

AESCHYLUS

AGAMEMNON

Translated by Richmond Lattimore

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Translated by David Grene

SOPHOCLES

OEDIPUS THE KING

Translated by David Grene

ANTIGONE

Translated by David Grene

EURIPIDES

HIPPOLYTUS

Translated by David Grene

GREEK TRAGEDIES

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VOLUME

1

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don't say that Zeus has brought you to calamity
that you could not foresee: do not do this:
but blame yourselves: now you know what you're doing:
and with this knowledge neither suddenly
nor secretly your own want of good sense
has tangled you in the net of ruin, past
all hope of rescue.

Prometheus

Now it is words no longer: now in very truth
the earth is staggered: in its depths the thunder
bellows resoundingly, the fiery tendrils
of the lightning flash light up, and whirling clouds
carry the dust along: all the winds' blasts
dance in a fury one against the other
in violent confusion: earth and sea
are one, confused together: such is the storm
that comes against me manifestly from Zeus
to work its terrors. O Holy mother mine,
O Sky that circling brings the light to all,
you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly.

1080

1090

OEDIPUS THE KING

Translated by David Grene

INTRODUCTION

The date is unknown. Most scholars are inclined to place it about 427 B.C., after the great plague at Athens, which is thought to have suggested the plague at Thebes in the play. But there is no reliable evidence. We happen to be told that this play, on its first presentation, gained only the second prize.

Aeschylus had already composed a Theban trilogy, of which an *Oedipus* (lost) was the second play, and we may assume that the largest outlines of the story were familiar to all. Or at least so much: that it was predicted that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother; that, unwittingly, he did both; and that these offenses were discovered and made public. Concerning details, there were certainly variations. There were different stories about how and where Oedipus died; Euripides in his lost *Oedipus* had the hero blinded by the henchmen of Laius; the traditions about Antigone and Ismene are not fixed.

Still, in *Oedipus the King*, once the hero appears and announces his identity, the audience will know the great glaring facts about Oedipus and will realize almost at once that Oedipus does not know these facts. The situation makes for a story heavily charged with irony. The advance of the action consists of a probing into the past. Every "act" or episode brings in a new "helper"—Oedipus himself, Creon, Teiresias, Jocasta, Messenger, Herdsman—each of whom contributes his clue, until the whole secret is out. A fresh dimension of irony lies in the fact that the ghastly tragedy is mounted on the frame of a happy romance—the lost baby miraculously saved, thought dead but restored and *united with his parents*. The search for the murderer of Laius and the identity of Oedipus come out at the same point. The discovery is the climax.

It would be difficult to interpret *Oedipus the King* as a story of the punishment of pride. The deeds for which the hero would be "punished" were preordained before he was even conceived. But it is true that the endowments which make him grand—his impulsive intellect, his passion for truth, his great physical strength, his in-

tegrity, and his pride—are all necessarily used to work out the pattern of his fate down to its final fulfilment in the realization of what that fate has been.

Even among the plays of Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* stands out for its poetry, the sinewy, intense composition of the spoken passages, and the wild splendor of the choral odes.

CHARACTERS

Oedipus, King of Thebes
Jocasta, His Wife
Creon, His Brother-in-Law
Teiresias, an Old Blind Prophet
A Priest
First Messenger
Second Messenger
A Herdsman
A Chorus of Old Men of Thebes

OEDIPUS THE KING

SCENE: *In front of the palace of Oedipus at Thebes. To the right of the stage near the altar stands the Priest with a crowd of children. Oedipus emerges from the central door.*

Oedipus

Children, young sons and daughters of old Cadmus,
why do you sit here with your suppliant crowns?
The town is heavy with a mingled burden
of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and incense;
I did not think it fit that I should hear
of this from messengers but came myself,—
I Oedipus whom all men call the Great.

5

(He turns to the Priest.)

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

10

Priest

O ruler of my country, Oedipus,
you see our company around the altar;
you see our ages; some of us, like these,
who cannot yet fly far, and some of us
heavy with age; these children are the chosen
among the young, and I the priest of Zeus.
Within the market place sit others crowned
with suppliant garlands, at the double shrine
of Pallas and the temple where Ismenus
gives oracles by fire. King, you yourself
have seen our city reeling like a wreck
already; it can scarcely lift its prow
out of the depths, out of the bloody surf.

15

20

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

Plague
on the
land

If you will rule this land, as now you rule it,
 better to rule it full of men than empty. 55
 For neither tower nor ship is anything
 when empty, and none live in it together.

Oedipus

I pity you, children. You have come full of longing,
 but I have known the story before you told it
 only too well. I know you are all sick,
 yet there is not one of you, sick though you are,
 that is as sick as I myself. 60

Your several sorrows each have single scope
 and touch but one of you. My spirit groans
 for city and myself and you at once.
 You have not roused me like a man from sleep;
 65 know that I have given many tears to this,
 gone many ways wandering in thought,
 but as I thought I found only one remedy
 and that I took. I sent Menoeceus' son

Creon, Jocasta's brother, to Apollo,
to his Pythian temple,
 that he might learn there by what act or word
 I could save this city. As I count the days,
 it vexes me what ails him; he is gone
 far longer than he needed for the journey. 75
 But when he comes, then, may I prove a villain,
 if I shall not do all the God commands.

Find out what
cause the plague

Priest

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

Oedipus

His face is bright. O holy Lord Apollo, 80
 grant that his news too may be bright for us
 and bring us safety.

Priest

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

Oedipus

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

85

(Creon enters.)

Creon

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

Oedipus

What do you mean?
What you have said so far
leaves me uncertain whether to trust or fear.

90

Creon

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

Oedipus

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

Creon

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

95

What must
be done
to heal
the land

Oedipus

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

Creon

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

blood guilt

100

Oedipus

Who is this man whose fate the God pronounces?

Creon

My Lord, before you piloted the state
we had a king called Laius.

Oedipus

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

105

Creon

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

Oedipus

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

Creon

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

110

Oedipus

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

Creon

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

115

Oedipus

Was there no messenger, no fellow traveller
who knew what happened? Such a one might tell
something of use.

Creon

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

Oedipus

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

120

Creon

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

Oedipus

How could a robber dare a deed like this were he not helped with money from the city, money and treachery?

125

Creon

That indeed was thought.

But Laius was dead and in our trouble there was none to help.

Oedipus

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

Creon

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

130

Oedipus

I will bring this to light again, King Phoebus fittingly took this care about the dead, and you too fittingly.

And justly you will see in me an ally, a champion of my country and the God. For when I drive pollution from the land

135

light of Apollo
light is important

« 116 »

I will not serve a distant friend's advantage, but act in my own interest. Whoever he was that killed the king may readily wish to dispatch me with his murderous hand; so helping the dead king I help myself. *Dramatic Irony* 140

Come, children, take your suppliant boughs and go; up from the altars now. Call the assembly and let it meet upon the understanding that I'll do everything. God will decide whether we prosper or remain in sorrow.

145

Priest

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

150

(Exeunt all but the Chorus.)

Chorus

Strophe

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

that has come to glorious Thebes?

I am stretched on the rack of doubt, and terror and trembling hold

my heart, O Delian Healer, and I worship full of fears

for what doom you will bring to pass, new or renewed in the revolving years.

155

Speak to me, immortal voice, child of golden Hope.

Antistrophe

First I call on you, Athene, deathless daughter of Zeus, and Artemis, Earth Upholder,

160

who sits in the midst of the market place in the throne which men call Fame,

and Phoebus, the Far Shooter, three averters of Fate,

« 117 »

come to us now, if ever before, when ruin rushed upon the state, 165
you drove destruction's flame away
out of our land.

Strophe

Our sorrows defy number;
all the ship's timbers are rotten;
taking of thought is no spear for the driving away of the plague. 170
There are no growing children in this famous land;
there are no women bearing the pangs of childbirth.
You may see them one with another, like birds swift on the
wing, 175
quicker than fire unmastered,
speeding away to the coast of the Western God.

Antistrophe

In the unnumbered deaths
of its people the city dies;
those children that are born lie dead on the naked earth
unpitied, spreading contagion of death; and grey haired mothers
and wives
everywhere stand at the altar's edge, suppliant, moaning; 182-85
the hymn to the healing God rings out but with it the wailing
voices are blended.
From these our sufferings grant us, O golden Daughter of Zeus,
glad-faced deliverance.

Strophe

There is no clash of brazen shields but our fight is with the War
God,
a War God ringed with the cries of men, a savage God who burns 191
us;
grant that he turn in racing course backwards out of our coun-
try's bounds
to the great palace of Amphitrite or where the waves of the 195
Thracian sea
deny the stranger safe anchorage.
Whatsoever escapes the night

at last the light of day revisits;
so smite the War God, Father Zeus,
beneath your thunderbolt,
for you are the Lord of the lightning, the lightning that
carries fire. 200

Antistrophe

And your unconquered arrow shafts, winged by the golden
corded bow,
Lycean King, I beg to be at our side for help; 205
and the gleaming torches of Artemis with which she scours the
Lycean hills,
and I call on the God with the turban of gold, who gave his name
to this country of ours, 210
the Bacchic God with the wind flushed face,
Evian One, who travel
with the Maenad company,
combat the God that burns us
with your torch of pine;
for the God that is our enemy is a God unhonoured among the 215
Gods.

(*Oedipus returns.*)

Oedipus

For what you ask me—if you will hear my words,
and hearing welcome them and fight the plague,
you will find strength and lightening of your load.

Hark to me; what I say to you, I say
as one that is a stranger to the story
as stranger to the deed. For I would not
be far upon the track if I alone
were tracing it without a clue. But now,
since after all was finished, I became
a citizen among you, citizens—
now I proclaim to all the men of Thebes:
who so among you knows the murderer
by whose hand Laius, son of Labdacus,

*the track of
his own story
search for
identity*

225

died—I command him to tell everything to me,—yes, though he fears himself to take the blame on his own head; for bitter punishment he shall have none, but leave this land unharmed.

Or if he knows the murderer, another, a foreigner, still let him speak the truth.

For I will pay him and be grateful, too.

But if you shall keep silence, if perhaps some one of you, to shield a guilty friend, or for his own sake shall reject my words—hear what I shall do then:

I forbid that man, whoever he be, my land, my land where I hold sovereignty and throne; and I forbid any to welcome him

or cry him greeting or make him a sharer in sacrifice or offering to the Gods, or give him water for his hands to wash.

I command all to drive him from their homes, since he is our pollution, as the oracle of Pytho's God proclaimed him now to me.

So I stand forth a champion of the God and of the man who died.

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

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

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

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

230

235

240

245

250

255

Since I am now the holder of his office, and have his bed and wife that once was his, and had his line not been unfortunate

260

we would have common children—(fortune leaped upon his head)—because of all these things,

I fight in his defence as for my father, and I shall try all means to take the murderer of Laius the son of Labdacus

265

the son of Polydorus and before him of Cadmus and before him of Agenor.

Those who do not obey me, may the Gods grant no crops springing from the ground they plough nor children to their women! May a fate like this, or one still worse than this consume them!

270

For you whom these words please, the other Thebans, may Justice as your ally and all the Gods live with you, blessing you now and for ever!

275

Chorus

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

Oedipus

Right; but to put compulsion on the Gods against their will—no man can do that.

280

Chorus

May I then say what I think second best?

Oedipus

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

Chorus

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

*light & seeing
darkness
not seeing
ignorance*

285

Oedipus

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

Chorus

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

290

Oedipus

What is it?
I look at every story.

Chorus

It was said
that he was killed by certain wayfarers.

Oedipus

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

Chorus

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

295

Oedipus

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

Chorus

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

(Enter Teiresias, led by a little boy.)

Oedipus

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

300

in you alone one that can rescue us.

Perhaps you have not heard the messengers,
but Phoebus sent in answer to our sending
an oracle declaring that our freedom
from this disease would only come when we
should learn the names of those who killed King Laius,
and kill them or expel from our country.

305

Do not begrudge us oracles from birds,
or any other way of prophecy
within your skill; save yourself and the city,
save me; redeem the debt of our pollution
that lies on us because of this dead man.

310

We are in your hands; pains are most nobly taken
to help another when you have means and power.

315

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

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

320

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

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

325

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

What do you mean?

You know of something but refuse to speak.
Would you betray us and destroy the city?

330

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

You would provoke a stone! Tell us, you villain,
tell us, and do not stand there quietly
unmoved and balking at the issue.

335

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

Who would not feel his temper rise
at words like these with which you shame our city?

340

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

Since they will come
tell them to me.

Teiresias

I will say nothing further.

Against this answer let your temper rage
as wildly as you will.

Oedipus

Indeed I am

345

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

Teiresias

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

350

Oedipus

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

355

Teiresias

I have.

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

Oedipus

And who has taught you truth?

Not your profession surely!

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

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

360

Oedipus

I did not grasp it,
not so to call it known. Say it again.

Teiresias

I say you are the murderer of the king
whose murderer you seek.

Oedipus

Not twice you shall
say calumnies like this and stay unpunished.

Teiresias

Shall I say more to tempt your anger more?

Oedipus

As much as you desire; it will be said
in vain.

365

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

Yes, if the truth has anything of strength.

Oedipus

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

370

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

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

375

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

Was this your own design
or Creon's?

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

Wealth, sovereignty and skill outmatching skill
for the contrivance of an envied life!

380

Great store of jealousy fill your treasury chests,
if my friend Creon, friend from the first and loyal,

385

thus secretly attacks me, secretly

desires to drive me out and secretly

suborns this juggling, trick devising quack,

this wily beggar who has only eyes

for his own gains, but blindness in his skill.

For, tell me, where have you seen clear, Teiresias,

390

with your prophetic eyes? When the dark singer,

the sphinx, was in your country, did you speak

word of deliverance to its citizens?

And yet the riddle's answer was not the province

of a chance comer. It was a prophet's task

and plainly you had no such gift of prophecy

395

from birds nor otherwise from any God

to glean a word of knowledge. But I came,

Oedipus, who knew nothing, and I stopped her.

I solved the riddle by my wit alone.

Mine was no knowledge got from birds. And now

you would expel me,

because you think that you will find a place

400

by Creon's throne. I think you will be sorry,

both you and your accomplice, for your plot
to drive me out. And did I not regard you
as an old man, some suffering would have taught you
that what was in your heart was treason.

Chorus

We look at this man's words and yours, my king,
and we find both have spoken them in anger. 405
We need no angry words but only thought
how we may best hit the God's meaning for us.

Teiresias

If you are king, at least I have the right
no less to speak in my defence against you.
Of that much I am master. I am no slave 410
of yours, but Loxias', and so I shall not
enroll myself with Creon for my patron.
Since you have taunted me with being blind,
here is my word for you.

You have your eyes but see not where you are
in sin, nor where you live, nor whom you live with.
Do you know who your parents are? Unknowing
you are an enemy to kith and kin
in death, beneath the earth, and in this life. 415

A deadly footed, double striking curse,
from father and mother both, shall drive you forth
out of this land, with darkness on your eyes,
that now have such straight vision. Shall there be
a place will not be harbour to your cries, 420
a corner of Cithaeron will not ring
in echo to your cries, soon, soon,—
when you shall learn the secret of your marriage,
which steered you to a haven in this house,—
haven no haven, after lucky voyage?
And of the multitude of other evils
establishing a grim equality
between you and your children, you know nothing. 425

So, muddy with contempt my words and Creon's!
Misery shall grind no man as it will you.

Oedipus

Is it endurable that I should hear
such words from him? Go and a curse go with you!
Quick, home with you! Out of my house at once! 430

Teiresias

I would not have come either had you not called me.

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

I am a fool then, as it seems to you—
but to the parents who have bred you, wise. 435

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

This day will show your birth and will destroy you.

Oedipus

How needlessly your riddles darken everything.

Teiresias

But it's in riddle answering you are strongest. 440

Oedipus

Yes. Taunt me where you will find me great.

Teiresias

It is this very luck that has destroyed you.

Oedipus

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

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

Yes, lead him off. So long as you are here, 445

you'll be a stumbling block and a vexation;
once gone, you will not trouble me again.

Teiresias

I have said
what I came here to say not fearing your
countenance: there is no way you can hurt me.
I tell you, king, this man, this murderer
(whom you have long declared you are in search of,
indicting him in threatening proclamation
as murderer of Laius)—he is here.

450

In name he is a stranger among citizens
but soon he will be shown to be a citizen
true native Theban, and he'll have no joy
of the discovery: blindness for sight
and beggary for riches his exchange,
he shall go journeying to a foreign country
tapping his way before him with a stick.
He shall be proved father and brother both
to his own children in his house; to her
that gave him birth, a son and husband both;
a fellow sower in his father's bed
with that same father that he murdered.

455

Go within, reckon that out, and if you find me
mistaken, say I have no skill in prophecy.

460

(Exeunt separately Teiresias and Oedipus.)

Chorus

Strophe

Who is the man proclaimed
by Delphi's prophetic rock
as the bloody handed murderer,
the doer of deeds that none dare name?

465

Now is the time for him to run
with a stronger foot
than Pegasus
for the child of Zeus leaps in arms upon him
with fire and the lightning bolt,

470

and terribly close on his heels
are the Fates that never miss.

Antistrophe

Lately from snowy Parnassus
clearly the voice flashed forth,
bidding each Theban track him down,
the unknown murderer.

475

In the savage forests he lurks and in
the caverns like
the mountain bull.

He is sad and lonely, and lonely his feet
that carry him far from the navel of earth;
but its prophecies, ever living,
flutter around his head.

480

Strophe

The augur has spread confusion,
terrible confusion;

I do not approve what was said
nor can I deny it.

485

I do not know what to say;
I am in a flutter of foreboding;
I never heard in the present
nor past of a quarrel between
the sons of Labdacus and Polybus,
that I might bring as proof
in attacking the popular fame
of Oedipus, seeking
to take vengeance for undiscovered
death in the line of Labdacus.

490

495

Antistrophe

Truly Zeus and Apollo are wise
and in human things all knowing;
but amongst men there is no
distinct judgment, between the prophet
and me—which of us is right.

500

One man may pass another in wisdom
 but I would never agree
 with those that find fault with the king
 till I should see the word
 proved right beyond doubt. For once
 in visible form the Sphinx
 came on him and all of us
 saw his wisdom and in that test
 he saved the city. So he will not be condemned by my mind. 512

(Enter Creon.)

Creon

Citizens, I have come because I heard
 deadly words spread about me, that the king
 accuses me. I cannot take that from him.
 If he believes that in these present troubles 515
 he has been wronged by me in word or deed
 I do not want to live on with the burden
 of such a scandal on me. The report 520
 injures me doubly and most vitally—
 for I'll be called a traitor to my city
 and traitor also to my friends and you.

Chorus

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

Creon

But did he say that it was in compliance 525
 with schemes of mine that the seer told him lies?

Chorus

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

Creon

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

Chorus

I do not know; I have no eyes to see 530
 what princes do. Here comes the king himself.

(Enter Oedipus.)

Oedipus

You, sir, how is it you come here? Have you so much
 brazen-faced daring that you venture in
 my house although you are proved manifestly
 the murderer of that man, and though you tried,
 openly, highway robbery of my crown? 535
 For God's sake, tell me what you saw in me,
 what cowardice or what stupidity,
 that made you lay a plot like this against me?
 Did you imagine I should not observe
 the crafty scheme that stole upon me or
 seeing it, take no means to counter it? 540
 Was it not stupid of you to make the attempt,
 to try to hunt down royal power without
 the people at your back or friends? For only
 with the people at your back or money can
 the hunt end in the capture of a crown.

Creon

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

Oedipus

You're quick to speak, but I am slow to grasp you, 545
 for I have found you dangerous,—and my foe.

Creon

First of all hear what I shall say to that.

Oedipus

At least don't tell me that you are not guilty.

Creon

If you think obstinacy without wisdom
 a valuable possession, you are wrong. 550

Oedipus

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

Creon
This is but just—
but tell me, then, of what offense I'm guilty?

Oedipus
Did you or did you not urge me to send
to this prophetic mumbler? 555

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

Oedipus
How long ago is it since Laius. . . .

Creon
What about Laius? I don't understand.

Oedipus
Vanished—died—was murdered? 560

Creon
It is long,
a long, long time to reckon.

Oedipus
Was this prophet
in the profession then?

Creon
He was, and honoured
as highly as he is today.

Oedipus
At that time did he say a word about me?

Creon
Never, at least when I was near him. 565

Oedipus
You never made a search for the dead man?

Creon
We searched, indeed, but never learned of anything.

Oedipus
Why did our wise old friend not say this then?

Creon
I don't know; and when I know nothing, I
usually hold my tongue. *Oedipus is Moderate*

Oedipus
You know this much, 570
and can declare this much if you are loyal.

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

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

Creon
You know yourself
whether he said this, but I demand that I
should hear as much from you as you from me. 575

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

Creon
Well, then. You're married to my sister.

Oedipus
Yes,
that I am not disposed to deny.

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

Oedipus
Yes, everything she wants 580
she has from me.

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

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

Creon

Not if you will reflect on it as I do.
 Consider, first, if you think any one
 would choose to rule and fear rather than rule 585
 and sleep untroubled by a fear if power
 were equal in both cases. I, at least,
I was not born with such a frantic yearning
to be a king—but to do what kings do.
 And so it is with every one who has learned
 wisdom and self-control. As it stands now,
 the prizes are all mine—and without fear. 590
 But if I were the king myself, I must
 do much that went against the grain.
 How should despotic rule seem sweeter to me
 than painless power and an assured authority?
 I am not so besotted yet that I
 want other honours than those that come with profit. 595
 Now every man's my pleasure; every man greets me;
 now those who are your suitors fawn on me,—
 success for them depends upon my favour.
 Why should I let all this go to win that?
 My mind would not be traitor if it's wise; 600
 I am no treason lover, of my nature,
 nor would I ever dare to join a plot.
 Prove what I say. Go to the oracle
 at Pytho and inquire about the answers,
 if they are as I told you. For the rest, 605
 if you discover I laid any plot
 together with the seer—kill me, I say,
 not only by your vote but by my own.
 But do not charge me on obscure opinion
 without some proof to back it. It's not just
 lightly to count your knaves as honest men,
 nor honest men as knaves. To throw away 610
 an honest friend is, as it were, to throw
 your life away, which a man loves the best.

In time you will know all with certainty;
 time is the only test of honest men,
 one day is space enough to know a rogue.

Chorus

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

Oedipus

When he that plots against me secretly
 moves quickly, I must quickly counterplot. 620
 If I wait taking no decisive measure
 his business will be done, and mine be spoiled.

Creon

What do you want to do then? Banish me?

Oedipus

No, certainly; kill you, not banish you.¹

Creon

I do not think that you've your wits about you. 626

Oedipus

For my own interests, yes.

Creon

But for mine, too,
 you should think equally.

Oedipus

You are a rogue.

Creon

Suppose you do not understand?

Oedipus

But yet
 I must be ruler.

1. Two lines omitted here owing to the confusion in the dialogue consequent on the loss of a third line. The lines as they stand in Jebb's edition (1902) are:

Oed.: That you may show what manner of thing is envy.

Creon: You speak as one that will not yield or trust.

[*Oed.* lost line.]

Creon
Not if you rule badly.

Oedipus
O, city, city!

Creon
I too have some share 630
in the city; it is not yours alone.

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

(Enter Jocasta.)

Jocasta
For shame! Why have you raised this foolish squabbling 635
brawl? Are you not ashamed to air your private
griefs when the country's sick? Go in, you, Oedipus,
and you, too, Creon, into the house. Don't magnify
your nothing troubles.

Creon
Sister, Oedipus,
your husband, thinks he has the right to do 640
terrible wrongs—he has but to choose between
two terrors: banishing or killing me.

Oedipus
He's right, Jocasta; for I find him plotting
with knavish tricks against my person.

Creon
That God may never bless me! May I die
accursed, if I have been guilty of 645
one tittle of the charge you bring against me!

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

Chorus
Be gracious, be merciful, 649
we beg of you.

Oedipus
In what would you have me yield?

Chorus
He has been no silly child in the past.
He is strong in his oath now.
Spare him.

Oedipus
Do you know what you ask?

Chorus
Yes.

Oedipus
Tell me then.

Chorus
He has been your friend before all men's eyes; do not cast him 656
away dishonoured on an obscure conjecture.

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

Chorus
May the Sun God, king of Gods, forbid! May I die without God's 660
blessing, without friends' help, if I had any such thought. But my
spirit is broken by my unhappiness for my wasting country; and 665
this would but add troubles amongst ourselves to the other
troubles.

Oedipus
Well, let him go then—if I must die ten times for it, 669
or be sent out dishonoured into exile.
It is your lips that prayed for him I pitied,
not his; wherever he is, I shall hate him.

Creon
I see you sulk in yielding and you're dangerous
when you are out of temper; natures like yours
are justly heaviest for themselves to bear. 675

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

Creon
I'll go, you have not known me, but they have,
and they have known my innocence. (Exit.)

Chorus
Won't you take him inside, lady?

Jocasta
Yes, when I've found out what was the matter. 680

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

Jocasta
So, on both sides?

Chorus
Yes.

Jocasta
What was the story?

Chorus
I think it best, in the interests of the country, to leave it where
it ended. 685

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

Chorus
Sir, I have said before and I say again—be sure that I would have
been proved a madman, bankrupt in sane council, if I should put
you away, you who steered the country I love safely when she 689

was crazed with troubles. God grant that now, too, you may
prove a fortunate guide for us. 695

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

Oedipus
Yes, I will tell you. 700
I honour you more than I honour them.
It was Creon and the plots he laid against me.

Jocasta
Tell me—if you can clearly tell the quarrel—

Oedipus
Creon says
that I'm the murderer of Laius.

Jocasta
Of his own knowledge or on information?

Oedipus
He sent this rascal prophet to me, since
he keeps his own mouth clean of any guilt. 705

Jocasta
Do not concern yourself about this matter;
listen to me and learn that human beings
have no part in the craft of prophecy.
Of that I'll show you a short proof. 710
There was an oracle once that came to Laius,—
I will not say that it was Phoebus' own,
but it was from his servants—and it told him
that it was fate that he should die a victim
at the hands of his own son, a son to be born
of Laius and me. But, see now, he,
the king, was killed by foreign highway robbers
at a place where three roads meet—so goes the story;
and for the son—before three days were out
after his birth King Laius pierced his ankles 715

and by the hands of others cast him forth
upon a pathless hillside. So Apollo
failed to fulfill his oracle to the son,
that he should kill his father, and to Laius
also proved false in that the thing he feared,
death at his son's hands, never came to pass.
So clear in this case were the oracles,
so clear and false. Give them no heed, I say;
what God discovers need of, easily
he shows to us himself.

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

How long ago is this?

Jocasta

The news came to the city just before

you became king and all men's eyes looked to you.
What is it, Oedipus, that's in your mind?

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

What is the thought that troubles your heart?

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

O God, I think I have
called curses on myself in ignorance.

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

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

755

Jocasta

The only servant that escaped safe home.

Oedipus

Is he at home now?

Jocasta

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

760

Oedipus

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

765

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

770

Oedipus

It shall not be kept from you, since my mind
has gone so far with its forebodings. Whom
should I confide in rather than you, who is there
of more importance to me who have passed
through such a fortune?

Polybus was my father, king of Corinth,
and Merope, the Dorian, my mother.

775

I was held greatest of the citizens
in Corinth till a curious chance befell me
as I shall tell you—curious, indeed,
but hardly worth the store I set upon it.
There was a dinner and at it a man,
a drunken man, accused me in his drink
of being bastard. I was furious
but held my temper under for that day.

780

Next day I went and taxed my parents with it;
they took the insult very ill from him,
the drunken fellow who had uttered it.
So I was comforted for their part, but
still this thing rankled always, for the story
crept about widely. And I went at last
to Pytho, though my parents did not know.

785

But Phoebus sent me home again unhonoured
in what I came to learn, but he foretold
other and desperate horrors to befall me,
that I was fated to lie with my mother,
and show to daylight an accursed breed
which men would not endure, and I was doomed
to be murderer of the father that begot me.

790

When I heard this I fled, and in the days
that followed I would measure from the stars
the whereabouts of Corinth—yes, I fled
to somewhere where I should not see fulfilled
the infamies told in that dreadful oracle.

795

And as I journeyed I came to the place
where, as you say, this king met with his death.
Jocasta, I will tell you the whole truth.

800

When I was near the branching of the crossroads,
going on foot, I was encountered by
a herald and a carriage with a man in it,
just as you tell me. He that led the way

and the old man himself wanted to thrust me
 out of the road by force. I became angry
 and struck the coachman who was pushing me.
 When the old man saw this he watched his moment,
 and as I passed he struck me from his carriage,
 full on the head with his two pointed goad.
 But he was paid in full and presently
 my stick had struck him backwards from the car
 and he rolled out of it. And then I killed them
 all. If it happened there was any tie
 of kinship twixt this man and Laius,
 who is then now more miserable than I,
 what man on earth so hated by the Gods,
 since neither citizen nor foreigner
 may welcome me at home or even greet me,
 but drive me out of doors? And it is I,
 I and no other have so cursed myself.
 And I pollute the bed of him I killed
 by the hands that killed him. Was I not born evil?
 Am I not utterly unclean? I had to fly
 and in my banishment not even see
 my kindred nor set foot in my own country,
 or otherwise my fate was to be yoked
 in marriage with my mother and kill my father,
 Polybus who begot me and had reared me.
 Would not one rightly judge and say that on me
 these things were sent by some malignant God?
 O no, no, no—O holy majesty
 of God on high, may I not see that day!
 May I be gone out of men's sight before
 I see the deadly taint of this disaster
 come upon me.

Chorus

Sir, we too fear these things. But until you see this man face to
 face and hear his story, hope.

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

I'll tell you; if I find that his story is the same as yours, I at least
 will be clear of this guilt.

Jocasta

Why what so particularly did you learn from my story?

Oedipus

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

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

Right. But yet, send some one for the peasant to bring him here;
 do not neglect it.

Jocasta

I will send quickly. Now let me go indoors. I will do nothing
 except what pleases you.

(Exeunt.)

Chorus

Strophe
 May destiny ever find me

pious in word and deed 865
prescribed by the laws that live on high:
laws begotten in the clear air of heaven,
whose only father is Olympus;
no mortal nature brought them to birth,
no forgetfulness shall lull them to sleep; 870
for God is great in them and grows not old.

Antistrophe

Insolence breeds the tyrant, insolence 875
if it is glutted with a surfeit, unseasonable, unprofitable,
climbs to the roof-top and plunges
sheer down to the ruin that must be,
and there its feet are no service.
But I pray that the God may never
abolish the eager ambition that profits the state. 880
For I shall never cease to hold the God as our protector.

those who
want to
be like
gods
will suffer
a fall

Strophe

If a man walks with haughtiness
of hand or word and gives no heed
to justice and the shrines of Gods
despises—may an evil doom
smite him for his ill-starred pride of heart!—
if he reaps gains without justice
and will not hold from impiety
and his fingers itch for untouchable things. 890
When such things are done, what man shall contrive
to shield his soul from the shafts of the God?
When such deeds are held in honour,
why should I honour the Gods in the dance? 895

without
people like
Oedipus
with ambition
will wonder
the people
be

Antistrophe

No longer to the holy place,
to the navel of earth I'll go
to worship, nor to Abae
nor to Olympia, 900
unless the oracles are proved to fit,
for all men's hands to point at.

O Zeus, if you are rightly called
the sovereign lord, all-mastering,
let this not escape you nor your ever-living power! 905
The oracles concerning Laius
are old and dim and men regard them not.
Apollo is nowhere clear in honour; God's service perishes. 910

(Enter Jocasta, carrying garlands.)

Jocasta

Princes of the land, I have had the thought to go
to the Gods' temples, bringing in my hand
garlands and gifts of incense, as you see.
For Oedipus excites himself too much
at every sort of trouble, not conjecturing, 915
like a man of sense, what will be from what was,
but he is always at the speaker's mercy,
when he speaks terrors. I can do no good
by my advice, and so I came as suppliant
to you, Lycaean Apollo, who are nearest.
These are the symbols of my prayer and this 920
my prayer: grant us escape free of the curse.
Now when we look to him we are all afraid;
he's pilot of our ship and he is frightened.

(Enter Messenger.)

Messenger

Might I learn from you, sirs, where is the house of Oedipus? Or 925
best of all, if you know, where is the king himself?

Chorus

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

Messenger

God bless you, lady, and God bless your household! God bless 930
Oedipus' noble wife!

Jocasta

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

Messenger

Good news, lady. Good for your house and for your husband.

Jocasta

What is your news? Who sent you to us?

935

Messenger

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

Jocasta

What is this news of double meaning?

Messenger

The people of the Isthmus will choose Oedipus to be their king.
That is the rumour there.

940

Jocasta

But isn't their king still old Polybus?

Messenger

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

Jocasta

Is that the truth? Is Oedipus' father dead?

Messenger

May I die myself if it be otherwise!

Jocasta (to a servant)

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

945

(Enter Oedipus.)

Oedipus

Dearest Jocasta, why have you sent for me?

950

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

Who is he? What is his message for me?

Jocasta

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

955

Oedipus

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

Messenger

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

Oedipus

By treachery or sickness?

960

Messenger

A small thing will put old bodies asleep.

Oedipus

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

Messenger

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

Oedipus

Ha! Ha! O dear Jocasta, why should one
look to the Pythian hearth? Why should one look
to the birds screaming overhead? They prophesied
that I should kill my father! But he's dead,
and hidden deep in earth, and I stand here
who never laid a hand on spear against him,—
unless perhaps he died of longing for me,
and thus I am his murderer. But they,
the oracles, as they stand—he's taken them
away with him, they're dead as he himself is,
and worthless.

*Also lay his
C. Polybus' death.*

965

970

Jocasta

That I told you before now.

Oedipus

You did, but I was misled by my fear.

Jocasta

Then lay no more of them to heart, not one

975

Oedipus

But surely I must fear my mother's bed?

Jocasta

Why should man fear since chance is all in all for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing?

Best to live lightly, as one can, unthinkingly.

As to your mother's marriage bed,—don't fear it.

Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles, many a man has lain with his own mother.

But he to whom such things are nothing bears his life most easily.

extreme view
Blind CHANCES
IS EVERYTHING
Life IS
Chaos.

980

Oedipus

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

985

Jocasta

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

Oedipus

Great light of comfort; but I fear the living.

Messenger

Who is the woman that makes you afraid?

Oedipus

Merope, old man, Polybus' wife.

990

Messenger

What about her frightens the queen and you?

Oedipus

A terrible oracle, stranger, from the Gods.

Messenger

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

Oedipus

O no! Once on a time Loxias said that I should lie with my own mother and

995

take on my hands the blood of my own father. And so for these long years I've lived away from Corinth; it has been to my great happiness; but yet it's sweet to see the face of parents.

Messenger

This was the fear which drove you out of Corinth?

1000

Oedipus

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

Messenger

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

Oedipus

You would not find me thankless if you did.

Messenger

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

1005

Oedipus

No, I will never come near my parents.

Messenger

Son,

it's very plain you don't know what you're doing.

Oedipus

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

Messenger

If your homecoming is checked by fears like these.

1010

Oedipus

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

Messenger

The murder and the incest?

Oedipus

Yes, old man;

that is my constant terror.

Messenger

Do you know
that all your fears are empty?

Oedipus

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

Messenger

Because Polybus was no kin to you in blood.

Oedipus

What, was not Polybus my father?

Messenger

No more than I but just so much.

Oedipus

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

Messenger

Neither he nor I
begat you.

Oedipus

Why then did he call me son?

Messenger

A gift he took you from these hands of mine.

Oedipus

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

Messenger

His childlessness before persuaded him.

Oedipus

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

Messenger

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

Oedipus

And why
were you a traveller in those parts?

Messenger

I was
in charge of mountain flocks.

Oedipus

You were a shepherd?
A hireling vagrant?

Messenger

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

Oedipus

What ailed me when you took me in your arms?

Messenger

In that your ankles should be witnesses.

Oedipus

Why do you speak of that old pain?

Messenger

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

Oedipus

My swaddling clothes brought me a rare disgrace.

Messenger

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

Oedipus

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

Messenger

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

Oedipus

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

Messenger Yes, from another shepherd. 1040

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

Messenger He was called Laius' man.

Oedipus You mean the king who reigned here in the old days?

Messenger Yes, he was that man's shepherd.

Oedipus Is he alive still, so that I could see him? 1045

Messenger You who live here would know that best.

Oedipus Do any of you here know of this shepherd whom he speaks about in town or in the fields? Tell me. It's time that this was found out once for all. 1050

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

Oedipus Jocasta, do you know about this man whom we have sent for? Is he the man he mentions? 1055

Jocasta Why ask of whom he spoke? Don't give it heed; nor try to keep in mind what has been said. It will be wasted labour.

Oedipus With such clues I could not fail to bring my birth to light.

Jocasta I beg you—do not hunt this out—I beg you, if you have any care for your own life. What I am suffering is enough. 1060

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

Jocasta O be persuaded by me, I entreat you; *knows the truth*
~~do not do this.~~

Oedipus I will not be persuaded to let be the chance of finding out the whole thing clearly. 1065

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

Oedipus Then the best counsel vexes me, and has for some while since.

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

Oedipus Here, some one, go and fetch the shepherd for me; and let her find her joy in her rich family! 1070

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

(Exit.)

Chorus

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

1075

Oedipus

Break out what will! I at least shall be
willing to see my ancestry, though humble.
Perhaps she is ashamed of my low birth,
for she has all a woman's high-flown pride.
But I account myself a child of Fortune,
beneficent Fortune, and I shall not be
dishonoured. She's the mother from whom I spring;
the months, my brothers, marked me, now as small,
and now again as mighty. Such is my breeding,
and I shall never prove so false to it,
as not to find the secret of my birth.

1080

1085

Chorus

Strophe

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

1090

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

Antistrophe

Who was it bore you, child? One of
the long-lived nymphs who lay with Pan—
the father who treads the hills?
Or was she a bride of Loxias, your mother? The grassy slopes
are all of them dear to him. Or perhaps Cyllene's king
or the Bacchants' God that lives on the tops

1098

1104

of the hills received you a gift from some
one of the Helicon Nymphs, with whom he mostly plays?

(Enter an old man, led by Oedipus' servants.)

Oedipus

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

1110

1115

Chorus

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

Oedipus

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

1120

Messenger

This is he
before your eyes.

Oedipus

Old man, look here at me
and tell me what I ask you. Were you ever
a servant of King Laius?

Herdsman

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

Oedipus

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

Herdsman

Most of my life was spent among the flocks.

1125

Oedipus

In what part of the country did you live?

Herdsman

Cithaeron and the places near to it.

Oedipus

And somewhere there perhaps you knew this man?

Herdsman

What was his occupation? Who?

Oedipus

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

1130

Herdsman

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

Messenger

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

1135

1140

Herdsman

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

Messenger

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

Herdsman

What's this?
Why do you ask this question?

Messenger

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

1145

Herdsman

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

Oedipus

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

Herdsman

O best of masters,
how do I give offense?

Oedipus

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

1150

Herdsman

He speaks out of his ignorance, without meaning.

Oedipus

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

Herdsman

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

Oedipus (to the servants)

Here, one of you,
twist his hands behind him.

Herdsman

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

1155

Oedipus

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

Herdsman

I did.
I wish I'd died the day I did.

Oedipus

You will
unless you tell me truly.

Herdsmen

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

Oedipus

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

1160

Herdsmen

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

Oedipus

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

Herdsmen

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

Oedipus

One of these citizens? or from what house?

Herdsmen

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

1165

Oedipus

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

Herdsmen

It was one of the children
of Laius.

Oedipus

A slave? Or born in wedlock?

Herdsmen

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

Oedipus

And I of frightful hearing. But I must hear.

1170

Herdsmen

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

He knows
the truth
that must
hear it
out

Oedipus

She gave it to you?

Herdsmen

Yes, she did, my lord.

Confirmation

Oedipus

To do what with it?

Herdsmen

Make away with it.

Oedipus

She was so hard—its mother?

1175

Herdsmen

Aye, through fear
of evil oracles.

Oedipus

Which?

Herdsmen

They said that he
should kill his parents.

Oedipus

How was it that you
gave it away to this old man?

Herdsmen

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

1180

Oedipus

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

point of
recognition

1185

(Exeunt all but the Chorus.)

presented in image of light

163

Chorus

Strophe

O generations of men, how I
count you as equal with those who live
not at all!

What man, what man on earth wins more
of happiness than a seeming
and after that turning away?

Oedipus, you are my pattern of this,
Oedipus, you and your fate!
Luckless Oedipus, whom of all men
I envy not at all.

1190

1196

Antistrophe

In as much as he shot his bolt
beyond the others and won the prize
of happiness complete—

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

Strophe

But now whose tale is more miserable?
Who is there lives with a savager fate?
Whose troubles so reverse his life as his?

O Oedipus, the famous prince
for whom a great haven
the same both as father and son
sufficed for generation,
how, O how, have the furrows ploughed
by your father endured to bear you, poor wretch,
and hold their peace so long?

1204

Antistrophe

Time who sees all has found you out
against your will; judges your marriage accursed,
begetter and begot at one in it.

1213

O child of Laius,
would I had never seen you.
I weep for you and cry
a dirge of lamentation.

To speak directly, I drew my breath
from you at the first and so now I lull
my mouth to sleep with your name.

1222

(Enter a second messenger.)

Second Messenger

O Princes always honoured by our country,
what deeds you'll hear of and what horrors see,
what grief you'll feel, if you as true born Thebans
care for the house of Labdacus's sons.

1225

Phasis nor Ister cannot purge this house,
I think, with all their streams, such things
it hides, such evils shortly will bring forth
into the light, whether they will or not;
and troubles hurt the most
when they prove self-inflicted.

1230

Chorus

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

Second Messenger

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

1235

Chorus

Unhappy woman! How?

Second Messenger

By her own hand. The worst of what was done
you cannot know. You did not see the sight.
Yet in so far as I remember it

you'll hear the end of our unlucky queen. 1240
 When she came raging into the house she went
 straight to her marriage bed, tearing her hair
 with both her hands, and crying upon Laius 1245
 long dead—Do you remember, Laius,
that night long past which bred a child for us
to send you to your death and leave
a mother making children with her son?
 And then she groaned and cursed the bed in which
 she brought forth husband by her husband, children 1250
 by her own child, an infamous double bond.
 How after that she died I do not know,—
 for Oedipus distracted us from seeing.
 He burst upon us shouting and we looked
 to him as he paced frantically around,
 begging us always: Give me a sword, I say,
to find this wife no wife, this mother's womb, 1255
this field of double sowing whence I sprang
and where I sowed my children! As he raved
some god showed him the way—none of us there.
 Bellowing terribly and led by some 1260
 invisible guide he rushed on the two doors,—
 wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets,
 he charged inside. There, there, we saw his wife
 hanging, the twisted rope around her neck.
 When he saw her, he cried out fearfully 1265
 and cut the dangling noose. Then, as she lay,
 poor woman, on the ground, what happened after,
 was terrible to see. He tore the brooches—
the gold chased brooches fastening her robe—
away from her and lifting them up high
dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out— 1270
such things as: they will never see the crime
I have committed or had done upon me!
 Dark eyes, now in the days to come look on
 forbidden faces, do not recognize

those whom you long for—with such imprecations 1275
 he struck his eyes again and yet again
 with the brooches. And the bleeding eyeballs gushed
 and stained his beard—no sluggish oozing drops
 but a black rain and bloody hail poured down.
 So it has broken—and not on one head 1280
 but troubles mixed for husband and for wife.
 The fortune of the days gone by was true
 good fortune—but today groans and destruction
 and death and shame—of all ills can be named 1285
 not one is missing.

Chorus

Is he now in any ease from pain?

Second Messenger

He shouts

for some one to unbar the doors and show him
 to all the men of Thebes, his father's killer,
 his mother's—no I cannot say the word,
 it is unholy—for he'll cast himself, 1290
 out of the land, he says, and not remain
 to bring a curse upon his house, the curse
 he called upon it in his proclamation. But
 he wants for strength, aye, and some one to guide him;
 his sickness is too great to bear. You, too,
 will be shown that. The bolts are opening. 1295
 Soon you will see a sight to waken pity
 even in the horror of it.

(Enter the blinded Oedipus.)

Chorus

This is a terrible sight for men to see!
 I never found a worse!
 Poor wretch, what madness came upon you!
 What evil spirit leaped upon your life 1300
 to your ill-luck—a leap beyond man's strength!
 Indeed I pity you, but I cannot

look at you, though there's much I want to ask
and much to learn and much to see.
I shudder at the sight of you.

1305

Oedipus

O, O,
where am I going? Where is my voice
borne on the wind to and fro?
Spirit, how far have you sprung?

1310

Chorus

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

Oedipus

Darkness!
Horror of darkness enfolding, resistless, unspeakable visitant sped
by an ill wind in haste!
madness and stabbing pain and memory
of evil deeds I have done!

1315

Chorus

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

1320

Oedipus

My friend,
you are the only one steadfast, the only one that attends on me;
you still stay nursing the blind man.
Your care is not unnoticed. I can know
your voice, although this darkness is my world.

1325

Chorus

Doer of dreadful deeds, how did you dare
so far to do despite to your own eyes?
what spirit urged you to it?

Oedipus

It was Apollo, friends, Apollo,
that brought this bitter bitterness, my sorrows to completion.
But the hand that struck me

1330

was none but my own.

*small wand of self
assertion*

Why should I see

whose vision showed me nothing sweet to see?

1335

Chorus

These things are as you say.

Oedipus

What can I see to love?
What greeting can touch my ears with joy?
Take me away, and haste—to a place out of the way!
Take me away, my friends, the greatly miserable,
the most accursed, whom God too hates
above all men on earth!

1340

1345

Chorus

Unhappy in your mind and your misfortune,
would I had never known you!

Oedipus

Curse on the man who took
the cruel bonds from off my legs, as I lay in' the field.
He stole me from death and saved me,
no kindly service.
Had I died then
I would not be so burdensome to friends.

1350

1355

Chorus

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

Oedipus

Then I would not have come
to kill my father and marry my mother infamously.
Now I am godless and child of impurity,
begetter in the same seed that created my wretched self.
If there is any ill worse than ill,
that is the lot of Oedipus.

1360

1365

Chorus

I cannot say your remedy was good;
you would be better dead than blind and living.

Oedipus

What I have done here was best done—don't tell me
otherwise, do not give me further counsel. 1370

I do not know with what eyes I could look
upon my father when I die and go
under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother—
those two to whom I have done things deserving
worse punishment than hanging. Would the sight
of children, bred as mine are, gladden me? 1375

No, not these eyes, never. And my city,
its towers and sacred places of the Gods,
of these I robbed my miserable self
when I commanded all to drive *him* out,
the criminal since proved by God impure
and of the race of Laius. 1380

To this guilt I bore witness against myself—
with what eyes shall I look upon my people? 1385

No. If there were a means to choke the fountain
of hearing I would not have stayed my hand
from locking up my miserable carcase,
seeing and hearing nothing; it is sweet
to keep our thoughts out of the range of hurt. 1390

Cithaeron, why did you receive me? why
having received me did you not kill me straight?
And so I had not shown to men my birth. 1395

O Polybus and Corinth and the house,
the old house that I used to call my father's—
what fairness you were nurse to, and what foulness
festered beneath! Now I am found to be
a sinner and a son of sinners. Crossroads,
and hidden glade, oak and the narrow way
at the crossroads, that drank my father's blood
offered you by my hands, do you remember
still what I did as you looked on, and what
I did when I came here? O marriage, marriage! 1400

you bred me and again when you had bred
bred children of your child and showed to men
brides, wives and mothers and the foulest deeds
that can be in this world of ours. 1405

Come—it's unfit to say what is unfit
to do.—I beg of you in God's name hide me
somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me,
or throw me into the sea, to be forever
out of your sight. Approach and deign to touch me
for all my wretchedness, and do not fear.
No man but I can bear my evil doom. 1415

Chorus

Here Creon comes in fit time to perform
or give advice in what you ask of us.
Creon is left sole ruler in your stead.

Oedipus

Creon! Creon! What shall I say to him?
How can I justly hope that he will trust me? 1420
In what is past I have been proved towards him
an utter liar.

(Enter Creon.)

Creon

Oedipus, I've come
not so that I might laugh at you nor taunt you
with evil of the past. But if you still
are without shame before the face of men
reverence at least the flame that gives all life,
our Lord the Sun, and do not show unveiled
to him pollution such that neither land
nor holy rain nor light of day can welcome. 1425

(To a servant.)

Be quick and take him in. It is most decent
that only kin should see and hear the troubles
of kin. 1430

Oedipus

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

Creon

What do you need that you would ask of me?

1435

Oedipus

Drive me from here with all the speed you can
to where I may not hear a human voice.

Creon

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

Oedipus

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

1440

Creon

Yes, that indeed was said.
But in the present need we had best discover
what we should do.

Oedipus

And will you ask about
a man so wretched?

Creon

Now even you will trust
the God.

1445

Oedipus

So, I command you—and will beseech you—
to her that lies inside that house give burial
as you would have it; she is yours and rightly
you will perform the rites for her. For me—

never let this my father's city have me
living a dweller in it. Leave me live

1450

in the mountains where Cithaeron is, that's called
my mountain, which my mother and my father
while they were living would have made my tomb.
So I may die by their decree who sought
indeed to kill me. Yet I know this much:
no sickness and no other thing will kill me.
I would not have been saved from death if not
for some strange evil fate. Well, let my fate
go where it will.

1455

Creon, you need not care
about my sons; they're men and so wherever
they are, they will not lack a livelihood.
But my two girls—so sad and pitiful—
whose table never stood apart from mine,
and everything I touched they always shared—
O Creon, have a thought for them! And most
I wish that you might suffer me to touch them
and sorrow with them.

1460

1465

(Enter Antigone and Ismene, Oedipus' two daughters.)

O my lord! O true noble Creon! Can I
really be touching them, as when I saw?
What shall I say?

1470

Yes, I can hear them sobbing—my two darlings!
and Creon has had pity and has sent me
what I loved most?

Am I right?

1475

Creon

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

Oedipus

God bless you for it, Creon,
and may God guard you better on your road
than he did me!

O children, 1480
 where are you? Come here, come to my hands,
 a brother's hands which turned your father's eyes,
 those bright eyes you knew once, to what you see,
 a father seeing nothing, knowing nothing,
 begetting you from his own source of life. 1485
 I weep for you—I cannot see your faces—
 I weep when I think of the bitterness
 there will be in your lives, how you must live
 before the world. At what assemblages
 of citizens will you make one? to what 1490
 gay company will you go and not come home
 in tears instead of sharing in the holiday?
 And when you're ripe for marriage, who will he be,
 the man who'll risk to take such infamy
 as shall cling to my children, to bring hurt 1495
 on them and those that marry with them? What
 curse is not there? "Your father killed his father
 and sowed the seed where he had sprung himself
 and begot you out of the womb that held him."
 These insults you will hear. Then who will marry you? 1500
 No one, my children; clearly you are doomed
 to waste away in barrenness unmarried.
 Son of Menoeceus, since you are all the father
 left these two girls, and we, their parents, both 1505
 are dead to them—do not allow them wander
 like beggars, poor and husbandless.
 They are of your own blood.
 And do not make them equal with myself
 in wretchedness; for you can see them now
 so young, so utterly alone, save for you only.
 Touch my hand, noble Creon, and say yes. 1510
 If you were older, children, and were wiser,
 there's much advice I'd give you. But as it is,
 let this be what you pray: give me a life

wherever there is opportunity
 to live, and better life than was my father's.
Creon
 Your tears have had enough of scope; now go within the house. 1515
Oedipus
 I must obey, though bitter of heart.
Creon
 In season, all is good.
Oedipus
 Do you know on what conditions I obey?
Creon
 You tell me them,
 and I shall know them when I hear.
Oedipus
 That you shall send me out
 to live away from Thebes.
Creon
 That gift you must ask of the God.
Oedipus
 But I'm now hated by the Gods.
Creon
 So quickly you'll obtain your prayer.
Oedipus
 You consent then? 1520
Creon
 What I do not mean, I do not use to say.
Oedipus
 Now lead me away from here.
Creon
 Let go the children, then, and come.
Oedipus
 Do not take them from me.

Creon

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

(As Creon and Oedipus go out.)

Chorus

You that live in my ancestral Thebes, behold this Oedipus,—
him who knew the famous riddles and was a man most masterful; 1525
not a citizen who did not look with envy on his lot—
see him now and see the breakers of misfortune swallow him!
Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy till
he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain. 1530

ANTIGONE

Translated by David Grene