

Oedipus at Colonus

By Sophocles

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Oedipus

Child of a blind old man, Antigone, to what region have we come, or to what *polis* of men? Who will entertain the wandering Oedipus today with scanty gifts? **5** Little do I crave, and obtain still less than that little, and with that I am content. For patience is the lesson of suffering [*pathos*], and of the long years upon me, and lastly of a noble mind. My child, if you see any resting-place, **10** either on profane ground or by groves of the gods, stop me and set me down, so that we may inquire where we are. We have come to learn as strangers [*xenoi*] from the townsmen, and to bring to fulfillment [*telos*] whatever we hear.

Antigone

Father, toil-worn Oedipus, the towers that **15** ring the *polis*, to judge by sight, are far off; and this place is sacred [*hieros*], to judge from its appearance: laurel, olive, and vine grow thick-set; and a feathered crowd of nightingales makes music within. So sit here on this unshaped stone; **20** you have traveled a long way for an old man.

Oedipus

Seat me, then, and watch over the blind.

Antigone

If time can teach, I need not learn that.

Oedipus

Can you tell me, now, where we have arrived?

Antigone

Athens I know, but not this place.

Oedipus

25 Yes, so much every traveler told us.

Antigone

Well, shall I go and learn what the spot is called?

Oedipus

Yes, child, if indeed it is inhabited [*oikeîn*].

Antigone

It surely is inhabited [*oikeîn*]. But I think there is no need—I see a man nearby.

Oedipus

30 Setting off and coming toward us?

Antigone

He is at our side already. Speak whatever seems timely to you, for the man is here.

A Xenos enters, a man of Colonus.

Oedipus

Xenos, hearing from this maiden, who has sight both for herself and for me, **35** that you have arrived as a scout of good fortune for the solving of our doubts...

Xenos

Now, before you inquire [*historeîn*] of me at length, leave this seat. You occupy ground which it is unholy to tread upon.

Oedipus

And what is this ground? To which of the gods is it sacred?

Xenos

Ground inviolable, on which no one may dwell [*oikeîn*]. The dread **40** goddesses hold it, the daughters of Earth and Darkness.

Oedipus

Who are they? Whose awe-inspiring name might I hear and invoke in prayer?

Xenos

The all-seeing Eumenides the people here would call them: but other names please elsewhere.

Oedipus

Then graciously may they receive their suppliant! **45** Never again will I depart from my seat in this land.

Xenos

What does this mean?

Oedipus

The watchword of my fate.

Xenos

I dare not remove you without warrant from the *polis*, until I report what I am doing.

Oedipus

⁴⁹ I implore you by the gods, stranger [*xenos*], do not deprive me of honor [*a-tîmân*],
⁵⁰ wanderer that I am, and do point out to me the things I ask you to tell me.

Xenos

⁵¹Indicate [*sēmainein*] to me, and it will be clear that you will not be without honor [*a-tīmos*] from me.

Oedipus

⁵²What, then, is the place [*khōros*] that I [we] have entered?

Xenos

⁵³All that I myself know, you will hear and learn. ⁵⁴This whole place [*khōros*] is sacred [*hieros*]; it is possessed ⁵⁵by the revered [*semnos*] Poseidon, and inside it is the fire-bringing god, ⁵⁶the Titan Prometheus. As for the place [*topos*] where you have set foot, ⁵⁷it is called the Bronze-Step Threshold of this land here. ⁵⁸It is the Protection of Athens. And the neighboring fields ⁵⁹claim as their own this person here, Colonus [*Kolōnos*],¹ who is the rider of chariots [*hippotēs*], ⁶⁰as their ancient ruler; and all the population bear the name of ⁶¹this person here [= Colonus] as their shared [*koinon*] possession. ⁶²Such, you see, stranger [*xenos*], are these things, which are what they are not because what we say ⁶³gives them honor [*tīmân*], but rather because we live in communion [*sun-ousiā*] with them.

Oedipus

⁶⁴Are there indeed dwellers in this region?

Xenos

65 Yes indeed, the namesakes of this god here [Colonus].²

Oedipus

Have they a king? Or does speaking [in assembly] rest with the masses?

Xenos

These parts are ruled by the king in the city.

Oedipus

And who is he that is sovereign in counsel and in might?

Xenos

Theseus he is called, son of Aegeus who was before him.

Oedipus

70 Could a messenger go to him from among you?

Xenos

With what aim? To speak, or to prepare his coming?

Oedipus

So that by a small service he [Theseus] may find a great gain.

Xenos

And what help can come from one who cannot see?

Oedipus

In all that I speak there will be vision.

Xenos

75 Take care now, *xenos*, that you come to no harm; for you are noble, if I may judge by your looks, leaving your fortune [*daimōn*] aside. Stay here, where I found you, until I go and tell these things to the people of this district [*dēmos*]*—*not in the city.

80 They will decide for you whether you should stay or go back.

The Xenos exits.

Oedipus

My child, has the *xenos* left us?

Antigone

He is gone, and so you can speak what you wish, father, fully serene [*hēsukhos*], knowing that I alone am near.

Oedipus

Ladies of dread aspect, since your seat is **85** the first in this land at which I have bent my knee, show yourselves not ungracious to Phoebus or to myself; who, when he proclaimed that doom of many woes, spoke to me of this rest after long years: on reaching my goal in a land where I should find a seat of the awe-inspiring Goddesses **90** and a shelter for *xenoi*, there I should profitably close my weary life, through my having fixed my abode [*oikos*] there, for those who received me, but ruin [*atē*] for those who sent me forth, who drove me away. And he went on to warn me that signs [*sēmeia*] of these things would come, **95** in earthquake, or in thunder, or in the lightning of Zeus. Now I perceive that in this journey some trusty omen from you has surely led me to this grove; never otherwise could I have met with you, first of all, in my wanderings—I, in my sobriety, with you who touch no wine, **100** —or taken this august [*semnon*] seat not shaped by men. Then, goddesses, according to the word of Apollo, give me at last some way to accomplish and close my course—unless, perhaps, I seem too lowly, **105** enslaved as I am evermore to woes the sorest on the earth. Hear, sweet daughters of primeval Darkness! Hear, you that are called the city of great Athena, Athens, given most *tīmē* of all cities! Pity this poor phantom of the man Oedipus! **110** For in truth it is the former living body no more.

Antigone

Hush! Here come some aged men to spy out your resting-place.

Oedipus

I will be mute. But hide me in the grove, apart from the road, till I learn **115** how these men will speak. For in learning is the safeguard of our course.

They exit. The Chorus of elders of Colonus enters.

Chorus

strophe 1

Look! Who was he, then? Where is he staying? Where has he rushed from this place, **120** man most insatiable [without *koros*] among all who live? Scan the ground, look well, press the search everywhere. A wanderer that old man must have been, **125** a wanderer, not a dweller in the land; otherwise he never would have advanced into this untrodden grove of the maidens with whom none may strive. **130** Their name we tremble to speak, we pass them by with eyes turned away, mouthing the words, without sound or word, with a *phrēn* that is *euphēmos*.³ But now it is said that one has come who reveres them not at all; **135** and him I cannot yet discern, though I look round all the sacred space [*temenos*], nor do I know where to find his lodging.

Oedipus steps forward with Antigone.

Oedipus

Behold the man you seek! For in sound is my sight, as the saying goes.

Chorus

140 Oh! Oh! Fearful he is to see, and fearful to hear!

Oedipus

Do not regard me, I beg you, as a lawless man.

Chorus

Zeus defend us! who may this old man be?

Oedipus

Not so wholly of the best fate **145** that you would pronounce him happy [*eudaimōn*], guardians of this land! It's plain; otherwise I would not be creeping, as you see, by the eyes of others, and buoying my strength upon the weakness [of my daughter].

Chorus

antistrophe 1

Alas! were you sightless even from birth? **150** Evil have been your days, and many, it appears. But at least if I can help it, you shall not add this curse to your lot. You go too far—too far! **155** That your rash steps may intrude on the field of this voiceless, grassy glade, where the waters of the mixing bowl blend their stream with the flow of honeyed offerings, beware, unhappiest of *xenoi*. **160** Do not go on! Withdraw! Let a wide space part us. Do you hear, toil-worn wanderer? If you have anything to say in converse with us, **165** leave forbidden ground, and speak where it is custom [*nomos*] for all; but, till then, refrain.

Oedipus

170 Daughter, to what counsel shall we incline?

Antigone

My father, we must behave just as the townspeople do, listening and giving way where it is necessary.

Oedipus

Then give me your hand.

Antigone

I lay it in yours.

Oedipus

Xenoi, let me not suffer a violation of *dikē* **175** when I have trusted in you, and have passed from my refuge!

Chorus

strophe 2

Never, old man, never will any one remove you from your resting-place here against your will.

Oedipus moves forward.

Oedipus

Further, then?

Chorus

Come still further.

Oedipus

Further?

Chorus

180 Lead him onward, maiden, for you hear us and obey.

Antigone

Come, follow this way with your dark steps, father, as I lead you.

Chorus

A *xenos* in a foreign land, **185** poor man, bear to detest what the *polis* holds steadfastly as not *philon*, and to reverence what she holds as *philon*!

Oedipus

Lead me, then, child, to a spot where I may speak and listen within piety's domain, **190** and let us not wage war with necessity.

Chorus

There! Do not incline your steps beyond that ledge of bedrock.

Oedipus

This far?

Chorus

Enough, I say.

Oedipus

195 Shall I sit down?

Chorus

Yes, move sideways and crouch low on the edge of the rock.

Antigone

200 Father, this is my task: in serenity [*hēsukhiā*]...

Oedipus

Ah me! ah me!

Antigone

...to fit step to step, and lean your aged frame upon my *philos* arm.

Oedipus

Woe for the disaster [*atē*] of a *phrēn* gone bad!

Antigone seats him on the rock.

Chorus

Ah, poor man, since now you are at ease, speak! What is your lineage among mortals? With what name are you led on your path of labors [*ponoi*]? **205** What fatherland can you tell us of?

Oedipus

Xenoi, I am without *polis*, but do not...

Chorus

What is this that you forbid, old man?

Oedipus

210 Do not, do not ask me who I am! Seek nor probe no further!

Chorus

What does this mean?

Oedipus

Horrid the birth...

Chorus

Speak!

Oedipus

My child—ah me!—what shall I say?

Chorus

215 What is your lineage, *xenos* ; speak! And who is your father?

Oedipus

Woe is me! What will I experience [*paskhein*], my child?

Antigone

Speak, for you are driven to the verge.

Oedipus

Then speak I will. I have no way to hide it.

Chorus

You two make a long delay. Come, hasten!

Oedipus

220 Do you know of a son of Laios?

Chorus

Oh!

Oedipus

...and of the family of the Labdakidai?

Chorus

O Zeus!

Oedipus

...and of the pitiful Oedipus?

Chorus

You are he?

Oedipus

Have no fear of any words that I speak...

Chorus

Ah, no, no!

Oedipus

Unhappy that I am!

Chorus

Oh, oh!

Oedipus

225 Daughter, what is about to befall?

Chorus

Out with you! Forth from the land!

Oedipus

And your promise—to what fulfillment will you bring it?

Chorus

No man is visited by the punishment of fate if he requites deeds which were first experienced [*paskhein*] by him. **230** Deceit on the one part matches deceits on the other, and gives labor [*ponos*] instead of reward [*kharis*]. And you—back with you! Out from your seat! **235** Away from my land with all speed, that you may not fasten some heavier burden on my *polis*!

Antigone

Xenoi whose *phrenes* have respect [*aidōs*], since you have not allowed my aged father—knowing, as you do, **240** the rumor of his unintended deeds—pity at least my poor self, I implore you, who supplicate you for my father alone. I beg you with eyes that can still look **245** on your own, like one sprung from your own blood, that this sufferer may find respect [*aidōs*]. On you, as on a god, we depend in our misery. But come, grant the favor [*kharis*] for which we hardly dare hope! **250** I implore you by everything that you hold *philos* at home: by child, by wife, or treasure, or god! Look well and you will not find the mortal who, if a god should lead him on, could escape.

Chorus

Feel sure, daughter of Oedipus, that we pity you and him alike **255** for your misfortune; but dreading the punishment of the gods, we could not say anything beyond what we have now said to you.

Oedipus

What help comes, then, of repute or fair fame, if it ends in idle breath; **260** seeing that Athens, as men say, is god-fearing beyond all, and alone has the power to save [*sōzein*] the outraged *xenos*, and alone the power to help him? And where are these things for me, when, after making me rise up from this rocky seat, you then drive me from the land, afraid of my name alone? **265** Not, surely, afraid of my person or of my acts; since my acts, at least, have been in suffering [*paskhein*] rather than doing—if I must mention the tale of my mother and my father, because of which you fear me. That know I full well. **270** And yet how was I innately evil [*kakos*]? I, who was merely requiting a wrong that I suffered [*paskhein*], so that, had I been acting with knowledge, even then I could not be accounted *kakos*. But, as it was, all unknowing I

went where I went—while they who made me suffer [*paskhein*] knowingly sought my ruin. **275** Therefore, *xenoi*, I beseech you by the gods: just as you made me leave my seat, so save [*sōzein*] me, and do not, while you render *tīmē* to the gods, consider those gods to be fools. But rather consider that they look on the god-fearing man **280** and on the godless, and that never yet has an impious man found escape. With the help of those gods, do not becloud the good fortune [*eudaimoniā*] of Athens by paying service to unholy deeds. As you have received the suppliant under your pledge, **285** rescue me and guard me to the end; nor treat me without *tīmē* when you look on this face unlovely to behold, for I have come to you as one holy [*hieros*] and pious, bearing comfort for this people. But when the master is come, **290** whoever is your leader, then you will hear and know all; meanwhile show yourselves in no way *kakos*.

Chorus

The thoughts you urge, old man, must inspire awe; they have been set forth in grave words. **295** But I am content that the rulers of our country should judge in this case.

Oedipus

And where, *xenoi*, is the lord of this realm?

Chorus

He is at the city of his fathers in our land. The messenger who sent us here has gone to fetch him.

Oedipus

Do you think that he will have any regard or care for the blind man, **300** so as to come here himself?

Chorus

Yes, surely, as soon as he learns of your name.

Oedipus

Who is there to bring him that utterance [*epos*]?

Chorus

The way is long, and many stories [*epea*] from travelers often wander about. When he hears them, he will soon be with us, never fear. **305** For your name, old man, has been loudly heralded through all lands, so that even if he is taking his ease, and slow to move, when he hears of you he will swiftly arrive.

Oedipus

Well, may he come with good fortune both for his own *polis* and for me! What noble man [*esthlos*] is not his own *philos*?

Antigone

310 O Zeus! What shall I say? What shall I think, my father?

Oedipus

What is it, Antigone, my child?

Antigone

I see a woman coming towards us, mounted on a colt of Etna; she wears a Thessalian bonnet to screen her face from the sun. **315** What shall I say? Is it she, or is it not? Does my judgment err? Yes—no—I cannot tell—ah me! It is no other, yes! She greets me with bright glances **320** as she draws near, and makes a signal [*sēmainein*]. Here is Ismene, clearly, and no other before me.

Oedipus

What's that you say, my child?

Antigone

That I see your daughter, my sister. By her voice right away you can know her.

Ismene enters.

Ismene

Father and sister, names most sweet to me! How hard it was to find you! **325** And how hard now to look upon you for my tears!

Oedipus

My child, have you come?

Ismene

Father, your fate is sad to see!

Oedipus

Are you with us, my child?

Ismene

Not without toil, indeed, for myself.

Oedipus

Touch me, my daughter!

Ismene

I give a hand to each at once.

Oedipus

330 Ah my children, my sisters!

Ismene

Alas, twice-wretched life!

Oedipus

Her life and mine?

Ismene

And mine, wretched me, makes a third.

Oedipus

Child, why have you come?

Ismene

Through concern for you, father.

Oedipus

Through longing to see me?

Ismene

Yes, and to bring you news by my own mouth, with the only faithful servant that I had.

Oedipus

335 And where are the young men, your brothers, in our ordeal [*ponos*]?

Ismene

They are where they are; their circumstances now are terrible.

Oedipus

True image of the customs [*nomoi*] of Egypt that they show in their spirit and their life! For there the men sit weaving in the house, **340** but the wives go forth to win the daily bread. And in your case, my daughters, those to whom these labors [*ponoi*] belonged keep the house at home like maidens, while you two, in their place, bear your poor father's labors [*ponoi*]. **345** The one, from the time when her youth was past and she came into her strength, has always been this old man's guide in weary wanderings, often roaming, hungry and barefoot, through the wild woods, often battered by rains and scorching sun. **350** And the comforts of home, poor girl, she holds in the second place, so long as her father should have her care. And you, my child, in former days came forth, bringing your father, unknown to the Kadmeians, all the *mantis*-delivered words that had been given concerning Oedipus. **355** You became a faithful guardian on my behalf, when I was being driven from the land. Now, in turn, what report [*mūthos*] have you brought your father, Ismene? On what mission have you set forth from home? For you do not come empty-handed, I know well, **360** or without some cause of fear for me.

Ismene

The sufferings [*pathos*] that I bore [*paskhein*], father, in seeking where you dwelt, I will pass by; I would not renew the pain in the recital. **365** But the evils that now beset your ill-fated sons—it is of these that I have come to indicate [*sēmainein*]. At first it was their decision that the throne should be left to Creon, and the city spared pollution, when they thought calmly about the ancient blight on our family, **370** and how it has clung to your unfortunate house. But now, moved by some god and by an erring *phrēn*, an evil strife [*eris*] has seized them—thrice-deluded!—to grasp at rule and the power of a *turannos*. And the younger son has stripped the elder, Polyneikes, of the throne, **375** and has driven him from his fatherland. But he, as the widespread

rumor says among us, has gone to the valley of Argos as an exile, and is taking to himself a novel kinship, and warriors for his *philoï*, intending that he shall soon get hold of the Kadmeian land with *tīmē*, **380** or mount to the sky. These are not empty words, my father, but terrible deeds; and where the gods will have pity on your ordeal [*ponoi*], I cannot tell.

Oedipus

385 What, had you come to hope that the gods would ever have concern enough for me to give me salvation [*sōtēriā*]?

Ismene

Yes, that is my hope, father, from the present words of the *mantis*.

Oedipus

What are they? What has been prophesied, my child?

Ismene

That you will be desired some day, in life and death, by the men of that land, **390** for their safety's sake.

Oedipus

And who could profit from such a one as I?

Ismene

Their power, it is said, proves to be in your hands.

Oedipus

When I no longer exist, then I am a man?

Ismene

Yes, for the gods now raise you up; but before they worked your ruin.

Oedipus

395 It is a paltry thing to lift age, when youth was ruined.

Ismene

Well, know at least that Creon will come to you on this account—and soon, not late.

Oedipus

With what purpose, daughter? Interpret that to me.

Ismene

To plant you near the Kadmeian land, so that they may have you in their power, **400** while you may not set foot within their borders.

Oedipus

And what kind of profit [*ōphelēsis*]⁴ will I be for them while I rest beyond their gates?

Ismene

Your tomb contains a curse for them, if it should suffer misfortune.

Oedipus

I need no god to help my wits so far.

Ismene

For this reason, therefore, they wish to get you as their neighbor; **405** but in a place where you would not have power [*kratos*] over yourself.

Oedipus

Will they really cover me in Theban dust?

Ismene

No, the guilt of related blood debars you, father.

Oedipus

Then never will they become my masters.

Ismene

Some day then this will be a grief for the Kadmeians.

Oedipus

410 In what conjunction of events, my child?

Ismene

Under the power of your anger, when they stand at your tomb.

Oedipus

And who has told you this, my child?

Ismene

Sacred envoys [*theōroi*], from the Delphian hearth.

Oedipus

And has Phoebus indeed spoken this concerning me?

Ismene

415 So say the men who have come back to Thebes.

Oedipus

Has either of my sons heard this?

Ismene

Yes, both have heard it, and know it well.

Oedipus

And then those worst of sons, aware of this, preferred the tyranny to the wish of recalling me?

Ismene

420 It grieves me to hear this, but I must bear it.

Oedipus

Then may the gods not quench their fated strife [*eris*], and may it fall to me to decide this war on which they are now setting their hands, raising spear against spear! **425** For then neither would he who now holds the scepter and the throne survive, nor would the exile ever return; seeing that when I, their father, was being thrust without *tīmē* from my country, they did not stop or defend me. No, they saw me sent forth homeless, **430** and heard the crier proclaim my sentence of exile. Perhaps you will say that that was my own wish then, and that the *polis* fittingly granted me that gift. Not so! For on that first day, when my *thūmos* seethed, **435** and my sweetest wish was for death—indeed, death by stoning—no one was found to help me in that desire. But after a time, when all my anguish was now softened, and when I began to feel that my *thūmos* had been excessive in punishing those past errors, **440** then it was that the *polis* set about to drive me by force from the land, after all that time. And my sons, when they had the strength to bring help—sons to their own father—they would not do it. For lack of one little word [*epos*] from them, I was left to wander, an outcast and a beggar evermore. **445** Instead, it is from these, maidens as they are, insofar as nature enables them, that I obtain my daily food, and a shelter in the land, and the aid of family. Their brothers have bartered their father for the throne, the scepter of power, and the tyranny of the realm. **450** No, never will they win Oedipus for an ally, nor will good ever come to them from this reign at Thebes; that I know, when I hear this maiden's *mantis*-delivered words and reflect on the old prophecies stored in my own mind, which Phoebus has fulfilled for me at last. **455** Therefore let them send Creon to seek me—or whoever else is mighty in Thebes. For if you, *xenoi*, with the help of the dread goddesses who reign in your district [*dēmos*], are willing to defend me, you will obtain a great savior [*sōtēr*] for this *polis*, **460** and trouble [*ponoi*] for my enemies.

Chorus

You are worthy of compassion, Oedipus, both you and these maidens. And since to this plea you append your power to be *sōtēr* of our land, I wish to advise you for your advantage.

Oedipus

465 Most *philoī*, be my patrons [*proxenoi*], and I will bring everything to fulfillment [*telos*].

Chorus

Then make atonement to these *daimones*, to whom you have come first, and on whose ground you have trespassed.

Oedipus

With what rites? Instruct me, *xenoi*.

Chorus

First, from an ever-flowing **470** spring bring holy [*hierai*] drink-offerings, borne in ritually pure hands.

Oedipus

And when I have gotten this unmixed draught?

Chorus

There are bowls, the work of a skilled craftsman; crown their edges and the handles at either side.

Oedipus

With olive branches, or woolen cloths, or in what way?

Chorus

475 Take the freshly-shorn wool of an ewe-lamb.

Oedipus

Good; and then to what last rite [*telos*] shall I proceed?

Chorus

Pour the drink-offerings, with your face to the dawn.

Oedipus

Shall I pour them with these vessels of which you speak?

Chorus

Yes, in three streams; but the last vessel...

Oedipus

480 With what shall I fill this, before I set it down? Teach me this also.

Chorus

With water and honey; but add no wine.

Oedipus

And when the ground under the dark shade has drunk these?

Chorus

Three times lay on it nine branches of olive with both your hands, and meanwhile make this prayer.

Oedipus

485 I wish to hear this prayer; it is the most important part.

Chorus

We call them Eumenides, so that with well-wishing *menos* they may receive the

suppliant as his saviors [*sōtēres*]. Let this be your prayer, or of whoever prays for you. Speak inaudibly, and do not lift up your voice; then retire, without looking behind. **490** If you should do this, I would be bold enough to come to your aid; but otherwise, *xenos*, I would fear for you.

Oedipus

Daughters, do you hear these *xenoi* who dwell nearby?

Antigone

We have listened. Tell us what to do.

Oedipus

495 I cannot make the trip; for I am disabled by lack of strength and lack of sight, twin evils. But let one of you two go and do these things. For I think that one *psūkhē* suffices to pay this debt for ten thousand, if it comes with good will. **500** Act, then, with speed. But don't abandon me, for my body wouldn't have the strength to move, without help or a guiding hand.

Ismene

Then I will go to perform the rite; but where I am to find the place—this I wish to learn.

Chorus

505 On the further side of this grove, *xenē*. And if you have need of anything, there is a guardian of the place. He will direct you.

Ismene

Off to my task. But you, Antigone, watch our father here. In the case of parents, if we have labor [*ponos*], we must not keep a memory it.

Ismene exits.

Chorus

strophe 1

510 Terrible it is, *xenos*, to arouse the old woe that has for so long been laid to rest: and yet I yearn to hear...

Oedipus

What now?

Chorus

...of that grief-filled anguish, cureless, with which you have wrestled.

Oedipus

515 By your hospitality [*xeniā*], do not uncover the shame that I have suffered

[*paskhein*]!

Chorus

Seeing that the tale is wide-spread and in no way weakens, I wish, friend, to hear it aright.

Oedipus

Ah me!

Chorus

Grant the favor, I beg!

Oedipus

Alas, alas!

Chorus

antistrophe 1

520 Grant my wish, as I have granted yours to the full.

Oedipus

I have suffered the greatest evils, *xenoi*—suffered it through unintended deeds—may the god know it! No part was of my own choice.

Chorus

But in what way?

Oedipus

525 In an evil marriage, the *polis* bound me, all unknowing, to disaster [*atē*].

Chorus

Is it true, as I hear, that you made your mother the partner of your bed, to its infamy?

Oedipus

Ah me! These words, *xenoi*, are like death to my ears. And those two maidens of mine...

Chorus

530 What will you say?

Oedipus

...two daughters—two curses [*atē*]...

Chorus

O Zeus!

Oedipus

...of me begotten, sprang from the travail of the womb that bore me too.

Chorus

strophe 2

These, then, are at once your daughters, and...

Oedipus

535...sisters, indeed, of their father.

Chorus

Oh!

Oedipus

Indeed, woes untold sweep back upon my soul!

Chorus

You have suffered [*paskhein*]...

Oedipus

I have suffered [*paskhein*] woes grievous to bear.

Chorus

You have done...

Oedipus

I have not done it!

Chorus

How?

Oedipus

540 A gift was given to me—O, wretched that I am, if only I had never won from the *polis* that gift for my services!

Chorus

antistrophe 2

Cursed man! What of this? Did you commit the murder...

Oedipus

What now? What would you learn?

Chorus

...of your father?

Oedipus

Oh! oh! a second stab—wound on wound!

Chorus

545 You killed...

Oedipus

I killed—yet have I a plea...

Chorus

What can you plead?

Oedipus

...a plea of *dikē*.

Chorus

What?

Oedipus

I will tell you: I slew without *noos* and perished utterly. Pure before the law [*nomos*], without knowledge of my act, I have come to this pass!

Chorus

Look, there comes our lord, Theseus, son of Aegeus, **550** at the sound of your voice, to do that for which he was summoned.

Theseus enters.

Theseus

Through hearing from many in the past about the bloody marring of your sight, I recognized it was you, son of Laios; and now on coming here, through sight I am more fully certain. **555** For your clothing and that heart-rending face alike assure me that it is you. And in all compassion I ask you, ill-fated Oedipus, with what petition to the *polis* and to me have you taken your place here, you and the poor maiden at your side. Declare it. Dire indeed must be the fortune which you tell, **560** for me to stand aloof from it; since I know that I myself also was reared in exile, just as you, and that in foreign lands I wrestled with perils to my life, like no other man. **565** Never, then, would I turn aside from a *xenos*, such as you are now, or refuse to help in his salvation [*sōtēriā*]. For I know well that I am a man, and that my portion of tomorrow is no greater than yours.

Oedipus

Theseus, in a few words your nobleness has come to such a point **570** that I need not feel shame [*aidōs*] in making a brief speech. You have said who I am, from what father I am sprung, and from what land I have come; and so nothing else remains for me but to speak my wish, and the tale is told.

Theseus

575 Then inform me of this very thing, so that I may learn it.

Oedipus

⁵⁷⁶ I [= Oedipus] come to donate this wretched body of mine ⁵⁷⁷ as a gift to you [= Theseus]—a gift that seems not to be important when you look at it. But it has ⁵⁷⁸ benefits coming out from it that have more power than any form of beauty.

Theseus

And what gain do you claim to have brought?

Oedipus

580 Hereafter you may learn it—but not yet.

Theseus

At what time, then, will the benefit become clear?

Oedipus

When I am dead, and you have given me burial.

Theseus

You crave life's last service; but for all between you have no memory, or no care.

Oedipus

585 Indeed, for by that service I gather in all the rest.

Theseus

This favor [*kharis*] you crave from me is brief indeed.

Oedipus

Yet take care; the struggle here is no light one. No, indeed.

Theseus

Do you mean in respect to your sons, or to me?

Oedipus

They will compel you to convey me there [to Thebes].

Theseus

590 But if you are willing, then exile is not becoming.

Oedipus

No, when I was willing, they refused.

Theseus

Foolish man, anger [*thūmos*] amidst woes is not suitable.

Oedipus

When you have heard my story, admonish; till then, forbear.

Theseus

Speak. I must not pronounce without knowledge.

Oedipus

595 I have suffered [*paskhein*], Theseus, terrible woes upon woes.

Theseus

Will you speak of the ancient trouble of your family?

Oedipus

No, indeed; that is gossiped throughout Hellas.

Theseus

How, then, do you suffer beyond other men?

Oedipus

The circumstance is this: from my country I have been driven by my own sons; **600** and I may not return, since I am guilty of a father's blood.

Theseus

Why would they have you brought back, if you must dwell [*oikeîn*] apart?

Oedipus

The word of the god will compel them.

Theseus

What suffering [*pathos*] do they fear from the oracles?

Oedipus

605 That they must be struck down in this land.

Theseus

And how should bitterness come between them and me?

Oedipus

Most *philos* son of Aegeus, to the gods alone old age and death never come, but everything else sinks into chaos from time which overpowers all. **610** Earth's strength wilts [verb *phthi-*], and so too the strength of the body; trust dies, distrust is born; and the same spirit is never steadfast among *philoî*, or between *polis* and *polis*. For some now, for others tomorrow sweet feelings turn to bitter, and then once more to being *philos*. **615** And if now the sun shines brightly between Thebes and you, yet time in his course gives birth to days and nights untold, in which from a small cause they will **620** scatter with the spear today's pledges of concord. ⁶²¹ [There in my tomb under the Earth,] where my sleeping and hidden corpse, ⁶²² cold as it is, will at some

moment in the future drink their hot blood, if Zeus is still Zeus, and Phoebus, the son of Zeus, speaks clear. But, since I would not break silence concerning utterances [*epea*] that must not be disturbed, allow me to cease where I began. **625** Only keep your own pledge good, and never will you say that in vain you welcomed Oedipus to be a dweller [*oikētēr*] in this land—if indeed the gods do not deceive me.

Chorus

Lord, from the first this man has shown a **630** will to give *telos* to these utterances [*epea*], or similar ones, for our land.

Theseus

Who, then, would reject the goodwill [*eumeneia*] of such a one? To whom, first, the hearth of a spear-*xenos* is always available on our side, by reciprocal right; then too he has come as a suppliant to our *daimones*, **635** paying no small recompense to this land and to me. In reverence for these claims, I will never spurn his *kharis*, and I will establish an abode [*oikos*] for him as a citizen in the land. And if it is the pleasure of the *xenos* to remain here, I will command you to **640** protect him; or, if it pleases him, to come with me. This way or that, Oedipus, you may choose [*krinein*]; your desire will be mine.

Oedipus

O Zeus, may you be good to men such as these!

Theseus

What is your wish, then? Will you come to my house?

Oedipus

Yes, I would, if it were divinely ordained [*themis*]. But this is the place...

Theseus

645 What will you do here? Speak, for I will not hinder you.

Oedipus

...where I will have power [*kratos*] over those who cast me out.

Theseus

The promised gift of your presence would be great.

Oedipus

It shall be, if you keep your pledge with me.

Theseus

Have courage concerning me; never will I betray you.

Oedipus

650 I will not bind you with an oath as if a base man.

Theseus

Well, you would win nothing more than by my word.

Oedipus

What will you do, then?

Theseus

What is it that you fear?

Oedipus

Men will come...

Theseus

But these men here will see to that.

Oedipus

Beware that if you leave me...

Theseus

Don't instruct me in my duties.

Oedipus

655 Fear constrains me...

Theseus

My heart feels no fear.

Oedipus

You don't know the threats...

Theseus

I know that none will lead you from here against my will. Often threats have blustered in men's *thūmos* with words [*epea*] loud and vain; but when the *noos* comes to itself once more, **660** the threats have vanished. For those men, too, perhaps—yes, even if in boldness they have spoken dreadful things of bringing you back, the voyage here will prove long and hard to sail. Now I advise [*par-aineîn*] you, apart from any decision of mine, to be of a good courage, **665** if indeed Phoebus has been your escort here. Even if I am not present, still my name, I know, will shield you from suffering [*paskhein*] harm.

Theseus exits.

Chorus

strophe 1

This place [*khōrā*] here, having good power from horses [*eu-hippos*], O stranger [*xenos*], is the most potent inhabitation on earth—that is where you have just arrived.

⁶⁷⁰ It is Colonus [*Kolōnos*], shining white [*argēs*]. Here the nightingale, a constant visitor, trills her clear note under the trees of green glades, dwelling in the midst of the wine-colored ivy ⁶⁷⁵ and the god's inviolate foliage, rich in berries and fruit, unvisited by sun, unvexed by the wind of any storm. Here the Bacchic reveler Dionysus ever walks the ground, ⁶⁸⁰ companion of the nymphs that nursed him.

antistrophe 1

And, feeding on heavenly dew, the narcissus blooms day by day with its fair clusters, over and over again; it is the ancient garland [*stephanōma*] of the two Great Goddesses. ⁶⁸⁵ And the crocus blooms with a golden gleam. Nor do the ever-flowing springs diminish, from which the waters of Cephisus wander off, and each day this river, swift in making things fertile, ⁶⁹⁰ moves with its pure current over the broad plains of Earth with her swelling breasts. Nor have the singing and dancing choruses [*choroi*] of the Muses shunned this place, nor Aphrodite of the golden rein.

strophe 2

⁶⁹⁵ And there is a thing such as I have not heard of on Asian ground, nor as ever yet originating in the great Dorian island of Pelops: it is a plant unconquered, self-renewing, causing terror for enemies armed with spears. ⁷⁰⁰ It greatly flourishes in this land—the gray-leafed olive, nurturer of children. No young man may harm it by the ravages of his hand, nor may anyone who lives with old age. For the sleepless circular eye ⁷⁰⁵ of Zeus Morios [guard of the sacred olive trees] watches over it, and so too does gray-eyed Athena.

antistrophe 2

And I have another word of praise [*ainos*] to say for this city, our mother [*mātro-polis*], and it is a most potent word: ⁷¹⁰ [I praise] the gift of the great superhuman force [*daimōn*]. It is the greatest thing worthy of praise. It has the good power of horses [*eu-hippon*], the good power of colts [*eu-pōlon*], the good power of the sea [*eu-thalasson*]. I say this because you, son of Kronos, lord Poseidon, have set the city on the throne of these words of praise ⁷¹⁵ by inventing, first of all on our own roadways, the bit that cures the rage of horses. Meanwhile the oar, well shaped for rowing on the sea, is gliding past the land as it leaps [*thrōiskein*] to keep time with the singing and dancing of the hundred-footed Nereids.

Antigone

720 Land that gets praise [*ep-ainos*] above all lands, now it is your task to make those bright praises seen in deeds!

Oedipus

What strange new thing has befallen, my daughter?

Antigone

Creon there draws near us, and not without followers, father.

Oedipus

Ah, most *philoī* old men, now give me **725** the final proof of my safety [*sōtēriā*]!

Chorus

Courage! It will be yours. For even if I am aged, this country's strength has not grown old.

Creon enters with attendants.

Creon

Gentlemen, noble dwellers [*oikētores*] in this land, I see from your eyes that a sudden fear has troubled you at my coming; **730** but do not shrink back from me, and let no bad utterance [*epos*] escape you. I am here with no thought of force; I am old, and I know that the *polis* to which I have come is mighty, if any in Hellas has might. **735** No, I have been sent, aged as I am, to plead with this man to return with me to the land of Kadmos. I am not one man's envoy, but have a mandate from all our people; since it belonged to me, by tie of family, beyond all other Thebans to show grief [*penthos*] over his woes. **740** Unhappy Oedipus, hear us, and come back to your home [*oikos*]! With *dikē* you are summoned by all the Kadmeians, and most of all by me, just as I—unless I am the most *kakos* of all men born—feel most sorrow for your woes, old man, **745** when I see you, unhappy as you are, a *xenos* and a wanderer evermore, roaming in beggary, with one handmaid for your support. Ah me, I had not thought that she could fall to such a depth of misery as that to which she has fallen—**750** this poor girl!—as she tends forever your dark life amid poverty; in ripe youth, but unwed: a prize for the first passerby to seize. Is it not a cruel reproach—alas!—that I have cast at you, and me, and all our family? **755** But indeed an open shame cannot be hidden. Oedipus, in the name of your ancestral gods, listen to me! Hide it, and consent to return to the city and the house of your ancestors, after bidding a kind farewell to this *polis*. For she is worthy; yet your own city has a right [*dikē*] to claim your reverence, **760** since it was she that nurtured you long ago.

Oedipus

You who will dare anything, who from any just [*dikaīos*] plea would derive a crafty trick, why do you make this attempt on me, and seek once more to snare me in your trap where I would feel most grief? **765** Long ago, when I labored under the sickness of my self-made evils, and I yearned to be cast out of the land, you refused to grant the favor [*khāris*]. But when my fierce anger had spent its force, and seclusion in the house was sweet to me, **770** it was then that you thrust me from the house and cast me from the land. And this common tie of family that you mention—that was not at all *philon* to you then. Now, in turn, when you see that I have a welcome with good *noos* from this *polis* and all her nation, you try to pluck me away, wrapping your cruel thoughts in soft words. **775** And yet what pleasure do you find in this, in treating me as *philos* against my will? As if a man should refuse you a gift, bring you no aid, when you continually begged for it; but after your *thūmos* was sated with your desires, he should grant it then, when the favor [*khāris*] could bring no gratitude [*khāris*] **780** — would you not find your delight in this empty? Yet such is the nature of your own offers to me: noble [*esthla*] in appearance, but in substance ignoble [*kaka*]. And I will

declare it to these men too, to show you up as *kakos*. You have come to get me, **785** not to bring me to my home [*oikos*], but to plant me near your borders, so that your *polis* might escape uninjured by evils from this land. That fate is not for you, but this one: the brooding of my vengeful spirit on your land forever; and for my sons, this heirloom: **790** just so much soil in my realm in which to die. Do I not have more *phrenes* than you in the fortunes of Thebes? Yes, far wiser, by as much as the sources of my knowledge are truer: Phoebus I mean, and his father, Zeus himself. But you have come here with fraud on your lips, yes, **795** and with a tongue keener than the edge of a sword; yet by their use you may well reap more sorrow than salvation [*sōtēriā*]. Still, since I know that I cannot persuade you of this, go! Allow us to live on here; for even in this plight our life would not be bad if we should be content with it.

Creon

800 Which of us, do you think, suffers most in this exchange—I by your action, or you by your own?

Oedipus

For me, it is enough if your pleading fails both with me and with these men nearby.

Creon

Unhappy man, will you let everyone see that even in your years you have gained no *phrenes*? **805** Must you live on to disgrace your old age?

Oedipus

You have a clever tongue, but I know no just [*dikaios*] man who can produce from every side a pretty speech.

Creon

Words may be many, and yet not to the point.

Oedipus

As if yours, indeed, were few, but on the mark.

Creon

810 They cannot be, not for one whose *noos* is such as yours.

Oedipus

Begone! I will say it for these men too. And do not besiege me with a jealous watch where I am destined to remain.

Creon

I call these men, and not you, to witness the tenor of your words to your *philoī*. And if I ever catch you...

Oedipus

815 And who could catch me against the will of these allies?

Creon

I promise you, soon you'll smart without that.

Oedipus

Where is the deed which backs that threatening word?

Creon

One of your two daughters I have myself just seized and sent away. The other I will drag off forthwith.

Oedipus

820 Oh no!

Creon

You'll soon find more to weep about.

Oedipus

You have my child?

Creon

And I will have this one in no long time.

Oedipus

Oh! *Xenoi*, what will you do? Will you betray me? Will you not drive the godless man from this land?

Chorus

Depart, stranger! Quick! **825** Your present deed is not just [*dikaios*], nor the deed which you have done.

Creon

To his attendants.

It's time for you to drag this girl off against her will, if she will not go freely.

Antigone

Wretched that I am! Where can I flee? Where find help from gods or men?

Chorus

What are you doing, *xenos*?

Creon

830 I will not touch this man, but her who is mine.

Oedipus

Lords of the land!

Chorus

Xenos, you are acting without *dikē*.

Creon

With *dikē*.

Chorus

How?

Creon

I take my own.

He lays his hand on Antigone.

Oedipus

strophe

Oh, *polis*!

Chorus

What are you doing, *xenos*? Release her! **835** Your strength and ours will soon come to the test.

Creon

Stand back!

Chorus

Not while this is your purpose.

Creon

There will be war with the *polis* [of Thebes] for you, if you harm me.

Oedipus

Did I not say so?

Chorus

Unhand the girl at once!

Creon

840 Don't make commands where you are not the master.

Chorus

Let go, I tell you!

Creon

To his guards, who seize Antigone.
And I tell you: be off!

Chorus

Help, men of Colonus, bring help! The *polis*, our *polis*, is attacked by force! Come to our aid!

Antigone

I am being dragged away in misery. *Xenoi, xenoi* !

Oedipus

845 My child, where are you?

Antigone

I am led off by force.

Oedipus

Give me your hand, my child!

Antigone

I am helpless.

Creon

Away with you!

Oedipus

I am wretched, wretched!

The guards exit with Antigone.

Creon

So those two staffs will never again support your path. **850** But since you wish to overcome your country and your *philoï*, whose will I, though *turannos* as well, am here discharging, then I wish you victory. For in time, I am sure, you will come to recognize all this, that now too as in time past, it is you who have done yourself no good, by indulging your anger despite your *philoï*. **855** This has always been your ruin.

Chorus

Stop there, *xenos*!

Creon

Hands off, I say!

Chorus

I will not let go, unless you give back the maidens.

Creon

Then you'll soon give the *polis* a more valuable prize, for I'll lay hands on more than those two girls.

Chorus

860 What! What do you intend?

Creon

This man here will be my captive.

Chorus

A valiant threat!

Creon

It will be done immediately.

Chorus

Indeed, unless the ruler of this realm prevents you.

Oedipus

Voice of shamelessness! Will you really lay hands on me?

Creon

Be silent, I say!

Oedipus

865 No! May the *daimones* of this place grant me to utter this further curse! Most *kakos* of men, when these eyes were dark, you wrenched from me the helpless one who was my eyesight and made off with her by force. Therefore to you and to your race may the Sun, the god who sees all things, **870** grant in time an old age such as mine!

Creon

Do you see this, people of the land?

Oedipus

They see both you and me. They know in their *phrenes* that I have suffered [*paskhein*] in deeds, and my defense is mere words.

Creon

I will not check my *thūmos*. Though I am alone **875** and slow with age, I'll take this man by force.

Oedipus

antistrophe

Ah, my wretchedness!

Chorus

What arrogance you have come with, *xenos*, if you think you will achieve this!

Creon

I will.

Chorus

Then I think this *polis* no longer exists.

Creon

880 For men who are *dikaioi*, the weak vanquishes the strong.

Oedipus

Do you hear his words?

Chorus

Yes, but he will not bring them to *telos*.

Creon

Zeus knows perhaps, but you do not.

Chorus

This is *hubris*!

Creon

Hubris which you must bear.

Chorus

Hear people, hear rulers of the land! Come quickly, come! **885** These men are on their way to cross our borders!

Theseus enters.

Theseus

What is this shout? What is the trouble? What fear has moved you to stop my sacrifice at the altar to the sea-god, the lord of this district of yours, Colonus? Speak, so that I may know the situation; for that is why I have sped **890** here more swiftly than was pleasant.

Oedipus

Most *philos* of men! I know your voice. Terrible are the things I have just suffered [*paskhein*] at the hands of this man here.

Theseus

What things are these? And who has pained you? Speak!

Oedipus

Creon, whom you see here, **895** has torn from me my children—my only two.

Theseus

What's that you say?

Oedipus

You have heard what wrongs I have suffered [*paskhein*].

Theseus

Hurry, one of you attendants, to the altars there, and order the people to leave the sacrifice **900** and race on foot and by horse full speed, to the region where the two highways meet, so that the maidens may not pass, and I not become a mockery to this *xenos* as one worsted by force. Quick, I say, away with you!

As for this man, if my **905** anger went as far as he deserves, I would not let him go uninjured from my hand. But now, just such law [*nomos*] as he himself has brought will be the rule for his correction.

You will never leave this land **910** until you bring those maidens and produce them in my sight. For your action is a disgrace to me, and to your own ancestors, and to your country. You have come to a *polis* that practices *dikē* and sanctions nothing without law, **915** yet you have spurned her lawful authorities and made this violent assault. You are taking captives at will and subjugating them by force, as if you believed that my *polis* was void of men, or manned by slaves, and that I counted for nothing. Yet it was not Thebes that trained you to be *kakos*. Thebes is not accustomed to rearing men without *dikē*, **920** nor would she praise [*ep-aineîn*] you, if she learned that you are despoiling me, and despoiling the gods, when by force you drive off their unfortunate suppliants. If my foot were upon your land, never would I drag off or lead away someone **925** without permission from the ruler of the land, whoever he might be—no, even if my claim had the most *dikē* of all. I would know how a *xenos* ought to live among citizens. But you are disgracing a *polis* that does not deserve it: your own, **930** and your years, despite their fullness, bring you an old age barren of *noos*. Now, I have said before, and I say it once again: let the maidens be brought here speedily, unless you wish to be an unwilling transferred occupant, by force, of an abode [*oikos*] in this country. **935** These are the words of my lips; my *noos* is in accord.

Chorus

Do you see your plight, *xenos*? You are judged *dikaios* by where you are from, but your deeds are found to be evil [*kaka*].

Creon

It is not because I thought this *polis* void of men, son of Aegeus, or of counsel, as you say, **940** that I have done this deed; but because I judged that its people could never be so zealous for my relatives as to support them against my will. And I knew that this people would not receive a parricide and a polluted man, **945** a man whose unholy marriage—a marriage with children—had been found out. Such wisdom, I knew, was immemorial on the Areopagus, which does not allow such wanderers to dwell within this *polis*. Trusting in that, I sought to take this prize. **950** And I would not have done so, had he not been calling down bitter curses on me and on my lineage. As I suffered [*paskhein*] wrong in this way, I judged that I had a right to this requital. For *thūmos* knows no old age, until death comes; **955** the dead alone feel no galling pain. In response to this, you will do what pleases you; for, though my case is *dikaios*, the lack of aid makes me weak. Yet in the face of your actions, despite my age, I will endeavor

to pay you back.

Oedipus

960 Arrogance without respect [*aidōs*], where do you think this *hubris* falls—on my old age, or on your own? Bloodshed, incest, misery—all this your tongue has launched against me, and all this I have borne in my wretchedness by no choice of mine. **965** For this was *philon* to the gods, who felt *mēnis*, perhaps, with my family from of old. Taking me alone, you could not find a reproach for any crime, in retribution for which I was driven to commit these errors against myself and against my kin. Tell me now: if, by the voice of an oracle, some divine doom was coming on my father, **970** that he should die by a son's hand, how could you justly reproach me with this, when I was then unborn, when no father had yet begotten me, no mother's womb conceived me? But if, having been born to misery—as I was born—I came to blows with my father and slew him, ignorant of what **975** I was doing and to whom, how could you reasonably blame the unwitting deed? And my mother—wretch, do you feel no shame in forcing me to speak of her marriage, when she was your sister, and when it was such as I will now tell? **980** For I will not be silent, when you have gone so far in impious speech.

Yes, she was my mother, yes—alas, for my miseries! I did not know it, nor did she, and to her shame she bore children to the son whom she had borne. **985** But one thing, at least, I know: that you willingly revile her and me, but I did not willingly marry her, and I do not willingly speak now. No, I will not be called *kakos* on account of this marriage, nor in the slaying of my father, which you charge me with again and again in bitter insult. **990** Answer just one thing of those about which I inquire [*historeîn*]. If, here and now, someone should come up and try to murder you—you, the *dikaïos* one—would you ask if the murderer was your father, or would you revenge yourself on him immediately? **995** I think that if your life is *philon* to you, you would requite the one who is guilty [*aitios*], and not look around for a justification. Such then were the evils into which I came, led by the gods; and to them, I think, my father's *psūkhē*, could it come back to life, would not contradict me. **1000** But you are not *dikaïos*; you are one who considers it a fine thing to make every sort of utterance [*epos*], both those which are sanctioned and those which are forbidden—such are your taunts against me in the presence of these men. And to you it seems a fine thing to flatter the renowned Theseus, and Athens, saying how well-established an abode [*oikos*] it is. **1005** Yet while giving such generous praise [*ep-ainos*], you forget that if any land knows how to worship the gods with *tīmai*, this land excels in that. It is from her that you had planned to steal me, a suppliant and an old man, and tried to seize me, having already carried off my daughters. **1010** Therefore I now call on the goddesses here, I supplicate them, I beseech them with prayers, to bring me help and to fight on my behalf, that you may learn well what kind of men this *polis* is guarded by.

Chorus

The *xenos* is a good man, lord. **1015** His fate has been accursed, but it is worthy of our aid.

Theseus

Enough of words. The doers of the deed are in flight, while we, those who suffer

[*paskhein*], stand still.

Creon

What order, then, do you have for a powerless man?

Theseus

Guide the way on the path to them while I escort you, **1020** in order that if you are keeping the maidens whom we seek in these lands, you yourself may reveal them to me. But if your men are fleeing with the spoils in their grasp, we may spare our trouble; the chase is for others, from whom they will never escape out of this land to thank their gods. **1025** Come, lead the way! And know that the captor has been captured; fate has seized you as you hunted. Gains got by guile without *dikē* are not saved [*sōzein*]. And you will have no ally in your purpose; for I well know that it is not without accomplice or resource that you have come to such **1030** *hubris*, from the daring mood which has inspired you here. There was someone you were trusting in when you did these deeds. This I must consider, and I must not make this *polis* weaker than one man.

Does your *noos* pick up on any of these things? **1035** Or do these words seem as empty as the warnings given when you were laying your plans?

Creon

Say what you wish while you are here; I will not object. But at home I too will know how to act.

Theseus

Make your threats, then, but go forward. As for you, Oedipus, stay here in peace with my pledge that, unless I die beforehand, **1040** I will not cease until I put you in possession of your children.

Oedipus

May you have recompense [*kharis*], Theseus, for your nobleness and for your observance of *dikē* in caring for me!

Theseus exits with attendants and Creon.

Chorus

strophe 1

Oh, to be where the enemy, turned to fight, **1045** will soon join in Arēs' clash of bronze, by the shores of Apollo, perhaps, or by that torch-lit beach **1050** where the Great Goddesses maintain awe-inspiring rites [*telos* pl.] for mortals on whose lips the ministering Eumolpidae⁵ have laid the golden seal of silence. There, I think, the war-rousing **1055** Theseus and the two maiden sisters will soon meet within our borders, amid the war-cry of resisting men!

antistrophe 1

Or perhaps they will soon draw near to the pastures on the west of Oea's snowy rock, **1060** fleeing on young horses or in chariots racing full speed. He will be caught! **1065** Terrible is the neighboring Arēs, terrible the might of the followers of Theseus. Yes, the steel of every bridle flashes, **1070** and against their opponents our whole cavalry charges forward, who give *tīmē* to Athena, Our Lady of the Horses, and to the earth-girdling god of the sea [*pontos*], the *philos* son of Rhea.

strophe 2

Is the battle now or yet to be? **1075** For somehow my mind presages to me that soon I will meet the maidens who have suffered fearfully, who have found fearful suffering [*pathos* pl.] at the hands of a kinsman.

Today Zeus will bring something to *telos*. **1080** I am a *mantis* who predicts noble struggles [*esthloi agōnes*]. Oh, to be a dove with the strength and swiftness of a whirlwind, that I might reach an airy cloud, and hang my gaze above the *agōnes*!

antistrophe 2

1085 Hear, all-ruling lord of the sky, all-seeing Zeus! Grant to the guardians of this land to achieve with triumphant might the capture that gives the prize into their hands! And may your daughter too bring it to *telos*, dread Pallas Athena! **1090** And Apollo, the hunter, and his sister, who follows the spotted, swift-footed deer—I wish that they would come, a double help **1095** to this land and to its people.

Wanderer *xenos*, you will not say your watcher was a false *mantis*, for I see your daughters once again drawing near.

Oedipus

Where? Where? What's that? What do you mean?

Antigone and Ismene enter with Theseus and his attendants.

Antigone

Father, father, **1100** I wish some god would grant that your eyes might see this most noble [*aristos*] man, who has brought us here to you!

Oedipus

My child, are you really here?

Antigone

Yes, for these strong arms have saved [*sōzein*] us—Theseus and his most *philo*i followers.

Oedipus

Come here, my children, to your father! **1105** Grant me your embrace—restored beyond all hope!

Antigone

We shall grant your wish, for we crave the favor [*kharis*] we bestow.

Oedipus

Where, then, where are you?

Antigone

Here we are, approaching you together.

Oedipus

Most *phila* offspring!

Antigone

Everything is *philon* to its parent.

Oedipus

Supports of a man—

Antigone

Ill-fated as he is ill-fated.

Oedipus

1110 I hold my dear ones, my most dear [*phila*] possessions. Now, if I should die, I would not be wholly wretched, since you have come to me. Press close to me on either side, children, cling to your father, and rest from your wandering, so desolate, so grievous! **1115** And tell me what has happened as briefly as you can, since brief speech suffices for young maidens.

Antigone

Here is the one who saves us [*sōzein*]: you should hear the story from him, father, and the deed will be brief for you and me.

Oedipus

Xenos, do not be amazed at my persistence, if I prolong my words to my children, **1120** found again beyond my hope. I well know that my present joy in them has come to me from you, and you alone, for you—and not any other mortal—have saved [*sōzein*] them. May the gods grant to you my wish, **1125** both to you yourself and to this land; for among you, above all mankind, I have found the fear of god, the spirit of decency, and lips that tell no lie. I know these things, and I repay them with these words; for what I have, I have through you, and no one else. **1130** Stretch out to me your right hand, lord, that I may touch it; and if it is *themis*, let me kiss [verb of *philos*] your cheek. But what am I saying? Wretched as I have become, how could I consent to touch a man in whom no stain of evils has made its abode [*oikos*]? **1135** I will not touch you—nor will I allow it, if you do consent. They alone, who know them, can share these burdens. Receive my greeting where you stand, and in the future too give me your care, with all *dikē*, as you have given it up to this hour.

Theseus

I feel no amazement, if you have had a lengthy conversation **1140** from joy in these children, or if your first concern has been for their words rather than for me. Indeed, there is nothing to vex me in that. Not with words so much as deeds would I add luster to my life. You have this proof: **1145** I have cheated you in none of my sworn promises, old man. Here am I, with the maidens living, uninjured by those threats. As to how the *agōn* was won, what need have I vainly to boast of what you will learn from these two when you are together? **1150** But there is a matter that has just presented itself to me, as I came here. Give me your counsel regarding it; for, though it is small, it is food for wonder. And mortal man must consider nothing beneath his concern.

Oedipus

1155 What is it, son of Aegeus? Tell me; I myself know nothing of what you inquire.

Theseus

They say a man—not from your *polis*, yet of your family—has somehow thrown himself down, as a suppliant, at our altar of Poseidon, where I was sacrificing when I first set out here.

Oedipus

1160 What land does he come from? What does he desire by his supplication?

Theseus

I know one thing only: they tell me he asks you for a chance to deliver a brief speech [*mūthos*], a thing of no great burden.

Oedipus

On what topic? That suppliant state is of no small account.

Theseus

He asks, they say, no more than that he may confer with you, **1165** and return unharmed from his journey here.

Oedipus

Who can he be that implores the god in this way?

Theseus

Consider whether there is anyone in your family at Argos, who might desire this favor from you.

Oedipus

Most *philos*, say no more!

Theseus

What is wrong?

Oedipus

1170 Don't ask me for...

Theseus

For what? Speak!

Oedipus

From hearing these things I know who the suppliant is.

Theseus

And who can he be, that I should have an objection to him?

Oedipus

My son, lord, a hated son whose words would vex my ear like the words of no man besides.

Theseus

1175 What? Can you not listen, without doing what you do not wish to do? Why does it pain you to hear him?

Oedipus

Lord, that voice has become most hateful to his father. Do not constrain me to yield in this.

Theseus

But consider whether his suppliant state constrains you; **1180** what if you have a duty of respect for the god?

Antigone

Father, listen to me, though I am young who will advise [*paraineîn*]. Allow this man here to give favor [*kharis*] to his own *phrēn* and to the god as he wishes, and for your daughters' sake allow our brother to come. **1185** He will not tear you by force from your resolve—never fear—with such words as will not be for your good. What harm can there be in listening to words? Deeds wickedly devised, as you know, are betrayed by speech. You sired him, **1190** so, even if he wrongs you with the most impious of wrongs, father, it is not right [*themis*] for you to wrong him in return. Let him come! Other men too have *kakoi* offspring and a sharp *thūmos*, but they hear advice and are charmed from their mood by the gentle spells of *philoî*. **1195** Look to the past, away from the present; consider all the pains that you have suffered [*paskhein*] through your father and mother. If you consider those things, I know well that you will perceive that the coming to *telos* of an evil *thūmos* is evil. Your reasons to reflect on this are not trivial, **1200** bereft of your unseeing eyes. Yield to us! It is not a fine thing for those seeking just things [*dikaia*] to keep asking; nor is it good that a man should experience [*paskhein*] good treatment, and thereafter not know how to requite it.

Oedipus

My child, by your pleading you overcome me; but your pleasure here is my grief. **1205** Still, let it be as is *philon* to you. Only, if that man is to come here, *xenos*, let no one ever become master over my *psūkhē*.

Theseus

Once only do I need hear such words, and no more, old man. I do not want to boast, **1210** but you may feel sure that you are saved [adj. of *sōtēr*], if indeed one of the gods is meanwhile saving [*sōzein*] me.

Theseus exits.

Chorus

strophe

Whoever craves the longer length of life, not content to desire a moderate span, him I will judge with no uncertainty: he clings to folly. **1215** For the long years lay in deposit many things nearer to pain than joy; but as for your delights, you will find them nowhere, when someone's life has fallen beyond the fitting period. **1220** The Helper comes at last to all alike, when the fate of Hadēs is suddenly revealed, without marriage-song, or lyre, or *khoroi*: Death at the coming to *telos*.

antistrophe

1225 Not to be born is, beyond all estimation, best; but when a man has seen the light of day, this is next best by far, that with utmost speed he should go back from where he came. For when he has seen youth go by, with its easy letting-go of *phrenes*, **1230** what hard affliction is foreign to him, what ordeals [*kamatoi*] does he not know? Killings, strife [*stasis* pl.], *eris*, battles, **1235** and envy. Last of all falls to his lot old age, blamed, drained of power [*kratos*], unsociable, without *philoï*, wherein dwells [*oikeîn*] every misery among miseries.

epode

In such years is this poor man here, not I alone. **1240** Like some cape that fronts the north which is lashed on every side by the waves of winter, so he also is fiercely lashed evermore by the dread disasters [*atai*] that break on him like the surf, some from the region of the setting sun, **1245** some from that of its rising, some in the realm of its noon-time rays, some from the gloom-wrapped hills of the North.

Antigone

Look, the *xenos*, it seems, is coming here to us. **1250** Yes, without attendants, father, with tears streaming from his eyes.

Oedipus

Who is he?

Antigone

The very man who was in our thoughts from the first. Polyneikes has come to us.

Polyneikes enters.

Polyneikes

Ah me, what should I do? Should I weep first **1255** for my own woes, sisters, or for those of my father here, in his old age? I have found him in a foreign [*xenē*] land, here with you two as an exile, clad in such garments as these. Their filth, a thing contrary to *philoī*, has resided with the old man for long, **1260** wasting his flesh; while above the sightless eyes the unkempt hair flutters in the breeze; and matching with these things, it seems, is the food that he carries, sustenance for his poor stomach.

Wretch that I am! I learn all this too late. **1265** And I bear witness that I have proved the most *kakos* of men in all that concerns care for you; from my own lips hear what I am. But seeing that Zeus himself in all his actions has *Aidōs* beside him to share his throne, may she come to your aid too, father. For the errors committed can be healed, **1270** but can never be made worse.

Why are you silent? Speak, father. Don't turn away from me. Don't you have any answer at all for me? Will you dismiss me without a word, without *tīmē*, and not tell me why you have *mēnis*? **1275** Seed of this man, my sisters, you at least must try to move our father's implacable, inexorable silence, so that he may not send me away like this, without *tīmē* and with no word [*epos*] in return, when I am the suppliant of the god.

Antigone

1280 Tell him yourself, unhappy man, what you have come to seek. When words flow, you know, they may give joy, or incite anger or pity, and so they may give a voice to the mute.

Polyneikes

Then I will speak boldly, for you give me excellent guidance, **1285** first claiming the help of the god himself, from whose altar the king of this land raised me to come to you, with a guaranty to speak and hear, and go my way unharmed. And I wish these pledges, *xenoi*, to be kept with me by you, and by my sisters here, and by my father. **1290** But now I want to tell you, father, why I came. I have been driven as an exile from my fatherland, because, as eldest-born, I thought it right to sit on your sovereign throne. **1295** Therefore Eteokles, though the younger, thrust me from the land, when he had neither defeated me by an argument of law, nor made a trial of might and deed. He brought over the *polis* by persuasion. The cause [*aitiā*] of this, I claim, is most of all the curse [Erinys] on your house; **1300** I also hear this from soothsayers. For when I came to Dorian Argos, I made Adrastos my father-in-law. And I bound to me by oath all men of the Apian land who are foremost in their renown for war, **1305** so that with their aid I might collect the seven armies of spearmen against Thebes, and die in the cause of *dikē*, or drive the doers of this wrong from the land. All right then, why have I come to you now? Bearing prayers of supplication, father, in person to you, **1310** my own prayers and those of my allies, who now with seven armies behind their seven spears have set their blockade around the plain of Thebes. One such is swift-speared Amphiaraios, a matchless warrior, and a matchless diviner; **1315** then comes the son of Oineus, Aetolian Tydeus; Eteoklos is third, of Argive birth; the fourth, Hippomedon, is sent by Talaos, his father; while Kapaneus, the fifth, boasts that he will burn Thebes to the ground with fire; and sixth, Arcadian Parthenopaios rushes to the war. **1320** He is named for that virgin⁶ of long ago from

whose marriage in later time he was born, the trusty son of Atalanta. Last come I, your son—or if not yours, then the offspring of an evil fate, but yours at least in name — **1325** leading the fearless army of Argos to Thebes. It is we who implore you, father, every one of us, by your daughters here and by your *psūkhē*, begging you to forgo your fierce *mēnis* against me, as I go forth to punish my brother, **1330** who has expelled me and robbed me of my fatherland. For if anything trustworthy comes from oracles, they said that whomever you join in alliance will have victorious power [*kratos*]. Then, by the streams of water and gods of our race, I ask you to listen and to yield. **1335** I am a beggar and a *xenos*, as you are yourself; by paying court to others both you and I have an abode [*oikos*], obtaining by lot the same fate [*daimōn*]. But he is *turannos* at home—wretched me!—and in his luxuriance [*habrosunē*] laughs at you and me alike. **1340** But if you join as ally to my *phrēn*, with little trouble [*ponos*] or time I will scatter his strength to the winds, so that I will bring you home and set you in your own house, and set me in mine, when I have cast him out by force. If you are with me, then I can make this boast; but without you **1345** I cannot even be saved [*sōzein*].

Chorus

For the sake of him who has sent this man, Oedipus, speak what seems good to you, before you send him away.

Oedipus

Guardians of this land, if it were not Theseus who had sent him here to me, thinking it right [*dikaion*] that he should hear my response, **1350** then never would he have heard my prophetic voice [*omphē*]. But now he will be graced with it, before he goes, and hear from me such words as never will gladden his life. **1355** Most *kakos* of men, when you had the scepter and the throne, which now your brother has in Thebes, you drove me, your own father, into exile; and by depriving me of the *polis* you caused me to wear this clothing at whose sight you weep, now that you have come to the same state of misery as I. **1360** The time for tears is past. I must bear this burden as long as I live, and keep you before my mind as a murderer. For it is you that have made me subject to this anguish; it is you that have thrust me out, and because of you I wander, begging my daily bread from strangers. **1365** And had these daughters not been born to me to be my comfort, in truth I would be dead, for lack of help from you. But now these girls save [*sōzein*] me; they are my nurses; they are men, not women, in sharing my ordeal [*ponos*]. But you are from another and are no sons of mine. **1370** Therefore the *daimōn* looks upon you—not yet as he soon will look, if indeed those armies of yours are moving against Thebes. There is no way in which you can ever overthrow that *polis*. Before that you will fall, tainted by the pollution [*miasma*] of bloodshed, and so too your brother. **1375** Such curses as my heart before now sent up against you both, I now invoke to fight for me, in order that you may think it fit to revere your parents and not to treat utterly without *tīmē* your father, because he who begot such sons is blind. It was not my daughters here who did this. **1380** This supplication of yours, and this throne of yours, will lie in the power [*kratos*] of my curses, if indeed *dikē*, revealed long ago, sits beside Zeus, to share his throne through sanction of primordial laws [*nomoi*]. But off to perdition with you, abhorred by me and unfathered! **1385** Take these curses which I call down on you, most *kakos* of the *kakoi*: may you never have power [*kratos*] over your native land, and may you never have a *nostos* to the valley of Argos; I pray that you die by a related hand, and slay

him by whom you have been driven out. This is my prayer. **1390** And I call on the hateful darkness of Tartaros that your father shares, to take you into another abode [*oikos*]; and I call on the she-*daimones* of this place, and I call on Arēs, who has set dreadful hatred in you both. Go with these words in your ear; **1395** go and announce to all the Kadmeians, and to your own faithful allies, that Oedipus has distributed such portions to his sons.

Chorus

Polyneikes, in your past travels I take no joy. Now go back with speed.

Polyneikes

Alas, for my journey and my failed attempt! Alas, for my companions! **1400** Such is the *telos* of the road on which we set out from Argos—wretched me!—such an end, that I cannot even mention it to any of my companions or turn them back, but must go in silence to meet this fate. **1405** But you, daughters of this man and my sisters, since you hear these hard curses of a father, do not—if this father’s curses are to reach a *telos* and you find some way of *nostos* to Thebes—do not, I beg you by the gods, leave me without *tīmē*, **1410** but give me burial and due funeral rites. So the praise [*ep-ainos*] which you now win from this man here for your ordeals [*ponoi*] will be increased by another praise no less, through your care for me.

Antigone

Polyneikes, I beseech you, hear me in one thing!

Polyneikes

1415 What is it, most *philē* Antigone? Speak!

Antigone

Turn your force back to Argos as quickly as may be, and do not destroy both yourself and your *polis*.

Polyneikes

No, it is not possible. For how could I lead the same force again, when once I had shrunk back?

Antigone

1420 But why, my brother, must your *thūmos* rise again? What gain will come to you from destroying your native land?

Polyneikes

It is shameful to be in exile, and to be mocked in this way by my brother, when I am eldest-born.

Antigone

Do you see to what sure fulfillment the words of this man who speaks like a *mantis* are leading, **1425** who declares mutual death for you two?

Polyneikes

Yes, for he wishes it. But I must not yield.

Antigone

Ah, wretched me! But who will dare follow you, when he hears what prophecies this man has uttered?

Polyneikes

1430 I will not report ill-tidings; a good leader should tell the better news, and not the worse.

Antigone

Is this then your fixed decision, my brother?

Polyneikes

Yes, and do not detain me. This path now will be my destiny, ill-fated and evil, because of my father here and his Furies [Erinyes]. But as for you two, **1435** may Zeus grant you good things, if you bring these things to *telos* for me when I am dead, since in life you will see me no more. Now release me, and farewell; for never again will you behold me living.

Antigone

Ah, wretched that I am!

Polyneikes

Do not mourn for me.

Antigone

And who would not mourn you, brother, when you are hurrying off **1440** to a death foreseen?

Polyneikes

If it is fated, then I must die.

Antigone

No, no, listen to my prayer!

Polyneikes

Do not plead for what must not be.

Antigone

Then I, indeed, am utterly wretched, if I must lose you!

Polyneikes

It rests with the *daimōn*, this way or that. But as for you two, **1445** I pray to the gods that you may never meet with evil; for in all men's eyes you do not deserve to suffer.

Polyneikes exits.

Chorus

strophe 1

Behold, new ills of heavy fate have newly come from the blind *xenos*, **1450** unless, perhaps, fate is finding its goal. I cannot say that a purpose of the *daimones* is ever vain. Time sees all things forever, and raises up some things, **1455** then on the next day raises others back up again. The sky resounds! Zeus!

Thunder

Oedipus

Children, children! If there is any man still here, send him forth to bring back Theseus, most noble [*aristos*] in all respects.

Antigone

And what, father, is the purpose of your summons?

Oedipus

1460 This winged thunder of Zeus will soon lead me to Hadēs. So send someone with speed.

Thunder.

Chorus

antistrophe 1

Listen! With a louder noise this one crashes down unspeakably, **1465** hurled by Zeus! The hair of my head stands up for fear, my *thūmos* is dismayed; for again the lightning flashes in the sky. What *telos* does it release? **1470** I fear it, for never does it fly forth in vain, or without misfortune. O great Sky! O Zeus!

Oedipus

Children, the appointed coming to the *telos* of life has reached this man; he can turn from it no more.

Antigone

How do you know? By what means do you understand this?

Oedipus

1475 I know it well. But let some one go, I pray you, as quickly as he can, and bring back the lord of this land.

Thunder.

Chorus

Look! Look! Once again the piercing din is around us! **1480** Be merciful, *daimōn*, be merciful, if you are bringing anything of gloom for the land which is our mother! May I find you well disposed, and may I not, because I have cared for a man accursed, somehow obtain a profitless return [*kharis*]? **1485** Lord Zeus, to you I cry!

Oedipus

Is the man near? Will he find me still in possession of my *psūkhē*, children, and master of my *phrenes*?

Antigone

And what is the pledge that you would like to have firm in your *phrēn*?

Oedipus

In return for his benefits, **1490** I would grant him the coming to *telos* of the favor [*kharis*] that I promised.

Chorus

Hurry, my son, come to us! If you chance to be in the glade sacrificing an ox to the sea-god Poseidon, **1495** then come! For the *xenos* thinks you worthy, you and your *polis* and your *philoī*, to receive thanks [*kharis*] with *dikē* in return for benefits experienced [*paskhein*]. Hasten quickly, lord!

Theseus enters.

Theseus

1500 What din is this that once more rings forth from you all, from my people as clearly as from our *xenos*? Can a thunderbolt from Zeus be the cause, or rushing hail in its fierce onset? When the god sends such a storm, foreboding of every sort may find a place.

Oedipus

1505 Lord, you have appeared at my desire, and to you some god granted noble [*esthlē*] fortune at this coming.

Theseus

And what new thing has now occurred, son of Laios?

Oedipus

My life hangs in the balance; and I wish to die without cheating you and this *polis* of what I solemnly declared [*sun-aineîn*].

Theseus

1510 And what is the proof of your fate that you depend on?

Oedipus

The gods themselves are heralds [*kēru*x pl.] in announcing the news to me, nor do they cheat me of any of the appointed signs [*sēmata*].

Theseus

What makes these things clear? Tell me, old man.

Oedipus

The thunder, crash after crash; the lightning, flash after flash, **1515** hurled from the unconquered hand.

Theseus

I am persuaded, for in much I find you a prophet whose voice is not false. Then say what must be done.

Oedipus

I will expound myself, son of Aegeus, the treasures which will be laid up for this *polis*, such as age can never hurt. **1520** Immediately, with no hand to guide me, I will be leader to the place where I must die. But as to that place, never reveal it to another man, neither where it is hidden, nor in what region it lies, so that it may be an eternal defense for you, better than many shields, better than the spear of neighbors which brings relief. **1525** But as for mysteries which speech may not profane, you will learn them yourself when you come to that place alone, since I cannot declare them either to any of these people, or even to my own children, though I love them. **1530** Save [*sōzein*] them always to yourself, and when you reach the end [*telos*] of living, indicate [*sēmainein*] them to your eldest son alone, and let him reveal them to his successor in turn forever. In this way you will inhabit [*oikeîn*] this *polis* unscathed by the men born of the Dragon's teeth. Countless cities commit *hubris*, **1535** even though their neighbor commits no wrong. For the gods are slow to punish, yet they are sure, when men scorn holiness and turn to frenzy. Do not desire to experience [*paskhein*] this, son of Aegeus! But you know such things as these without my teaching. **1540** Let us now set forth to that place the divine summons urges me and hesitate no longer.

Children, follow me. For now in turn it is I that shine forth wondrously as a leader for you, as you were your father's. Onward. Do not touch me, but **1545** allow me unaided to find the holy [*hieros*] tomb where it is my fate [*moira*] to be secreted away in this land. This way, here, come this way! Hermes the Conductor and the goddess of the dead lead me in this direction. Light of day, no light to me, once you were mine, **1550** but now my body feels you for the last time! For now go to hide the coming to *telos* of my life in the house of Hadēs. But you, most *philos* of *xenoi*, may you yourself have a good fortune [*daimōn*], and this land, and your followers. In your prosperity, **1555** remember me in my death, and be fortunate evermore.

He exits, followed by his daughters, Theseus, and attendants.

Chorus

strophe

If it is *themis* for me with prayer to adore the Unseen Goddess [Persephone], and you, Lord of the Dead, then hear me, Aidoneus, Aidoneus [Hadēs]! **1560** Grant that without labor [*ponos*], without a fate arousing heavy grief [*akhos*], the *xenos* may pass to the all-concealing fields of the dead below, and to the Stygian house. **1565** Many were the sorrows that came to him without cause, but a *daimōn* that is just [*dikaios*] will lift him up again.

antistrophe

Goddesses of the nether world [Furies], and unconquered beast [Cerberus], **1570** whose lair lies in the gates of many *xenoi*, you untamable Watcher of Hadēs, snarling from the cavern's jaws, as rumor has always told! Hear me, Death, son of Earth and Tartaros! **1575** May that Watcher leave a clear path for the *xenos* on his way to the nether fields of the dead! To you I call, giver of the eternal sleep.

A Messenger enters.

Messenger

Citizens, my news might be summed up most briefly thus: Oedipus is dead. **1580** But the *mūthos* of the happening cannot be told in brief words, as the deeds done there were not brief.

Chorus

Is he gone, the unfortunate man?

Messenger

You may be sure that he has obtained his eternal life.

Chorus

1585 How? By a fate divine and without labor [*ponos*], the poor man?

Messenger

¹⁵⁸⁶ This [= the death of Oedipus] has already happened, and it was something that was outstandingly wondrous. ¹⁵⁸⁷ As for how he started to depart from this world, you yourself know that full well, since you were here: ¹⁵⁸⁸ he did not have any of his dear ones [*philoī*] as guide, ¹⁵⁸⁹ but rather he himself was leading the way for us all. ¹⁵⁹⁰ Then, when he arrived at the Threshold for Descending, ¹⁵⁹¹ with its bronze foundations rooted in the earth deep below ¹⁵⁹² he stopped still at one place where paths were leading in many directions, ¹⁵⁹³ near the Hollow Crater,^z which was where Theseus ¹⁵⁹⁴ and Peirithoos^a had made their faithful covenant lasting forever—it is marked there. ¹⁵⁹⁵ Midway he [= Oedipus] stood there between that place [= the Hollow Crater] and the Thorikios Petros,⁹ ¹⁵⁹⁶ between the Hollow Pear Tree and the Stone Tomb [*Iāinos taphos*]. ¹⁵⁹⁷ Next, he sat down and loosened his filthy clothing. ¹⁵⁹⁸ And then he called

out to his daughters, ordering them to bring from flowing streams ¹⁵⁹⁹ water for ritual washing [*loutra*] and for libations [*khoai*]¹⁶⁰⁰—to bring him the water from wherever [*pothen*] they brought it. And the two daughters went to the place of Demeter, the one who has the beautiful greenness [*khloē*].¹⁶⁰¹ The place was a Hill, and they went to it. ¹⁶⁰² In a short time they brought back what their father had ordered them to bring, and then they gave him ritual washing [*loutra*] ¹⁶⁰³ and dressed him, as is the custom [*nomos*]. ¹⁶⁰⁴ But when all his desire was fulfilled, ¹⁶⁰⁵ and nothing that he required was still undone, ¹⁶⁰⁶ then Zeus, He of the Earth Below [*khthonios*], made a thunderclap, and the maidens shuddered as they heard. They fell weeping at their father's knees, and did not cease from beating their breast, and from wailing loud. **1610** When he heard their sudden bitter cry, he put his arms around them and said: "My children, on this day your father no longer exists. Now I have perished utterly, and no longer will you bear the burden of tending me, **1615** which was no light one, I well know, my children. Yet just one word [*epos*] turns all those toils to nothing: you have been treated as *philai* by no one more than by this man; and now you will have me with you no longer, through all your days to come." **1620** In this way, clinging close to one another, the father and his daughters sobbed and wept. But when they came to the end [*telos*] of their crying, and the sound of wailing went forth no more, there was a silence; suddenly a voice called aloud to him, so that everyone **1625** felt the hair on their heads stand up from the sudden terror. The god called him again and again: "Oedipus! You, over there, Oedipus! Why do you delay our going? Too long you have been lingering." And when he perceived that he was called by the god, **1630** he asked that lord Theseus should come to him; and when he did, he said: "*philos*, give me the sworn pledge of your right hand for my children; and you, my daughters, for him. Give your solemn word [*kat-aineîn*] never to betray them by your own free will, but always to bring to a *telos* whatever is in your *phrenes* for their benefit." **1635** And he, as a man of noble spirit, without lamentation swore to give his solemn word [*kat-aineîn*] to his *xenos*. When Theseus had done this, ¹⁶³⁸ then, right away, Oedipus ¹⁶³⁹ felt for his children with blind hands, and said: ¹⁶⁴⁰ "Children, you must endure in a noble way in your hearts [*phrenes*] ¹⁶⁴¹ and depart from these places [*topoi*]; and, as for things forbidden by divine law [*themis*], do not ¹⁶⁴² consider it just [*dikaion*] to look upon those things, or to hear things you must not hear. ¹⁶⁴³ So go away, go, as fast as you can—except for the one who is authorized, ¹⁶⁴⁴ Theseus, who must be present and must learn the things that are being done [*drân*]." ¹⁶⁴⁵ Such things he spoke, and we listened, ¹⁶⁴⁶ each and every one of us. With streaming tears we mourned as we accompanied the maidens ¹⁶⁴⁷ and went off. But after we had departed, ¹⁶⁴⁸ in a short time, we turned around and looked back and saw ¹⁶⁴⁹ that the man was ¹⁶⁵⁰ nowhere present any more and that our king [= Theseus] was alone, screening his eyes ¹⁶⁵¹ by holding his hand in front of his head, as if some terrifying ¹⁶⁵² thing to fear had appeared before him, something unbearable to look at. ¹⁶⁵³ And then, after a short time, ¹⁶⁵⁴ we saw him adore the Earth ¹⁶⁵⁵ and also the Olympus that belongs to the gods, using the same wording for both. ¹⁶⁵⁶ But by what fate Oedipus perished, no one ¹⁶⁵⁷ among mortals can indicate, except the head of Theseus alone. ¹⁶⁵⁸ You see, what happened to him [= Oedipus] was not that the god's fiery ¹⁶⁵⁹ thunderbolt did him in, nor was he done in by anything that comes from the sea [*pontos*], ¹⁶⁶⁰ by some stirring of a gust of wind [*thuella*], coming for him in the fullness of time. ¹⁶⁶¹ No, it was either some escort sent by the gods, or else it was that thing from the nether world, ¹⁶⁶² that

thing that has good intentions [*noos*], that gaping unlit foundation of the earth. ¹⁶⁶³ You see, the man did not need lamentations, and there were no diseases ¹⁶⁶⁴ that gave him any pain at the moment when he was escorted away. No, if there was ever any mortal ¹⁶⁶⁵ who was wondrous [*thaumastos*], it was he. And if in anyone's eyes I seem to speak without *phrenes*, I would not try to win their belief if they think me lacking in *phrenes*.

Chorus

Where are his daughters and the escort of their *philoí*?

Messenger

Not far away; the sounds of mourning indicate [*sēmainein*] plainly that they are approaching.

Antigone, Ismene, and attendants enter.

Antigone

strophe 1

1670 Ah me, ah me! Now, indeed, is it for us to bewail in full the curse on our blood—ill-fated sisters as we are—deriving from our father! In former time we bore the long ordeal [*ponos*] without pause, **1675** and now at the last we bring to tell a sight and experience [*pathos*] that baffle reason.

Chorus

What is it?

Antigone

It is possible to conjecture, *philoí*.

Chorus

He is gone?

Antigone

Precisely in the way you could most wish for: indeed, neither Arēs took him, nor the sea [*pontos*], **1680** but instead he was snatched away to the fields which no one may see, carried along by some swift, strange doom. Wretched me! For us a night like death has descended on our eyes; **1685** how shall we find our hard livelihood, roaming to some far land, or on the waves of the sea [*pontos*]?

Ismene

I do not know. If only murderous Hadēs would join me in death to my aged father! **1690** Wretched me! I cannot live the life that must be mine.

Chorus

Best of daughters, you both must bear the will of the gods. Do not be inflamed with

too much grief; **1695** what you have encountered is not to be blamed.

Antigone

antistrophe 1

There is longing even for woes. What was in no way *philon* was *philon*, so long as I held him in my embrace. **1700** Father, *philos*, clothed in the darkness of the underworld forever! Never in your absence will you not be *philos* to me and to my sister here.

Chorus

He fared...

Antigone

He fared as he desired.

Chorus

1705 In what way?

Antigone

He died on the foreign [*xenē*] ground that he desired; he has his well-shaded bed beneath the ground for ever; and he did not leave behind unwept sorrow [*penthos*]. With these weeping eyes, father, I lament you; **1710** nor do I know how in my wretchedness I must still my grief [*akhos*] for you that is so immense. Alas! You wanted to die in a foreign [*xenē*] land, but you died without me near.

Ismene

Wretched me! What fate **1715** awaits you and me, *philē*, orphaned as we are of our father?

Chorus

1720 Cease from your grief [*akhos*], *philai*, since he has discharged his *telos* in a way that is blessed [*olbios*]. No one is beyond the reach of evil.

Antigone

strophe 2

Philē, let us hasten back.

Ismene

1725 To do what deed?

Antigone

A longing fills my soul...

Ismene

For what?

Antigone

To see the netherworld home.

Ismene

Of whom?

Antigone

Wretched me! Of our father.

Ismene

And how can this be *themis*? Surely you understand?

Antigone

1730 Why this rebuke?

Ismene

And surely you know this, too...

Antigone

What more would you tell me?

Ismene

That he perished without a tomb, apart from everyone.

Antigone

Lead me there, and then kill me, too.

Ismene

Unhappy me! Abandoned and helpless, **1735** where am I now to live my wretched life [*aiōn*]?

Chorus

antistrophe 2

Philai, do not be afraid.

Antigone

But where shall I flee?

Chorus

Already a refuge has been found...

Antigone

What do you mean?

Chorus

1740...that no harm befall you.

Antigone

I feel...

Chorus

What are you thinking?

Antigone

How we are to go home, I cannot tell.

Chorus

Do not seek to go.

Antigone

Trouble surrounds us.

Chorus

And previously it bore heavily.

Antigone

1745 Then it was desperate, but now even crueler.

Chorus

Vast, then, is the sea of your troubles.

Antigone

Alas, alas! Zeus, where shall we turn? **1750** To what last hope does the *daimōn* now drive us?

Theseus enters.

Theseus

Cease your lament, children! Where the grace [*kharis*] of the nether night is stored up, there is no room for public sorrow [*penthos*]; *nemesis* would follow.

Antigone

Son of Aegeus, we supplicate you!

Theseus

1755 To obtain what desire, my children?

Antigone

We want look with our own eyes upon our father's tomb.

Theseus

It is not *themis* to go there.

Antigone

What do you mean, lord, ruler of Athens?

Theseus

1760 Children, he told me that no one should draw near that place, or approach with prayer the holy [*hiera*] tomb in which he sleeps. He said that, so long as I saw to this, I would always keep the country free from pain. **1765** The *daimōn* heard me say these things, as did the all-seeing Oath of Zeus.

Antigone

If this is his *noos*, we must be content with it. **1770** Send us to ancient Thebes, in case we may somehow stop the bloodshed that threatens our brothers.

Theseus

I will do both this and whatever other favorable service I can, for you **1775** and for the newly-departed under the earth, according to reciprocity [*kharis*]. I am bound to spare no pains.

Chorus

Cease; raise up the lamentation no further. These things are established firm.

Notes

[[back](#)] **1.** So the 'district' or *dēmos* of Colonus is named after the hero-charioteer named Colonus; conversely, the cult hero is named after the landmark that distinguishes this district, which is a *kolōnos* or 'tumulus' of a hero. See Nagy *Sign of the hero* (2001) n34 for a medieval Irish parallel: the singing of an incantation to the gravestone of the hero Fergus, long dead, becomes the equivalent of singing this incantation to the hero himself, who is thus temporarily brought back to life.

[[back](#)] **2.** At climactic moments in the veneration of cult heroes, they can be called *theoi* 'gods'. See Nagy *Sign of the hero* (2001) 17.

[[back](#)] **3.** The word *euphēmos* means 'uttering in a proper way' when it is applied in a sacred context; it means 'silent' when it is applied in a non-sacred context.

[[back](#)] **4.** Words like this derive from sacred epithets describing cult heroes as benefactors of communities living near the grounds where they the heroes are buried.
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[[back](#)] **5.** The priests in charge of the rites of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis.

[[back](#)] **6.** Parthenopaios means 'having the looks of the maiden [*parthenos*]'.

[[back](#)] **7.** The Greek word *krātēr* means 'mixing-bowl' and, by extension, 'crater'.

[[back](#)] **8.** Theseus and Perithoös journeyed together to the Underworld, but only Theseus was able to return.

[[back](#)] **9.** Meaning 'Leaping Rock'; *Thorikios* is apparently derived from *thoros* 'leaping; semen'.

[[back](#)] **10.** The epithet *eukhloos* 'of the tender plants' is related to *khloē* 'growth of tender plants', which is related to the epithet of Demeter, *Khloē* = Chloe. This epithet is also a name, as in the ancient erotic novel *Daphnis and Chloe*.

[[back](#)] **11.** The verb *drân* means 'do' or 'perform ritual, sacrifice'.

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