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? 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, 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 townspeople, and to bring to fulfillment [telos] whatever we hear.

Antigone

Father, toil-worn Oedipus, the towers that 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; 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], wanderer that I am, and do point out to me the things I ask you to tell me.
Xenos
51 Indicate [sēmainein] to me, and it will be clear that you will not be without honor [a-timōs] from me.

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

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

Oedipus
64 Are 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

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. 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 \textit{paskhein} by him. 230 Deceit on the one part matches deceits on the other, and gives labor \textit{ponos} instead of reward \textit{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 \textit{polis}!

Antigone
\textit{Xenoi} whose \textit{phrenes} have respect \textit{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 \textit{aidōs}. On you, as on a god, we depend in our misery. But come, grant the favor \textit{kharis} for which we hardly dare hope! 250 I implore you by everything that you hold \textit{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 \textit{sōzein} the outraged \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{kakos}? I, who was merely requiting a wrong that I suffered \textit{paskhein}, so that, had I been acting with knowledge, even then I could not be accounted \textit{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, xenoī, 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, xenoī, 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 [понос]?

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

**Oedipus**

340 True image of the customs [номос] of Egypt that they show in their spirit and their life! For there the men sit weaving in the house, but the wives go forth to win the daily bread. And in your case, my daughters, those to whom these labors [понос] belonged keep the house at home like maidens, while you two, in their place, bear your poor father’s labors [понос].

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. 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. You became a faithful guardian on my behalf, when I was being driven from the land. Now, in turn, what report [мутhos] 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, or without some cause of fear for me.

**Ismene**

355 The sufferings [патhos] that I bore [паскхейн], father, in seeking where you dwelt, I will pass by; I would not renew the pain in the recital. But the evils that now beset your ill-fated sons—it is of these that I have come to indicate [семайнеин]. 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, and how it has clung to your unfortunate house. But now, moved by some god and by an erring φρην, an evil strife [ерис] has seized them—thrice-deluded!—to grasp at rule and the power of a туранос. And the younger son has stripped the elder, Polyneikes, of the throne, 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 philoi, intending that he shall soon get hold of the Kadmeian land with timē, 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 [ophelēsis] 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.
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 timē 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 philoi, 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 [hieraī] 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
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

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

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— as a gift to you [= Theseus]—a gift that seems not to be important when you look at it. But it has 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 \([verb\ pthi-]\), and so too the strength of the body; trust dies, distrust is born; and the same spirit is never steadfast among \(philoi\), 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.
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.
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 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, 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 of the two Great Goddesses. 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, moves with its pure current over the broad plains of Earth with her swelling breasts. Nor have the singing and dancing choruses of the Muses shunned this place, nor Aphrodite of the golden rein.

strophe 2

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. 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 eye 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 to say for this city, our mother, and it is a most potent word: [I praise] the gift of the great superhuman force. It is the greatest thing worthy of praise. It has the good power of horses, the good power of colts, the good power of the sea. I say this because you, son of Kronos, lord Poseidon, have set the city on the throne of these words of praise 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 to keep time with the singing and dancing of the hundred-footed Nereids.

Antigone

Land that gets praise 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 philoi 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 [dikaios] 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 [kharis]. 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 [kharis] could bring no gratitude [kharis] 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 philoi. 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

strope

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 philoi, 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 philoi. 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
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! 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 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, has torn from me my children—my only two.
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
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 dikaios 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 dikaios; 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 Eumolpidai 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, fleeing on young horses or in chariots racing full speed. He will be caught! Terrible is the neighboring Arēs, terrible the might of the followers of Theseus. Yes, the steel of every bridle flashes, 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.

Is the battle now or yet to be? 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. 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!

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! And Apollo, the hunter, and his sister, who follows the spotted, swift-footed deer—I wish that they would come, a double help 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, I wish some god would grant that your eyes might see this most noble man, who has brought us here to you!

Oedipus
My child, are you really here?

Antigone
Yes, for these strong arms have saved us—Theseus and his most philoi followers.

Oedipus
Come here, my children, to your father! 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 philia 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 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: 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? 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, 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 [paraineǐn]. 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 philoi. 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, 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. 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. 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

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, what hard affliction is foreign to him, what ordeals [kamatoi] does he not know? Killings, strife [stasis pl.], eris, battles, and envy. Last of all falls to his lot old age, blamed, drained of power [kratos], unsociable, without philoi, wherein dwells [oikeîn] every misery among miseries.

epode

In such years is this poor man here, not I alone. 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, 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. 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 philoi, 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 Amphiarao, 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 Kapanes, 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 virgin 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—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], and 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 timē, 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

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

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**

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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 philoi, 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-aineīn].

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

Oedipus
The gods themselves are heralds [kērux 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 [Hades]! 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 Hades, 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

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 [*philoi*] 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, 1594 which was where Theseus and Peirithoos 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, 1596 between the Hollow Pear Tree and the Stone Tomb [*lāïnos 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 water for ritual washing [loutra] and for libations [khoai]—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]. The place was a Hill, and they went to it. In a short time they brought back what their father had ordered them to bring, and then they gave him ritual washing [loutra] and dressed him, as is the custom [nomos]. But when all his desire was fulfilled, and nothing that he required was still undone, 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. 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, 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.” 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 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, 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.” 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, then, right away, Oedipus felt for his children with blind hands, and said: “Children, you must endure in a noble way in your hearts [phrenes] and depart from these places [topoi]; and as for things forbidden by divine law [Themis], do not consider it just [dikaion] to look upon those things, or to hear things you must not hear. So go away, go, as fast as you can—except for the one who is authorized, Theseus, who must be present and must learn the things that are being done [drâın].” Such things he spoke, and we listened, each and every one of us. With streaming tears we mourned as we accompanied the maidens and went off. But after we had departed, in a short time, we turned around and looked back and saw that the man was nowhere present any more and that our king [= Theseus] was alone, screening his eyes by holding his hand in front of his head, as if some terrifying thing to fear had appeared before him, something unbearable to look at. And then, after a short time, we saw him adore the Earth and also the Olympus that belongs to the gods, using the same wording for both. But by what fate Oedipus perished, no one among mortals can indicate, except the head of Theseus alone. You see, what happened to him [= Oedipus] was not that the god’s fiery thunderbolt did him in, nor was he done in by anything that comes from the sea [pontos], by some stirring of a gust of wind [thuella], coming for him in the fullness of time. No, it was either some escort sent by the gods, or else it was that thing from the nether world,
thing that has good intentions [noos], that gaping unlit foundation of the earth. 

You see, the man did not need lamentations, and there were no diseases that gave him any pain at the moment when he was escorted away. No, if there was ever any mortal 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 philoi?

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

_Antigone, Ismene, and attendants enter._

**Antigone**

_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, philoi.

**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] 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. GN

[back] 5. The priests in charge of the rites of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis.
6. Parthenopaios means ‘having the looks of the maiden [parthenos]’.


8. Theseus and Perithoös journeyed together to the Underworld, but only Theseus was able to return.

9. Meaning ‘Leaping Rock’; Thorikios is apparently derived from thoros ‘leaping; semen’.

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.

11. The verb drân means ‘do’ or ‘perform ritual, sacrifice’.

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