

# Oedipus at Colonus

By Sophocles

Translated by F. Storr

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## 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

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In front of the grove of the Eumenides.

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(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 scant 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 (strophe 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,  
Grove by the light of other eyes his way,  
Or face the storm upon so frail a stay?

CHORUS (antistrophe 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 (strophe 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 Follow with blind steps, father, as I lead.

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 (antistrophe 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.

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.

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 weak  
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 (strophe 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 (antistrophe 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 (strophe 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 reflux 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 (antistrophe 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 (strophe 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.

(antistrophe 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.

(strophe 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.

(antistrophe 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 prove 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 (strophe 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.

(antistrophe 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.

(strophe 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.

(antistrophe 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 (strophe)

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.

(antistrophe)

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 Rhippean 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 stablsh thee,  
And stablsh, 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 (strophe 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 (antistrophe 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 (strophe 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 (antistrophe 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. 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 (strophe)

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.

(antistrophe)



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, vanished 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 (strophe 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 (antistrophe 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 loss 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 (strophe 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 (antistrophe 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 overwhelm 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 mortal  
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.

THE END