

Oedipus the King
Sophocles
Translated by David Grene

CHARACTERS

OEDIPUS, King of Thebes

JOCASTA, His Wife

CREON, His Brother-in-Law

TEIRESIAS, an Old Blind Prophet

PRIEST

FIRST MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER

A HERDSMAN

**A CHORUS OF OLD MEN OF
THEBES**

PART I:

Scene: *In front of the palace of Oedipus at Thebes. To the Right of the stage near the altar stands the PRIEST with a crowd of children.*

OEDIPUS emerges from the central door.

OEDIPUS: Children, young sons and daughters of old Cadmus,¹

why do you sit here with your suppliant crowns?²
the town is heavy with a mingled burden
of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and
incense;

5 I did not think it fit that I should hear
of this from messengers but came myself,--
I Oedipus whom all men call the Great.

[*He returns to the PRIEST.*]

You're old and they are young; come, speak for them.
What do you fear or want, that you sit here
10 suppliant? Indeed I'm willing to give all
that you may need; I would be very hard
should I not pity suppliants like these.

PRIEST: O ruler of my country, Oedipus,

You see our company around the altar;
15 you see our ages; some of us, like these,
who cannot yet fly far, and some of us
heavy with age; these children are the chosen
among the young, and I the priest of Zeus.
Within the market place sit others crowned
20 with suppliant garlands³, at the double shrine
of Pallas⁴ and the temple where Ismenus
gives oracles by fire⁵. King, you yourself
have seen our city reeling like a wreck

already; it can scarcely lift its prow
25 out of the depths, out of the bloody surf.
A blight is on the fruitful plants of the earth.
A blight is on the cattle in the fields,
a blight is on our women that no children
are born to them; a God that carries fire,
30 a deadly pestilence, is on our town,
strikes us and spears us not, and the house of Cadmus
is emptied of its people while black Death
grows rich in groaning and in lamentation.⁶
We have not come as suppliants to this altar
35 because we thought of you as a God,
but rather judging you the first of men
in all the chances of this life and when
we mortals have to do with more than man.
You came and by your coming saved our city,
40 freed us from the tribute which we paid of old
to the Sphinx,⁷ cruel singer. This you did
in virtue of no knowledge we could give you,
in virtue of no teaching; it was God
that aided you, men say, and you are held
45 with God's assistance to have saved our lives.
Now Oedipus, Greatest in all men's eyes,
here falling at your feet we all entreat you,
find us some strength for rescue.
Perhaps you'll hear a wise word from some God.
50 perhaps you will learn something from a man
(for I have seen that for the skilled of the practice
the outcome of their counsels live the most).
Noblest of men, go, and raise up our city,
go,-- and give heed. For now this land of ours
55 calls you its savior since you saved it once.
So, let us never speak about your reign
as of a time when first our feet were set
secure on high, but later fell to ruin.
Raise up our city, save it and raise it up.

¹ **Cadmus** *n.* mythical founder and first king of Thebes, a city in central Greece where the play takes place

² **suppliant crowns** wreaths worn by people who ask favors of the gods.

³ **suppliant garlands** branches wound in wool, which were placed on the altar and left there until the suppliant's request was granted.

⁴ **double shrine of Pallas** the two temples of Athena.

⁵ **temple where Ismenus gives oracles by fire** Temple of Apollo, located by Ismenus, the Theban river, where the priests studied patterns in the ashes of sacrificial victims to foretell the future.

⁶ **lamentation** *n.* expression of deep sorrow

⁷ **Sphinx** winged female monster at Thebes that ate men who could not answer her riddle: "what is it that walks on four legs at dawn, two legs at midday, and three legs in the evening, and has only one voice; when it walks on most feet, is it weakest?" Creon, appointed ruler of Thebes, offered the kingdom and the hand of his sister, Jocasta, to anyone who could answer the riddle. Oedipus saved Thebes by answering correctly, "Man, who crawls in infancy, walks upright in his prime, and leans on a cane in old age." Outraged, the Sphinx destroyed herself, and Oedipus became King of Thebes

60 Once you have brought us luck with happy omen;
be no less now in fortune.
If you will rule this land, as now you rule it,
better to rule it full of men than empty.
For neither tower nor ship is anything
65 when empty, and none live in it together.

OEDIPUS: I pity you, children. You have come full of
longing,

but I have known the story before you told it
only too well. I know you are all sick,
yet there is not one of you, sick though you are,
70 that is as sick as myself.

Your several sorrows each have single scope
and touch but one of you. My spirit groans
for city and myself and you at once.

You have not roused me like a man from sleep;
75 know that I have given many tears to this,
gone many ways wandering in thoughts,
but as I thought I found only one remedy

and that I took. I sent Menoeceus' son
Creon, Jocasta's brother, to Apollo,

80 to his Pythian temple,⁸
that he might learn there by what act or word

I could save this city. As I count the days,
it vexes me what ails him; he is gone
far longer than he needed for the journey.

85 But when he comes, than may I prove a villain,
if I shall not do all the God commands.

PRIEST: Thanks for your gracious words. Your servants
here signal that Creon is this moment coming.

OEDIPUS: His face is bright. O holy Lord Apollo,
90 grant that his news too may be bright for us
and bring us safety.

PRIEST: It is happy news,
I think, for else his head would not be crowned
with sprigs of fruitful laurel.⁹

OEDIPUS: We will know soon,
96 he's within hail. Lord Creon, my good brother,
what is the word you bring us from the God?

[CREON enters.]

CREON: A good word, --for things hard to bear
themselves if in the final issue all is well
100 I count complete good fortune.

OEDIPUS: What do you mean?
What have you said so far

leaves me uncertain whether to trust or fear.

CREON: If you will hear my news before these others
105 I am ready to speak, or else to go within.

OEDIPUS: Speak it to all;
the grief I bear, I bear it more for these
than for my own hear.

CREON: I will tell you, then,
110 what I heard from the God.
King Phoebus¹⁰ in plain words commanded us
to drive out a pollution from our land,
pollution grown ingrained within the land;
drive it out, said the God, not cherish it,
115 till it's past cure.

OEDIPUS: What is the rite
of purification? How shall it be done?

CREON: By banishing a man, or expiation¹¹
of blood by blood, since it is murder guilt
120 which holds our city in this destroying storm.

OEDIPUS: Who is this man whose fate the God
pronounces?

CREON: My lord, before you piloted the state
we had a king called Laius.

OEDIPUS: I know of him by hearsay. I have not seen
him.

CREON: The God commanded clearly: let some one
126 punish with force this dead man's murderers.

OEDIPUS: Where are they in the world? Where would a
trace of this old crime be found? It would be hard
to guess where.

CREON: The clue is in this land;
131 that which is sought is found;
the unheeded thing escapes:
so said the God.

OEDIPUS: Was it at home,
or in the country that death came upon him,
135 or in another country travelling?

CREON: He went, he said himself, upon an embassy,¹²
but never returned when he set out from home.

OEDIPUS: Was there no messenger, no fellow traveler
who knew what happened? Such a one might tell

⁸ **Pythian temple** shrine of Apollo at Delphi, below Mount
Parnassus in central Greece

⁹ **sprigs of fruitful laurel** Laurel symbolized triumph; a crown of
laurel signified good news.

¹⁰ **King Phoebus Apollo, god of the sun.**

¹¹ **expiation** *n.* The act of making amends for wrongdoing.

¹² **embassy** *n.* important mission or errand

140 something of use.

CREON: They were all killed save one. He fled in terror
and he could tell us nothing in clear terms
of what he knew, nothing, but one thing only.

OEDIPUS: What was it?
145 If we could even find a slim beginning
in which to hope, we might discover much.

CREON: This man said the robbers they encountered
were many and the hands that did the murder
were many; it was no man's single power.

OEDIPUS: How could a robber date a deed like this
151 Were he not helped with money from the city,
Money and treachery?

CREON: That indeed was thought.
But Laius was dead and in our trouble
There was none to help.

OEDIPUS: What trouble was so great to hinder you
157 inquiring out the murder of your king?

CREON: The riddling Sphinx induced us to neglect
mysterious crimes and rather seek solution
160 of troubles at our feet.

OEDIPUS: I will bring this to light again. King Phoebus
fittingly took this care about the dead,
and you to fittingly.
And justly you will see in me an ally,
165 a champion of my country and the God.
For when I drive pollution from the land
I will not serve a distant friend's advantage,

but act in my own interest. Whoever
he was that killed the king may readily
170 wish to dispatch me with his murderous hand;
so helping the dead king I help myself.
Come, children, take your suppliant boughs and go;
up from the altars now. Call the assembly
and let it meet upon the understanding
175 that I'll do everything. God will decide
whether we prosper or remain in sorrow.

PRIEST: Rise, children—it was this we came to seek,
which of himself the king now offers us.
May Phoebus who gave us the oracle
180 come to our rescue and stay the plague.

[Exit all but the CHORUS.]

CHORUS:

Strophe

What is the sweet spoken word of God from the shrine of
Pytho rich in gold

that has come to glorious Thebes?

I am stretched on the rack of doubt, and terror and
trembling hold
my heart, O Delian Healer,¹³ and I worship full of fears
185 for what doom you will bring to pass, new or renewed
in the revolving years.
Speak to me, immortal voice,
child of golden Hope.

Antistrophe

First I call on you, Athene, deathless daughter of Zeus,
and Artemis, Earth Upholder,
190 who sits in the midst of the market place in the throne
which men call Fame,
and Phoebus, the Far Shooter, three averters of Fate,
come to us now, if ever before, when ruin rushed upon the
state,
you drove destruction's flame away out
of our land.

Strophe

195 Our sorrows defy number;
all the ship's timbers are rotten;
taking of thought is no spear for the driving away of the
plague
There are no growing children in this famous land;
there are no women bearing the pangs of childbirth.
200 You may see them one with another, like birds swift
on the wing,
quicker than fire unmastered,
speeding away to the coast of the Western God.¹⁴

Antistrophe

In the unnumbered death
of its people the city dies;
205 those children that are born lie dead on the naked
earth
unpitied, spreading contagion of death; and gray-haired
mothers and wives
everywhere stand at the altar's edge, suppliant, moaning;
the hymn to the healing God¹⁵ rings out but with it the
wailing voices are blended.
From these our sufferings grant us, O golden Daughter of
Zeus,¹⁶
210 glad-faced deliverance.

Strophe

There is no clash of brazen¹⁷ shields but our fight is with
the War God,¹⁸

¹³ **Delian Healer** Born on the island of Delos, Apollo's title was "healer"; he caused and averted plagues.

¹⁴ **Western God** Since the sun sets in the west, this is the god of night, or Death.

¹⁵ **healing God** Apollo.

¹⁶ **golden Daughter of Zeus** Athena.

¹⁷ **brazen** *adj.* of brass or like brass in color

¹⁸ **War God** Ares

a War God ringed with the cries of men, a savage God
 who burns us;
 grant that he turn in racing course backwards out of our
 country's bounds
 to the great palace of Amphitrite¹⁹ or where the waves of
 the Thracian sea
 215 deny the stranger safe anchorage.
 Whatsoever escapes the night at last the light of day
 revisits;
 so smite the War God, Father Zeus,
 beneath your thunderbolt,
 220 for you are the Lord of the lightning, the lightning that
 carries fire.

Antistrophe

And your unconquered arrow shafts, winged by the golden
 corded bow,
 Lycean King²⁰, I beg to be at our side for help;
 and the gleaming torches of Artemis with which she
 scourges the Lycean hills,
 and I call on the God with the turban of gold²¹, who gave
 his name to this country of ours.
 225 the Bacchic God with the wind flushed face²²,
 Evian One,²³ who travel
 with the Maenad company,²⁴
 combat the God that burns us
 with your torch of pine;
 230 for the God that is our enemy is a God unhonored
 among the Gods

[OEDIPUS *returns*.]

OEDIPUS: For what you ask me—if you will hear my
 words,
 and hearing welcome them and fight the plague,
 you will find strength and lightening of your load.
 Hark to me; what I say to you, I say
 235 as one that is a stranger to the story
 as stranger to the deed. For I would not
 be far upon the track if I alone
 were tracing it without a clue. But now,
 since after all was finished, I became
 240 a citizen among you, citizens—
 now I proclaim to all the men of Thebes:

¹⁹ **Amphitrite** sea goddess who was the wife of Poseidon, god of the sea.

²⁰ **Lycean King** Apollo, whose title *Lykios* means “god of light.”

²¹ **God with turban of gold** Dionysus, god of wine, who was born of Zeus and a woman of Thebes, the first Greek city to honor him. He wears an oriental turban because he has come from the East.

²² **Bacchic God with the wind flushed face** refers to Dionysus, who had a youthful, rosy complexion; Bacchus means “riotous god”

²³ **Evian One** Dionysus, called Evios because his followers addressed him with the ritual cry “evoi”

²⁴ **Maenad company** female followers of Dionysus.

who so among you knows the murderer
 by whose hand Laius, son of Labdacus,
 died—I command him to tell everything
 245 to me,— yes, though he fears himself to take the
 blame

on his own head; for bitter punishment
 he shall have none, but leave this land unharmed.
 Or if he knows the murderer, another,
 a foreigner, still let him speak the truth.
 250 For I will pay him and be grateful, too.

But if you shall keep silence, if perhaps
 some one of you, to shield a guilty friend,
 some one of you, to shield reject my words –
 hear what I shall do then:

255 I forbid that man, whoever he be, my land,
 my land where I hold sovereignty²⁵ and throne;
 and I forbid any to welcome him
 or cry him greeting or make him a sharer
 in sacrifice or offering to the Gods,
 260 or give him water for his hands to wash.
 I command all to drive him from their homes,
 since he is our pollution, as the oracle
 of Pytho's God²⁶ proclaimed him now to me.
 So I stand forth a champion of the God
 265 and of the man who died.

Upon the murderer I invoke this curse—
 whether he is one man and all unknown,
 or one of many—may he wear out his life
 in misery to miserable doom!

270 If with my knowledge he lives at my hearth
 I pray that I myself may feel my curse.

On you I lay my charge to fulfill all this
 for me, for the God, and for this land of ours
 destroyed and blighted, by the God forsaken.

275 Even were this no matter of God's ordinance
 it would not fit you so to leave it lie,
 unpurified, since a good man is dead
 and one that was a king. Search it out.

Since I am now the holder of his office,
 280 And have his bed and wife that once was his,
 and had his line not been unfortunate
 we would have common children—(fortune leaped
 upon his head)—because of all these things,
 I fight in his defense as for my father,

285 and I shall try all means to take the murderer
 of Laius the son of Labdacus
 the son of Polydorus and before him
 of Cadmus and before him of Agenor.

Those who do not obey me, may the Gods
 290 grant no crops springing from the ground they
 plow

nor children to their women! May a fate
 like this, or one still worse than this consume them!
 For you whom these words please, the other Thebans,

²⁵ **sovereignty** *n.* supreme authority

²⁶ **Pytho's God** Apollo

may Justice as your ally and all the Gods
295 live with you, blessing you now and for ever!

CHORUS: As you have held me to my oath, I speak:
I neither killed the king nor can declare
the killer; but since Phoebus set the quest
it is his part to tell who the man is.

OEDIPUS: Right; but to put compulsion²⁷ on the Gods
301 against their will—no man can do that

CHORUS: May I then say what I think second best?

OEDIPUS: If there's a third best, too, spare not to tell it

CHORUS: I know that what the Lord Teiresias
305 sees, is most often what the Lord Apollo
sees. If you should inquire of this from him
you might find out most clearly.

OEDIPUS: Even in this my actions have not been
sluggard²⁸
On Creon's word I have sent two messengers
310 and why the prophet is not here already
I have been wondering.

CHORUS: His skill apart
there is besides only an old faint story.

OEDIPUS: What is it?
315 I look at every story.

CHORUS: It was said
that he was killed by certain wayfarers.

OEDIPUS: I heard that, too, but no one saw the killer.

CHORUS: Yet if he has a share of fear at all,
320 his courage will not stand firm, hearing your curse.

OEDIPUS: The man who in the doing did not shrink
will fear no word.

CHORUS: Here comes his prosecutor:
led by your men the godly prophet comes
325 in whom alone of mankind truth is native.

[Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a little boy]

OEDIPUS: Teiresias, you are versed in everything,
things teachable and things not to be spoken,
things of the heaven and earth-creeing things.
You have no eyes but in your mind you know 330 with
what a plague our city is afflicted.
My lord, in you alone we find a champion,

in you alone on that can rescue us.
Perhaps you have not heard the messengers,
but Phoebus sent in answer to our sending 335 an
oracle declaring that our freedom
from this disease would only come when we
should learn the names of those who killed King Laius,
and kill them or expel them from our country.
Do not begrudge us oracle from birds,
340 or any other way of prophecy
within your skill; save yourself and the city,
save me; redeem the debt of our pollution
that lies on us because of this dead man.
We are in your hands; pains are most nobly taken 345 to
help another when you have means and power.

TEIRESIAS: Alas, how terrible is wisdom when
it brings no profit to the man that's wise!
This I knew well, but had forgotten it,
else I would not have come here.

OEDIPUS: What is this?
351 How sad you are now you have come!

TEIRESIAS: Let me
go home, It will be easiest for us both
to bear our several destinies to the end
355 if you will follow my advice.

OEDIPUS: You'd rob us
of this your gift of prophecy? You talk as one who had
no care for law nor love
for Thebes who reared you.

TEIRESIAS: Yes, but I see that even your own words
361 miss the mark; therefore I must fear for mine.

OEDIPUS: For God's sake if you know of anything,
do not turn from us; all of us kneel to you,
all of us here, your suppliants.

TEIRESIAS: All of you here know nothing. I will not
366 bring to light of day my troubles, mine—
rather than call them yours.

OEDIPUS: What do you mean?
You know of something but refuse to speak.
Would you betray us and destroy the city?

TEIRESIAS: I will not bring this pain upon us both,
371 neither on you nor on myself. Why is it
you question me and waste your labor? I will tell you
nothing.

OEDIPUS: You would provoke a stone! Tell us, you
villain,
375 tell us, and do not stand there quietly

²⁷ **compulsion** *n.* driving force; coercion.

²⁸ **sluggard** *adj.* lazy or idle

unmoved and balking²⁹ at the issue.

TEIRESIAS: You blame my temper but you do not see
your own that lives within you; it is me
you chide.³⁰

OEDIPUS: Who would not feel this temper rise
381 at words like these with which you shame our city?

TEIRESIAS: Of themselves things will come, although I
hide them
and breathe no word of them.

OEDIPUS: Since they will come
386 tell them to me.

TEIRESIAS: I will say nothing further.
Against this answer let your temper rage
as wildly as you will.

OEDIPUS: Indeed I am
391 so angry I shall not hold back a jot
of what I think. For I would have you know
I think you were complotter³¹ of the deed
and doer of the deed save in so far
395 as for the actual killing. Had you had eyes
I would have said alone you murdered him.

TEIRESIAS: Yes? Then I warn you faithfully to keep
the letter of your proclamation and
from this day forth to speak no word of greeting
400 to these nor me; you are the land's pollution.

OEDIPUS: How shamelessly you started up this taunt!
How do you think you will escape?

TEIRESIAS: I have.
I have escaped; the truth is what I cherish
405 and that's my strength.

OEDIPUS: And who has taught you truth?
Not your profession surely!

TEIRESIAS: You have taught me,
for you have made me speak against my will.

OEDIPUS: Speak what? Tell me again that I may learn it
better.

TEIRESIAS: Did you not understand before or would
you
412 provoke me into speaking?

OEDIPUS: I did not grasp it.

not so to call it known. Say it again.

TEIRESIAS: I say you are the murderer of the king
416 whose murderer you seek.

OEDIPUS: Not twice you shall
say calumnies³² like this and stay unpunished.

TEIRESIAS: Shall I say more to tempt your anger more?

OEDIPUS: As much as you desire; it will be said
21 in vain

TEIRESIAS: I say with those you love best
you live in foulest shame unconsciously
and do not see where you are in calamity.³³

OEDIPUS: Do you imagine you can always talk
426 like this, and live to laugh at it hereafter?

TEIRESIAS: Yes, if the truth has anything of strength.

OEDIPUS: It has, but not for you; it has no strength
for you because you are blind in mind and ears
430 as well as in your eyes.

TEIRESIAS: You are a poor wretch
to taunt me with the very insults which every one soon
will heap upon yourself.

OEDIPUS: Your life is one long night so that you cannot
435 hurt me or any other who sees the light.

TEIRESIAS: It is not fate that I should be your ruin,
Apollo is enough; it is his care
to work this out.

OEDIPUS: Was this your own design
440 or Creon's?

TEIRESIAS: Creon is no hurt to you,
but you are yourself.

OEDIPUS: Wealth, sovereignty and skill outmatching
skill
for the contrivance³⁴ of an envied life!
445 Great store of jealousy fill your treasury chests,
if my friend Creon, friend from this and loyal,
thus secretly attacks me, secretly
desires to drive me out and secretly
suborns³⁵ this juggling trick devising quack,
450 this wily beggar who has only eyes

²⁹ **balking** *v.* obstinately refusing to act.

³⁰ **chide** *v.* scold.

³¹ **complotter** *n.* person who plots against another person.

³² **calumnies** *n.* false and malicious statements; slander.

³³ **calamity** *n.* extreme misfortune that leads to disaster.

³⁴ **contrivance** *n.* act of devising or scheming.

³⁵ **suborns** *v.* instigates a person to commit perjury.

for his own gains, but blindness in his skill.
 For, tell me, where have you seen clear, Teiresias,
 with your prophetic eyes? When the dark singer,
 the sphinx, was in your country, did you speak
 455 word of deliverance to its citizens?
 And yet the riddle's answer was not the province
 of a chance comer. It was a prophet's task
 and plainly you had no such gift of prophecy
 from birds nor otherwise from any God
 460 to glean a word of knowledge. But I came,
 Oedipus, who knew nothing, and I stopped her.
 I solved the riddle by my own wit alone.
 Mine was no knowledge got from birds. And now
 you would expel me,
 465 because you think that you will find a place
 by Creon's throne. I think you will be sorry,
 both you and your accomplice, for your plot
 to drive me out. And did I not regard you
 as an old man, some suffering would have taught you
 470 that what was in your heart was treason.

CHORUS: We look at this man's words and yours, my
 king, and we find both have spoken them in anger.
 We need no angry words but only thought
 how we may best hit the God's meaning for us.

TEIRESIAS: If you are king, at least I have the right
 476 no less to speak in my defense against you.
 Of that much I am master. I am no slave
 of yours, but Loxias', and so I shall not
 enroll myself with Creon for my patron.
 480 Since you have taunted me with being blind,
 here is my word for you.
 You have your eyes but see not where you are
 in sin, nor where you live, nor whom you live with.
 Do you know who your parents are? Unknowing
 485 you are an enemy to kith and kin
 in death, beneath the earth, and in this life.
 A deadly footed, double striking curse,
 from father and mother both, shall drive you forth
 out of this land, with darkness on your eyes,
 490 that now have such straight vision. Shall there be
 a place will not be harbor to your cries,³⁶
 a corner of Cithaeron³⁷ will not ring
 in echo to your cries, soon, soon,--
 when you shall learn the secret of your marriage,
 495 which steered you to a haven in this house,--
 haven no haven, after lucky voyage?
 And of the multitude of other evils
 establishing a grim equality
 between you and your children, you know nothing.
 500 So, muddy with contempt my words and Creon's!
 Misery shall grind no man as it will you.

³⁶ **Shall. . . cries** is there any place that won't be full of your
 cries?

³⁷ **Cithaeron** *n.* mountain near Thebes on which Oedipus was
 abandoned as an infant.

OEDIPUS: Is it endurable that I should hear
 such words from him? Go and a curse go with you!
 Quick, home with you! Out of my house at once!

TEIRESIAS: I would not have come either had you not
 call me.

OEDIPUS: I did not know then you would talk like a
 fool—
 507 or it would have been long before I called you.

TEIRESIAS: I am a fool then, as it seems to you—
 but to the parents who have bred you, wise.

OEDIPUS: What parents? Stop! Who are they of all the
 world?

TEIRESIAS: This day will show your birth and will
 destroy you.

OEDIPUS: How needlessly your riddles darken
 everything.

TEIRESIAS: But it's in riddle answering you are
 strongest.

OEDIPUS: Yes. Taunt me where you will find me great.

TEIRESIAS: It is this very luck that has destroyed you.

OEDIPUS: I do not care, if it has saved this city.

TEIRESIAS: Well, I will go. Come, boy, lead me away.

OEDIPUS: Yes, lead him off. So long as you are here,
 you'll be a stumbling block and a vexation;
 520 once gone, you will not trouble me again.

TEIRESIAS: I have said
 what I came here to say not fearing your
 countenance; there is no way you can hurt me.
 I tell you, king, this man, this murderer
 525 (whom you have long declared you are in search
 of,
 indicting him in threatening proclamation
 as murderer of Laius)—he is here.
 In name he is a stranger among citizens
 But soon he will be shown to be a citizen
 530 true native Theban, and he'll have no joy.
 of the discovery: blindness for sight
 and beggary for riches his exchange,
 he shall go journeying to a foreign country
 tapping his way before him with a stick.
 535 He shall be proved father and brother both
 to his own children in his own house; to her
 that gave him birth, a son and husband both;
 a fellow sower in his father's bed

with that same father that he murdered.
540 Go within, reckon that out, and if you find me
mistaken, say I have no skill in prophecy

[*exit separately TEIRESIAS and OEDIPUS*]

CHORUS:

Strophe

who is the man proclaimed
by Delphi's prophetic rock
as the bloody handed murderer,
545 the doer of deeds that none dare name?
Now is the time for him to run
with a stronger foot
than Pegasus³⁸
for the child of Zeus leaps in arms upon him
550 with fire and the lightning bolt,
and terribly close on his heels
are the Fates that never miss.

Antistrophe

Lately from snowy Parnassus
clearly the voice flashed forth,
555 bidding each Theban track him down,
the unknown murderer.
In the savage forests he lurks and in
the caverns like
the mountain bull
560 He is sad and lonely, his feet
that carry him far from the navel of earth;³⁹
but its prophecies, ever living,
flutter around his head.

Strophe

The augur⁴⁰ has spread confusion,
565 terrible confusion;
I do not approve what was said
nor can I deny it.
I do not know what to say;
I am in a flutter of foreboding;
570 I never heard in the present
nor past of a quarrel between
the sons of Labdacus and Polybus,
that I might bring as proof
in attacking the popular fame
575 of Oedipus, seeking
to take vengeance for undiscovered death in the line
of Labdacus.

Antistrophe

Truly Zeus and Apollo are wise
and in human things all knowing;

³⁸ **Pegasus** mythical winged horse.

³⁹ **navel of earth** fissure, or crack, on Mount Parnassus from which mysterious vapors arose to inspire Pythia, priestess of the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi.

⁴⁰ **augur** *n.* fortuneteller or prophet; refers here to Teiresias

580 but amongst men there is no
distinct judgment, between the prophet and me—which
of us is right.

One man may pass another in wisdom
but I would never agree
585 with those that find fault with the king
till I should see the word
proved right beyond doubt. For once
in visible form the Sphinx
came on him and all of us
590 saw his wisdom and in that test
he saved the city. So he will not be condemned by my
mind.

[*Enter CREON.*]

CREON: Citizens, I have come because I heard
deadly words spread about me, that the king
accuses me. I cannot take that from him.
595 If he believes that in these present troubles
he has been wronged by me in word or deed I do not
want to live on with the burden
of such a scandal on me. The report
injures me doubly and most vitally—
600 for I'll be called a traitor to my city
and traitor also to my friends and you.

CHORUS: Perhaps it was a sudden gust of anger
that forced that insult from him, and no judgment.

CREON: But did he say that it was a compliances
605 with schemes of mine that the seer told him lies?

CHORUS: Yes, he said that, but why, I do not know.

CREON: Were his eyes straight in his head? Was his
mind right
when he accused me in this fashion?

CHORUS: I do not know; I have no eyes to see
610 what princes do. Here comes the king himself.

[*Enter OEDIPUS*]

OEDIPUS: You, sir, how is it you come here? Have you
so much

brazen faced daring that you venture in
my house although you are proved manifestly⁴¹
the murderer of that man, and though you tried,
615 openly, highway robbery of my crown?
For God's sake, tell me what you saw in me, what
cowardice or what stupidity,
that made you lay a plot like this against me?
Did you imagine I should not observe
620 the crafty scheme that stole upon me or
seeing it, take no means to counter it?

⁴¹ **proved manifestly** clearly proved with evidence.

Was it not stupid of you to make the attempt,
to try to hunt down royal power without
the people at your back or friends? For only
625 with the people at your back or money can
the hunt end in the capture of a crown.

CREON: Do you know what you're doing? Will you
listen
to words to answer yours, and then pass judgment?

OEDIPUS: You're quick to speak, but I am slow to grasp
you,
630 for I have found you dangerous,---and my foe.

CREON: First of all hear what I shall say to that.

OEDIPUS: At least don't tell me that you are not guilt.

CREON: If you think obstinacy⁴² without wisdom
a valuable possession, you are wrong.

OEDIPUS: And you are wrong if you believe that one,
636 a criminal, will not be punished only
because he is my kinsman.

CREON: This is but just –
but tell me, then, of what offense I'm guilty?

OEDIPUS: Did you or did you not urge me to send
641 to this prophetic mumbler?

CREON: I did indeed,
and I shall stand by what I told you.

OEDIPUS: How long ago is it since Laius. . . .

CREON: What about Laius? I don't understand.

OEDIPUS: Vanished—died—was murdered?

CREON: It is long,
648 a long, long time to reckon.

OEDIPUS: Was this prophet
650 in the profession then?

CREON: He was, and honored
as highly as he is today.

OEDIPUS: At that time did he say a word about me?

CREON: Never, at least not when I was near him.

OEDIPUS: You never made a search for the dead man?

CREON: We searched, indeed, but never learned of
anything.

OEDIPUS: Why did our wise old friend not say this then?

CREON: I don't know; and when I know nothing, I
659 usually hold my tongue.

OEDIPUS: You know this much,
661 and can declare this much if you are loyal.

CREON: What is it? If I know, I'll not deny it.

OEDIPUS: That he would not have said that I killed
Laius
had he not met you first.

CREON: You know yourself
666 whether he said this, but I demand that I
should hear as much from you as you from me.

OEDIPUS: Then hear, — I'll not be proved a murderer.

CREON: Well, then. You're married to my sister.

OEDIPUS: Yes,
671 that I am not disposed to deny.

CREON: You rule
this country giving her an equal share
in the government?

OEDIPUS: Yes, everything she wants
676 she has from me.

CREON: And I, as thirdsman to you,
am rated as the equal of you two?

OEDIPUS: Yes, and it's there you've proved yourself
false friend.

CREON: Not if you will reflect on it as I do.
681 Consider, first, if you think any one
would choose to rule and fear rather than rule
and sleep untroubled by a feat if power
were equal in both cases. I, at least,
685 I was not born with such a frantic yearning
to be a king—but to do what kings do.
And so it is with every one who has learned
wisdom and self-control. As it stands now,
the prizes are all mine—and without fear.
690 But if I were the king myself, I must

⁴² **obstinacy** *n.* stubbornness; state of being unyielding to reason. Creon means that Oedipus cannot see—or refuses to see—the facts

do much that went against the grain. How should
 despotic⁴³ rule seem sweeter to me
 than painless power and an assured authority?
 I am not so besotted⁴⁴ yet that I
 695 want other honors than those that come with profit.
 Now every man's my pleasure; every man greets me;
 now those who are your suitors fawn on me, —
 success for them depends upon my favor.
 Why should I let all this go to win that?
 700 My mind would not be traitor if it's wise;
 I am no treason lover, of my nature, nor would I ever
 dare to join a plot.

Prove what I say. Go to the oracle
 at Pytho and inquire about the answers,
 705 if they are as I told you. For the rest,
 if you discover that I laid any plot together with the
 seer, kill me, I say,
 not only by your vote but by my own.
 But do not charge me on obscure opinion
 710 without some proof to back it. It's not just
 lightly to count your knaves as honest men, nor with
 honest men as knaves. To throw away
 an honest friend is, as it were, to throw
 your life away, which a man loves the best.
 715 In the time you will know all with certainty;
 time is the only test of honest men, one day is space
 enough to know a rogue.

CHORUS: His words are wise, king, if one fears to fall.
 Those who are quick of temper are not safe.

OEDIPUS: When he that plots against me secretly
 721 moves quickly, I must quickly counterplot.

If I wait taking no decisive measure
 his business will be done, and mine be spoiled.

CREON: What do you want to do then? Banish me?

OEDIPUS: No, certainly; kill you, not banish you.

CREON: I do not think you've your wits about you.

OEDIPUS: For my own interests, yes.

CREON: But for mine, too,
 729 you should think equally.

OEDIPUS: You are a rogue.

CREON: Suppose you do not understand?

OEDIPUS: But yet
 I must be ruler.

CREON: Not if you rule badly.

OEDIPUS: O, city, city!

CREON: I too have some share
 737 in the city; it is not yours alone.

CHORUS: Stop, my lords! Here—and in the nick of time
 I see Jocasta coming from the house;
 740 with her help lay the quarrel that now stirs you.

[Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA: For shame! Why have you raised this foolish
 squabbling
 brawl? Are you not ashamed to air your private
 griefs when the country's sick? Go in, you, Oedipus,
 and you, too, Creon, into the house. Don't magnify
 745 your nothing troubles.

CREON: Sister, Oedipus,
 your husband, thinks he has the right to do
 terrible wrongs—he has but to choose between
 two terrors: banishing or killing me.

OEDIPUS: He's right, Jocasta; for I find him plotting
 751 with knavish⁴⁵ tricks against my person.

CREON: That God may never bless me! May I die
 accursed, if I have been guilty of
 one tittle⁴⁶ of the charge you bring against me!

JOCASTA: I beg you, Oedipus, trust him in this,
 756 spare him for the sake of this his oath to God,
 for my sake, and the sake of those who stand here.

CHORUS: Be gracious, be merciful,
 we beg you.

OEDIPUS: In what would you have me yield?

CHORUS: He has been no silly child in the past.
 762 he is strong in his oath now.
 Spare him.

OEDIPUS: Do you know what you ask?

CHORUS: Yes.

OEDIPUS: Tell me then.

CHORUS: He has been your friend before all men's eyes;
 do not cast
 him away dishonored on an obscure conjecture.

⁴³ **despotic** *adj.* absolute; unlimited; tyrannical.

⁴⁴ **besotted** *v.* stupefied; foolish.

⁴⁵ **knavish** *adj.* deceitful.

⁴⁶ **tittle** *n.* a very small particle.

OEDIPUS: I would have you know that this request of yours
really requests my death or banishment.

CHORUS: May the Sun God,⁴⁷ king of Gods, forbid!
May I die
772 without God's blessing, without friends' help, if I
had any such
thought. But my spirit is broken by my unhappiness for my
wasting country; and this would but add troubles
775 amongst ourselves to the other troubles.

OEDIPUS: Well, let him go then—if I must die ten times
for it,
or be sent out dishonored into exile.
It is your lips that prayed for him pitied,
not his; wherever he is, I shall hate him.

CREON: I see you sulk in yielding and you're dangerous
781 when you are out of temper; natures like yours
are justly heaviest for themselves to bear.

OEDIPUS: Leave me alone! Take yourself off, I tell you.

CREON: I'll go you have not known me, but they have,
785 and they have known my innocence.

[Exit.]

CHORUS: Won't you take him inside, lady?

JOCASTA: Yes, when I've found out what was the
matter.

CHORUS: There was some misconceived suspicion of a
story, and
on the other side the sting of injustice.

JOCASTA: So, on both sides?

CHORUS: Yes.

JOCASTA: What was the story?

CHORUS: I think it best, in the interests of the country,
to leave it
794 where it ended.

OEDIPUS: You see where you have ended, straight of
judgment
796 although you are, by softening my anger.

CHORUS: Sir, I have said before and I say again— be
sure that I

would have been proved a madman, bankrupt in sane
council, if I
should put you away, you who steered the country I
love safely
800 when she was crazed with troubles. God grant that
now, too, you
may prove a fortunate guide for us.

JOCASTA: Tell me, my lord, I beg of you, what was it
that roused your anger so?

OEDIPUS: Yes, I will tell you.
805 I honor you more than I honor them.
It was Creon and the plots he laid against me.

JOCASTA: Tell me—if you can clearly tell the
quarrel—

OEDIPUS: Creon says
that I'm the murder of Laius.

JOCASTA: Of his own knowledge or on information?

OEDIPUS: He sent this rascal prophet to me, since
he keeps his own mouth clean of any guilt.

JOCASTA: Do not concern yourself about this matter;
listen to me and learn that human beings
815 have no part in the craft of prophecy.
Of that I'll show you a short proof.
There was an oracle once that came to Laius, —
I will not say that it was Phoebus' own,
but it was from his servants— and it told him
820 that it was fate that he should die a victim
at the hands of his own son, a son to be born
of Laius and me. But, see now, he,
the king, was killed by foreign highway robbers
at a place where three roads meet—so goes the story;
825 and for the son—before three days were out
after his birth King Laius pierced his ankles
and by the hands of others cast him forth
upon a pathless hillside. So Apollo
failed to fulfill his oracle to the son,
830 that he should kill his father, and to Laius
also proved false in that the thing he feared,
death at his son's hands, never came to pass.
So clear in this case were the oracles,
so clear and false. Give them no heed, I say;
835 what God discovers need of, easily
he shows to us himself.

OEDIPUS: O dear Jocasta,
as I hear this from you, there comes upon me
a wandering of the soul—I could run mad.

JOCASTA: What trouble is it, that you turn again
841 and speak like this?

⁴⁷ Sun God Apollo

OEDIPUS: I thought I heard you say
that Laius was killed at a crossroads.

JOCASTA: Yes, that was how the story went and still
845 that word goes round.

OEDIPUS: Where is this place, Jocasta,
where he was murdered?

JOCASTA: Phocis is the country
and the road splits there, one of two roads from Delphi,
850 another comes from Daulia.

OEDIPUS: How long ago is this?

JOCASTA: The news came to the city just before
you became king and all men's eyes looked to you.
854 What is it, Oedipus, that's in your mind?

OEDIPUS: What have you designed, O Zeus, to do with
me?

JOCASTA: What is the thought that troubles your heart?

OEDIPUS: Don't ask me yet—tell me of Laius—
How did he look? How old or young was he?

JOCASTA: He was a tall man and his hair was grizzled
860 already—nearly white—and in his form
not unlike you.

OEDIPUS: O God, I think I have
called curses upon myself in ignorance.

JOCASTA: What do you mean? I am terrified
865 when I look at you.

OEDIPUS: I have a deadly fear
that the old seer had eyes. You'll show me more
if you can tell me one more thing.

JOCASTA: I will.
870 I'm frightened, —but if I can understand,
I'll tell you all you ask.

OEDIPUS: How was his company?
Had he few with him when he went this journey,
or many servants, as would suit a prince?

JOCASTA: In all there were but five, and among them
876 a herald;⁴⁸ and one carriage for the king.

OEDIPUS: It's plain—it's plain—who was it told you
this?

JOCASTA: The only servant that escaped safe home.

OEDIPUS: Is he at home now?

JOCASTA: No, when he came home again
881 and saw you king and Laius was dead,
he came to me and touched my hand and begged
that I should send him to the fields to be
my shepherd and so he might see the city
885 as far off as he might. So I
sent him away. He was an honest man,
as slaves go, and was worthy of far more
than what he asked of me.

OEDIPUS: O, how I wish that he could come back
quickly!

JOCASTA: He can. Why is your heart so set on this?

OEDIPUS: O dear Jocasta, I am full of fears
892 that I have spoken far too much; and therefore
I wish to see this shepherd.

JOCASTA: He will come;
895 but, Oedipus, I think I'm worthy too
to know what it is that disquiets you.

OEDIPUS: It shall not be kept from you, since my mind
has gone so far with its forebodings. Whom
should I confide in rather than you, who is there
900 of more importance to me who have passed
through such a fortune?
Polybus was my father, king of Corinth,⁴⁹
and Merope, the Dorian,⁵⁰ my mother.
I was held greatest of the citizens
905 in Corinth till a curious chance befell me
as I shall tell you—curious, indeed,
but hardly worth the store set upon it.
There was a dinner and at it a man,
a drunken man, accused me in his drink
910 of being bastard. I was furious
but held my temper under for that day.
Next day I went and taxed⁵¹ my parents with it;
they took the insult very ill from him,
the drunken fellow who had uttered it.
915 So I was comforted for their part, but
still this thing rankled⁵² always, for the story
crept about widely. And I went at last
to Pytho, though my parents did not know.
But Phoebus sent me home again unhonored

⁴⁹ **Corinth** city at the western end of the isthmus (Greece) that
joins the Peloponnesus to Boeotia

⁵⁰ **Dorian** *n.* one of the main branches of the Hellenes; the
Dorians invaded the Peloponnesus.

⁵¹ **taxed** *v.* imposed a burden on; put a strain on.

⁵² **rankled** *v.* caused to have long-lasting anger and
resentment.

⁴⁸ **herald** *n.* person who makes proclamations and carries
messages.

920 in what I came to learn, but he foretold
 other and desperate horrors to befall me,
 that I was fated to lie with my mother,
 and show to daylight an accursed breed
 which men would not endure, and I was doomed
 925 to be murdered of the father that begot me.
 When I heard this I fled, and in the days
 that followed I would measure from the stars
 the whereabouts of Corinth—yes, I fled
 to somewhere where I should not see fulfilled
 930 the infamies⁵³ told in that dreadful oracle.
 And as I journeyed I came to the place
 where, as you say, this king met with his death.
 Jocasta, I will tell you the whole truth.
 When I was near the branching of the crossroads,
 935 going on foot, I was encountered by
 a herald and a carriage with a man in it,
 just as you tell me. He that led the way
 and the old man himself wanted to thrust me
 out of the road by force. I became angry
 940 and struck the coachman who was pushing me.
 When the old man saw this he watched his moment,
 and as I passed he struck me from his carriage,
 full on the head with his two pointed goad.⁵⁴
 But he was pain in full and presently
 945 my stick had struck him backwards from the car
 and he rolled out of it. And then I killed them
 all. If it happened there was any tie
 of kinship twixt this man and Laius,
 who is then now more miserable than I,
 950 what man on earth so hated by the Gods,
 since neither citizen nor foreigner
 may welcome me at home or even greet me,
 but drive me out of doors? And it is I,
 I and no other have so cursed myself.
 955 And I pollute the bed of him I killed
 by the hands that killed him. Was I not born evil?
 Am I not utterly unclean? I had to fly
 and in my banishment not even see
 my kindred not set foot in my own country,
 960 or otherwise my fate was to be yoked
 in marriage with my mother and kill my father,
 Polybus who begot me and had reared me.
 Would not one rightly judge and say that on me
 these things were sent by some malignant God?
 965 O no, no, no—O holy majesty
 of God on high, may I not see that day!
 May I be gone out of men's sight before
 I see the deadly taint of this disaster
 come upon me.

CHORUS: Sir, we too fear these things. But until you see
 this man

971 face to face and hear his story, hope.

OEDIPUS: Yes, I have just this much hope—to wait until
 the herdsman comes.

JOCASTA: And when he comes, what do you want with
 him?

OEDIPUS: I'll tell you; if I find that his story is the same
 as yours, I

975 at least will be clear of this guilt.

JOCASTA: Why what so particularly did you learn from
 my story?

OEDIPUS: You said that he spoke of highway *robbers*
 who killed Laius. Now if he uses the same num-
 ber, it was not I who killed him. One man cannot
 980 be the same as many. But if he speaks of a man
 travelling alone, then clearly the burden of the
 guilt inclines toward me.

JOCASTA: Be sure, at least, that this was how he
 told the story. He cannot unsay it now, for every
 985 one in the city heard it—not I alone. But, Oedi-
 pus, even if he diverges from what he said then,
 he shall never prove that the murder of Laius
 squares rightly with the prophecy—for Loxias
 declared that the king should be killed by his own
 990 son. And that poor creature did not kill him
 surely, —for he died himself first. So as far as
 prophecy goes, henceforward I shall not look to
 the right hand or the left.

OEDIPUS: Right. But yet, send some one for the peasant
 to bring

995 him here; do not neglect it.

JOCASTA: I will send quickly. Now let me go indoors. I
 will do

nothing except what pleases you.

[Exit.]

CHORUS:

Strophe

May destiny ever find me
 pious in word and deed
 995 prescribed by the laws that live on high:
 laws begotten in the clear air of heaven,
 whose only father is Olympus;
 no mortal nature brought them to birth,
 no forgetfulness shall lull them to sleep;
 1000 for God is great in them and grows not old.

Antistrophe

Insolence⁵⁵ breeds the tyrant, insolence

⁵³ **infamies** *n.* items of notorious disgrace and dishonor.

⁵⁴ **goad** *n.* sharp, pointed stick used to drive animals.

⁵⁵ **insolence** *n.* arrogance; bold disrespectfulness.

if it is glutted with a surfeit,⁵⁶ unseasonable,
unprofitable,
climbs to the roof-top and plunges
sheer down to the ruin that must be,
1005 and there its feet are no service.
But I pray that the God may never
abolish the eager ambition that profits the state.
For I shall never cease to hold the God as our protector.

Strophe

If a man walks with haughtiness
1010 of hand or word and gives no heed
to Justice and the shrines of Gods
despises—may an evil doom
smite him for his ill-starred pride of heart! —

if he reaps gains without justice
1015 and will not hold from impiety
and his fingers itch for untouchable things.
When such things are done, what man shall contrive to
shield his soul from the shafts of the God?
When such deeds are held in honor,
1020 why should I honor the Gods in the dance?

Antistrophe

No longer to the holy place,
to the navel of earth I'll go
to worship, not to Abae
not to Olympia,
1025 unless the oracles are proved to fit,
for all men's hands to point at.
O Zeus, if you are rightly called
the sovereign lord, all mastering,
let this not escape you nor your ever-living power!
1030 The oracles concerning Laius
are old and dim and men regard them not.
Apollo is nowhere clear in honor; God's service
perishes.

PART II:

JOCASTA: Princes of the land, I have had the thought to
go
to the Gods' temples, bringing in my hand 1035
garlands and gifts of incense, as you see.
For Oedipus excites himself too much
at every sort of trouble, not conjecturing,⁵⁷
like a man of sense, what will come from what was,
but he is always at speaker's mercy, 1040 when he
speaks terrors. I can do no good
by my advice, and so I came as suppliant
to you, Lycaean Apollo, who are nearest.
These are the symbols of my prayer and this

my prayer: grant us escape free of the curse. 1045
Now when we look to him we are all afraid;
he's pilot of our ship and he is frightened.

[Enter MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER: Might I learn from you, sirs, where is the
house of Oedipus? Or best
of all, if you know, where is the king himself?

CHORUS: This is his house and he is within doors. This
lady is his wife and mother
1050 of his children.

MESSENGER: God bless you, lady, and God bless your
household! God bless
Oedipus' noble wife!

JOCASTA: God bless you, sir, for your kind greeting!
What do you
want of us that you have come here? What have you
to tell us?

MESSENGER: Good news, lady. Good for your house
and for your
1056 husband.

JOCASTA: What is your news? Who sent you to us?

MESSENGER: I come from Corinth and the news I bring
will give
you pleasure. Perhaps a little pain too.

JOCASTA: What is this news of double meaning?

MESSENGER: The people of the Isthmus will choose
Oedipus to be
1062 their king. That is the rumor there.

JOCASTA: But isn't their king still old Polybus?

MESSENGER: No. He is in his grave. Death has got
him.

JOCASTA: Is that the truth? Is Oedipus' father dead?

MESSENGER: May I die myself if it be otherwise!

JOCASTA: [to a SERVANT]: Be quick and run to the
King with the
news! O oracles of the Gods, where are you now? It
was from
this man Oedipus fled, lest he should be his murderer!
And
1070 now he is dead, in the course of nature, and not
killed by Oedipus.

[Enter OEDIPUS.]

⁵⁶ **surfeit** *n.* excessive supply

⁵⁷ **conjecturing** *v.* inferring or prediction from incomplete
evidence.

OEDIPUS: Dearest Jocasta, why have you sent for me?

JOCASTA: Listen to this man and when you hear reflect
what is the
outcome of the holy oracles of the Gods.

OEDIPUS: Who is he? What is his message for me?

JOCASTA: He is from Corinth and he tells us that
1076 your father Polybus is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS: What's this you say, sir? Tell me yourself.

MESSENGER: Since this is the first matter you want
clearly told:
Polybus has gone down to death. You may be sure of
it.

OEDIPUS: By treachery or sickness?

MESSENGER: A small thing will put old bodies asleep.

OEDIPUS: So he died of sickness, it seems, —poor old
man!

MESSENGER: Yes, and of age—the long years he had
1085 measured.

OEDIPUS: Ha! Ha! O dear Jocasta, why should one
look to the Pythian hearth?⁵⁸ Why should one look to
the birds screaming overhead? They prophesied
that I should kill my father! But he's dead,
1090 and hidden deep in earth, and I stand here
who never laid a hand on a spear against him,—
unless perhaps he died of longing for me,

and thus I am his murderer. But they,
the oracles, as they stand—he's taken them
1095 away with him, they're dead as he himself is,
and worthless.

JOCASTA: That I told you before now.

OEDIPUS: You did, but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA: But surely I must fear my mother's bed?

OEDIPUS: Why should man fear since chance is all in all
1101 for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing?
Best to live lightly, as one can, unthinkingly. As to
your mother's marriage bed, —don't fear it.
1105 Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles,
many a man has lain with his own mother.
But he to whom such things are nothing bears
his life most easily.

OEDIPUS: All that you say would be said perfectly
1110 if she were dead; but since she lives I must
still fear, although you talk so well, Jocasta:

JOCASTA: Still in your father's death there's light of
comfort?

OEDIPUS: Great light of comfort; but I fear the living.

MESSENGER: Who is the woman that makes you
afraid?

OEDIPUS: Merope, old man, Polybus' wife.

MESSENGER: What about her frightens the queen and
you?

OEDIPUS: A terrible oracle, stranger, from the Gods.

MESSENGER: Can it be told? Or does the sacred law
1120 forbid another to have knowledge of it?

OEDIPUS: O no! Once on a time Loxias said
that I should lie with my own mother and
take on my hands the blood of my own father.
And so for these long years I've lived away
1125 from Corinth; it has been to my great happiness;
but yet it's sweet to see the face of parents.

MESSENGER: This was the fear which drove you out of
Corinth?

OEDIPUS: Old man, I did not wish to kill my father.

MESSENGER: Why should I not free you from this fear,
sir.
1130 since I have come to you in all goodwill?

OEDIPUS: You would not find me thankless if you did.

MESSENGER: Why, it was just for this I brought the
news, —
to earn your thanks when you had come safe home.

OEDIPUS: No, I will never come near my parents.

MESSENGER: Son,
1136 it's very plain you don't know what you're doing.

OEDIPUS: What do you mean, old man? For God's sake,
tell me.

MESSENGER: If your homecoming is checked by fears
like these.

OEDIPUS: Yes, I'm afraid that Phoebus may prove right.

⁵⁸ **Pythian hearth** *n.* the Delphic oracle that prophesied
Oedipus' crime.

MESSENGER: The murder and the incest?

OEDIPUS: Yes, old man;
1142 that is my constant terror.

MESSENGER: Do you know
that all your fears are empty?

OEDIPUS: How is that,
1146 if they are father and mother and I their son?

MESSENGER: Because Polybus was no kin to you in blood.

OEDIPUS: What, was not Polybus my father?

MESSENGER: No more than I but just so much.

OEDIPUS: How can
1151 my father be my father as much as one
that's nothing to me?

MESSENGER: Neither he nor I begat you.

OEDIPUS: Why then did he call me son?

MESSENGER: A gift he took you from these hands of mine.

OEDIPUS: Did he love so much what he took from another's hand?

MESSENGER: His childlessness before persuaded him.

OEDIPUS: Was I a child you bought or found when I
1159 was given to him?

MESSENGER: On Cithaeron's slopes
in the twisting thickets you were found.

OEDIPUS: And why
were you a traveler in those parts?

MESSENGER: I was in charge of mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS: You were a shepherd?
1167 a hireling vagrant?⁵⁹

MESSENGER: Yes, but at least at that time
the man that saved your life, son.

OEDIPUS: What ailed me when you took me in your arms?

MESSENGER: In that your ankles should be witnesses.

OEDIPUS: Why do you speak of that old pain?

MESSENGER: I loosed you;
1175 the tendons of your feet were pierced and fettered, —

OEDIPUS: My swaddling⁶⁰ clothes brought me a rare disgrace.

MESSENGER: So that from this you're called your present name.⁶¹

OEDIPUS: Was this my father's doing or my mother's?
For God's sake, tell me.

MESSENGER: I don't know, but he
1181 who gave you to me has more knowledge than I.

OEDIPUS: You yourself did not find me then? You took me
from someone else?

MESSENGER: Yes, from another shepherd.

OEDIPUS: Who was he? Do you know him well enough to tell?

MESSENGER: He was called Laius' man.

OEDIPUS: You mean the king who reigned here in the old days?

MESSENGER: Yes, he was that man's shepherd.

OEDIPUS: Is he alive
1190 still, so that I could see him?

MESSENGER: You who live here
would know best.

OEDIPUS: Do any of you here
know of this shepherd whom he speaks about
1195 in town or in the fields? Tell me. It's time
that this was found out once for all.

CHORUS: I think he is none other than the peasant
whom you have sought to see already; but
Jocasta here can tell us best of that.

OEDIPUS: Jocasta, do you know about this man
1201 whom we have sent for? Is he the man he mentions?

⁵⁹ **hireling vagrant** person who wanders from place to place and works at odd jobs.

⁶⁰ **swaddling clothes** long, narrow bands of cloth wrapped around infants in ancient times.

⁶¹ **your present name** *Oedipus* means "swollen foot"

JOCASTA: Why ask of whom he spoke? Don't give it heed;

nor try to keep in mind what has been said.
It will be wasted labor.

OEDIPUS: With such clues
1206 I could not fail to bring my birth to light.

JOCASTA: I beg you—do not hunt this out—I beg you,
if you have any care for your own life.
What I am suffering is enough.

OEDIPUS: Keep up
1211 your heart, Jocasta. Though I'm proved a slave,
thrice slave, and though my mother is thrice slave,
you'll not be shown to be of lowly lineage.

JOCASTA: O be persuaded by me, I entreat you;
1215 do not do this.

OEDIPUS: I will not be persuaded to let be
the chance of finding out the whole thing clearly.

JOCASTA: It is because I wish you well that I
give you this counsel—and it's the best counsel.

OEDIPUS: Then the best counsel vexes me, and has
1221 for some while since.

JOCASTA: O Oedipus, God help you!
God keep you from the knowledge of who you are!

OEDIPUS: Here, some one, go and fetch the shepherd for me;
1225 and let her find her joy in her rich family!

JOCASTA: O Oedipus, unhappy Oedipus!
that is all I can call you, and the last thing
that I shall ever call you.

[Exit.]

CHORUS: Why has the queen gone, Oedipus, in wild
1230 grief rushing from us? I am afraid that trouble
will break out of this silence.

OEDIPUS: Break out what will! I at least shall be
willing to see my ancestry, though humble.
Perhaps she is ashamed of my low birth,
1235 for she has all a woman's high-flown pride.
But I account myself a child of Fortune,⁶²
beneficent Fortune, and I shall not be
dishonored. She's the mother from whom I spring;
the months, my brothers, marked me, now as small

⁶² **child of Fortune** Since Fortune, or good luck, saved him from death, Oedipus refuses to feel shame at being illegitimate or of humble origins.

1240 and now again as mighty. Such is my breeding,
and I shall never prove so false to it,
as not to find the secret of my birth.

CHORUS:

Strophe

If I am a prophet and wise of heart
you shall not fail, Cithaeron,
1245 by the limitless sky, you shall not!—
to know at tomorrow's full moon
that Oedipus honors you,
as native to him and mother and nurse at once;
and that you are honored in dancing by us, as finding
favor in sight of our king.

1250 Apollo, to whom we cry, find these things
pleasing!

Antistrophe

Who was it bore you, child? One of
the long-lived nymphs⁶³ who lay with Pan⁶⁴—
the father who treads the hills?
Or was she a bride of Loxias, your mother? The
grassy slopes
1255 are all of them dear to him. Or perhaps Cyllene's
king⁶⁵
or the Bacchaants' God that lives on the tops
of the hills received you a gift from some
one of the Helicon Nymphs, with whom he mostly
plays?

{Enter an OLD MAN, lead by OEDIPUS' SERVANTS.]

OEDIPUS: If some one like myself who never met him
1260 may make a guess, —I think this is the herdsman,
whom we were seeking. His old age is consonant
with the other. And besides, the men who bring him
I recognize as my own servants. You
perhaps may better me in knowledge since
1265 you've seen the man before.

CHORUS: You can be sure

I recognize him. For if Laius
had ever an honest shepherd, this was he.

OEDIPUS: You, sir, from Corinth, I must ask you first,
1270 is this the man you spoke of?

MESSENGER: This is he
before your eyes.

OEDIPUS: Old man, look here at me
and tell me what I ask you. Were you ever

⁶³ **nymphs** *n.* minor female divinities with youthful, beautiful, and amorous qualities; "nymph" means young woman.

⁶⁴ **Pan** Arcadian shepherd god who lived in the mountains, danced and sang with the nymphs, and played his pipes.

⁶⁵ **Cyllene's King** Hermes, the messenger god.

1275 a servant of King Laius?

HERDSMAN: I was, —
no slave he bought but reared in his own house.

OEDIPUS: What did you do as work? How did you live?

HERDSMAN: Most of my life was spent among the flocks.

OEDIPUS: In what part of the country did you live?

HERDSMAN: Cithaeron and the places near to it.

OEDIPUS: And somewhere there perhaps you knew this man?

HERDSMAN: What was his occupation? Who?

OEDIPUS: This man here,
1285 have you had any dealings with him?

HERDSMAN: No—
not such that I can quickly call to mind.

MESSENGER: That is no wonder, master. But I'll make him remember what he does not know. For I know, that he well knows the country of
1290 Cithaeron, how he with two flocks, I with one kept company for three years—each year half a year—from spring till autumn time and then when winter came I drove my flocks to our fold home again and he to Laius' steadings. Well—am I right or not in what I said we did?

HERDSMAN: You're right—although it's a long time ago.

MESSENGER: Do you remember giving me a child
1296 to bring up as my foster child?

HERDSMAN: What's this?
Why do you ask the question?

MESSENGER: Look old man,
1300 here he is—here's the man who was that child!

HERDSMAN: Death take you! Won't you hold your tongue?

OEDIPUS: No, no,
do not find fault with him, old man. Your words are more at fault than his.

HERDSMAN: O best of masters,
1306 how do I give offense?

OEDIPUS: When you refuse
to speak about the child of whom he asks you.

HERDSMAN: He speaks out of his ignorance, without meaning.

OEDIPUS: If you'll not talk to gratify me, you
1311 will talk with pain to urge you.

HERDSMAN: O please, sir,
don't hurt an old man, sir.

OEDIPUS [*to the SERVANTS*]: Here, one of you,
1315 twist his hands behind him.

HERDSMAN: Why, God help me, why?
What do you want to know?

OEDIPUS: You gave a child
to him, —the child he asked you of?

HERDSMAN: I did.
1321 I wish I'd died the day I did.

OEDIPUS: You will
unless you tell me truly.

HERDSMAN: And I'll die
1325 far worse if I should tell you.

OEDIPUS: This fellow
is bent on more delays, as it would seem.

HERDSMAN: O no, no! I have told you that I gave it.

OEDIPUS: Where did you get this child from? Was
1330 it your own or did you get it from another?

HERDSMAN: Not
my own at all; I had it from some one.

OEDIPUS: One of these citizens? or from what house?

HERDSMAN: O master, please—I beg you, master, please
1335 don't ask me more.

OEDIPUS: You're a dead man if I
ask you again.

HERDSMAN: It was one of the children
of Laius.

OEDIPUS: A slave? Or born in wedlock?

HERDSMAN: O God, I am on the brink of frightful speech.

OEDIPUS: And I of frightful hearing. But I must hear.

HERDSMAN: The child was called his child; but she within,
1344 your wife would tell you best how all this was.

OEDIPUS: *She gave it to you?*

HERDSMAN: Yes, she did, my lord.

OEDIPUS: To do what with?

HERDSMAN: Make away with it.

OEDIPUS: She was so hard—its mother?

HERDSMAN: Aye through fear
1351 of evil oracles.

OEDIPUS: Which?

HERDSMAN: They said that he should kill his parents.

OEDIPUS: How was it that you gave it to this old man?

HERDSMAN: O master,
I pitied it, and thought that I could send it
off to another country and this man
1360 was from another country. But he saved it
for the most terrible troubles. If you are
the man he says you are, you're bred to misery.

OEDIPUS: O, O, O, they will all come,
all come out clearly! Light of the sun, let me
1365 look upon you no more after today!
I who first saw the light bred of a match
accursed and accursed in my living
with them I lived with, cursed in my killing.

[*Exit all but the CHORUS.*]

CHORUS:

Strophe

O generations of men, how I
1370 count you as equal with those who live
not at all!
What man, What man on earth wins more
of happiness than a seeming
and after that turning away?
1375 Oedipus, you are my pattern of this,
Oedipus, you and your fate!
Luckless Oedipus, whom of all men
I envy not at all.

Antistrophe

In as much as he shot his bolt
1380 beyond the others and won the prize

of happiness complete—

O Zeus—and killed and reduced to nought
the hooked taloned maid of the riddling speech,⁶⁶
standing a tower against death for my land;
1385 hence he was called my king and hence
was honored the highest of all
honors; and hence he ruled
in the great city of Thebes.

Strophe

But now whose tale is more miserable?
1390 Who is there lives with a savager fate?
Whose troubles so reverse his life as his?
O Oedipus, the famous prince
for whom a great have
the same both as a father and son
1395 sufficed for generation,
how, O how, have the furrows plowed
by your father endured to bear you, poor wretch,
and hold their peace so long?

Antistrophe

Time who sees all has found you out
1400 against your will; judges your marriage accursed,
begetter and begot at one in it.
O child of Laius,
would I had never seen you.
I weep for you and cry
1405 a dirge of lamentation.
To speak directly, I drew my breath
from you at the first and so now I lull
my mouth to sleep with your name.

[*Enter a SECOND MESSENGER*]

SECOND MESSENGER: O Princes always honored by
our country,

1410 what deeds you'll hear of and what horrors see,
what grief you'll feel, if you as true born Thebans,
care for the house of Labdacus's sons.
Phasts nor Ister⁶⁷ cannot purge⁶⁸ this house,
I think, with all their streams, such things
1415 it hides, such evils shortly will bring forth
into the light, whether they will or not;
and troubles hurt the most
when they prove self-inflicted.

CHORUS: What we had known before did not fall short
1420 of bitter groaning's worth; what's more to tell?

SECOND MESSENGER: Shortest to hear and tell—our
glorious queen Jocasta's dead.

⁶⁶ the hooked taloned maid of the riddling speech the Sphinx;
talons are claws.

⁶⁷ Phasis nor Ister rivers that flow to the Black Sea.

⁶⁸ purge v. cleanse of guilt or sin.

CHORUS: Unhappy woman! How?

SECOND MESSENGER: By her own hand. The worst of what was done

1425 you cannot know. You did not see the sight.

Yet in so far as I remember it
you'll hear the end of our unlucky queen.

When she came raging into the house she went
straight to her marriage bed, tearing her hair
1430 with both her hands, and crying upon Laius
long dead—Do you remember, Laius,
that night long past which bred a child for us
to send you to your death and leave
a mother making children with her son?

1435 And then she groaned and cursed the bed in
which

she brought forth husband by her husband, children
by her own child, an infamous double bond.

How after that she died I do not know, —
for Oedipus distracted us from seeing.

1440 He burst upon us shouting and we looked
to him as he paced frantically around,
begging us always: Give me a sword, I say,
to find this wife no wife, this mother's womb,
this field of double sowing whence I sprang
1445 and where I sowed my children! As he raved
some god showed him the way—none of us there.

Bellowing terribly and led by some
invisible guide he rushed on the two doors, —
wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets,
1450 he charged inside. There, there, we saw his wife
hanging, the twisted rope around her neck.

When he saw her, he cried out fearfully
and cut the dangling noose. Then as she lay,
poor woman, on the ground, what happened after.

1455 was terrible to see. He tore the brooches—
the gold chased brooches fastening her robe—
away from her and lifting them up high

dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out
such things as: they will never see the crime

1460 I have committed or had done upon me!
Dark eyes, now in the days to come look on

forbidden faces, do not recognize ^{those}
whom you long for—with such imprecations⁶⁹

he struck his eyes again and yet again

1465 with the brooches. And the bleeding eyeballs
gushed

and stained his beard—no sluggish oozing drops
but a black rain and bloody hail poured down.

So it has broken—and not on one head
but troubles mixed for husband and for wife.

1470 The fortune of the days gone was true
good fortune—but today groans and destruction
and death and shame—of all ills can be named
not one is missing.

CHORUS: Is he now in any ease from pain?

SECOND MESSENGER: He shouts

1476 for some one to unbar the doors and show him
to all the men of Thebes, his father's killer,
his mother's—no I cannot say the word,
it is unholy—for he'll cast himself,

1480 out of the land, he says, and not remain

to bring a curse upon his house, the curse
he called upon it in his proclamation. But

he wants for strength, aye, and some one to guide him;
his sickness is too great to bear. You, too,

1485 will be shown that. The bolts are opening.

Soon you will see a sight to waken pity
even in the horror of it.

[Enter the blinded Oedipus.]

CHORUS: This is a terrible sight for men to see!

I never found a worse!

1490 Poor wretch, what madness came upon you!

What evil spirit leaped upon your life

to your ill-luck—a leap beyond man's strength!

Indeed I pity you, but I cannot

look at you, though there's much I want to ask

1495 and much to learn and much to see.

I shudder at the sight of you.

OEDIPUS: O,O,

where am I going? Where is my voice

borne on the wind to and fro?

1500 Spirit, how far have you sprung?

CHORUS: To a terrible place whereof men's ears
may not hear, nor their eyes behold it.

OEDIPUS: Darkness!

Horror of darkness enfolding, resistless unspeakable
visitant sped by an ill wind in haste!

1505 madness and stabbing pain and memory
of evil deeds I have done!

CHORUS: In such misfortunes it's no wonder
if double weighs the burden of your grief.

OEDIPUS: My friend,

15110you are the only steadfast, the one that attends on
me;

you still stay nursing the blind man.

Your care is not unnoticed. I can know

your voice, although this darkness is my world.

CHORUS: Doer of dreadful deeds, how did you dare

1515 so far to do despite to your own eyes?

What spirit urged you to it?

OEDIPUS: It was Apollo, friends, Apollo,

⁶⁹ **imprecations** *n.* acts of cursing and invoking evil.

that brought this bitter bitterness, my sorrows to completion.

But the hand that struck me

1520 was none but my own.

Why should I see

whose vision shoed me nothing sweet to see?

CHORUS: These things are as you say.

OEDIPUS: What can I see to love?

1525 What greeting can touch my ears with joy?

Take me away, and haste—to the place out of the way!

Take me away, my friends, the greatly miserable,
the most accursed, whom God too hates

above all men on earth!

CHORUS: Unhappy in your mind and your misfortune,

1531 would I had never known you!

OEDIPUS: Curse on the man who took

the cruel bonds from off my legs, as I lay in the field.

He stole me from death and saved me,

1535 no kindly service.

Had I died then

I would not be so burdensome to friends.

CHORUS: I, too, could have wished it had been so.

OEDIPUS: Then I would not have come

1540 to kill my father and marry my mother
infamously.

Now I am godless and child of impurity,

begetter in the same seed that created my wretched self.

If there is any ill worse than ill,

that is the lot of Oedipus.

CHORUS: I cannot say your remedy was good;

1546 you would be better dead than blind and living.

OEDIPUS: What I have done here was best done—don't tell me

otherwise, do not give me further counsel.

I do not know with what eyes I could look

1550 upon my father when I die and go

under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother—

those two to whom I have done things deserving
worse punishment than hanging. Would the sight
of children bred as mine are, gladden me?

1555 No, not these eyes, never. And my city,

its towers and sacred places of the Gods,

of these I robbed my miserable self

when I commanded all to drive *him* out,

the criminal since proved by God impure

1560 and of the race of Laius.

To this guilt I bore witness against myself—

with what eyes shall I look upon my people?

No. If there were a means to choke the fountain

of hearing I would not have stayed my hand
1565 from locking up my miserable carcass,⁷⁰

seeing and hearing nothing; it is sweet

to keep your thoughts out of the range of hurt.

Cithaeron, why did you receive me? why

having received me did you not kill me straight?

1570 And so I had not shown to men my birth.

O Polybus and Corinth and the house,

the old house that I used to call my father's—

what fairness you were nurse to, and what foulness

festered beneath! Now I am found to be

1575 a sinner and a son of sinners. Crossroads,

and hidden glade, oak and the narrow way

at the crossroads, that drank my father's blood

offered you by my hands, do you remember

still what I did as you looked on, and what

1580 I did when I came here? O marriage, marriage!

you bred me and again when you had

bred children of your child and showed to men

brides, wives and mothers and the foulest deeds

that can be in this world of ours.

1585 Come—it's unfit to say what is unfit

to do. —I beg of you in God's name hide me

somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me,

or throw me into the sea, to be forever

out of your sight. Approach and deign to touch me

1590 for all my wretchedness, and do not fear.

No man but I can bear my evil doom.

CHORUS: Here Creon comes in fit time to perform
or give advice in what you ask of us.

Creon is left as sole ruler in your stead.

OEDIPUS: Creon! Creon! What shall I say to him?

1596 How can I justly hope that he will trust me?

In what is past I have been proved towards him

an utter liar.

[Enter CREON.]

CREON: Oedipus, I've come

1600 not so that I might laugh at you nor taunt you

with evil of the past. But if you still

are without shame before the face of men

reverence at least the flame that gives all life,

our Lord the Sun, and do not show unveiled

1605 to him pollution such that neither land

nor holy rain nor light of day can welcome.

[To a SERVANT.]

Be quick and take him in. It is most decent

that only kin should see and hear the troubles

of kin.

⁷⁰ **carcass** *n.* dead body of an animal; here, scornful references to Oedipus' own body.

OEDIPUS: I beg you, since you've torn me from
1611 my dreadful expectations and have come
in a most noble spirit to a man
that has used you vilely⁷¹—do a thing for me.
I shall speak for your own good, not for my own.

CREON: What do you need that you would ask of me?

OEDIPUS: Drive me from here with all the speed you
can

to where I may not hear a human voice.

CREON: Be sure, I would have done this had not I
wished first of all to learn from the God the course
1620 of action I should follow.

OEDIPUS: But his word
has been quite clear to let the parricide,⁷²
the sinner, die.

CREON: Yes, that indeed was said.
1625 But in the present need we have best discover
what we should do.

OEDIPUS: And will you ask about
a man so wretched?

CREON: Now even you will trust
1630 the God.

OEDIPUS: So. I command you—and will beseech you—
to her that lies inside that house give burial
as you would have it; she is yours and rightly
you will perform the rites for her. For me—
1635 never let this my father's city have me
living a dweller in it. Leave me live
in the mountains where Cithaeron is, that's called
my mountain, which my mother and father
while they were living would have made my tomb.
1640 So I may die by their decree who sought
indeed to kill me. Yet I know this much:
no sickness and no other thing will kill me.
I would not have been saved from death if not
For some strange evil fate. Well, let my fate
1645 go where it will.
Creon, you need not care
about my sons; they're men and so wherever
they are, they will not lack a livelihood.
But my two girls—so sad and pitiful—
150 whose table never stood apart from mine,
and everything I touched they always shared—
O Creon, have a thought for them! And most
I wish that you might suffer me to touch them
and sorrow with them.

[Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE, OEDIPUS' two
daughters.]

1655 O my lord! O true noble Creon! Can I
really be touching them, as when I saw?
What shall I say?
Yes, I can hear them sobbing—my two darlings!
and Creon has had pity and has sent me
1660 what I loved most? Am I right?

CREON: You're right: it was I gave you this
because I knew from old days how you loved them
as I see now.

OEDIPUS: God bless you for it, Creon,
1666 and may God guard you better on your road
that he did me!
O children,
where are you? Come here, come to my hands,
1670 a brothers hands which turned your father's eyes,
those bright eyes you knew once, to what you see,
a father seeing nothing, knowing nothing,
begetting you from his own source of life.
I weep for you—I cannot see your faces—
1675 I weep when I think of the bitterness
there will be in your lives, how you must live
before the world. At what assemblages
gay company will you go and not come home
1680 in tears instead of sharing in the holiday?
And when you're ripe for marriage, who will he be
the man who'll risk to take such infamy
as shall cling to my children, to bring hurt
on them and those that marry with them? What
1685 curse is not there? "Your father killed his father
and sowed the seed where he had sprung himself
and begot you out of the womb that held him."
These insults you will hear. Then who will marry you?
No one, my children; clearly you are doomed
1690 to waste away in barrenness unmarried.
Son of Menoeceus,⁷³ since you are all the father
left these two girls, and we, their parents, both
are dread to them—do not allow them wander
like beggars, poor and husbandless.
1695 They are of your own blood.
And do not make them equal with myself
in wretchedness; for you can see them now
so young, so utterly alone, save you only.
Touch my hand, noble Creon, and say yes.
1700 If you were older, children, and wiser,
there's much advice I'd give you. But as it is,
let this be what you pray: give me a life
wherever there is opportunity
to live, and better than was my father's.

CREON: Your tears have had enough of scope; no go
within the house.

⁷¹ **vilely** *adv.* wickedly.

⁷² **parricide** *n.* one who murders one's father.

⁷³ **Son of Menoeceus** Creon.

OEDIPUS: I must obey, though bitter of heart.

CREON: In season, all is good.

OEDIPUS: Do you know on what conditions I obey?

CREON: You tell me them,
1710 and I shall know them when I hear.

OEDIPUS: That you shall send me out
to live away from Thebes.

CREON: That gift you must ask of the God.

OEDIPUS: But I'm now hated by the Gods.

CREON: So quickly you'll obtain your prayer.

OEDIPUS: You consent then?

CREON: What I do not mean, I do not use to say.

OEDIPUS: Now lead me away from here.

CREON: Let go the children, then, and come.

OEDIPUS: Do not take them from me.

CREON: Do not seek to be master in everything,
1722 for the things you mastered did not follow you
throughout your life.

[As CREON *and* OEDIPUS *go out*.]

CHORUS: You that live in my
ancestral Thebes, behold this Oedipus, —

Him who knew the famous riddles and was a man most
masterful;

1725 not a citizen who did not look with envy on his
lot—

see him now and see the breakers of misfortune
swallow him!

Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy
till

he has passed the final limit of his life secure from
pain.