

# The Oedipus Cycle

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#  OEDIPUS THE KING

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###  ARGUMENT

 To Laius, King of Thebes, an oracle foretold that the child born to him by his queen Jocasta would slay his father and wed his mother. So when in time a son was born the infant's feet were riveted together and he was left to die on Mount Cithaeron. But a shepherd found the babe and tended him, and delivered him to another shepherd who took him to his master, the King of Corinth. Polybus being childless adopted the boy, who grew up believing that he was indeed the King's son. Afterwards doubting his parentage he inquired of the Delphic god and heard himself the word declared before to Laius. Wherefore he fled from what he deemed his father's house and in his flight he encountered and unwillingly slew his father Laius. Arriving at Thebes he answered the riddle of the Sphinx and the grateful Thebans made their deliverer king. So he reigned in the room of Laius, and espoused the widowed queen. Children were born to them and Thebes prospered under his rule, but again a grievous plague fell upon the city. Again the oracle was consulted and it bade them purge themselves of blood-guiltiness. Oedipus denounces the crime of which he is unaware, and undertakes to track out the criminal. Step by step it is brought home to him that he is the man. The closing scene reveals Jocasta slain by her own hand and Oedipus blinded by his own act and praying for death or exile.

###  DRAMATIS PERSONAE

####                                 Oedipus.                                 The Priest of Zeus.                                 Creon.                                 Chorus of Theban Elders.                                 Teiresias.                                 Jocasta.                                 Messenger.                                 Herd of Laius.                                 Second Messenger. Scene: Thebes. Before the Palace of Oedipus.

#  OEDIPUS THE KING

 Suppliants of all ages are seated round the altar at the palace doors,
 at their head a PRIEST OF ZEUS.  To them enter OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS
 My children, latest born to Cadmus old,
 Why sit ye here as suppliants, in your hands
 Branches of olive filleted with wool?
 What means this reek of incense everywhere,
 And everywhere laments and litanies?
 Children, it were not meet that I should learn
 From others, and am hither come, myself,
 I Oedipus, your world-renowned king.
 Ho! aged sire, whose venerable locks
 Proclaim thee spokesman of this company,
 Explain your mood and purport.  Is it dread
 Of ill that moves you or a boon ye crave?
 My zeal in your behalf ye cannot doubt;
 Ruthless indeed were I and obdurate
 If such petitioners as you I spurned.

PRIEST
 Yea, Oedipus, my sovereign lord and king,
 Thou seest how both extremes of age besiege
 Thy palace altars—fledglings hardly winged,
 and greybeards bowed with years; priests, as am I
 of Zeus, and these the flower of our youth.
 Meanwhile, the common folk, with wreathed boughs
 Crowd our two market-places, or before
 Both shrines of Pallas congregate, or where
 Ismenus gives his oracles by fire.
 For, as thou seest thyself, our ship of State,
 Sore buffeted, can no more lift her head,
 Foundered beneath a weltering surge of blood.
 A blight is on our harvest in the ear,
 A blight upon the grazing flocks and herds,
 A blight on wives in travail; and withal
 Armed with his blazing torch the God of Plague
 Hath swooped upon our city emptying
 The house of Cadmus, and the murky realm
 Of Pluto is full fed with groans and tears.
      Therefore, O King, here at thy hearth we sit,
 I and these children; not as deeming thee
 A new divinity, but the first of men;
 First in the common accidents of life,
 And first in visitations of the Gods.
 Art thou not he who coming to the town
 of Cadmus freed us from the tax we paid
 To the fell songstress?  Nor hadst thou received
 Prompting from us or been by others schooled;
 No, by a god inspired (so all men deem,
 And testify) didst thou renew our life.
 And now, O Oedipus, our peerless king,
 All we thy votaries beseech thee, find
 Some succor, whether by a voice from heaven
 Whispered, or haply known by human wit.
 Tried counselors, methinks, are aptest found 1To furnish for the future pregnant rede.
 Upraise, O chief of men, upraise our State!
 Look to thy laurels! for thy zeal of yore
 Our country's savior thou art justly hailed:
 O never may we thus record thy reign:—
 "He raised us up only to cast us down."
 Uplift us, build our city on a rock.
 Thy happy star ascendant brought us luck,
 O let it not decline!  If thou wouldst rule
 This land, as now thou reignest, better sure
 To rule a peopled than a desert realm.
 Nor battlements nor galleys aught avail,
 If men to man and guards to guard them tail.

OEDIPUS
 Ah! my poor children, known, ah, known too well,
 The quest that brings you hither and your need.
 Ye sicken all, well wot I, yet my pain,
 How great soever yours, outtops it all.
 Your sorrow touches each man severally,
 Him and none other, but I grieve at once
 Both for the general and myself and you.
 Therefore ye rouse no sluggard from day-dreams.
 Many, my children, are the tears I've wept,
 And threaded many a maze of weary thought.
 Thus pondering one clue of hope I caught,
 And tracked it up; I have sent Menoeceus' son,
 Creon, my consort's brother, to inquire
 Of Pythian Phoebus at his Delphic shrine,
 How I might save the State by act or word.
 And now I reckon up the tale of days
 Since he set forth, and marvel how he fares.
 'Tis strange, this endless tarrying, passing strange.
 But when he comes, then I were base indeed,
 If I perform not all the god declares.

PRIEST
 Thy words are well timed; even as thou speakest
 That shouting tells me Creon is at hand.

OEDIPUS
 O King Apollo! may his joyous looks
 Be presage of the joyous news he brings!

PRIEST
 As I surmise, 'tis welcome; else his head
 Had scarce been crowned with berry-laden bays.

OEDIPUS
 We soon shall know; he's now in earshot range.
 [Enter CREON]
 My royal cousin, say, Menoeceus' child,
 What message hast thou brought us from the god?

CREON
 Good news, for e'en intolerable ills,
 Finding right issue, tend to naught but good.

OEDIPUS
 How runs the oracle? thus far thy words
 Give me no ground for confidence or fear.

CREON
 If thou wouldst hear my message publicly,
 I'll tell thee straight, or with thee pass within.

OEDIPUS
 Speak before all; the burden that I bear
 Is more for these my subjects than myself.

CREON
 Let me report then all the god declared.
 King Phoebus bids us straitly extirpate
 A fell pollution that infests the land,
 And no more harbor an inveterate sore.

OEDIPUS
 What expiation means he?  What's amiss?

CREON
 Banishment, or the shedding blood for blood.
 This stain of blood makes shipwreck of our state.

OEDIPUS
 Whom can he mean, the miscreant thus denounced?

CREON
 Before thou didst assume the helm of State,
 The sovereign of this land was Laius.

OEDIPUS
 I heard as much, but never saw the man.

CREON
 He fell; and now the god's command is plain:
 Punish his takers-off, whoe'er they be.

OEDIPUS
 Where are they?  Where in the wide world to find
 The far, faint traces of a bygone crime?

CREON
 In this land, said the god; "who seeks shall find;
 Who sits with folded hands or sleeps is blind."

OEDIPUS
 Was he within his palace, or afield,
 Or traveling, when Laius met his fate?

CREON
 Abroad; he started, so he told us, bound
 For Delphi, but he never thence returned.

OEDIPUS
 Came there no news, no fellow-traveler
 To give some clue that might be followed up?

CREON
 But one escape, who flying for dear life,
 Could tell of all he saw but one thing sure.

OEDIPUS
 And what was that?  One clue might lead us far,
 With but a spark of hope to guide our quest.

CREON
 Robbers, he told us, not one bandit but
 A troop of knaves, attacked and murdered him.

OEDIPUS
 Did any bandit dare so bold a stroke,
 Unless indeed he were suborned from Thebes?

CREON
 So 'twas surmised, but none was found to avenge
 His murder mid the trouble that ensued.

OEDIPUS
 What trouble can have hindered a full quest,
 When royalty had fallen thus miserably?

CREON
 The riddling Sphinx compelled us to let slide
 The dim past and attend to instant needs.

OEDIPUS
 Well, *I* will start afresh and once again
 Make dark things clear.  Right worthy the concern
 Of Phoebus, worthy thine too, for the dead;
 I also, as is meet, will lend my aid
 To avenge this wrong to Thebes and to the god.
 Not for some far-off kinsman, but myself,
 Shall I expel this poison in the blood;
 For whoso slew that king might have a mind
 To strike me too with his assassin hand.
 Therefore in righting him I serve myself.
 Up, children, haste ye, quit these altar stairs,
 Take hence your suppliant wands, go summon hither
 The Theban commons.  With the god's good help
 Success is sure; 'tis ruin if we fail.
 [Exeunt OEDIPUS and CREON]

PRIEST
 Come, children, let us hence; these gracious words
 Forestall the very purpose of our suit.
 And may the god who sent this oracle
 Save us withal and rid us of this pest.
 [Exeunt PRIEST and SUPPLIANTS]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Sweet-voiced daughter of Zeus from thy gold-paved Pythian shrine
           Wafted to Thebes divine,
 What dost thou bring me?  My soul is racked and shivers with fear.
           (Healer of Delos, hear!)
 Hast thou some pain unknown before,
 Or with the circling years renewest a penance of yore?
 Offspring of golden Hope, thou voice immortal, O tell me.

(Ant. 1)
 First on Athene I call; O Zeus-born goddess, defend!
           Goddess and sister, befriend,
 Artemis, Lady of Thebes, high-throned in the midst of our mart!
           Lord of the death-winged dart!
             Your threefold aid I crave
      From death and ruin our city to save.
 If in the days of old when we nigh had perished, ye drave
 From our land the fiery plague, be near us now and defend us!

(Str. 2)
      Ah me, what countless woes are mine!
      All our host is in decline;
      Weaponless my spirit lies.
      Earth her gracious fruits denies;
      Women wail in barren throes;
      Life on life downstriken goes,
      Swifter than the wind bird's flight,
      Swifter than the Fire-God's might,
      To the westering shores of Night.

(Ant. 2)
      Wasted thus by death on death
      All our city perisheth.
      Corpses spread infection round;
      None to tend or mourn is found.
      Wailing on the altar stair
      Wives and grandams rend the air—
      Long-drawn moans and piercing cries
      Blent with prayers and litanies.
      Golden child of Zeus, O hear
      Let thine angel face appear!

(Str. 3)
 And grant that Ares whose hot breath I feel,
           Though without targe or steel
 He stalks, whose voice is as the battle shout,
 May turn in sudden rout,
 To the unharbored Thracian waters sped,
           Or Amphitrite's bed.
      For what night leaves undone,
      Smit by the morrow's sun
 Perisheth.  Father Zeus, whose hand
 Doth wield the lightning brand,
 Slay him beneath thy levin bold, we pray,
           Slay him, O slay!

(Ant. 3)
 O that thine arrows too, Lycean King,
           From that taut bow's gold string,
 Might fly abroad, the champions of our rights;
           Yea, and the flashing lights
 Of Artemis, wherewith the huntress sweeps
           Across the Lycian steeps.
 Thee too I call with golden-snooded hair,
           Whose name our land doth bear,
 Bacchus to whom thy Maenads Evoe shout;
           Come with thy bright torch, rout,
                Blithe god whom we adore,
                The god whom gods abhor.

[Enter OEDIPUS.]
 OEDIPUS
 Ye pray; 'tis well, but would ye hear my words
 And heed them and apply the remedy,
 Ye might perchance find comfort and relief.
 Mind you, I speak as one who comes a stranger
 To this report, no less than to the crime;
 For how unaided could I track it far
 Without a clue?  Which lacking (for too late
 Was I enrolled a citizen of Thebes)
 This proclamation I address to all:—
 Thebans, if any knows the man by whom
 Laius, son of Labdacus, was slain,
 I summon him to make clean shrift to me.
 And if he shrinks, let him reflect that thus
 Confessing he shall 'scape the capital charge;
 For the worst penalty that shall befall him
 Is banishment—unscathed he shall depart.
 But if an alien from a foreign land
 Be known to any as the murderer,
 Let him who knows speak out, and he shall have
 Due recompense from me and thanks to boot.
 But if ye still keep silence, if through fear
 For self or friends ye disregard my hest,
 Hear what I then resolve; I lay my ban
 On the assassin whosoe'er he be.
 Let no man in this land, whereof I hold
 The sovereign rule, harbor or speak to him;
 Give him no part in prayer or sacrifice
 Or lustral rites, but hound him from your homes.
 For this is our defilement, so the god
 Hath lately shown to me by oracles.
 Thus as their champion I maintain the cause
 Both of the god and of the murdered King.
 And on the murderer this curse I lay
 (On him and all the partners in his guilt):—
 Wretch, may he pine in utter wretchedness!
 And for myself, if with my privity
 He gain admittance to my hearth, I pray
 The curse I laid on others fall on me.
 See that ye give effect to all my hest,
 For my sake and the god's and for our land,
 A desert blasted by the wrath of heaven.
 For, let alone the god's express command,
 It were a scandal ye should leave unpurged
 The murder of a great man and your king,
 Nor track it home.  And now that I am lord,
 Successor to his throne, his bed, his wife,
 (And had he not been frustrate in the hope
 Of issue, common children of one womb
 Had forced a closer bond twixt him and me,
 But Fate swooped down upon him), therefore I
 His blood-avenger will maintain his cause
 As though he were my sire, and leave no stone
 Unturned to track the assassin or avenge
 The son of Labdacus, of Polydore,
 Of Cadmus, and Agenor first of the race.
 And for the disobedient thus I pray:
 May the gods send them neither timely fruits
 Of earth, nor teeming increase of the womb,
 But may they waste and pine, as now they waste,
 Aye and worse stricken; but to all of you,
 My loyal subjects who approve my acts,
 May Justice, our ally, and all the gods
 Be gracious and attend you evermore.

CHORUS
 The oath thou profferest, sire, I take and swear.
 I slew him not myself, nor can I name
 The slayer.  For the quest, 'twere well, methinks
 That Phoebus, who proposed the riddle, himself
 Should give the answer—who the murderer was.

OEDIPUS
 Well argued; but no living man can hope
 To force the gods to speak against their will.

CHORUS
 May I then say what seems next best to me?

OEDIPUS
 Aye, if there be a third best, tell it too.

CHORUS
 My liege, if any man sees eye to eye
 With our lord Phoebus, 'tis our prophet, lord
 Teiresias; he of all men best might guide
 A searcher of this matter to the light.

OEDIPUS
 Here too my zeal has nothing lagged, for twice
 At Creon's instance have I sent to fetch him,
 And long I marvel why he is not here.

CHORUS
 I mind me too of rumors long ago—
 Mere gossip.

OEDIPUS
                Tell them, I would fain know all.

CHORUS
 'Twas said he fell by travelers.

OEDIPUS
                                    So I heard,
 But none has seen the man who saw him fall.

CHORUS
 Well, if he knows what fear is, he will quail
 And flee before the terror of thy curse.

OEDIPUS
 Words scare not him who blenches not at deeds.

CHORUS
 But here is one to arraign him.  Lo, at length
 They bring the god-inspired seer in whom
 Above all other men is truth inborn.
 [Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a boy.]

OEDIPUS
 Teiresias, seer who comprehendest all,
 Lore of the wise and hidden mysteries,
 High things of heaven and low things of the earth,
 Thou knowest, though thy blinded eyes see naught,
 What plague infects our city; and we turn
 To thee, O seer, our one defense and shield.
 The purport of the answer that the God
 Returned to us who sought his oracle,
 The messengers have doubtless told thee—how
 One course alone could rid us of the pest,
 To find the murderers of Laius,
 And slay them or expel them from the land.
 Therefore begrudging neither augury
 Nor other divination that is thine,
 O save thyself, thy country, and thy king,
 Save all from this defilement of blood shed.
 On thee we rest.  This is man's highest end,
 To others' service all his powers to lend.

TEIRESIAS
 Alas, alas, what misery to be wise
 When wisdom profits nothing!  This old lore
 I had forgotten; else I were not here.

OEDIPUS
 What ails thee?  Why this melancholy mood?

TEIRESIAS
 Let me go home; prevent me not; 'twere best
 That thou shouldst bear thy burden and I mine.

OEDIPUS
 For shame! no true-born Theban patriot
 Would thus withhold the word of prophecy.

TEIRESIAS
 *Thy* words, O king, are wide of the mark, and I
 For fear lest I too trip like thee...

OEDIPUS
                                         Oh speak,
 Withhold not, I adjure thee, if thou know'st,
 Thy knowledge.  We are all thy suppliants.

TEIRESIAS
 Aye, for ye all are witless, but my voice
 Will ne'er reveal my miseries—or thine. 2

 OEDIPUS
 What then, thou knowest, and yet willst not speak!
 Wouldst thou betray us and destroy the State?

TEIRESIAS
 I will not vex myself nor thee.  Why ask
 Thus idly what from me thou shalt not learn?

OEDIPUS
 Monster! thy silence would incense a flint.
 Will nothing loose thy tongue?  Can nothing melt thee,
 Or shake thy dogged taciturnity?

TEIRESIAS
 Thou blam'st my mood and seest not thine own
 Wherewith thou art mated; no, thou taxest me.

OEDIPUS
 And who could stay his choler when he heard
 How insolently thou dost flout the State?

TEIRESIAS
 Well, it will come what will, though I be mute.

OEDIPUS
 Since come it must, thy duty is to tell me.

TEIRESIAS
 I have no more to say; storm as thou willst,
 And give the rein to all thy pent-up rage.

OEDIPUS
 Yea, I am wroth, and will not stint my words,
 But speak my whole mind.  Thou methinks thou art he,
 Who planned the crime, aye, and performed it too,
 All save the assassination; and if thou
 Hadst not been blind, I had been sworn to boot
 That thou alone didst do the bloody deed.

TEIRESIAS
 Is it so?  Then I charge thee to abide
 By thine own proclamation; from this day
 Speak not to these or me.  Thou art the man,
 Thou the accursed polluter of this land.

OEDIPUS
 Vile slanderer, thou blurtest forth these taunts,
 And think'st forsooth as seer to go scot free.

TEIRESIAS
 Yea, I am free, strong in the strength of truth.

OEDIPUS
 Who was thy teacher? not methinks thy art.

TEIRESIAS
 Thou, goading me against my will to speak.

OEDIPUS
 What speech? repeat it and resolve my doubt.

TEIRESIAS
 Didst miss my sense wouldst thou goad me on?

OEDIPUS
 I but half caught thy meaning; say it again.

TEIRESIAS
 I say thou art the murderer of the man
 Whose murderer thou pursuest.

OEDIPUS
                               Thou shalt rue it
 Twice to repeat so gross a calumny.

TEIRESIAS
 Must I say more to aggravate thy rage?

OEDIPUS
 Say all thou wilt; it will be but waste of breath.

TEIRESIAS
 I say thou livest with thy nearest kin
 In infamy, unwitting in thy shame.

OEDIPUS
 Think'st thou for aye unscathed to wag thy tongue?

TEIRESIAS
 Yea, if the might of truth can aught prevail.
 OEDIPUS
 With other men, but not with thee, for thou
 In ear, wit, eye, in everything art blind.

TEIRESIAS
 Poor fool to utter gibes at me which all
 Here present will cast back on thee ere long.

OEDIPUS
 Offspring of endless Night, thou hast no power
 O'er me or any man who sees the sun.

TEIRESIAS
 No, for thy weird is not to fall by me.
 I leave to Apollo what concerns the god.

OEDIPUS
 Is this a plot of Creon, or thine own?

TEIRESIAS
 Not Creon, thou thyself art thine own bane.

OEDIPUS
 O wealth and empiry and skill by skill
 Outwitted in the battlefield of life,
 What spite and envy follow in your train!
 See, for this crown the State conferred on me.
 A gift, a thing I sought not, for this crown
 The trusty Creon, my familiar friend,
 Hath lain in wait to oust me and suborned
 This mountebank, this juggling charlatan,
 This tricksy beggar-priest, for gain alone
 Keen-eyed, but in his proper art stone-blind.
 Say, sirrah, hast thou ever proved thyself
 A prophet?  When the riddling Sphinx was here
 Why hadst thou no deliverance for this folk?
 And yet the riddle was not to be solved
 By guess-work but required the prophet's art;
 Wherein thou wast found lacking; neither birds
 Nor sign from heaven helped thee, but *I* came,
 The simple Oedipus; *I* stopped her mouth
 By mother wit, untaught of auguries.
 This is the man whom thou wouldst undermine,
 In hope to reign with Creon in my stead.
 Methinks that thou and thine abettor soon
 Will rue your plot to drive the scapegoat out.
 Thank thy grey hairs that thou hast still to learn
 What chastisement such arrogance deserves.

CHORUS
 To us it seems that both the seer and thou,
 O Oedipus, have spoken angry words.
 This is no time to wrangle but consult
 How best we may fulfill the oracle.

TEIRESIAS
 King as thou art, free speech at least is mine
 To make reply; in this I am thy peer.
 I own no lord but Loxias; him I serve
 And ne'er can stand enrolled as Creon's man.
 Thus then I answer:  since thou hast not spared
 To twit me with my blindness—thou hast eyes,
 Yet see'st not in what misery thou art fallen,
 Nor where thou dwellest nor with whom for mate.
 Dost know thy lineage?  Nay, thou know'st it not,
 And all unwitting art a double foe
 To thine own kin, the living and the dead;
 Aye and the dogging curse of mother and sire
 One day shall drive thee, like a two-edged sword,
 Beyond our borders, and the eyes that now
 See clear shall henceforward endless night.
 Ah whither shall thy bitter cry not reach,
 What crag in all Cithaeron but shall then
 Reverberate thy wail, when thou hast found
 With what a hymeneal thou wast borne
 Home, but to no fair haven, on the gale!
 Aye, and a flood of ills thou guessest not
 Shall set thyself and children in one line.
 Flout then both Creon and my words, for none
 Of mortals shall be striken worse than thou.

OEDIPUS
 Must I endure this fellow's insolence?
 A murrain on thee!  Get thee hence!  Begone
 Avaunt! and never cross my threshold more.

TEIRESIAS
 I ne'er had come hadst thou not bidden me.

OEDIPUS
 I know not thou wouldst utter folly, else
 Long hadst thou waited to be summoned here.

TEIRESIAS
 Such am I—as it seems to thee a fool,
 But to the parents who begat thee, wise.

OEDIPUS
 What sayest thou—"parents"?  Who begat me, speak?

TEIRESIAS
 This day shall be thy birth-day, and thy grave.

OEDIPUS
 Thou lov'st to speak in riddles and dark words.

TEIRESIAS
 In reading riddles who so skilled as thou?

OEDIPUS
 Twit me with that wherein my greatness lies.

TEIRESIAS
 And yet this very greatness proved thy bane.

OEDIPUS
 No matter if I saved the commonwealth.

TEIRESIAS
 'Tis time I left thee.  Come, boy, take me home.

OEDIPUS
 Aye, take him quickly, for his presence irks
 And lets me; gone, thou canst not plague me more.

TEIRESIAS
 I go, but first will tell thee why I came.
 Thy frown I dread not, for thou canst not harm me.
 Hear then:  this man whom thou hast sought to arrest
 With threats and warrants this long while, the wretch
 Who murdered Laius—that man is here.
 He passes for an alien in the land
 But soon shall prove a Theban, native born.
 And yet his fortune brings him little joy;
 For blind of seeing, clad in beggar's weeds,
 For purple robes, and leaning on his staff,
 To a strange land he soon shall grope his way.
 And of the children, inmates of his home,
 He shall be proved the brother and the sire,
 Of her who bare him son and husband both,
 Co-partner, and assassin of his sire.
 Go in and ponder this, and if thou find
 That I have missed the mark, henceforth declare
 I have no wit nor skill in prophecy.
 [Exeunt TEIRESIAS and OEDIPUS]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Who is he by voice immortal named from Pythia's rocky cell,
 Doer of foul deeds of bloodshed, horrors that no tongue can tell?
           A foot for flight he needs
           Fleeter than storm-swift steeds,
           For on his heels doth follow,
 Armed with the lightnings of his Sire, Apollo.
           Like sleuth-hounds too
           The Fates pursue.

(Ant. 1)
 Yea, but now flashed forth the summons from Parnassus' snowy peak,
 "Near and far the undiscovered doer of this murder seek!"
           Now like a sullen bull he roves
           Through forest brakes and upland groves,
           And vainly seeks to fly
           The doom that ever nigh
           Flits o'er his head,
 Still by the avenging Phoebus sped,
           The voice divine,
           From Earth's mid shrine.
 (Str. 2)
 Sore perplexed am I by the words of the master seer.
 Are  they true, are they false?  I know not and bridle my  tongue for
    fear,
 Fluttered with vague surmise; nor present nor future is clear.
 Quarrel of ancient date or in days still near know I none
 Twixt the Labdacidan house and our ruler, Polybus' son.
 Proof is there none:  how then can I challenge our King's good name,
 How in a blood-feud join for an untracked deed of shame?

(Ant. 2)
 All wise are Zeus and Apollo, and nothing is hid from their ken;
 They are gods; and in wits a man may surpass his fellow men;
 But that a mortal seer knows more than I know—where
 Hath this been proven?  Or how without sign assured, can I blame
 Him who saved our State when the winged songstress came,
 Tested and tried in the light of us all, like gold assayed?
 How can I now assent when a crime is on Oedipus laid?

CREON
 Friends, countrymen, I learn King Oedipus
 Hath laid against me a most grievous charge,
 And come to you protesting.  If he deems
 That I have harmed or injured him in aught
 By word or deed in this our present trouble,
 I care not to prolong the span of life,
 Thus ill-reputed; for the calumny
 Hits not a single blot, but blasts my name,
 If by the general voice I am denounced
 False to the State and false by you my friends.

CHORUS
 This taunt, it well may be, was blurted out
 In petulance, not spoken advisedly.

CREON
 Did any dare pretend that it was I
 Prompted the seer to utter a forged charge?

CHORUS
 Such things were said; with what intent I know not.

CREON
 Were not his wits and vision all astray
 When upon me he fixed this monstrous charge?

CHORUS
 I know not; to my sovereign's acts I am blind.
 But lo, he comes to answer for himself.
 [Enter OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS
 Sirrah, what mak'st thou here?  Dost thou presume
 To approach my doors, thou brazen-faced rogue,
 My murderer and the filcher of my crown?
 Come, answer this, didst thou detect in me
 Some touch of cowardice or witlessness,
 That made thee undertake this enterprise?
 I seemed forsooth too simple to perceive
 The serpent stealing on me in the dark,
 Or else too weak to scotch it when I saw.
 This *thou* art witless seeking to possess
 Without a following or friends the crown,
 A prize that followers and wealth must win.

CREON
 Attend me.  Thou hast spoken, 'tis my turn
 To make reply.  Then having heard me, judge.

OEDIPUS
 Thou art glib of tongue, but I am slow to learn
 Of thee; I know too well thy venomous hate.

CREON
 First I would argue out this very point.

OEDIPUS
 O argue not that thou art not a rogue.

CREON
 If thou dost count a virtue stubbornness,
 Unschooled by reason, thou art much astray.

OEDIPUS
 If thou dost hold a kinsman may be wronged,
 And no pains follow, thou art much to seek.

CREON
 Therein thou judgest rightly, but this wrong
 That thou allegest—tell me what it is.

OEDIPUS
 Didst thou or didst thou not advise that I
 Should call the priest?

CREON
                          Yes, and I stand to it.

OEDIPUS
 Tell me how long is it since Laius...

CREON
 Since Laius...?  I follow not thy drift.

OEDIPUS
 By violent hands was spirited away.

CREON
 In the dim past, a many years agone.

OEDIPUS
 Did the same prophet then pursue his craft?

CREON
 Yes, skilled as now and in no less repute.

OEDIPUS
 Did he at that time ever glance at me?

CREON
 Not to my knowledge, not when I was by.

OEDIPUS
 But was no search and inquisition made?

CREON
 Surely full quest was made, but nothing learnt.

OEDIPUS
 Why failed the seer to tell his story *then*?

CREON
 I know not, and not knowing hold my tongue.

OEDIPUS
 This much thou knowest and canst surely tell.

CREON
 What's mean'st thou?  All I know I will declare.

OEDIPUS
 But for thy prompting never had the seer
 Ascribed to me the death of Laius.

CREON
 If so he thou knowest best; but I
 Would put thee to the question in my turn.

OEDIPUS
 Question and prove me murderer if thou canst.

CREON
 Then let me ask thee, didst thou wed my sister?

OEDIPUS
 A fact so plain I cannot well deny.

CREON
 And as thy consort queen she shares the throne?

OEDIPUS
 I grant her freely all her heart desires.

CREON
 And with you twain I share the triple rule?

OEDIPUS
 Yea, and it is that proves thee a false friend.

CREON
 Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thyself,
 As I with myself.  First, I bid thee think,
 Would any mortal choose a troubled reign
 Of terrors rather than secure repose,
 If the same power were given him?  As for me,
 I have no natural craving for the name
 Of king, preferring to do kingly deeds,
 And so thinks every sober-minded man.
 Now all my needs are satisfied through thee,
 And I have naught to fear; but were I king,
 My acts would oft run counter to my will.
 How could a title then have charms for me
 Above the sweets of boundless influence?
 I am not so infatuate as to grasp
 The shadow when I hold the substance fast.
 Now all men cry me Godspeed! wish me well,
 And every suitor seeks to gain my ear,
 If he would hope to win a grace from thee.
 Why should I leave the better, choose the worse?
 That were sheer madness, and I am not mad.
 No such ambition ever tempted me,
 Nor would I have a share in such intrigue.
 And if thou doubt me, first to Delphi go,
 There ascertain if my report was true
 Of the god's answer; next investigate
 If with the seer I plotted or conspired,
 And if it prove so, sentence me to death,
 Not by thy voice alone, but mine and thine.
 But O condemn me not, without appeal,
 On bare suspicion.  'Tis not right to adjudge
 Bad men at random good, or good men bad.
 I would as lief a man should cast away
 The thing he counts most precious, his own life,
 As spurn a true friend.  Thou wilt learn in time
 The truth, for time alone reveals the just;
 A villain is detected in a day.

CHORUS
 To one who walketh warily his words
 Commend themselves; swift counsels are not sure.

OEDIPUS
 When with swift strides the stealthy plotter stalks
 I must be quick too with my counterplot.
 To wait his onset passively, for him
 Is sure success, for me assured defeat.

CREON
 What then's thy will?  To banish me the land?

OEDIPUS
 I would not have thee banished, no, but dead,
 That men may mark the wages envy reaps.

CREON
 I see thou wilt not yield, nor credit me.

OEDIPUS
 [None but a fool would credit such as thou.] 3

 CREON
 Thou art not wise.

OEDIPUS
                     Wise for myself at least.

CREON
 Why not for me too?

OEDIPUS
                     Why for such a knave?

CREON
 Suppose thou lackest sense.

OEDIPUS
                               Yet kings must rule.

CREON
 Not if they rule ill.

OEDIPUS
                          Oh my Thebans, hear him!

CREON
 Thy Thebans? am not I a Theban too?

CHORUS
 Cease, princes; lo there comes, and none too soon,
 Jocasta from the palace.  Who so fit
 As peacemaker to reconcile your feud?
 [Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA
 Misguided princes, why have ye upraised
 This wordy wrangle?  Are ye not ashamed,
 While the whole land lies striken, thus to voice
 Your private injuries?  Go in, my lord;
 Go home, my brother, and forebear to make
 A public scandal of a petty grief.

CREON
 My royal sister, Oedipus, thy lord,
 Hath bid me choose (O dread alternative!)
 An outlaw's exile or a felon's death.

OEDIPUS
 Yes, lady; I have caught him practicing
 Against my royal person his vile arts.

CREON
 May I ne'er speed but die accursed, if I
 In any way am guilty of this charge.

JOCASTA
 Believe him, I adjure thee, Oedipus,
 First for his solemn oath's sake, then for mine,
 And for thine elders' sake who wait on thee.

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Hearken, King, reflect, we pray thee, but not stubborn but relent.

OEDIPUS
 Say to what should I consent?

CHORUS
 Respect a man whose probity and troth
 Are known to all and now confirmed by oath.

OEDIPUS
 Dost know what grace thou cravest?

CHORUS
                                    Yea, I know.

OEDIPUS
 Declare it then and make thy meaning plain.

CHORUS
 Brand not a friend whom babbling tongues assail;
 Let not suspicion 'gainst his oath prevail.

OEDIPUS
 Bethink you that in seeking this ye seek
 In very sooth my death or banishment?

CHORUS
 No, by the leader of the host divine!
 (Str. 2)
 Witness, thou Sun, such thought was never mine,
 Unblest, unfriended may I perish,
 If ever I such wish did cherish!
 But O my heart is desolate
 Musing on our striken State,
 Doubly fall'n should discord grow
 Twixt you twain, to crown our woe.

OEDIPUS
 Well, let him go, no matter what it cost me,
 Or certain death or shameful banishment,
 For your sake I relent, not his; and him,
 Where'er he be, my heart shall still abhor.

CREON
 Thou art as sullen in thy yielding mood
 As in thine anger thou wast truculent.
 Such tempers justly plague themselves the most.

OEDIPUS
 Leave me in peace and get thee gone.

CREON
                                    I go,
 By thee misjudged, but justified by these.
 [Exeunt CREON]

CHORUS
 (Ant. 1)
 Lady, lead indoors thy consort; wherefore longer here delay?

JOCASTA
 Tell me first how rose the fray.

CHORUS
 Rumors bred unjust suspicious and injustice rankles sore.

JOCASTA
 Were both at fault?

CHORUS
                     Both.

JOCASTA
                          What was the tale?

CHORUS
 Ask me no more.  The land is sore distressed;
 'Twere better sleeping ills to leave at rest.

OEDIPUS
 Strange counsel, friend!  I know thou mean'st me well,
 And yet would'st mitigate and blunt my zeal.

CHORUS
 (Ant. 2)
 King, I say it once again,
 Witless were I proved, insane,
 If I lightly put away
 Thee my country's prop and stay,
 Pilot who, in danger sought,
 To a quiet haven brought
 Our distracted State; and now
 Who can guide us right but thou?

JOCASTA
 Let me too, I adjure thee, know, O king,
 What cause has stirred this unrelenting wrath.

OEDIPUS
 I will, for thou art more to me than these.
 Lady, the cause is Creon and his plots.

JOCASTA
 But what provoked the quarrel? make this clear.

OEDIPUS
 He points me out as Laius' murderer.

JOCASTA
 Of his own knowledge or upon report?

OEDIPUS
 He is too cunning to commit himself,
 And makes a mouthpiece of a knavish seer.

JOCASTA
 Then thou mayest ease thy conscience on that score.
 Listen and I'll convince thee that no man
 Hath scot or lot in the prophetic art.
 Here is the proof in brief.  An oracle
 Once came to Laius (I will not say
 'Twas from the Delphic god himself, but from
 His ministers) declaring he was doomed
 To perish by the hand of his own son,
 A child that should be born to him by me.
 Now Laius—so at least report affirmed—
 Was murdered on a day by highwaymen,
 No natives, at a spot where three roads meet.
 As for the child, it was but three days old,
 When Laius, its ankles pierced and pinned
 Together, gave it to be cast away
 By others on the trackless mountain side.
 So then Apollo brought it not to pass
 The child should be his father's murderer,
 Or the dread terror find accomplishment,
 And Laius be slain by his own son.
 Such was the prophet's horoscope.  O king,
 Regard it not.  Whate'er the god deems fit
 To search, himself unaided will reveal.

OEDIPUS
 What memories, what wild tumult of the soul
 Came o'er me, lady, as I heard thee speak!

JOCASTA
 What mean'st thou?  What has shocked and startled thee?

OEDIPUS
 Methought I heard thee say that Laius
 Was murdered at the meeting of three roads.

JOCASTA
 So ran the story that is current still.

OEDIPUS
 Where did this happen?  Dost thou know the place?

JOCASTA
 Phocis the land is called; the spot is where
 Branch roads from Delphi and from Daulis meet.

OEDIPUS
 And how long is it since these things befell?

JOCASTA
 'Twas but a brief while were thou wast proclaimed
 Our country's ruler that the news was brought.

OEDIPUS
 O Zeus, what hast thou willed to do with me!

JOCASTA
 What is it, Oedipus, that moves thee so?

OEDIPUS
 Ask me not yet; tell me the build and height
 Of Laius?  Was he still in manhood's prime?

JOCASTA
 Tall was he, and his hair was lightly strewn
 With silver; and not unlike thee in form.

OEDIPUS
 O woe is me!  Mehtinks unwittingly
 I laid but now a dread curse on myself.

JOCASTA
 What say'st thou?  When I look upon thee, my king,
 I tremble.

OEDIPUS
           'Tis a dread presentiment
 That in the end the seer will prove not blind.
 One further question to resolve my doubt.

JOCASTA
 I quail; but ask, and I will answer all.

OEDIPUS
 Had he but few attendants or a train
 Of armed retainers with him, like a prince?

JOCASTA
 They were but five in all, and one of them
 A herald; Laius in a mule-car rode.

OEDIPUS
 Alas! 'tis clear as noonday now.  But say,
 Lady, who carried this report to Thebes?

JOCASTA
 A serf, the sole survivor who returned.

OEDIPUS
 Haply he is at hand or in the house?

JOCASTA
 No, for as soon as he returned and found
 Thee reigning in the stead of Laius slain,
 He clasped my hand and supplicated me
 To send him to the alps and pastures, where
 He might be farthest from the sight of Thebes.
 And so I sent him.  'Twas an honest slave
 And well deserved some better recompense.

OEDIPUS
 Fetch him at once.  I fain would see the man.

JOCASTA
 He shall be brought; but wherefore summon him?

OEDIPUS
 Lady, I fear my tongue has overrun
 Discretion; therefore I would question him.

JOCASTA
 Well, he shall come, but may not I too claim
 To share the burden of thy heart, my king?

OEDIPUS
 And thou shalt not be frustrate of thy wish.
 Now my imaginings have gone so far.
 Who has a higher claim that thou to hear
 My tale of dire adventures?  Listen then.
 My sire was Polybus of Corinth, and
 My mother Merope, a Dorian;
 And I was held the foremost citizen,
 Till a strange thing befell me, strange indeed,
 Yet scarce deserving all the heat it stirred.
 A roisterer at some banquet, flown with wine,
 Shouted "Thou art not true son of thy sire."
 It irked me, but I stomached for the nonce
 The insult; on the morrow I sought out
 My mother and my sire and questioned them.
 They were indignant at the random slur
 Cast on my parentage and did their best
 To comfort me, but still the venomed barb
 Rankled, for still the scandal spread and grew.
 So privily without their leave I went
 To Delphi, and Apollo sent me back
 Baulked of the knowledge that I came to seek.
 But other grievous things he prophesied,
 Woes, lamentations, mourning, portents dire;
 To wit I should defile my mother's bed
 And raise up seed too loathsome to behold,
 And slay the father from whose loins I sprang.
 Then, lady,—thou shalt hear the very truth—
 As I drew near the triple-branching roads,
 A herald met me and a man who sat
 In a car drawn by colts—as in thy tale—
 The man in front and the old man himself
 Threatened to thrust me rudely from the path,
 Then jostled by the charioteer in wrath
 I struck him, and the old man, seeing this,
 Watched till I passed and from his car brought down
 Full on my head the double-pointed goad.
      Yet was I quits with him and more; one stroke
 Of my good staff sufficed to fling him clean
 Out of the chariot seat and laid him prone.
 And so I slew them every one.  But if
 Betwixt this stranger there was aught in common
 With Laius, who more miserable than I,
 What mortal could you find more god-abhorred?
 Wretch whom no sojourner, no citizen
 May harbor or address, whom all are bound
 To harry from their homes.  And this same curse
 Was laid on me, and laid by none but me.
 Yea with  these hands all gory I pollute
 The bed of him I slew.  Say, am I vile?
 Am I not utterly unclean, a wretch
 Doomed to be banished, and in banishment
 Forgo the sight of all my dearest ones,
 And never tread again my native earth;
 Or else to wed my mother and slay my sire,
 Polybus, who begat me and upreared?
 If one should say, this is the handiwork
 Of some inhuman power, who could blame
 His judgment?  But, ye pure and awful gods,
 Forbid, forbid that I should see that day!
 May I be blotted out from living men
 Ere such a plague spot set on me its brand!

CHORUS
 We too, O king, are troubled; but till thou
 Hast questioned the survivor, still hope on.

OEDIPUS
 My hope is faint, but still enough survives
 To bid me bide the coming of this herd.

JOCASTA
 Suppose him here, what wouldst thou learn of him?

OEDIPUS
 I'll tell thee, lady; if his tale agrees
 With thine, I shall have 'scaped calamity.

JOCASTA
 And what of special import did I say?

OEDIPUS
 In thy report of what the herdsman said
 Laius was slain by robbers; now if he
 Still speaks of robbers, not a robber, I
 Slew him not; "one" with "many" cannot square.
 But if he says one lonely wayfarer,
 The last link wanting to my guilt is forged.

JOCASTA
 Well, rest assured, his tale ran thus at first,
 Nor can he now retract what then he said;
 Not I alone but all our townsfolk heard it.
 E'en should he vary somewhat in his story,
 He cannot make the death of Laius
 In any wise jump with the oracle.
 For Loxias said expressly he was doomed
 To die by my child's hand, but he, poor babe,
 He shed no blood, but perished first himself.
 So much for divination.  Henceforth I
 Will look for signs neither to right nor left.

OEDIPUS
 Thou reasonest well.  Still I would have thee send
 And fetch the bondsman hither.  See to it.

JOCASTA
 That will I straightway.  Come, let us within.
 I would do nothing that my lord mislikes.
 [Exeunt OEDIPUS and JOCASTA]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 My lot be still to lead
      The life of innocence and fly
 Irreverence in word or deed,
      To follow still those laws ordained on high
 Whose birthplace is the bright ethereal sky
      No mortal birth they own,
      Olympus their progenitor alone:
 Ne'er shall they slumber in oblivion cold,
 The god in them is strong and grows not old.

(Ant. 1)
      Of insolence is bred
 The tyrant; insolence full blown,
      With empty riches surfeited,
 Scales the precipitous height and grasps the throne.
      Then topples o'er and lies in ruin prone;
      No foothold on that dizzy steep.
 But O may Heaven the true patriot keep
 Who burns with emulous zeal to serve the State.
 God is my help and hope, on him I wait.

(Str. 2)
 But the proud sinner, or in word or deed,
      That will not Justice heed,
      Nor reverence the shrine
      Of images divine,
 Perdition seize his vain imaginings,
      If, urged by greed profane,
      He grasps at ill-got gain,
 And lays an impious hand on holiest things.
      Who when such deeds are done
      Can hope heaven's bolts to shun?
 If sin like this to honor can aspire,
 Why dance I still and lead the sacred choir?

(Ant. 2)
 No more I'll seek earth's central oracle,
      Or Abae's hallowed cell,
      Nor to Olympia bring
      My votive offering.
 If before all God's truth be not bade plain.
      O Zeus, reveal thy might,
      King, if thou'rt named aright
 Omnipotent, all-seeing, as of old;
      For Laius is forgot;
      His weird, men heed it not;
 Apollo is forsook and faith grows cold.
 [Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA
 My lords, ye look amazed to see your queen
 With wreaths and gifts of incense in her hands.
 I had a mind to visit the high shrines,
 For Oedipus is overwrought, alarmed
 With terrors manifold.  He will not use
 His past experience, like a man of sense,
 To judge the present need, but lends an ear
 To any croaker if he augurs ill.
 Since then my counsels naught avail, I turn
 To thee, our present help in time of trouble,
 Apollo, Lord Lycean, and to thee
 My prayers and supplications here I bring.
 Lighten us, lord, and cleanse us from this curse!
 For now we all are cowed like mariners
 Who see their helmsman dumbstruck in the storm.
 [Enter Corinthian MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER
 My masters, tell me where the palace is
 Of Oedipus; or better, where's the king.

CHORUS
 Here is the palace and he bides within;
 This is his queen the mother of his children.

MESSENGER
 All happiness attend her and the house,
 Blessed is her husband and her marriage-bed.

JOCASTA
 My greetings to thee, stranger; thy fair words
 Deserve a like response.  But tell me why
 Thou comest—what thy need or what thy news.

MESSENGER
 Good for thy consort and the royal house.

JOCASTA
 What may it be?  Whose messenger art thou?

MESSENGER
 The Isthmian commons have resolved to make
 Thy husband king—so 'twas reported there.

JOCASTA
 What! is not aged Polybus still king?

MESSENGER
 No, verily; he's dead and in his grave.

JOCASTA
 What! is he dead, the sire of Oedipus?

MESSENGER
 If I speak falsely, may I die myself.

JOCASTA
 Quick, maiden, bear these tidings to my lord.
 Ye god-sent oracles, where stand ye now!
 This is the man whom Oedipus long shunned,
 In dread to prove his murderer; and now
 He dies in nature's course, not by his hand.
 [Enter OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS
 My wife, my queen, Jocasta, why hast thou
 Summoned me from my palace?

JOCASTA
                               Hear this man,
 And as thou hearest judge what has become
 Of all those awe-inspiring oracles.

OEDIPUS
 Who is this man, and what his news for me?

JOCASTA
 He comes from Corinth and his message this:
 Thy father Polybus hath passed away.

OEDIPUS
 What? let me have it, stranger, from thy mouth.

MESSENGER
 If I must first make plain beyond a doubt
 My message, know that Polybus is dead.

OEDIPUS
 By treachery, or by sickness visited?

MESSENGER
 One touch will send an old man to his rest.

OEDIPUS
 So of some malady he died, poor man.

MESSENGER
 Yes, having measured the full span of years.

OEDIPUS
 Out on it, lady! why should one regard
 The Pythian hearth or birds that scream i' the air?
 Did they not point at me as doomed to slay
 My father? but he's dead and in his grave
 And here am I who ne'er unsheathed a sword;
 Unless the longing for his absent son
 Killed him and so *I* slew him in a sense.
 But, as they stand, the oracles are dead—
 Dust, ashes, nothing, dead as Polybus.

JOCASTA
 Say, did not I foretell this long ago?

OEDIPUS
 Thou didst:  but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA
 Then let I no more weigh upon thy soul.

OEDIPUS
 Must I not fear my mother's marriage bed.

JOCASTA
 Why should a mortal man, the sport of chance,
 With no assured foreknowledge, be afraid?
 Best live a careless life from hand to mouth.
 This wedlock with thy mother fear not thou.
 How oft it chances that in dreams a man
 Has wed his mother!  He who least regards
 Such brainsick phantasies lives most at ease.

OEDIPUS
 I should have shared in full thy confidence,
 Were not my mother living; since she lives
 Though half convinced I still must live in dread.

JOCASTA
 And yet thy sire's death lights out darkness much.

OEDIPUS
 Much, but my fear is touching her who lives.

MESSENGER
 Who may this woman be whom thus you fear?

OEDIPUS
 Merope, stranger, wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER
 And what of her can cause you any fear?

OEDIPUS
 A heaven-sent oracle of dread import.

MESSENGER
 A mystery, or may a stranger hear it?

OEDIPUS
 Aye, 'tis no secret.  Loxias once foretold
 That I should mate with mine own mother, and shed
 With my own hands the blood of my own sire.
 Hence Corinth was for many a year to me
 A home distant; and I trove abroad,
 But missed the sweetest sight, my parents' face.

MESSENGER
 Was this the fear that exiled thee from home?

OEDIPUS
 Yea, and the dread of slaying my own sire.

MESSENGER
 Why, since I came to give thee pleasure, King,
 Have I not rid thee of this second fear?

OEDIPUS
 Well, thou shalt have due guerdon for thy pains.

MESSENGER
 Well, I confess what chiefly made me come
 Was hope to profit by thy coming home.

OEDIPUS
 Nay, I will ne'er go near my parents more.

MESSENGER
 My son, 'tis plain, thou know'st not what thou doest.

OEDIPUS
 How so, old man?  For heaven's sake tell me all.

MESSENGER
 If this is why thou dreadest to return.

OEDIPUS
 Yea, lest the god's word be fulfilled in me.

MESSENGER
 Lest through thy parents thou shouldst be accursed?

OEDIPUS
 This and none other is my constant dread.

MESSENGER
 Dost thou not know thy fears are baseless all?

OEDIPUS
 How baseless, if I am their very son?

MESSENGER
 Since Polybus was naught to thee in blood.

OEDIPUS
 What say'st thou? was not Polybus my sire?

MESSENGER
 As much thy sire as I am, and no more.

OEDIPUS
 My sire no more to me than one who is naught?

MESSENGER
 Since I begat thee not, no more did he.

OEDIPUS
 What reason had he then to call me son?

MESSENGER
 Know that he took thee from my hands, a gift.

OEDIPUS
 Yet, if no child of his, he loved me well.

MESSENGER
 A childless man till then, he warmed to thee.

OEDIPUS
 A foundling or a purchased slave, this child?

MESSENGER
 I found thee in Cithaeron's wooded glens.

OEDIPUS
 What led thee to explore those upland glades?

MESSENGER
 My business was to tend the mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS
 A vagrant shepherd journeying for hire?

MESSENGER
 True, but thy savior in that hour, my son.

OEDIPUS
 My savior? from what harm? what ailed me then?

MESSENGER
 Those ankle joints are evidence enow.

OEDIPUS
 Ah, why remind me of that ancient sore?

MESSENGER
 I loosed the pin that riveted thy feet.

OEDIPUS
 Yes, from my cradle that dread brand I bore.

MESSENGER
 Whence thou deriv'st the name that still is thine.

OEDIPUS
 Who did it?  I adjure thee, tell me who
 Say, was it father, mother?

MESSENGER
                               I know not.
 The man from whom I had thee may know more.

OEDIPUS
 What, did another find me, not thyself?

MESSENGER
 Not I; another shepherd gave thee me.

OEDIPUS
 Who was he?  Would'st thou know again the man?

MESSENGER
 He passed indeed for one of Laius' house.

OEDIPUS
 The king who ruled the country long ago?

MESSENGER
 The same:  he was a herdsman of the king.

OEDIPUS
 And is he living still for me to see him?

MESSENGER
 His fellow-countrymen should best know that.

OEDIPUS
 Doth any bystander among you know
 The herd he speaks of, or by seeing him
 Afield or in the city? answer straight!
 The hour hath come to clear this business up.

CHORUS
 Methinks he means none other than the hind
 Whom thou anon wert fain to see; but that
 Our queen Jocasta best of all could tell.

OEDIPUS
 Madam, dost know the man we sent to fetch?
 Is the same of whom the stranger speaks?

JOCASTA
 Who is the man?  What matter?  Let it be.
 'Twere waste of thought to weigh such idle words.

OEDIPUS
 No, with such guiding clues I cannot fail
 To bring to light the secret of my birth.

JOCASTA
 Oh, as thou carest for thy life, give o'er
 This quest.  Enough the anguish *I* endure.

OEDIPUS
 Be of good cheer; though I be proved the son
 Of a bondwoman, aye, through three descents
 Triply a slave, thy honor is unsmirched.

JOCASTA
 Yet humor me, I pray thee; do not this.

OEDIPUS
 I cannot; I must probe this matter home.

JOCASTA
 'Tis for thy sake I advise thee for the best.

OEDIPUS
 I grow impatient of this best advice.

JOCASTA
 Ah mayst thou ne'er discover who thou art!

OEDIPUS
 Go, fetch me here the herd, and leave yon woman
 To glory in her pride of ancestry.

JOCASTA
 O woe is thee, poor wretch!  With that last word
 I leave thee, henceforth silent evermore.
 [Exit JOCASTA]

CHORUS
 Why, Oedipus, why stung with passionate grief
 Hath the queen thus departed?  Much I fear
 From this dead calm will burst a storm of woes.

OEDIPUS
 Let the storm burst, my fixed resolve still holds,
 To learn my lineage, be it ne'er so low.
 It may be she with all a woman's pride
 Thinks scorn of my base parentage.  But I
 Who rank myself as Fortune's favorite child,
 The giver of good gifts, shall not be shamed.
 She is my mother and the changing moons
 My brethren, and with them I wax and wane.
 Thus sprung why should I fear to trace my birth?
 Nothing can make me other than I am.

CHORUS
 (Str.)
 If my soul prophetic err not, if my wisdom aught avail,
           Thee, Cithaeron, I shall hail,
 As the nurse and foster-mother of our Oedipus shall greet
 Ere tomorrow's full moon rises, and exalt thee as is meet.
 Dance and song shall hymn thy praises, lover of our royal race.
           Phoebus, may my words find grace!

(Ant.)
 Child,  who bare thee, nymph or goddess? sure thy sure was  more  than
 man,
           Haply the hill-roamer Pan.
 Of did Loxias beget thee, for he haunts the upland wold;
 Or Cyllene's lord, or Bacchus, dweller on the hilltops cold?
 Did some Heliconian Oread give him thee, a new-born joy?
           Nymphs with whom he love to toy?

OEDIPUS
 Elders, if I, who never yet before
 Have met the man, may make a guess, methinks
 I see the herdsman who we long have sought;
 His time-worn aspect matches with the years
 Of yonder aged messenger; besides
 I seem to recognize the men who bring him
 As servants of my own.  But you, perchance,
 Having in past days known or seen the herd,
 May better by sure knowledge my surmise.

CHORUS
 I recognize him; one of Laius' house;
 A simple hind, but true as any man.
 [Enter HERDSMAN.]

OEDIPUS
 Corinthian, stranger, I address thee first,
 Is this the man thou meanest!

MESSENGER
                               This is he.

OEDIPUS
 And now old man, look up and answer all
 I ask thee.  Wast thou once of Laius' house?

HERDSMAN
 I was, a thrall, not purchased but home-bred.

OEDIPUS
 What was thy business? how wast thou employed?

HERDSMAN
 The best part of my life I tended sheep.

OEDIPUS
 What were the pastures thou didst most frequent?

HERDSMAN
 Cithaeron and the neighboring alps.

OEDIPUS
                                    Then there
 Thou must have known yon man, at least by fame?

HERDSMAN
 Yon man? in what way? what man dost thou mean?

OEDIPUS
 The man here, having met him in past times...

HERDSMAN
 Off-hand I cannot call him well to mind.

MESSENGER
 No wonder, master.  But I will revive
 His blunted memories.  Sure he can recall
 What time together both we drove our flocks,
 He two, I one, on the Cithaeron range,
 For three long summers; I his mate from spring
 Till rose Arcturus; then in winter time
 I led mine home, he his to Laius' folds.
 Did these things happen as I say, or no?

HERDSMAN
 'Tis long ago, but all thou say'st is true.

MESSENGER
 Well, thou mast then remember giving me
 A child to rear as my own foster-son?

HERDSMAN
 Why dost thou ask this question?  What of that?

MESSENGER
 Friend, he that stands before thee was that child.

HERDSMAN
 A plague upon thee!  Hold thy wanton tongue!

OEDIPUS
 Softly, old man, rebuke him not; thy words
 Are more deserving chastisement than his.

HERDSMAN
 O best of masters, what is my offense?

OEDIPUS
 Not answering what he asks about the child.

HERDSMAN
 He speaks at random, babbles like a fool.

OEDIPUS
 If thou lack'st grace to speak, I'll loose thy tongue.

HERDSMAN
 For mercy's sake abuse not an old man.

OEDIPUS
 Arrest the villain, seize and pinion him!

HERDSMAN
 Alack, alack!
 What have I done? what wouldst thou further learn?

OEDIPUS
 Didst give this man the child of whom he asks?

HERDSMAN
 I did; and would that I had died that day!

OEDIPUS
 And die thou shalt unless thou tell the truth.

HERDSMAN
 But, if I tell it, I am doubly lost.

OEDIPUS
 The knave methinks will still prevaricate.

HERDSMAN
 Nay, I confessed I gave it long ago.

OEDIPUS
 Whence came it? was it thine, or given to thee?

HERDSMAN
 I had it from another, 'twas not mine.

OEDIPUS
 From whom of these our townsmen, and what house?

HERDSMAN
 Forbear for God's sake, master, ask no more.

OEDIPUS
 If I must question thee again, thou'rt lost.

HERDSMAN
 Well then—it was a child of Laius' house.

OEDIPUS
 Slave-born or one of Laius' own race?

HERDSMAN
 Ah me!
 I stand upon the perilous edge of speech.

OEDIPUS
 And I of hearing, but I still must hear.

HERDSMAN
 Know then the child was by repute his own,
 But she within, thy consort best could tell.

OEDIPUS
 What! she, she gave it thee?

HERDSMAN
                               'Tis so, my king.

OEDIPUS
 With what intent?

HERDSMAN
                     To make away with it.

OEDIPUS
 What, she its mother.

HERDSMAN
                     Fearing a dread weird.

OEDIPUS
 What weird?

HERDSMAN
           'Twas told that he should slay his sire.

OEDIPUS
 What didst thou give it then to this old man?

HERDSMAN
 Through pity, master, for the babe.  I thought
 He'd take it to the country whence he came;
 But he preserved it for the worst of woes.
 For if thou art in sooth what this man saith,
 God pity thee! thou wast to misery born.

OEDIPUS
 Ah me! ah me! all brought to pass, all true!
 O light, may I behold thee nevermore!
 I stand a wretch, in birth, in wedlock cursed,
 A parricide, incestuously, triply cursed!
 [Exit OEDIPUS]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
           Races of mortal man
           Whose life is but a span,
 I count ye but the shadow of a shade!
           For he who most doth know
           Of bliss, hath but the show;
 A moment, and the visions pale and fade.
 Thy fall, O Oedipus, thy piteous fall
 Warns me none born of women blest to call.

(Ant. 1)
           For he of marksmen best,
           O Zeus, outshot the rest,
 And won the prize supreme of wealth and power.
           By him the vulture maid
           Was quelled, her witchery laid;
 He rose our savior and the land's strong tower.
 We hailed thee king and from that day adored
 Of mighty Thebes the universal lord.

(Str. 2)
           O heavy hand of fate!
           Who now more desolate,
 Whose tale more sad than thine, whose lot more dire?
           O Oedipus, discrowned head,
           Thy cradle was thy marriage bed;
 One harborage sufficed for son and sire.
 How could the soil thy father eared so long
 Endure to bear in silence such a wrong?

(Ant. 2)
           All-seeing Time hath caught
           Guilt, and to justice brought
 The son and sire commingled in one bed.
           O child of Laius' ill-starred race
           Would I had ne'er beheld thy face;
 I raise for thee a dirge as o'er the dead.
 Yet, sooth to say, through thee I drew new breath,
 And now through thee I feel a second death.
 [Enter SECOND MESSENGER.]

SECOND MESSENGER
 Most grave and reverend senators of Thebes,
 What Deeds ye soon must hear, what sights behold
 How will ye mourn, if, true-born patriots,
 Ye reverence still the race of Labdacus!
 Not Ister nor all Phasis' flood, I ween,
 Could wash away the blood-stains from this house,
 The ills it shrouds or soon will bring to light,
 Ills wrought of malice, not unwittingly.
 The worst to bear are self-inflicted wounds.

CHORUS
 Grievous enough for all our tears and groans
 Our past calamities; what canst thou add?

SECOND MESSENGER
 My tale is quickly told and quickly heard.
 Our sovereign lady queen Jocasta's dead.

CHORUS
 Alas, poor queen! how came she by her death?

SECOND MESSENGER
 By her own hand.  And all the horror of it,
 Not having seen, yet cannot comprehend.
 Nathless, as far as my poor memory serves,
 I will relate the unhappy lady's woe.
 When in her frenzy she had passed inside
 The vestibule, she hurried straight to win
 The bridal-chamber, clutching at her hair
 With both her hands, and, once within the room,
 She shut the doors behind her with a crash.
 "Laius," she cried, and called her husband dead
 Long, long ago; her thought was of that child
 By him begot, the son by whom the sire
 Was murdered and the mother left to breed
 With her own seed, a monstrous progeny.
 Then she bewailed the marriage bed whereon
 Poor wretch, she had conceived a double brood,
 Husband by husband, children by her child.
 What happened after that I cannot tell,
 Nor how the end befell, for with a shriek
 Burst on us Oedipus; all eyes were fixed
 On Oedipus, as up and down he strode,
 Nor could we mark her agony to the end.
 For stalking to and fro "A sword!" he cried,
 "Where is the wife, no wife, the teeming womb
 That bore a double harvest, me and mine?"
 And in his frenzy some supernal power
 (No mortal, surely, none of us who watched him)
 Guided his footsteps; with a terrible shriek,
 As though one beckoned him, he crashed against
 The folding doors, and from their staples forced
 The wrenched bolts and hurled himself within.
 Then we beheld the woman hanging there,
 A running noose entwined about her neck.
 But when he saw her, with a maddened roar
 He loosed the cord; and when her wretched corpse
 Lay stretched on earth, what followed—O 'twas dread!
 He tore the golden brooches that upheld
 Her queenly robes, upraised them high and smote
 Full on his eye-balls, uttering words like these:
 "No more shall ye behold such sights of woe,
 Deeds I have suffered and myself have wrought;
 Henceforward quenched in darkness shall ye see
 Those ye should ne'er have seen; now blind to those
 Whom, when I saw, I vainly yearned to know."
      Such was the burden of his moan, whereto,
 Not once but oft, he struck with his hand uplift
 His eyes, and at each stroke the ensanguined orbs
 Bedewed his beard, not oozing drop by drop,
 But one black gory downpour, thick as hail.
 Such evils, issuing from the double source,
 Have whelmed them both, confounding man and wife.
 Till now the storied fortune of this house
 Was fortunate indeed; but from this day
 Woe, lamentation, ruin, death, disgrace,
 All ills that can be named, all, all are theirs.

CHORUS
 But hath he still no respite from his pain?

SECOND MESSENGER
 He cries, "Unbar the doors and let all Thebes
 Behold the slayer of his sire, his mother's—"
 That shameful word my lips may not repeat.
 He vows to fly self-banished from the land,
 Nor stay to bring upon his house the curse
 Himself had uttered; but he has no strength
 Nor one to guide him, and his torture's more
 Than man can suffer, as yourselves will see.
 For lo, the palace portals are unbarred,
 And soon ye shall behold a sight so sad
 That he who must abhorred would pity it.
 [Enter OEDIPUS blinded.]

CHORUS
           Woeful sight! more woeful none
           These sad eyes have looked upon.
           Whence this madness?  None can tell
           Who did cast on thee his spell,
           prowling all thy life around,
           Leaping with a demon bound.
           Hapless wretch! how can I brook
           On thy misery to look?
           Though to gaze on thee I yearn,
           Much to question, much to learn,
           Horror-struck away I turn.

OEDIPUS
 Ah me! ah woe is me!
 Ah whither am I borne!
 How like a ghost forlorn
 My voice flits from me on the air!
 On, on the demon goads.  The end, ah where?

CHORUS
 An end too dread to tell, too dark to see.

OEDIPUS
 (Str. 1)
 Dark, dark!  The horror of darkness, like a shroud,
 Wraps me and bears me on through mist and cloud.
 Ah me, ah me!  What spasms athwart me shoot,
 What pangs of agonizing memory?

CHORUS
 No marvel if in such a plight thou feel'st
 The double weight of past and present woes.

OEDIPUS
 (Ant. 1)
 Ah friend, still loyal, constant still and kind,
           Thou carest for the blind.
 I know thee near, and though bereft of eyes,
           Thy voice I recognize.

CHORUS
 O doer of dread deeds, how couldst thou mar
 Thy vision thus?  What demon goaded thee?

OEDIPUS
 (Str. 2)
 Apollo, friend, Apollo, he it was
           That brought these ills to pass;
 But the right hand that dealt the blow
           Was mine, none other.  How,
 How, could I longer see when sight
           Brought no delight?

CHORUS
 Alas! 'tis as thou sayest.

OEDIPUS
 Say, friends, can any look or voice
 Or touch of love henceforth my heart rejoice?
           Haste, friends, no fond delay,
           Take the twice cursed away
                Far from all ken,
 The man abhorred of gods, accursed of men.

CHORUS
 O thy despair well suits thy desperate case.
 Would I had never looked upon thy face!

OEDIPUS
 (Ant. 2)
 My curse on him whoe'er unrived
 The waif's fell fetters and my life revived!
 He meant me well, yet had he left me there,
 He had saved my friends and me a world of care.

CHORUS
 I too had wished it so.

OEDIPUS
 Then had I never come to shed
 My father's blood nor climbed my mother's bed;
 The monstrous offspring of a womb defiled,
 Co-mate of him who gendered me, and child.
 Was ever man before afflicted thus,
 Like Oedipus.

CHORUS
 I cannot say that thou hast counseled well,
 For thou wert better dead than living blind.

OEDIPUS
 What's done was well done.  Thou canst never shake
 My firm belief.  A truce to argument.
 For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes
 I could have met my father in the shades,
 Or my poor mother, since against the twain
 I sinned, a sin no gallows could atone.
 Aye, but, ye say, the sight of children joys
 A parent's eyes.  What, born as mine were born?
 No, such a sight could never bring me joy;
 Nor this fair city with its battlements,
 Its temples and the statues of its gods,
 Sights from which I, now wretchedst of all,
 Once ranked the foremost Theban in all Thebes,
 By my own sentence am cut off, condemned
 By my own proclamation 'gainst the wretch,
 The miscreant by heaven itself declared
 Unclean—and of the race of Laius.
 Thus branded as a felon by myself,
 How had I dared to look you in the face?
 Nay, had I known a way to choke the springs
 Of hearing, I had never shrunk to make
 A dungeon of this miserable frame,
 Cut off from sight and hearing; for 'tis bliss
 to bide in regions sorrow cannot reach.
 Why didst thou harbor me, Cithaeron, why
 Didst thou not take and slay me?  Then I never
 Had shown to men the secret of my birth.
 O Polybus, O Corinth, O my home,
 Home of my ancestors (so wast thou called)
 How fair a nursling then I seemed, how foul
 The canker that lay festering in the bud!
 Now is the blight revealed of root and fruit.
 Ye triple high-roads, and thou hidden glen,
 Coppice, and pass where meet the three-branched ways,
 Ye drank my blood, the life-blood these hands spilt,
 My father's; do ye call to mind perchance
 Those deeds of mine ye witnessed and the work
 I wrought thereafter when I came to Thebes?
 O fatal wedlock, thou didst give me birth,
 And, having borne me, sowed again my seed,
 Mingling the blood of fathers, brothers, children,
 Brides, wives and mothers, an incestuous brood,
 All horrors that are wrought beneath the sun,
 Horrors so foul to name them were unmeet.
 O, I adjure you, hide me anywhere
 Far from this land, or slay me straight, or cast me
 Down to the depths of ocean out of sight.
 Come hither, deign to touch an abject wretch;
 Draw near and fear not; I myself must bear
 The load of guilt that none but I can share.
 [Enter CREON.]

CREON
 Lo, here is Creon, the one man to grant
 Thy prayer by action or advice, for he
 Is left the State's sole guardian in thy stead.

OEDIPUS
 Ah me! what words to accost him can I find?
 What cause has he to trust me?  In the past
 I have bee proved his rancorous enemy.

CREON
 Not in derision, Oedipus, I come
 Nor to upbraid thee with thy past misdeeds.
 (To BYSTANDERS)
 But shame upon you! if ye feel no sense
 Of human decencies, at least revere
 The Sun whose light beholds and nurtures all.
 Leave not thus nakedly for all to gaze at
 A horror neither earth nor rain from heaven
 Nor light will suffer.  Lead him straight within,
 For it is seemly that a kinsman's woes
 Be heard by kin and seen by kin alone.

OEDIPUS
 O listen, since thy presence comes to me
 A shock of glad surprise—so noble thou,
 And I so vile—O grant me one small boon.
 I ask it not on my behalf, but thine.

CREON
 And what the favor thou wouldst crave of me?

OEDIPUS
 Forth from thy borders thrust me with all speed;
 Set me within some vasty desert where
 No mortal voice shall greet me any more.

CREON
 This had I done already, but I deemed
 It first behooved me to consult the god.

OEDIPUS
 His will was set forth fully—to destroy
 The parricide, the scoundrel;  and I am he.

CREON
 Yea, so he spake, but in our present plight
 'Twere better to consult the god anew.

OEDIPUS
 Dare ye inquire concerning such a wretch?

CREON
 Yea, for thyself wouldst credit now his word.

OEDIPUS
 Aye, and on thee in all humility
 I lay this charge:  let her who lies within
 Receive such burial as thou shalt ordain;
 Such rites 'tis thine, as brother, to perform.
 But for myself, O never let my Thebes,
 The city of my sires, be doomed to bear
 The burden of my presence while I live.
 No, let me be a dweller on the hills,
 On yonder mount Cithaeron, famed as mine,
 My tomb predestined for me by my sire
 And mother, while they lived, that I may die
 Slain as they sought to slay me, when alive.
 This much I know full surely, nor disease
 Shall end my days, nor any common chance;
 For I had ne'er been snatched from death, unless
 I was predestined to some awful doom.
      So be it.  I reck not how Fate deals with me
 But my unhappy children—for my sons
 Be not concerned, O Creon, they are men,
 And for themselves, where'er they be, can fend.
 But for my daughters twain, poor innocent maids,
 Who ever sat beside me at the board
 Sharing my viands, drinking of my cup,
 For them, I pray thee, care, and, if thou willst,
 O might I feel their touch and make my moan.
 Hear me, O prince, my noble-hearted prince!
 Could I but blindly touch them with my hands
 I'd think they still were mine, as when I saw.
 [ANTIGONE and ISMENE are led in.]
 What say I? can it be my pretty ones
 Whose sobs I hear?  Has Creon pitied me
 And sent me my two darlings?  Can this be?

CREON
 'Tis true; 'twas I procured thee this delight,
 Knowing the joy they were to thee of old.

OEDIPUS
 God speed thee! and as meed for bringing them
 May Providence deal with thee kindlier
 Than it has dealt with me!  O children mine,
 Where are ye?  Let me clasp you with these hands,
 A brother's hands, a father's; hands that made
 Lack-luster sockets of his once bright eyes;
 Hands of a man who blindly, recklessly,
 Became your sire by her from whom he sprang.
 Though I cannot behold you, I must weep
 In thinking of the evil days to come,
 The slights and wrongs that men will put upon you.
 Where'er ye go to feast or festival,
 No merrymaking will it prove for you,
 But oft abashed in tears ye will return.
 And when ye come to marriageable years,
 Where's the bold wooers who will jeopardize
 To take unto himself such disrepute
 As to my children's children still must cling,
 For what of infamy is lacking here?
 "Their father slew his father, sowed the seed
 Where he himself was gendered, and begat
 These maidens at the source wherefrom he sprang."
 Such are the gibes that men will cast at you.
 Who then will wed you?  None, I ween, but ye
 Must pine, poor maids, in single barrenness.
 O Prince, Menoeceus' son, to thee, I turn,
 With the it rests to father them, for we
 Their natural parents, both of us, are lost.
 O leave them not to wander poor, unwed,
 Thy kin, nor let them share my low estate.
 O pity them so young, and but for thee
 All destitute.  Thy hand upon it, Prince.
 To you, my children I had much to say,
 Were ye but ripe to hear.  Let this suffice:
 Pray ye may find some home and live content,
 And may your lot prove happier than your sire's.

CREON
 Thou hast had enough of weeping; pass within.

OEDIPUS
                                              I must obey,
 Though 'tis grievous.

CREON
                          Weep not, everything must have its day.

OEDIPUS
 Well I go, but on conditions.

CREON
                               What thy terms for going, say.

OEDIPUS
 Send me from the land an exile.

CREON
                               Ask this of the gods, not me.

OEDIPUS
 But I am the gods' abhorrence.

CREON
                               Then they soon will grant thy plea.

OEDIPUS
 Lead me hence, then, I am willing.

CREON
                                    Come, but let thy children go.

OEDIPUS
 Rob me not of these my children!

CREON
                                    Crave not mastery in all,
 For the mastery that raised thee was thy bane and wrought thy fall.

CHORUS
 Look ye, countrymen and Thebans, this is Oedipus the great,
 He who knew the Sphinx's riddle and was mightiest in our state.
 Who of all our townsmen gazed not on his fame with envious eyes?
 Now, in what a sea of troubles sunk and overwhelmed he lies!
 Therefore wait to see life's ending ere thou count one mortal blest;
 Wait till free from pain and sorrow he has gained his final rest.

##  FOOTNOTES

 1 (return)
 [ Dr. Kennedy and others render "Since to men of experience I see that also comparisons of their counsels are in most lively use."]

 2 (return)
 [ Literally "not to call them thine," but the Greek may be rendered "In order not to reveal thine."]

 3 (return)
 [ The Greek text that occurs in this place has been lost.]

#  SOPHOCLES

##  OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

###    Translation by F. Storr, BA Formerly Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge From the Loeb Library Edition Originally published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and William Heinemann Ltd, London First published in 1912

###  ARGUMENT

 Oedipus, the blind and banished King of Thebes, has come in his wanderings to Colonus, a deme of Athens, led by his daughter Antigone. He sits to rest on a rock just within a sacred grove of the Furies and is bidden depart by a passing native. But Oedipus, instructed by an oracle that he had reached his final resting-place, refuses to stir, and the stranger consents to go and consult the Elders of Colonus (the Chorus of the Play). Conducted to the spot they pity at first the blind beggar and his daughter, but on learning his name they are horror-striken and order him to quit the land. He appeals to the world-famed hospitality of Athens and hints at the blessings that his coming will confer on the State. They agree to await the decision of King Theseus. From Theseus Oedipus craves protection in life and burial in Attic soil; the benefits that will accrue shall be told later. Theseus departs having promised to aid and befriend him. No sooner has he gone than Creon enters with an armed guard who seize Antigone and carry her off (Ismene, the other sister, they have already captured) and he is about to lay hands on Oedipus, when Theseus, who has heard the tumult, hurries up and, upbraiding Creon for his lawless act, threatens to detain him till he has shown where the captives are and restored them. In the next scene Theseus returns bringing with him the rescued maidens. He informs Oedipus that a stranger who has taken sanctuary at the altar of Poseidon wishes to see him. It is Polyneices who has come to crave his father's forgiveness and blessing, knowing by an oracle that victory will fall to the side that Oedipus espouses. But Oedipus spurns the hypocrite, and invokes a dire curse on both his unnatural sons. A sudden clap of thunder is heard, and as peal follows peal, Oedipus is aware that his hour is come and bids Antigone summon Theseus. Self-guided he leads the way to the spot where death should overtake him, attended by Theseus and his daughters. Halfway he bids his daughters farewell, and what followed none but Theseus knew. He was not (so the Messenger reports) for the gods took him.

###  DRAMATIS PERSONAE

 OEDIPUS, banished King of Thebes.
 ANTIGONE, his daughter.
 ISMENE, his daughter.
 THESEUS, King of Athens.
 CREON, brother of Jocasta, now reigning at Thebes.
 POLYNEICES, elder son of Oedipus.
 STRANGER, a native of Colonus.
 MESSENGER, an attendant of Theseus.
 CHORUS, citizens of Colonus.

     Scene:  In front of the grove of the Eumenides.

#  OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

 Enter the blind OEDIPUS led by his daughter, ANTIGONE.

OEDIPUS
 Child of an old blind sire, Antigone,
 What region, say, whose city have we reached?
 Who will provide today with scanted dole
 This wanderer?  'Tis little that he craves,
 And less obtains—that less enough for me;
 For I am taught by suffering to endure,
 And the long years that have grown old with me,
 And last not least, by true nobility.
 My daughter, if thou seest a resting place
 On common ground or by some sacred grove,
 Stay me and set me down.  Let us discover
 Where we have come, for strangers must inquire
 Of denizens, and do as they are bid.

ANTIGONE
 Long-suffering father, Oedipus, the towers
 That fence the city still are faint and far;
 But where we stand is surely holy ground;
 A wilderness of laurel, olive, vine;
 Within a choir or songster nightingales
 Are warbling.  On this native seat of rock
 Rest; for an old man thou hast traveled far.

OEDIPUS
 Guide these dark steps and seat me there secure.

ANTIGONE
 If time can teach, I need not to be told.

OEDIPUS
 Say, prithee, if thou knowest, where we are.

ANTIGONE
 Athens I recognize, but not the spot.

OEDIPUS
 That much we heard from every wayfarer.

ANTIGONE
 Shall I go on and ask about the place?

OEDIPUS
 Yes, daughter, if it be inhabited.

ANTIGONE
 Sure there are habitations; but no need
 To leave thee; yonder is a man hard by.

OEDIPUS
 What, moving hitherward and on his way?

ANTIGONE
 Say rather, here already.  Ask him straight
 The needful questions, for the man is here.
 [Enter STRANGER]

OEDIPUS
 O stranger, as I learn from her whose eyes
 Must serve both her and me, that thou art here
 Sent by some happy chance to serve our doubts—

STRANGER
 First quit that seat, then question me at large:
 The spot thou treadest on is holy ground.

OEDIPUS
 What is the site, to what god dedicate?

STRANGER
 Inviolable, untrod; goddesses,
 Dread brood of Earth and Darkness, here abide.

OEDIPUS
 Tell me the awful name I should invoke?

STRANGER
 The Gracious Ones, All-seeing, so our folk
 Call them, but elsewhere other names are rife.

OEDIPUS
 Then may they show their suppliant grace, for I
 From this your sanctuary will ne'er depart.

STRANGER
 What word is this?

OEDIPUS
                     The watchword of my fate.

STRANGER
 Nay, 'tis not mine to bid thee hence without
 Due warrant and instruction from the State.

OEDIPUS
 Now in God's name, O stranger, scorn me not
 As a wayfarer; tell me what I crave.

STRANGER
 Ask; your request shall not be scorned by me.

OEDIPUS
 How call you then the place wherein we bide?

STRANGER
 Whate'er I know thou too shalt know; the place
 Is all to great Poseidon consecrate.
 Hard by, the Titan, he who bears the torch,
 Prometheus, has his worship; but the spot
 Thou treadest, the Brass-footed Threshold named,
 Is Athens' bastion, and the neighboring lands
 Claim as their chief and patron yonder knight
 Colonus, and in common bear his name.
 Such, stranger, is the spot, to fame unknown,
 But dear to us its native worshipers.

OEDIPUS
 Thou sayest there are dwellers in these parts?

STRANGER
 Surely; they bear the name of yonder god.

OEDIPUS
 Ruled by a king or by the general voice?

STRANGER
 The lord of Athens is our over-lord.

OEDIPUS
 Who is this monarch, great in word and might?

STRANGER
 Theseus, the son of Aegeus our late king.

OEDIPUS
 Might one be sent from you to summon him?

STRANGER
 Wherefore?  To tell him aught or urge his coming?

OEDIPUS
 Say a slight service may avail him much.

STRANGER
 How can he profit from a sightless man?

OEDIPUS
 The blind man's words will be instinct with sight.

STRANGER
 Heed then; I fain would see thee out of harm;
 For by the looks, marred though they be by fate,
 I judge thee noble; tarry where thou art,
 While I go seek the burghers—those at hand,
 Not in the city.  They will soon decide
 Whether thou art to rest or go thy way.
 [Exit STRANGER]

OEDIPUS
 Tell me, my daughter, has the stranger gone?

ANTIGONE
 Yes, he has gone; now we are all alone,
 And thou may'st speak, dear father, without fear.

OEDIPUS
 Stern-visaged queens, since coming to this land
 First in your sanctuary I bent the knee,
 Frown not on me or Phoebus, who, when erst
 He told me all my miseries to come,
 Spake of this respite after many years,
 Some haven in a far-off land, a rest
 Vouchsafed at last by dread divinities.
 "There," said he, "shalt thou round thy weary life,
 A blessing to the land wherein thou dwell'st,
 But to the land that cast thee forth, a curse."
 And of my weird he promised signs should come,
 Earthquake, or thunderclap, or lightning flash.
 And now I recognize as yours the sign
 That led my wanderings to this your grove;
 Else had I never lighted on you first,
 A wineless man on your seat of native rock.
 O goddesses, fulfill Apollo's word,
 Grant me some consummation of my life,
 If haply I appear not all too vile,
 A thrall to sorrow worse than any slave.
 Hear, gentle daughters of primeval Night,
 Hear, namesake of great Pallas; Athens, first
 Of cities, pity this dishonored shade,
 The ghost of him who once was Oedipus.

ANTIGONE
 Hush! for I see some grey-beards on their way,
 Their errand to spy out our resting-place.

OEDIPUS
 I will be mute, and thou shalt guide my steps
 Into the covert from the public road,
 Till I have learned their drift.  A prudent man
 Will ever shape his course by what he learns.
 [Enter CHORUS]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Ha!  Where is he?  Look around!
 Every nook and corner scan!
 He the all-presumptuous man,
 Whither vanished? search the ground!
 A wayfarer, I ween,
 A wayfarer, no countryman of ours,
 That old man must have been;
 Never had native dared to tempt the Powers,
           Or enter their demesne,
 The Maids in awe of whom each mortal cowers,
           Whose name no voice betrays nor cry,
           And as we pass them with averted eye,
 We move hushed lips in reverent piety.
           But now some godless man,
                'Tis rumored, here abides;
           The precincts through I scan,
                Yet wot not where he hides,
                     The wretch profane!
                     I search and search in vain.

OEDIPUS
           I am that man; I know you near
           Ears to the blind, they say, are eyes.

CHORUS
           O dread to see and dread to hear!

OEDIPUS
 Oh sirs, I am no outlaw under ban.

CHORUS
 Who can he be—Zeus save us!—this old man?

OEDIPUS
 No favorite of fate,
 That ye should envy his estate,
 O, Sirs, would any happy mortal, say,
 Grope by the light of other eyes his way,
 Or face the storm upon so frail a stay?

CHORUS
 (Ant. 1)
 Wast thou then sightless from thy birth?
 Evil, methinks, and long
 Thy pilgrimage on earth.
 Yet add not curse to curse and wrong to wrong.
           I warn thee, trespass not
           Within this hallowed spot,
 Lest thou shouldst find the silent grassy glade
           Where offerings are laid,
 Bowls of spring water mingled with sweet mead.
           Thou must not stay,
           Come, come away,
           Tired wanderer, dost thou heed?
 (We are far off, but sure our voice can reach.)
           If aught thou wouldst beseech,
 Speak where 'tis right; till then refrain from speech.

OEDIPUS
 Daughter, what counsel should we now pursue?

ANTIGONE
 We must obey and do as here they do.

OEDIPUS
 Thy hand then!

ANTIGONE
                Here, O father, is my hand,

OEDIPUS
 O Sirs, if I come forth at your command,
 Let me not suffer for my confidence.

CHORUS
 (Str. 2)
 Against thy will no man shall drive thee hence.

OEDIPUS
 Shall I go further?

CHORUS
                     Aye.

OEDIPUS
                          What further still?

CHORUS
 Lead maiden, thou canst guide him where we will.

ANTIGONE 4\*       \*        \*        \*        \*        \*

OEDIPUS
 \*       \*        \*        \*        \*        \*

ANTIGONE
 \*       \*        \*        \*        \*        \*
 Follow with blind steps, father, as I lead.

OEDIPUS

\*       \*        \*        \*        \*        \*

CHORUS
 In a strange land strange thou art;
 To her will incline thy heart;
 Honor whatso'er the State
 Honors, all she frowns on hate.

OEDIPUS
 Guide me child, where we may range
 Safe within the paths of right;
 Counsel freely may exchange
 Nor with fate and fortune fight.

CHORUS
 (Ant. 2)
 Halt!  Go no further than that rocky floor.

OEDIPUS
 Stay where I now am?

CHORUS
                     Yes, advance no more.

OEDIPUS
 May I sit down?

CHORUS
                Move sideways towards the ledge,
 And sit thee crouching on the scarped edge.

ANTIGONE
 This is my office, father, O incline—

OEDIPUS
 Ah me! ah me!

ANTIGONE
 Thy steps to my steps, lean thine aged frame on mine.

OEDIPUS
 Woe on my fate unblest!

CHORUS
 Wanderer, now thou art at rest,
 Tell me of thy birth and home,
 From what far country art thou come,
 Led on thy weary way, declare!

OEDIPUS
 Strangers, I have no country.  O forbear—

CHORUS
 What is it, old man, that thou wouldst conceal?

OEDIPUS
 Forbear, nor urge me further to reveal—

CHORUS
 Why this reluctance?

OEDIPUS
                     Dread my lineage.

CHORUS
                                         Say!

OEDIPUS
 What must I answer, child, ah welladay!

CHORUS
 Say of what stock thou comest, what man's son—

OEDIPUS
 Ah me, my daughter, now we are undone!

ANTIGONE
 Speak, for thou standest on the slippery verge.

OEDIPUS
 I will; no plea for silence can I urge.

CHORUS
 Will neither speak?  Come, Sir, why dally thus!

OEDIPUS
 Know'st one of Laius'—

CHORUS
                          Ha?  Who!

OEDIPUS
 Seed of Labdacus—

CHORUS
                     Oh Zeus!

OEDIPUS
 The hapless Oedipus.

CHORUS
                     Art he?

OEDIPUS
 Whate'er I utter, have no fear of me.

CHORUS
 Begone!

OEDIPUS
           O wretched me!

CHORUS
                          Begone!

OEDIPUS
 O daughter, what will hap anon?

CHORUS
 Forth from our borders speed ye both!

OEDIPUS
 How keep you then your troth?

CHORUS
 Heaven's justice never smites
 Him who ill with ill requites.
 But if guile with guile contend,
 Bane, not blessing, is the end.
 Arise, begone and take thee hence straightway,
 Lest on our land a heavier curse thou lay.

ANTIGONE
      O sirs! ye suffered not my father blind,
      Albeit gracious and to ruth inclined,
      Knowing the deeds he wrought, not innocent,
           But with no ill intent;
           Yet heed a maiden's moan
           Who pleads for him alone;
           My eyes, not reft of sight,
 Plead with you as a daughter's might
 You are our providence,
 O make us not go hence!
 O with a gracious nod
 Grant us the nigh despaired-of boon we crave?
           Hear us, O hear,
 But all that ye hold dear,
 Wife, children, homestead, hearth and God!
 Where will you find one, search ye ne'er so well.
 Who 'scapes perdition if a god impel!

CHORUS
 Surely we pity thee and him alike
 Daughter of Oedipus, for your distress;
 But as we reverence the decrees of Heaven
 We cannot say aught other than we said.

OEDIPUS
 O what avails renown or fair repute?
 Are they not vanity?  For, look you, now
 Athens is held of States the most devout,
 Athens alone gives hospitality
 And shelters the vexed stranger, so men say.
 Have I found so?  I whom ye dislodged
 First from my seat of rock and now would drive
 Forth from your land, dreading my name alone;
 For me you surely dread not, nor my deeds,
 Deeds of a man more sinned against than sinning,
 As I might well convince you, were it meet
 To tell my mother's story and my sire's,
 The cause of this your fear.  Yet am I then
 A villain born because in self-defense,
 Striken, I struck the striker back again?
 E'en had I known, no villainy 'twould prove:
 But all unwitting whither I went, I went—
 To ruin; my destroyers knew it well,
 Wherefore, I pray you, sirs, in Heaven's name,
 Even as ye bade me quit my seat, defend me.
 O pay not a lip service to the gods
 And wrong them of their dues.  Bethink ye well,
 The eye of Heaven beholds the just of men,
 And the unjust, nor ever in this world
 Has one sole godless sinner found escape.
 Stand then on Heaven's side and never blot
 Athens' fair scutcheon by abetting wrong.
 I came to you a suppliant, and you pledged
 Your honor; O preserve me to the end,
 O let not this marred visage do me wrong!
 A holy and god-fearing man is here
 Whose coming purports comfort for your folk.
 And when your chief arrives, whoe'er he be,
 Then shall ye have my story and know all.
 Meanwhile I pray you do me no despite.

CHORUS
 The plea thou urgest, needs must give us pause,
 Set forth in weighty argument, but we
 Must leave the issue with the ruling powers.

OEDIPUS
 Where is he, strangers, he who sways the realm?

CHORUS
 In his ancestral seat; a messenger,
 The same who sent us here, is gone for him.

OEDIPUS
 And think you he will have such care or thought
 For the blind stranger as to come himself?

CHORUS
 Aye, that he will, when once he learns thy name.

OEDIPUS
 But who will bear him word!

CHORUS
                               The way is long,
 And many travelers pass to speed the news.
 Be sure he'll hear and hasten, never fear;
 So wide and far thy name is noised abroad,
 That, were he ne'er so spent and loth to move,
 He would bestir him when he hears of thee.

OEDIPUS
 Well, may he come with blessing to his State
 And me!  Who serves his neighbor serves himself. 5

 ANTIGONE
 Zeus!  What is this?  What can I say or think?

OEDIPUS
 What now, Antigone?

ANTIGONE
                     I see a woman
 Riding upon a colt of Aetna's breed;
 She wears for headgear a Thessalian hat
 To shade her from the sun.  Who can it be?
 She or a stranger?  Do I wake or dream?
 'This she; 'tis not—I cannot tell, alack;
 It is no other!  Now her bright'ning glance
 Greets me with recognition, yes, 'tis she,
 Herself, Ismene!

OEDIPUS
                     Ha! what say ye, child?

ANTIGONE
 That I behold thy daughter and my sister,
 And thou wilt know her straightway by her voice.
 [Enter ISMENE]

ISMENE
 Father and sister, names to me most sweet,
 How hardly have I found you, hardly now
 When found at last can see you through my tears!

OEDIPUS
 Art come, my child?

ISMENE
                     O father, sad thy plight!

OEDIPUS
 Child, thou art here?

ISMENE
                     Yes, 'twas a weary way.

OEDIPUS
 Touch me, my child.

ISMENE
                     I give a hand to both.

OEDIPUS
 O children—sisters!

ISMENE
                     O disastrous plight!

OEDIPUS
 Her plight and mine?

ISMENE
                     Aye, and my own no less.

OEDIPUS
 What brought thee, daughter?

ISMENE
                               Father, care for thee.

OEDIPUS
 A daughter's yearning?

ISMENE
                          Yes, and I had news
 I would myself deliver, so I came
 With the one thrall who yet is true to me.

OEDIPUS
 Thy valiant brothers, where are they at need?

ISMENE
 They are—enough, 'tis now their darkest hour.

OEDIPUS
 Out on the twain!  The thoughts and actions all
 Are framed and modeled on Egyptian ways.
 For there the men sit at the loom indoors
 While the wives slave abroad for daily bread.
 So you, my children—those whom I behooved
 To bear the burden, stay at home like girls,
 While in their stead my daughters moil and drudge,
 Lightening their father's misery.  The one
 Since first she grew from girlish feebleness
 To womanhood has been the old man's guide
 And shared my weary wandering, roaming oft
 Hungry and footsore through wild forest ways,
 In drenching rains and under scorching suns,
 Careless herself of home and ease, if so
 Her sire might have her tender ministry.
 And thou, my child, whilom thou wentest forth,
 Eluding the Cadmeians' vigilance,
 To bring thy father all the oracles
 Concerning Oedipus, and didst make thyself
 My faithful lieger, when they banished me.
 And now what mission summons thee from home,
 What news, Ismene, hast thou for thy father?
 This much I know, thou com'st not empty-handed,
 Without a warning of some new alarm.

ISMENE
 The toil and trouble, father, that I bore
 To find thy lodging-place and how thou faredst,
 I spare thee; surely 'twere a double pain
 To suffer, first in act and then in telling;
 'Tis the misfortune of thine ill-starred sons
 I come to tell thee.  At the first they willed
 To leave the throne to Creon, minded well
 Thus to remove the inveterate curse of old,
 A canker that infected all thy race.
 But now some god and an infatuate soul
 Have stirred betwixt them a mad rivalry
 To grasp at sovereignty and kingly power.
 Today the hot-branded youth, the younger born,
 Is keeping Polyneices from the throne,
 His elder, and has thrust him from the land.
 The banished brother (so all Thebes reports)
 Fled to the vale of Argos, and by help
 Of new alliance there and friends in arms,
 Swears he will stablish Argos straight as lord
 Of the Cadmeian land, or, if he fail,
 Exalt the victor to the stars of heaven.
 This is no empty tale, but deadly truth,
 My father; and how long thy agony,
 Ere the gods pity thee, I cannot tell.

OEDIPUS
 Hast thou indeed then entertained a hope
 The gods at last will turn and rescue me?

ISMENE
 Yea, so I read these latest oracles.

OEDIPUS
 What oracles?  What hath been uttered, child?

ISMENE
 Thy country (so it runs) shall yearn in time
 To have thee for their weal alive or dead.

OEDIPUS
 And who could gain by such a one as I?

ISMENE
 On thee, 'tis said, their sovereignty depends.

OEDIPUS
 So, when I cease to be, my worth begins.

ISMENE
 The gods, who once abased, uplift thee now.

OEDIPUS
 Poor help to raise an old man fallen in youth.

ISMENE
 Howe'er that be, 'tis for this cause alone
 That Creon comes to thee—and comes anon.

OEDIPUS
 With what intent, my daughter?  Tell me plainly.

ISMENE
 To plant thee near the Theban land, and so
 Keep thee within their grasp, yet now allow
 Thy foot to pass beyond their boundaries.

OEDIPUS
 What gain they, if I lay outside?

OEDIPUS
                                    Thy tomb,
 If disappointed, brings on them a curse.

OEDIPUS
 It needs no god to tell what's plain to sense.

ISMENE
 Therefore they fain would have thee close at hand,
 Not where thou wouldst be master of thyself.

OEDIPUS
 Mean they to shroud my bones in Theban dust?

ISMENE
 Nay, father, guilt of kinsman's blood forbids.

OEDIPUS
 Then never shall they be my masters, never!

ISMENE
 Thebes, thou shalt rue this bitterly some day!

OEDIPUS
 When what conjunction comes to pass, my child?

ISMENE
 Thy angry wraith, when at thy tomb they stand. 6

 OEDIPUS
 And who hath told thee what thou tell'st me, child?

ISMENE
 Envoys who visited the Delphic hearth.

OEDIPUS
 Hath Phoebus spoken thus concerning me?

ISMENE
 So say the envoys who returned to Thebes.

OEDIPUS
 And can a son of mine have heard of this?

ISMENE
 Yea, both alike, and know its import well.

OEDIPUS
 They knew it, yet the ignoble greed of rule
 Outweighed all longing for their sire's return.

ISMENE
 Grievous thy words, yet I must own them true.

OEDIPUS
 Then may the gods ne'er quench their fatal feud,
 And mine be the arbitrament of the fight,
 For which they now are arming, spear to spear;
 That neither he who holds the scepter now
 May keep this throne, nor he who fled the realm
 Return again.  *They* never raised a hand,
 When I their sire was thrust from hearth and home,
 When I was banned and banished, what recked they?
 Say you 'twas done at my desire, a grace
 Which the state, yielding to my wish, allowed?
 Not so; for, mark you, on that very day
 When in the tempest of my soul I craved
 Death, even death by stoning, none appeared
 To further that wild longing, but anon,
 When time had numbed my anguish and I felt
 My wrath had all outrun those errors past,
 Then, then it was the city went about
 By force to oust me, respited for years;
 And then my sons, who should as sons have helped,
 Did nothing: and, one little word from them
 Was all I needed, and they spoke no word,
 But let me wander on for evermore,
 A banished man, a beggar.  These two maids
 Their sisters, girls, gave all their sex could give,
 Food and safe harborage and filial care;
 While their two brethren sacrificed their sire
 For lust of power and sceptred sovereignty.
 No! me they ne'er shall win for an ally,
 Nor will this Theban kingship bring them gain;
 That know I from this maiden's oracles,
 And those old prophecies concerning me,
 Which Phoebus now at length has brought to pass.
 Come Creon then, come all the mightiest
 In Thebes to seek me; for if ye my friends,
 Championed by those dread Powers indigenous,
 Espouse my cause; then for the State ye gain
 A great deliverer, for my foemen bane.

CHORUS
 Our pity, Oedipus, thou needs must move,
 Thou and these maidens; and the stronger plea
 Thou urgest, as the savior of our land,
 Disposes me to counsel for thy weal.

OEDIPUS
 Aid me, kind sirs; I will do all you bid.

CHORUS
 First make atonement to the deities,
 Whose grove by trespass thou didst first profane.

OEDIPUS
 After what manner, stranger?  Teach me, pray.

CHORUS
 Make a libation first of water fetched
 With undefiled hands from living spring.

OEDIPUS
 And after I have gotten this pure draught?

CHORUS
 Bowls thou wilt find, the carver's handiwork;
 Crown thou the rims and both the handles crown—

OEDIPUS
 With olive shoots or blocks of wool, or how?

CHORUS
 With wool from fleece of yearling freshly shorn.

OEDIPUS
 What next? how must I end the ritual?

CHORUS
 Pour thy libation, turning to the dawn.

OEDIPUS
 Pouring it from the urns whereof ye spake?

CHORUS
 Yea, in three streams; and be the last bowl drained
 To the last drop.

OEDIPUS
                     And wherewith shall I fill it,
 Ere in its place I set it?  This too tell.

CHORUS
 With water and with honey; add no wine.

OEDIPUS
 And when the embowered earth hath drunk thereof?

CHORUS
 Then lay upon it thrice nine olive sprays
 With both thy hands, and offer up this prayer.

OEDIPUS
 I fain would hear it; that imports the most.

CHORUS
 That, as we call them Gracious, they would deign
 To grant the suppliant their saving grace.
 So pray thyself or whoso pray for thee,
 In whispered accents, not with lifted voice;
 Then go and look back.  Do as I bid,
 And I shall then be bold to stand thy friend;
 Else, stranger, I should have my fears for thee.

OEDIPUS
 Hear ye, my daughters, what these strangers say?

ANTIGONE
 We listened, and attend thy bidding, father.

OEDIPUS
 I cannot go, disabled as I am
 Doubly, by lack of strength and lack of sight;
 But one of you may do it in my stead;
 For one, I trow, may pay the sacrifice
 Of thousands, if his heart be leal and true.
 So to your work with speed, but leave me not
 Untended; for this frame is all too week
 To move without the help of guiding hand.

ISMENE
 Then I will go perform these rites, but where
 To find the spot, this have I yet to learn.

CHORUS
 Beyond this grove; if thou hast need of aught,
 The guardian of the close will lend his aid.

ISMENE
 I go, and thou, Antigone, meanwhile
 Must guard our father.  In a parent's cause
 Toil, if there be toil, is of no account.
 [Exit ISMENE]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Ill it is, stranger, to awake
 Pain that long since has ceased to ache,
 And yet I fain would hear—

OEDIPUS
 What thing?

CHORUS
 Thy tale of cruel suffering
 For which no cure was found,
 The fate that held thee bound.

OEDIPUS
 O bid me not (as guest I claim
 This grace) expose my shame.

CHORUS
 The tale is bruited far and near,
 And echoes still from ear to ear.
 The truth, I fain would hear.

OEDIPUS
 Ah me!

CHORUS
      I prithee yield.

OEDIPUS
                     Ah me!

CHORUS
 Grant my request, I granted all to thee.

OEDIPUS
 (Ant. 1)
 Know then I suffered ills most vile, but none
 (So help me Heaven!) from acts in malice done.

CHORUS
 Say how.

OEDIPUS
           The State around
 An all unwitting bridegroom bound
 An impious marriage chain;
           That was my bane.

CHORUS
 Didst thou in sooth then share
 A bed incestuous with her that bare—

OEDIPUS
 It stabs me like a sword,
 That two-edged word,
 O stranger, but these maids—my own—

CHORUS
 Say on.

OEDIPUS
 Two daughters, curses twain.

CHORUS
 Oh God!

OEDIPUS
 Sprang from the wife and mother's travail-pain.

CHORUS
 (Str. 2)
 What, then thy offspring are at once—

OEDIPUS
                                         Too true.
 Their father's very sister's too.

CHORUS
 Oh horror!

OEDIPUS
           Horrors from the boundless deep
 Back on my soul in refluent surges sweep.

CHORUS
 Thou hast endured—

OEDIPUS
                     Intolerable woe.

CHORUS
 And sinned—

OEDIPUS
                I sinned not.

CHORUS
                               How so?

OEDIPUS
 I served the State; would I had never won
 That graceless grace by which I was undone.

CHORUS
 (Ant. 2)
 And next, unhappy man, thou hast shed blood?

OEDIPUS
 Must ye hear more?

CHORUS
                     A father's?

OEDIPUS
                                    Flood on flood
 Whelms me; that word's a second mortal blow.

CHORUS
 Murderer!

OEDIPUS
           Yes, a murderer, but know—

CHORUS
 What canst thou plead?

OEDIPUS
                          A plea of justice.

CHORUS
                                              How?

OEDIPUS
 I slew who else would me have slain;
 I slew without intent,
 A wretch, but innocent
 In the law's eye, I stand, without a stain.

CHORUS
 Behold our sovereign, Theseus, Aegeus' son,
 Comes at thy summons to perform his part.
 [Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS
 Oft had I heard of thee in times gone by—
 The bloody mutilation of thine eyes—
 And therefore know thee, son of Laius.
 All that I lately gathered on the way
 Made my conjecture doubly sure; and now
 Thy garb and that marred visage prove to me
 That thou art he.  So pitying thine estate,
 Most ill-starred Oedipus, I fain would know
 What is the suit ye urge on me and Athens,
 Thou and the helpless maiden at thy side.
 Declare it; dire indeed must be the tale
 Whereat *I* should recoil.  I too was reared,
 Like thee, in exile, and in foreign lands
 Wrestled with many perils, no man more.
 Wherefore no alien in adversity
 Shall seek in vain my succor, nor shalt thou;
 I know myself a mortal, and my share
 In what the morrow brings no more than thine.

OEDIPUS
 Theseus, thy words so apt, so generous
 So comfortable, need no long reply
 Both who I am and of what lineage sprung,
 And from what land I came, thou hast declared.
 So without prologue I may utter now
 My brief petition, and the tale is told.

THESEUS
 Say on, and tell me what I fain would learn.

OEDIPUS
 I come to offer thee this woe-worn frame,
 A gift not fair to look on; yet its worth
 More precious far than any outward show.

THESEUS
 What profit dost thou proffer to have brought?

OEDIPUS
 Hereafter thou shalt learn, not yet, methinks.

THESEUS
 When may we hope to reap the benefit?

OEDIPUS
 When I am dead and thou hast buried me.

THESEUS
 Thou cravest life's last service; all before—
 Is it forgotten or of no account?

OEDIPUS
 Yea, the last boon is warrant for the rest.

THESEUS
 The grace thou cravest then is small indeed.

OEDIPUS
 Nay, weigh it well; the issue is not slight.

THESEUS
 Thou meanest that betwixt thy sons and me?

OEDIPUS
 Prince, they would fain convey me back to Thebes.

THESEUS
 If there be no compulsion, then methinks
 To rest in banishment befits not thee.

OEDIPUS
 Nay, when *I* wished it *they* would not consent.

THESEUS
 For shame! such temper misbecomes the faller.

OEDIPUS
 Chide if thou wilt, but first attend my plea.

THESEUS
 Say on, I wait full knowledge ere I judge.

OEDIPUS
 O Theseus, I have suffered wrongs on wrongs.

THESEUS
 Wouldst tell the old misfortune of thy race?

OEDIPUS
 No, that has grown a byword throughout Greece.

THESEUS
 What then can be this more than mortal grief?

OEDIPUS
 My case stands thus; by my own flesh and blood
 I was expelled my country, and can ne'er
 Thither return again, a parricide.

THESEUS
 Why fetch thee home if thou must needs obey.

THESEUS
 What are they threatened by the oracle?

OEDIPUS
 Destruction that awaits them in this land.

THESEUS
 What can beget ill blood 'twixt them and me?

OEDIPUS
 Dear son of Aegeus, to the gods alone
 Is given immunity from eld and death;
 But nothing else escapes all-ruinous time.
 Earth's might decays, the might of men decays,
 Honor grows cold, dishonor flourishes,
 There is no constancy 'twixt friend and friend,
 Or city and city; be it soon or late,
 Sweet turns to bitter, hate once more to love.
 If now 'tis sunshine betwixt Thebes and thee
 And not a cloud, Time in his endless course
 Gives birth to endless days and nights, wherein
 The merest nothing shall suffice to cut
 With serried spears your bonds of amity.
 Then shall my slumbering and buried corpse
 In its cold grave drink their warm life-blood up,
 If Zeus be Zeus and Phoebus still speak true.
 No more:  'tis ill to tear aside the veil
 Of mysteries; let me cease as I began:
 Enough if thou wilt keep thy plighted troth,
 Then shall thou ne'er complain that Oedipus
 Proved an unprofitable and thankless guest,
 Except the gods themselves shall play me false.

CHORUS
 The man, my lord, has from the very first
 Declared his power to offer to our land
 These and like benefits.

THESEUS
                          Who could reject
 The proffered amity of such a friend?
 First, he can claim the hospitality
 To which by mutual contract we stand pledged:
 Next, coming here, a suppliant to the gods,
 He pays full tribute to the State and me;
 His favors therefore never will I spurn,
 But grant him the full rights of citizen;
 And, if it suits the stranger here to bide,
 I place him in your charge, or if he please
 Rather to come with me—choose, Oedipus,
 Which of the two thou wilt.  Thy choice is mine.

OEDIPUS
 Zeus, may the blessing fall on men like these!

THESEUS
 What dost thou then decide—to come with me?

OEDIPUS
 Yea, were it lawful—but 'tis rather here—

THESEUS
 What wouldst thou here?  I shall not thwart thy wish.

OEDIPUS
 Here shall I vanquish those who cast me forth.

THESEUS
 Then were thy presence here a boon indeed.

OEDIPUS
 Such shall it prove, if thou fulfill'st thy pledge.

THESEUS
 Fear not for me; I shall not play thee false.

OEDIPUS
 No need to back thy promise with an oath.

THESEUS
 An oath would be no surer than my word.

OEDIPUS
 How wilt thou act then?

THESEUS
                          What is it thou fear'st?

OEDIPUS
 My foes will come—

THESEUS
                     Our friends will look to that.

OEDIPUS
 But if thou leave me?

THESEUS
                     Teach me not my duty.

OEDIPUS
 'Tis fear constrains me.

THESEUS
                          *My* soul knows no fear!

OEDIPUS
 Thou knowest not what threats—

THESEUS
                               I know that none
 Shall hale thee hence in my despite.  Such threats
 Vented in anger oft, are blusterers,

 An idle breath, forgot when sense returns.
 And for thy foemen, though their words were brave,
 Boasting to bring thee back, they are like to find
 The seas between us wide and hard to sail.
 Such my firm purpose, but in any case
 Take heart, since Phoebus sent thee here.  My name,
 Though I be distant, warrants thee from harm.

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
      Thou hast come to a steed-famed land for rest,
           O stranger worn with toil,
      To a land of all lands the goodliest
           Colonus' glistening soil.
      'Tis the haunt of the clear-voiced nightingale,
           Who hid in her bower, among
      The wine-dark ivy that wreathes the vale,
           Trilleth her ceaseless song;
      And she loves, where the clustering berries nod
           O'er a sunless, windless glade,
      The spot by no mortal footstep trod,
      The pleasance kept for the Bacchic god,
      Where he holds each night his revels wild
      With the nymphs who fostered the lusty child.

(Ant. 1)
      And fed each morn by the pearly dew
           The starred narcissi shine,
      And a wreath with the crocus' golden hue
           For the Mother and Daughter twine.
      And never the sleepless fountains cease
           That feed Cephisus' stream,
      But they swell earth's bosom with quick increase,
           And their wave hath a crystal gleam.
      And the Muses' quire will never disdain
      To visit this heaven-favored plain,
      Nor the Cyprian queen of the golden rein.

(Str. 2)
      And here there grows, unpruned, untamed,
           Terror to foemen's spear,
      A tree in Asian soil unnamed,
      By Pelops' Dorian isle unclaimed,
           Self-nurtured year by year;
      'Tis the grey-leaved olive that feeds our boys;
      Nor youth nor withering age destroys
      The plant that the Olive Planter tends
      And the Grey-eyed Goddess herself defends.

(Ant. 2)
      Yet another gift, of all gifts the most
      Prized by our fatherland, we boast—
      The might of the horse, the might of the sea;
      Our fame, Poseidon, we owe to thee,
      Son of Kronos, our king divine,
      Who in these highways first didst fit
      For the mouth of horses the iron bit;
      Thou too hast taught us to fashion meet
      For the arm of the rower the oar-blade fleet,
      Swift as the Nereids' hundred feet
      As they dance along the brine.

ANTIGONE
 Oh land extolled above all lands, 'tis now
 For thee to make these glorious titles good.

OEDIPUS
 Why this appeal, my daughter?

ANTIGONE
                               Father, lo!
 Creon approaches with his company.

OEDIPUS
 Fear not, it shall be so; if we are old,
 This country's vigor has no touch of age.
 [Enter CREON with attendants]

CREON
 Burghers, my noble friends, ye take alarm
 At my approach (I read it in your eyes),
 Fear nothing and refrain from angry words.
 I come with no ill purpose; I am old,
 And know the city whither I am come,
 Without a peer amongst the powers of Greece.
 It was by reason of my years that I
 Was chosen to persuade your guest and bring
 Him back to Thebes; not the delegate
 Of one man, but commissioned by the State,
 Since of all Thebans I have most bewailed,
 Being his kinsman, his most grievous woes.
 O listen to me, luckless Oedipus,
 Come home!  The whole Cadmeian people claim
 With right to have thee back, I most of all,
 For most of all (else were I vile indeed)
 I mourn for thy misfortunes, seeing thee
 An aged outcast, wandering on and on,
 A beggar with one handmaid for thy stay.
 Ah! who had e'er imagined she could fall
 To such a depth of misery as this,
 To tend in penury thy stricken frame,
 A virgin ripe for wedlock, but unwed,
 A prey for any wanton ravisher?
 Seems it not cruel this reproach I cast
 On thee and on myself and all the race?
 Aye, but an open shame cannot be hid.
 Hide it, O hide it, Oedipus, thou canst.
 O, by our fathers' gods, consent I pray;
 Come back to Thebes, come to thy father's home,
 Bid Athens, as is meet, a fond farewell;
 Thebes thy old foster-mother claims thee first.

OEDIPUS
 O front of brass, thy subtle tongue would twist
 To thy advantage every plea of right
 Why try thy arts on me, why spread again
 Toils where 'twould gall me sorest to be snared?
 In old days when by self-wrought woes distraught,
 I yearned for exile as a glad release,
 Thy will refused the favor then I craved.
 But when my frenzied grief had spent its force,
 And I was fain to taste the sweets of home,
 Then thou wouldst thrust me from my country, then
 These ties of kindred were by thee ignored;
 And now again when thou behold'st this State
 And all its kindly people welcome me,
 Thou seek'st to part us, wrapping in soft words
 Hard thoughts.  And yet what pleasure canst thou find
 In forcing friendship on unwilling foes?
 Suppose a man refused to grant some boon
 When you importuned him, and afterwards
 When you had got your heart's desire, consented,
 Granting a grace from which all grace had fled,
 Would not such favor seem an empty boon?
 Yet such the boon thou profferest now to me,
 Fair in appearance, but when tested false.
 Yea, I will proved thee false, that these may hear;
 Thou art come to take me, not to take me home,
 But plant me on thy borders, that thy State
 May so escape annoyance from this land.
 *That* thou shalt never gain, but *this* instead—
 My ghost to haunt thy country without end;
 And for my sons, this heritage—no more—
 Just room to die in.  Have not I more skill
 Than thou to draw the horoscope of Thebes?
 Are not my teachers surer guides than thine—
 Great Phoebus and the sire of Phoebus, Zeus?
 Thou art a messenger suborned, thy tongue
 Is sharper than a sword's edge, yet thy speech
 Will bring thee more defeats than victories.
 Howbeit, I know I waste my words—begone,
 And leave me here; whate'er may be my lot,
 He lives not ill who lives withal content.

CREON
 Which loses in this parley, I o'erthrown
 By thee, or thou who overthrow'st thyself?

OEDIPUS
 I shall be well contented if thy suit
 Fails with these strangers, as it has with me.

CREON
 Unhappy man, will years ne'er make thee wise?
 Must thou live on to cast a slur on age?

OEDIPUS
 Thou hast a glib tongue, but no honest man,
 Methinks, can argue well on any side.

CREON
 'Tis one thing to speak much, another well.

OEDIPUS
 Thy words, forsooth, are few and all well aimed!

CREON
 Not for a man indeed with wits like thine.

OEDIPUS
 Depart!  I bid thee in these burghers' name,
 And prowl no longer round me to blockade
 My destined harbor.

CREON
                     I protest to these,
 Not thee, and for thine answer to thy kin,
 If e'er I take thee—

OEDIPUS
                     Who against their will
 Could take me?

CREON
                Though untaken thou shalt smart.

OEDIPUS
 What power hast thou to execute this threat?

CREON
 One of thy daughters is already seized,
 The other I will carry off anon.

OEDIPUS
 Woe, woe!

CREON
           This is but prelude to thy woes.

OEDIPUS
 Hast thou my child?

CREON
                     And soon shall have the other.

OEDIPUS
 Ho, friends! ye will not surely play me false?
 Chase this ungodly villain from your land.

CHORUS
 Hence, stranger, hence avaunt!  Thou doest wrong
 In this, and wrong in all that thou hast done.

CREON (to his guards)
 'Tis time by force to carry off the girl,
 If she refuse of her free will to go.

ANTIGONE
 Ah, woe is me! where shall I fly, where find
 Succor from gods or men?

CHORUS
                          What would'st thou, stranger?

CREON
 I meddle not with him, but her who is mine.

OEDIPUS
 O princes of the land!

CHORUS
                          Sir, thou dost wrong.

CREON
 Nay, right.

CHORUS
                How right?

CREON
                          I take but what is mine.

OEDIPUS
 Help, Athens!

CHORUS
 What means this, sirrah? quick unhand her, or
 We'll fight it out.

CREON
                     Back!

CHORUS
                          Not till thou forbear.

CREON
 'Tis war with Thebes if I am touched or harmed.

OEDIPUS
 Did I not warn thee?

CHORUS
                     Quick, unhand the maid!

CREON
 Command your minions; I am not your slave.

CHORUS
 Desist, I bid thee.

CREON (to the guard)
                     And O bid thee march!

CHORUS
           To the rescue, one and all!
           Rally, neighbors to my call!
           See, the foe is at the gate!
           Rally to defend the State.

ANTIGONE
 Ah, woe is me, they drag me hence, O friends.

OEDIPUS
 Where art thou, daughter?

ANTIGONE
                          Haled along by force.

OEDIPUS
 Thy hands, my child!

ANTIGONE
                     They will not let me, father.

CREON
 Away with her!

OEDIPUS
                Ah, woe is me, ah woe!

CREON
 So those two crutches shall no longer serve thee
 For further roaming.  Since it pleaseth thee
 To triumph o'er thy country and thy friends
 Who mandate, though a prince, I here discharge,
 Enjoy thy triumph; soon or late thou'lt find
 Thou art an enemy to thyself, both now
 And in time past, when in despite of friends
 Thou gav'st the rein to passion, still thy bane.

CHORUS
 Hold there, sir stranger!

CREON
                          Hands off, have a care.

CHORUS
 Restore the maidens, else thou goest not.

CREON
 Then Thebes will take a dearer surety soon;
 I will lay hands on more than these two maids.

CHORUS
 What canst thou further?

CREON
                          Carry off this man.

CHORUS
 Brave words!

CREON
                And deeds forthwith shall make them good.

CHORUS
 Unless perchance our sovereign intervene.

OEDIPUS
 O shameless voice!  Would'st lay an hand on me?

CREON
 Silence, I bid thee!

OEDIPUS
                     Goddesses, allow
 Thy suppliant to utter yet one curse!
 Wretch, now my eyes are gone thou hast torn away
 The helpless maiden who was eyes to me;
 For these to thee and all thy cursed race
 May the great Sun, whose eye is everywhere,
 Grant length of days and old age like to mine.

CREON
 Listen, O men of Athens, mark ye this?

OEDIPUS
 They mark us both and understand that I
 Wronged by the deeds defend myself with words.

CREON
 Nothing shall curb my will; though I be old
 And single-handed, I will have this man.

OEDIPUS
 O woe is me!

CHORUS
 Thou art a bold man, stranger, if thou think'st
 To execute thy purpose.

CREON
                          So I do.

CHORUS
 Then shall I deem this State no more a State.

CREON
 With a just quarrel weakness conquers might.

OEDIPUS
 Ye hear his words?

CHORUS
                     Aye words, but not yet deeds,
 Zeus knoweth!

CREON
                Zeus may haply know, not thou.

CHORUS
 Insolence!

CREON
           Insolence that thou must bear.

CHORUS
           Haste ye princes, sound the alarm!
           Men of Athens, arm ye, arm!
           Quickly to the rescue come
           Ere the robbers get them home.
 [Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS
 Why this outcry?  What is forward? wherefore was I called away
 From the altar of Poseidon, lord of your Colonus?  Say!
 On what errand have I hurried hither without stop or stay.

OEDIPUS
 Dear friend—those accents tell me who thou art—
 Yon man but now hath done me a foul wrong.

THESEUS
 What is this wrong and who hath wrought it?  Speak.

OEDIPUS
 Creon who stands before thee.  He it is
 Hath robbed me of my all, my daughters twain.

THESEUS
 What means this?

OEDIPUS
                Thou hast heard my tale of wrongs.

THESEUS
 Ho! hasten to the altars, one of you.
 Command my liegemen leave the sacrifice
 And hurry, foot and horse, with rein unchecked,
 To where the paths that packmen use diverge,
 Lest the two maidens slip away, and I
 Become a mockery to this my guest,
 As one despoiled by force.  Quick, as I bid.
 As for this stranger, had I let my rage,
 Justly provoked, have play, he had not 'scaped
 Scathless and uncorrected at my hands.
 But now the laws to which himself appealed,
 These and none others shall adjudicate.
 Thou shalt not quit this land, till thou hast fetched
 The maidens and produced them in my sight.
 Thou hast offended both against myself
 And thine own race and country.  Having come
 Unto a State that champions right and asks
 For every action warranty of law,
 Thou hast set aside the custom of the land,
 And like some freebooter art carrying off
 What plunder pleases thee, as if forsooth
 Thou thoughtest this a city without men,
 Or manned by slaves, and me a thing of naught.
 Yet not from Thebes this villainy was learnt;
 Thebes is not wont to breed unrighteous sons,
 Nor would she praise thee, if she learnt that thou
 Wert robbing me—aye and the gods to boot,
 Haling by force their suppliants, poor maids.
 Were I on Theban soil, to prosecute
 The justest claim imaginable, I
 Would never wrest by violence my own
 Without sanction of your State or King;
 I should behave as fits an outlander
 Living amongst a foreign folk, but thou
 Shamest a city that deserves it not,
 Even thine own, and plentitude of years
 Have made of thee an old man and a fool.
 Therefore again I charge thee as before,
 See that the maidens are restored at once,
 Unless thou would'st continue here by force
 And not by choice a sojourner; so much
 I tell thee home and what I say, I mean.

CHORUS
 Thy case is perilous; though by birth and race
 Thou should'st be just, thou plainly doest wrong.

CREON
 Not deeming this city void of men
 Or counsel, son of Aegeus, as thou say'st
 I did what I have done; rather I thought
 Your people were not like to set such store
 by kin of mine and keep them 'gainst my will.
 Nor would they harbor, so I stood assured,
 A godless parricide, a reprobate
 Convicted of incestuous marriage ties.
 For on her native hill of Ares here
 (I knew your far-famed Areopagus)
 Sits Justice, and permits not vagrant folk
 To stay within your borders.  In that faith
 I hunted down my quarry; and e'en then
 I had refrained but for the curses dire
 Wherewith he banned my kinsfolk and myself:
 Such wrong, methought, had warrant for my act.
 Anger has no old age but only death;
 The dead alone can feel no touch of spite.
 So thou must work thy will; my cause is just
 But weak without allies; yet will I try,
 Old as I am, to answer deeds with deeds.

OEDIPUS
 O shameless railer, think'st thou this abuse
 Defames my grey hairs rather than thine own?
 Murder and incest, deeds of horror, all
 Thou blurtest forth against me, all I have borne,
 No willing sinner; so it pleased the gods
 Wrath haply with my sinful race of old,
 Since thou could'st find no sin in me myself
 For which in retribution I was doomed
 To trespass thus against myself and mine.
 Answer me now, if by some oracle
 My sire was destined to a bloody end
 By a son's hand, can this reflect on me,
 Me then unborn, begotten by no sire,
 Conceived in no mother's womb?  And if
 When born to misery, as born I was,
 I met my sire, not knowing whom I met
 or what I did, and slew him, how canst thou
 With justice blame the all-unconscious hand?
 And for my mother, wretch, art not ashamed,
 Seeing she was thy sister, to extort
 From me the story of her marriage, such
 A marriage as I straightway will proclaim.
 For I will speak; thy lewd and impious speech
 Has broken all the bonds of reticence.
 She was, ah woe is me! she was my mother;
 I knew it not, nor she; and she my mother
 Bare children to the son whom she had borne,
 A birth of shame.  But this at least I know
 Wittingly thou aspersest her and me;
 But I unwitting wed, unwilling speak.
 Nay neither in this marriage or this deed
 Which thou art ever casting in my teeth—
 A murdered sire—shall I be held to blame.
 Come, answer me one question, if thou canst:
 If one should presently attempt thy life,
 Would'st thou, O man of justice, first inquire
 If the assassin was perchance thy sire,
 Or turn upon him?  As thou lov'st thy life,
 On thy aggressor thou would'st turn, no stay
 Debating, if the law would bear thee out.
 Such was my case, and such the pass whereto
 The gods reduced me; and methinks my sire,
 Could he come back to life, would not dissent.
 Yet thou, for just thou art not, but a man
 Who sticks at nothing, if it serve his plea,
 Reproachest me with this before these men.
 It serves thy turn to laud great Theseus' name,
 And Athens as a wisely governed State;
 Yet in thy flatteries one thing is to seek:
 If any land knows how to pay the gods
 Their proper rites, 'tis Athens most of all.
 This is the land whence thou wast fain to steal
 Their aged suppliant and hast carried off
 My daughters.  Therefore to yon goddesses,
 I turn, adjure them and invoke their aid
 To champion my cause, that thou mayest learn
 What is the breed of men who guard this State.

CHORUS
 An honest man, my liege, one sore bestead
 By fortune, and so worthy our support.

THESEUS
 Enough of words; the captors speed amain,
 While we the victims stand debating here.

CREON
 What would'st thou?  What can I, a feeble man?

THESEUS
 Show us the trail, and I'll attend thee too,
 That, if thou hast the maidens hereabouts,
 Thou mayest thyself discover them to me;
 But if thy guards outstrip us with their spoil,
 We may draw rein; for others speed, from whom
 They will not 'scape to thank the gods at home.
 Lead on, I say, the captor's caught, and fate
 Hath ta'en the fowler in the toils he spread;
 So soon are lost gains gotten by deceit.
 And look not for allies; I know indeed
 Such height of insolence was never reached
 Without abettors or accomplices;
 Thou hast some backer in thy bold essay,
 But I will search this matter home and see
 One man doth not prevail against the State.
 Dost take my drift, or seem these words as vain
 As seemed our warnings when the plot was hatched?

CREON
 Nothing thou sayest can I here dispute,
 But once at home I too shall act my part.

THESEUS
 Threaten us and—begone!  Thou, Oedipus,
 Stay here assured that nothing save my death
 Will stay my purpose to restore the maids.

OEDIPUS
 Heaven bless thee, Theseus, for thy nobleness
 And all thy loving care in my behalf.
 [Exeunt THESEUS and CREON]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
           O when the flying foe,
           Turning at last to bay,
           Soon will give blow for blow,
           Might I behold the fray;
           Hear the loud battle roar
           Swell, on the Pythian shore,
           Or by the torch-lit bay,
           Where the dread Queen and Maid
           Cherish the mystic rites,
           Rites they to none betray,
           Ere on his lips is laid
           Secrecy's golden key
           By their own acolytes,
           Priestly Eumolpidae.

           There I might chance behold
           Theseus our captain bold
           Meet with the robber band,
           Ere they have fled the land,
           Rescue by might and main
           Maidens, the captives twain.

(Ant. 1)
           Haply on swiftest steed,
           Or in the flying car,
           Now they approach the glen,
           West of white Oea's scaur.
           They will be vanquished:
           Dread are our warriors, dread
           Theseus our chieftain's men.
           Flashes each bridle bright,
           Charges each gallant knight,
           All that our Queen adore,
           Pallas their patron, or
           Him whose wide floods enring
           Earth, the great Ocean-king
           Whom Rhea bore.

(Str. 2)
           Fight they or now prepare
           To fight? a vision rare
           Tells me that soon again
           I shall behold the twain
           Maidens so ill bestead,
           By their kin buffeted.
 Today, today Zeus worketh some great thing
      This day shall victory bring.
 O for the wings, the wings of a dove,
 To be borne with the speed of the gale,
 Up and still upwards to sail
      And gaze on the fray from the clouds above.
 (Ant. 2)
 All-seeing Zeus, O lord of heaven,
 To our guardian host be given
 Might triumphant to surprise
 Flying foes and win their prize.
 Hear us, Zeus, and hear us, child
 Of Zeus, Athene undefiled,
 Hear, Apollo, hunter, hear,
 Huntress, sister of Apollo,
 Who the dappled swift-foot deer
 O'er the wooded glade dost follow;
 Help with your two-fold power
 Athens in danger's hour!
 O wayfarer, thou wilt not have to tax
 The friends who watch for thee with false presage,
 For lo, an escort with the maids draws near.
 [Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE with THESEUS]

OEDIPUS
 Where, where? what sayest thou?

ANTIGONE
                               O father, father,
 Would that some god might grant thee eyes to see
 This best of men who brings us back again.

OEDIPUS
 My child! and are ye back indeed!

ANTIGONE
                                    Yes, saved
 By Theseus and his gallant followers.

OEDIPUS
 Come to your father's arms, O let me feel
 A child's embrace I never hoped for more.

ANTIGONE
 Thou askest what is doubly sweet to give.

OEDIPUS
 Where are ye then?

ANTIGONE
                     We come together both.

OEDIPUS
 My precious nurslings!

ANTIGONE
                          Fathers aye were fond.

OEDIPUS
 Props of my age!

ANTIGONE
                So sorrow sorrow props.

OEDIPUS
 I have my darlings, and if death should come,
 Death were not wholly bitter with you near.
 Cling to me, press me close on either side,
 There rest ye from your dreary wayfaring.
 Now tell me of your ventures, but in brief;
 Brief speech suffices for young maids like you.

ANTIGONE
 Here is our savior; thou should'st hear the tale
 From his own lips; so shall my part be brief.

OEDIPUS
 I pray thee do not wonder if the sight
 Of children, given o'er for lost, has made
 My converse somewhat long and tedious.
 Full well I know the joy I have of them
 Is due to thee, to thee and no man else;
 Thou wast their sole deliverer, none else.
 The gods deal with thee after my desire,
 With thee and with this land! for fear of heaven
 I found above all peoples most with you,
 And righteousness and lips that cannot lie.
 I speak in gratitude of what I know,
 For all I have I owe to thee alone.
 Give me thy hand, O Prince, that I may touch it,
 And if thou wilt permit me, kiss thy cheek.
 What say I?  Can I wish that thou should'st touch
 One fallen like me to utter wretchedness,
 Corrupt and tainted with a thousand ills?
 Oh no, I would not let thee if thou would'st.
 They only who have known calamity
 Can share it.  Let me greet thee where thou art,
 And still befriend me as thou hast till now.

THESEUS
 I marvel not if thou hast dallied long
 In converse with thy children and preferred
 Their speech to mine; I feel no jealousy,
 I would be famous more by deeds than words.
 Of this, old friend, thou hast had proof; my oath
 I have fulfilled and brought thee back the maids
 Alive and nothing harmed for all those threats.
 And how the fight was won, 'twere waste of words
 To boast—thy daughters here will tell thee all.
 But of a matter that has lately chanced
 On my way hitherward, I fain would have
 Thy counsel—slight 'twould seem, yet worthy thought.
 A wise man heeds all matters great or small.

OEDIPUS
 What is it, son of Aegeus?  Let me hear.
 Of what thou askest I myself know naught.

THESEUS
 'Tis said a man, no countryman of thine,
 But of thy kin, hath taken sanctuary
 Beside the altar of Poseidon, where
 I was at sacrifice when called away.

OEDIPUS
 What is his country? what the suitor's prayer?

THESEUS
 I know but one thing; he implores, I am told,
 A word with thee—he will not trouble thee.

OEDIPUS
 What seeks he?  If a suppliant, something grave.

THESEUS
 He only waits, they say, to speak with thee,
 And then unharmed to go upon his way.

OEDIPUS
 I marvel who is this petitioner.

THESEUS
 Think if there be not any of thy kin
 At Argos who might claim this boon of thee.

OEDIPUS
 Dear friend, forbear, I pray.

THESEUS
                               What ails thee now?

OEDIPUS
 Ask it not of me.

THESEUS
                     Ask not what? explain.

OEDIPUS
 Thy words have told me who the suppliant is.

THESEUS
 Who can he be that I should frown on him?

OEDIPUS
 My son, O king, my hateful son, whose words
 Of all men's most would jar upon my ears.

THESEUS
 Thou sure mightest listen.  If his suit offend,
 No need to grant it.  Why so loth to hear him?

OEDIPUS
 That voice, O king, grates on a father's ears;
 I have come to loathe it.  Force me not to yield.

THESEUS
 But he hath found asylum.  O beware,
 And fail not in due reverence to the god.

ANTIGONE
 O heed me, father, though I am young in years.
 Let the prince have his will and pay withal
 What in his eyes is service to the god;
 For our sake also let our brother come.
 If what he urges tend not to thy good
 He cannot surely wrest perforce thy will.
 To hear him then, what harm?  By open words
 A scheme of villainy is soon bewrayed.
 Thou art his father, therefore canst not pay
 In kind a son's most impious outrages.
 O listen to him; other men like thee
 Have thankless children and are choleric,
 But yielding to persuasion's gentle spell
 They let their savage mood be exorcised.
 Look thou to the past, forget the present, think
 On all the woe thy sire and mother brought thee;
 Thence wilt thou draw this lesson without fail,
 Of evil passion evil is the end.
 Thou hast, alas, to prick thy memory,
 Stern monitors, these ever-sightless orbs.
 O yield to us; just suitors should not need
 To be importunate, nor he that takes
 A favor lack the grace to make return.

OEDIPUS
 Grievous to me, my child, the boon ye win
 By pleading.  Let it be then; have your way
 Only if come he must, I beg thee, friend,
 Let none have power to dispose of me.

THESEUS
 No need, Sir, to appeal a second time.
 It likes me not to boast, but be assured
 Thy life is safe while any god saves mine.
 [Exit THESEUS]

CHORUS
 (Str.)
 Who craves excess of days,
           Scorning the common span
           Of life, I judge that man
 A giddy wight who walks in folly's ways.
 For the long years heap up a grievous load,
           Scant pleasures, heavier pains,
           Till not one joy remains
 For him who lingers on life's weary road
      And come it slow or fast,
           One doom of fate
           Doth all await,
           For dance and marriage bell,
           The dirge and funeral knell.
 Death the deliverer freeth all at last.
 (Ant.)
           Not to be born at all
           Is best, far best that can befall,
           Next best, when born, with least delay
           To trace the backward way.
 For when youth passes with its giddy train,
      Troubles on troubles follow, toils on toils,
           Pain, pain for ever pain;
           And none escapes life's coils.
           Envy, sedition, strife,
 Carnage and war, make up the tale of life.
 Last comes the worst and most abhorred stage
           Of unregarded age,
 Joyless, companionless and slow,
           Of woes the crowning woe.

(Epode)
 Such ills not I alone,
 He too our guest hath known,
 E'en as some headland on an iron-bound shore,
 Lashed by the wintry blasts and surge's roar,
 So is he buffeted on every side
 By drear misfortune's whelming tide,
           By every wind of heaven o'erborne
           Some from the sunset, some from orient morn,
           Some from the noonday glow.
 Some from Rhipean gloom of everlasting snow.

ANTIGONE
 Father, methinks I see the stranger coming,
 Alone he comes and weeping plenteous tears.

OEDIPUS
 Who may he be?

ANTIGONE
                The same that we surmised.
 From the outset—Polyneices.  He is here.
 [Enter POLYNEICES]

POLYNEICES
 Ah me, my sisters, shall I first lament
 My own afflictions, or my aged sire's,
 Whom here I find a castaway, with you,
 In a strange land, an ancient beggar clad
 In antic tatters, marring all his frame,
 While o'er the sightless orbs his unkept locks
 Float in the breeze; and, as it were to match,
 He bears a wallet against hunger's pinch.
 All this too late I learn, wretch that I am,
 Alas!  I own it, and am proved most vile
 In my neglect of thee:  I scorn myself.
 But as almighty Zeus in all he doth
 Hath Mercy for co-partner of this throne,
 Let Mercy, father, also sit enthroned
 In thy heart likewise.  For transgressions past
 May be amended, cannot be made worse.

Why silent?  Father, speak, nor turn away,
 Hast thou no word, wilt thou dismiss me then
 In mute disdain, nor tell me why thou art wrath?
 O ye his daughters, sisters mine, do ye
 This sullen, obstinate silence try to move.
 Let him not spurn, without a single word
 Of answer, me the suppliant of the god.

ANTIGONE
 Tell him thyself, unhappy one, thine errand;
 For large discourse may send a thrill of joy,
 Or stir a chord of wrath or tenderness,
 And to the tongue-tied somehow give a tongue.

POLYNEICES
 Well dost thou counsel, and I will speak out.
 First will I call in aid the god himself,
 Poseidon, from whose altar I was raised,
 With warrant from the monarch of this land,
 To parley with you, and depart unscathed.
 These pledges, strangers, I would see observed
 By you and by my sisters and my sire.
 Now, father, let me tell thee why I came.
 I have been banished from my native land
 Because by right of primogeniture
 I claimed possession of thy sovereign throne
 Wherefrom Etocles, my younger brother,
 Ousted me, not by weight of precedent,
 Nor by the last arbitrament of war,
 But by his popular acts; and the prime cause
 Of this I deem the curse that rests on thee.
 So likewise hold the soothsayers, for when
 I came to Argos in the Dorian land
 And took the king Adrastus' child to wife,
 Under my standard I enlisted all
 The foremost captains of the Apian isle,
 To levy with their aid that sevenfold host
 Of spearmen against Thebes, determining
 To oust my foes or die in a just cause.
 Why then, thou askest, am I here today?
 Father, I come a suppliant to thee
 Both for myself and my allies who now
 With squadrons seven beneath their seven spears
 Beleaguer all the plain that circles Thebes.
 Foremost the peerless warrior, peerless seer,
 Amphiaraiis with his lightning lance;
 Next an Aetolian, Tydeus, Oeneus' son;
 Eteoclus of Argive birth the third;
 The fourth Hippomedon, sent to the war
 By his sire Talaos; Capaneus, the fifth,
 Vaunts he will fire and raze the town; the sixth
 Parthenopaeus, an Arcadian born
 Named of that maid, longtime a maid and late
 Espoused, Atalanta's true-born child;
 Last I thy son, or thine at least in name,
 If but the bastard of an evil fate,
 Lead against Thebes the fearless Argive host.
 Thus by thy children and thy life, my sire,
 We all adjure thee to remit thy wrath
 And favor one who seeks a just revenge
 Against a brother who has banned and robbed him.
 For victory, if oracles speak true,
 Will fall to those who have thee for ally.
 So, by our fountains and familiar gods
 I pray thee, yield and hear; a beggar I
 And exile, thou an exile likewise; both
 Involved in one misfortune find a home
 As pensioners, while he, the lord of Thebes,
 O agony! makes a mock of thee and me.
 I'll scatter with a breath the upstart's might,
 And bring thee home again and stablish thee,
 And stablish, having cast him out, myself.
 This will thy goodwill I will undertake,
 Without it I can scare return alive.

CHORUS
 For the king's sake who sent him, Oedipus,
 Dismiss him not without a meet reply.

OEDIPUS
 Nay, worthy seniors, but for Theseus' sake
 Who sent him hither to have word of me.
 Never again would he have heard my voice;
 But now he shall obtain this parting grace,
 An answer that will bring him little joy.
 O villain, when thou hadst the sovereignty
 That now thy brother holdeth in thy stead,
 Didst thou not drive me, thine own father, out,
 An exile, cityless, and make we wear
 This beggar's garb thou weepest to behold,
 Now thou art come thyself to my sad plight?
 Nothing is here for tears; it must be borne
 By *me* till death, and I shall think of thee
 As of my murderer; thou didst thrust me out;
 'Tis thou hast made me conversant with woe,
 Through thee I beg my bread in a strange land;
 And had not these my daughters tended me
 I had been dead for aught of aid from thee.
 They tend me, they preserve me, they are men
 Not women in true service to their sire;
 But ye are bastards, and no sons of mine.
 Therefore just Heaven hath an eye on thee;
 Howbeit not yet with aspect so austere
 As thou shalt soon experience, if indeed
 These banded hosts are moving against Thebes.
 That city thou canst never storm, but first
 Shall fall, thou and thy brother, blood-imbrued.
 Such curse I lately launched against you twain,
 Such curse I now invoke to fight for me,
 That ye may learn to honor those who bear thee
 Nor flout a sightless father who begat
 Degenerate sons—these maidens did not so.
 Therefore my curse is stronger than thy "throne,"
 Thy "suppliance," if by right of laws eterne
 Primeval Justice sits enthroned with Zeus.
 Begone, abhorred, disowned, no son of mine,
 Thou vilest of the vile! and take with thee
 This curse I leave thee as my last bequest:—
 Never to win by arms thy native land,
 No, nor return to Argos in the Vale,
 But by a kinsman's hand to die and slay
 Him who expelled thee.  So I pray and call
 On the ancestral gloom of Tartarus
 To snatch thee hence, on these dread goddesses
 I call, and Ares who incensed you both
 To mortal enmity.  Go now proclaim
 What thou hast heard to the Cadmeians all,
 Thy staunch confederates—this the heritage
 that Oedipus divideth to his sons.

CHORUS
 Thy errand, Polyneices, liked me not
 From the beginning; now go back with speed.

POLYNEICES
 Woe worth my journey and my baffled hopes!
 Woe worth my comrades!  What a desperate end
 To that glad march from Argos!  Woe is me!
 I dare not whisper it to my allies
 Or turn them back, but mute must meet my doom.
 My sisters, ye his daughters, ye have heard
 The prayers of our stern father, if his curse
 Should come to pass and ye some day return
 To Thebes, O then disown me not, I pray,
 But grant me burial and due funeral rites.
 So shall the praise your filial care now wins
 Be doubled for the service wrought for me.

ANTIGONE
 One boon, O Polyneices, let me crave.

POLYNEICES
 What would'st thou, sweet Antigone?  Say on.

ANTIGONE
 Turn back thy host to Argos with all speed,
 And ruin not thyself and Thebes as well.

POLYNEICES
 That cannot be.  How could I lead again
 An army that had seen their leader quail?

ANTIGONE
 But, brother, why shouldst thou be wroth again?
 What profit from thy country's ruin comes?

POLYNEICES
 'Tis shame to live in exile, and shall I
 The elder bear a younger brother's flouts?

ANTIGONE
 Wilt thou then bring to pass his prophecies
 Who threatens mutual slaughter to you both?

POLYNEICES
 Aye, so he wishes:—but I must not yield.

ANTIGONE
 O woe is me! but say, will any dare,
 Hearing his prophecy, to follow thee?

POLYNEICES
 I shall not tell it; a good general
 Reports successes and conceals mishaps.

ANTIGONE
 Misguided youth, thy purpose then stands fast!

POLYNEICES
 'Tis so, and stay me not.  The road I choose,
 Dogged by my sire and his avenging spirit,
 Leads me to ruin; but for you may Zeus
 Make your path bright if ye fulfill my hest
 When dead; in life ye cannot serve me more.
 Now let me go, farewell, a long farewell!
 Ye ne'er shall see my living face again.

ANTIGONE
 Ah me!

POLYNEICES
           Bewail me not.

ANTIGONE
                          Who would not mourn
 Thee, brother, hurrying to an open pit!

POLYNEICES
 If I must die, I must.

ANTIGONE
                          Nay, hear me plead.

POLYNEICES
 It may not be; forbear.

ANTIGONE
                          Then woe is me,
 If I must lose thee.

POLYNEICES
                     Nay, that rests with fate,
 Whether I live or die; but for you both
 I pray to heaven ye may escape all ill;
 For ye are blameless in the eyes of all.
 [Exit POLYNEICES]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
      Ills on ills! no pause or rest!
      Come they from our sightless guest?
      Or haply now we see fulfilled
      What fate long time hath willed?
      For ne'er have I proved vain
      Aught that the heavenly powers ordain.
      Time with never sleeping eye
      Watches what is writ on high,
      Overthrowing now the great,
      Raising now from low estate.
 Hark!  How the thunder rumbles!  Zeus defend us!

OEDIPUS
 Children, my children! will no messenger
 Go summon hither Theseus my best friend?

ANTIGONE
 And wherefore, father, dost thou summon him?

OEDIPUS
 This winged thunder of the god must bear me
 Anon to Hades.  Send and tarry not.

CHORUS
 (Ant. 1)
 Hark! with louder, nearer roar
 The bolt of Zeus descends once more.
 My spirit quails and cowers:  my hair
 Bristles for fear.  Again that flare!
 What doth the lightning-flash portend?
 Ever it points to issues grave.

 Dread powers of air!  Save, Zeus, O save!

OEDIPUS
 Daughters, upon me the predestined end
 Has come; no turning from it any more.

ANTIGONE
 How knowest thou?  What sign convinces thee?

OEDIPUS
 I know full well.  Let some one with all speed
 Go summon hither the Athenian prince.

CHORUS
 (Str. 2)
 Ha! once more the deafening sound
 Peals yet louder all around
 If thou darkenest our land,
 Lightly, lightly lay thy hand;
 Grace, not anger, let me win,
 If upon a man of sin
 I have looked with pitying eye,
 Zeus, our king, to thee I cry!

OEDIPUS
 Is the prince coming?  Will he when he comes
 Find me yet living and my senses clear!

ANTIGONE
 What solemn charge would'st thou impress on him?

OEDIPUS
 For all his benefits I would perform
 The promise made when I received them first.

CHORUS
 (Ant. 2)
           Hither haste, my son, arise,
           Altar leave and sacrifice,
           If haply to Poseidon now
           In the far glade thou pay'st thy vow.
           For our guest to thee would bring
           And thy folk and offering,
           Thy due guerdon.  Haste, O King!
 [Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS
 Wherefore again this general din? at once
 My people call me and the stranger calls.
 Is it a thunderbolt of Zeus or sleet
 Of arrowy hail? a storm so fierce as this
 Would warrant all surmises of mischance.

OEDIPUS
 Thou com'st much wished for, Prince, and sure some god
 Hath bid good luck attend thee on thy way.

THESEUS
 What, son of Laius, hath chanced of new?

OEDIPUS
 My life hath turned the scale.  I would do all
 I promised thee and thine before I die.

THESEUS
 What sign assures thee that thine end is near?

OEDIPUS
 The gods themselves are heralds of my fate;
 Of their appointed warnings nothing fails.

THESEUS
 How sayest thou they signify their will?

OEDIPUS
 This thunder, peal on peal, this lightning hurled
 Flash upon flash, from the unconquered hand.

THESEUS
 I must believe thee, having found thee oft
 A prophet true; then speak what must be done.

OEDIPUS
 O son of Aegeus, for this state will I
 Unfold a treasure age cannot corrupt.
 Myself anon without a guiding hand
 Will take thee to the spot where I must end.
 This secret ne'er reveal to mortal man,
 Neither the spot nor whereabouts it lies,
 So shall it ever serve thee for defense
 Better than native shields and near allies.
 But those dread mysteries speech may not profane
 Thyself shalt gather coming there alone;
 Since not to any of thy subjects,  nor
 To my own children, though I love them dearly,
 Can I reveal what thou must guard alone,
 And whisper to thy chosen heir alone,
 So to be handed down from heir to heir.
 Thus shalt thou hold this land inviolate
 From the dread Dragon's brood. 7  The justest State
 By countless wanton neighbors may be wronged,
 For the gods, though they tarry, mark for doom
 The godless sinner in his mad career.
 Far from thee, son of Aegeus, be such fate!
 But to the spot—the god within me goads—
 Let us set forth no longer hesitate.
 Follow me, daughters, this way.  Strange that I
 Whom you have led so long should lead you now.
 Oh, touch me not, but let me all alone
 Find out the sepulcher that destiny
 Appoints me in this land.  Hither, this way,
 For this way Hermes leads, the spirit guide,
 And Persephassa, empress of the dead.
 O light, no light to me, but mine erewhile,
 Now the last time I feel thee palpable,
 For I am drawing near the final gloom
 Of Hades.  Blessing on thee, dearest friend,
 On thee and on thy land and followers!
 Live prosperous and in your happy state
 Still for your welfare think on me, the dead.
 [Exit THESEUS followed by ANTIGONE and ISMENE]

CHORUS
 (Str.)
           If mortal prayers are heard in hell,
           Hear, Goddess dread, invisible!
           Monarch of the regions drear,
                Aidoneus, hear, O hear!
           By a gentle, tearless doom
           Speed this stranger to the gloom,
           Let him enter without pain
           The all-shrouding Stygian plain.
           Wrongfully in life oppressed,
           Be he now by Justice blessed.

(Ant.)
           Queen infernal, and thou fell
           Watch-dog of the gates of hell,
           Who, as legends tell, dost glare,
           Gnarling in thy cavernous lair
           At all comers, let him go
           Scathless to the fields below.
           For thy master orders thus,
           The son of earth and Tartarus;
           In his den the monster keep,
           Giver of eternal sleep.
 [Enter MESSENGER]

MESSENGER
 Friends, countrymen, my tidings are in sum
 That Oedipus is gone, but the event
 Was not so brief, nor can the tale be brief.

CHORUS
 What, has he gone, the unhappy man?

MESSENGER
                                    Know well
 That he has passed away from life to death.

CHORUS
 How?  By a god-sent, painless doom, poor soul?

MESSENGER
 Thy question hits the marvel of the tale.
 How he moved hence, you saw him and must know;
 Without a friend to lead the way, himself
 Guiding us all.  So having reached the abrupt
 Earth-rooted Threshold with its brazen stairs,
 He paused at one of the converging paths,
 Hard by the rocky basin which records
 The pact of Theseus and Peirithous.
 Betwixt that rift and the Thorician rock,
 The hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb,
 Midway he sat and loosed his beggar's weeds;
 Then calling to his daughters bade them fetch
 Of running water, both to wash withal
 And make libation; so they clomb the steep;
 And in brief space brought what their father bade,
 Then laved and dressed him with observance due.
 But when he had his will in everything,
 And no desire was left unsatisfied,
 It thundered from the netherworld; the maids
 Shivered, and crouching at their father's knees
 Wept, beat their breast and uttered a long wail.
 He, as he heard their sudden bitter cry,
 Folded his arms about them both and said,
 "My children, ye will lose your sire today,
 For all of me has perished, and no more
 Have ye to bear your long, long ministry;
 A heavy load, I know, and yet one word
 Wipes out all score of tribulations—*love*.
 And love from me ye had—from no man more;
 But now must live without me all your days."
 So clinging to each other sobbed and wept
 Father and daughters both, but when at last
 Their mourning had an end and no wail rose,
 A moment there was silence; suddenly
 A voice that summoned him; with sudden dread
 The hair of all stood up and all were 'mazed;
 For the call came, now loud, now low, and oft.
 "Oedipus, Oedipus, why tarry we?
 Too long, too long thy passing is delayed."
 But when he heard the summons of the god,
 He prayed that Theseus might be brought, and when
 The Prince came nearer:  "O my friend," he cried,
 "Pledge ye my daughters, giving thy right hand—
 And, daughters, give him yours—and promise me
 Thou never wilt forsake them, but do all
 That time and friendship prompt in their behoof."
 And he of his nobility repressed
 His tears and swore to be their constant friend.
 This promise given, Oedipus put forth
 Blind hands and laid them on his children, saying,
 "O children, prove your true nobility
 And hence depart nor seek to witness sights
 Unlawful or to hear unlawful words.
 Nay, go with speed; let none but Theseus stay,
 Our ruler, to behold what next shall hap."
 So we all heard him speak, and weeping sore
 We companied the maidens on their way.
 After brief space we looked again, and lo
 The man was gone, evanished from our eyes;
 Only the king we saw with upraised hand
 Shading his eyes as from some awful sight,
 That no man might endure to look upon.
 A moment later, and we saw him bend
 In prayer to Earth and prayer to Heaven at once.
 But by what doom the stranger met his end
 No man save Theseus knoweth.  For there fell
 No fiery bold that reft him in that hour,
 Nor whirlwind from the sea, but he was taken.
 It was a messenger from heaven, or else
 Some gentle, painless cleaving of earth's base;
 For without wailing or disease or pain
 He passed away—and end most marvelous.
 And if to some my tale seems foolishness
 I am content that such could count me fool.

CHORUS
 Where are the maids and their attendant friends?

MESSENGER
 They cannot be far off; the approaching sound
 Of lamentation tells they come this way.
 [Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE]

ANTIGONE
 (Str. 1)
 Woe, woe! on this sad day
      We sisters of one blasted stock
      must bow beneath the shock,
 Must weep and weep the curse that lay
      On him our sire, for whom
 In life, a life-long world of care
      'Twas ours to bear,
      In death must face the gloom
      That wraps his tomb.
 What tongue can tell
 That sight ineffable?

CHORUS
 What mean ye, maidens?

ANTIGONE
                          All is but surmise.

CHORUS
 Is he then gone?

ANTIGONE
                     Gone as ye most might wish.
 Not in battle or sea storm,
 But reft from sight,
 By hands invisible borne
 To viewless fields of night.
 Ah me! on us too night has come,
 The night of mourning.  Wither roam
 O'er land or sea in our distress
 Eating the bread of bitterness?

ISMENE
 I know not.  O that Death
 Might nip my breath,
 And let me share my aged father's fate.
 I cannot live a life thus desolate.

CHORUS
 Best of daughters, worthy pair,
 What heaven brings ye needs must bear,
 Fret no more 'gainst Heaven's will;
 Fate hath dealt with you not ill.

ANTIGONE
 (Ant. 1)
 Love can turn past pain to bliss,
      What seemed bitter now is sweet.
 Ah me! that happy toil is sweet.
      The guidance of those dear blind feet.
 Dear father, wrapt for aye in nether gloom,
      E'en in the tomb
 Never shalt thou lack of love repine,
      Her love and mine.

CHORUS
 His fate—

ANTIGONE
           Is even as he planned.

CHORUS
 How so?

ANTIGONE
 He died, so willed he, in a foreign land.
 Lapped in kind earth he sleeps his long last sleep,
      And o'er his grave friends weep.
 How great our lost these streaming eyes can tell,
      This sorrow naught can quell.
 Thou hadst thy wish 'mid strangers thus to die,
      But I, ah me, not by.

ISMENE
 Alas, my sister, what new fate
 \*     \*     \*     \*     \*     \*
 \*     \*     \*     \*     \*     \*
 Befalls us orphans desolate?

CHORUS
 His end was blessed; therefore, children, stay
 Your sorrow.  Man is born to fate a prey.

ANTIGONE
 (Str. 2)
 Sister, let us back again.

ISMENE
 Why return?

ANTIGONE
                My soul is fain—
 ISMENE
 Is fain?

ANTIGONE
           To see the earthy bed.

ISMENE
 Sayest thou?

ANTIGONE
                Where our sire is laid.

ISMENE
 Nay, thou can'st not, dost not see—

ANTIGONE
 Sister, wherefore wroth with me?

ISMENE
 Know'st not—beside—

ANTIGONE
                     More must I hear?

ISMENE
 Tombless he died, none near.

ANTIGONE
 Lead me thither; slay me there.

ISMENE
 How shall I unhappy fare,
 Friendless, helpless, how drag on
 A life of misery alone?

CHORUS
 (Ant. 2)
 Fear not, maids—

ANTIGONE
                     Ah, whither flee?

CHORUS
 Refuge hath been found.

ANTIGONE
                          For me?

CHORUS
 Where thou shalt be safe from harm.

ANTIGONE
 I know it.

CHORUS
           Why then this alarm?

ANTIGONE
 How again to get us home
 I know not.

CHORUS
                Why then this roam?

ANTIGONE
 Troubles whelm us—

CHORUS
                     As of yore.

ANTIGONE
 Worse than what was worse before.

CHORUS
 Sure ye are driven on the breakers' surge.

ANTIGONE
 Alas! we are.

CHORUS
                Alas! 'tis so.

ANTIGONE
 Ah whither turn, O Zeus?  No ray
 Of hope to cheer the way
 Whereon the fates our desperate voyage urge.
 [Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS
 Dry your tears; when grace is shed
 On the quick and on the dead
 By dark Powers beneficent,
 Over-grief they would resent.

ANTIGONE
 Aegeus' child, to thee we pray.

THESEUS
 What the boon, my children, say.

ANTIGONE
 With our own eyes we fain would see
 Our father's tomb.

THESEUS
                     That may not be.

ANTIGONE
 What say'st thou, King?

THESEUS
                          My children, he
 Charged me straitly that no moral
 Should approach the sacred portal,
 Or greet with funeral litanies
 The hidden tomb wherein he lies;
 Saying, "If thou keep'st my hest
 Thou shalt hold thy realm at rest."
 The God of Oaths this promise heard,
 And to Zeus I pledged my word.

ANTIGONE
 Well, if he would have it so,
 We must yield.  Then let us go
 Back to Thebes, if yet we may
 Heal this mortal feud and stay
 The self-wrought doom
 That drives our brothers to their tomb.

THESEUS
 Go in peace; nor will I spare
 Ought of toil and zealous care,
 But on all your needs attend,
 Gladdening in his grave my friend.

CHORUS
 Wail no more, let sorrow rest,
 All is ordered for the best.

###  FOOTNOTES

 4 (return)
 [ The Greek text for the passages marked here and later in the text have been lost.]

 5 (return)
 [ To avoid the blessing, still a secret, he resorts to a commonplace; literally, "For what generous man is not (in befriending others) a friend to himself?"]

 6 (return)
 [ Creon desires to bury Oedipus on the confines of Thebes so as to avoid the pollution and yet offer due rites at his tomb. Ismene tells him of the latest oracle and interprets to him its purport, that some day the Theban invaders of Athens will be routed in a battle near the grave of Oedipus.]

 7 (return)
 [ The Thebans sprung from the Dragon's teeth sown by Cadmus.]

#  SOPHOCLES

##  ANTIGONE

###  Translation by F. Storr, BA Formerly Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge From the Loeb Library Edition Originally published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and William Heinemann Ltd, London First published in 1912

###  ARGUMENT

 Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, the late king of Thebes, in defiance of Creon who rules in his stead, resolves to bury her brother Polyneices, slain in his attack on Thebes. She is caught in the act by Creon's watchmen and brought before the king. She justifies her action, asserting that she was bound to obey the eternal laws of right and wrong in spite of any human ordinance. Creon, unrelenting, condemns her to be immured in a rock-hewn chamber. His son Haemon, to whom Antigone is betrothed, pleads in vain for her life and threatens to die with her. Warned by the seer Teiresias Creon repents him and hurries to release Antigone from her rocky prison. But he is too late: he finds lying side by side Antigone who had hanged herself and Haemon who also has perished by his own hand. Returning to the palace he sees within the dead body of his queen who on learning of her son's death has stabbed herself to the heart.

###  DRAMATIS PERSONAE

 ANTIGONE  and ISMENE—daughters of Oedipus and sisters  of  Polyneices
       and Eteocles.

CREON, King of Thebes.

HAEMON, Son of Creon, betrothed to Antigone.

EURYDICE, wife of Creon.

TEIRESIAS, the prophet.

CHORUS, of Theban elders.

A WATCHMAN

A MESSENGER

A SECOND MESSENGER

#  ANTIGONE

              ANTIGONE and ISMENE before the Palace gates.

ANTIGONE
 Ismene, sister of my blood and heart,
 See'st thou how Zeus would in our lives fulfill
 The weird of Oedipus, a world of woes!
 For what of pain, affliction, outrage, shame,
 Is lacking in our fortunes, thine and mine?
 And now this proclamation of today
 Made by our Captain-General to the State,
 What can its purport be?  Didst hear and heed,
 Or art thou deaf when friends are banned as foes?

ISMENE
 To me, Antigone, no word of friends
 Has come, or glad or grievous, since we twain
 Were reft of our two brethren in one day
 By double fratricide; and since i' the night
 Our Argive leaguers fled, no later news
 Has reached me, to inspirit or deject.

ANTIGONE
 I know 'twas so, and therefore summoned thee
 Beyond the gates to breathe it in thine ear.

ISMENE
 What is it?  Some dark secret stirs thy breast.

ANTIGONE
 What but the thought of our two brothers dead,
 The one by Creon graced with funeral rites,
 The other disappointed?  Eteocles
 He hath consigned to earth (as fame reports)
 With obsequies that use and wont ordain,
 So gracing him among the dead below.
 But Polyneices, a dishonored corse,
 (So by report the royal edict runs)
 No man may bury him or make lament—
 Must leave him tombless and unwept, a feast
 For kites to scent afar and swoop upon.
 Such is the edict (if report speak true)
 Of Creon, our most noble Creon, aimed
 At thee and me, aye me too; and anon
 He will be here to promulgate, for such
 As have not heard, his mandate; 'tis in sooth
 No passing humor, for the edict says
 Whoe'er transgresses shall be stoned to death.
 So stands it with us; now 'tis thine to show
 If thou art worthy of thy blood or base.

ISMENE
 But how, my rash, fond sister, in such case
 Can I do anything to make or mar?

ANTIGONE
 Say, wilt thou aid me and abet?  Decide.

ISMENE
 In what bold venture?  What is in thy thought?

ANTIGONE
 Lend me a hand to bear the corpse away.

ISMENE
 What, bury him despite the interdict?

ANTIGONE
 My brother, and, though thou deny him, thine
 No man shall say that *I* betrayed a brother.

ISMENE
 Wilt thou persist, though Creon has forbid?

ANTIGONE
 What right has he to keep me from my own?

ISMENE
 Bethink thee, sister, of our father's fate,
 Abhorred, dishonored, self-convinced of sin,
 Blinded, himself his executioner.
 Think of his mother-wife (ill sorted names)
 Done by a noose herself had twined to death
 And last, our hapless brethren in one day,
 Both in a mutual destiny involved,
 Self-slaughtered, both the slayer and the slain.
 Bethink thee, sister, we are left alone;
 Shall we not perish wretchedest of all,
 If in defiance of the law we cross
 A monarch's will?—weak women, think of that,
 Not framed by nature to contend with men.
 Remember this too that the stronger rules;
 We must obey his orders, these or worse.
 Therefore I plead compulsion and entreat
 The dead to pardon.  I perforce obey
 The powers that be.  'Tis foolishness, I ween,
 To overstep in aught the golden mean.

ANTIGONE
 I urge no more; nay, wert thou willing still,
 I would not welcome such a fellowship.
 Go thine own way; myself will bury him.
 How sweet to die in such employ, to rest,—
 Sister and brother linked in love's embrace—
 A sinless sinner, banned awhile on earth,
 But by the dead commended; and with them
 I shall abide for ever.  As for thee,
 Scorn, if thou wilt, the eternal laws of Heaven.

ISMENE
 I scorn them not, but to defy the State
 Or break her ordinance I have no skill.

ANTIGONE
 A specious pretext.  I will go alone
 To lap my dearest brother in the grave.

ISMENE
 My poor, fond sister, how I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE
 O waste no fears on me; look to thyself.

ISMENE
 At least let no man know of thine intent,
 But keep it close and secret, as will I.

ANTIGONE
 O tell it, sister; I shall hate thee more
 If thou proclaim it not to all the town.

ISMENE
 Thou hast a fiery soul for numbing work.

ANTIGONE
 I pleasure those whom I would liefest please.

ISMENE
 If thou succeed; but thou art doomed to fail.

ANTIGONE
 When strength shall fail me, yes, but not before.

ISMENE
 But, if the venture's hopeless, why essay?

ANTIGONE
 Sister, forbear, or I shall hate thee soon,
 And the dead man will hate thee too, with cause.
 Say I am mad and give my madness rein
 To wreck itself; the worst that can befall
 Is but to die an honorable death.

ISMENE
 Have thine own way then; 'tis a mad endeavor,
 Yet to thy lovers thou art dear as ever.
 [Exeunt]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Sunbeam, of all that ever dawn upon
           Our seven-gated Thebes the brightest ray,
                O eye of golden day,
 How fair thy light o'er Dirce's fountain shone,
 Speeding upon their headlong homeward course,
 Far quicker than they came, the Argive force;
                Putting to flight
 The argent shields, the host with scutcheons white.
 Against our land the proud invader came
 To vindicate fell Polyneices' claim.
           Like to an eagle swooping low,
           On pinions white as new fall'n snow.
 With clanging scream, a horsetail plume his crest,
 The aspiring lord of Argos onward pressed.

(Ant. 1)
 Hovering around our city walls he waits,
 His spearmen raven at our seven gates.
 But ere a torch our crown of towers could burn,
 Ere they had tasted of our blood, they turn
 Forced by the Dragon; in their rear
 The din of Ares panic-struck they hear.
 For Zeus who hates the braggart's boast
 Beheld that gold-bespangled host;
 As at the goal the paean they upraise,
 He struck them with his forked lightning blaze.

(Str. 2)
 To earthy from earth rebounding, down he crashed;
      The fire-brand from his impious hand was dashed,
 As like a Bacchic reveler on he came,
 Outbreathing hate and flame,
 And tottered.  Elsewhere in the field,
 Here, there, great Area like a war-horse wheeled;
           Beneath his car down thrust
           Our foemen bit the dust.

Seven captains at our seven gates
 Thundered; for each a champion waits,
 Each left behind his armor bright,
 Trophy for Zeus who turns the fight;
 Save two alone, that ill-starred pair
 One mother to one father bare,
 Who lance in rest, one 'gainst the other
 Drave, and both perished, brother slain by brother.

(Ant. 2)
 Now Victory to Thebes returns again
 And smiles upon her chariot-circled plain.
           Now let feast and festal should
           Memories of war blot out.
           Let us to the temples throng,
           Dance and sing the live night long.
           God of Thebes, lead thou the round.
           Bacchus, shaker of the ground!
           Let us end our revels here;
           Lo! Creon our new lord draws near,
           Crowned by this strange chance, our king.
           What, I marvel, pondering?
           Why this summons?  Wherefore call
           Us, his elders, one and all,
           Bidding us with him debate,
           On some grave concern of State?
 [Enter CREON]

CREON
 Elders, the gods have righted one again
 Our storm-tossed ship of state, now safe in port.
 But you by special summons I convened
 As my most trusted councilors; first, because
 I knew you loyal to Laius of old;
 Again, when Oedipus restored our State,
 Both while he ruled and when his rule was o'er,
 Ye still were constant to the royal line.
 Now that his two sons perished in one day,
 Brother by brother murderously slain,
 By right of kinship to the Princes dead,
 I claim and hold the throne and sovereignty.
 Yet 'tis no easy matter to discern
 The temper of a man, his mind and will,
 Till he be proved by exercise of power;
 And in my case, if one who reigns supreme
 Swerve from the highest policy, tongue-tied
 By fear of consequence, that man I hold,
 And ever held, the basest of the base.
 And I contemn the man who sets his friend
 Before his country.  For myself, I call
 To witness Zeus, whose eyes are everywhere,
 If I perceive some mischievous design
 To sap the State, I will not hold my tongue;
 Nor would I reckon as my private friend
 A public foe, well knowing that the State
 Is the good ship that holds our fortunes all:
 Farewell to friendship, if she suffers wreck.
 Such is the policy by which I seek
 To serve the Commons and conformably
 I have proclaimed an edict as concerns
 The sons of Oedipus; Eteocles
 Who in his country's battle fought and fell,
 The foremost champion—duly bury him
 With all observances and ceremonies
 That are the guerdon of the heroic dead.
 But for the miscreant exile who returned
 Minded in flames and ashes to blot out
 His father's city and his father's gods,
 And glut his vengeance with his kinsmen's blood,
 Or drag them captive at his chariot wheels—
 For Polyneices 'tis ordained that none
 Shall give him burial or make mourn for him,
 But leave his corpse unburied, to be meat
 For dogs and carrion crows, a ghastly sight.
 So am I purposed; never by my will
 Shall miscreants take precedence of true men,
 But all good patriots, alive or dead,
 Shall be by me preferred and honored.

CHORUS
 Son of Menoeceus, thus thou will'st to deal
 With him who loathed and him who loved our State.
 Thy word is law; thou canst dispose of us
 The living, as thou will'st, as of the dead.

CREON
 See then ye execute what I ordain.

CHORUS
 On younger shoulders lay this grievous charge.

CREON
 Fear not, I've posted guards to watch the corpse.

CHORUS
 What further duty would'st thou lay on us?

CREON
 Not to connive at disobedience.

CHORUS
 No man is mad enough to court his death.

CREON
 The penalty *is* death:  yet hope of gain
 Hath lured men to their ruin oftentimes.
 [Enter GUARD]

GUARD
 My lord, I will not make pretense to pant
 And puff as some light-footed messenger.
 In sooth my soul beneath its pack of thought
 Made many a halt and turned and turned again;
 For conscience plied her spur and curb by turns.
 "Why hurry headlong to thy fate, poor fool?"
 She whispered.  Then again, "If Creon learn
 This from another, thou wilt rue it worse."
 Thus leisurely I hastened on my road;
 Much thought extends a furlong to a league.
 But in the end the forward voice prevailed,
 To face thee.  I will speak though I say nothing.
 For plucking courage from despair methought,
 'Let the worst hap, thou canst but meet thy fate.'

CREON
 What is thy news?  Why this despondency?

GUARD
 Let me premise a word about myself?
 I neither did the deed nor saw it done,
 Nor were it just that I should come to harm.

CREON
 Thou art good at parry, and canst fence about
 Some matter of grave import, as is plain.

GUARD
 The bearer of dread tidings needs must quake.

CREON
 Then, sirrah, shoot thy bolt and get thee gone.

GUARD
 Well, it must out; the corpse is buried; someone
 E'en now besprinkled it with thirsty dust,
 Performed the proper ritual—and was gone.

CREON
 What say'st thou?  Who hath dared to do this thing?

GUARD
 I cannot tell, for there was ne'er a trace
 Of pick or mattock—hard unbroken ground,
 Without a scratch or rut of chariot wheels,
 No sign that human hands had been at work.
 When the first sentry of the morning watch
 Gave the alarm, we all were terror-stricken.
 The corpse had vanished, not interred in earth,
 But strewn with dust, as if by one who sought
 To avert the curse that haunts the unburied dead:
 Of hound or ravening jackal, not a sign.
 Thereat arose an angry war of words;
 Guard railed at guard and blows were like to end it,
 For none was there to part us, each in turn
 Suspected, but the guilt brought home to none,
 From lack of evidence.  We challenged each
 The ordeal, or to handle red-hot iron,
 Or pass through fire, affirming on our oath
 Our innocence—we neither did the deed
 Ourselves, nor know who did or compassed it.
 Our quest was at a standstill, when one spake
 And bowed us all to earth like quivering reeds,
 For there was no gainsaying him nor way
 To escape perdition:  *Ye*are*bound*to*tellThe*King,*ye*cannot*hide*it; so he spake.
 And he convinced us all; so lots were cast,
 And I, unlucky scapegoat, drew the prize.
 So here I am unwilling and withal
 Unwelcome; no man cares to hear ill news.

CHORUS
 I had misgivings from the first, my liege,
 Of something more than natural at work.

CREON
 O cease, you vex me with your babblement;
 I am like to think you dote in your old age.
 Is it not arrant folly to pretend
 That gods would have a thought for this dead man?
 Did they forsooth award him special grace,
 And as some benefactor bury him,
 Who came to fire their hallowed sanctuaries,
 To sack their shrines, to desolate their land,
 And scout their ordinances?  Or perchance
 The gods bestow their favors on the bad.
 No! no! I have long noted malcontents
 Who wagged their heads, and kicked against the yoke,
 Misliking these my orders, and my rule.
 'Tis they, I warrant, who suborned my guards
 By bribes.  Of evils current upon earth
 The worst is money.  Money 'tis that sacks
 Cities, and drives men forth from hearth and home;
 Warps and seduces native innocence,
 And breeds a habit of dishonesty.
 But they who sold themselves shall find their greed
 Out-shot the mark, and rue it soon or late.
 Yea, as I still revere the dread of Zeus,
 By Zeus I swear, except ye find and bring
 Before my presence here the very man
 Who carried out this lawless burial,
 Death for your punishment shall not suffice.
 Hanged on a cross, alive ye first shall make
 Confession of this outrage.  This will teach you
 What practices are like to serve your turn.
 There are some villainies that bring no gain.
 For by dishonesty the few may thrive,
 The many come to ruin and disgrace.

GUARD
 May I not speak, or must I turn and go
 Without a word?—

CREON
                     Begone! canst thou not see
 That e'en this question irks me?

GUARD
                                    Where, my lord?
 Is it thy ears that suffer, or thy heart?

CREON
 Why seek to probe and find the seat of pain?

GUARD
 I gall thine ears—this miscreant thy mind.

CREON
 What an inveterate babbler! get thee gone!

GUARD
 Babbler perchance, but innocent of the crime.

CREON
 Twice guilty, having sold thy soul for gain.

GUARD
 Alas! how sad when reasoners reason wrong.

CREON
 Go, quibble with thy reason.  If thou fail'st
 To find these malefactors, thou shalt own
 The wages of ill-gotten gains is death.
 [Exit CREON]

GUARD
 I pray he may be found.  But caught or not
 (And fortune must determine that) thou never
 Shalt see me here returning; that is sure.
 For past all hope or thought I have escaped,
 And for my safety owe the gods much thanks.

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Many wonders there be, but naught more wondrous than man;
 Over the surging sea, with a whitening south wind wan,
 Through the foam of the firth, man makes his perilous way;
 And the eldest of deities Earth that knows not toil nor decay
 Ever he furrows and scores, as his team, year in year out,
 With breed of the yoked horse, the ploughshare turneth about.

(Ant. 1)
 The light-witted birds of the air, the beasts of the weald and the wood
 He traps with his woven snare, and the brood of the briny flood.
 Master of cunning he:  the savage bull, and the hart
 Who roams the mountain free, are tamed by his infinite art;
 And the shaggy rough-maned steed is broken to bear the bit.

(Str. 2)
 Speech and the wind-swift speed of counsel and civic wit,
 He hath learnt for himself all these; and the arrowy rain to fly
 And the nipping airs that freeze, 'neath the open winter sky.
 He hath provision for all: fell plague he hath learnt to endure;
 Safe whate'er may befall: yet for death he hath found no cure.

(Ant. 2)
 Passing the wildest flight thought are the cunning and skill,
 That guide man now to the light, but now to counsels of ill.
 If he honors the laws of the land, and reveres the Gods of the State
 Proudly his city shall stand; but a cityless outcast I rate
 Whoso bold in his pride from the path of right doth depart;
 Ne'er may I sit by his side, or share the thoughts of his heart.

          What strange vision meets my eyes,
           Fills me with a wild surprise?
           Sure I know her, sure 'tis she,
           The maid Antigone.
           Hapless child of hapless sire,
           Didst thou recklessly conspire,
           Madly brave the King's decree?
           Therefore are they haling thee?
 [Enter GUARD bringing ANTIGONE]

GUARD
 Here is the culprit taken in the act
 Of giving burial.  But where's the King?

CHORUS
 There from the palace he returns in time.
 [Enter CREON]

CREON
 Why is my presence timely?  What has chanced?

GUARD
 No man, my lord, should make a vow, for if
 He ever swears he will not do a thing,
 His afterthoughts belie his first resolve.
 When from the hail-storm of thy threats I fled
 I sware thou wouldst not see me here again;
 But the wild rapture of a glad surprise
 Intoxicates, and so I'm here forsworn.
 And here's my prisoner, caught in the very act,
 Decking the grave.  No lottery this time;
 This prize is mine by right of treasure-trove.
 So take her, judge her, rack her, if thou wilt.
 She's thine, my liege; but I may rightly claim
 Hence to depart well quit of all these ills.

CREON
 Say, how didst thou arrest the maid, and where?

GUARD
 Burying the man.  There's nothing more to tell.

CREON
 Hast thou thy wits?  Or know'st thou what thou say'st?

GUARD
 I saw this woman burying the corpse
 Against thy orders.  Is that clear and plain?

CREON
 But how was she surprised and caught in the act?

GUARD
 It happened thus.  No sooner had we come,
 Driven from thy presence by those awful threats,
 Than straight we swept away all trace of dust,
 And bared the clammy body.  Then we sat
 High on the ridge to windward of the stench,
 While each man kept he fellow alert and rated
 Roundly the sluggard if he chanced to nap.
 So all night long we watched, until the sun
 Stood high in heaven, and his blazing beams
 Smote us.  A sudden whirlwind then upraised
 A cloud of dust that blotted out the sky,
 And swept the plain, and stripped the woodlands bare,
 And shook the firmament.  We closed our eyes
 And waited till the heaven-sent plague should pass.
 At last it ceased, and lo! there stood this maid.
 A piercing cry she uttered, sad and shrill,
 As when the mother bird beholds her nest
 Robbed of its nestlings; even so the maid
 Wailed as she saw the body stripped and bare,
 And cursed the ruffians who had done this deed.
 Anon she gathered handfuls of dry dust,
 Then, holding high a well-wrought brazen urn,
 Thrice on the dead she poured a lustral stream.
 We at the sight swooped down on her and seized
 Our quarry.  Undismayed she stood, and when
 We taxed her with the former crime and this,
 She disowned nothing.  I was glad—and grieved;
 For 'tis most sweet to 'scape oneself scot-free,
 And yet to bring disaster to a friend
 Is grievous.  Take it all in all, I deem
 A man's first duty is to serve himself.

CREON
 Speak, girl, with head bent low and downcast eyes,
 Does thou plead guilty or deny the deed?

ANTIGONE
 Guilty.  I did it, I deny it not.

CREON (to GUARD)
 Sirrah, begone whither thou wilt, and thank
 Thy luck that thou hast 'scaped a heavy charge.
 (To ANTIGONE)
 Now answer this plain question, yes or no,
 Wast thou acquainted with the interdict?

ANTIGONE
 I knew, all knew; how should I fail to know?

CREON
 And yet wert bold enough to break the law?

ANTIGONE
 Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,
 And she who sits enthroned with gods below,
 Justice, enacted not these human laws.
 Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
 Could'st by a breath annul and override
 The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.
 They were not born today nor yesterday;
 They die not; and none knoweth whence they sprang.
 I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,
 To disobey these laws and so provoke
 The wrath of Heaven.  I knew that I must die,
 E'en hadst thou not proclaimed it; and if death
 Is thereby hastened, I shall count it gain.
 For death is gain to him whose life, like mine,
 Is full of misery.  Thus my lot appears
 Not sad, but blissful; for had I endured
 To leave my mother's son unburied there,
 I should have grieved with reason, but not now.
 And if in this thou judgest me a fool,
 Methinks the judge of folly's not acquit.

CHORUS
 A stubborn daughter of a stubborn sire,
 This ill-starred maiden kicks against the pricks.

CREON
 Well, let her know the stubbornest of wills
 Are soonest bended, as the hardest iron,
 O'er-heated in the fire to brittleness,
 Flies soonest into fragments, shivered through.
 A snaffle curbs the fieriest steed, and he
 Who in subjection lives must needs be meek.
 But this proud girl, in insolence well-schooled,
 First overstepped the established law, and then—
 A second and worse act of insolence—
 She boasts and glories in her wickedness.
 Now if she thus can flout authority
 Unpunished, I am woman, she the man.
 But though she be my sister's child or nearer
 Of kin than all who worship at my hearth,
 Nor she nor yet her sister shall escape
 The utmost penalty, for both I hold,
 As arch-conspirators, of equal guilt.
 Bring forth the older; even now I saw her
 Within the palace, frenzied and distraught.
 The workings of the mind discover oft
 Dark deeds in darkness schemed, before the act.
 More hateful still the miscreant who seeks
 When caught, to make a virtue of a crime.

ANTIGONE
 Would'st thou do more than slay thy prisoner?

CREON
 Not I, thy life is mine, and that's enough.

ANTIGONE
 Why dally then?  To me no word of thine
 Is pleasant:  God forbid it e'er should please;
 Nor am I more acceptable to thee.
 And yet how otherwise had I achieved
 A name so glorious as by burying
 A brother? so my townsmen all would say,
 Where they not gagged by terror,  Manifold
 A king's prerogatives, and not the least
 That all his acts and all his words are law.

CREON
 Of all these Thebans none so deems but thou.

ANTIGONE
 These think as I, but bate their breath to thee.

CREON
 Hast thou no shame to differ from all these?

ANTIGONE
 To reverence kith and kin can bring no shame.

CREON
 Was his dead foeman not thy kinsman too?

ANTIGONE
 One mother bare them and the self-same sire.

CREON
 Why cast a slur on one by honoring one?

ANTIGONE
 The dead man will not bear thee out in this.

CREON
 Surely, if good and evil fare alive.

ANTIGONE
 The slain man was no villain but a brother.

CREON
 The patriot perished by the outlaw's brand.

ANTIGONE
 Nathless the realms below these rites require.

CREON
 Not that the base should fare as do the brave.

ANTIGONE
 Who knows if this world's crimes are virtues there?

CREON
 Not even death can make a foe a friend.

ANTIGONE
 My nature is for mutual love, not hate.

CREON
 Die then, and love the dead if thou must;
 No woman shall be the master while I live.
 [Enter ISMENE]

CHORUS
           Lo from out the palace gate,
           Weeping o'er her sister's fate,
           Comes Ismene; see her brow,
           Once serene, beclouded now,
           See her beauteous face o'erspread
           With a flush of angry red.

CREON
 Woman, who like a viper unperceived
 Didst harbor in my house and drain my blood,
 Two plagues I nurtured blindly, so it proved,
 To sap my throne.  Say, didst thou too abet
 This crime, or dost abjure all privity?

ISMENE
 I did the deed, if she will have it so,
 And with my sister claim to share the guilt.

ANTIGONE
 That were unjust.  Thou would'st not act with me
 At first, and I refused thy partnership.

ISMENE
 But now thy bark is stranded, I am bold
 To claim my share as partner in the loss.

ANTIGONE
 Who did the deed the under-world knows well:
 A friend in word is never friend of mine.

ISMENE
 O sister, scorn me not, let me but share
 Thy work of piety, and with thee die.

ANTIGONE
 Claim not a work in which thou hadst no hand;
 One death sufficeth.  Wherefore should'st thou die?

ISMENE
 What would life profit me bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE
 Ask Creon, he's thy kinsman and best friend.

ISMENE
 Why taunt me?  Find'st thou pleasure in these gibes?

ANTIGONE
 'Tis a sad mockery, if indeed I mock.

ISMENE
 O say if I can help thee even now.

ANTIGONE
 No, save thyself; I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE
 Is e'en this boon denied, to share thy lot?

ANTIGONE
 Yea, for thou chosed'st life, and I to die.

ISMENE
 Thou canst not say that I did not protest.

ANTIGONE
 Well, some approved thy wisdom, others mine.

ISMENE
 But now we stand convicted, both alike.

ANTIGONE
 Fear not; thou livest, I died long ago
 Then when I gave my life to save the dead.

CREON
 Both maids, methinks, are crazed.  One suddenly
 Has lost her wits, the other was born mad.

ISMENE
 Yea, so it falls, sire, when misfortune comes,
 The wisest even lose their mother wit.

CREON
 I' faith thy wit forsook thee when thou mad'st
 Thy choice with evil-doers to do ill.

ISMENE
 What life for me without my sister here?

CREON
 Say not thy sister *here*:  thy sister's dead.

ISMENE
 What, wilt thou slay thy own son's plighted bride?

CREON
 Aye, let him raise him seed from other fields.

ISMENE
 No new espousal can be like the old.

CREON
 A plague on trulls who court and woo our sons.

ANTIGONE
 O Haemon, how thy sire dishonors thee!

CREON
 A plague on thee and thy accursed bride!

CHORUS
 What, wilt thou rob thine own son of his bride?

CREON
 'Tis death that bars this marriage, not his sire.

CHORUS
 So her death-warrant, it would seem, is sealed.

CREON
 By you, as first by me; off with them, guards,
 And keep them close.  Henceforward let them learn
 To live as women use, not roam at large.
 For e'en the bravest spirits run away
 When they perceive death pressing on life's heels.

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Thrice blest are they who never tasted pain!
      If once the curse of Heaven attaint a race,
      The infection lingers on and speeds apace,
 Age after age, and each the cup must drain.

So when Etesian blasts from Thrace downpour
      Sweep o'er the blackening main and whirl to land
      From Ocean's cavernous depths his ooze and sand,
 Billow on billow thunders on the shore.

(Ant. 1)
 On the Labdacidae I see descending
      Woe upon woe; from days of old some god
      Laid on the race a malison, and his rod
 Scourges each age with sorrows never ending.

The light that dawned upon its last born son
      Is vanished, and the bloody axe of Fate
      Has felled the goodly tree that blossomed late.
 O Oedipus, by reckless pride undone!

(Str. 2)
 Thy might, O Zeus, what mortal power can quell?
 Not sleep that lays all else beneath its spell,
 Nor moons that never tire:  untouched by Time,
           Throned in the dazzling light
           That crowns Olympus' height,
 Thou reignest King, omnipotent, sublime.

           Past, present, and to be,
           All bow to thy decree,
           All that exceeds the mean by Fate
           Is punished, Love or Hate.

(Ant. 2)
 Hope flits about never-wearying wings;
 Profit to some, to some light loves she brings,
 But no man knoweth how her gifts may turn,
 Till 'neath his feet the treacherous ashes burn.
 Sure 'twas a sage inspired that spake this word;
           *If evil good appear*          *To any, Fate is near*;
 And brief the respite from her flaming sword.

           Hither comes in angry mood
           Haemon, latest of thy brood;
           Is it for his bride he's grieved,
           Or her marriage-bed deceived,
           Doth he make his mourn for thee,
           Maid forlorn, Antigone?
 [Enter HAEMON]

CREON
 Soon shall we know, better than seer can tell.
 Learning may fixed decree anent thy bride,
 Thou mean'st not, son, to rave against thy sire?
 Know'st not whate'er we do is done in love?

HAEMON
 O father, I am thine, and I will take
 Thy wisdom as the helm to steer withal.
 Therefore no wedlock shall by me be held
 More precious than thy loving goverance.

CREON
 Well spoken:  so right-minded sons should feel,
 In all deferring to a father's will.
 For 'tis the hope of parents they may rear
 A brood of sons submissive, keen to avenge
 Their father's wrongs, and count his friends their own.
 But who begets unprofitable sons,
 He verily breeds trouble for himself,
 And for his foes much laughter.  Son, be warned
 And let no woman fool away thy wits.
 Ill fares the husband mated with a shrew,
 And her embraces very soon wax cold.
 For what can wound so surely to the quick
 As a false friend?  So spue and cast her off,
 Bid her go find a husband with the dead.
 For since I caught her openly rebelling,
 Of all my subjects the one malcontent,
 I will not prove a traitor to the State.
 She surely dies.  Go, let her, if she will,
 Appeal to Zeus the God of Kindred, for
 If thus I nurse rebellion in my house,
 Shall not I foster mutiny without?
 For whoso rules his household worthily,
 Will prove in civic matters no less wise.
 But he who overbears the laws, or thinks
 To overrule his rulers, such as one
 I never will allow.  Whome'er the State
 Appoints must be obeyed in everything,
 But small and great, just and unjust alike.
 I warrant such a one in either case
 Would shine, as King or subject; such a man
 Would in the storm of battle stand his ground,
 A comrade leal and true; but Anarchy—
 What evils are not wrought by Anarchy!
 She ruins States, and overthrows the home,
 She dissipates and routs the embattled host;
 While discipline preserves the ordered ranks.
 Therefore we must maintain authority
 And yield to title to a woman's will.
 Better, if needs be, men should cast us out
 Than hear it said, a woman proved his match.

CHORUS
 To me, unless old age have dulled wits,
 Thy words appear both reasonable and wise.

HAEMON
 Father, the gods implant in mortal men
 Reason, the choicest gift bestowed by heaven.
 'Tis not for me to say thou errest, nor
 Would I arraign thy wisdom, if I could;
 And yet wise thoughts may come to other men
 And, as thy son, it falls to me to mark
 The acts, the words, the comments of the crowd.
 The commons stand in terror of thy frown,
 And dare not utter aught that might offend,
 But I can overhear their muttered plaints,
 Know how the people mourn this maiden doomed
 For noblest deeds to die the worst of deaths.
 When her own brother slain in battle lay
 Unsepulchered, she suffered not his corse
 To lie for carrion birds and dogs to maul:
 Should not her name (they cry) be writ in gold?
 Such the low murmurings that reach my ear.
 O father, nothing is by me more prized
 Than thy well-being, for what higher good
 Can children covet than their sire's fair fame,
 As fathers too take pride in glorious sons?
 Therefore, my father, cling not to one mood,
 And deemed not thou art right, all others wrong.
 For whoso thinks that wisdom dwells with him,
 That he alone can speak or think aright,
 Such oracles are empty breath when tried.
 The wisest man will let himself be swayed
 By others' wisdom and relax in time.
 See how the trees beside a stream in flood
 Save, if they yield to force, each spray unharmed,
 But by resisting perish root and branch.
 The mariner who keeps his mainsheet taut,
 And will not slacken in the gale, is like
 To sail with thwarts reversed, keel uppermost.
 Relent then and repent thee of thy wrath;
 For, if one young in years may claim some sense,
 I'll say 'tis best of all to be endowed
 With absolute wisdom; but, if that's denied,
 (And nature takes not readily that ply)
 Next wise is he who lists to sage advice.

CHORUS
 If he says aught in season, heed him, King.
 (To HAEMON)
 Heed thou thy sire too; both have spoken well.

CREON
 What, would you have us at our age be schooled,
 Lessoned in prudence by a beardless boy?

HAEMON
 I plead for justice, father, nothing more.
 Weigh me upon my merit, not my years.

CREON
 Strange merit this to sanction lawlessness!

HAEMON
 For evil-doers I would urge no plea.

CREON
 Is not this maid an arrant law-breaker?

HAEMON
 The Theban commons with one voice say, No.

CREON
 What, shall the mob dictate my policy?

HAEMON
 'Tis thou, methinks, who speakest like a boy.

CREON
 Am I to rule for others, or myself?

HAEMON
 A State for one man is no State at all.

CREON
 The State is his who rules it, so 'tis held.

HAEMON
 As monarch of a desert thou wouldst shine.

CREON
 This boy, methinks, maintains the woman's cause.

HAEMON
 If thou be'st woman, yes.  My thought's for thee.

CREON
 O reprobate, would'st wrangle with thy sire?

HAEMON
 Because I see thee wrongfully perverse.

CREON
 And am I wrong, if I maintain my rights?

HAEMON
 Talk not of rights; thou spurn'st the due of Heaven

CREON
 O heart corrupt, a woman's minion thou!

HAEMON
 Slave to dishonor thou wilt never find me.

CREON
 Thy speech at least was all a plea for her.

HAEMON
 And thee and me, and for the gods below.

CREON
 Living the maid shall never be thy bride.

HAEMON
 So she shall die, but one will die with her.

CREON
 Hast come to such a pass as threaten me?

HAEMON
 What threat is this, vain counsels to reprove?

CREON
 Vain fool to instruct thy betters; thou shall rue it.

HAEMON
 Wert not my father, I had said thou err'st.

CREON
 Play not the spaniel, thou a woman's slave.

HAEMON
 When thou dost speak, must no man make reply?

CREON
 This passes bounds.  By heaven, thou shalt not rate
 And jeer and flout me with impunity.
 Off with the hateful thing that she may die
 At once, beside her bridegroom, in his sight.

HAEMON
 Think not that in my sight the maid shall die,
 Or by my side; never shalt thou again
 Behold my face hereafter.  Go, consort
 With friends who like a madman for their mate.
 [Exit HAEMON]

CHORUS
 Thy son has gone, my liege, in angry haste.
 Fell is the wrath of youth beneath a smart.

CREON
 Let him go vent his fury like a fiend:
 These sisters twain he shall not save from death.

CHORUS
 Surely, thou meanest not to slay them both?

CREON
 I stand corrected; only her who touched
 The body.

CHORUS
           And what death is she to die?

CREON
 She shall be taken to some desert place
 By man untrod, and in a rock-hewn cave,
 With food no more than to avoid the taint
 That homicide might bring on all the State,
 Buried alive.  There let her call in aid
 The King of Death, the one god she reveres,
 Or learn too late a lesson learnt at last:
 'Tis labor lost, to reverence the dead.

CHORUS
 (Str.)
 Love resistless in fight, all yield at a glance of thine eye,
 Love who pillowed all night on a maiden's cheek dost lie,
 Over the upland holds.  Shall mortals not yield to thee?

(Ant).
 Mad are thy subjects all, and even the wisest heart
 Straight to folly will fall, at a touch of thy poisoned dart.
 Thou didst kindle the strife, this feud of kinsman with kin,
 By the eyes of a winsome wife, and the yearning her heart to win.
 For as her consort still, enthroned with Justice above,
 Thou bendest man to thy will, O all invincible Love.

          Lo I myself am borne aside,
           From Justice, as I view this bride.
           (O sight an eye in tears to drown)
           Antigone, so young, so fair,
                Thus hurried down
           Death's bower with the dead to share.

ANTIGONE
 (Str. 1)
 Friends, countrymen, my last farewell I make;
           My journey's done.
 One last fond, lingering, longing look I take
           At the bright sun.
 For Death who puts to sleep both young and old
           Hales my young life,
 And beckons me to Acheron's dark fold,
           An unwed wife.
 No youths have sung the marriage song for me,
           My bridal bed
 No maids have strewn with flowers from the lea,
           'Tis Death I wed.

CHORUS
           But bethink thee, thou art sped,
           Great and glorious, to the dead.
           Thou the sword's edge hast not tasted,
           No disease thy frame hath wasted.
           Freely thou alone shalt go
           Living to the dead below.

ANTIGONE
 (Ant. 1)
 Nay, but the piteous tale I've heard men tell
      Of Tantalus' doomed child,
 Chained upon Siphylus' high rocky fell,
      That clung like ivy wild,
 Drenched by the pelting rain and whirling snow,
      Left there to pine,
 While on her frozen breast the tears aye flow—
      Her fate is mine.

CHORUS
           She was sprung of gods, divine,
           Mortals we of mortal line.
           Like renown with gods to gain
           Recompenses all thy pain.
           Take this solace to thy tomb
           Hers in life and death thy doom.

ANTIGONE
 (Str. 2)
 Alack, alack!  Ye mock me.  Is it meet
      Thus to insult me living, to my face?
 Cease, by our country's altars I entreat,
      Ye lordly rulers of a lordly race.
 O fount of Dirce, wood-embowered plain
      Where Theban chariots to victory speed,
 Mark ye the cruel laws that now have wrought my bane,
      The friends who show no pity in my need!
 Was ever fate like mine?  O monstrous doom,
      Within a rock-built prison sepulchered,
 To fade and wither in a living tomb,
      And alien midst the living and the dead.

CHORUS
 (Str. 3)
           In thy boldness over-rash
           Madly thou thy foot didst dash
           'Gainst high Justice' altar stair.
           Thou a father's guild dost bear.

ANTIGONE
 (Ant. 2)
 At this thou touchest my most poignant pain,
      My ill-starred father's piteous disgrace,
 The taint of blood, the hereditary stain,
      That clings to all of Labdacus' famed race.
 Woe worth the monstrous marriage-bed where lay
      A mother with the son her womb had borne,
 Therein I was conceived, woe worth the day,
      Fruit of incestuous sheets, a maid forlorn,
 And now I pass, accursed and unwed,
      To meet them as an alien there below;
 And thee, O brother, in marriage ill-bestead,
      'Twas thy dead hand that dealt me this death-blow.

CHORUS
           Religion has her chains, 'tis true,
           Let rite be paid when rites are due.
           Yet is it ill to disobey
           The powers who hold by might the sway.
           Thou hast withstood authority,
           A self-willed rebel, thou must die.

ANTIGONE
 Unwept, unwed, unfriended, hence I go,
      No longer may I see the day's bright eye;
 Not one friend left to share my bitter woe,
      And o'er my ashes heave one passing sigh.

CREON
 If wail and lamentation aught availed
 To stave off death, I trow they'd never end.
 Away with her, and having walled her up
 In a rock-vaulted tomb, as I ordained,
 Leave her alone at liberty to die,
 Or, if she choose, to live in solitude,
 The tomb her dwelling.  We in either case
 Are guiltless as concerns this maiden's blood,
 Only on earth no lodging shall she find.

ANTIGONE
 O grave, O bridal bower, O prison house
 Hewn from the rock, my everlasting home,
 Whither I go to join the mighty host
 Of kinsfolk, Persephassa's guests long dead,
 The last of all, of all more miserable,
 I pass, my destined span of years cut short.
 And yet good hope is mine that I shall find
 A welcome from my sire, a welcome too,
 From thee, my mother, and my brother dear;
 From with these hands, I laved and decked your limbs
 In death, and poured libations on your grave.
 And last, my Polyneices, unto thee
 I paid due rites, and this my recompense!
 Yet am I justified in wisdom's eyes.
 For even had it been some child of mine,
 Or husband mouldering in death's decay,
 I had not wrought this deed despite the State.
 What is the law I call in aid?  'Tis thus
 I argue.  Had it been a husband dead
 I might have wed another, and have borne
 Another child, to take the dead child's place.
 But, now my sire and mother both are dead,
 No second brother can be born for me.
 Thus by the law of conscience I was led
 To honor thee, dear brother, and was judged
 By Creon guilty of a heinous crime.
 And now he drags me like a criminal,
 A bride unwed, amerced of marriage-song
 And marriage-bed and joys of motherhood,
 By friends deserted to a living grave.
 What ordinance of heaven have I transgressed?
 Hereafter can I look to any god
 For succor, call on any man for help?
 Alas, my piety is impious deemed.
 Well, if such justice is approved of heaven,
 I shall be taught by suffering my sin;
 But if the sin is theirs, O may they suffer
 No worse ills than the wrongs they do to me.

CHORUS
 The same ungovernable will
 Drives like a gale the maiden still.

CREON
 Therefore, my guards who let her stay
 Shall smart full sore for their delay.

ANTIGONE
 Ah, woe is me!  This word I hear
 Brings death most near.

CHORUS
 I have no comfort.  What he saith,
 Portends no other thing than death.

ANTIGONE
 My fatherland, city of Thebes divine,
 Ye gods of Thebes whence sprang my line,
 Look, puissant lords of Thebes, on me;
 The last of all your royal house ye see.
 Martyred by men of sin, undone.
 Such meed my piety hath won.
 [Exit ANTIGONE]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Like to thee that maiden bright,
           Danae, in her brass-bound tower,
 Once exchanged the glad sunlight
           For a cell, her bridal bower.
 And yet she sprang of royal line,
           My child, like thine,
           And nursed the seed
           By her conceived
 Of Zeus descending in a golden shower.
 Strange are the ways of Fate, her power
 Nor wealth, nor arms withstand, nor tower;
 Nor brass-prowed ships, that breast the sea
           From Fate can flee.

(Ant. 1)
 Thus Dryas' child, the rash Edonian King,
 For words of high disdain
 Did Bacchus to a rocky dungeon bring,
 To cool the madness of a fevered brain.
           His frenzy passed,
           He learnt at last
 'Twas madness gibes against a god to fling.
 For once he fain had quenched the Maenad's fire;
 And of the tuneful Nine provoked the ire.

(Str. 2)
 By the Iron Rocks that guard the double main,
           On Bosporus' lone strand,
 Where stretcheth Salmydessus' plain
           In the wild Thracian land,
 There on his borders Ares witnessed
           The vengeance by a jealous step-dame ta'en
 The gore that trickled from a spindle red,
           The sightless orbits of her step-sons twain.

(Ant. 2)
 Wasting away they mourned their piteous doom,
 The blasted issue of their mother's womb.
 But she her lineage could trace
           To great Erecththeus' race;
 Daughter of Boreas in her sire's vast caves
           Reared, where the tempest raves,
 Swift as his horses o'er the hills she sped;
 A child of gods; yet she, my child, like thee,
                By Destiny
 That knows not death nor age—she too was vanquished.
 [Enter TEIRESIAS and BOY]

TEIRESIAS
 Princes of Thebes, two wayfarers as one,
 Having betwixt us eyes for one, we are here.
 The blind man cannot move without a guide.

CREON
 Why tidings, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS
                               I will tell thee;
 And when thou hearest thou must heed the seer.

CREON
 Thus far I ne'er have disobeyed thy rede.

TEIRESIAS
 So hast thou steered the ship of State aright.

CREON
 I know it, and I gladly own my debt.

TEIRESIAS
 Bethink thee that thou treadest once again
 The razor edge of peril.

CREON
                          What is this?
 Thy words inspire a dread presentiment.

TEIRESIAS
 The divination of my arts shall tell.
 Sitting upon my throne of augury,
 As is my wont, where every fowl of heaven
 Find harborage, upon mine ears was borne
 A jargon strange of twitterings, hoots, and screams;
 So knew I that each bird at the other tare
 With bloody talons, for the whirr of wings
 Could signify naught else.  Perturbed in soul,
 I straight essayed the sacrifice by fire
 On blazing altars, but the God of Fire
 Came not in flame, and from the thigh bones dripped
 And sputtered in the ashes a foul ooze;
 Gall-bladders cracked and spurted up:  the fat
 Melted and fell and left the thigh bones bare.
 Such are the signs, taught by this lad, I read—
 As I guide others, so the boy guides me—
 The frustrate signs of oracles grown dumb.
 O King, thy willful temper ails the State,
 For all our shrines and altars are profaned
 By what has filled the maw of dogs and crows,
 The flesh of Oedipus' unburied son.
 Therefore the angry gods abominate
 Our litanies and our burnt offerings;
 Therefore no birds trill out a happy note,
 Gorged with the carnival of human gore.
 O ponder this, my son.  To err is common
 To all men, but the man who having erred
 Hugs not his errors, but repents and seeks
 The cure, is not a wastrel nor unwise.
 No fool, the saw goes, like the obstinate fool.
 Let death disarm thy vengeance.  O forbear
 To vex the dead.  What glory wilt thou win
 By slaying twice the slain?  I mean thee well;
 Counsel's most welcome if I promise gain.

CREON
 Old man, ye all let fly at me your shafts
 Like anchors at a target; yea, ye set
 Your soothsayer on me.  Peddlers are ye all
 And I the merchandise ye buy and sell.
 Go to, and make your profit where ye will,
 Silver of Sardis change for gold of Ind;
 Ye will not purchase this man's burial,
 Not though the winged ministers of Zeus
 Should bear him in their talons to his throne;
 Not e'en in awe of prodigy so dire
 Would I permit his burial, for I know
 No human soilure can assail the gods;
 This too I know, Teiresias, dire's the fall
 Of craft and cunning when it tries to gloss
 Foul treachery with fair words for filthy gain.

TEIRESIAS
 Alas! doth any know and lay to heart—

CREON
 Is this the prelude to some hackneyed saw?

TEIRESIAS
 How far good counsel is the best of goods?

CREON
 True, as unwisdom is the worst of ills.

TEIRESIAS
 Thou art infected with that ill thyself.

CREON
 I will not bandy insults with thee, seer.

TEIRESIAS
 And yet thou say'st my prophesies are frauds.

CREON
 Prophets are all a money-getting tribe.

TEIRESIAS
 And kings are all a lucre-loving race.

CREON
 Dost know at whom thou glancest, me thy lord?

TEIRESIAS
 Lord of the State and savior, thanks to me.

CREON
 Skilled prophet art thou, but to wrong inclined.

TEIRESIAS
 Take heed, thou wilt provoke me to reveal
 The mystery deep hidden in my breast.

CREON
 Say on, but see it be not said for gain.

TEIRESIAS
 Such thou, methinks, till now hast judged my words.

CREON
 Be sure thou wilt not traffic on my wits.

TEIRESIAS
 Know then for sure, the coursers of the sun
 Not many times shall run their race, before
 Thou shalt have given the fruit of thine own loins
 In quittance of thy murder, life for life;
 For that thou hast entombed a living soul,
 And sent below a denizen of earth,
 And wronged the nether gods by leaving here
 A corpse unlaved, unwept, unsepulchered.
 Herein thou hast no part, nor e'en the gods
 In heaven; and thou usurp'st a power not thine.
 For this the avenging spirits of Heaven and Hell
 Who dog the steps of sin are on thy trail:
 What these have suffered thou shalt suffer too.
 And now, consider whether bought by gold
 I prophesy.  For, yet a little while,
 And sound of lamentation shall be heard,
 Of men and women through thy desolate halls;
 And all thy neighbor States are leagues to avenge
 Their mangled warriors who have found a grave
 I' the maw of wolf or hound, or winged bird
 That flying homewards taints their city's air.
 These are the shafts, that like a bowman I
 Provoked to anger, loosen at thy breast,
 Unerring, and their smart thou shalt not shun.
 Boy, lead me home, that he may vent his spleen
 On younger men, and learn to curb his tongue
 With gentler manners than his present mood.
 [Exit TEIRESIAS]

CHORUS
 My liege, that man hath gone, foretelling woe.
 And, O believe me, since these grizzled locks
 Were like the raven, never have I known
 The prophet's warning to the State to fail.

CREON
 I know it too, and it perplexes me.
 To yield is grievous, but the obstinate soul
 That fights with Fate, is smitten grievously.

CHORUS
 Son of Menoeceus, list to good advice.

CHORUS
 What should I do.  Advise me.  I will heed.

CHORUS
 Go, free the maiden from her rocky cell;
 And for the unburied outlaw build a tomb.

CREON
 Is that your counsel?  You would have me yield?

CHORUS
 Yea, king, this instant.  Vengeance of the gods
 Is swift to overtake the impenitent.

CREON
 Ah! what a wrench it is to sacrifice
 My heart's resolve; but Fate is ill to fight.

CHORUS
 Go, trust not others.  Do it quick thyself.

CREON
 I go hot-foot.  Bestir ye one and all,
 My henchmen!  Get ye axes!  Speed away
 To yonder eminence!  I too will go,
 For all my resolution this way sways.
 'Twas I that bound, I too will set her free.
 Almost I am persuaded it is best
 To keep through life the law ordained of old.
 [Exit CREON]

CHORUS
 (Str. 1)
 Thou by many names adored,
           Child of Zeus the God of thunder,
           Of a Theban bride the wonder,
 Fair Italia's guardian lord;

In the deep-embosomed glades
           Of the Eleusinian Queen
 Haunt of revelers, men and maids,
           Dionysus, thou art seen.

Where Ismenus rolls his waters,
           Where the Dragon's teeth were sown,
 Where the Bacchanals thy daughters
           Round thee roam,
           There thy home;
 Thebes, O Bacchus, is thine own.

(Ant. 1)
 Thee on the two-crested rock
           Lurid-flaming torches see;
 Where Corisian maidens flock,
           Thee the springs of Castaly.

By Nysa's bastion ivy-clad,
 By shores with clustered vineyards glad,
 There to thee the hymn rings out,
 And through our streets we Thebans shout,
           All hall to thee
           Evoe, Evoe!

(Str. 2)
 Oh, as thou lov'st this city best of all,
 To thee, and to thy Mother levin-stricken,
 In our dire need we call;
 Thou see'st with what a plague our townsfolk sicken.
           Thy ready help we crave,
 Whether adown Parnassian heights descending,
 Or o'er the roaring straits thy swift was wending,
           Save us, O save!

(Ant. 2)
 Brightest of all the orbs that breathe forth light,
      Authentic son of Zeus, immortal king,
 Leader of all the voices of the night,
      Come, and thy train of Thyiads with thee bring,
           Thy maddened rout
 Who dance before thee all night long, and shout,
           Thy handmaids we,
           Evoe, Evoe!

[Enter MESSENGER]

MESSENGER
 Attend all ye who dwell beside the halls
 Of Cadmus and Amphion.  No man's life
 As of one tenor would I praise or blame,
 For Fortune with a constant ebb and rise
 Casts down and raises high and low alike,
 And none can read a mortal's horoscope.
 Take Creon; he, methought, if any man,
 Was enviable.  He had saved this land
 Of Cadmus from our enemies and attained
 A monarch's powers and ruled the state supreme,
 While a right noble issue crowned his bliss.
 Now all is gone and wasted, for a life
 Without life's joys I count a living death.
 You'll tell me he has ample store of wealth,
 The pomp and circumstance of kings; but if
 These give no pleasure, all the rest I count
 The shadow of a shade, nor would I weigh
 His wealth and power 'gainst a dram of joy.

CHORUS
 What fresh woes bring'st thou to the royal house?

MESSENGER
 Both dead, and they who live deserve to die.

CHORUS
 Who is the slayer, who the victim? speak.

MESSENGER
 Haemon; his blood shed by no stranger hand.

CHORUS
 What mean ye? by his father's or his own?

MESSENGER
 His own; in anger for his father's crime.

CHORUS
 O prophet, what thou spakest comes to pass.

MESSENGER
 So stands the case; now 'tis for you to act.

CHORUS
 Lo! from the palace gates I see approaching
 Creon's unhappy wife, Eurydice.
 Comes she by chance or learning her son's fate?
 [Enter EURYDICE]

EURYDICE
 Ye men of Thebes, I overheard your talk.
 As I passed out to offer up my prayer
 To Pallas, and was drawing back the bar
 To open wide the door, upon my ears
 There broke a wail that told of household woe
 Stricken with terror in my handmaids' arms
 I fell and fainted.  But repeat your tale
 To one not unacquaint with misery.

MESSENGER
 Dear mistress, I was there and will relate
 The perfect truth, omitting not one word.
 Why should we gloze and flatter, to be proved
 Liars hereafter?  Truth is ever best.
 Well, in attendance on my liege, your lord,
 I crossed the plain to its utmost margin, where
 The corse of Polyneices, gnawn and mauled,
 Was lying yet.  We offered first a prayer
 To Pluto and the goddess of cross-ways,
 With contrite hearts, to deprecate their ire.
 Then laved with lustral waves the mangled corse,
 Laid it on fresh-lopped branches, lit a pyre,
 And to his memory piled a mighty mound
 Of mother earth.  Then to the caverned rock,
 The bridal chamber of the maid and Death,
 We sped, about to enter.  But a guard
 Heard from that godless shrine a far shrill wail,
 And ran back to our lord to tell the news.
 But as he nearer drew a hollow sound
 Of lamentation to the King was borne.
 He groaned and uttered then this bitter plaint:
 "Am I a prophet? miserable me!
 Is this the saddest path I ever trod?
 'Tis my son's voice that calls me.  On press on,
 My henchmen, haste with double speed to the tomb
 Where rocks down-torn have made a gap, look in
 And tell me if in truth I recognize
 The voice of Haemon or am heaven-deceived."
 So at the bidding of our distraught lord
 We looked, and in the craven's vaulted gloom
 I saw the maiden lying strangled there,
 A noose of linen twined about her neck;
 And hard beside her, clasping her cold form,
 Her lover lay bewailing his dead bride
 Death-wedded, and his father's cruelty.
 When the King saw him, with a terrible groan
 He moved towards him, crying, "O my son
 What hast thou done?  What ailed thee?  What mischance
 Has reft thee of thy reason?  O come forth,
 Come forth, my son; thy father supplicates."
 But the son glared at him with tiger eyes,
 Spat in his face, and then, without a word,
 Drew his two-hilted sword and smote, but missed
 His father flying backwards.  Then the boy,
 Wroth with himself, poor wretch, incontinent
 Fell on his sword and drove it through his side
 Home, but yet breathing clasped in his lax arms
 The maid, her pallid cheek incarnadined
 With his expiring gasps.  So there they lay
 Two corpses, one in death.  His marriage rites
 Are consummated in the halls of Death:
 A witness that of ills whate'er befall
 Mortals' unwisdom is the worst of all.
 [Exit EURYDICE]

CHORUS
 What makest thou of this?  The Queen has gone
 Without a word importing good or ill.

MESSENGER
 I marvel too, but entertain good hope.
 'Tis that she shrinks in public to lament
 Her son's sad ending, and in privacy
 Would with her maidens mourn a private loss.
 Trust me, she is discreet and will not err.

CHORUS
 I know not, but strained silence, so I deem,
 Is no less ominous than excessive grief.

MESSENGER
 Well, let us to the house and solve our doubts,
 Whether the tumult of her heart conceals
 Some fell design.  It may be thou art right:
 Unnatural silence signifies no good.

CHORUS
           Lo! the King himself appears.
           Evidence he with him bears
           'Gainst himself (ah me! I quake
           'Gainst a king such charge to make)
           But all must own,
           The guilt is his and his alone.

CREON
 (Str. 1)
           Woe for sin of minds perverse,
           Deadly fraught with mortal curse.
           Behold us slain and slayers, all akin.
           Woe for my counsel dire, conceived in sin.
                Alas, my son,
                Life scarce begun,
                Thou wast undone.
           The fault was mine, mine only, O my son!

CHORUS
 Too late thou seemest to perceive the truth.

CREON
 (Str. 2)
 By sorrow schooled.  Heavy the hand of God,
 Thorny and rough the paths my feet have trod,
 Humbled my pride, my pleasure turned to pain;
 Poor mortals, how we labor all in vain!
 [Enter SECOND MESSENGER]

SECOND MESSENGER
 Sorrows are thine, my lord, and more to come,
 One lying at thy feet, another yet
 More grievous waits thee, when thou comest home.

CREON
 What woe is lacking to my tale of woes?

SECOND MESSENGER
 Thy wife, the mother of thy dead son here,
 Lies stricken by a fresh inflicted blow.

CREON
 (Ant. 1)
      How bottomless the pit!
           Does claim me too, O Death?
           What is this word he saith,
      This woeful messenger?  Say, is it fit
      To slay anew a man already slain?
           Is Death at work again,
      Stroke upon stroke, first son, then mother slain?

CHORUS
 Look for thyself.  She lies for all to view.

CREON
 (Ant. 2)
 Alas! another added woe I see.
 What more remains to crown my agony?
 A minute past I clasped a lifeless son,
 And now another victim Death hath won.
 Unhappy mother, most unhappy son!

SECOND MESSENGER
 Beside the altar on a keen-edged sword
 She fell and closed her eyes in night, but erst
 She mourned for Megareus who nobly died
 Long since, then for her son; with her last breath
 She cursed thee, the slayer of her child.

CREON
 (Str. 3)
           I shudder with affright
 O for a two-edged sword to slay outright
           A wretch like me,
           Made one with misery.

SECOND MESSENGER
 'Tis true that thou wert charged by the dead Queen
 As author of both deaths, hers and her son's.

CREON
 In what wise was her self-destruction wrought?

SECOND MESSENGER
 Hearing the loud lament above her son
 With her own hand she stabbed herself to the heart.

CREON
 (Str. 4)
 I am the guilty cause.  I did the deed,
 Thy murderer.  Yea, I guilty plead.
 My henchmen, lead me hence, away, away,
 A cipher, less than nothing; no delay!

CHORUS
 Well said, if in disaster aught is well
 His past endure demand the speediest cure.

CREON
 (Ant. 3)
           Come, Fate, a friend at need,
           Come with all speed!
           Come, my best friend,
           And speed my end!
           Away, away!
 Let me not look upon another day!

CHORUS
 This for the morrow; to us are present needs
 That they whom it concerns must take in hand.

CREON
 I join your prayer that echoes my desire.

CHORUS
 O pray not, prayers are idle; from the doom
 Of fate for mortals refuge is there none.

CREON
 (Ant. 4)
 Away with me, a worthless wretch who slew
 Unwitting thee, my son, thy mother too.
 Whither to turn I know now; every way
           Leads but astray,
 And on my head I feel the heavy weight
           Of crushing Fate.

CHORUS
      Of happiness the chiefest part
           Is a wise heart:
      And to defraud the gods in aught
           With peril's fraught.
      Swelling words of high-flown might
      Mightily the gods do smite.
      Chastisement for errors past
      Wisdom brings to age at last.