

◊EDIPUS AT ◊OLONUS

Characters OEDIPUS
 ANTIGONE, daughter of Oedipus
 A STRANGER
 CHORUS of old men of Colonus
 ISMENE, daughter of Oedipus
 THESEUS, king of Athens
 CREON, king of Thebes
 POLYNICES, son of Oedipus
 A MESSENGER

Scene: A grove in Colonus dedicated to the Furies. A statue or stele of the legendary horseman-hero Colonus can be seen on one side. There is a flat rock, sacred throne of the Furies, in the middle of the orchestra, and another low outcrop of rock to one side.

(Enter Oedipus from one side, old, blind, and ragged, led by Antigone.)

OEDIPUS

My daughter—daughter of the blind old man—
where have we come to now, Antigone?
What lands are these, or holdings of what city?
Who will be kind to Oedipus this evening°
and give alms to the wanderer?
Though he ask little and receive still less,
it is sufficient:
 suffering and time,
vast time, have been instructors in contentment,
which kingliness° teaches too.

But now, child,
 if you can see a resting place—perhaps
 a roadside fountain, or some holy grove,
 tell me and let me pause there and sit down:
 so we may learn our whereabouts, and take
 our cue from what we hear, as strangers should.

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;
 a covert for the song and hush of nightingales
 in their snug wings.

But 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.

(Antigone helps Oedipus sit down on the rock, at center.)

OEDIPUS

What can you say, now, as to where we are?

ANTIGONE

This place I do not know; I know the city
 must be Athens.

OEDIPUS

As all the travelers said.

ANTIGONE

Then shall I go and ask what place this is?

OEDIPUS

Do, child, if there is any life nearby.

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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 toward us?

(Enter a Stranger, from the side.)

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.

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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 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 have no discourtesy from me.

OEDIPUS

What is this region that we two have entered?

STRANGER

As much as I can tell you, I will tell.

This country, all of it, is blessed ground;
the god Poseidon loves it; in it the fire carrier
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
who is sculptured here, Colonus master 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 here on their lands?

STRANGER

They do,
the clan of those descended from that hero.

65

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OEDIPUS

Ruled by a prince? Or by the greater number?

STRANGER

The land is governed from Athens, by the 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

Friend, listen to me: I wish you no injury;
you seem wellborn, 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, to the side.)

OEDIPUS

Child, has he gone?

ANTIGONE

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

[149] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

OEDIPUS

(Praying.)

Ladies whose eyes
are terrible, Spirits, upon your sacred ground
I have first bent my knees in this new land; 85
therefore be mindful of me and of Apollo.
For when he gave me oracles of evil,
he also spoke of this: a resting place,
after long years, in the last country, where
I should find home among the sacred Furies: 90
that I might round out there my bitter life,
conferring benefit on those who received me,
a curse on those who have driven me away.
Portents, he said, would make me sure of this:
earthquake, thunder, or god's smiling lightning.° 95
But I am sure of it now, sure that you guided me
with feathery certainty° upon this road,
and led me here into your hallowed wood.
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 105
as no man had before.
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 carcass and his ghost,
for Oedipus is not the strength he was. 110

ANTIGONE

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

[150] SOPHOCLES

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, 115
we shall be better able to act with prudence.

(Oedipus and Antigone move to one side, into the
grove. Enter the Chorus, from the other side.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

Look for him. Who could he be? Where
is he? Where is the stranger
impious, blasphemous, shameless? 120
Use your eyes, search him out!
Cover the ground and uncover him!
Vagabond!
The old man must be a vagabond,
not of our land, for he'd never 125
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— 130
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 135
still cannot see him,
cannot say where he has hidden.

(Oedipus comes forward with Antigone.)

OEDIPUS [chanting in turn with the Chorus]

That stranger is I. As they say of the blind:
sounds are the things I see.

[151] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

CHORUS

Ah!

His face is dreadful! His voice is dreadful!

140

OEDIPUS

I beg you not to think of me as a criminal.

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?

145

CHORUS [now singing]

ANTISTROPHE A

Ah! His eyes are blind!
And were you brought into the world so?
Unhappy life—and so long!
Well, not if I can stop it
will you have this curse as well.

150

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!

155

Stand aside and come down then!
There is too much space between us!^o
Say, wanderer, can you hear?
If you have a mind to tell us
your business, or wish to converse with our council,

160

165

come away from that place!
Only speak where it's proper to do so!

OEDIPUS [chanting in turn with Antigone]

Now, daughter, what is the way of wisdom?

170

ANTIGONE

We must do just as they do here, father;^o
we should give in now, and listen to them.

OEDIPUS

Stretch out your hand to me.

ANTIGONE

There, I am with you.

OEDIPUS

Sirs, let there be no injustice done me,
once I have trusted you, and left my refuge.

175

(Led by Antigone, he moves forward.)

CHORUS [singing in turn with Antigone and Oedipus]

STROPHE B

Never, never, will anyone drive you away
from rest in this land, old man!

OEDIPUS

Shall I come farther?

CHORUS

Yes, farther.

OEDIPUS

And now?

180

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°

*Stranger in a strange country,
courage, afflicted man!
Whatever the state abhors,
you too abhor, and honor
whatever the state holds dear.*

185

OEDIPUS [chanting]

*Lead me on, then, child,
to where we may speak or listen respectfully.
Let us not fight necessity.*

190

CHORUS [singing]

ANTISTROPHE B

*Now! Go no further than that platform there,
formed of the natural rock.*

OEDIPUS

This?

195

CHORUS

Far enough; you can hear us.

OEDIPUS

Shall I sit down?

CHORUS

*Yes, sit there to the side,
at the edge of the rock.*

ANTIGONE

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

OEDIPUS

Ah, me!

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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, 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 [singing in turn with Antigone and the Chorus]

EPODE

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 family?
Who was your father?*

215

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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!

220

OEDIPUS

Have you heard of Laius' family?

CHORUS

Ah!

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?

225

CHORUS

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

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OEDIPUS

And what of the promises you made me?

CHORUS

God will not punish the man
who makes return for an injury.

230

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!

235

ANTIGONE [still singing]

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—

240

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!

245

By all you have and own that is dear to you,
children, wives, possessions, gods, I pray you!
For you will never see in all the world
a man whom god has led
escape his destiny!

250

CHORUS LEADER [now speaking]

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 dare not speak more generously!

255

[157] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

OEDIPUS [*speaking*]

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,
fixed on the unjust too;° no impious man
can twist away from them forever.
Now, in their presence, do not blot your city's
luster 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 LEADER

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 LEADER

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 LEADER

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

OEDIPUS

But who will tell him that?

CHORUS LEADER

It is a long road, and the rumors of travelers
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 toward us;
she is wearing the wide Thessalian sun hat.

I don't know!

315

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

320

now as she comes! It is my dear Ismene!

OEDIPUS

What did you say, child?

(Ismene enters, with one attendant, from the side.)

ANTIGONE

That I see your daughter!

My sister! Now you can tell her by her voice.

ISMENE

O father and sister together, dearest voices!

325

Now I have found you—how, I scarcely know—

I don't know how I shall see you through my tears!

OEDIPUS

Child, have you 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

Why have you come, child?

ISMENE

Thinking of you, father.

OEDIPUS

You were lonely?

ISMENE

Yes; and I bring 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;

340

the women go out and attend to business.

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. 345
 One, since her childhood ended and her body
 gained its strength, has wandered ever with me,
 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, Polynices, 375

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of place and kingship, and then banished him.
 But now the people hear he has gone to Argos,
 into the valley land, has joined that nation,^o
 and is enlisting friends among its warriors: 380
 telling them Argos shall honorably win
 Thebes and her plain, or else eternal glory.^o
 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
 with my deliverance?

ISMENE

I have, father. 385

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 worn to nothing, strength in me?

ISMENE

For the gods who threw you down sustain you now.

OEDIPUS

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

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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 Thebes outside the country?

ISMENE

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

OEDIPUS

Ah, then!

This does not need divine interpretation.

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 not, some day it will be bitter for them.

OEDIPUS

How will that be, my child?

410

ISMENE

When they shall stand
where you are buried, and feel your anger there.

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.

415

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.

420

OEDIPUS

Gods!

Never quench their fires of ambition!

Let the last word be mine upon this battle
they are about to join, with the spears lifting!

I'd see that he who holds the scepter now
will not have power long, nor would the other,
the banished one, return!

425

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! 430
 And would you 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;
 then it was that the city—in its good time!— 440
 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, a beggar, to wander forever!
 Only by grace of these two girls, unaided, 445
 have I got food or shelter or devotion;
 their two brothers held their father of less worth
 than sitting on a throne and being king.
 Well, they shall never win me in their fight,^o 450
 nor will they profit from the rule of Thebes.
 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, 455
 or any other of influence in the state.
 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 LEADER

Oedipus: you are surely worth our pity:
 you, and your children, too. And since you claim

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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 LEADER

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

OEDIPUS

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

CHORUS LEADER

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 LEADER

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

OEDIPUS

Of myrtle sprigs, or woolen stuff, or what?

CHORUS LEADER

Take the fleeces cropped from a young lamb. 475

OEDIPUS

Just so; then how must I perform the rite?

CHORUS LEADER

Facing the quarter of the morning light
 pour your libations out.

OEDIPUS

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

CHORUS LEADER

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

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OEDIPUS

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

480

CHORUS LEADER

With water and honey; but with no wine added.

OEDIPUS

And when the leaf-dark earth receives it?

CHORUS LEADER

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 this, for it has great power.

485

CHORUS LEADER

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.
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.

490

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

495

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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 LEADER

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

ISMENE

I am going now. Antigone, you will stay
and care for father. If it were difficult,
I should not think it so, since it is for him.^o

(Exit Ismene to the side.)

CHORUS [*singing in turn with Oedipus*]

STROPHE A

What evil things have slept since long ago
it is not sweet to waken;
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!

[169] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

CHORUS

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

520

OEDIPUS

ANTISTROPHE A

*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

You say—

OEDIPUS

*These luckless two
were given birth by her who gave birth to me.*

CHORUS

STROPHE B

These then are daughters; they are also—

OEDIPUS

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

535

CHORUS

Ah, pity!

[170] SOPHOCLES

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 that I had never won it!
Would that I had never served the state that day!°*

540

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE B

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.

545

OEDIPUS

Killed him. Yet, there is—

[171] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

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!°*

(Enter Theseus from the side, with a retinue of soldiers.)

CHORUS LEADER

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

550

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
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
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,
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.

555

560

565

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 wished to go, they would not have it.

THESEUS

What childishness! You are surely in no position—

OEDIPUS

When you know me, admonish me; not now!

THESEUS

Instruct me then. 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; all Hellas talks of that.

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,
as a parricide, my return is not allowed.

600

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;
faith dies; distrust is born;
and imperceptibly the spirit changes
between a man and his friend, or between two cities.

610

For some men soon, for others in later time,
their pleasure sickens; or love comes again.
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.

615

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:
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.

625

CHORUS LEADER

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.
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.
You know your own needs best; I accede to them.

635

640

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.

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.

660

Even aside from me and my intentions,
did not Apollo send and guide you here?
However it may be, I can assure you,
while I'm away, my name will be your shield.

665

(Exit Theseus and soldiers, to the side.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

The land of running horses, fair
Colonus takes a guest;
he shall not seek another home.^o
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 night long.

675

No sun nor wind may enter there
nor the winter's rain;
but ever through the shadow goes
Dionysus reveler,
immortal maenads in his train.

680

ANTISTROPHE A

Here with drops of heaven's dews
at daybreak all the year,
the clusters of narcissus bloom,
time-hallowed garlands for the brows
of those great Ladies whom we fear.

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,^o

685

[178] SOPHOCLES

But like perpetual lovers move
on the maternal land.
And here the choiring Muses come,
and the divinity of Love,
with the gold reins in her hand.

690

STROPHE B

And our land has a thing unknown
on Asia's sounding coast
or in the sea-surrounded west
where Pelops' kin holds sway:^o
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 spearsman in his rage.

695

700

Ah, how it flourishes in every field,
most beautifully here!
The gray-leafed 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 Protector of the Shoot has sage
eyes that forever are awake,
and Pallas watches with her sea-gray eyes.

705

ANTISTROPHE B

Last and grandest praise I sing
to Athens, nurse of men,
for her great pride and for the splendor
destiny has conferred on her.
Land from which fine horses spring!
Land where foals are beautiful!
Land of the sea and the seafarer,
enthroned on her pure littoral
by Cronus' briny son in ancient time.

710

[179] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

That lord, Poseidon, must I praise again
 who found our horsemen fit 715
 for first bestowal of the curb and bit,
 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 track of winds on waters virginal.°

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

A man is coming toward us,
 and it is Creon—not alone, though, father.

OEDIPUS

Most kindly friends! I hope you may give proof,
 and soon, of your ability to protect me! 725

CHORUS LEADER

No fear: it will be proved. I may be old,
 but the nation's strength has not grown old.

(Enter Creon from the side, with soldiers.)

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.

[180] SOPHOCLES

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 know the word I bring. Your countrymen
 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,
 forever tending you, leading a beggar's 750
 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, as she merits;
 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 own life's 765

[181] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

evil, when I would gladly have left my land,
 you had no mind to give me what I wanted!
 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 would draw me away—
 a cruel thing, for all your soothing words.
 Why is it your pleasure to be amiable 775
 to those who do not want your amiability?
 Suppose that when you begged for something desperately
 a man should neither grant it you nor give
 sympathy even; but later when you were glutted
 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? 780
 That is the sort of kindness you offer me:
 generous in words, but in reality evil.
 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 785
 so that the city may escape my curse,
 escape from punishment by Athens.
 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 795
 harm, not good, you'll get by it!—
 however, I know you'll never believe that—
 only leave us! Let us live here in peace!
 Is this misfortune, if it brings contentment?

CREON
 Which of us do you consider is more injured 800
 by talk like this? You hurt only yourself.

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 805
 brings you no wisdom? that you shame your age?

OEDIPUS
 An agile wit! 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! 810

OEDIPUS
 Leave me! I speak for these men, too!
 Spare me your wardship, 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 opposing,
who is going to take me by violence?

815

CREON

You'll suffer without need of that, I promise you!

OEDIPUS

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

CREON

Your daughters: one of them I have just now
had seized and carried off; now I'll take this one!

OEDIPUS

Ah!

CREON

Soon you shall have more reason to groan about it! 820

OEDIPUS

You have my child?

CREON

And this one in a moment!

OEDIPUS

Ah, friends! What will you do? Will you betray me?
Expel this man who has profaned your country!

CHORUS LEADER

Go, and go quickly, stranger! You have no right
to do what you are doing, or what you have done! 825

CREON

(To his soldiers.)

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

(Two soldiers approach Antigone.)

ANTIGONE

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

[184] SOPHOCLES

CHORUS LEADER

What are you doing, stranger?

CREON

I will not touch this man; but she is mine. 830

OEDIPUS

O masters of this land!

CHORUS LEADER

This is unjust!

CREON

No, just!

CHORUS LEADER

Why so?

CREON

I take what belongs to me!

OEDIPUS *[now singing]*

STROPHE

O Athens!

(The soldiers seize Antigone.)

CHORUS *[mostly singing while Creon, Antigone, and Oedipus speak in response]*

What are you doing, stranger? Will you 835
Let her go? Must we have a test of strength?

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 foretell this?

[185] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

CHORUS LEADER

Take your hands
off the child at once!

CREON

What you cannot enforce,
do not command!

CHORUS LEADER

Release the child, I say!

CREON

And I say—march!

840

CHORUS

Help! Here, men of Colonus! Help! Help!
The city, my city, is violated!
Help, ho!

ANTIGONE

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

OEDIPUS

Where are you, child?

ANTIGONE

They have overpowered me!

845

OEDIPUS

Give me your hands, little one!

ANTIGONE

I cannot do it!

CREON

(To the soldiers.)

Will you get on with her?

(Exit the guards to one side, dragging Antigone.)

OEDIPUS

God help me now!°

[186] SOPHOCLES

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,
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!

850

855

CHORUS LEADER

(To Creon, approaching him.)

Control yourself, stranger!

CREON

Don't touch me, I say!

CHORUS LEADER

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

CREON

By god, I'll have more plunder in a moment
to bring my city! I'll not stop with them!

CHORUS LEADER

Now what are you about?

860

CREON

I'll take him, too!

CHORUS LEADER

A terrible thing to say!

CREON

It will be done!

CHORUS LEADER

Not if the ruler of our land can help it!°

OEDIPUS

Voice of shamelessness! Will you touch me?

[187] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

CREON

Silence, I say!

OEDIPUS

No! May the powers here
not make me silent until I say this curse: 865
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! 870

CREON

Do you see this, men of the land of Athens?

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 advances toward Oedipus.)

OEDIPUS

ANTISTROPHE

Ah!

CHORUS

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

CREON

I do think so!

CHORUS

If you could, our city would be finished! 880

CREON

In a just cause the weak will beat the strong!

[188] SOPHOCLES

OEDIPUS

You hear his talk?

CHORUS LEADER

By Zeus, he shall not do it!

CREON

Zeus may determine that, but you will not.

CHORUS LEADER

Is this not criminal?

CREON

(Laying hold of Oedipus.)

If so, you'll bear it!

CHORUS *[singing]*

Ho, everyone! Captains, ho!

Come on the run!

885

They are well on their way by now!

(Enter Theseus from the side, 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 sea god, the patron of Colonus.

Tell me, let me know everything;

I do not care to make such haste for nothing. 890

OEDIPUS

O dearest friend—I recognize your voice—
a fearful 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 this you say?

[189] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

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.
The girls must not be taken past that point,
or I shall be a laughingstock to this fellow,
as if I were a man to be handled roughly!
Go on, do as I tell you! Quick!

900

(Exit a soldier, to the side.)

This man—
if I should act in anger, as he deserves,
I would not let him leave my hands unbloodied;
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.
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.

910

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

920

by dragging helpless people from their sanctuary!
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.
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.

925

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 LEADER

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 . . .
And surely, I thought, no one would give welcome
to an unholy man, a parricide,
a man with whom his mother had been found!
Such at least was my estimate of the wisdom
native to the Areopagus; I thought
Athens was not a home for such exiles.
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.

940

945

950

Only death; the dead cannot be hurt.^o

955

You will do as 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
by fate, against my will! It was god's pleasure,
and perhaps our family had angered him long ago.^o

960

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
nor whom I killed^o—again, how could you find
guilt in that unmeditated act?

975

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;
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.

980

But one thing I do know: you are content
to slander her as well as me for that;

985

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
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
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.

995

1000

You also think it clever to flatter Theseus,
and Athens—her exemplary government.
But in your flattery you have forgotten this:
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;^o indeed, you seized me
and you have seized and carried off my daughters.

1005

Now for that profanation I make my prayer,
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.

1010

CHORUS LEADER

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 1025
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 1030
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.^o
Do you understand at all? Or do you think
that what I say is still without importance? 1035

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 1040
until I put your children in your hands.

OEDIPUS

Bless you for your noble heart, Theseus,
and you are blessed in what you do for us.^o

(Exit Theseus and Creon to the side, with the soldiers.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

Ah, god, to be where the pillagers make stand!^o
To hear the shout and brazen sound of war! 1045
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 1055
will press the fighting on—until he take
the virgin sisters from the foemen's ring,
within his country, for his country's sake!

ANTISTROPHE A

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,^o
they honor her whose glory all men know,
and honor the sea god, who is dear forever 1070
to Rhea Mother, who bore him long ago.

STROPHE B

Swords out—or has the work of swords begun?
 My mind leans to a whisper:
 within the hour they must surrender
 the woeful children of the blinded one;
 this day is shaped by Zeus Artificer.
 I can call up the bright sword play,^o
 but wish the wind would lift me like a dove
 under the tall cloud cover
 to look with my own eyes on this affray.

1075

ANTISTROPHE B

Zeus, lord of all, and eye of heaven on all,
 let our home troop's hard riding
 cut them off, and a charge from hiding
 carry the combat in one shock and fall.
 Stand, helmeted Athena, at our side,
 Apollo, Artemis, come down,
 hunter and huntress of the flickering deer—
 pace with each cavalier
 for honor of our land and Athens town.^o

1085

1090

1095

CHORUS LEADER *[speaking]*

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

What did you say? Ah, where?

*(Enter Theseus from the side, leading Antigone
 and Ismene, escorted 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

[196] SOPHOCLES

OEDIPUS

Ah, child! You are really here?

ANTIGONE

Yes, for the might
 of Theseus and his kind followers saved us.

OEDIPUS

Come to your father, child, and let me touch you both,
 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.^o

1115

[197] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

ANTIGONE

Theseus saved us: he is the one to tell you,
and he can put it briefly and make it clear.^o

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
fit to be fellow sufferers of mine 1135
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 a man is here claiming to be
a relative of yours, though not of Thebes;
for some reason he has thrown himself in prayer^o
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

Upon what subject?
If he's in prayer, it cannot be a trifle.

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 that would come here to pray?^o

THESEUS

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

OEDIPUS

Dear friend!

Say no more!

THESEUS

What has alarmed 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 hold at fault?

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 distress you so to hear him?

1175

OEDIPUS

My lord, even his voice is hateful to me.
Don't overrule me; 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 our 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 though he wrongs you, father,
and wrongs you impiously, still you cannot
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;
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.

1195

You have, I think, a permanent reminder
in your lost, irrecoverable eyes.
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!°

1200

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

1205

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

(Exit Theseus to the side, with his soldiers, leaving two on guard.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE

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 1215
you will not see his pleasure anywhere.
The last attendant is the same for all,
old men and young alike, as in its season 1220
man's heritage of underworld appears:
there being then no epithalamion,
no music and no dance. Death is the finish.

ANTISTROPHE

Not to be born surpasses thought and speech.
The second best is to have seen the light 1225
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? 1230
What heavy burden will he not endure?
Jealousy, faction, quarreling, and battle—
the bloodiness of war, the grief of war. 1235
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.

EPODE

This is the truth, not for me only,

[202] SOPHOCLES

but for this blind and ruined man. 1240
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; 1245
now from the plunging down of the sun,
now from the sunrise quarter,
now from where the noonday gleams,
now from the night and the north.

ANTIGONE

I think I see the stranger near us now,
and no men with him, father; but his eyes 1250
swollen with weeping as he comes.

(Enter Polynices, from the side.)

OEDIPUS

Who comes?

ANTIGONE

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

POLYNICES

Ah, now what shall I do? Sisters, shall I
weep for my misfortunes or for those 1255
I see in the old man, my father,
whom I have found here in an alien land,
with two frail girls, an outcast for so long,
and with such garments! The abominable
filth grown old with him, rotting his sides! 1260
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.

[203] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

And I swear now that I have been villainous
in not supporting you! You need not wait
to hear it said by others! 1265
 Only, think:
compassion limits even the power of god;^o
so may there be a limit with you, father!
For all that has gone wrong may still be healed, 1270
and surely the worst is passed!
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 . . .^o

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.

POLYNICES

I will speak out then; your advice is fair.
First, however, I must claim the help 1285
of that same god, Poseidon, from whose altar
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,
strangers, 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.
For that, Eteocles, the younger of us, 1295
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
from clairvoyants whom I afterward consulted . . .^o 1300
Then, when I went to the Dorian land of Argos,
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 Amphiaraus, 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, Talauus, sent him); Capaneus,
the fifth, has sworn he'll raze the town of Thebes
with fire-brands; and sixth is Parthenopaeus,
an Arcadian who roused himself to war— 1320
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. 1330
If we can put any trust in oracles,
they say that those you bless shall come to power.
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? 1335
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!
If you will stand by me in my resolve, 1340
I'll waste no time or trouble whipping him;°
and then I'll reestablish 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. 1345

CHORUS LEADER

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, 1350
you never would have heard a sound from me.
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: 1355
me, your own father: made me a homeless man,
insuring me these rags you maunder over°
when you behold them—now that you, as well,
have fallen on evil days and are in exile.
Weeping is no good now. However long 1360
my life may last, I have to see it through;
but I regard you as a murderer!
For you reduced me to this misery;
you made me an exile; because of you
I have begged my daily bread from other men.
If I had not these daughters to sustain me, 1365
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!

And so it is that there are eyes that watch you° 1370
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. For I
have placed that curse upon you before this, 1375
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.

And so your supplication and your throne 1380
are overmastered surely—if accepted
Justice still has place in the laws of god.°

Now go! For I abominate and disown you,
wretched scum! Go with the malediction
I here pronounce for you: that you shall never 1385
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
 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 these 1390
 powers indwelling here; and to that power
 of furious War that filled your hearts with hate!
 Now you have heard me. Go: tell it to Thebes,
 tell all the Thebans; tell your faithful fighting
 friends what sort of honors 1395
 Oedipus has divided among his sons!

CHORUS LEADER

Polynices, I find no matter for sympathy
 in your directing yourself here. You may retire.

POLYNICES

Ah, what a journey! What a failure!
 My poor companions! See the finish now 1400
 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.
 O sisters—daughters of his, sisters of mine! 1405
 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.° 1410
 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.

ANTIGONE

Polynices, I beseech you, listen to me!

POLYNICES

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!

POLYNICES

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

ANTIGONE

Now why, boy, must your anger rise again? 1420
 What is the good of laying waste your homeland?

POLYNICES

It is shameful to run; and it is also shameful
 to be a laughingstock to a younger brother.

ANTIGONE

But see how you fulfill his prophecies!
 Did he not cry that you should kill each other? 1425

POLYNICES

He wishes that. But I cannot give way.

ANTIGONE

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

POLYNICES

I'll not report this trifle. A good commander
 tells heartening news, or keeps the news to himself. 1430

ANTIGONE

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

POLYNICES

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! 1435
 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.

ANTIGONE

You break my heart!

POLYNICES

Do not grieve for me.

ANTIGONE

Who would not grieve for you,
sweet brother! You go with open eyes to death.

1440

POLYNICES

Death, if that must be.

ANTIGONE

No! Do as I ask!

POLYNICES

You ask the impossible.

ANTIGONE

Then I am lost,
if I must be deprived of you!

POLYNICES

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

(Exit Polynices to the side.)

CHORUS [singing, while Oedipus and Antigone speak in response]

STROPHE A

So in this new event we see
new forms of terror working through the blind,
or else inscrutable destiny.
I am not one to say "This is in vain"

1450

[210] SOPHOCLES

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 is heard.)

Ah, Zeus! Heaven's height has cracked!

(Thunder and lightning.)

OEDIPUS

O children, children! Could someone here—
could someone bring the hero, Theseus?

ANTIGONE

Father, what is your reason for calling him?

OEDIPUS

Zeus' beating thunder, any moment now,
will clap me underground: send for him quickly!

1460

(Thunder and lightning.)

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE A

Hear it° cascading down the air!
The god-thrown, the gigantic, holy sound!
Terror crawls to the tips of my hair!
My heart shakes!

1465

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 thunderclap.)

STROPHE B

Hear the wild thunder fall!°
Towering Nature is transfixed.
Be merciful, great spirit, if you run
this sword of darkness through our mother land;

1480

[211] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

come not for our confusion,^o
 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 you! 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

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE B

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: 1495
 receive from this strange man
 whatever may be his heart's desire
 that you and I and Athens are worthy of:^o
 My lord, come quickly as you can!

(Enter Theseus from the side.)

THESEUS
 Now why do you all together
 set up this shout once more? 1500
 I see it comes from you, as from our friend.
 Is it a lightning bolt from Zeus? a squall
 of rattling hail? Those are familiar things
 when such a tempest rages over heaven.

[212] SOPHOCLES

OEDIPUS
 My lord, I longed for you to come! This is 1505
 gods' 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?^o 1510

OEDIPUS
 The great, incessant thunder and continuous
 flashes of lightning from the hand of Zeus. 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

[213] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

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.^o
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 now proceed 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!

(Oedipus begins to walk to the side, leading his daughters.)

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!

*(Exit Oedipus to the side, followed by his daughters
and by Theseus with his soldiers.)*

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE

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:^o
let not our friend go down in grief and weariness
to that all-shrouding fold,
the dead man's plain, the house that has no light.
Because his sufferings were great, unmerited and untold,
let some just god relieve him from distress!

ANTISTROPHE

O powers under the earth, and tameless
beast in the passageway,
rumbler prone at the gate of the strange hosts,^o
their guard forever, as 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!

(Enter a Messenger, from the side.)

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 LEADER

He is gone, poor man?

MESSENGER

You may be sure that he has left this world.

CHORUS LEADER

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

MESSANGER

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.
 Halfway between that place of stone 1595
 with its hollow pear tree, and the marble tomb,
 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 saw the hillcrest of Demeter, 1600
 freshener of all things: 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
 frees us of all the weight and pain of life:° 1615
 that word is love. You never shall have more
 from anyone 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 my prince and friend,
 give your right hand now as a binding pledge
 to my two daughters; children, give him your hands.
 Promise that you will never willingly
 betray them, but will carry out in kindness
 whatever is best for them in the days to come." 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 such voices as may not be heard.
 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, sobbing, with the 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,
 shading his eyes as if from something fearful, 1650
 awesome 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 Zeus, 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 LEADER

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.

(Enter Antigone and Ismene together, from the side.)

ANTIGONE [*singing in turn with Ismene and the Chorus*]

STROPHE A

Now we may weep, indeed. 1670
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
in all that we have seen and done 1675
bewildering mystery.

[218] SOPHOCLES

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, 1680
but something invisible and strange
caught him up—or down—
into a space unseen.
But we are lost, dear sister. A deathly
night is ahead of us.
For how, in some far country wandering, 1685
or on the lifting seas,
shall we eke out our lives?

ISMENE

I cannot guess. But as for me,
I wish that murderous Hades would take me 1690
in one death with our father.
This is such desolation
I cannot go on living.

CHORUS

Most admirable sisters:
whatever god has brought about
is to be borne with courage.
You must not feed the flames of grief; 1695
no blame can come to you.

ANTIGONE

ANTISTROPHE A

One may long for the past

[219] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

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.

CHORUS

He lived his life . . .

ANTIGONE

He did as he had wished!

CHORUS

What do you mean?

ANTIGONE

In this land among strangers
 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.
 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?
 What destiny awaits us both
 now we have lost our father?°

CHORUS

Dear children, remember

[220] SOPHOCLES

that his last hour was free and blessed.
 So make an end of grieving!
 Is anyone in all the world
 safe from unhappiness?

ANTIGONE

STROPHE B

Let us run back there!

SMENE

Why, what shall we do?

ANTIGONE

I am carried away with longing—

SMENE

For what—tell me!

ANTIGONE

To see the resting place in the earth—

ISMENE

Of whom?

ANTIGONE

Father's! O, what misery I feel!

ISMENE

But that is not permitted. Do you not see?

ANTIGONE

Do not rebuke me!

ISMENE

And remember, too—

ANTIGONE

Oh, what?

ISMENE

He had no tomb; there was no one near!

ANTIGONE

Take me there and you can kill me, too!

[221] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

1700

1705

1710

1715

1720

1725

1730

ISMENE

Ah! I am truly lost!
Helpless and so forsaken!
Where shall I go and how shall I live?

1735

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE B

You must not fear, 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!

1740

ANTIGONE

No...

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

[222] SOPHOCLES

CHORUS

A wide and desolate world it is for you.°

ANTIGONE

Great god! What way is there, O Zeus?
Do the powers that rule our lives
still press me on to hope at all?

1750

(Enter Theseus from the side, with attendants.)

THESEUS° [chanting in alternation with Antigone and the Chorus until
the end of the play]

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

1765

[223] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

*I swore I would, and the god heard me,
the oathkeeper who makes note of all.°*

ANTIGONE

*If this was our father's cherished wish,
we must be satisfied.*

*Send us back, then, to ancient Thebes,
in hopes we may stop the bloody war
from coming between our brothers!*

1770

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.°*

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ANTIGONE *Translated by Elizabeth Wyckoff*

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