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OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

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Medea

33rd Thousand

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9th Thousand

The Trojan Women

39th Thousand

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The Oresteia

Collected Edition

SOPHOCLES
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Translated into English rhyming verse

with Introduction and Notes

/ by

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WOKING

P R E F A C E

THE *Oedipus at Colonus** has often been compared with *King Lear*. It is not only that both plays have for their central figure an old, dethroned and banished king, driven mad or half-mad by his awful experiences, and breathing a strange atmosphere of kingly pride alternating with helplessness, of towering passion with profound peace. In both also the suffering hero achieves a sort of change, or conversion. "The poem," says Professor Dowden, "might well be named the redemption of Lear" and in a sense the present play shows the redemption of Oedipus. But whereas Lear repents of his pride and self-will and is brought "to kinship and sympathy with all afflicted humanity," Oedipus feels no need to repent for his involuntary acts of pollution, but by unflinching endurance of the evils laid upon him, by mysterious gods, he is transformed from an outcast to a hero, from a despised and unclean wanderer to an object of adoration and dread. It is significant that both plays make heavy, if not impossible, demands on the producer for tempests and thunderstorms. And of both it may be said, that, while neither can quite be called a "well-made play," each nevertheless contains some of the author's very greatest work.

Greek tradition tells us that the play was produced by the poet's grandson, Sophocles the younger, four

The two plays are generally known by their Latin names, *Oedipus Rex*, (Oedipus, king) and *Oedipus Coloneus*, (Oedipus of Colonus)

OEDIPUS, AT COLONUS

years after the author's death at the age of ninety This is confirmed by the metrical and linguistic tests, which clearly prove the *Colonêus* to be among the last of the poet's writings, indeed it would almost seem that some parts of the play required a fourth actor, unless we escape that startling conclusion by the somewhat evasive hypothesis of a supernumerary *persona muta* who was not always entirely mute * The play certainly leaves the impression of coming from one who has largely left the turmoil of life behind him and looks back upon it with deepened understanding and mature mastery of language and poetry

Some modern readers have seen signs of old age in a certain lengthiness and lack of concentration in the drama It is, as Aristotle would say, "episodic," and each episode involves some dissipation of interest The ancient critics, however, seem to have singled out the "oeconomia"—the construction or management—of the play for particular admiration Aristophanes of Byzantium considered that in this respect it had no equal He might have pointed out that it contains many characters, none of them mere vessels of rhetoric but each with his own *ethos* and his own purposes and a good reason for entering when he does And it is true that each episode serves its purpose in showing the gradual sanctification or "heroization" of Oedipus A hero was by no means necessarily a lovable character, he had to be firstly, uncanny and different from common men, and secondly formidable, with powers to injure

* Called by Pollux (4, 110) a "*parachorêgêma*" or "extra supplement"

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or to bless, connected always with a taboo grave. So far he is like a mediaeval saint, but he need not be saintly in character. Aegisthus and Salmoneus, famous for their sins, were "heroes." An extreme case is that of the athlete Cleomêdês, who, after killing his opponent, went mad and destroyed a school with sixty children in it, naturally people were afraid of such a being and felt it desirable to "appease" his tomb. The terrific cursing of Polynices by his father, which was heart-breaking to Antigone, seems to us a very strange prelude to the scene of something like sanctification which immediately follows, but of course heroization is not the same thing as sanctification. The curse showed how truly formidable the inmate of that mysterious tomb was to be, and we must always remember that in an insecure and unpoliced society, like those of antiquity in general, the punishment of the wicked was a keenly felt social necessity. Was the wrong-doer to go scot-free, and the cry of the "wronged ones in the darkness" to be left unheard? A true hero must curse as well as bless.

Though not in any sense part of a trilogy, the *Coloneus* has an obvious connection with two other Sophoclean plays. The *Oedipus Rex*, produced some twenty years earlier, had ended on a raw and painful note. The blinded man's last words, when all else has been taken from him, are a cry, "Ah no, take not away my daughters", and they are immediately taken. This harsh "curtain" is against the normal practice of Greek Art, which likes to end on a note of calm, and it may

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well be that Sophocles in his old age wished, as a sort of atonement, to let the agonized and accursed hero of his greatest drama attain, as it were, a special position of reconciliation with God. The *Antigone* also, which was even earlier than the first Oedipus, was clearly in the mind of the poet when writing this play. The Polynices scenes, and especially the final speeches of the two sisters, are clearly meant to lead up to the situation in the beginning of the *Antigone*. Indeed the unusual obviousness of this technique in the last scene has led some scholars to suspect its genuineness. It is a curious coincidence that the final scene of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* also seems to have been altered so as to suit the *Antigone*.

In many Greek tragedies a modern reader is struck by what is loosely called the "modernity" of the general tone. It is really the permanent human feeling which rises above the temporary conventions of a particular age. In such cases the dramatic sympathy, the conception of what is good or evil, in the ancient author falls naturally into sympathy with that of an enlightened European of the present day. In the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, the *Trojan Women* or the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, the theme is one that still disturbs us, and the poet's attitude towards it is what we naturally expect. With Sophocles we have much more often to make the effort of putting ourselves imaginatively in an ancient, or what used to be called a "pagan," position. He seems to be untouched by the sophistic movement, untouched by Socrates, of course quite

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untouched by Plato. He seems to be full of a correct or even a primitive piety. He makes no attempt to moralize his gods or to pass any moral judgement upon them. They are mostly terrifying, and often inexplicably malignant. Of course we must remember that he is an artist, not a philosopher. He does, far more than the other two tragedians, make a practice of deepening the darkness of his tragic situations both by an insistence on physical pain or horror and by making full use of the mysterious terrors of that irrational primitive religion to which Oedipus's parricide and incest were not offences or errors capable of being rationally thought about but monstrous and inhuman pollutions, the last limit of imaginable sin. The cultivated Athenian of Sophocles' time had largely, though not entirely, escaped from these primitive ways of thought, the philosophic movements of the last two generations had done their work of enlightenment. Theseus is above such things here, as he is in Euripides' *Heracles*. He is not only, as always, a good democrat as well as a King, but also a King of the heroic age who has nevertheless had the advantage of an education in fifth-century philosophy. It is worth noticing, however, that to the Chorus Oedipus has repeatedly to labour the point of his lack of intention or knowledge and consequent lack of guilt (ll. 266 ff., 540 ff., 960-1000). Even so he is only partially successful. Though excused, and even accepted as a citizen of Athens, he is still no normal man. Innocent or not, the atmosphere of his awful doings stays about him. The play is full of the in-

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fectiousness of the untouchable, whether it be too polluted and evil to leave anyone in its close neighbourhood safe, or too holy to be approached with impunity, like the shrine of the Eumenides. In the Book of Samuel, we may remember, Uzzah was struck dead when, with the best intentions, he touched the Ark of God (I Sam vi 7). The conceptions, which seem to us utterly different, are equally combined in such words as the Roman *sacer*, or the Polynesian *taboo*. Oedipus is *araios*, charged with a curse or *Ara* as a wire may be charged with electricity, not only because he is himself accursed, but also because he is an old, blind, helpless, and deeply-wronged man, and thus has much of the sacredness of a suppliant. To touch or even look upon (l 1480-1484) one so unholy may be fatal, to do wrong to one so afflicted is an abominable offence. His curse, unlike those of Lear upon his children, acts like a law. Those upon Creon (l 870, "an old age such as mine") and Polynices were both completely fulfilled.

Connected with this power of the curse is the power of the *taboo* grave. The grave of a specially holy or unholy man is itself *araios*, charged with a curse. The bones of saints are still a valuable possession in some eastern countries, both Christian and Moslem. Indeed there have been cases where a saint has been, if not murdered, at least encouraged to die *in situ* by his admirers, in order to get possession of his remains. The graves of Eurystheus in the *Heraclidae*, of Orestes in the *Eumenides*, and of Oedipus

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here, are all to be a great defence to Athens, because any foreign invader, not knowing their position nor the correct ritual for appeasing them, would pretty certainly violate them and thus incur the wrath of the dead. The rightful possessor would give them the proper tendance and thus secure protection. The Thebans tried to play a double game, to exclude Oedipus from his native soil and yet to keep control over his grave. Theseus by his frank and merciful acceptance of the polluted suppliant seems, as it were, to nullify his pollution. One may compare his similar annulment of the pollution of his friend at the end of Euripides' *Heracles*, and a striking passage in the other *Oedipus* (ll 1480 ff) where no one dares to approach or even look upon the polluted and bloodstained man until the two little girls, not conscious of such things, throw themselves into his arms without fear. By that they have diverted the lightning and others can touch him too. Sophocles can use the philosophic ideas when it suits him, though he never obtrudes them.

Of the other characters, Antigone is the same loving and heroic girl as in the play that bears her name. If she is sometimes fierce she is fierce through love. There she faced death rather than fail her dead brother. Here she is ready for any ordeal rather than fail her blind father. It is worth noting that here too, she is a fighter. She stands up to the Colonean elders when her father has lost heart (l 237), and stands up to him himself, unsparingly, when he refuses to see Polynices. The last scene of this play may throw light on a question

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which has often been raised in the *Antigone* Is Antigone the older and stronger of the two sisters, Ismene the younger and weaker? Or, on the contrary, is Antigone the young passionate and impulsive girl, Ismene the elder and more prudent? Most scholars have taken the first view, but the scene between the sisters after l 1669 strongly suggests the second

Creon is not brought into any particular relation to the falsely accused Creon of the *Oedipus Rex* nor yet to the rigid conscientious tyrant of the *Antigone*. He belongs to a type peculiarly detested by the dramatists, both tragic and comic, of the later years of the Peloponnesian War, the hard-faced politician. We know that he is a ruthless hypocritical schemer, but he contrives almost always to have the *beau rôle* and to put his opponents in the wrong. His entrance is masterly. It is almost impossible to resist so reasonable a plea, so modestly urged. When he shows his teeth he gets the best of the repartees. When denounced by Theseus he maintains his dignity and his power of sarcasm, an old man, alone in a strange country he yields calmly to superior strength but reserves his full answer till he is on his own soil. The name "Creon" means merely "ruler," and that is what the Creon of legend always is, an official rather than a person, but the poets can give that colourless figure such character as it pleases them.

Polynicês is a character mainly created by his situation, the wronged warrior prince, determined at all costs to get his rights and indifferent to all else, ready

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to die if he must but incapable of making any concession, perhaps too weak to change, perhaps too heroic, mostly blind to things outside himself, though capable of penitence for his neglect of his father and of tender love for his two sisters

The aged poet is said to have lived at Colonus, and this play is full of a special love for the actual neighbourhood of his home and the little religious rites and local sanctities that were centred there. No other play that has come down to us shows this sort of feeling, though we may be reminded of Horace's feeling for his Sabine farm. The sanctuary of the Eumenides, the grove where there is nearly always a nightingale, the two paths to the Theban border, the "brazen threshold" and the place midway between "the three-crested rock, the hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb," have by now become legendary, to Sophocles they were part of his home (l. 162),

The fame thereof

Was slender, but to know them was to love

In an ancient Greek this love of the actual land and groves expressed itself naturally in local rituals of worship. The lists of deities and rites which Sophocles delights in often seem conventional and formal to us. Yet perhaps they are merely the natural expression of that "pagan" state of mind which was always ready to "have sight of Proteus rising from the sea" and from the sight to create both a ritual and a legend. The same love of the land merges easily into a national patriotism

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of the more ordinary sort. By the year in which the *Coloneus* was written the Beloved City was in dire distress, and it was difficult for any Athenian not to feel her an almost sacred being beset by lawless and brutal foes. There is great artistic skill in the lyrics in which Sophocles celebrates these homely places and worships, but many will feel that his full genius emerges most in those which deal with the impersonal and eternal subjects, old age and death. The particular part which the various choral lyrics play in the development of the drama will be treated in the notes.

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

OEDIPUS, formerly King of Thebes, now exiled, son of Laius and Jocasta

ANTIGONÊ, his daughter.

ISMÊNÊ, his daughter

POLYNÍCÊS, his eldest son

CREON, brother of Jocasta, the chief influence in Thebes

THÊSEUS, King of Athens, son of Aigeus

AN ATHENIAN STRANGER

A MESSENGER

CHORUS of Elders of Colônus, with their LEADER.

"The Oedipus at Colonus was produced after the death of the poet by his grandson, Sophocles, son of Ariston, in the archonship of Mikon (402 B C), who was fourth from Callias, in whose year of office most authorities say Sophocles died" THE ANCIENT ARGUMENT

SCENE

The Hill of COLONUS outside Athens Back at the left the Grove of the Eumenides, a tangle of olive, laurel, and vine further back at the right a view of the Acropolis In front of the Grove, near the middle, a Rock in which a seat has been cut

Enter from spectators' left OEDIPUS, now an old man, with beggar's dress and wallet and staff, his hair long and wild, his eye-sockets empty He is led by his daughter ANTIGONE, a girl about eighteen, poorly clad

The time is toward the close of day

OEDIPUS

Child of an age-worn father and a blind,
 What lands be these, what town of human kind?
 What new folk now shall greet with hazardous
 And stinted alms the outcast Oedipus,
 Who craves but little of them, and yet less
 Receiving is content? Longsufferingness
 I have learnt by much pain, and the company
 Of the slow years, and mine own royalty.
 My child, if thou canst see some resting place,
 Be it on ground profane or by the grace
 Of God o'ershadowed, lead and set me there
 When some man passeth I will ask him where

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [12-25]

We are come We needs must hearken all they say
Whose lands we traverse, and their words obey

ANTIGONE [Looking off]

Father and king toil-worn, grey towers there are
Crowning a city—to mine eyes still far
But where we stand the place is holy, green
With bay, olive and vine and deep within
Are darting wings, and somewhere through the trees
A nightingale, all song Come take thine ease
On this rough seat of stone 'Tis a long way
For one so old, thy feet have fared to-day

OEDIPUS

Aye, help me sit, and guard my darkness. So [Sits]

ANTIGONE

If time can teach, that lesson I should know.

OEDIPUS

Know'st thou at all the region where we are?

ANTIGONE

This spot, no It is Athens there afar

OEDIPUS

So much we learned from every wayfarer

ANTIGONE

Well, shall I leave thee and go ask somewhere?

OEDIPUS

Yes, ask, if 'tis a place where men may dwell.

ANTIGONE

Oh, 'tis inhabited — Yet it were well
To wait I see a man there within call

OEDIPUS

Doth he come towards us? Doth he move at all?

ANTIGONE

He soon will come Now speak in question clear
What thy heart prompteth, for the man is here
[Enter STRANGER.]

OEDIPUS

Sir Stranger, hearing from this maid, whose eyes
Are hers and mine, that here in timely wise
Thou comest for the solving of our doubt

STRANGER

Stay! Ere thou question further, get thee out
From here, 'tis holy ground, where none may sit.

OEDIPUS

What is the grove? And what God haunteth it?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [39-48]

STRANGER

Untouched it is, untrod Dread Virgins hold
Their court here, born of Earth and Darkness old

OEDIPUS

Who? Let me hear their names and I will pray

STRANGER

[*Hesitating to pronounce the real name*
The all-seeing Spirits of Mercy, our folk say
In Athens elsewhere other names they bear

OEDIPUS [*Suddenly kneeling*

With mercy, then, may they accept and spare
Him who now kneels to them Here I have found
My peace, and leave no more this holy ground

STRANGER

What means this?

OEDIPUS

'Tis the watchword of my fate

STRANGER

For me, I dare not move thee till the state
Give warrant They who rule must know thy deed.
[*He moves to go off.*

OEDIPUS [*Detaining him*]

Nay, keep not from an outcast in his need,
Stranger, the little knowledge that he sues

STRANGER

Well, make thy questions I shall not refuse

OEDIPUS

Tell me, what is this region that we tread?

STRANGER

All that I know of it can soon be said
All here is holy ground men say our Sire
Poseidon treads it, and the Wand of Fire,
Titan Promêtheus, with him Thou dost feel
The rock? The threshold of the Bronzen Heel
'Tis called, which guardeth Athens On each hand
Men say the primal master of the land
Was old Colônus, he who first made tame
The war-horse All the folk yet bear his name
Such, stranger, are these hills The fame thereof
Is slender, yet to know them is to love

OEDIPUS

There be, then, folk who dwell and habit here?

STRANGER

Surely, Colônês is the name they bear

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

[66-74]

OEDIPUS

Have they some lord, or doth the mass bear sway?

STRANGER

In Athens is the king these lands obey

OEDIPUS

And what king there doth such obedience claim?

STRANGER

Old Aigeus' son, Theseus they call his name

OEDIPUS

Will one of you bear him a word from me?

STRANGER

What word? Or wouldst thou bid him come to thee?

OEDIPUS

That little toil shall bring him great reward

STRANGER

How can a man who sees not help our lord?

OEDIPUS

The words that I shall speak, they shall have eyes!

STRANGER

Stranger, I would not have thee anywise
 Ill done by, for I see thou art a man
 Noble, in all save fortune For a span
 Of time wait here, I will go forth and tell—
 Not all the city, but the folk who dwell
 Hard by, thy story As their laws decide
 Thou shalt depart this precinct, or abide [Exit

OEDIPUS

Child, has the stranger left us?

ANTIGONE

Yes speak on
 In peace all thy desire I am here alone

OEDIPUS

[*Kneeling towards the Grove*

O awful Eyes, O Shapes of Majesty,
 To you before all else this bended knee
 Its homage brings, be gracious for my sake
 And Lord Apollo's too, who when he spake
 Long since my doom of evil, made me blest
Still by the far-off promise of this rest,
In a last land, where They whom the world fears
Should spread a chair for me and make me theirs,
 There this sore heart should rest and have an end;
 To them that shelter me a powerful friend,

To them that drave me outcast from my home
 A curse undying And a sign shall come,
 So vowed he, or strange thunder, or the ground
 Quaking, or fire from God If I have found
 This grove, for sure some wingèd guide from you
 Hath led me How else had I trod so true,
 Grey-souled to your all-wineless house, and won
 My rest with you on this unchiselled stone?
 O Spirits, by Apollo's word I pray,
 Vouchsafe me, after so long life, some way
 To pass and make an end, unless ye know
Of aught that lacketh still to the great woe
This heart must bear, beyond all human kind
 Sweet Maidens horn of Darkness old and blind,
 Be near, be merciful, O thou, alone
 Of cities, whom God's Virgin calls her own,
 Precious beyond all cities, hear me, scan
 The shape of this dim shadow, once a man
 And Oedipus but I was different then

ANTIGONE

Peace, Father, now! I see some aged men
 Here hasting, to spy out thy resting place

OEDIPUS

I am silent Hide me from the path a space
 Behind yon trees, to hearken what they say
 Some knowledge of their minds would ease our way

[ANTIGONE *leads OEDIPUS into the Grove*
where he stays unseen.]

Enter CHORUS of Elders, in groups, searching

CHORUS

[Various voices, confusedly]

Strophe —Mark there! Who was it?—Where lieth
he? Fled, is he?—Gone as a quick
bird goes?

—The daring of it! The daring of it! But
use your eyes Sweep the thicket
clear

—Put question to everyone Old and a
wanderer?—Surely a wanderer, no
man that knows,

Would dare to harbour him here,

Here in the trackless grove
Of Them with whom none may strive,
The Virgins who know not love,
And their fear is a thing alive,
We dare not name their name,
We raise no eyes to them,
Only a prayer, a spell
We whisper beneath our breath,
A voiceless wordless thought,
And a man is here, men tell,
Whom no fear entereth!

LEADER

Yet I see him not,

Nor mark nor sign of him, though all round
Mine eyes have searched thro' the holy ground

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [138-153]

OEDIPUS [From the Grove]

Behold the man ye desire
In sound are mine only eyes

LEADER

Ah! Awful voice, and dire
Aspect!

OEDIPUS

But yet nowise
A lawbreaker!

LEADER

God's mercy!
What can this old man be?

OEDIPUS

Not one of a lot so bright,
Ye guards not a man to bless
Who walks by another's sight,
Groping, and all his might
Anchored on feebleness

CHORUS [Confusedly]

Antistrophe —Ah there! His eyes, they are visionless!
Was it then ever so? Even from
birth?
—A bitter lifetime, a long long lifetime
is written there Yet, if I can
aid,

154-173] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Thou shalt not add sin to thy sorrows,
O Stranger For this is great
trespass! The wrath of the
earth

Lies in that speechless glade,
Where the grass is green below,
And rock-cupped waters flow
With offerings honey-sweet
Blended Ah back! Thy feet
Back there! And speak not yet
[He moves a step or two out

LEADER

Back still It is safer there
Dost hear me, thou desolate,
Thou age-worn wanderer?
Out from the precinct, nearer still
Where the ground is free Then speak thy will

OEDIPUS

[Hesitating

My child, what can one think?

ANTIGONE

Incline
Thy will, Father, to these men's will

OEDIPUS

[Assenting.

Give me thy hand

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [174-194

ANTIGONE

'Tis laid in thine

OEDIPUS

I come — Oh, bring me not to ill,
Strangers, because I trusted you
And did as ye would have me do

LEADER

No man shall move thee more No man
Shall break thy rest or show thee wrath

OEDIPUS

Further?

LEADER

Yes

OEDIPUS

Further?

LEADER

Still a span :
Thou lead him thou canst see the path

[To ANTIGONE.

There, 'tis enough

195-210] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

OEDIPUS

Now may I sit?

LEADER

Aye, crouch a little at thy right
The rock's edge

ANTIGONE

I will show thee it

OEDIPUS

[Seating himself on the Rock seat

Oh, without hope or sight!

LEADER

Unhappy one, now thou hast ease again,
Say who thou art, thus woman-led in pain,
What is thy fatherland?

OEDIPUS

[Desperately.

I have no land

And now, no further!

LEADER

I scarce understand

OEDIPUS

Ask me not who I am, nor strive nor seek . . .

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS, [211-218]

LEADER

What can this mean?

OEDIPUS

Dark is my race . .

LEADER

[*Sternly*]

Come, speak!

OEDIPUS

My child, what shall I say?

LEADER

Speak swiftly thou!

Thy lineage and thy father's name!

OEDIPUS

Woe's me,

What will become of us?

ANTIGONE

Best face them now

And speak, we are on the edge of destiny .

OEDIPUS

Then speak I will, Strangers, I have no way
To hide it more

LEADER

Ye both make long delay

ŒDIPUS

Ye know by fame one born of Laius .

CHORUS

[*Confusedly*]

O God!

ŒDIPUS

. a Prince of the Labdacidae,

CHORUS

[*In tumult*]

Great God in heaven!

ŒDIPUS

. the ill-starred Oedipus?

CHORUS

God shield us! *Thou* art he?

VARIOUS VOICES

[*Confused*]

O ~~horror beyond horror!~~—Get thee gone!
Hated of God!—Out, out, accursèd one!

ŒDIPUS

Fear not the words I speak .

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [224-236]

CHORUS

—Thou bleeding stain,
Thou sin incarnate!

OEDIPUS (to ANTIGONE)

Child, what will they do?

CHORUS

—Out from the land! Begone for ever, both!
—Out from the land!

OEDIPUS

Ye gave but now your oath .

CHORUS

—Go, go! And far from Athens both the twain!

OEDIPUS

Will ye not prove it true?

CHORUS

[*various voices*]

—No; you deceived us first Ye did a worse
Wrong 'Tis no sin to pay thee back in kind
—Shall we give faith and kindness for the curse
Ye have cast on us?—Thou evil thing and blind,
Speak not but go! We have no rest for thee
In Athens Go thy ways and leave her free!
[OEDIPUS, *his voice drowned, loses heart and gives*
way. ANTIGONE stands before him.]

ANTIGONE

O pitying strangers, since ye will not hear
My old blind father, for some tales ye have heard
Of his unpurposed sin, Oh, still give ear
To a lost maiden, and accept the word
I speak for his sake See, I am not blind
As he is I can look into your eyes,
Look into mine! 'Tis one of your own kind
Implores you for compassion Our life lies
In your hand, as in heaven's Unbend that brow
And grant the prayer we scarce dare hope for now

Oh, if there be at home one thing you love
Most, I beseech you in the name thereof,
Be it woman, be it child, or work or God,
I that have nothing! And before you hate
My father, think what man can fly the road
 That God hath marked and Fate

LEADER

Daughter of Oedipus, both him and thee
We pity in this strange calamity
Yet if he stay, on all our land we dread
God's wrath for harboured sin — Our word is said

OEDIPUS

[Who has recovered himself.]

What good is in men's praise? What profiteth
High rumour, rolling like an idle breath?

In fame is Athens the most god-fearing
Of cities, only she is swift to bring
 Help to the stranger vexèd, only she
 Strong to defend the weak Are you for me
 That Athens? Who have brought me here, beguiled
 From refuge, and then hunt me to the wild
 In dread at my mere name? For sure 'tis not
 Myself ye fear, nor any deed I wrought
 If deeds ye call what were more sufferings
 Than doings

Since ye make me speak the things
 Ye dread me for, my parents, and the whole
 Darkness, how dare ye call me in my soul
 Evil? They planned my death I smote again
 My smiters Was that sin? Nay, had my brain
 Seen all my hand was working, even so
 'Twere no great sin As things were, each dark blow
 I struck, was struck unknowing, but those two
Who cast their child to death, they knew, they knew!

Oh, in God's name, I charge you, since 'tis ye
 None else, have drawn me from this sanctuary,
 Be now yourselves mine altar Nor be hot
 To help the Gods with wrath They need it not
They know the innocent and they know the man
Of sin, and never since this world began
 Hath wrong escaped them and gone free/Let Them
 Suffice for me, nor cloud the diadem
 Of blessèd Athens by this traitor's deed

[To the LEADER

O thou who didst accept me in my need,
 Be true! Save me and keep! Nor, quailing now
 To see the wreck and horror of this brow,
 Cast me away Both god-fearing am I
And altar-sacred, and a boon most high
 I bring your people When there cometh he
 Who needs must come, your King, whoe'er he be,
 Then ye shall hearken and know all, till then,
 Do me no wrong

LEADER

O ancient among men,
 I needs must bow before thy counsel, thus
 In grave words uttered It sufficeth us
 To leave thee judgeless 'till the King be come.

OEDIPUS

Where dwells your king?

LEADER

He keeps his father's home,
 The fortress of our land A messenger,
 The same who found me, went to seek him there.

OEDIPUS

Think ye himself will come? Hath a king's mind
 Room for the call of one so poor and blind?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [301-322]

LEADER

For sure he will Thou hast far-reaching fame
In Greece, old man, and once he hears thy name,
Though sleeping, he would wake and hither speed

OEDIPUS

Pray heaven, he come, to serve his city's need
And mine ! His own true welfare he must seek

ANTIGONE *[Looking off*

O Zeus ! How dare I think it ? Dare I speak ?

OEDIPUS

What is it, child Antigone ?

ANTIGONE

I see

A damsel on a colt of Sicily,
Her hat broad-shaded to the sun, apace
She rides to us I cannot see her face
Is it or is it not ? I lose my way
Thinking, yes, no I know not what to say
Ah, she dismounts She has waved to me and smiled !
Father ! It is Ismênê

OEDIPUS

How, my child ?

What sayst thou ?

323-329] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

ANTIGONE

Tis thy daughter and mine own
Sister Her voice Ah, thou wilt know its tone

ISMENE

[Entering.

O Father! Sister! Names so sweet of sound,
How hardly have I found you! And when found
I scarce can see you for these blinding tears

OEDIPUS

Child, thou art come!

ISMENE

O Father, how the years
Have wrecked thee!

OEDIPUS

Thou art with us?

ISMENE

And some pain

It cost me

OEDIPUS

Touch me, child.

ISMENE

To both the twain

I reach my hands

[All three clasp hands

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [330-335]

OEDIPUS

O sisters true to me!

ISMENE

~~Alas, what suffering, suffering, lives!~~

OEDIPUS

That she

And I must lead?

ISMENE

And I because of you

OEDIPUS

Why hast thou come?

ISMENE

To give thee service true

OEDIPUS

Thou hast longed to see me?

ISMENE

I had news for thee,

And came myself to bring it secretly

With this one faithful thrall to guide my way.

OEDIPUS

The young strong men, thy brothers, where are they?

ISMENE

They ! They are where they are, and dire their state

OEDIPUS

Those two ! 'Tis said, in Egypt the men wait
 At home in comfort, sitting at the loom
 Indoors, while out abroad the women roam,
 Toiling to earn their bread 'Tis so with you
 My daughters They whose place it was to do
 These deeds, like girls at home will stay at ease
 While you two in their stead go forth to appease.
 Your father's sufferings This one, from the day
 She ceased to be a child and won her way
 Towards womanhood, hath ever been my guide,
 The old man's staff She has wandered through the wide
 Forests, aye, often hungry, with bare feet,
 She has trod through wintry rain and scorching heat
 She thought not of the ease and royal fare
 At home, could but her father have due care
And thou, child, camest forth in former days
From Thebes to let me know by secret ways
All oracles that touched my destiny
 A faithful watcher, Child, I had in thee,
 When first they drove me from the land But now
 What brings thee to this place ? What comest thou
 To tell me ? For I trow not empty here
 Thou comest, nor without some load of fear.

ISMENE

I will not tell what dangers of the road
 Befell me, searching for the unknown abode
 That covered thee Why should I wake again
 By a tale told those memories of pain?
 But thine ill-fated sons 'tis of the fell
 Doom that besets those two, I came to tell
At first they were content thy throne should be
Passed on to Creon, that alone would free
 Thebes from her stain, so thought they, pondering
 What ancient poisons to thy lineage cling
 Then, or by act of god, or by their own
 Wild hearts, between those brothers twain was sown
 A seed of strife—Q thrice-infatuate!—
 To grasp again at power and kingly state
 Now, in hot youth, the second of the pair
 Hath ta'en from Polynices, the true heir,
 His crown and right, and cast him from the land
 He fled, as now in Thebes the rumours stand,
 To hill-girt Argos there, though poor and lost,
 Won the king's daughter, won an armèd host
 To swear that Argos now, as his ally,
 Shall lay Thebes low or lift her to the sky
 In glory 'Tis not words, deeds terrible
 Are gathering here, Father And who can tell
 What gods may yet have pity for thy fall?

OEDIPUS

Hadst thou that hope? How should the gods at all
 Have thought for me, to raise me ere I die!

387-397] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

ISMENE

What gives me hope is their last prophecy.

OEDIPUS

An oracle, my child? What hath it said?

ISMENE

That thou beyond all else, alive or dead,
Shalt be desired of Thebes, if Thebes would live.

OEDIPUS

Live? What life is there such as I could give?

ISMENE

The secret health of Thebes is lodged in thee.

OEDIPUS

I am nothing, who can make a man of me?

ISMENE

The gods o'erthrew thee, they can raise thee too

OEDIPUS

Raise, weak with age, whom young and strong they
threw?

ISMENE

Creon himself believes that word of fate
He is travelling here himself and will not wait

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [398-408]

OEDIPUS

Explain, my child What seeks he by such toil?

ISMENE

To have thy body not in Theban soil
But in their grasp, close by the border laid

OEDIPUS

Beyond their gates, how can I bring them aid?

ISMENE

Thy tomb, left in neglect, would work them woe.

OEDIPUS

That much without god's warning they might know.

ISMENE

For fear of that they fain would bury thee
Within their own control, not leave thee free

OEDIPUS

Some Theban dust they will give to wrap me in?

ISMENE

That is forbid thee by thine ancient sin.

OEDIPUS

Then never shall they hold me in their power!

409-417] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

ISMENE

Woe, then to Thebes, when comes the appointed hour!

OEDIPUS

What visitation, child, shall bring their doom?

ISMENE

Thine anger, when their feet shall tread thy tomb

OEDIPUS

From whose word, daughter, is this presage known?

ISMENE

From sacred envoys to the Delphic throne

OEDIPUS

'Tis truly of me, Apollo hath spoken thus'

ISMENE

'Tis thus the word from Delphi came to us

OEDIPUS

Hath either of my sons that message heard?

ISMENE

Both; they have pondered well Apollo's word.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [418-440]

OEDIPUS

False-hearted sons! Their rank and royalty
Were more to them than any thoughts of me

ISMENE

I grieve to hear such words, yet hear I must,

OEDIPUS

Then quench not, O ye gods, if gods are just,
Their fore-ordained strife! And be it mine
This issue to decide, which now they join,
Spear against spear, in never-ending hate,
Then neither shall that man abide in state
Who now sits crowned, nor he that is cast out
Ever return They spoke not, hindered not,
They stood and saw their father, driven in shame
From land and home, with heralds to proclaim
His everlasting exile Wilt thou say
'Twas then mine own wish to be cast away,
And Thebes but granted what I asked? Not so
On that first day, when all my soul, I know,
Was fiery with self-loathing, death alone
Seemed kind, the sinner's death by stone on stone.
None then stood forth to give me my desire
But after, when, with length of days, the fire
Was burnt out, and I grew to know that wrath
Had swept me away upon too wild a path,
Too fierce a judgement of an old misdeed,
'Twas then, then, after years, that Thebes decreed

My banishment, and they, born of my blood,
 Sons, in a father's peril, when they could
 Have helped me would not, till for lack of one
 Slight word I was cast out, beggared, alone,
 Till death, save only that these sisters, two
 Young girls, with what of strength they had, were true,
 Came with me, found the food I live by, made
 The earth no longer dreadful to my tread
 My only kindred these, these gave me love
 But those two sons—so hear me Zeus above!—
 Who sold their father for a royal seat
 And sceptre, and Thebes bowing at their feet,
 My voice shall save them not, nor shall my throne
 Bring blessing That I know, and long have known
 By ancient voices that long since have rolled
 About me, and the tale this maid hath told
 Bid them send out their trackers—Creon, yea,
 And what so traitor else in Thebes hath sway,
 Will ye but take me in, will ye but stand
 With These, the Holy Ones who watch your land,
 Athens hath here a well-spring from which flows
 Strong help for her and downfall to her foes

LEADER

Most worthy art thou, Oedipus, of all
 Compassion, thou and these two maids withal;
 And more, we ponder on that secret vow
 Of help through thee to Athens. Therefore now
 I fain would give thee warning for thy weal

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [465-475]

OEDIPUS

Friend, speak thy warning I will all fulfil

LEADER

Make offering to these Spirits, to whose ground
Thou first hast come, and crossed their holy bound

OEDIPUS

What is the ritual, Stranger? Let me know.

LEADER

First, from a fountain of unfailing flow
Draughts must be poured by hands without a stain

OEDIPUS

By stainless hands? And when the draught is ta'en?

LEADER

Great urns, an artist's work, are there, all down
The edge and the two handles weave a crown

OEDIPUS

A crown of wool, or green leaves, or what kind?

LEADER

A young lamb's fleece about it should be twined

• 476-485] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

OEDIPUS

So be it, and after—how complete the rite?

LEADER

Pour with thy face set toward the rising light.

OEDIPUS

Into those crownèd urns the gift is poured?

LEADER

Three times, the vessel emptied at the third

OEDIPUS

How should I fill it? Make that also clear

LEADER

With water and honey, let no wine be near.

OEDIPUS

And when the shadowed Earth has drunk my gift?

LEADER

In both thine arms branches of olive lift
Thrice nine, and laying them, thy prayer recite:

OEDIPUS

Speak it That prayer must be a charm of might.

LEADER

As they are called The Merciful, beseech
 That now they will a hand of mercy reach
 To save their suppliant, let that prayer be said
 By thee, or whoso speaketh in thy stead,
 With un-uplifted voice and speech unheard,
 Then go, and look not back In every word
 Do thus, and I beside thee joyfully
 Will stand, else, stranger, I should fear for thee

OEDIPUS

Daughters, ye heard what these near-dwellers say?

ISMENE

We heard Give us thy charge and we obey.

OEDIPUS

I can not go A twofold plague on me
 Is laid, who have no strength and cannot see
 Go, one of you, then, and perform the rite.
The prayer of one pure heart, I think, hath might
To atone for many Let what must be done
Be done with speed But leave me not alone
 The while My body scarce hath power to stand
 Friendless, or move without some guiding hand.

ISMENE

I will perform the rite But will ye not
 Direct me, strangers, to the appointed spot?

LEADER

'Tis in this grove, but at the further side,
 And if thou hast need of aught, there is a guide
 Keeping the shrine, who will advise with thee

ISMENE

So, to my task And thou, Antigone,
 Watch o'er our father ~~Toiling for his sake~~
An aching body thinks not of the ache-

[*Exit* ISMENE.]

CHORUS

Strophe

It were cruel to awaken into life an ancient anguish
 That hath long been untroubled in its rest,
 Yet I long to ask

OEDIPUS

What ask ye?

CHORUS

Of the sick wound beyond healing,
 That hath all, all, the life of thee opprest

OEDIPUS

Ah, unveil not to the sunlight the long shame that I
 have suffered,
 I pray thee, grant so much to a guest.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [517-526]

CHORUS

Tis a tale spread wide and never ceasing,
And I fain would know the truth

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Thou wilt bear with us, I pray thee

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Nay, I beseech thee

Give grace to me as I gave to thee

OEDIPUS

Antistrophe

I have borne a yoke of evil that I willed not, God be
witness!

Not one step I purposed of the way.

CHORUS

What evil?

OEDIPUS

To a bondage of great sin the City bound me,
They bound me on their high bridal day

527-536] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

CHORUS

'Twas a mother, though that name can scarce be spoken,
They delivered to thine arms, so men say.

OEDIPUS

Woe is me, 'tis death to hear it! Ye have spoke the
word, O strangers,
And these twain that in my darkness I begot . . .

CHORUS

Ah, what wilt thou?

OEDIPUS

My two daughters, two destroyers . . .

CHORUS

God in heaven!

OEDIPUS

On a mother's flesh were wrought

CHORUS

Strophe 2.

Then these are both thy children and . . .

OEDIPUS

The very sisters of their sire *father*

CHORUS

Oh, horror!

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [537-542

OEDIPUS

Horrors beyond count
Come sweeping on my soul, like fire

CHORUS

Thou hast suffered!

OEDIPUS

Yes, I have suffered; pangs
Are mine that never sleep nor tire.

CHORUS

Thou hast done .

OEDIPUS

I did no deed!

CHORUS

No deed?

OEDIPUS

I took a gift the City gave
Oh, why should she have given me that,
The City that I sought to save?

CHORUS

Antistrophe

Unhappy! Blood, too, on thy hand!

543-548] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

OEDIPUS

What wouldst thou? What dost seek to know?

CHORUS

A father's blood.

OEDIPUS

Thou seekest still
Torture on torture, blow on blow!

CHORUS

Didst thou not slay?

OEDIPUS

I slew. But there
Mine innocent heart hath answer, too.

CHORUS

What answer?

OEDIPUS

'Twas but Justice

CHORUS

How?

OEDIPUS

'Tis simply told The man I slew
Would have slain me In will, in law,
- Unstained I did what I must do.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [549-574

LEADER

See, at thy call, King Theseus, Aigeus' son,
Cometh himself, thy prayer will now be won

[Enter THESEUS

THESEUS

I know thee, Child of Laius Legendwise
The blood-dark desolation of thine eyes
Hath reached my ears, and here being come to-day
Thou hast made thy tale more clear This wild array
And grief-dishonoured brow suffice to prove
Thou art that King indeed, and needs must move
Our pity Say what now can comfort thee
What ask ye of my city or of me,
Thou and thy most sad helper? 'Twere a dire
Task that should make me shrink from your desire,
Who well remember how myself, a child,
Bore exile like to thine, and peril piled
On peril fronted on strange shores alone,
Which no man else hath borne Therefore from none
Who walks, like thee, in travail on strange ground
Will I avert mine eyes Here, standing crowned,
I know my lot is mortal and for me
Abides no surer morrow than for thee

OEDIPUS

Theseus, thy nobleness in little speech
Hath saved me long discourse No need to teach
My name to thee nor country, nor the race
I spring from All thou knowest One sole grace
I have to ask thee and my tale is told

575-585] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

THESEUS

So be it I fain would hear

OEDIPUS [*After a slight pause*

Theseus, this old
And grief-worn body as a gift I bear
To Athens and to thee, not passing fair
To human eyes, yet 'tis a precious thing

THESEUS

How precious, friend? What blessing will it bring?

OEDIPUS

Hereafter thou shalt learn, not now Not now.

THESEUS

At what time shall we feel it? Knowest thou?

OEDIPUS

When I am dead and thou hast made my grave.

THESEUS

Nay! Is it Time's last bounty thou wilt crave,
With all between uncared for or forgot?

OEDIPUS

Give me the last. the rest shall fail me not.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [586-594

THESEUS

Full gladly I would grant some larger grace

OEDIPUS -

Think! think! 'Tis no light trial thou shalt face

THESEUS

How? Will thy sons some blame against me bring?

OEDIPUS

They seek to take me back to Thebes, O King.

THESEUS

In kindness? Then 'twere ill to stay exiled.

OEDIPUS

When I craved home they drove me to the wild

THESEUS

Proud heart! Small help is, in affliction, pride

OEDIPUS†

Wait. E'er thou hast heard all, forbear to chide.

THESEUS

Say on. I must not judge before I know.

OEDIPUS

Long have I suffered, woe on deadly woe

THESEUS

What wouldst thou tell? That ancient tale of blood?

OEDIPUS

Nay, that tale everywhere is understood
This is another I am cast away
By mine own folk from mine own land, and may
Never return nor dwell with them again
My father's blood hath left too deep a stain

THESEUS

How can they call thee home, being thus shut out?

OEDIPUS *[Mysteriously.]*

The mouth of God shall compass them about

THESEUS

With dread of some foreshadowed misery?

OEDIPUS

That in this land, unless preserved by me,
Thebes shall be smitten and perish.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [606-627

THESEUS

All is peace

'Twixt Thebes and me How should that comfort cease?

OEDIPUS

Fair Aigeus' son, only to gods on high
Not to grow old is given, nor yet to die,
All else is turmoiled by our master, Time
Decay is in earth's bloom and manhood's prime,
Faith dies and Unfaith blossoms like a flower,
And who of men shall find from hour to hour,
Or in loud cities and the marts thereof,
Or silent chambers of his own heart's love,
One wind blow true for ever? Soon or late
Hate shall be love and love veer back to hate
And now if summer shines and all is well
'Twixt Thebes and thee, lo, Time immeasurable
Flows on, night after night, day after day,
Till that day come when Thebes, in armed array,
Raging for some slight cause, shall front you here
And this fair concord scatter with the spear
Then, here beneath them, my wronged body, deep
And cold, shall turn him in his starved sleep
And drain the hot red blood of them, like dew,
If God be still God and his Son speak true .

But who would breathe the secrets of the dark;
I end as I began Do thou but mark
My promise and thine own, and none shall say
That Theseus on a false and wasted day

628-643] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Did welcome Oedipus beneath these skies
To dwell for ever more unless God lies.

LEADER

Sire, from the first, sure-seeming promises
He hath made to Athens, these and like to these.

THESEUS

Who would reject the hand of such a man?
Have not his fathers shared, since Thebes began,
Our hearth in sojourn and our arms in war?
And he, by men cast off and driven afar,
Hath none save God and me, from such an one
Cometh great vengeance or great benison
I will not spurn his prayer nor cast away
The boon of his good will Be thou this day
Our citizen

*[He clasps OEDIPUS' hand OEDIPUS much moved
cannot at first answer*

Stay, if it pleasure thee,
Here under these men's care, or come with me
To mine own house Have it which way thou please

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, be merciful to men like these!

THESEUS

Which wouldst thou, then? Wilt share my hearth and
cheer?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [644-652]

OEDIPUS

If that might be ' But no ' The place is here

THESEUS

The place? For what? I will not hinder thee

OEDIPUS

Where I shall break them that rejected me

THESEUS

If that could be, 'twere great,

OEDIPUS

It shall be, friend,
If but thy word stay faithful to the end

THESEUS

Fear not I shall not fail thee

OEDIPUS

'Tis enough
I would not, like a man of slighter stuff,
Bind thee with oaths

THESEUS

'Twould bring no surer trust.

OEDIPUS

How wilt thou act, then?

THESEUS

What dost fear the most?

OEDIPUS

Those men will come ,

THESEUS

In these men's care thou art.

OEDIPUS

And if thou leave me .

THESEUS

Teach me not my part!

OEDIPUS

'Tis fear constrains me

THESEUS

I know naught of fear

OEDIPUS

Thou knowest not their threats

THESEUS

I know, from here

No man in my despite shall carry thee. ,

These threats, how often in some ecstasy

Of wrath men rage in stormy words and vain!

But when the true mind is enthroned again

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [661-684

All is forgot These men who wax so bold
 In wrath, and swear to tear thee from my hold,
 May find, I think, before such heights they scale,
 A sundering sea too wide, too hard to sail
 Thou needst not me If Lord Apollo here
 Hath led thee, here canst sojourn without fear,
 Howbeit, the name of Theseus, though his arm
 Be distant, shall safeguard thee from all harm
 [Exit THESEUS

CHORUS

Here, where the Warrior Steed had birth,
 Come, wanderer, to a place of rest,
 A home, the dearest upon earth,
 Beneath Colonus' gleaming crest
 Often a secret music through this vale
 Comes thrilling, where some sweet-voiced nightingale
 Hides in a dell of green,
 She loves the clustering ivy, dark as wine,
 And that deep-leaved, that thousand-berried shrine,
 Where no foot treads, where never sun may shine
 Nor storm-wind pierce the screen
 Only the mystic Dionysus there,
 Ringed by the nymphs who erst his cradle bare,
Treadeth his dance unseen

Here blossoms in fresh dew from heaven
 The crocus with its gleam of gold,
 And clusters of narcissus, given
 As crowns by men of old

To Maid and Mother, goddesses most high,
 Nor ever run those sleepless channels dry
 Which shepherd o'er the plain
 The runlets of Cephîsus, day by day
 Through earth's deep bosom he will wind his way,
 And swift her life increaseth, whereso stray
 Those waters without stain,
 A haunt not hated by the Muses' band,
 Nor turneth Aphrodîtê from this land
 Averse her golden rein

One bloom I know is hers, which hath no peer
 In Asian lands nor Pelops' Dorian isle
 A thing self-born, a dread to the hostile spear,
 Fearless of force or guile,
 Whose root most richly in this soil hath sprung,
 The gray-leaved Olive, nurse of all things young;
 Which nor the craft of age nor youth's wild will
 With ravishing hand shall conquer, orb'd on high
 Zeus of the Olive guards her still, and still
 Flashes Athena's eye

And one last praise I utter o'er this land,
 Our Mother, 'tis a gift to her alone
 Set out by Cronos-born Poseidon's hand,
 Who raised her to this throne,
 And made her mistress of his secrets three,
 The Horses, the Young Horses, and the Sea

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [712-729]

The Horse he gave, the Curb that maketh sweet
Its wildness on our ways, the Oar he gave
Deft to man's hand, fast following o'er the wave
The Nereids' hundred feet

ANTIGONE [Looking off]

O land by all men's praises richly blest,
Now shall thy shining honour meet the test

OEDIPUS

Daughter, what is it?

ANTIGONE

Father, hitherward
Creon is coming, Creon with his guard

OEDIPUS

O Elders, if you love me, 'tis in you
Alone that I may find deliverance true!

LEADER

Fear not It shall be thine Though I be frayed
With age, the strength of Athens doth not fade.

[Enter CREON with armed guards]

CREON

Ye gentle habitants, do I surmise
A sudden trouble clouding in your eyes

At my approach? Nay, prithee, put all dread
 Away, and let no word of wrath be said
 'Tis not in any mood for violent deeds
 I come, an old man, to a land which leads
All Hellas in renown and majesty,
To beg this wanderer to return with me,
Two aged Thebans, home to Thebes again
Not my sole voice, but every citizen
 Through me doth call him, seeing that I, in race
His nearest, suffer most for his distress

O Oedipus unhappy, hear my call
 Come to thy home The sons of Cadmus all
 Pray thee with right, but none with right so great
 As mine, who most for thy forlorn estate
 —Were I not else the vilest of mankind?—
 Feel pain, old friend, whom on strange soil I find
 For ever wandering, lacking all, thine aid
 In travel none, alas, but this one maid
 Poor girl, whom never I had thought to see
 Fallen like this to shame and misery,
 Her only care thee and thy wounded face,
 Begging her food, so young, a husbandless
 Virgin, a prey to every passer by!

Ah, shame upon me! 'Tis a wrong most high
 'Gainst thee, 'gainst me, 'gainst all our house and pride!
 I have named it 'tis a thing too gross to hide
 Oh, by our fathers' gods, sweep it away,
 Thou, Oedipus, and grant me what I pray,
 Consenting to come with me to thine own
 Land, to thy fathers' house All love be shown

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [759-784]

To Athens she is worthy but more worth
Is home, thy home which fostered thee from birth

OEDIPUS

Man, wilt thou shrink from nothing? Canst devise
Always a fair front built by subtle lies?
Dost hope to cheat me still, trap me again
In snares whose memory is my bitterest pain?
In the early days when, sick with mine own sin,
I prayed to be cast out, to hold me in
And thwart my longing was thy whole intent,
But when my fury of self-rage was spent
And sweet it seemed in mine own house to stay
Sheltered, then thou must have me thrust away
From home, from country, little to thy mind
Was then all this regard for kith and kind
And now again, when thou hast found me here
Well-friended in this city and held dear
By her strong sons, thy one thought is to part
Me from her, by soft words from a hard heart
How should it please me, thus, against my mood
And will, by them I love not to be wooed?
If one when thou wert starving brought no aid,
But after, when all hunger was allayed,
Lavished his graceless meats, would that not be
A vain thing? That is what thou bringst to me,
Soft promises with bitter deeds behind!
Come, I will speak and show these friends what kind
Of man thou art In love thou comest now
To lead me to mine own old home? Not thou!

Thou com'st to lay my dead bones in a grave
 Beyond thy borders, that their spell may save
 Thy land for ever from the invader's tread
 That thou shalt never have! I grant instead
 Deep in thy soil, rooted eternally,
My curse, and to my two sons I decree
My land enough to die in! Is it I
 Or thou more surely knoweth what things lie
 In store for Thebes? 'Tis I, not thou, have heard
 The surer message, even Apollo's word,
Which errs not, being the word of Zeus, his sire.
 Thy lips are as a sword engaged for hire
 And sharpened, but the use of it will wreak
 More ill than good to them that bade thee speak.
 But go I know I cannot move thee Go,
 And leave me here, outcast Aye, even so
I am content, so but I have my will

CREON

Dost think thy wild words bring to me more ill
 Than to thyself, man, in our converse now?

OEDIPUS

I only pray that on my misery thou
 Mayst have no power, nor yet on these men's ears

CREON

Unhappy man, not yet, for all thy years,
Grown wise! Should age be so self-torturing?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [806-817

OEDIPUS

That subtle tongue! No honest man can bring
The self-same art to plead for good or ill

CREON

Words may be many and yet lack all skill.

OEDIPUS

And thine, so brief, are certain of their aim?

CREON

With minds like thine, that were a hopeless claim

OEDIPUS

Go! For these too I speak Go, nor beset
With spies this land, my home predestinate

CREON

These men, not thou, can say what answer vain
Thou hast made to kindness Once I have thee ta'en

OEDIPUS

Ta'en! Who can take me against these men's will?

CREON

So be it! Yet I can make thee miserable

OEDIPUS

These threats what base have they, or what intent?

CREON

Thou hast two daughters One I have seized and sent
To Thebes The other I shall take anon

OEDIPUS

Woe's me!

CREON

Thou soon shalt have good cause to moan.

OEDIPUS

Thou hast ta'en my child!

CREON

And soon shall have them both.

OEDIPUS

Friends! Friends! What say you? Will you keep your
oath?

Oh, cast from Athens this ungodly man!

LEADER

Stranger, begone! Unlawful is the plan
Thou plottest—and unlawful thy deeds done.

CREON [To the Guards.

'Tis time, men Seize the girl there Get her gone
Quickly Use force if she will not obey

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [827-832

ANTIGONE

Where can I go? What succour can I pray
From god or man?

LEADER

Stranger, what deeds are these?

CREON -

I touch not him 'Tis my own ward I seize

OEDIPUS

Elders of Athens!

LEADER

Man, a deed thou hast done
'Gainst law .

CREON

Most lawful!

LEADER

How?

CREON

I claim my own.

OEDIPUS

Strophe.

O Athens!

LEADER

Wouldst thou so?
Back, stranger Set her free
Shall it be word or blow?

CREON

Hands off, man!

LEADER

Not from thee,
Not while such things can be!

CREON

Touch me and Thebes in arms shall join the fray.

OEDIPUS

I warned you .

LEADER

I command you, set her free!

CREON

Give orders where thou hast authority

LEADER

Let go, I charge you!

CREON

Captain, go your way.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [841-847

CHORUS

Forward! Oh, forward here,
Ye who about us dwell!
Forward! They wrong our dear
Athens, our citadel
By force Oh, guard her well!

ANTIGONE

Woe's me! They are dragging me O strangers,
friends

OEDIPUS

Where art thou, child?

ANTIGONE

I am torn away from thee

OEDIPUS

Thy hand, my child!

ANTIGONE

I cannot move my hands

CREON

Away with her!

OEDIPUS

Misery, misery!

EXEUNT *Soldiers with* ANTIGONE

CREON

So those two loving crutches shall no more
 Support thy goings! 'Tis thy will to score
 A victory o'er thy kindred and thy state,
 Whose servant, I, their king, am designate?
 Enjoy thy victory! Thou shalt learn at last
 Thy lesson, that both now and in time past
 A fool thou hast been to spurn all well-wishers
And have no guide but rage, thy lifelong curse.

LEADER

Hold, stranger! Stay!

CREON

I warn thee; drop that arm.

LEADER

I will not, till those maids are safe from harm.

CREON

A greater forfeit then shall Athens pay
 Than those two girls I seek a larger prey.

LEADER

What mean'st thou?

CREON

This blind man shall follow too.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [861-871

LEADER

Thou threatenest us?

CREON

And what I threaten do.

LEADER

Not if the Prince of Athens hinders thee!

OEDIPUS

That pitiless voice! Wilt thou lay hands on me?

CREON

Be silent, thou!

OEDIPUS

O grant me, of your grace,
Voice, even here, ye spirits of this place,
To speak one curse! Thou cruellest of men,
Mine eyes of old being darkened, hast thou then
My one light, my true eye, unshielded, torn
By violence from me? Therefore, be it sworn!
The all-seeing Sun on thee and all thy line
Shall bring to pass an old age such as mine!

CREON

Ye see his madness, people of the land?

OEDIPUS

They see both me and thee, and understand,
To what deeds I retort with empty breath

CREON

By force then, for I will not curb my wrath,
Alone here as I am and old and slow,
Myself will seize him

OEDIPUS

Woe upon thee, woe!

CHORUS

Antistrophe.

Stranger, a boldness rare
Is thine if such a thought
Thou darest.

CREON

See! I dare.

CHORUS

Are Athens' laws as naught?

CREON

Weakness can master strength when justice leads.

OEDIPUS

Ye hear his words?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [882-890]

LEADER

Which never shall be deeds!

Zeus knoweth!

CREON

Zeus may know, not thou for sure!

LEADER

This is an outrage

CREON

One you must endure.

CHORUS

Hither, ye people all!

'Tis crime, and more than crime

Lords of the land, I call

For succour, for help in time!

[Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS

What means that cry? What work is here? What fear
hath made you summon me

From the high Altar where I stood in prayer to Him
who Rules the Sea,

The Lord of your Colonus? Speak and tarry not, let
all be said,

For hot-foot, recking not of ease or order, to your call
I sped

OEDIPUS

O faithful friend, tis thou ! Thy voice I know
This man hath wronged me, struck me a coward's blow

THESEUS

What kind of wrong ? And who hath wrought it ? Say

OEDIPUS

Y'on Creon, whom thou seest, hath torn away -
Both, both, those that are left to me, and fled -

THESEUS

What means he ?

OEDIPUS

What I have suffered I have said

THESEUS [*To his attendants*

Up, with all speed ! Go, take mine order straight
To yonder altars where my people wait
Break off the sacrifice Bid foot and horse
Uncurbed, together, speed to where the course
Of the two trackways joins, lest they get past
Our border watch unseen, and I be cast
To scorn as one by strangers easily
Despoiled and mocked at Up, I tell thee, fly !
For this man, if mine anger ranged as far
As his offences, not without a scar
Had he escaped my grasp But, as it is,
On him my sentence shall be even as his

On those two maids Thou art my prisoner here,
 And shalt not move till thou restore them, clear
 And free before mine eyes The deed thou hast done
 Is worthy neither of me nor of thine own
 City nor race Thou hast trespassed on a land
 Observing justice, firm to take her stand
 Always on law, rushed in and, hot with pride,
 Swept all the City's' stablished powers aside,
 Ta'en prisoners at thy pleasure, laid thine hand
 On all that pleased thee Is Athens then a land
 Of slaves, not men, and I a thing of naught?
 Thebes, surely, to such doings schooled thee not,
 She never chose unrighteous sons to rear
 She will not speak thy praises, if she hear
 Thy wrong to me, thy wrong to God on high,
 Wrought on His suppliants in their misery
 Would I, suppose my foot were on thy soil,
 Without due permit from its King, take spoil
 And ransom? Nay, although as clear as day
 My rights were, I should know too well what way
 Of life is seemly in an alien land __
 But thou on thine own Thebes hast laid a brand
 Of shame that she deserves not. Age hath brought
 Grey hairs to thee, but no grey powers of thought,
 Therefore I tell thee again, and thou take heed
 Have those two maids brought hither with all speed
 Unless thou wouldst make longer in the land
 Thy much enforced sojourn This command
 Comes not from my lips only but my heart.

LEADER

Stranger, 'tis so Of righteous blood thou art
And noble, but thy deeds belie thy blood

CREON

Neither in counsel nor in hardihood
Lacking, O Son of Aigeus, did I deem
Thy folk, but entering here, how could I dream
So strong a fancy for my kinsfolk would
Possess them, as to claim them theirs for good,
Against my will? I felt full sure beside
Athens would scarce receive a parricide,
A man incestuous, known to all as one
Stained by a mother coupling with her son
Full sure the wisdom that in Ares' Rock
Is rooted ne'er would take wayfaring folk
Of that sort in her sacred boundaries
In such belief I sought to take my prize
Nor, even so thinking, had I turned to force,
Until on me and mine he laid a curse
Most deadly Whereupon, being wronged, to smite
The wrongdoer I reckoned but my right
For anger ages not, but burns till death
Only dead men no dolour wakeneth.
Take, therefore, whatso action pleaseth thee,
Since I, though just my cause, am solitary
And powerless, yet for all my weakness I
Some day will to thy deeds with deeds reply

OEDIPUS

O shameless heart! And think'st thou to have thrown
 On my grey head these horrors or thine own?
 Hast cried aloud that stain of kindred goie,
Incest and desolation, which I bore
 But willed not? 'Twas, methinks, the wrath divine
Against some dark forefather of my line,
 Not me, in me what evil can ye find
 For which I should be cursed with crimes so blind
 'Gainst mine, and me? The oracle had said
 My father 'twas God's doom should be struck
 dead

By his own son Am I to be believed
 Guilty, I, unbegotten, unconceived,
 Unborn? And if thereafter, born to doom
 Like that, I met and slew, not knowing whom
 I slew nor what I did, my father, who
 Can charge on me the crime I never knew
Nor willed? And then my mother, she, thine own
 Sister, whose shame with gibes thou harpest on,
 And seek'st to make me speak Aye, speak I will,
 Since thou of foulest talk hast had thy fill
 She was, she was, my mother Misery!
 My mother, when I knew it not, nor she,
 And to her shame bore children to the son
 Herself had borne But thou, what hast thou done?
 With full will thou hast wakened, with full will,
 My shame and hers I did my deed of ill
Unwilling, and unwilling I speak now
 And this I say, that vainly seekest thou,

Or in that deed or in my father's death,
 Which everlastingly with bitter breath
 Thou hurl'st against me, a fair ground to call
 Me evil. This thing answer me withal
 If, here and now, some stranger came and sought
 To kill thee, thee, so strict in deed and thought,
 Wouldst question "Is this unknown man by chance
 My father?" or strike quickly in defence
 Smite him, I think, if still thou lov'st the light,
 Not look around thee for thy legal right
 In such a pass, by God bewildered, then
 I strove. Oh, were my father risen again
 I think, I think, himself would pardon me
 But thou not righteous art thou, only free
 To fling foul condemnations, mouth at will
 Things speakable and things unspeakable,
 All to defile me here before the eyes
 Of strangers. Aye, and thou hast found it wise
 To praise the fame of Theseus and of great
 Athens, the just, the law-abiding state,
 But this forgettest, that, if any land
 On earth hath piety to understand
 The gods' due rites, 'tis Athens, and 'tis there
 Thou dar'st from the hearth of God to tear
 This age-worn suppliant, violent hands to lay
 On me, and my two daughters bear ^{away}
 Wherefore in prayer I lift my voice to these
Dread Goddesses against such enemies
 To give due aid, so thou shalt learn ere long
 What breed of men defends this land from wrong

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1014-1035]

LEADER

This man, though dogged by dire calamity,
Is noble, Sire, and meet for help from thee

THESEUS

Enough! Or shall the plunderers of the land
Escape while we, their victims, idly stand?

CREON

Speak thy commands to one whose light is low

THESEUS

Thou lead me on their track Myself will go
To escort thee If thou hast hid the maids hard by,
Reveal them to me If their slavers fly
Far off we need not trouble There be those
Gone forth whose nets even now about them close,
They will not thank their gods for passage fair!
Lead on, but know the hand that set the snare
Is now ensnared The hunter is the prey
The prizes of such treason melt away
Full fast Nor think of helpers, though I guess
That never to such pride of recklessness
Hadst thou advanced unarmed or unallied
Was there help here in which thou durst confide?
That I must watch My city neither can,
Nor shall, be weaker than one lawless man
Dost understand at all? Or is it in vain
I spoke to thee before, and speak again?

1036-1057] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

CREON

I came not here thy charges to deny,
At home I shall know well how to reply

THESEUS

Threaten thy fill but go Thou, Oedipus,
Remain in peace, putting full trust in us
I swear, unless I die, I will restore
Right soon the daughters whom thou longest for.

OEDIPUS

Theseus, may God reward thy nobleness,
And this foresheltering aid for my distress
[*Exeunt THESEUS and CREON.*]

CHORUS

It is there that I would be,
Where the foemen turn at bay,
With a shout, no more to flee,
But confront us in the fray,
Be it inland where the Great Rocks soar,
Or amid the lit torches of the shore,
Where an old rite is cherished and made young
By the Holy Ones whose high golden Key
Of Silence is laid upon the tongue
Of the grave Eumolpidae
Is it there our Prince's word
With a war-cry strong to save

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1058-1079]

Shall awake the sleeping sword
Ere the border line be passed,
And beside those sisters brave
Stand at last?

Or it may be, drawing nigh
By the northward and the west
To the pastures lying high
Beneath Oirê's snowy crest,
They are rushing in a rivalry of speed
On chariots or on steed outvying steed
Oh, ours shall be the prize! Dread in fight
Are the lances of Colonus, very dread
Is the cavalry of Theseus, borne ahead
With bridles flashing bright
For Athena they will ride,
In their harness full of pride,
For above them watcheth She
With the Shaker of the Earth,
Whom the Horse loves and the Sea,
Rhea's birth.

They strike, or do they wait their hour?
A hope is whispering in my brain,
Of sudden weakening in the power
Of evil o'er those captives twain
Much-suffering, who have found in these
Their kinsmen their worst enemies.
Ere evening falleth Zeus shall send
Fulfilment of a wondrous end,

The voices of my heart foretell
 A day of battle ended well
 But, Oh, amid the clouds to fly
 On storm-swift pinions of a dove,
 And, sudden, with far-ranging eye,
 Sweep on the battle from above!

O Thou above all gods that are,
 All-seeing eye, all-ruling hand,
 Great Zeus, we pray thee, in this war
 Give strength to them who rule our land;
 And with thee let Athena be,
 Thy daughter, robed in majesty
 And, oh, ye twain in swift array,
 Apollo, Hunter of the Prcy,
 And Artemis, the Archer Maid,
 Fleet follower of the dappled doe
 Fast-flying, come, a twofold aid,
 To us and ours your mercy show!
Enter THESEUS with Guards escorting ANTIGONE
and ISMENE

LEADER

Ah, wanderer, mark! Not false the prophecy
Of us, thy watchers. Yonder I descry
 The maidens with their escort drawing near.

OEDIPUS

Where? Where? What sayst thou?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1099-1108]

ANTIGONE

Father! Father dear!

Would that some god could give thee power to see
This brave man who has brought us back to thee!

OEDIPUS

Child, are ye both here?

ANTIGONE

Yes 'Tis Theseus' arm,
With his true guards, hath saved us from all harm

OEDIPUS

Come to me, child, and let me feel once more
Those dear arms that so long I looked not for!

ANTIGONE

Thy prayer is mine 'Tis what I long for most

OEDIPUS

Where are ye? Where?

ANTIGONE

Here, both We are not lost.

OEDIPUS

Sweet flowers!

1109-1122] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

ANTIGONE

All fathers of their own are fain

OEDIPUS

Props of my age !

ANTIGONE

And partners of thy pain

[The two daughters embrace their father]

OEDIPUS

I hold my best beloved, and cannot be
Living or dead, unhappy utterly,
With you beside me Press my body, so,
Children, on either side Come closer Grow
Into your father's being Breathe again
From that hard path of loneliness and pain
And quickly as ye may brief speech is w
For maidens such as you say what befell

ANTIGONE

Here stands our champion As the deed was his,
His be the tale My task the lighter is

OEDIPUS

[To THESEUS]

Thy pardon, if too long, too eagerly,
I have greeted these, mine own, restored to me
Past hope I know through thee, through thee alone,
Like light upon our eyes, this joy hath shone.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1123-1148]

'Tis thou, hast saved them May the all-powerful God
 Grant such reward as I, the powerless, would,
 To thee and to this land For here I find
Alone among the cities of mankind
Honour and godliness and truth Even so
 I speak her praise, and what I speak I know,
 Seeing all I have, O King, I have through thee
 Reach out, I pray thee, thy right hand for me
 To clasp it close, friend, aye, and if I may,
 To kiss thy cheek Alas, what would I say?
 Wretch that I am, how could I ask that thou
 Shouldst bear the touch of one upon whose brow
 Is burned every pollution that man knows
 I ask not, nor will suffer it 'Tis those
 Only who have my burden borne, may share
 With me my desolation Nay, stand there
 Apart, I still can bless thee, friend, and thou
Still grant me the same righteous care as now

THESEUS

I marvel not that, having thus re-won
 Thy lost ones, long in joy thy speech hath run,
 Nor yet that their sweet greeting before mine
 Hath claimed thy welcome Why should I repine?
 'Tis by deeds done I fain would seek to gird
 My life to greatness, not the spoken word
 See, Father, have I failed in aught I swore
 To do? Have I not brought them here, before
 Thine eyes, alive, by all those menaces
 Unscarred? About the fray scarce mine it is

1149-1165] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

To speak Thou hast those with thee who, I **know**
Will tell thee all But, prithee, here bestow
Thy thought There came a tale to me but **now**,
As here I came, no great thing, yet, I vow,
Strange, and the smallest thing may call for thought

OEDIPUS

What is it, Son of Aigeus? I know naught
Of what thou hast heard, say how the story ran

THESEUS

Some man, thy kin but not thy countryman,
Hath cast him suppliant, I know not how,
On the Altar of Poseidon, where but now
I stood at sacrifice ere here I came

OEDIPUS

Whence comes he? What doth his petition claim?

THESEUS

I know but one thing, speech with thee, they say,
He seeks, not long, not grievous any way

OEDIPUS

To what end? Thus to kneel hath import grave

THESEUS

Some speech with thee, that only doth he crave,
And then a safe return by the same road

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1166-1174

OEDIPUS

Who can it be who thus implores the God?

THESEUS

Think if in Argos any of thy race
Hath settled, who might seek to win thy grace.

OEDIPUS

[*Trembling*

O friend! Peace! No word more!

THESEUS

What shakes thee so?

OEDIPUS

Ask me not that!

THESEUS

What? Tell me all

OEDIPUS

I know

That suppliant Thy last question tells me all

THESEUS

On whom could it with such dire meaning fall?

OEDIPUS

My son, O King, the accursèd, whom to hear,
Were anguish, like none other, to mine ear.

1175-1194] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

THESEUS

Canst thou not hear him without doing aught
Thou wouldst not? The mere hearing hurts thee not.

OEDIPUS

That voice, my son's, rings hateful to his sire
Compel me not to yield him his desire

THESEUS

The suppliant's knee is a compulsion hard
To escape The God too claimeth due regard

ANTIGONE

O Father, hear my word, though I be still
But young in counsel Let Theseus fulfill
His own heart's prompting and the God reveie
For our sake, too, admit our brother here
To implore thee He cannot force thee to revoke
Thy purpose—fear it not—by mere words spoke
Unwisely But to hear him where can be
The harm in that? And if some treachery
Be brewing, speech will bring it to the test.
He is thy child, and though the cruellest
Of wrongs and most ungodly he had wrought
On thee, thou, Father, must requite him not.
Oh, let him come! Men have had evil sons
Ere now, and hot wrath, yet the gentle tones
Of counsel and the prayers of friends have power
Softly to charm away their evil hour

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1195-1214]

Ah, turn again, remember what dire woe
From sire, from mother, smote thee long ago
Look to those days, and think on what a path
Thou then wast guided by this fire of wrath
Alas, a living monitor thou hast
In those dark orbs, that light for ever lost
Oh, yield to us! Dost see not? It is wrong
That those who pray for justice should pray long,
Or one who hath received great love should yet
Make no requital but stand obdurate

OEDIPUS

Daughter, a grievous grace ye win from me,
Pleading, but as ye will so let it be
Yet, if that man must come to me and speak
This only, Friend, I ask, that none shall seek
Again to hold my body in his sway

THESEUS

Enough That word once spoken I obey,
Old Prince No boast I speak but promise true,
The god that guardeth me shall guard thee too
[Exit THESEUS]

CHORUS

Who craveth more and ever more
Of life, beyond his lotted span,
As one astray and cleaving sore
To the wrong road I judge that man.

The stores his long days may have won
 Move nearer suffering and defeat,
 And joy—he knows not where 'tis gone,
 When life lags longer than is meet,
 Till one Deliverer from all wrong
 The unseen portal openeth,
 Where lives no love, no lyre, no song,
 Only the last thing, Death

Not to be born, by all acclaim,
 Were best, but once that gate be passed
 To hasten thither whence he came
 Is man's next prize—and fast, Oh fast!
 For, once he has unloosed his hand
 From Youth and Youth's light vanities,
 What blow can from his path be banned?
 What griefs will not be surely his? '
 Strife, envy, falseness, blood and hate,
 Till, last, the curse of curses, lone,
 Despised, weak, friendless, desolate,
 Old age hath claimed his own

We are old and know suffering, but dread ^c
Is the doom of this stranger at the door '
 Like a wave-lashed and winter-beaten shore,
 By the tempests of the North overrun, '
 The cold storms beat upon his head
 There is storm from the sinking of the sun,
 And storm from his first going forth,
 Storm from the noon-tide's light,
 Storm from the mountains of the night,
 And the wild winds of the north ,

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1249-1268]

ANTIGONE

Ah, yonder! 'Tis that suppliant, meseems,
Alone, untended Father, his cheek streams
With tears new-shed 'Tis thee he seeks to find

OEDIPUS

Who is he?

ANTIGONE

Who but he that in our mind
Hath been so long 'Tis Polynîcês here
[*Enter POLYNICES, OEDIPUS turns away.*]

POLYNICES

What shall I do? God help me, should this tear,
Sisters, be shed for sufferings of my own
Or his, my father's, aged and alone
Save for you two, in a strange land outcast,
In such a garb! Its ancient filth has passed
Into his withered flesh, infecting all
His flank, and o'er that eyeless face withal
Long hair untended tosses in the wind
And food, poor fragments of a beggar's kind
His nurture! Oh, I am accurst, accurst,
To have learnt all this too late! Let me be first
Now to bear witness that in villainy
Most vile am I, thus to have tended thee!
Hear what I am from no lips but my own
Yet doth not Mercy share the supreme throne

Of Zeus in all his doings? Let her win
 A place in thy heart, Father, for my sin
~~May yet be atoned~~, made worse it cannot be
 Why art thou silent?

O Father, speak! Turn not away from me!
 Wilt answer nothing, but in silent scorn
 Reject me? Can that wrath that long hath torn
 Thy heart not speak? O ye, sprung from his seed,
 My sisters, try to move in my dire need
 Those lips implacable, inexorable!
 A suppliant here I kneel It is not well
 To turn me thus, without a word, away

[OEDIPUS remains silent

ANTIGONE

Unhappy one, speak thou Say all thy say
 A flow of words may waken some old joys,
 Sorrows, or pities, that may render voice
 Back to the lips that had no voice before

POLYNICES

So be it I will speak out I thank thee for
 That counsel First, I summon to mine aid
 The God himself, at whose feet I was laid
 When the King raised me up and hither sent
 To speak and hear, with due enfranchisement
 Of safe return, which safety I require,
 Strangers, from you, my sisters, and my sire
 Now, I will tell thee, Father, why I came
 I am an outcast from my home, in shame

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1293-1322]

And banishment, because, as elder son,
 I claimed to sit upon thy sovereign throne,
 Whence Eteoclês, my younger, by nō right
 Of law, by no ordeal of armèd might,
 Cozening the people's favour, had me cast
 To banishment Whereof the first and last
 Cause I pronounce the Curse that clings to thee,
No act of mine And so our seers decree
 Straightway to Dorian Argos did I bring
 My cause I won the daughter of the King
 Adrastus Then by oaths to me I bound
 Them that for deeds of war were most renowned
 In Argos With their aid I now advance
 A sevenfold host, good wielders of the lance,
 'Gainst Thebes, and either in just battle die
 Or cast the usurper down Wilt ask me why
 I have now come hither? 'Tis a suppliant call
 And prayer to thee, Father, from me and all
 My host that round the plain of Thêbê stands,
 Seven mighty spearmen, seven united bands
 Great Amphiaraus, first in fight, is there,
 And first in all the auguries of the air,
 The Aetolian son of Oineus with his Vine,
 Tydeus, Eteoclus, of true Argive line,
 Hippomedon, sent by Talaos, his sire,
 Great Capaneus, who swears to burn with fire
 The tower of Thebes Then from Arcadia came
 A knight who bears his warrior-mother's name,
 ' That Maid so long by lovers unbeguiled,
 Parthenopaeus, Atalanta's child

1323-1347] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

The chief am I, thy first-born—or if not
 Thy son, then by some demon fate begot—
 To lead 'gainst Thebes the dauntless Argive spear
 All these, by whatsoe'er to thee is dear,
 Home, child, or life, implore thee to forget
Thy heavy wrath 'gainst me, who now am set
 Forth to chastise that brother who hath banned
 My right and robbed me of my fatherland
 The oracles—if aught of truth there be
 In oracles—have spoke who so from thee
Hath blessing shall the key of victory hold
 Oh, by our springs and fountains, by the old
 Gods of our race, be softened ! Look on me,
Like thee I am a beggar, and like thee
In a strange land Like thee I have no home,
Saving by court to strangers The same doom
 Imprisons both, while yonder in our house
 The usurper in his pride makes mock of us
 Father, if thou wilt join thy heart to ours,
 With little time or toil my gathered powers
 Will break his fences, lead thee to thy throne,
 'Stablish in right thy honour and my own,
 And drive him to the winds If thy good will
 Is with me all this hope I can fulfil
 Without thee, I shall not return alive
[OEDIPUS stands silent

LEADER

Nay, for the sender's sake some answer give,
 Or good or ill, e'er he be turned away

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1348-1374]

OEDIPUS

Lords of Colônus, hearken what I say
 Were this not 'Theseus' charge, had he not stirred
 My heart to grant this man an answering word,
 He ne'er had heard my voice But be it so!
 He shall not hence without an answer go,
 And such an answer as shall bring, I trow,
Joy to his life no more Thou traitor, thou!
 Thou, when thou hadst the sceptre and the throne
 Which now thy brother holdeth for his own,
 Didst me, thy father, drive unfriended, out
To exile, thou didst cast these rags about
 My beggared frame, which now, made one with me
 In toil and suffering, thou weepst to see
 I shed no tears I bear what I must bear
Till death, remembering thee, my murder
 'Tis thou hast made me thus to live in woe,
 Thou hast cast me out 'Tis by thy deed I go
 A wanderer, begging from strange hands my lot
 Of daily bread, and, had I not begot
 These daughters, my true help, in certainty
 I had died long since, for any aid from thee
 These girls have fed me, these preserve me, these
 Are men, not women, for hard services
 But ye two brothers, ye are bastard blood,
Not sons of mine Therefore the eye of God
 Is burning—but not yet with all the hate
 Stored for thine armies by the Theban gate
 | Thou shalt not take that city Thou shalt die
Blood-stained in sin, and with thy brother lie

1375-1397] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

So ran the curse that my soul sent before
Against you, and now calls to rise once more /
 To fight my battle, that ye two may deign
 To reverence your begetters, and refrain
 From trampling on an eyeless man, brought low
 By sons like you These two girls did not so
 Thy right of royal birth, thy suppliant's cry,
 This curse annuls for ever, while on high
 At the right hand of Zeus Justice shall hold
 Her seat, true guardian of the laws of old
 Begone, thou thing abhorred and fatherless,
 And with thee take, most foul in wickedness,
These words of doom, the last gift of my hand.
 Thou shalt not wreck by war thy fatherland,
 Thou shalt not back to Argos make thy way,
 By hand of kindred thou shalt die, and slay
 Dying, the man who flung thee from the throne.
 Such doom I speak, and call in prayer the lone
Darkness from which we spring, that home again
 It take thee, never more to dwell with men
 I call the awful spirits of this glade,
 I call Ares the Slayer, who hath laid
 In your two hearts the seed of that dire hate
 Hear and begone! To all in Thebes relate,
 And thine own host, how Oedipus outshares,
With his last word, his kingdom to his heirs.

LEADER

That e'er thou camest here, unhappy one,
 My heart can feel no joy, and now, begone

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1398-1417

POLYNICES

Woe for my coming and my baffled quest!
Woe for my comrades! What an end unblest
To that proud march from Argos! Such an end—
I cannot speak thereof to any friend,
I cannot turn my army back Woe's me!
Silent I go to meet my destiny
O Sisters, ye his children, who have heard
Here at my side our father's ruthless word,
I charge ye, by God's mercy, when on me
That curse shall be fulfilled, if then you be
In Thebes and home, leave not my body all
Dishonoured, give me rites of burial
And unction So the praises that ye two
Have earned from this man for your service true
Shall be again by other praise not less
Increased, for that last deed of faithfulness

ANTIGONE

Brother! I pray, in one thing list to me!

POLYNICES

What wouldst thou? Speak, most dear Antigone.

ANTIGONE

Turn back thy host to Argos, quickly, now;
E'er all be lost, Thebes and thy friends and thou

1418-1430] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

POLYNICES

It may not be If I turn back, the men
I lead now ne'er would follow me again

ANTIGONE

Again? But why again? What good should come
To thee, brother, from having wrecked thy home?

POLYNICES

'Tis base to stay an outcast, while his scorn
Mocks at my weakness, me his elder-born

ANTIGONE

Dost seek to give thy father's prophecy
Fulfilment, dooming both to slay and die?

POLYNICES

'Tis what he wishes!—No I cannot yield.

ANTIGONE

Woe's me! But who will follow to the field
Of battle when they hear those oracles?

POLYNICES

They will not hear them A good leader tells
The heartening news The worse must silent fall

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1431-1441

ANTIGONE

Brother! Thy will is fixed beyond recall?

POLYNICES

It is Detain me not A path is mine
To tread henceforth facing that doom, that sign
Of evil, planted by my sire and his
Avengers Sisters, for you twain it is
My prayer that God may bless the paths ye tread,
Grant me but that one grace when I am dead,
I shall not ask another Let me go,
And fare ye well, both

ANTIGONE

Woe for ever, woe!

POLYNICES

Weep not for me

ANTIGONE

Who could her weeping hide
When to stark death thou marchest open-eyed?

POLYNICES

I die when I needs must

ANTIGONE

Friend! For my sake . . .

1442-1458] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

POLYNICES

No more vain pleading!

ANTIGONE

Oh, my heart will break

If I lose thee!

POLYNICES

Thus or some other way,
Fate will decide But for you twain I pray
That God protect you from all ill, for ye
By all your deeds deserve not misery.

[Exit POLYNICES *Low thunder is heard far off*

CHORUS

New threatenings of wrath before us loom
From this man old and blind,
'Tis evil, fraught with doom,
Or doth perchance some heavenly purpose find
Its end here, some decree
Of God that without aim can never be?
For Time's eye watcheth, watcheth, to undo
The strong, and on the morrow to make new

Loud Thunder

O voice of Heaven! O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

O children, children! Haste Whom can ye send
For Theseus, in this need my truest friend?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1459-1476

ANTIGONE

Father, what is there thou wouldst have him do?

OEDIPUS

This winged thunder of Zeus will guide my way
Even now to Hades Send Make no delay

Thunder as before.

CHORUS

Ah 'tis the hand of God! It crashes there
Again, unspeakable

My head is stabbed with fear,

And all my spirit cowers beneath its spell,
Striking from sky to earth

What new thing from these signs shall come to birth?
I tremble Meaningless it cannot be
Such wrath, nor fall without calamity
O voice of Heaven! O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

Daughters, the fated end of life is come
Upon me I cannot fly nor turn therefrom

ANTIGONE

Thou know'st? Some sign is here that tells thee true?

OEDIPUS

Most sure I know it Send some messenger
With speed to lead the Lord of Athens here

More Thunder.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1500-1515]

THESEUS

Why this new clamour rising from you all?
I hear my people's voice, I hear the call
Of this my guest Say not some thunderstroke
Or storm of lashing hail from Zeus hath broke
Upon you—though no terror were amiss
When heaven is opened in such rage as this

OEDIPUS

O King, I pined for thee 'Tis thou indeed?
Praise God thou art with me in my hour of need!

THESEUS

What new need is upon thee, Laius' son?

OEDIPUS

My life's last hour I would not leave undone
What I have vowed to Athens, when I die

THESEUS

What signs are here of such calamity?

OEDIPUS

The gods are their own heralds They have told
Their tale, naught failing from their words of old

THESEUS

Old sufferer, how do they their doom reveal?

OEDIPUS

This never-ceasing thunder, peal on peal,
Doth speak their message, and yon levin brand
That lightens in the unconquerable hand [Thunder

1516-1537] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

THESEUS

Thou conquerest me These signs have proved thee true
And filled with power Tell me what thing to do

OEDIPUS

Theseus, for thee and thine I will unfold
A secret that shall live and grow not old
Myself first, with no aid of hand or eye,
Will lead thee to the place where I must die
Which place reveal thou never, nor the guise
It beareth, nor the region where it lies,
So shalt thou gain a stronger fence from harm
Than many a shield or many an allied arm
More things there be to tell thee, but no speech
May wake them yet, when thou and I shall reach
That place alone, with no man near us, then
'Tis thine to know them For no sons of men,
Not these, not mine own children, whom I love,
Shall ever from my lips hear word thereof
Guard them thyself alone And when thy share
Of life draws near its end, then to thine heir
Reveal the tale, and he to his, and so
For ever more Thus shall thy city go
Her ways unravaged by the Dragon's Brood
Else crowding round thee, though thy deeds be good,
Are cities that will lightly turn to wrong
For God is slow to smite yet sure and strong
His judgement upon them that go astray
From godliness and turn the madman's way.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1538-1559]

O Son of Aigeus, seek not thou to go
 That road But all this it was *thine* to know
 Long since And that which from the God is come
 Doth urge me Let us on to my dark home
 Nor scruple more Ye Daughters, to my side
 Come, both Henceforth I am become your guide,
 Whom once ye guided Come, but touch me not
 Myself alone will find that holy spot
 Where hid for ever I shall lie This way,
 So, come this way Soul-guiding Hermes goes
 Before and She whose name the Darkness knows
 O Lamp unlit, the only light of old
 To these wrecked eyes, for the last time thy hold
 Is on me Yea, it looseth as I go
 To hide my blindness and my wrongs below
 Where Hades dwells O friend, O helping hand,
 Blessed be thou, thy lieges and thy land,
 Remembering one here hidden, one who trod
 Through sin, through death, the path ordained of God.
 [*Exeunt* OEDIPUS, THESEUS and the SISTERS]

CHORUS

To the Bride whom none beholdeth,
 And to thee, Lord of the Dying,
 To the calm seats that enthrone you,
 To the dark where none hath known you,
 We uplift our adoration;
 Lo, I name thee, kneeling, crying,
 A i d ô n e u, A i d ô n e u !

Not in torment, we beseech thee,
 Not with noise of lamentation,
 May he stive to thee and reach thee,
 Through the fields that fear enfoldeth,
 Through the shadow-haunted City
 He hath borne enough of sorrow,
 God is just and shall have pity,
 Shall have mercy on the morrow
 , A ð ò n e u, A ð ò n e u !

There be noises of disaster,
 There be goddess-shapes infernal,
 And beyond the crowded portal—
 So men whisper and refrain not—
 Lo, a wild beast body lying
 And the voice of one that ravens,
 One that sleeps not, one immortal,
 Watching, gnarling, from his caverns

Still them, Thou that art their master,
 Thou, O Terrene, O Nocturnal !
 Let them slumber and complain not,
 Let them cease and leave this mortal
 Passage, where the gates are parted,
 Through the turmoil of the dying,
 Through the dreams of the departed,
 Home to Thee, O Sleep Eternal !

[Enter a MESSENGER

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1579-159]

MESSENGER

Athenians, in the briefest shape I may
I tell you Oedipus hath passed away.
But all his doings cannot in a few
Light words be told Not light they were to do

LEADER

How? Is he dead?

MESSENGER

Most surely from the sight
Of man he hath passed, and left the realms of light

LEADER

Some griefless stroke from heaven upon him fell?

MESSENGER

Thou hast said it 'Tis a wondrous tale to tell
How from this place he started, thou wilt know,
Who saw him, with no guide, no friend to show
The way, himself a leader to us all
So came he to that threshold mystical
Of Earth, deep-rooted by the Brazen Stair
Precipitous Many branching paths are there
He made his choice among them, till he stayed
Close by the basoned rock where Theseus laid
The inviolate memorial of his pledge
Sworn to Pirithous, near the bason's edge,

Midway between that Stone of Triple Plume,
 The hollow Pear-tree and the marble tomb
 There pausing he sat down and loosed withal
 His sordid raiment Then with a proud call
 He charged his daughters water from the spring
 To find, for cleansing and for offering
 Libation Swift to do their father's will,
 The maidens sped to where Dêmêtêr's Hill,
 Green with the goddess' gift, stood clear to view
 They brought the water, and with ritual due
 Prepared him, and the raiment of the grave
About him wrapped, then, when his heart could **crave**
 No more of service, and there rested naught
 Undone of the lustration that he sought,
 God's voice beneath us thundered At that sound
 The maidens sank to earth in tears, and wound
 Their arms about his knee and beat their breast
 He heard their sudden cry of grief, and pressed
 Both to his arms "My children, from this day
 You have no father All is passed away
 That once was mine or me, and all the sore
 Toils of my tendance shall be yours no more,
 Hard toils, I know well, yet one word there is
 That maketh light your heaviest services
 Love I have given you, such as none beside
 Could give But now alone ye shall abide
 And orphaned of that love through all your days "

So, clinging close and sobbing in amaze,
 All wept, but when the rite of tears was o'er,
 And that lamenting cry arose no more,

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1623-1657]

Deep silence fell, then on the silence brake
 A great voice calling All our hearts did shake
 With fear and our hair stiffened, for all round
 Like many divine voices, rose that sound
 "Ho Thou! Thou Oedipus! Why do we stay
 Our goings? All too long is thy delay"
 He heard, and, hearing, knew God's summons clear
 Straightway he called that Theseus be brought near,
 And when he came, "O friend," he cried, "in troth
 Give me thy right hand—man's most ancient oath—
 Clasp it, my daughters!—never to forsake
 These twain but act in all things for their sake
 As love will prompt" And he, as a true friend,
 Unshrinking, vowed in good faith to the end
 To observe his promise Once that deed was done,
 The father laid his groping hands upon
 His children's heads and spake "Be strong of heart,
 Daughters! From this place ye must now depart
 Seek not to see forbidden sights, or hear
 Words spoken that are not for mortal ear
 Go with all haste Theseus, alone with me,
 Hath right this secret thing to hear and see"

We all had heard his charge, and, with lament
 And tears, followed the maidens as they went
 At last, we turned again to look, and there,
 Long gazing, him we saw not anywhere,
 But Theseus standing all alone, his hand
 Across his face uplifted, to withstand
 The sight of some dread vision which no eye
 Of mortal might endure To Earth and Sky,

1653-1676] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

To Mother Earth and Sky the House of God,
We saw him, in one movement where he stood,
Make prayer

And what way Oedipus hath gone
From life none knoweth save Theseus alone
For sure there came no visible death, no sweep
Of fire from God, no storm-wind of the deep,
But or some guide was sent from heaven above,
Or, yawned the firmament of death, in love
And mercy, to receive him without pain
For not in mortal anguish was he ta'en,
Nor sickness nor lament, but in a dream
Of wonder for this tale if any deem
Me mad for such, I care not what they say

[Exit MESSENGER.]

LEADER

The daughters and their escort, where are they?
Not far, methinks Those voices that we hear
Lamenting show the maidens drawing near

[Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE.]

ANTIGONE

Misery, misery! What can remain for us, twain in
unhappiness, utterly naught?
Only to look on this curse that hath lain on us, born of
our father's blood, never forgot,
Long as he lived we have served him unrestingly
Now, at the last, what saw we, what suffered we?
An end too strange for thought

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1677-1696]

LEADER

What is that end?

ANTIGONE

We know not, only guess

LEADER

Gone is he?

ANTIGONE

Gone, methinks, in blessedness.
How say ye? He to whom there came
No stroke of war nor stormy seas,
But unseen regions without name
Rapt him to their great silences
For us, a darkness of the grave
Heavy upon our eyelid stays,
On what far land or tossing wave
Shall we two wander through our weary days?

! ISMENE

I know not, sister, I, forlorn!
I would that Hades' hand of fire
Would give me rest beside my wearied sire,
For that which cometh is not to be borne

LEADER

Bravest of daughters, sisters one in fame,
'Tis wisdom where life leadeth to be led
Stir not your hearts to flame;
Not without glory is the path ye tread

1697-1714] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

ANTIGONE

Even for sorrow the heart of mortality craveth in
 memory once it is past,
That which was sorely unsweet could be sweet to me,
 father and sorrow together held fast
Father, beloved one, thou that hast covered thee
Deep in the darkness, still reacheth our love to thee—
 Her love and mine shall last

LEADER

His end was

ANTIGONE

Even the end he hungered for

LEADER

What wise?

ANTIGONE

Upon a strange yet chosen shore,
For ever in a shaded sleep
 Below the realm of light he lies,
While those he left are left to weep
 Dost see, Father, my streaming eyes?
I know not how to crush, to lay
 In nothingness, such grief as mine,
 To die unknown, the wish was thine,
But must I give thee nothing on thy way?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1715-1727]

ISMENE

Alas, what fate abideth thee and me,
Sister? For ever fatherless are we

LEADER

Nay, sisters well-belovèd, since his life
In happy wise is now unyoked and free,
Cease from this mourning strife
Unsnared by sorrow can no mortal be

ANTIGONE

Now haste we back!

ISMENE

What haste have we?

ANTIGONE

Desire constrains me

ISMENE

What desire?

ANTIGONE

That dark and earthly home to see

ISMENE

Of whom?

ANTIGONE

Unhappy! Of our sire

1728-1737] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

ISMENE

Can that be lawful? Seest thou not ?

ANTIGONE

What should I see?

ISMENE

This too recall .

ANTIGONE

Thou chidest me?

ISMENE

He passed without
Or grave or rite, unseen of all.

ANTIGONE

Oh, take me where he died, and there
slay me!

ISMENE

Alas, with neither friend
Nor hope, in what land shall I bear
My life to its last end?

LEADER

Ah, fear not!

ANTIGONE

Whither shall I fly?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1738-1746]

LEADER

Your flights are ended

ANTIGONE

In what home?

LEADER

Here, where all grief shall pass you by

ANTIGONE

Nay, I have thoughts .

LEADER

Say where they roam.

ANTIGONE

Toward Thebes, our home, but how to go
I know not

LEADER

That road seek not thou!
'Tis troublous, all

ANTIGONE

'Twas alway so.

LEADER

Hopeless of old, more hopeless now

ⁿ₁₇₄₇₋₁₇₅₉] OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

A sea of storms is tossing there.

ANTIGONE

O Zeus, yet guide me to begone!

To what last hope, amid despair,

Doth some god urge me on? [Enter THESEUS

THESEUS

Weep not, my children Who would weep
When Unseen Powers to quick and dead
Alike a gracious end have sped
Stir not the anger of the deep

ANTIGONE

O Son of Aigeus, grant one thing . . .

THESEUS

My daughter, speak that one desire.

ANTIGONE

To see the tomb that holds our sire

THESEUS

It may not be.

ANTIGONE

How so, O King?

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS [1760-1779 ~

THESEUS

Your sire on me this charge has thrown,
No mortal shall approach that place,
Nor lift a voice that tomb to grace
Wherein he sleeps, unseen, unknown

Thus shall he keep my soil untrod
By foeman's feet, his charge was clear,
'Twas heard in Heaven it reached the ear
Of Faith, the all-seeing Child of God

ANTIGONE

If so our father wills, 'tis good
To ancient Thebes, then, let us speed,
We still may stem, in hour of need,
The torrent of our brethren's blood

THESEUS

That will I, and if aught avail
To aid or you or him, yet new
In his dark travel, him and you
I never shall betray nor fail

CHORUS

Let there be Peace, O ye that mourn! Give o'er
Your vain lament, whate'er hath been before,
This that is done shall stand for ever more

NOTES

OEDIPUS

THE PREVIOUS STORY

Laius, king of Thebes, had kidnapped the beautiful son of his benefactor, Pelops. For this Apollo decreed that he must have no son himself, if he had, it would kill him and commit incest upon its mother, Jocasta. A son was born, and his parents exposed it to die on Mt Kithairon, *but a Corinthian shepherd found it* and took it to Corinth, where it was named Oedipus and was reared as the son of the childless queen Merope and her husband Polybus. Hearing a taunt that he was no true son of Polybus, Oedipus inquired at Delphi, and the oracle, not answering his question, told him he was doomed to kill his father and wed his mother. Thinking this referred to Polybus and Merope, Oedipus fled away from Corinth. On his travel he was rudely struck and driven off the road by a stranger and in the ensuing fight killed him. The stranger was really Laius. Coming to Thebes Oedipus found the city in distress, ravaged by the riddling Sphinx. The king was lost, and Creon, as governor, offered the crown and the hand of Jocasta to any one who would deliver the city. Oedipus faced the Sphinx, guessed her riddle, and accepted the prize. Later the city was visited by a

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

plague, the Delphic oracle said this was because the murderer of Laius was in the city, unknown Oedipus vows to find him, and in an unshrinking search, even when he sees where it is leading, proves that the murderer is he himself Jocasta kills herself, Oedipus puts out his eyes, so that he may never in the next life see his parents' faces He begs to be cast out on the mountain to die as his parents had wished, but Creon refuses to do this till advice shall come from the oracle at Delphi Later, apparently, he was cast out and would have died, had he not been tended by his daughter Antigone His kingdom was divided between his sons, Eteocles and Polynices

P 17, l 16, Ground profane or.] A holy place would be more undisturbed than the open road but not necessarily forbidden ground The grove of the Eumenides was specially sacred and "untrodden"

P 20, l 42, Spirits of Mercy] The Eumnyes, or Furies, originally perhaps the spirits of the wronged dead calling for vengeance, were so formidable that they were generally known by some euphemistic name, *Semnai*, "The Venerable" or *Eumenides*, "Those of Good Will" But Oedipus has a special relation or kinship with them Like them he is ancient and sad and craves for justice, and the oracle has foretold that in their shrine he shall find peace

P 21, l 53 ff On these local sanctities see Introduction p 13

P 28, l 174 He is leaving sanctuary and will be at their mercy

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

P 33, l 245, Not blind] That is, "You and I can look into each other's eyes and thus meet in human sympathy"

P 34, l 274, They planned my death] The exposure of unwanted infants has been, throughout history, a common practice in times of distress. It is a frequent *ficelle* in Menander's plays. Here however it is treated as a cruel crime.

P 36 f The Ismene scene. See Introduction, p. 6

P 39, l 337 In Egypt men sitting at the loom. This is one of three passages in which Sophocles seems clearly to be borrowing from the book, or the public readings, of his friend Herodotus. See Hdt., II, 35. The others are *Electra* 62, compared with the return of Zalmoxis in Hdt., IV, 95, and *Antigone*, 905 ff., on the irreplaceableness of a brother, compared with Hdt., III, 119.

P 39, l 354, All oracles] Notice how much the helpless and wronged old man, having no prospect of ordinary human aid, pins his hopes upon signs and oracles.

P 40, l 375, Polynices is here the elder, Eteoclés gets rid of him, not by any honourable means, such as *oïdeal* by battle, but "by persuading the city." In Aeschylus' *Seven* and Euripides' *Phoemissae* Eteocles is the elder, but the two brothers, in order to avoid strife, have agreed to share the throne, reigning year and year about. Eteocles reigns first and refuses to resign at the end of the year.

P 42, l 406, Some Theban dust] Even outside

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Theban territory his body might have a casing of Theban earth wrapped round it, in that case he would, ritually, be buried in his native soil

P 44, ll 431-444 This somewhat awkward and elaborate argument is strictly in accord with the end of *Oedipus Rex*. Perhaps the extraordinarily moving prayer of Oedipus there, to be cast out to die on the mountains, could not be forgotten either by Sophocles or his audience. Otherwise it would have been much simpler to avoid the story of the change of mind (Cf 766 ff.)

P 46, l 470, With clean hands] It is true that Oedipus might make his hands ritually "clean" before entering the precinct, but it looks as if he rather shrank from the word and preferred that one of the daughters should go

P 48, l 486 The Merciful See on l 42

Pp 49-53, ll 510-550 Chorus One might have thought that the horror expressed by the Elders at their first hearing of the names of Laius and Oedipus was enough without this reinforcement of all the details of Oedipus's incest and parricide. Evidently Sophocles felt it necessary to emphasize strongly both the "untouchableness" of Oedipus and the heroic charity of Theseus. To an ancient audience Oedipus bore a twofold stain of kindred blood, having committed the greatest offence possible against both father and mother, and this produced a sentiment of religious horror which we cannot quite feel

P 54, l 562 This speech of Theseus is a typical

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expression of Greek *Sophrosynē*, or "moderation," the opposite of *Hubris*

P 55, l 576, My body a gift] See Introduction
p 10

P 58, l 620, Thebes in armed array] History, of course confirmed this prophecy Thebes was a constant enemy of Athens

Pp 62-64, ll 667-719 Chorus This lyric, I think, is meant to suggest a fairly long space of time during which Oedipus has stayed in untroubled peace at Colonus, and further to show what a peaceful and heaven-protected place of rest he has at last found

P 62, l 667 The Greek says merely "this well-horsed land", but I think the meaning of the word is religious or mystical, like all the references in this ode One of the great Attic legends tells of the contest between Athēna and Poseidon for the possession of Attica, as then rival gifts, Poseidon created the horse, Athēna the olive The story typifies, no doubt, the contest between the *Pediæis*, or the people of the plain, and the *Paraloi*, those of the sea (Cf 59, 713, 1072) The reference to the "young horses" as distinct from "the horses" is something to which we have no clue, the Olive is, of course, the sacred olive which the Persians burned but could not kill, when they destroyed the Acropolis in 480 B C

P 63, l 693, golden rein] Aphrodite had a golden chariot

P 63, l 704, orb'd on high] the orb of the sun was "Olive Zeus," the chief force that makes the olive grow.

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P 65, ll 728 ff Observe what a good case Creon makes for himself Even his later speech in 939 ff, after he has put himself obviously in the wrong by his acts, is dignified and effective

P 66, l 766, I prayed to be cast out] Cf on 431-444

P 67, l 799, Cf 870 Oedipus is in extreme misery, his curse on Creon emphasizes it, but at least he is not in the power of his enemies

P 73, l 860 By ordinary Greek law Creon, as Antigone's uncle, is her natural guardian, her father being an exile without rights But he has no right to kidnap her on Attic territory Over Oedipus he has no rights, at any rate now that Oedipus is accepted as an Athenian citizen. (l 637)

P 78, l 919 This extremely respectful language towards Thebes herself is interesting It suggests a political attitude. "The Thebans are quite good people, it is only the wicked anti-Athenian party in Thebes who make the trouble"

Pp 83-85, ll 1044-1095 Battles in Greek tragedy must always be "off stage" and are usually described in a Messenger's speech The finest example is the description of the Battle of Salamis in the *Persae* A lyric like this is hardly suitable for describing a battle, but can indicate the feelings and guesses of those who are left behind waiting for the result For a much deeper and more tragic form of the same effect compare the prayers and terrified exclamations of the besieged women in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (78-180)

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✓P 83, l 1047 Be it inland etc Cf l 900 The Theban guards might have started by either of two roads, one through the hills (by the pass of Daphne?), one by the Bay of Eleusis, where torch-light processions formed part of the Mysteries in worship of the Holy goddesses, Le the Mother and the Maid, Demeter and Korê The Eumolpid family had certain hereditary duties in Eleusinian worship, and the "key," or bar, of silence was of course incumbent on all the initiated

P 84, l 1072 Rhea's birth Poseidon was the son of Cronos and Rhea Observe that in Sophocles there is no conflict between Poseidon and Athena

P 88, l 1131, Stand there apart] The kiss of the untouchable would be too much, even after his acceptance as a citizen Theseus does stand far off

P 89, l 1156, not thy countryman] Polynices had no doubt lost his Theban citizenship, at any rate he had come from Argos

P 90, l 1172, with such dire meaning fall] That is "My last words, apparently harmless, seem to have branded the man as evil or hostile"

P 91, l 1177 The actual sound of Polynices' voice is pain to the blind man, as the voice of Creon was in l 863

Pp 92 f, ll 1211-1249 Lyric on Old Age Old age was like Love and Death, a conventional subject for gnomic poetry In Stobaeus's *Anthology* three successive chapters are "Praise of Age," "Dispraise of Age," "That Age can be borne well" The present ode expresses well the feeling of the Elders when faced

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with the misery and age of Oedipus, whose worst wish for Creon had been "an old age such as mine" (870) "Not to be born" is best for a man in the same sense in which "to have no history" is happiness for a nation, both are true if you count only "the crimes, follies, and disasters of mankind," leaving out the joys and achievements

P 95, l 1281 An incomplete line, or rather two words spoken *extra metrum*

P 96, ll 1284 ff It was a proud achievement for a homeless exile, like Polynices, to inspire such confidence that Adrastus was willing to give him his daughter's hand and the seven great chiefs to make common cause with him The list of the Seven is the same as in Aeschylus, in Euripides' *Phoenissae* the shadowy Eteoclus is omitted and Adrastus himself included

P 98, l 1360 "I do not weep, I curse my enemy" I conquer sorrow and nurse undying anger

P 99, l 1375, The curse before] After hearing Ismene's news (ll 421 ff, 451 ff)

P 99, l 1390 The lone Darkness from which we spring] The conception seems to be that the accursed race has sprung from some special Erebos of its own, which can now receive Polynices to its home apart from all human kind

P 100, l 1410 Polynices' prayer for due funeral rites turns one's mind at once to the *Antigone* Cf l 1442 "If I lose thee," which shows the same special love for Polynices as in the *Antigone*

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P 103, ll 1447 ff, "Evil, fraught with doom"] Oedipus is still a sinister figure, especially after his curse upon his son. A little later on (l 1483) he is still "a man of sin" the mere sight of whom may be fatal.

P 107, l 1519 Having heard the divine summons Oedipus is changed. It is like the change at l 84 where, as soon as the Stranger is gone, he turns in prayer to the Eumenides: terrible to others, to him they are kindred and friends. He has, of course, no thought of forgiving his enemies or withdrawing his curse; his curse is part of his supernatural power, but he has turned to greater things.

P 107, l 1534, Dragon brood] The teeth of the Dragon that Cadmus killed were sown as seeds, and from them sprang a harvest of armed men who fought till only five were left. From those five the true Thebans were descended.

P 108, l 1541, "That which from the god is come"] It is not defined further. It is an inward feeling or sense of command. Cf. the "guide" in l 1661.

P 108, l 1549 The "Lamp unlit" is of course the darkness that envelops the blind. Such darkness no longer affects him.

P 108 f, l 1556 ff This whole lyric has an echoing liturgical effect. The mysterious name "Aidôneus" is a Homeric form of "Hades". In drama it occurs only here and in the invocation of the ghost of Darius in the *Persae*, ll 649 ff. There too it is repeated twice. The infernal goddesses would perhaps be such as Persephone herself, Hecate, and certain avenging

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spirits The wailing recalls Cocytus, "the river of Wailing" The "wild beast body" and the ravening voice of course belong to the watch-dog of Hades, Cerberus

P 110 f, ll 1587 ff As the scholiast says, "These places are known to the natives"

The rock of triple plume] There was such a rock at Colônus (Schol on l 57), so "three-crested" may well be the right word here in place of the MS "Thorycian rock" Thorycus was a deme in the extreme south of Attica, far away from Colônus Observe that though these local details are given so exactly, evidently from local tradition, the site of the actual grave is known to none Perhaps Sophocles is combining two different traditions by making the place where Oedipus was translated different from the place where his body was ultimately laid Nothing is known of the pear tree or the marble tomb

P 110, l 1594, Pledge] It was in consequence of this pledge that Theseus, after vainly trying to dissuade Pirithous from his journey to Hades, was compelled to accompany him and to share his long imprisonment The whole language here is more suited to the time of Sophocles than to the lifetime of Theseus himself

P 113, l 1658, No visible death] There had been storm and lightning just before, but at this moment there was nothing to account for the disappearance of Oedipus It must have been some influence or "presence" from the Gods, or else perhaps the roof of Hades opened and the nether world received him

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P 116, l 1724, Can that be lawful?] Observe that Ismene is the wiser, Antigone is carried away by her feelings Cf l 1756

P 120, l 1769, Faith] The Greek Horkos, "oath," is in its original meaning a "fence" or "sanction" When you have given your word there is some Thing or Spirit that binds you or "fences" you in, it is a "watcher of oaths" See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, Appendix D

P, 120 l 1770, Thebes] They reach Thebes too late to stop the mutual slaying of the brothers, cf the opening of the *Antigone*



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