

# 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.