take heart;
What the state has long held hateful,
Hate, and respect what it loves.
Oedipus
Lead me on, then, child,
To where we may speak or listen respectfully;
Let us not fight necessity.
Chorus
Now! Go no further than that platform there,
Formed of the natural rock.
Oedipus
This?

Chorus

Far enough; you can hear us.

Oedipus

Shall I sit down?

Chorus

Yes, sit there
To the left on the ridge of the rock.

195

Antigone

Father, this is where I can help you;
You must keep step with me; gently now.

Oedipus

Ah, me!

Antigone

Lean your old body on my arm;
It is I who love you; let yourself down.

200

Oedipus

How bitter blindness is!

(He is seated on the rock downstage, center.)

Chorus

Now that you are at rest, poor man,
Tell us, what is your name?
Who are you, wanderer?
What is the land of your ancestors?

205

Oedipus

I am an exile, friends; but do not ask me . . .

Chorus

What is it you fear to say, old man?

Oedipus

No, no, no! Do not go on
Questioning me! Do not ask my name!

210

Chorus

Why not?

Oedipus

My star was unspeakable.

Chorus

Speak!

Oedipus

My child, what can I say to them?

Chorus

Answer us, stranger; what is your race,
Who was your father?

215

Oedipus

God help me, what will become of me, child?

Antigone

Tell them; there is no other way.

Oedipus

Well, then, I will; I cannot hide it.

Chorus

Between you, you greatly delay. Speak up!

Oedipus

Have you heard of Laius' family?

Chorus

Ah!

220

Oedipus

Of the race of Labdacidae?

Chorus

Ah, Zeus!

Oedipus

And ruined Oedipus?

Chorus

You are he!

Oedipus

Do not take fright from what I say—

Chorus

Oh, dreadful!

Oedipus

I am accursed.

Chorus

Oh, fearful!

Oedipus

Antigone, what will happen now?

Chorus

Away with you! Out with you! Leave our country!

Oedipus

And what of the promises you made me?

Chorus

God will not punish the man
Who makes return for an injury:
Deceivers may be deceived:
They play a game that ends
In grief, and not in pleasure.
Leave this grove at once!
Our country is not for you!
Wind no further
Your clinging evil upon us!

Antigone

O men of reverent mind!
Since you will not suffer my father,
Old man though he is,
And though you know his story—
He never knew what he did—
Take pity still on my unhappiness,
And let me intercede with you for him.
Not with lost eyes, but looking in your eyes
As if I were a child of yours, I beg
Mercy for him, the beaten man! O hear me!
We are thrown upon your mercy as on God's;
Be kinder than you seem!
By all you have and own that is dear to you:
Children, wives, possessions, gods, I pray you!

225

230

235

240

245

250

For you will never see in all the world
A man whom God has led
Escape his destiny!

SCENE 2

Chorus

Child of Oedipus, indeed we pity you,
Just as we pity him for his misfortune;
But we tremble to think of what the gods may do;
We could not dare to speak more generously!

Oedipus

What use is reputation then? What good
Comes of a noble name? A noble fiction!
For Athens, so they say, excels in piety;
Has power to save the wretched of other lands;
Can give them refuge; is unique in this.
Yet, when it comes to me, where is her refuge?
You pluck me from these rocks and cast me out,
All for fear of a name!

Or do you dread
My strength? my actions? I think not, for I . . .
Suffered those deeds more than I acted them,
As I might show if it were fitting here
To tell my father's and my mother's story . . .
For which you fear me, as I know too well.

And yet, how was I evil in myself?
I had been wronged, I retaliated; even had I
Known what I was doing, was that evil?
Then, knowing nothing, I went on. Went on.
But those who wronged me knew, and ruined me

Therefore I beg of you before the gods,
For the same cause that made you move me—
In reverence of your gods—give me this shelter,
And thus accord those powers what is theirs.
Think: their eyes are fixed upon the just,



255

260

265

270

275

Fixed on the unjust, too; no impious man
 C in twist away from them forever.
 Now, in their presence, do not blot your city's
 Lustre by bending to unholy action;
 As you would receive an honest petitioner,
 Give me, too, sanctuary; though my face
 Be dreadful in its look, yet honor me!
 For I come here as one endowed with grace
 By those who are over Nature; and I bring
 Advantage to this race, as you may learn
 More fully when some lord of yours is here.
 Meanwhile be careful to be just.

Chorus
 Old man,
 This argument of yours compels our wonder.
 It was not feebly worded. I am content
 That higher authorities should judge this matter.

Oedipus
 And where is he who rules the land, strangers?

Chorus
 In his father's city; but the messenger
 Who sent us here has gone to fetch him also.

Oedipus
 Do you think a blind man will so interest him
 As to bring him such a distance?

Chorus
 I do, indeed, when he has heard your name.

Oedipus
 But who will tell him that?

Chorus
 It is a long road, and the rumors of travellers
 Have a way of wandering. He will have word of them;
 Take heart—he will be here. Old man, your name

Has gone over all the earth; though he may be
 At rest when the news comes, he will come quickly.

Oedipus
 Then may he come with luck for his own city,
 As well as for me. . . . The good befriend themselves.

Antigone
 O Zeus! What shall I say? How interpret this?

Oedipus
 Antigone, my dear child, what is it?

Antigone
 A woman
 Riding a Sicilian pony and coming towards us;
 She is wearing the wide Thessalian sun-hat;
 I don't know!
 Is it or isn't it? Or am I dreaming?
 I think so; yes!—No. I can't be sure. . . .

Ah, poor child,
 It is no one else but she! And she is smiling
 Now as she comes! It is my dear Ismene!

Oedipus
 What did you say, child?

(*Ismene enters, with one Attendant.*)

Antigone
 That I see your daughter!
 My sister! Now you can tell her by her voice.

Ismene
 O father and sister together! Dearest voices!
 Now I have found you—how, I scarcely know—
 I don't know how I shall see you through my tears!

Oedipus
 Child, you have come?

Ismene
 Father, how old you seem!

Oedipus
Child, are you here?

Ismene
And such a time I had!

Oedipus
Touch me, little one.

Ismene
I shall hold you both!

Oedipus
My children . . . and sisters.

Ismene
Oh, unhappy people! 330

Oedipus
She and I?

Ismene
And I with you, unhappy.

Oedipus
But, child, why have you come?

Ismene
For your sake, father.

Oedipus
You missed me?

Ismene
Yes; and I have news for you.
I came with the one person I could trust.

Oedipus
Why, where are your brothers? Could they not do it? 335

Ismene
They are—where they are. It is a hard time for them.

Oedipus
Ah! They behave as if they were Egyptians,
Bred the Egyptian way! Down there, the men
Sit indoors all day long, weaving;
The women go out and attend to business. 340
Just so your brothers, who should have done this work

Sit by the fire like home-loving girls,
And you two, in their place, must bear my hardships.

One, since her childhood ended and her body
Gained its power, has wandered ever with me, 345
An old man's governess; often in the wild
Forest going without shoes, and hungry,
Beaten by many rains, tired by the sun; 350
Yet she rejected the sweet life of home
So that her father should have sustenance.

And you, my daughter, once before came out,
Unknown to Thebes, bringing me news of all
The oracle had said concerning me; 355
And you remained my faithful outpost there,
When I was driven from that land.

But now,
What news, *Ismene*, do you bring your father?
Why have you left your house to make this journey?
You came for no light reason, I know that;
It must be something serious for me. 360

Ismene
I will pass over the troubles I have had
Searching for your whereabouts, father.
They were hard enough to bear; and I will not
Go through it all again in telling of them.
In any case, it is your sons' troubles 365
That I have come to tell you.
First it was their desire, as it was Creon's,
That the throne should pass to him; that thus the city
Should be defiled no longer: such was their reasoning
When they considered our people's ancient curse
And how it enthralled your pitiful family. 370
But then some fury put it in their hearts—
O pitiful again!—to itch for power:
For seizure of prerogative and throne;
And it was the younger and the less mature

Who stripped his elder brother, Polyneices,
Of place and kingship, and then banished him. 375

But now the people hear he has gone to Argos,
Into the valley land, has joined that nation,
And is enlisting friends among its warriors,
Telling them Argos shall honorably win 380
Thebes and her plain, or else eternal glory.
This is not a mere recital, father;
But terrible truth!

How long will it be, I wonder,
Before the gods take pity on your distress?

Oedipus
You have some hope then that they are concerned 385
With my deliverance?

Ismene
I have, father.
The latest sentences of the oracle . . .

Oedipus
How are they worded? What do they prophesy?

Ismene
That you shall be much solicited by our people
Before your death—and after—for their welfare. 390

Oedipus
And what could anyone hope from such as I?

Ismene
The oracles declare their strength's in you—

Oedipus
When I am finished, I suppose I am strong!

Ismene
For the gods who threw you down sustain you now.

Oedipus
Slight favor, now I am old! My doom was early. 395

Ismene
The proof of it is that Creon is coming to you
For that same reason, and soon: not by and by.

Oedipus
To do what, daughter? Tell me about this.

Ismene
To settle you near the land of Thebes, and so
Have you at hand; but you may not cross the border. 400

Oedipus
What good am I to them outside the country?

Ismene
It is merely that if your burial were unlucky,
That would be perilous for them.

Oedipus
Ah, then!
No god's assistance is needed in comprehending.

Ismene
Therefore they want to keep you somewhere near,
Just at the border, where you'll not be free. 405

Oedipus
And will they compose my shade with Theban dust?

Ismene
Ah, father! No. Your father's blood forbids it.

Oedipus
Then they shall never hold me in their power!

Ismene
If so, some day it will be bitter for them.

Oedipus
How will that be, my child?

Ismene
When they shall stand
Where you are buried, and feel your anger there. 410

Oedipus

What you have said—from whom did you hear it, child?

Ismene

The envoys told me when they returned from Delphi.

Oedipus

Then all this about me was spoken there?

Ismene

According to those men, just come to Thebes.

Oedipus

Has either of my sons had word of this?

Ismene

They both have, and they understand it well.

Oedipus

The scoundrels! So they knew all this, and yet
Would not give up the throne to have me back?

Ismene

It hurts me to hear it, but I can't deny it.

Oedipus

Gods!

Put not their fires of ambition out!

Let the last word be mine upon this battle

They are about to join, with the spears lifting!

I'd see that the one who holds the sceptre now

Would not have power long, nor would the other,

The banished one, return!

These were the two

Who saw me in disgrace and banishment

And never lifted a hand for me. They heard me

Howled from the country, heard the thing proclaimed!

And will they say I wanted exile then,

An appropriate clemency, granted by the state?

That is all false! The truth is that at first

My mind was a boiling caldron; nothing so sweet
As death, death by stoning, could have been given me;

435

Yet no one there would grant me that desire.
It was only later, when my madness cooled,
And I had begun to think my rage excessive,
My punishment too great for what I had done;

440

Then it was that the city—in its good time!—
Decided to be harsh, and drove me out.
They could have helped me then; they could have
Helped him who begot them! Would they do it?

For lack of a little word from that fine pair
Out I went, like a beggar, to wander forever!

445

Only by grace of these two girls, unaided,
Have I got food or shelter or devotion;
The others held their father of less worth
Than sitting on a throne and being king.

Well, they shall never win me in their fight!
Nor will they profit from the rule of Thebes.

450

I am sure of that; I have heard the prophecies
Brought by this girl; I think they fit those others
Spoken so long ago, and now fulfilled.

So let Creon be sent to find me: Creon,
Or any other of influence in the state.

455

If you men here consent—as do those powers
Holy and awful, the spirits of this place—
To give me refuge, then shall this city have
A great savior; and woe to my enemies!

460

Chorus

Oedipus: you are surely worth our pity:

You, and your children, too. And since you claim

Also to be a savior of our land,

I'd like to give you counsel for good luck.

Oedipus

Dear friend! I'll do whatever you advise.

465

Chorus

Make expiation to these divinities
Whose ground you violated when you came.

Oedipus

In what way shall I do so? Tell me, friends.

Chorus

First you must bring libations from the spring
That runs forever; and bring them with clean hands.

470

Oedipus

And when I have that holy water, then?

Chorus

There are some bowls there, by a skillful potter;
Put chaplets round the brims, over the handles.

Oedipus

Of myrtle springs, or woolen stuff, or what?

Chorus

Take the fleeces cropped from a young lamb.

475

Oedipus

Just so; then how must I perform the rite?

Chorus

Facing the quarter of the morning light,
Pour your libations out.

Oedipus

Am I to pour them from the bowls you speak of?

Chorus

In three streams, yes; the last one, empty it.

Oedipus

With what should it be filled? Tell me this, too.

480

Chorus

With water and honey; but with no wine added.

Oedipus

And when the leaf-dark earth receives it?

Chorus

Lay three times nine young shoots of olive on it
With both your hands; meanwhile repeat this prayer:

Oedipus

This I am eager to hear: it has great power.

485

Chorus

That as we call them Eumenides,
Which means the gentle of heart,
May they accept with gentleness
The suppliant and his wish.

So you, or he who prays for you, address them;

But do not speak aloud or raise a cry;
Then come away, and do not turn again.

490

If you will do all this, I shall take heart
And stand up for you; otherwise, O stranger,
I should be seriously afraid for you.

Oedipus

Children, you hear the words of these good people?

Antigone

Yes; now tell us what we ought to do.

Oedipus

It need not be performed by me; I'm far
From having the strength or sight for it—I have neither.

495

Let one of you go and carry out the ritual.
One soul, I think, often can make atonement
For many others, if it be sincere.

Now do it quickly.—Yet do not leave me alone!
I could not move without the help of someone.

500

Ismene

I'll go and do it. But where am I to go?
Where shall I find the holy place, I wonder?

Chorus

On the other side of the wood, girl. If you need it,
You may get help from the attendant there.

505

Ismene

I am going now. Antigone, you'll stay
And care for father. Even if it were hard,
I should not think it so, since it is for him.

(Ismene goes out, right. The chorus draws nearer to Oedipus.)

CHORAL DIALOGUE

Chorus

What evil things have slept since long ago
It is not sweet to awaken;
And yet I long to be told—

510

Oedipus

What?

Chorus

Of that heartbreak for which there was no help,
The pain you have had to suffer.

Oedipus

For kindness' sake, do not open
My old wound, and my shame.

515

Chorus

It is told everywhere, and never dies;
I only want to hear it truly told.

Oedipus

Ah! Ah!

Chorus

Consent I beg you;
Give me my wish, and I shall give you yours.

520

Oedipus

I had to face a thing most terrible,
Not willed by me, I swear;
I would have abhorred it all.

Chorus

So?

Oedipus

Though I did not know, Thebes married me to evil;
Fate and I were joined there.

525

Chorus

Then it was indeed your mother
With whom the thing was done?

Oedipus

Ah! It is worse than death to have to hear it!
Strangers! Yes: and these two girls of mine . . .

530

Chorus

Go on—

Oedipus

These luckless two

Were given birth by her who gave birth to me.

Chorus

These then are daughters; they are also—

Oedipus

Sisters: yes, their father's sisters . . .

535

Chorus

Ah, pity!

Oedipus

Pity, indeed. What throngs

Of pities come into my mind!

Chorus

You suffered—

Oedipus

Yes, unspeakably.

Chorus

You sinned—

Oedipus

No, I did not sin!

Chorus

How not?

Oedipus

I thought

Of her as my reward. Ah, would I had never won it!
Would I had never served the State that day!

540

Chorus

Unhappy man—and you also killed—

Oedipus

What is it now? What are you after?

Chorus

Killed your father!

Oedipus

God in heaven!

You strike again where I am hurt.

Chorus

You killed him.

Oedipus

Killed him. Yet, there is—

545

Chorus

What more?

Oedipus

A just extenuation.

This:

I did not know him; and he wished to murder me.
Before the law—before God—I am innocent!

(The Chorus turns at the approach of Theseus.)

SCENE 3

Chorus

The king is coming! Aegeus' eldest son,
Theseus: news of you has brought him here.

550

(Theseus enters with soldiers, left.)

Theseus

In the old time I often heard men tell
Of the bloody extinction of your eyes.
Even if on my way I were not informed,
I'd recognize you, son of Laius.

The garments and the tortured face

555

Make plain your identity. I am sorry for you.

And I should like to know what favor here

You hope for from the city and from me:

Both you and your unfortunate companion.

Tell me. It would be something dire indeed

560

To make me leave you comfortless; for I

Too was an exile. I grew up abroad,

And in strange lands I fought as few men have

With danger and with death.

Therefore no wanderer shall come, as you do,

565

And be denied my audience or aid.

I know I am only a man; I have no more

To hope for in the end than you have.

Oedipus

Theseus, in those few words your nobility

Is plain to me. I need not speak at length;

570

You have named me and my father accurately,

Spoken with knowledge of my land and exile.

There is, then, nothing left for me to tell

But my desire; and then the tale is ended.

Theseus

Tell me your wish, then; let me hear it now.

575

Oedipus

I come to give you something, and the gift

Is my own beaten self: no feast for the eyes;

Yet in me is a more lasting grace than beauty.

Theseus

What grace is this you say you bring to us?

Oedipus
 In time you'll learn, but not immediately. 580

Theseus
 How long, then, must we wait to be enlightened?

Oedipus
 Until I am dead, and you have buried me.

Theseus
 Your wish is burial? What of your life meanwhile?
 Have you forgotten that?—or do you care?

Oedipus
 It is all implicated in my burial. 585

Theseus
 But this is a brief favor you ask of me.

Oedipus
 See to it, nevertheless! It is not simple.

Theseus
 You mean I shall have trouble with your sons?

Oedipus
 Those people want to take me back there now.

Theseus
 Will you not go? Is exile admirable? 590

Oedipus
 No. When I would have returned, they would not have it.

Theseus
 What childishness! You are surely in no position—

Oedipus
 When you know me, rebuke me; not till then!

Theseus
 Well, tell me more. I must not speak in ignorance.

Oedipus
 Theseus, I have been wounded more than once. 595

Theseus
 Is it your family's curse that you refer to?

Oedipus
 Not merely that; for all Greece buzzes with it.

Theseus
 Then what is the wound that is so pitiless?

Oedipus
 Think how it is with me. I was expelled
 From my own land by my own sons; and now, 600
 As a parricide, my return is not allowed.

Theseus
 How can they summon you, if this is so?

Oedipus
 The sacred oracle compels them to.

Theseus
 They fear some punishment from his forebodings?

Oedipus
 They fear they will be struck down in this land! 605

Theseus
 And how could war arise between these nations?

Oedipus
 Most gentle son of Aegeus! The immortal
 Gods alone have neither age nor death!
 All other things almighty Time disquiets.
 Earth wastes away; the body wastes away; 610
 Faith dies; distrust is born.
 And imperceptibly the spirit changes
 Between a man and his friend, or between two cities.
 For some men soon, for others in later time,
 Their pleasure sickens; or love comes again. 615
 And so with you and Thebes: the sweet season
 Holds between you now; but time goes on,
 Unmeasured Time, fathering numberless

Nights, unnumbered days: and on one day
They'll break apart with spears this harmony—
All for a trivial word. 620

And then my sleeping and long-hidden corpse,
Cold in the earth, will drink hot blood of theirs,
If Zeus endures; if his son's word is true . . .

However: there's no felicity in speaking
Of hidden things. Let me come back to this: 625
Be careful that you keep your word to me;
For if you do you'll never say of Oedipus
That he was given refuge uselessly—
Or if you say it, then the gods have lied.

Chorus

My lord: before you came this man gave promise
Of having power to make his words come true. 630

Theseus

Who would reject his friendship? Is he not
One who would have, in any case, an ally's
Right to our hospitality?
Moreover he has asked grace of our deities,
And offers no small favor in return. 635
As I value that favor, I shall not refuse
This man's desire; I declare him a citizen.

And if it should please our friend to remain here,
I direct you to take care of him;
Or else he may come with me.

Whatever you choose,
Oedipus, we shall be happy to accord. 640
You know your own needs best; I accede to them.

Oedipus

May God bless men like these!

Theseus

What do you say then? Shall it be my house?

Oedipus

If it were right for me. But the place is here . . .

Theseus

And what will you do here?—Not that I oppose you. 645

Oedipus

Here I shall prevail over those who banished me.

Theseus

Your presence, as you say, is a great blessing.

Oedipus

If you are firm in doing what you promise.

Theseus

You can be sure of me; I'll not betray you.

Oedipus

I'll not ask pledges, as I would of scoundrels. 650

Theseus

You'd get no more assurance than by my word.

Oedipus

I wonder how you will behave?

Theseus

You fear?

Oedipus

That men will come—

Theseus

These men will attend to them.

Oedipus

Look: when you leave me—

Theseus

I know what to do!

Oedipus

I am oppressed by fear!

Theseus

I feel no fear. 655

Oedipus

You do not know the menace!

Theseus

I do know

No man is going to take you against my will.

Angry men are liberal with threats

And bluster generally. When the mind

Is master of itself, threats are no matter.

660

These people may have dared to talk quite fiercely

Of taking you; perhaps, as I rather think,

They'll find a sea of troubles in the way.

Therefore I should advise you to take heart.

Even aside from me and my intentions,

Did not Apollo send and guide you here?

665

However it may be, I can assure you,

While I'm away, my name will be your shield.

(Exit Theseus and soldiers. The Chorus turns to the audience.)

CHORAL POEM

Chorus

The land beloved of horsemen, fair

Colonus takes a guest;

He shall not seek another home,

For this, in all the earth and air,

Is most secure and loveliest.

670

In the god's untrodden vale

Where leaves and berries throng,

And wine-dark ivy climbs the bough,

The sweet, sojourning nightingale

Murmurs all day long.

675

No sun nor wind may enter there

Nor the winter's rain;

But eve. through the shadow goes

Dionysus reveler,

Immortal maenads in his train.

680

Here with drops of heaven's dew

At daybreak all the year,

The clusters of narcissus bloom,

Time-hallowed garlands for the brows

Of those great ladies whom we fear.

685

The crocus like a little sun

Blooms with its yellow ray;

The river's fountains are awake,

And his nomadic streams that run

Unthinned forever, and never stay;

690

But like perpetual lovers move

On the maternal land.

And here the choring Muses come,

And the divinity of love

With the gold reins in her hand.

(The Chorus may now shift its grouping or otherwise indicate a change of theme.)

Chorus

And our land has a thing unknown

On Asia's sounding coast

Or in the sea-surrounded west

Where Agamemnon's race has sway:

The olive, fertile and self-sown,

The terror of our enemies

That no hand tames nor tears away—

The blessed tree that never dies!—

But it will mock the swordsman in his rage.

695

Ah, how it flourishes in every field,

Most beautifully here!

The gray-leaved tree, the children's nourisher!

No young man nor one partnered by his age

Knows how to root it out nor make

Barren its yield;

For Zeus the Father smiles on it with sage

700

Eyes that forever are awake, 705
 And Pallas watches with her sea-pale eyes.
 Last and grandest praise I sing
 To Athens, nurse of men,
 For her great pride and for the splendor
 Destiny has conferred on her. 710
 Land from which fine horses spring!
 Land where foals are beautiful!
 Land of the sea and the sea-farer!
 Upon whose lovely littoral
 The god of the sea moves, the son of Time.
 That lover of our land I praise again,
 Who found our horsemen fit
 For first bestowal of the curb and bit, 715
 To discipline the stallion in his prime;
 And strokes to which our oarsmen sing,
 Well-fitted, oak and men,
 Whose long sea-oars in wondrous rhyme
 Flash from the salt foam, following
 The hundred-footed sea-wind and the gull.

*(At the conclusion of this, Antigone is standing stage
 right, looking off-stage attentively.)*

SCENE 4

Antigone
 Land so well spoken of and praised so much! 720
 Now is the time to show those words are true.
Oedipus
 What now, my child?
Antigone (returning to him)
 A man is coming towards us,
 And it is Creon—not unaccompanied, father.
Oedipus
 Most kindly friends! I hope you may give proof,
 And soon, of your ability to protect me! 725

Chorus

Don't be afraid: you'll see. I may be old,
 But the nation's strength has not grown old.

(Enter Creon, right, with guards.)

Creon

Gentlemen, and citizens of this land:
 I can see from your eyes that my arrival
 Has been a cause of sudden fear to you; 730
 Do not be fearful. And say nothing hostile!
 I have not come for any hostile action,
 For I am old, and know this city has
 Power, if any city in Hellas has.
 But for this man here: I, despite my age, 735
 Am sent to bring him to the land of Thebes.
 This is not one man's mission, but was ordered
 By the whole Theban people. I am their emissary
 Because it fell to me as a relative
 To mourn his troubles more than anyone.
 So, now, poor Oedipus, come home. 740
 You have heard my message. The people of the city
 Are right in summoning you—I most of all,
 For most of all, unless I am worst of men,
 I grieve for your unhappiness, old man.
 I see you ravaged as you are, a stranger 745
 Everywhere, never at rest,
 With only a girl to serve you in your need.—
 I never thought she'd fall to such indignity,
 Poor child! And yet she has; 750
 Forever tending you, leading a beggar's
 Life with you; a grown-up girl who knows
 Nothing of marriage; whoever comes can take her. . . .
 Is not this a disgrace? I weep to see it!
 Disgrace for you, for me, for all our people!
 We cannot hide what is so palpable, 755
 But you, if you will listen to me, Oedipus—

And in the name of your father's gods, listen!—
Bury the whole thing now; agree with me
To go back to your city and your home!

Take friendly leave of Athens, for she deserves it;
But you should have more reverence for Thebes,
Since long ago she was your kindly nurse.

760

Oedipus

You brazen rascal! Playing your rascal's tricks
In righteous speeches, as you always would!
Why do you try it? How can you think to take me
Into that snare I should so hate if taken?

That time when I was sick with my private
Agony: when I would lightly have left the earth—
You had no mind to give me what I wanted!

765

But when at long last I had had my fill
Of rage and grief, and in my quiet house
Began to find some comfort: that was the time
You chose to rout me out.

770

How precious was this kinship to you then?
It is the same thing now: you see this city
And all its people being kind to me,
So you attempt to coax me away from them!
A cruel thing, for all your soothing words.

What pleasure is there in being amiable
To those who do not want your amiability?

775

Suppose that when you wanted something terribly
A man should neither grant it you nor give
Sympathy even; but later when you were gluttoned
With all your heart's desire, should give it then,
When charity was no charity at all?
Would you not think the kindness somewhat hollow?
That is the sort of kindness you offer me:
Generous in words, but in reality evil.

780

Now I will tell these men, and prove you evil.
You come to take me, but not to take me home;
Rather to settle me outside the city
So that the city may escape my curse,
Escape from punishment by Athens.

785

Yes;

But you'll not have it. What you'll have is this:
My vengeance active in that land forever;
And what my sons will have of my old kingdom
Is just so much room as they need to die in!

790

Now who knows better the destiny of Thebes?
I do, for I have had the best informants:
Apollo, and Zeus himself who is his father.
And yet you come here with your fraudulent speech
All whetted up! The more you talk, the more
Harm, not good, you'll get by it!—
However, I know you'll never believe that.—

795

Only leave us! Let us live here in peace!
Is it a bad life, if it gives us pleasure?

Creon

Which of us do you consider is more injured
By talk like this? You hurt only yourself.

800

Oedipus

I am perfectly content, so long as you
Can neither wheedle me nor fool these others.

Creon

Unhappy man! Shall it be plain that time
Brings you no wisdom? that you shame your age?

805

Oedipus

What repartee! I know no honest man
Able to speak so well under all conditions!

Creon

To speak much is one thing; to speak to the point's another!

Oedipus

As if you spoke so little but so fittingly!

Creon

No, not fittingly for a mind like yours!

Oedipus

Go away! I speak for these men also!
Stop busybodying here where I must live!

Creon

I call on these—not you!—as witnesses
Of what rejoinder you have made to friends.—
If I ever take you—

Oedipus

With these men fighting for me,
Who is going to take me by violence?

Creon

You'll have pain enough without that, I promise you!

Oedipus

What are you up to? What is behind that brag?

Creon

Your two daughters: one of them I have just now
Had seized and carried off, and I'll take this one!

Oedipus

Ah!

Creon

You'll soon have better reason to groan about it!

Oedipus

You have my child?

Creon

And this one in a moment!

Oedipus

Ah, friends! What will you do? Will you betray me?
Are you not going to drive this thief away?

Chorus

Go, stranger! Off with you! You have no right
To do what you are doing, or what you have done!

825

Creon (to Guards)

You there: it would be well to take her now,
Whether she wants to go with you or not.

(*Two Guards approach Antigone.*)

Antigone

Oh, God, where shall I run? What help is there
From gods or men?

Chorus

What are you doing, stranger?

Creon

I will not touch this man; only her who is mine.

830

Oedipus

O masters of this land!

Chorus

This is unjust!

Creon

No, just!

Chorus

Why so?

Creon

I take what belongs to me!

Oedipus

O Athens!

(*The Guards pinion Antigone's arms.*)

Chorus

What are you doing, stranger? Will you
Let her go? Must we have a test of strength?

835

Creon

Hold off!

Chorus

Not while you persist in doing this!

Creon

Your city will have war if you hurt me!

Oedipus

Did I not proclaim this?

Chorus (to Guards)

Take your hands

Off the child at once!

Creon

What you cannot enforce,

Do not command!

Chorus

I tell you, let go!

Creon

And I tell you—on your way!

840

(The Guards pull Antigone toward the right.)

Chorus

Help! Here, men of Colonus! Help! Help!

The city, my city, is pillaged!

Hurry! Help, ho!

Antigone

They drag me away. How wretched! O friends, friends!

Oedipus (groping)

Where are you, child?

Antigone

They have overpowered me!

845

Oedipus

Give me your hands, little one!

Antigone

I cannot do it!

Creon (to Guards)

Will you get on with her?

(They go out, right.)

Oedipus

God help me now!

Creon

With these two sticks at any rate you'll never

Guide yourself again! But since you wish

To conquer your own people—by whose command,

850

Though I am royal, I have performed this act—

Go on and conquer! Later, I think, you'll learn

That now as before you have done yourself no good

By gratifying your temper against your friends!

Anger has always been your greatest sin!

855

Chorus (approaching Creon)

Control yourself, stranger!

Creon

Don't touch me, I say!

Chorus

I'll not release you! Those two girls were stolen!

Creon

By God, I'll have more booty in a moment

To bring my city! I'll not stop with them!

Chorus

Now what are you about?

Creon

I'll take him, too!

860

Chorus

A terrible thing to say!

Creon

It will be done!

Chorus

Not if the ruler of our land can help it!

Oedipus

Voice of shamelessness! Will you touch me?

Creon

Silence, I say!

Oedipus

No! May the powers here
Not make me silent until I say this curse:
You scoundrel, who have cruelly taken her
Who served my naked eyepits as their eyes!
On you and yours forever may the sun god,
Watcher of all the world, confer such days
As I have had, and such an age as mine!

865

Creon

Do you see this, citizens of this country?

Oedipus

They see both me and you; and they see also
That when I am hurt I have only words to avenge it!

Creon

I'll not stand for it longer! Alone as I am,
And slow with age, I'll try my strength to take him!

875

(Creon goes slowly toward Oedipus.)

Oedipus

Ah!

Chorus

You are a bold man, friend,
If you think you can do this!

Creon

I do think so!

Chorus

If you could do it, our city would be finished!

Creon

In a just cause the weak will beat the strong!

880

Oedipus

You hear his talk?

Chorus

By Zeus, he shall not do it!

Creon

Zeus may determine that, but you will not.

Chorus

Is this not criminal!

Creon (laying hold of Oedipus)

If so, you'll bear it!

Chorus

Ho, everyone! Captains, ho!

Hurry up! Come on the run!

They are well on their way by now!

885

(Theseus enters, left, with armed men.)

Theseus

Why do you shout? What is the matter here?

Of what are you afraid?

You have interrupted me as I was sacrificing

To the great god of the sea, Colonus's patron.

Tell me everything, so I may know;

I do not care to make such haste for nothing.

890

Oedipus

O dearest friend—I recognize your voice—

A despicable thing has just been done to me!

Theseus

What is it? Who is the man who did it? Tell me.

Oedipus

This Creon has had my daughters bound and stolen.

895

Theseus

What's that you say?

Oedipus

Yes; now you know my loss.

Theseus (to his men)

One of you go on the double

To the altar place and rouse the people there;

Make them leave the sacrifice at once

And run full speed, both foot and cavalry

As hard as they can gallop, for the place

Where the two highways come together.

900

The girls must not be permitted to pass there,
Or I will be a laughing-stock to this fellow,
As if I were a man to be handled roughly!
Go on, do as I tell you! Quick!

(Exit Soldier, left.)

This fellow—

If I should act in anger, as he deserves,
I wouldn't let him go without chastisement;
But he shall be subject to the sort of laws
He has himself imported here.—

905

(To Creon)

You: you shall never leave this land of Attica
Until you produce those girls here in my presence;
For your behavior is an affront to me,
A shame to your own people and your nation.

910

You come to a city-state that practices justice,
A state that rules by law, and by law only;
And yet you cast aside her authority,
Take what you please, and worse, by violence,
As if you thought there were no men among us,
Or only slaves; and as if I were nobody.

915

I doubt that Thebes is responsible for you:
She has no propensity for breeding rascals.
And Thebes would not applaud you if she knew
You tried to trick me and to rob the gods
By dragging helpless people from their sanctuary!

920

Were I a visitor in your country—
No matter how immaculate my claims—
Without consent from him who ruled the land,
Whoever he might be, I'd take nothing.

925

I think I have some notion of the conduct
Proper to one who visits a friendly city.
You bring disgrace upon an honorable
Land—your own land, too; a long life
Seems to have left you witless as you are old.

930

I said it once and say it now again:

Someone had better bring those girls here quickly,
Unless you wish to prolong your stay with us
Under close guard, and not much liking it.
This is not just a speech; I mean it, friend.

935

Chorus

Now do you see where you stand? Thebes is just,
But you are adjudged to have acted wickedly.

Creon

It was not that I thought this state unmanly,
Son of Aegeus; nor ill-governed, either;
Rather I did this thing in the opinion
That no one here would love my citizens
So tenderly as to keep them against my will . . .

940

And surely, I thought, no one would give welcome
To an unholy man, a parricide,
A man with whom his mother had been found!

945

Such at least was my estimate of the wisdom
Native to the Arcopagus; I thought
Athens was not a home for such exiles.

950

In that belief I considered him my prize.
Even so, I'd not have touched him had he not
Called down curses on my race and me;
That was an injury that deserved reprisal.
There is no old age for a man's anger,
Only death; the dead cannot be hurt.

955

You'll do whatever you wish in this affair,
For even though my case is right and just,
I am weak, without support. Nevertheless,
Old as I am, I'll try to hold you answerable.

Oedipus

O arrogance unashamed! Whose age do you
Think you are insulting, mine or yours?
The bloody deaths, the incest, the calamities
You speak so glibly of: I suffered them,

960

By fate, against my will! It was God's pleasure,
 And perhaps our race had angered him long ago. 965
 In me myself you could not find such evil
 As would have made me sin against my own.
 And tell me this: if there were prophecies
 Repeated by the oracles of the gods,
 That father's death should come through his own son,
 How could you justly blame it upon me? 970
 On me, who was yet unborn, yet unconceived,
 Not yet existent for my father and mother?
 If then I came into the world—as I did come—
 In wretchedness, and met my father in fight,
 And knocked him down, not knowing that I killed him 975
 Nor whom I killed—again, how could you find
 Guilt in that unmeditated act?
 As for my mother—damn you, you have no shame,
 Though you are her own brother, in forcing me
 To speak of that unspeakable marriage; 980
 But I shall speak, I'll not be silent now
 After you've let your foul talk go so far!
 Yes, she gave me birth—incredible fate!—
 But neither of us knew the truth; and she
 Bore my children also—and then her shame.
 But one thing I do know: you are content 985
 To slander her as well as me for that;
 While I would not have married her willingly
 Nor willingly would I ever speak of it.
 No: I shall not be judged an evil man,
 Neither in that marriage nor in that death
 Which you forever charge me with so bitterly.— 990
 Just answer me one thing:
 If someone tried to kill you here and now,
 You righteous gentleman, what would you do,
 Inquire first if the stranger was your father?
 Or would you not first try to defend yourself?

I think that since you like to be alive 995
 You'd treat him as the threat required; not
 Look around for assurance that you were right.
 Well, that was the sort of danger I was in,
 Forced into it by the gods. My father's soul,
 Were it on earth, I know would bear me out.
 You, however, being a knave—and since you 1000
 Think it fair to say anything you choose,
 And speak of what should not be spoken of—
 Accuse me of all this before these people.
 You also think it clever to flatter Theseus,
 And Athens—her exemplary government;
 But in your flattery you have forgotten this: 1005
 If any country comprehends the honors
 Due to the gods, this country knows them best;
 Yet you would steal me from Athens in my age
 And in my time of prayer; indeed, you seized me,
 And you have taken and carried off my daughters.
 Now for that profanation I make my prayer, 1010
 Calling on the divinities of the grove
 That they shall give me aid and fight for me;
 So you may know what men defend this town.
Chorus
 My lord, our friend is worthy; he has had
 Disastrous fortune; yet he deserves our comfort. 1015
Theseus
 Enough of speeches. While the perpetrators
 Flee, we who were injured loiter here.
Creon
 What will you have me do?—since I am worthless.
Theseus
 You lead us on the way. You can be my escort.
 If you are holding the children in this neighborhood 1020
 You yourself will uncover them to me.

If your retainers have taken them in flight,
The chase is not ours; others are after them.
And they will never have cause to thank their gods
For getting free out of this country.

All right. Move on. And remember that the captor
Is now the captive; the hunter is in the snare.
What was won by stealth will not be kept.

In this you'll not have others to assist you;
And I know well you had them, for you'd never
Dare to go so far in your insolence
Were you without sufficient accomplices.

You must have had a reason for your confidence,
And I must reckon with it. The whole city
Must not seem overpowered by one man.
Do you understand at all? Or do you think
That what I say is still without importance?

Creon

To what you say I make no objection here.
At home we, too, shall determine what to do.

Theseus

If you must threaten, do so on the way.
Oedipus, you stay here, and rest assured
That unless I perish first I'll not draw breath
Until I put your children in your hands.

Oedipus

Bless you for your noble heart, Theseus!
And good luck to you in what you do for us!

*(Two Soldiers take Creon by the arms and march him out,
right, followed by Theseus and the rest of his men.)*

*The Chorus follows a short way and stands
gazing after them.)*

CHORAL POEM

Chorus

Ah, God, to be where the pillagers make stand!
To hear the shout and brazen sound of war!

Or maybe on Apollo's sacred strand,
Or by that torchlit Eleusinian shore

Where pilgrims come, whose lips the golden key
Of sweet-voiced ministers has rendered still, 1050
To cherish there with grave Persephone
Consummate rest from death and mortal ill;

For even to those shades the warrior king
Will press the fighting on—until he take 1055
The virgin sisters from the foemen's ring,
Within his country, for his country's sake!

It may be they will get beyond the plain
And reach the snowy mountain's western side, 1060
If their light chariots have the racing rein,
If they have ponies, and if they can ride;

Yet they'll be taken: for the god they fear
Fights for our land, and Theseus sends forth 1065
His breakneck cavalry with all its gear
Flashing like mountain lightning to the north.

These are the riders of Athens, conquered never;
They honor her whose glory all men know,
And honor the god of the sea, who loves forever 1070
The feminine earth that bore him long ago.

*(A shift of grouping, and the four following stanzas
taken each by a separate voice.)*

Chorus

Has the fight begun? May it begin!
The presentiment enchants my mind 1075
That they shall soon give in!
And free the daughters of the blind
From hurt by their own kind!

*For God will see some noble thing
Before this day is over.*

Forevisioning the fight, and proud, 1080
Would I could be a soaring dove

And circle the tall cloud;
So might I gaze down from above
On the mêlée I love.

*For God will see some noble thing
Before this day is over.*

All highest of immortals! Hail,
Great Zeus who see all things below!
Let not our troopers fail;
But give them luck to snare and throw
And bring the quarry low!

1085

*And you shall see some noble thing
Before this day is over.*

Stern Pallas, hear us! Apollo, hear!
Hunter and sister who give chase
To the swift and dappled deer:
Be our protectors! Lend your grace
To our land and our race!

1090

*And you shall see some noble thing
Before this day is over.*

*(There is a long pause, and then the Chorus turns
to Oedipus in joy.)*

SCENE 5

Chorus

O wanderer! You will not say I lied;
I who kept lookout for you!
I see them now—the two girls—here they come
With our armed men around them!

Oedipus

Ah, where? Do you really mean it?

*(Theseus comes in leading by the hand Antigone and
Ismene, followed by Soldiers.)*

Antigone

Father, father!

I wish some god would give you eyes to see
The noble prince who brings us back to you!

1100

Oedipus

Ah, child! You are really here?

Antigone

Yes, for the strength

Of Theseus and his kind followers saved us.

Oedipus

Come to your father, child, and let me touch you
Whom I had thought never to touch again!

1105

Antigone

It shall be as you ask; I wish it as much as you.

Oedipus

Where are you?

Antigone

We are coming to you together.

Oedipus

My sweet children!

Antigone

To our father, sweet indeed.

Oedipus

My staff and my support!

Antigone

And partners in sorrow.

Oedipus

I have what is dearest to me in the world.
To die, now, would not be so terrible,
Since you are near me.

1110

Press close to me, child,

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.

1115

Antigone

Theseus saved us: he is the one to tell you;
Neither you nor I had much to do with it!

Oedipus

Dear friend: don't be offended if I continue
To talk to these two children overlong; 1120

I had scarce thought they would be seen again!
Be sure I understand that you alone
Made this joy possible for me.

You are the one that saved them, no one else.
And may the gods give you such destiny
As I desire for you: and for your country. 1125

For I have found you truly reverent,
Decent, and straight in speech: you only
Of all mankind.

I know it, and I thank you with these words.
All that I have I owe to your courtesy;—
Now give me your right hand, my lord, 1130
And if it be permitted, let me kiss you. . . .

What am I saying? How can a wretch like me
Desire to touch a man who has no stain
Of evil in him? No, no; I will not do it;
And neither shall you touch me. The only ones 1135
Fit to be fellow sufferers of mine

Are those with such experience as I have.
Receive my salutation where you are.
And for the rest, be kindly to me still
As you have been up to now.

Theseus

That you should talk a long time to your children
In joy at seeing them—why, that's no wonder! 1140
Or that you should address them before me—
There's no offense in that. It is not in words
That I should wish my life to be distinguished,
But rather in things done.

Have I not shown that? I was not a liar 1145
In what I swore I'd do for you, old man.

I am here; and I have brought them back
Alive and safe, for all they were threatened with.
As to how I found them, how I took them, why
Brag of it? You will surely learn from them.

However, there is a matter that just now 1150
Came to my attention on my way here—
A trivial thing to speak of, and yet puzzling;
I want your opinion on it.
It is best for a man not to neglect such things.

Oedipus

What is it, son of Aegeus? Tell me,
So I may know on what you desire counsel. 1155

Theseus

They say some man is here who claims to be
A relative of yours, though not of Thebes;
For some reason he has thrown himself in prayer
Before Poseidon's altar, where I was making
Sacrifice before I came.

Oedipus

What is his country? What is he praying for? 1160

Theseus

All I know is this: he asks, they tell me,
A brief interview with you, and nothing more.

Oedipus

What about, I wonder?
It can't be a slight matter, if he is praying.

Theseus

They say he only asks to speak to you
And then to depart safely by the same road. 1165

Oedipus

Who could it be who would come here to pray?

Theseus
 Think: have you any relative in Argos
 Who might desire this favor of you?

Oedipus
 Dear friend!
 Say no more!

Theseus
 What is the matter with you?

Oedipus
 No more!

Theseus
 But: what is the matter? Tell me. 1170

Oedipus
 When I heard "Argos" I knew the petitioner.

Theseus
 And who is he whom I must prepare to dislike?

Oedipus
 A son of mine, my lord, and a hated one.
 Nothing could be more painful than to listen to him.

Theseus
 But why? Is it not possible to listen
 Without doing anything you need not do?
 Why should it annoy you so to hear him? 1175

Oedipus
 My lord, even his voice is hateful to me.
 Don't beat me down; don't make me yield in this!

Theseus
 But now consider if you are not obliged
 To do so by his supplication here:
 Perhaps you have a duty to the god. 1180

Antigone
 Father: listen to me, even if I am young.
 Allow this man to satisfy his conscience
 And give the gods whatever he thinks their due.
 And let our brother come here, for my sake.

Don't be afraid: he will not throw you off
 In your resolve, nor speak offensively. 1185
 What is the harm in hearing what he says?
 If he has ill intentions, he'll betray them.
 You sired him; even had he wronged you, father,
 And wronged you impiously, still you could not
 Rightfully wrong him in return! 1190
 Do let him come!

Other men have bad sons,
 And other men are swift to anger; yet
 They will accept advice, they will be swayed
 By their friends' pleading, even against their nature.
 Reflect, not on the present, but on the past; 1195
 Think of your mother's and your father's fate
 And what you suffered through them! If you do,
 I think you'll see how terrible an end
 Terrible wrath may have.
 You have, I think, a permanent reminder
 In your lost, irrecoverable eyes. . . . 1200
 Ah, yield to us! If our request is just,
 We need not, surely, be importunate;
 And you, to whom I have not yet been hard,
 Should not be obdurate with me!

Oedipus
 Child, your talk wins you a pleasure
 That will be pain for me. If you have set
 Your heart on it, so be it. 1205

Only, Theseus: if he is to come here,
 Let no one have power over my life!

Theseus
 That is the sort of thing I need hear only
 Once, not twice, old man. I do not boast,
 But you should know your life is safe while mine is. 1210

(*Theseus goes out, left, with his Soldiers, leaving two on guard. The Chorus turns to address the audience.*)

CHORAL POEM

Chorus

Though he has watched a decent age pass by,
 A man will sometimes still desire the world.
 I swear I see no wisdom in that man.
 The endless hours pile up a drift of pain
 More unrelieved each day; and as for pleasure,
 When he is sunken in excessive age,
 You will not see his pleasure anywhere.
 The last attendant is the same for all,
 Old men and young alike, as in its season
 Man's heritage of underworld appears:
 There being then no epithalamion,
 No music and no dance. Death is the finish.

1215

Not to be born surpasses thought and speech.
 The second best is to have seen the light
 And then to go back quickly whence we came.
 The feathery follies of his youth once over,
 What trouble is beyond the range of man?
 What heavy burden will he not endure?
 Jealousy, faction, quarreling, and battle—
 The bloodiness of war, the grief of war.
 And in the end he comes to strengthless age,
 Abhorred by all men, without company,
 Unfriended in that uttermost twilight
 Where he must live with every bitter thing.

1220

1225

1230

1235

This is the truth, not for me only,
 But for this blind and ruined man.
 Think of some shore in the north the
 Concussive waves make stream
 This way and that in the gales of winter:
 It is like that with him:
 The wild wrack breaking over him
 From head to foot, and coming on forever;
 Now from the plunging down of the sun,

1240

1245

Now from the sunrise quarter,
 Now from where the noonday gleams,
 Now from the night and the north.

*(Antigone and Ismene have been looking off-stage, left.
 Antigone turns.)*

SCENE 6

Antigone

I think I see the stranger near us now,
 And no men with him, father; but his eyes
 Swollen with weeping as he comes.

1250

(Polyneices enters, left.)

Oedipus

Who comes?

Antigone

The one whom we have had so long in mind;
 It is he who stands here; it is Polyneices.

Polyneices

Ah, now what shall I do? Sisters, shall I
 Weep for my misfortunes or for those
 I see in the old man, my father,
 Whom I have found here in an alien land,
 With you two girls, an outcast for so long,
 And with such garments! The abominable
 Filth grown old with him, rotting his sides!
 And on his sightless face the ragged hair
 Streams in the wind. There's the same quality
 In the food he carries for his thin old belly.
 All this I learn too late.
 And I swear now that I have been villainous
 In not supporting you! You need not wait
 To hear it said by others!

1255

1260

1265

Only, think:

Compassion limits even the power of God;
 So may there be a limit for you, father!

For all that has gone wrong may still be healed,
And surely the worst is over! 1270

Why are you silent?
Speak to me, father! Don't turn away from me!
Will you not answer me at all? Will you
Send me away without a word?

Not even

Tell me why you are enraged against me?

Daughters of Oedipus, my own sisters, 1275
Try to move your so implacable father;
Do not let him reject me in such contempt!
Make him reply!

I am here on pilgrimage. . . .

Antigone

Poor brother: you yourself must tell him why. 1280
As men speak on they may sometimes give pleasure,
Sometimes annoy, or sometimes touch the heart;
And so somehow provide the mute with voices.

Polyneices

I will speak out then; your advice is fair.
First, however, I must claim the help 1285
Of that same god, Poseidon, from whose altars
The governor of this land has lifted me
And sent me here, giving me leave to speak
And to await response, and a safe passage.

These are the favors I desire from you,
Stranger, and from my sisters and my father. 1290

And now, father, I will tell you why I came.
I am a fugitive, driven from my country,
Because I thought fit, as the eldest born,
To take my seat upon your sovereign throne. 1295
For that, Eteocles, the younger of us,
Banished me—but not by a decision
In argument or ability or arms;
Merely because he won the city over.

Of this I believe the Furies that pursue you
Were indeed the cause: and so I hear 1300
From clairvoyants whom I afterwards consulted. . . .

Then, when I went into the Dorian land,
I took Adrastus as my father-in-law,
And bound to me by oath whatever men
Were known as leaders or as fighters there;
My purpose being to form an expedition
Of seven troops of spearmen against Thebes.— 1305
With which enlistment may I die for justice
Or else expel the men who exiled me!

So it is. Then why should I come here now?
Father, my prayers must be made to you!
Mine and those of all who fight with me! 1310
Their seven columns under seven captains

Even now complete the encirclement of Thebes:
Men like Amphiareus, the hard spear thrower,
Expert in spears and in the ways of eagles;
Second is Tydeus, the Aetolian, 1315
Son of Oeneus; third is Eteoclus,

Born in Argos; fourth is Hippomedon
(His father, Talaus, sent him); Capaneus,
The fifth, has sworn he'll raze the town of Thebes
With fire-brands; and sixth is Parthenopaeus, 1320
An Arcadian who roused himself to war—

Son of that virgin famous in the old time
Who long years afterward conceived and bore him—
Parthenopaeus, Atalanta's son.

And it is I, your son—or if I am not
Truly your son, since evil fathered me,
At least I am called your son—it is I who lead
The fearless troops of Argos against Thebes. 1325

Now in the name of these two children, father,
And for your own soul's sake, we all implore
And beg you to give up your heavy wrath

Against me! I go forth to punish him,
The brother who robbed me of my fatherland!
If we can put any trust in oracles,
They say that those you bless shall come to power.

1330

Now by the gods and fountains of our people,
I pray you, listen and comply! Are we not beggars
Both of us, and exiles, you and I?
We live by paying court to other men;
The same fate follows us.
But as for him—how insupportable!—
He lords it in our house, luxuriates there,
Laughs at us both!

1335

If you will stand by me in my resolve,
I'll waste no time or trouble whipping him;
And then I'll re-establish you at home,
And settle there myself, and throw him out.
If your will is the same as mine, it's possible
To promise this. If not, I can't be saved.

1340

1345

Chorus

For the sake of the one who sent him, Oedipus,
Speak to this man before you send him back.

Oedipus

Yes, gentlemen: but were it not Theseus,
The sovereign of your land, who sent him here,
Thinking it right that he should have an answer,
You never would have heard a sound from me.

1350

Well: he has asked, and he shall hear from me
A kind of answer that will not overjoy him.
You scoundrel!

When it was you who held
Throne and authority—as your brother now
Holds them in Thebes—you drove me into exile:
Me, your own father: made me a homeless man,
Insuring me these rags you blubber over

1355

When you behold them now—now that you, too,
Have fallen on evil days and are in exile.

Weeping is no good now. However long
My life may last, I have to see it through;
But I regard you as a murderer!

1360

For you reduced me to this misery,
You made me an alien. Because of you
I have begged my daily bread from other men.
If I had not these children to sustain me,
I might have lived or died for all your interest.
But they have saved me, they are my support,
And are not girls, but men, in faithfulness.
As for you two, you are no sons of mine!

1365

And so it is that there are eyes that watch you
Even now; though not as they shall watch
If those troops are in fact marching on Thebes.
You cannot take that city. You'll go down
All bloody, and your brother, too.

1370

For I

Have placed that curse upon you before this,
And now I invoke that curse to fight for me,
That you may see a reason to respect
Your parents, though your birth was as it was;
And though I am blind, not to dishonor me.
These girls did not.

1375

And so your supplication and your throne
Are overmastered surely,—if accepted
Justice still has place in the laws of God.
Now go! For I abominate and disown you!
You utter scoundrel! Go with the malediction
I here pronounce for you: that you shall never
Master your native land by force of arms,
Nor ever see your home again in Argos,
The land below the hills; but you shall die
By your own brother's hand, and you shall kill

1385

The brother who banished you. For this I pray.
And I cry out to the hated underworld
That it may take you home; cry out to those
Powers indwelling here; and to that Power
Of furious War that filled your hearts with hate!

1390

Now you have heard me. Go: tell it to Thebes,
Tell all the Thebans; tell your faithful fighting
Friends what sort of honors
Oedipus has divided among his sons!

1395

Chorus

Polyneices, your coming here has given me
No joy at all. Now go away at once.

Polyneices

Ah, what a journey! What a failure!
My poor companions! See the finish now
Of all we marched from Argos for! See me . . .
For I can neither speak of this to anyone
Among my friends, nor lead them back again;
I must go silently to meet this doom.

1400

O sisters—daughters of his, sisters of mine!
You heard the hard curse of our father:
For God's sweet sake, if father's curse comes true,
And if you find some way to return home,
Do not, at least, dishonor me in death!
But give me a grave and what will quiet me.
Then you shall have, besides the praise he now
Gives you for serving him, an equal praise
For offices you shall have paid my ghost.

1405

1410

Antigone

Polyneices, I beseech you, listen to me!

Polyneices

Dearest—what is it? Tell me, Antigone.

1415

Antigone

Withdraw your troops to Argos as soon as you can.
Do not go to your own death and your city's!

Polyneices

But that is impossible. How could I command
That army, even backward, once I faltered?

Antigone

Now why, boy, must your anger rise again?
What is the good of laying waste your homeland?

1420

Polyneices

It is shameful to run; and it is also shameful
To be a laughing-stock to a younger brother.

Antigone

But see how you fulfill his prophecies!
Did he not cry that you should kill each other?

1425

Polyneices

He wishes that. But I cannot give way.

Antigone

Ah, I am desolate! But who will dare
Go with you, after hearing the prophecies?

Polyneices

I'll not report this trifle. A good commander
Tells what is encouraging, not what is not.

1430

Antigone

Then you have made up your mind to this, my brother?

Polyneices

Yes. And do not try to hold me back.
The dark road is before me; I must take it,
Doomed by my father and his avenging Furies.
God bless you if you do what I have asked:
It is only in death that you can help me now.
Now let me go. Good-bye! You will not ever
Look in my eyes again.

1435

Antigone
 You break my heart!

Polyneices
 Do not grieve for me.

Antigone
 Who would not grieve for you,
 Sweet brother! You go with open eyes to death! 1440

Polyneices
 Death, if that must be.

Antigone
 No! Do as I ask!

Polyneices
 You ask the impossible.

Antigone
 Then I am lost,
 If I must be deprived of you!

Polyneices
 All that
 Rests with the powers that are over us,—
 Whether it must be so or otherwise.
 You two—I pray no evil comes to you,
 For all men know you merit no more pain. 1445
 (*Polyneices goes out, left. There is a dead silence;
 then the Chorus meditates.*)

CHORAL POEM AND DIALOGUE

Chorus
 So in this new event we see
 New forms of terror working through the blind,
 Or else inscrutable destiny. 1450
 I am not one to say "This is in vain"
 Of anything allotted to mankind.
 Though some must fall, or fall to rise again,
 Time watches all things steadily— 1455
 (*A terrific peal of thunder.*)

Ah, Zeus! Heaven's height has cracked!
 (*Thunder and lightning.*)

Oedipus
 O my child, my child! Could someone here—
 Could someone bring the hero, Theseus?

Antigone
 Father, what is your reason for calling him?

Oedipus
 God's beating thunder, any moment now, 1460
 Will clap me underground: send for him quickly!
 (*Thunder and lightning.*)

Chorus
 Hear it cascading down the air!
 The god-thrown, the gigantic, holy sound!
 Terror crawls to the tips of my hair! 1465
 My heart shakes!
 There the lightning flames again!
 What heavenly marvel is it bringing 'round?
 I fear it, for it never comes in vain,
 But for man's luck or his despair. . . . 1470
 (*Another terrific peal.*)

Ah, Zeus! Majestic heaven!

Oedipus
 My children, the appointed end has come;
 I can no longer turn away from it.

Antigone
 How do you know? What is the sign that tells you?

Oedipus
 I know it clearly now. Let someone quickly 1475
 Send for the king and bring him here to me!
 (*Thunder and lightning.*)

Chorus
 Hear the wild thunder fall!
 Towering Nature is transfixed!

Be merciful, great spirit, if you run 1480
 This sword of darkness through our mother land;
 Come not for our confusion,
 And deal no blows to me,
 Though your tireless Furies stand
 By him whom I have looked upon.
 Great Zeus, I make my prayer to thee! 1485

Oedipus
 Is the king near by? Will he come in time
 To find me still alive, my mind still clear?

Antigone
 Tell me what it is you have in mind!

Oedipus
 To give him now, in return for his great kindness,
 The blessing that I promised I would give. 1490
 (*Thunder.*)

Chorus
 O noble son, return!
 No matter if you still descend
 In the deep fastness of the sea god's grove,
 To make pure offering at his altar fire:
 Come back quickly, for God's love! 1495
 Receive from this strange man
 Whatever may be his heart's desire
 That you and I and Athens are worthy of.
 My lord, come quickly as you can!
 (*The thunder continues, until it stops abruptly with
 the entrance of Theseus, left.*)

SCENE 7

Theseus
 Now why do you all together 1500
 Set up this shout once more?
 I see it comes from you, as from our friend.
 Is it a lightning bolt from God? a squall

Of rattling hail? Those are familiar things
 When such a tempest rages over heaven.

Oedipus
 My lord, I longed for you to come! This is 1505
 God's work, your lucky coming.

Theseus
 Now, what new
 Circumstance has arisen, son of Laius?

Oedipus
 My life sinks in the scale: I would not die
 Without fulfilling what I promised Athens.

Theseus
 What proof have you that your hour has come? 1510

Oedipus
 The great, incessant thunder and continuous
 Flashes of lightning from the hand of God. 1515

Theseus
 I believe you. I have seen you prophesy
 Many things, none falsely. What must be done?

Oedipus
 I shall disclose to you, O son of Aegeus,
 What is appointed for you and for your city:
 A thing that age will never wear away.
 Presently now, without a soul to guide me, 1520
 I'll lead you to the place where I must die;
 But you must never tell it to any man,
 Not even the neighborhood in which it lies.
 If you obey, this will count more for you
 Than many shields and many neighbors' spears. 1525
 These things are mysteries, not to be explained;
 But you will understand when you come there
 Alone. Alone, because I cannot disclose it
 To any of your men or to my children,
 Much as I love and cherish them. But you

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
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
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
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!
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
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
To that all-shrouding cold,
The dead men's plain, the house that has no light.
Because his sufferings were great, unmerited and untold,
Let some just god relieve him from distress!

O powers under the earth, and tameless
Beast in the passage way,
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
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
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

That is the thing that seems so marvelous.
 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
 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;
 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; 1630
 And when he had come, said: "O beloved one,
 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! 1700
 Now you are shrouded in eternal darkness,
 Even in that absence
 You shall not lack our love,
 Mine and my sister's love.

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 unmourned.
 My eyes are blind with tears
 From crying for you, father. 1710
 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?

Ismene
 O pity! What is left for me? 1715
 What destiny awaits us both
 Now we have lost our father?

Chorus
 Dear children, remember 1720
 That his last hour was free and blessed.
 So make an end of grieving!

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!

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,
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. 1760
I swore I would, and the god heard me:
The oathkeeper who keeps track of all. 1765

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.