

Oedipus Tyrannus

By Sophocles

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Before the palace of Oedipus in Thebes. Suppliants are seated at the altars. Oedipus enters.

Oedipus

My children, latest-born wards of old Kadmos, why do you sit before me thus with wreathed branches of suppliants, while the city reeks with incense, **5** rings with prayers for health and cries of woe? I did not think it right, my children, to hear these things from the mouths of others, and have come here myself, Oedipus, with *kleos* among all people. Tell me, venerable old man—since it is proper that you **10** speak for these—in what mood you sit here, one of fear or of desire? Be sure that I will gladly give you all my help. I would be hard-hearted indeed if I did not pity such suppliants as these.

Priest of Zeus

¹⁴ Oedipus, ruler of my land, ¹⁵ you see the ages of those who are seated ¹⁶ at your altars: some, nestlings that cannot yet get very far ¹⁷ by flying, they don't have the strength, while others are weighted down with age. ¹⁸ The priest of Zeus, that is who I am, while these others are from the ranks of young men, ¹⁹ specially selected. The rest of the people, wearing garlands, ²⁰ are seated at the place of assembly [*agorai*], at the twin buildings of Athena, ²¹ temples, where Ismenos gives prophetic answers with his fiery ashes. ²² This is all because the city [*polis*], as you yourself see, is very much ²³ afflicted with a seastorm now, and it cannot lift its head ²⁴ any longer out of the depths of the murderous churning of the sea. ²⁵ Something that makes things wilt [*phthinein*] has descended on the buds containing the fruit [*karpos*] of the land. ²⁶ Yes, making things wilt [*phthinein*], it has also descended on the herds of cattle grazing in the pastures. And on whatever is produced ²⁷ from women, which has become lifeless. And the flaming god ²⁸ has swooped down. He is a most hateful plague, afflicting the city [*polis*]; because of him the house of Kadmos is emptied, while black ³⁰ Hādēs is enriched with sobs and laments [*gooi*]. ³¹ It is not because we rank you [= Oedipus] equal [*isos*] to the gods ³² that I and these children are suppliants at your hearth, ³³ but because we think of you as the first among men in life's shared fortunes, ³⁴ judging [*krinein*] you that way, and first also in dealings with superhuman forces [*daimones*]. ³⁵ You freed us when you came to the city of the Cadmeans [= Thebans], ³⁶ ridding us of the tribute we had to keep on giving to the harsh female singer of songs, ³⁷ and though you knew no more than anyone else, ³⁸ nor had you been taught, but rather by the assistance of a god [*theos*], ³⁹ it is said and it is thought that you resurrected

[*orthoûn* 'make straight'] our life. ⁴⁰ Now, as we all address your most powerful head, the head of Oedipus, as we touch it, ⁴¹ we, your suppliants, implore you as we turn to you ⁴² to find some protection [*alkē*] for us, whether from one of the gods ⁴³ you hear some prophetic wording [*phēmē*], or learn of it perhaps from some man. ⁴⁴ I say this because those who are experienced, ⁴⁵ thanks to the advice they give, can make—I see it—even accidental things have the power of life. ⁴⁶ Come, best [*aristos*] among mortals, resurrect [*an-orthoûn* 'make straight'] our city [*polis*]! ⁴⁷ Come! And do be careful, since now this land here ⁴⁸ calls you a savior [*sōtēr*], thanks to your willingness to help in the past. ⁴⁹ And, concerning your rule [*arkhē*], do not let it happen that our memory of it will be ⁵⁰ that we were first set up straight [*es orthon*] and then let down, falling again. ⁵¹ So give us safety and resurrect [*an-orthoûn* 'make straight'] this city [*polis*]! ⁵² With a favorable omen of birds was the past good fortune ⁵³ provided by you for us, and so become now the same person, equal [*isos*] to who you were, ⁵⁴ since, if in fact you are to rule this land just as you have power over it now, ⁵⁵ it is better to have power over men than over a wasteland. ⁵⁶ Neither tower nor ship is anything, ⁵⁷ if it is empty and no men dwell [*sun-oikeîn*] inside.

Oedipus

⁵⁸ My piteous children, I know—they are not unknown to me— ⁵⁹ the desires you have as you come to me. You see, I know well that ⁶⁰ you are all sick, and that, sick as you are, when it comes to me, ⁶¹ there is not a single one of you who is as sick as I am. ⁶² You see, your pain [*algos*] goes into each one of you ⁶³ alone, all by yourself, and into no other person, but my ⁶⁴ soul [*psūkhē*] mourns for the city [*polis*], for myself, and for you—it does it all together. ⁶⁵ So you are not awakening me from sleep; ⁶⁶ no, I want you to know that I have by now wept many tears, ⁶⁷ gone many ways in the wanderings of my thinking. ⁶⁸ After giving it some good thought, I came up with one and only one remedy [*iasis*], ⁶⁹ and I acted on it. You see, the son of Menoikeus, ⁷⁰ Creon, my wife's brother, was sent to the Pythian place, ⁷¹ sent by me to the dwellings of Phoebus [Apollo], so that he could find out what ⁷² I should do [*drân*] or say to save this city [*polis*] here. ⁷³ And now, when the lapse of days is reckoned, ⁷⁴ it bothers me what he might be doing, because it is beyond my expectation, ⁷⁵ how much longer he is gone past the fitting length of time. ⁷⁶ But when he does arrive, I will be worthless [*kakos*] ⁷⁷ if I do not do [*drân*] all the things indicated by the god.

Priest

You have spoken opportunely, since at this time these people here indicate [*sēmainein*] that Creon is drawing near.

Oedipus

80 Lord Apollo, may he come to us in the brightness of saving [*sōtēr*] fortune, even as

his face is bright!

Priest

He seems to bring comfort, since otherwise he would not be coming thickly crowned with berry-laden bay.

Oedipus

We will soon know: he is in range of hearing.

To Creon.

85 Lord, my relation, child of Menoikeus, what news have you brought us from the god?

Creon

Good news. I tell you that even troubles hard to bear will end in perfect peace if they find the right issue.

Oedipus

But what kind of answer [*epos*] was there? So far your words make me **90** neither bold nor fearful.

Creon

⁹¹ If you want to hear in the presence of these people here, ⁹² I am ready to speak: otherwise we can go inside.

Oedipus

⁹³ Speak to all. I say this because the load I am carrying for the sake of these people here, ⁹⁴ that sorrow [*penthos*], is more than the load I carry for my own soul [*psūkhē*].

Creon

95 I should tell you what I heard from the god: ⁹⁶ we have been given clear orders by Phoebus [Apollo] the lord ⁹⁷ to take the pollution [*miasma*] that he said has been nurtured in the land, ⁹⁸ in this one, and to expel it, not continuing to nurture it till it cannot be healed.

Oedipus

⁹⁹ To expel it [= the pollution] by using what kind of purification [*katharmos*]? What is the kind of misfortune that has happened?

Creon

100 To expel it [= the pollution] by expelling the man, or by paying back bloodshed with bloodshed. ¹⁰¹ That is the solution, since it is the blood that brings the tempest to our city [*polis*].

Oedipus

¹⁰² And who is the man whose fate [*tukhē*] he [= Apollo] thus reveals?

Creon

¹⁰³ We once had, my king, Laios as the leader ¹⁰⁴ of this land here before you started being the director [= *euthunein* 'direct' literally means 'make straight'] of this city [*polis*] here.

Oedipus

105 I know it well—by hearsay, for I never saw him.

Creon

¹⁰⁶ The man is dead, and now the god gives clear orders ¹⁰⁷ to take vengeance against those, whoever they are, who caused his death with their own hands.

Oedipus

¹⁰⁸ Where on earth are they? Where will this thing be found, ¹⁰⁹ this dim trail of an ancient guilt [*aitiā*]?

Creon

110 In this land, the god said. What is sought after can be caught; only that which is not watched escapes.

Oedipus

Was it in the house, or in the field, or on foreign soil that Laios met his bloody end?

Creon

He left our land, as he said, as an emissary [*theōros*] to Delphi. **115** And once he had set forth, he never again returned.

Oedipus

And was there none to tell? Was there no traveling companion who saw the deed, from whom tidings might have been gained and used?

Creon

All perished, save one who fled in fear, and could tell with assurance only one thing of all that he saw.

Oedipus

120 And what was that? One thing might hold the clue to many, if we could only get a small beginning for hope.

Creon

He said that robbers fell upon them, not in one man's might, but with a force of many.

Oedipus

How then, unless some intrigue had been worked with bribes **125** from here in Thebes, would the robber have been so bold?

Creon

Such things were surmised. But once Laios was slain no avenger arose amid our evils.

Oedipus

But when tyranny had fallen in this way, what evil prevented a full search?

Creon

130 The riddling Sphinx had led us to let things that were obscure go, and to investigate what was at our feet.

Oedipus

I will start afresh, and once more cast light on these things. Worthily has Phoebus Apollo—and worthily have you—bestowed this care on the cause of the dead. And so, as is *dikē*, you will find me leagued with you **135** in seeking vengeance for this land, and for the god as well. I will dispel this taint not on behalf of far-off *philoī*, but on my own behalf. For whoever slew Laios **140** might wish to take vengeance on me also with a hand as fierce. Therefore by avenging Laios I serve myself. Come, my children, as quickly as possible rise from the altar-steps, and lift these suppliant boughs. Let someone summon here Kadmos' people, warning them that I will leave nothing untried. **145** With the god's help our good fortune—or our fall—will stand revealed.

Priest

My children, let us rise. What we came to seek, this man promises of his own accord. And may Phoebus, who sent these oracles, **150** come to us as savior [*sōtēr*] and deliverer from the pestilence.

The Chorus of Theban elders enters.

Chorus

strophe 1

O sweetly-speaking message of Zeus, in what spirit have you come to glorious Thebes from golden Pytho? I am on the rack, terror shakes my *phrēn*, O Delian healer to whom wild cries rise, **155** in holy fear of you, wondering what thing you will work for me, perchance unknown before, perchance renewed with the revolving seasons [*hōrai*]. Tell me, immortal Voice, child of golden Hope.

antistrophe 1

First I call on you, daughter of Zeus, immortal Athena, **160** and on your sister, Artemis, guardian of our earth, who sits on her throne of good *kleos* above the circle of our *agorā*, and on far-shooting Apollo: O shine forth for me, my three-fold help against death! **165** If ever before you drove a fiery pest from our borders to stop disasters [*atai*] rushing upon our *polis*, come now also!

strophe 2

Alas, countless are the sorrows I bear! **170** A plague is on all our people, and thought can find no weapon for defense. The fruits of the glorious earth do not grow; by no birth of offspring do women surmount the labors [*kamatoi*] in which they shriek. **175** You can see life after life speed away, like a bird on the wing, swifter than irresistible fire, to the shore of the western god.

antistrophe 2

With such deaths past numbering, the *polis* perishes. **180** Unpitied, her children lie on the ground, spreading pestilence, with no one to mourn them. Meanwhile young wives and gray-haired mothers raise a wail at the steps of the altars, some here, some there, **185** and groan in supplication for their terrible pains [*ponoi*]. The prayers to the Healer ring clear, and with them the voice of lamentation. For which things, golden daughter of Zeus, send us the bright face of comfort.

strophe 3

190 Grant that the fierce god of death, who now, without the bronze of shields, yet amidst cries as though of battle, wraps me in the flames of his onset, may turn his back in speedy flight from our land, borne by a favorable wind to the great chamber of Amphitrite, **195** or to the Thracian waves, those waters where no *xenoi* find haven. For if night leaves anything undone, it comes to fulfillment [*telos*] by day. You who wield the **200** powers [*kratos* pl.] of fiery lightning, Zeus our father, slay him beneath your thunderbolt.

antistrophe 3

Lykeian Lord, would that the shafts from your bent bow's string of woven gold might **205** go forth in their might, our champions in the face of the foe, and the flashing fires of Artemis too, with which she darts through the Lycian hills. I call him whose locks are bound with gold, **210** who is named with the name of this land, ruddy Dionysus to whom Bacchants cry, to draw near with the blaze of his shining torch, **215** our ally against the god without *tīmē* among the gods.

Oedipus

You pray. And in answer to your prayer, if you will give a loyal reception to my words [*epea*], and minister to your own disease, you may hope to find succor and relief from woes. These words I will speak publicly, as one who was a stranger [*xenos*] to the report, **220** a stranger to the deed. I would not go far on the trail if I were tracing it alone, without a clue [*sumbolon*]. But as it is—since it was only after the event that I was counted a Theban among Thebans—to you, Kadmeians all, I do thus proclaim:

Whoever of you knows **225** by whom Laios son of Labdakos was slain, I bid him to indicate [*sēmainein*] all to me. And if he is afraid, I order him to remove the danger of the charge from his path by denouncing himself; he will suffer no other punishment, but will only leave this land, unhurt. **230** If anyone knows the assassin to be an alien,

from another land, let him not keep silent. I will make him profit [*kerdos*], and my gratitude [*kharis*] shall rest with him besides. But if he keeps silent, if anyone, through fear, seeks to screen himself or a *philos* from my pronouncement [*epos*], **235** then hear what I shall do. I charge you that no resident of this land, of which I hold the royal power [*kratos*], receive or address that murderer, whoever he is, or make him a partner in prayer or sacrifice, **240** or give him a share of the lustral rite. Ban him from your houses, all of you, knowing that this is the pollution [*miasma*], as the oracle of the Pythian god has recently shown to me. In this way **245** I am an ally to the *daimōn* and to the dead man. And I pray solemnly that the slayer, whoever he is, whether he has gotten away alone or with partners, may wear out his unblest life evilly as he is evil [*kakos*]. And for myself I pray that if he should, **250** with my knowledge, become a resident of my house, I may suffer [*paskhein*] the same things which I have just called down on others. I order you to make all these words come to fulfillment [*telos*], for my sake, for the sake of the god, and for the sake of our land, thus blasted with barrenness by angry heaven.

Even if the matter had not been urged upon us by a god, **255** it still would not have been fit that you should leave the guilt thus unpunished, when one so noble—and he your king—had perished. You should have searched it out. But now, since I hold the powers which he once held, **260** possessing his bed and the wife who bore his children, and since, had his hope of offspring [*genos*] not been unsuccessful, children born of one mother would have tied us with a common bond—as it was, fate swooped upon his head—I will uphold this cause, as though it were that of my own father, **265** and will leave no stone unturned in my search for the one who shed the blood, for the honor of the son of Labdakos—and son of Polydoros and of Kadmos before him and of Agenor of old.

And for those who do not obey me, I pray that the gods **270** send them neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb, but that they perish by the present fate, or by one still worse. But to all you other Kadmeians who are satisfied by these things, may *dikē*, our ally, **275** and all the gods be gracious always.

Chorus

As you have put me under oath, on my oath, my lord, I will speak. I am not the slayer, nor can I reveal him. As for the investigation, it was for Phoebus, who enjoined it, to tell us who wrought the deed.

Oedipus

280 Justly [*dikaia*] said. But no man on earth can force the gods to do what they do not want.

Chorus

I would like to say what seems to me the next best course.

Oedipus

And if there is a third course, do not hesitate to reveal it.

Chorus

I know that our lord Teiresias is the seer most like our **285** lord Apollo; from him, my lord, an investigator might learn most clearly about these affairs.

Oedipus

Not even this have I left uncared for. On Creon's suggestion, I sent a man to bring him. And I've been wondering for some time why he is not here.

Chorus

290 Indeed—his skill apart—the words [*epea*] are but faint and old.

Oedipus

What sort are they? I am investigating every tale.

Chorus

He was said to have been killed by some wayfarers.

Oedipus

I too have heard that. But no one sees the one who did it.

Chorus

If he knows what fear is, he will not hesitate to come forward when he **295** hears your curses, so dire are they.

Oedipus

When a man does not shrink from a deed, neither is he scared by a word.

Chorus

But there is no one to convict him. For here they bring at last the godlike seer [*mantis*], the only man in whom what is true [*alēthēs*] lives.

Teiresias enters, led by a boy.

Oedipus

300 Teiresias, whose soul grasps all things, that which may be told and that which is unspeakable, the secrets of heaven and the affairs of the earth—you feel with your *phrēn*, though you cannot see, what a huge plague haunts our *polis*. From which, great prophet, we find you to be our protector and only savior [*sōtēr*]. **305** Now, Phoebus—if indeed you have not heard the reports—has sent answer to our question that the only way to rid ourselves of this pest that afflicts us is to discover the slayers of Laios, and then to slay or banish them from our land. **310** Do not, then, begrudge us the voice of the birds or any other path of the knowledge of the seer [*mantis*], but save yourself and your *polis*, save me, save all that is damaged by the defilement [*miasma*] of the dead. We are in your hands, and man's noblest labor [*ponos*] is to help others **315** to the best of his means and powers.

Teiresias

Alas, how terrible it is to have *phrenes* when it does not benefit those who have it. I knew this well, but let it slip from mind; otherwise I would not have come here.

Oedipus

What now? How disheartened you have come!

Teiresias

320 Let me go home. For you will bear your own burden to the end, and I will bear mine, if you consent.

Oedipus

Your words are strange and unkindly to the *polis* which nurtured you, since you withhold this response.

Teiresias

I see that you, for your part, speak what is off the mark [*kairos*]. **325** Therefore do not speak, so I will not suffer [*paskhein*] the same.

Oedipus

For the love of the gods, don't turn away, if you have *phrenes*; we all implore you on our knees as suppliants.

Teiresias

All of you lack *phrenes*. Never will I reveal my evils—not to call them yours.

Oedipus

330 What are you saying? Do you know the secret and refuse to tell it? Will you betray and destroy the *polis*?

Teiresias

I will grieve neither myself nor you. Why do you ask these things in vain? You will not learn the answers from me.

Oedipus

You would anger a stone! Most *kakos* of the *kakoi*, will you not speak out? **335** Can nothing touch you? Will you never come to an end [*telos*]?

Teiresias

You find fault with my anger, but you do not perceive your own that lives with you; no, you blame me.

Oedipus

Who would not be angry hearing such words [*epea*], **340** with which you now are slighting the *polis*?

Teiresias

Though future will come of itself, though I shroud it in silence.

Oedipus

Since it must come anyway, it is right that you tell it to me.

Teiresias

I will speak no further; rage, if you wish, with the fiercest wrath your *thūmos* knows.

Oedipus

345 In my anger I will not spare to speak all my thoughts. Know that you seem to me to have helped in plotting the deed, and to have done it, short of performing the actual murder with your own hands; if you had eye-sight, I would have said that you had done even this by yourself.

Teiresias

350 True [*alēthēs*]? I order you to abide by your own decree, and from this day forth not to speak to these men or to me, since you are the accursed defiler of this land.

Oedipus

So brazen with your blustering taunt? **355** Where do you think to escape to?

Teiresias

I have escaped. There is strength in my truth [*alēthēs*].

Oedipus

Who taught you this? Not your skill, at any rate.

Teiresias

You yourself. For you spurred me on to speak against my will.

Oedipus

What did you say? Speak again, so I may learn it better.

Teiresias

360 Did you not understand before, or are you talking to test me?

Oedipus

I cannot say I understood fully. Tell me again.

Teiresias

I say that you are the killer of the man whose slayer you seek.

Oedipus

Now you will regret that you have said such dire words twice.

Teiresias

365 Should I tell you more, that you might get more angry?

Oedipus

Say as much as you want; it will be said in vain.

Teiresias

I say that you have been living in unguessed shame with your most *philos*, and do not see to what woe you have come.

Oedipus

Do think that you will always be able to speak like this without smarting for it?

Teiresias

If indeed there is any strength in truth [*alēthēs*].

Oedipus

370 There is, except for you. You do not have that strength, since you are maimed in your ears, in your *noos*, and in your eyes.

Teiresias

And you are a poor wretch to utter taunts that every man here will soon hurl at you.

Oedipus

Night, endless night has you in her keeping, so that you can never hurt me **375** nor any man that sees the light of the sun.

Teiresias

No, it is not your fate to fall at my hands, since Apollo, to whom this matter is a concern, is sufficient.

Oedipus

Are these Creon's devices, or your own?

Teiresias

Creon is no trouble for you; you are your own.

Oedipus

380 O wealth, and tyranny, and skill surpassing skill in life's keen rivalries, how great is the envy in your keeping, if, for the sake of this power which the *polis* has entrusted to me, a gift unsought, **385** Creon the trustworthy, Creon my old *philos*, has crept upon me by stealth, yearning to overthrow me, and has suborned such a scheming juggler as this, a tricky quack, who has eyes only for gain [*kerdos*], but is blind in his art!

390 Come, tell me, where have you proved yourself a seer [*mantis*]? Why, when the watchful dog who wove dark song was here, did you say nothing to free the people? Yet the riddle [*ainigma*] was not for the first comer to read: there was need for the help of a *mantis*, **395** and you were discovered not to have this art, either from birds, or as known from some god. But rather I, Oedipus the ignorant, stopped her, having attained the answer through my wit alone, untaught by birds. It is I whom you are trying to oust, thinking that **400** you will have great influence in Creon's court. But I think that you and the one who plotted these things will rue your zeal to purge the

land; if you did not seem to be an old man, you would have learned at the cost of your suffering [*pathos*] what sort of *phrenes* you have.

Chorus

To our way of thinking, these words, both his and yours, Oedipus, **405** have been said in anger. We have no need of this, but rather we must seek how we shall best discharge the *mantis*-delivered words of the god.

Teiresias

Though you are *turannos*, the right of reply must be deemed the same for both; over that I have power [*kratos*]. **410** For I do not live as your slave, but as Loxias'. I will not stand enrolled under Creon for my patron. And I tell you, since you have taunted my blindness, that though you have sight, you do not see what evil you are in, nor where you dwell, nor with whom. **415** Do you know who your parents are? You have been an unwitting enemy to your own people, both in the Underworld and on the earth above. And the double lash of your mother's and your father's curse will one day drive you from this land in dreadful haste, with darkness upon those eyes of yours which now can see. **420** What place will be harbor to your cries, what part of all Kithairon will not ring with them soon, when you have learned the meaning of the nuptials in which, within that house, you found a fatal haven, after a voyage so fair? And you have not guessed a throng of other evils, **425** which will bring you level with you true self and with your own children. Therefore heap your scorn upon Creon and upon my message; no man will ever be crushed more miserably than you.

Oedipus

Are these taunts to be endured from him? **430** Be gone, to your ruin, be gone this instant! Will you not turn your back and leave this house?

Teiresias

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

Oedipus

I did not know you would speak foolishly, for otherwise it would have been a long time before I summoned you to my home.

Teiresias

435 I was born like this—as you think, a fool, but in the opinion of the parents who bore you, quite in control of the *phrenes*.

Oedipus

What parents? Wait. What man is my sire?

Teiresias

This day will reveal your birth and bring your ruin.

Oedipus

What riddles [*ainigma* pl.], what dark words you always say.

Teiresias

440 Are you not the best at unraveling mysteries?

Oedipus

Reproach me in what you will find me to be great.

Teiresias

Yet it was just that fortune that undid you.

Oedipus

But if it saved [*sōzein*] this *polis*, I care not.

Teiresias

I take my leave. You, boy, lead me.

Oedipus

445 Yes, let him take you; here you are a hindrance, a source of trouble. When you have gone, you will vex me no more.

Teiresias

I will go when I have performed the errand for which I came, fearless to your frown; you can never destroy me. I tell you that the man whom you have been seeking this long while, **450** uttering threats and proclaiming a search into the murder of Laios, is here, apparently an emigrant stranger [*xenos*], but soon to be found a native of Thebes, unhappy about his fortune. A blind man, though now he sees, **455** a beggar, though now rich, he will make his way to a foreign land, feeling the ground before him with his staff. And he will be discovered to be at once brother and father of the children with whom he consorts; son and husband of the woman who bore him; **460** heir to his father's bed, shedder of his father's blood. So go in and evaluate this, and if you find that I am wrong, say then that I have no *phrenes* in the art of the *mantis*.

They exit.

Chorus

strophe 1

Who is he who the divine voice from the Delphian rock has said **465** wrought with blood-red hands horrors that no tongue can tell? It is time [*hōra*] that he ply in flight a foot stronger than the feet of storm-swift steeds. **470** The son of Zeus is springing upon him with fiery lightning, and with him come the dread unerring Fates.

antistrophe 1

Recently the message has flashed forth from snowy Parnassus **475** to make all search for the unknown man. He wanders under cover of the wild wood, among caves and

rocks, fierce as a bull, wretched and forlorn on his joyless path, still seeking to separate himself from the words of the *mantis* revealed at the central shrine of the earth. **480** But that doom ever lives, ever flits around him.

strophe 2

The wise augur moves me, neither approving nor denying, with dread, with dread indeed. **485** I am at a loss what to say. I am fluttered with expectations, seeing neither the present nor the future clearly. Never in past days or in these have I heard how the house of Labdakos **490** or the son of Polybos had any quarrel with one another that I could bring as proof **495** in assailing the public reputation of Oedipus, seeking to avenge the line of Labdakos for the undiscovered murder.

antistrophe 2

Zeus and Apollo indeed are perceptive [*sunetoi*] and know the affairs of the earth. **500** But there is no true test [*alēthēs krisis*] of whether a mortal *mantis* attains more knowledge than I do, though man may surpass man in wisdom [*sophiā*]. **505** But until I see the word made good, I will never assent when men blame Oedipus. Before all eyes the winged maiden came against him once upon a time, and he was seen to be *sophos*, **510** and bore the test in welcome service to the *polis*. Never, therefore, will he be judged guilty of evil by my *phrenes*.

Creon enters.

Creon

Fellow-citizens, having learned that Oedipus the *turannos* accuses me and makes terrible utterances [*epea*] against me, I have come, indignant. **515** If he thinks that in the present troubles he has suffered [*paskhein*] from me, by word or by deed, anything harmful, in truth I desire not my full term of years, when I must bear such blame as this. The wrong of this rumor **520** touches me not in one point alone, but has the largest scope, if I am to be called a *kakos* in the *polis*, *kakos* by you and by my *philoī*.

Chorus

But perhaps this taunt came under the stress of anger, rather from the purpose of his *phrenes*.

Creon

525 Was it said that my counsels had brought the *mantis* to utter his falsehoods?

Chorus

Such things were said—I don't know with what meaning.

Creon

And was this charge laid against me with steady eyes and steady *phrēn*?

Chorus

530 I don't know. I see not what my masters do. But here comes our lord from the house.

Oedipus enters.

Oedipus

You, how did you get here? Are you so boldfaced that you have come to my house, you who are manifestly the murderer of its master, **535** the palpable thief of my tyranny? Come, tell me, in the name of the gods, was it cowardice or folly which you saw in me and which led you to plot this thing? Did you think that I would not notice this deed of yours creeping upon me by stealth, or that if I became aware of it I would not ward it off? **540** Is your attempt not foolish, to seek the tyranny without followers or *philoï*—a prize which followers and property must win?

Creon

Mark me now: hear a fair reply in answer to your words, and then judge for yourself on the basis of knowledge.

Oedipus

545 You are apt in speech, but I am poor at learning from you, since I have found you a malignant foe.

Creon

Now hear first how I will explain this very thing.

Oedipus

One thing—that you are not evil [*kakos*—don't bother to explain to me.

Creon

If you think that stubbornness **550** without *noos* is a good gift, you do not have your *phrenes* straight.

Oedipus

If you think you can wrong a kinsman and escape the *dikē*, then you do not have *phrenes*.

Creon

Justly said, I grant you; but tell me what the wrong is that you say you are suffering [*paskhein*] at my hands.

Oedipus

555 Did you, or did you not, advise me to send for that revered *mantis*?

Creon

Even now I am of the same mind.

Oedipus

How long is it, then, since Laios...

Creon

Did what? My *noos* fails me.

Oedipus

560 Was swept out of sight by deadly violence.

Creon

The count of years would run far into the past.

Oedipus

Did this *mantis* possess this skill in those days?

Creon

He was *sophos* as now, and held in equal *tīmē*.

Oedipus

Did he make mention of me at that time?

Creon

565 Never, certainly, when I was within hearing.

Oedipus

Did you never investigate the murder?

Creon

Due search we held, of course; we learned nothing.

Oedipus

And how was it that this *sophos* man did not tell this story then.

Creon

I do not know; where I lack *phrenes* it is my custom to be silent.

Oedipus

570 This much, at least, you know, and could declare with insight enough.

Creon

What is that? If I know it, I will not deny.

Oedipus

That, if he had not conferred with you, he would never have named me as Laios' slayer.

Creon

If he says this, you know best; but I deem it just [*dikaia*] **575** to learn from you as

much as you have from me now.

Oedipus

Learn your fill. I will never be convicted as a murderer.

Creon

Say, then – have you married my sister?

Oedipus

That inquiry [*historia*] allows no denial.

Creon

And you rule the land as she does, with equal sway?

Oedipus

580 She obtains from me all that she wishes.

Creon

And do I not rank as a third peer of you two?

Oedipus

It's just there that you are seen to be an evil [*kakos*] *philos*.

Creon

Not so, if you would reason with your heart as I do with mine. Weigh this first: whether you think that anyone would **585** choose to rule amid terrors rather than in unruffled peace, granted that he is to have the same powers [*kratos* pl.]. Now I, for one, have by nature no yearning to be *turannos* rather than to do the deeds of a *turannos*, and neither does any man I know who understands how to have moderation [*sōphrosunē*]. **590** For now I attain everything from you without fear, but, if I were ruler myself, I would have to do much even against my own pleasure.

How then could tyranny be sweeter for me to have than painless rule and influence? Not yet am I so misguided **595** that I desire anything besides the good which brings gain [*kerdos*]. Now every man has a greeting for me; now all that have a request of you crave to speak with me, since therein lies all their hope of success. Why then should I resign these things and take those others? **600** No *noos* will become *kakos* while it has good *phrenes*. No, I am no lover of such policy, and if another put it into action, I could never bear to go along with him. And, in proof of this, first go to Pytho, and ask whether I brought a true report of the oracle. **605** Then next, if you have found that I have planned anything in concert with the soothsayer, take and slay me, by the sentence not of one mouth, but of two—of my own no less than yours. But do not assume me guilty [*aitios*] on unproved surmise. It is not just to judge the bad good at random, **610** nor the good bad. I count it a like thing for a man to cast off a true *philos* as to cast away the life in his own bosom, which he most loves. You will surely learn about these affairs in time, since time alone reveals a *dikaios* man. **615**

But you can discern a bad man even in one day alone.

Chorus

He has spoken well, my lord, for one who is taking care not to fall; those who are quick in *phrenes* are not sure.

Oedipus

When the stealthy plotter is moving on me quickly, I, too, must be quick in my counterplot. **620** If I await him at leisure [*hēsukhiā*], his ends will have been gained, and mine lost.

Creon

What do you want then? To banish me from the land?

Oedipus

Hardly. I desire your death, not your exile, so that I might show what a thing is envy.

Creon

625 Are you resolved not to yield or believe?

Oedipus

[Oedipus' response is missing.]

Creon

I see you are not in possession of *phrenes*.

Oedipus

Sane, at least, in my own interest.

Creon

But you should be so in mine also.

Oedipus

You are *kakos*.

Creon

But if you understand nothing?

Oedipus

Still I must rule.

Creon

Not if you rule badly.

Oedipus

O *polis, polis!*

Creon

630 The *polis* is mine too, not yours alone.

Chorus

Cease, lords. Just in time I see Iocasta coming from the house, with whose help you should resolve your present feud.

Iocasta enters.

Iocasta

Misguided men, why have you raised **635** such foolish strife [*stasis*] of tongues? Are you not ashamed, while the land is so sick, to stir up ills of your own? Come, go into the house—and you, Creon, go to yours—and stop making so much of a petty grief.

Creon

Kinswoman, Oedipus your husband **640** wants to do one of two terrible evils to me, either to thrust me from the land of my fathers or to arrest and slay me.

Oedipus

Yes indeed, for I have caught him, lady, working evil against my person with his evil craft.

Creon

May I get no benefit, **645** but perish accursed, if I have done any of the things of which you charge me.

Iocasta

In the name of the gods, believe it, Oedipus; first have respect [*aidōs*] for this oath of the gods, then for me, and for these men who stand before you.

Chorus

Consent, have *phrenes*, listen, my lord. I beg you.

Oedipus

650 What would you have me grant you?

Chorus

Respect him who was in the past not inept [*nēpios*], and who now is strong in his oath.

Oedipus

Do you understand what you crave?

Chorus

I do.

Oedipus

655 Tell me what you mean.

Chorus

That you should never use an unproved rumor to cast a dishonoring charge on the *philos* who has bound himself with a curse.

Oedipus

Then be very sure that when you seek this you are seeking death or exile from this land.

Chorus

660 No, by the god foremost among all the gods, by the Sun! Without gods, without *philoī*, may I die the worst possible death, if I have this thought in my *phrenes*! **665** But my unhappy soul is worn by the withering of the land, as well as by the thought that our old woes should be crowned by new ones arising from the two of you.

Oedipus

Then let him go, though I am surely doomed to death, **670** or to be thrust without *tīmē* from the land by force. Your words, not his, move me to compassion.

Chorus

You are truly sullen in yielding, as you are vehement in the excesses of your *thūmos*. But such natures are **675** justly most difficult for themselves to bear.

Oedipus

Then will you not be gone and leave me in peace?

Creon

I will go on my way. I have found you undiscerning, but in the view of these men I am just.

Creon exits.

Chorus

Woman, why do you hesitate to take this man into the house?

Iocasta

680 I will, when I have learned what has happened.

Chorus

Blind suspicion arose, bred of talk, and injustice inflicts wounds.

Iocasta

On both sides?

Chorus

Yes.

Iocasta

And what was the story?

Chorus

685 It is enough, I think, enough, when our land is already vexed, that the matter should rest where it ceased.

Oedipus

Do you see to what you have come, though noble [*agathos*] in intention, in seeking to relax and blunt my zeal?

Chorus

Lord, I have said it more than once: **690** be sure that I would be shown to be a madman, bankrupt in sane counsel [*phrenes*], if ever I forsake you, who gave a true course to my *philē* country when it was **695** distraught with pains [*ponoi*], and who now are likely to prove our prospering guide.

Iocasta

In the name of the gods, tell me, lord, the reason that you have conceived this steadfast *mēnis*.

Oedipus

700 That I will do, for I respect you, wife, above these men. Creon is the cause, and the plots he has laid against me.

Iocasta

Come, tell me how the quarrel began.

Oedipus

He says that I am the murderer of Laios.

Iocasta

On his own knowledge or on hearsay from another?

Oedipus

705 He has made a rascal *mantis* his mouth-piece; as for himself, he keeps his lips wholly pure.

Iocasta

Then absolve yourself of the things about which you are speaking. Listen to me, and take comfort in learning that nothing of mortal birth is a partaker in the art of the *mantis*. **710** I will give you a pithy indication [*sēmeia*] of this: An oracle came to Laios once—I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers—saying that he would suffer his fate at the hands of the child to be born to him and me. **715** And he—as the rumor goes—was murdered one day by strange [*xenoi*] robbers at a place where the three highways meet. The child's birth was not yet three days past, when Laios pinned his ankles together and had it thrown, by others' hands, on a remote mountain. **720** So, in that case, Apollo did not bring it to pass that the child should become the slayer of his father, or that Laios should suffer [*paskhein*] that which he

feared: death at the hands of his child; thus the messages of the seer's art had foretold. Pay them no regard. Whatever necessary event **725** the god seeks, he himself will easily bring to light.

Oedipus

What restlessness of *psūkhē*, wife, what tumult has come upon my *phrenes* since I heard you speak!

Iocasta

What anxiety has startled you, that you say this?

Oedipus

I thought that I heard this from you: that Laios **730** was slain where the three roads meet.

Iocasta

Yes, that was the report, and it has not yet ceased.

Oedipus

And where is the place where this event [*pathos*] occurred?

Iocasta

The land is called Phocis; the branching forks lead to the same spot from Delphi and from Daulia.

Oedipus

735 And how much time has passed since these events took place?

Iocasta

The news was announced to the *polis* shortly before you were first seen in power over this land.

Oedipus

O Zeus, what have you decreed to do to me?

Iocasta

Why, Oedipus, does this matter weigh upon your heart?

Oedipus

740 Don't ask me yet. Tell me rather what stature Laios had, and how ripe his manhood was.

Iocasta

He was tall—the silver just lightly strewn among his hair—and his form was not greatly unlike your own.

Oedipus

Unhappy that I am! I think that I have **745** laid myself under a terrible curse without

realizing it.

Iocasta

How do you mean? I tremble when I look at you, my lord.

Oedipus

I have dread fears that the *mantis* can see. But you will reveal the matter better if you tell me one thing more.

Iocasta

Indeed, though I tremble, I will hear and answer all that you ask.

Oedipus

750 Did he go with a small force, or like a chieftain, with many armed followers?

Iocasta

Five they were in all—a herald [*kēru*x] among them—and there was one carriage which bore Laios.

Oedipus

755 Alas! It's all clear now! Who gave you these tidings, lady?

Iocasta

A servant, the only survivor who returned home.

Oedipus

Is he perchance in the house now?

Iocasta

No. Soon after he returned and found you holding power [*kratos* pl.] in Laios' stead, **760** he pleaded with me, with hand laid on mine, to send him to the fields, to the pastures of the flocks, that he might be far from the sight of this city. And I sent him; he was worthy, for a slave, to win even a larger favor [*khari*s] than that.

Oedipus

765 Then may he return to us without delay!

Iocasta

That is easy. But why do you enjoy this?

Oedipus

I fear, lady, that my words have been rash, and therefore I wish to behold him.

Iocasta

He will come. But I think that **770** I too have a claim to learn what lies heavy on your heart, my lord.

Oedipus

It will not be kept from you, now that my foreboding have advanced so far. To whom more than to you would I speak in suffering such a fortune as this? My father was Polybos of Corinth, **775** my mother the Dorian Merope. I was considered the greatest man among the townspeople there, until a chance befell me, worthy of wonder, though not worthy of my own haste regarding it. At a banquet, a man drunk with wine **780** cast it at me that I was not the true son of my father. And I, vexed, restrained myself for that day as best as I could, but on the next went to my mother and father and questioned them. They were angry at the one who had let this taunt fly. **785** So I had comfort about them, but the matter rankled in my heart, for such a rumor still spread widely. I went to Delphi without my parents' knowledge, and Phoebus sent me forth without giving me the *tīmē* of the knowledge for which I had come, **790** but in his response set forth other things, full of sorrow and terror and woe: that I was fated to defile my mother's bed, that I would reveal to men a brood which they could not endure to behold, and that I would slay the father that sired me. When I heard this, I turned in flight from the land of Corinth, **795** from then on thinking of it only by its position under the stars, to some spot where I should never see fulfillment [*telos*] of the infamies foretold in my evil doom. And on my way I came to the land in which you say that this *turannos* perished. **800** Now, wife, I will tell you the truth [*alēthēs*]. When on my journey I was near those three roads, there I met a herald [*kērux*], and a man in a carriage drawn by colts, as you have described. The leader and the old man **805** himself tried to thrust me by force from the path. Then, in anger, I struck the one pushing me aside, the driver, and when the old man saw this, he watched for the moment I was passing, and from his carriage, brought his double goad full down on my head. **810** Yet he was paid back with interest: with one swift blow from the staff in this hand he rolled right out of the carriage onto his back. I slew every one of them. But if this *xenos* had any tie of kinship to Laios, **815** who is now more wretched than this man before you? What mortal could be proved more hateful to heaven? No *xenos*, no citizen, is allowed to receive him at home, it is unlawful for anyone to accost him, and all must push him from their homes. And this—this curse— **820** was laid on me by no other mouth than my own. And I pollute the bed of the slain man with my hands by which he perished. Am I now *kakos*? Oh, am I not utterly unclean, seeing that I must be banished, and in banishment neither see my own people, **825** nor set foot in my own land, or else be joined in wedlock to my mother, and slay my father Polybos, who sired and reared me. Then would he not speak correctly about Oedipus, who judged these things to be sent down by some cruel *daimōn*? **830** Forbid, forbid, you pure and awe-inspiring gods, that I should ever see that day! No, may I be swept away from all men, before I see myself visited with that brand of doom.

Chorus

To us, lord, these things are fraught with fear. Yet have hope, until at least you have gained full knowledge **835** from the one who saw the deed.

Oedipus

I have, in truth, this much hope alone: I await the man summoned from the pastures.

Iocasta

And what do you want from him when he appears?

Oedipus

I will tell you. If his story is found **840** to tally with yours, I will stand clear of suffering [*pathos*].

Iocasta

And what special note did you hear from me?

Oedipus

You said that he spoke of Laios as slain by robbers. If he still speaks of several as before, I was not the slayer: **845** a solitary man could not be considered the same as that band. But if he names one lonely wayfarer, then beyond doubt this deed is leaning in my direction.

Iocasta

Be assured that thus the story [*epos*] was first told. He cannot revoke that, **850** for the *polis* heard it, not I alone. But even if he should diverge somewhat from his former story, never, lord, can he show that the murder of Laios is justly [*dikaia*] square with the prophecy, for Loxias plainly said that he was to die at the hand of my child. **855** How was it then that that poor innocent never slew him, but perished first? So henceforth, as far as the words of a *mantis* are concerned, I would not look to my right hand or my left.

Oedipus

You judge well. But nevertheless send someone to fetch the peasant, **860** and neglect not this matter.

Iocasta

I will send without delay. But let us go into the house: nothing will I do save what is *philon* to you.

They go into the palace.

Chorus

strophe 1

May fate [*moira*] still find me winning the praise of reverent purity in all words and **865** deeds sanctioned by those laws [*nomoi*] of range sublime, called into life through the high clear sky, whose father is Olympus alone. The mortal nature of men did not beget them, **870** nor shall oblivion ever lay them to sleep: the god is mighty in them, and he grows not old.

antistrophe 1

Hubris breeds the *turannos*. *Hubris*, once vainly stuffed with wealth **875** that is not proper or good for it, when it has scaled the topmost ramparts, is hurled to a dire doom, where no use of the feet serves to good advantage. But I pray that the god never **880** quell such rivalry as benefits the *polis*. The god I will ever hold for our protector.

strophe 2

But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, **885** with no fear of *dikē*, no reverence for the images of *daimones*, may an evil fate seize him for his ill-starred pride, if he will not get his profit [*kerdos*] with *dikē*, **890** or avoid unholy deeds, but seeks to lay profaning hands on things untouchable. Where such things occur, what mortal shall boast any more that he can ward off the arrow of the gods from his *psūkhē*? **895** If such deeds are held in *tīmē*, why should I be part of the *khoros*?

antistrophe 2

No longer will I go reverently to the earth's central and inviolate shrine, no more to Abae's temple or to Olympia, **900** if these oracles do not fit the outcome, so that all mortals shall point at them with their fingers. **905** No, wielder of power—if thus you are rightly called—Zeus, Lord of all, may it not escape you and your deathless power! The old prophecies concerning Laios are fading; already men annul them, and nowhere is Apollo glorified with *tīmai*; **910** the worship of the gods is perishing.

Iocasta enters.

Iocasta

Lords of the land, the thought has come to me to visit the shrines of the *daimones*, with this wreathed branch and these gifts of incense in my hands. For Oedipus excites his *thūmos* excessively with all sorts of griefs, **915** and does not judge the new things from the old, like a man of *noos*, but is under the control of the speaker, if he speaks of frightful things. Since I can do no good by counsel, to you, Lykeian Apollo—for you are nearest— **920** I have come as a suppliant with these symbols of prayer, that you may find us some riddance from uncleanness. For now we are all afraid looking upon him, like those who see the pilot [*kubernētēs*] of their ship stricken with panic.

A messenger enters.

Messenger

Can you tell me, *xenoi*, where **925** the palace of the *turannos* Oedipus is? Or better still, tell me where he himself is, if you know.

Chorus

This is his dwelling, and he himself, *xenos*, is within. This woman here is the mother of his children.

Messenger

Then may she be ever fortunate [*olbia*] in a prosperous [*olbios*] home, **930** since she is his spouse in ritual fullness [*telos*].

Iocasta

May you be likewise, *xenos*; your fair greeting deserves this. But say what you have come to seek or to indicate [*sēmainein*].

Messenger

Good tidings, woman, for your house and your husband.

Iocasta

935 What are they? From whom have you come?

Messenger

From Corinth, and at the message I will give now you will doubtless rejoice, yet haply grieve.

Iocasta

What is it? Why has it this double potency?

Messenger

The people will make him *turannos* of the **940** Isthmian land, as it was said there.

Iocasta

How then? Is the aged Polybos no longer in power [*kratos*]?

Messenger

No. For death holds him in the tomb.

Iocasta

What do you mean? Is Polybos dead, old man?

Messenger

If I am not speaking the truth [*alēthēs*], I am content to die.

Iocasta

945 Handmaid, away with all speed, and tell this to your master! O you *mantis*-delivered words of the gods, where do you stand now? It is this man that Oedipus long feared he would slay. And now this man has died in the course of destiny, not by his hand.

Oedipus enters.

Oedipus

950 Iocasta, most *philē* wife, why have you summoned me forth from these doors?

Iocasta

Hear this man, and judge, as you listen, to what the awe-inspiring *mantis*-delivered

words have come.

Oedipus

Who is he and what news does he have for me?

Iocasta

955 He comes from Corinth to tell you that your father Polybos lives no longer, but has perished.

Oedipus

How, *xenos*? You be the one who indicates [*sēmainein*] it.

Messenger

If I must first make these tidings plain, know indeed that he is dead and gone.

Oedipus

960 By treachery, or from illness?

Messenger

A light tilt of the scale brings the aged to their rest.

Oedipus

Ah, he died, it seems, of sickness?

Messenger

Yes, and of the long years that he had lived.

Oedipus

Alas, alas! Why indeed, my wife, should one look to the **965** hearth of the Pythian *mantis*, or to the birds that scream above our heads, who declared that I was doomed to slay my sire? But he is dead, and lies beneath the earth, and here I am, not having put my hand to any spear—unless, perhaps, he was killed by longing for me; **970** thus I would be the cause of his death. But the oracles as they stand Polybos has swept with him to his rest in Hādēs. They are worth nothing.

Iocasta

Did I not long ago foretell this to you?

Oedipus

You did, but I was misled by my fear.

Iocasta

975 Now no longer keep any of those things in your *thūmos*.

Oedipus

But surely I must fear my mother's bed.

Iocasta

What should a mortal man fear, for whom the decrees of Fortune are supreme, and who has clear foresight of nothing? It is best to live at random, as one may. **980** But fear not that you will wed your mother. Many men before now have so fared in dreams. But he to whom these things are as though nothing bears his life most easily.

Oedipus

All these words of yours would have been well said, **985** were my mother not alive. But as it is, since she lives, I must necessarily fear, though you speak well.

Iocasta

Your father's death is a great sign for us to take cheer.

Oedipus

Great, I know. But my fear is of her who lives.

Messenger

And who is the woman about whom you fear?

Oedipus

990 Merope, old man, the consort of Polybos.

Messenger

And what is it in her that moves your fear?

Oedipus

A heaven-sent *mantis*-delivered word of dread import, *xenos*.

Messenger

Lawful, or unlawful, for another to know?

Oedipus

Lawful, surely. Loxias once said that I was **995** doomed to marry my own mother, and to shed with my own hands my father's blood. For which reasons I long shirked my home in Corinth—with a happy outcome, to be sure, but still it is sweet to see the face of one's parents.

Messenger

1000 Was it really for fear of this that you became an exile from that *polis*?

Oedipus

And because I did not wish, old man, to be the murderer of my father.

Messenger

Why did I not release you from this fear right away, lord? After all, I have come here with a *noos* that is favorable to you.

Oedipus

And you would get a worthy return [*kharis*] from me.

Messenger

1005 Why, that is the biggest reason for my coming, so that I would do well because of your coming back home.

Oedipus

But I would never go back to them, from whose seed I originate.

Messenger

My child, it is in a good way that you are unaware of what you are doing.

Oedipus

How do you mean, old man. I ask you by the gods, inform me!

Messenger

1010 If it is on account of these that you shun going home.

Oedipus

Fearing that the message of Phoebus may have a clear outcome.

Messenger

Is it that you fear contracting a pollution [*miasma*] from those whose seed gave you birth?

Oedipus

That's it, old man! That is what gives me eternal fear.

Messenger

Do you know, then, that your fears are wholly vain?

Oedipus

1015 How so, if I was born of those parents?

Messenger

Because you had no family tie in common with Polybos .

Oedipus

What are you saying? Was Polybos not my sire?

Messenger

Just as much, and no more, than he who speaks to you.

Oedipus

And how can my sire be level with him who is as though nothing to me?

Messenger

1020 No, he fathered you not at all, any more than I.

Oedipus

How, then, did he call me his son?

Messenger

Long ago he received you as a gift from my hands.

Oedipus

And yet he loved me so dearly, who came from another's hand?

Messenger

His former childlessness won him over.

Oedipus

1025 And had you bought me or found me by chance, when you gave me to him?

Messenger

I found you in Kithairon's winding glens.

Oedipus

And why were you roaming those regions?

Messenger

I was in charge of mountain flocks.

Oedipus

You were a shepherd, a vagrant hireling?

Messenger

1030 But your savior [*sōtēr*], my son, in that time.

Oedipus

And what was my pain when you took me in your arms?

Messenger

The ankles of your feet might bear witness.

Oedipus

Ah me, why do you speak of that old woe?

Messenger

I freed you when you had your ankles pinned together.

Oedipus

1035 It was a dread brand of shame that I took from my cradle.

Messenger

So much that from that fortune you were called by that name which you still bear.

Oedipus

Oh, in the name of the gods, was the deed my mother's or father's? Speak!

Messenger

I know not. He who gave you to me knows better of that than I.

Oedipus

What, you got me from another? You did not light on me yourself?

Messenger

1040 No. Another shepherd gave you to me.

Oedipus

Who was he? Can you tell clearly?

Messenger

I think he was said to be one of the household of Laios.

Oedipus

The *turannos* who ruled this country long ago?

Messenger

The same. The man was a herdsman in his service.

Oedipus

1045 Is he still alive, that I might see him?

Messenger

You natives of this country should know best.

Oedipus

Is there any of you here present that knows the herdsman of whom he speaks, having seen him either in the pastures or here in town? Indicate [*sēmainein*] **1050** The time [*kairos*] has come for these things to be revealed at long last.

Chorus

I think he speaks of no other than the peasant you already wanted to see. But Iocasta herself might best tell you that.

Oedipus

Wife, do you know in your *noos* the one whom we summoned lately? **1055** Is it of him that this man speaks?

Iocasta

Why ask of whom he spoke? Regard it not—waste not a thought on what he said—it would be vain.

Oedipus

It must not happen, with such clues [*sēmeia*] in my grasp, that I should fail to bring my origin [*genos*] to light.

Iocasta

1060 For the gods' sake, if you have any care for your own life, forgo this search! My anguish is enough.

Oedipus

Be of good courage. Even if I should be found the son of a servile mother—a slave by three descents—you will not be proved base [*kakē*].

Iocasta

Hear me, I implore you: do not do this.

Oedipus

1065 I will not hear of not discovering the whole truth.

Iocasta

Yet I wish you well; I counsel you for the best.

Oedipus

These best counsels, then, vex my patience.

Iocasta

Ill-fated man, may you never know who you are!

Oedipus

Go, some one, fetch me the herdsman. **1070** Leave this woman to glory in her wealthy ancestry [*genos*].

Iocasta

Alas, alas, miserable man—that word alone can I say to you—and no other word ever again!

She rushes from the palace.

Chorus

Why has this woman gone, Oedipus, rushing off in wild grief? I fear **1075** a storm of evils will soon break forth from this silence.

Oedipus

Break forth what will! Be my seed ever so lowly, I crave to learn it. That woman perhaps—for she is proud with more than a woman's pride—feels ashamed of my lowly birth [*genos*]. But I, who hold myself son of Fortune **1080** that gives good, will not be left without *tīmē*. She is the mother from whom I spring, and the months, my kinsmen, have marked me sometimes lowly, sometimes great. Such being my heritage, never more can I prove **1085** false to it, and not search out the secret of my birth [*genos*].

Chorus

If I am a *mantis* or wise of heart, **1090** Kithairon, you will not fail—by heaven, you will not—to know at tomorrow’s full moon that Oedipus honors you as native to him, as his nurse, and his mother, and that you are celebrated in our *khoros*, **1095** because you are well-pleasing to our *turannos*. O Phoebus, to whom we cry, may these things find favor in your sight!

antistrophe

Who was it, my son, who of the race whose years are many, that bore you in wedlock with **1100** Pan, the mountain-roaming father? Or was it a bride of Loxias that bore you? For *philai* to him are all the upland pastures. **1105** Or perhaps it was Kyllene’s lord, the god of the Bacchants, dweller on the hill-tops, that received you, a new-born joy, from one of the Nymphs of Helikon, with whom he most often sports.

Oedipus

1110 Elders, if it is right for me, who have never met the man, to guess, I think I see the herdsman of whom we have been long in quest. In his venerable old age he tallies with this man’s years, and moreover I recognize those who bring him, I think, as servants of mine. **1115** But perhaps you have an advantage in knowledge over me, if you have seen the herdsman before.

Chorus

Yes, I know him, be sure. He was in the service of Laios—trusty as any shepherd.

The herdsman is brought in.

Oedipus

I ask you first, Corinthian *xenos*, if this is the man you mean.

Messenger

1120 He is, the one you are looking at.

Oedipus

You, old man—look this way and answer all that I ask—were you once in the service of Laios?

Servant [therapōn]

I was—not a bought slave, but reared in his house.

Oedipus

Employed in what labor, or what way of life?

Servant

1125 For the better part of my life I tended the flocks.

Oedipus

And what regions did you most frequently haunt?

Servant

Sometimes Kithairon, sometimes the neighboring ground.

Oedipus

Are you aware of ever having seen this man in these parts?

Servant

Doing what? What man do you mean?

Oedipus

1130 This man here. Have you ever met him before?

Servant

Not so that I could speak at once from memory.

Messenger

And no wonder, master. But I will bring clear recollection to his ignorance. I am sure he knows well of the time we spent together in the region of Kithairon **1135** for six-month periods, from spring to Arktouros, he with two flocks, and I with one. And then for the winter I used to drive my flock to my own fold, and he took his to the fold of Laios. **1140** Did any of this happen as I tell it, or did it not?

Servant

You speak the truth [*alēthēs*], though it was long ago.

Messenger

Come, tell me now: do you remember having given me a boy in those days, to be reared as my own foster-son?

Servant

What now? Why do you inquire [*historeîn*] about this?

Messenger

1145 This man, my friend, is he who then was young.

Servant

Plague seize you. Be silent once and for all.

Oedipus

Rebuke him not, old man. Your words need rebuking more than his.

Servant

And in what way, most noble master, do I offend?

Oedipus

1150 In not telling of the boy of whom he inquires [*historeîn*].

Servant

He speaks without knowledge, but labors [*poneîn*] in vain.

Oedipus

You will not speak as a favor [*kharis*], but you will in pain.

Servant

No, in the name of the gods, do not mistreat an old man.

Oedipus

Ho, some one – tie his hands behind him this instant!

Servant

1155 Alas, why? What do you want to learn?

Oedipus

Did you give this man the child about whom he inquires [*historeîn*]?

Servant

I did. Would that I had perished that day!

Oedipus

Well, you will come to that, unless you say whatever has *dikē* in it.

Servant

But if I speak I will be destroyed all the more.

Oedipus

1160 This man is bent, I think, on more delays.

Servant

No, no! I said before that I gave it to him.

Oedipus

Where did you get it from? From your own house, or from another?

Servant

It was not my own; I received it from another.

Oedipus

From whom of the citizens here? From what home?

Servant

1165 For the love of the gods, master, inquire [*historeîn*] no more!

Oedipus

You are lost if I have to question you again.

Servant

It was a child, then, of the house of Laios.

Oedipus

A slave? Or one of his own family [*genos*]?

Servant

Alas! I am on the dreaded brink of speech.

Oedipus

1170 And I of hearing; I must hear nevertheless.

Servant

You must know then, that it was said to be his own child. But your wife within could say best how these matters lie.

Oedipus

How? Did she give it to you?

Servant

Yes, my lord.

Oedipus

For what purpose?

Servant

That I should do away with it.

Oedipus

1175 Her own child, the wretched woman?

Servant

Yes, from fear of the evil prophecies.

Oedipus

What were they?

Servant

The tale ran that he would slay his father.

Oedipus

Why, then, did you give him to this old man?

Servant

Out of pity, master, thinking that he would carry him to another land, from where he himself came. But he saved [*sōzein*] him for the direst woes. **1180** For if you are what this man says, be certain that you were born ill-fated.

Oedipus

Oh, oh! All brought to pass, all true. Light, may I now look on you for the last time—I who have been found to be accursed in birth, **1185** accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood.

He rushes into the palace.

Chorus

strophe 1

Alas, generations of mortals, how mere a shadow I count your life! Where, where is the mortal who **1190** attains a happiness [*eudaimoniā*] which is more than apparent and doomed to fall away to nothing? The example [*paradeigma*] of your fortune [*daimōn*] warns me—yours, unhappy Oedipus—to call no **1195** earthly creature blessed.

antistrophe 1

For he, O Zeus, shot his shaft with peerless skill, and won the prize of an entirely happy prosperity [*eudaimōn olbos*], having slain the maiden with crooked talons who sang darkly. **1200** He arose for our land like a tower against death. And from that time, Oedipus, you have been called our king, and have been given *tīmē* supremely, holding sway in great Thebes.

strophe 2

But now whose story is more grievous in men's ears? **1205** Who is a more wretched slave to troubles [*ponoi*] and fierce calamities [*atai*], with all his life reversed? Alas, renowned Oedipus! The same bounteous harbor was sufficient for you, both as child and as father, to make your nuptial couch in. Oh, how can the soil **1210** in which your father sowed, unhappy man, have endured you in silence for so long?

antistrophe 2

Time the all-seeing has found you out against your will, and he judges the monstrous marriage in which **1215** parent and child have long been one. Alas, child of Laios, would that I had never seen you! I wail as one who pours a dirge from his lips. **1220** It was you who gave me new life, to speak directly, and through you darkness has fallen upon my eyes.

A second messenger enters, from the palace.

Second Messenger

You who receive most *tīmē* in this land, what deeds you will hear, what deeds you will behold, what burden of suffering [*penthos*] will be yours, **1225** if, true to your *genos*, you still care for the house of Labdakos. For I think that neither the Istros nor the

Phasis could wash this house clean, so many are the evils that it shrouds, or will soon bring to light, wrought not unwittingly, but on purpose. **1230** And those griefs smart the most which are seen to be of our own choice.

Chorus

The troubles which we knew before are far from being easy to bear. Besides them, what do you have to announce?

Second Messenger

This is the shortest tale to tell and hear: **1235** our divine Iocasta is dead.

Chorus

Alas, wretched woman! From what cause [*aitiā*]?

Second Messenger

By her own hand. The worst pain of that which has happened is not for you, since you do not behold the events. Nevertheless, so far as my memory serves, **1240** you will learn that unhappy woman's suffering [*pathos*].

When, frantic, she passed within the vestibule, she rushed straight towards her marriage couch, clutching her hair with the fingers of both hands. Once within the chamber, **1245** she dashed the doors together behind her, then called on the name of Laios, long since a corpse, mindful of that son, born long ago, by whose hand the father was slain, leaving the mother to breed accursed offspring with his own. And she bewailed the wedlock in which, wretched woman, she had given birth to a twofold brood, **1250** husband by husband, children by her child. And how she perished is more than I know. For with a shriek Oedipus burst in, and did not allow us to watch her woe until the end; on him, as he rushed around, our eyes were set. **1255** To and fro he went, asking us to give him a sword, asking where he could find the wife who was no wife, but a mother whose womb had born both him and his children. And in his frenzy a *daimōn* was his guide, for it was none of us mortals who were near. **1260** With a dread cry, as though some one beckoned him on, he sprang at the double doors, forced the bending bolts from the sockets, and rushed into the room. There we beheld the woman hanging by the neck in a twisted noose of swinging cords. **1265** And when he saw her, with a dread deep cry he released the halter by which she hung. And when, on the ground, ¹²⁶⁷ that wretched person was lying there, terrifying were the things to be seen from that point onward. ¹²⁶⁸ For he [= Oedipus] tore from her clothing those gold-worked ¹²⁶⁹ brooches of hers, with which she had ornamented herself, ¹²⁷⁰ and, holding them high with raised hand, he struck his own eyeballs, ¹²⁷¹ uttering words like these: that they should not see him ¹²⁷² either experience such things as he was experiencing [*paskhein*] or doing [*drân*] such things— ¹²⁷³ but, from now on, in total darkness, those persons whom he ought never ¹²⁷⁴ to have seen, they could see them now, and, as for those persons whom he needed to know, they would fail to know them now. ¹²⁷⁵ Uttering such incantations, many times and not just one

time ¹²⁷⁶ did he strike with raised hand the spaces where the eyes open and close. And, at each blow the bloody ¹²⁷⁷ eyeballs made wet his bearded cheeks, and did not send forth ¹²⁷⁸ sluggish drops of gore, but all at once ¹²⁷⁹ a dark shower of blood poured down, like hail. ¹²⁸⁰ These evil happenings have burst forth, coming out of the two of them together, not from only one of them. ¹²⁸¹ No, they were mixed together, for both the man and the woman, these evil happenings. ¹²⁸² Their old prosperity [*olbos*] was once ¹²⁸³ true blessedness [*olbos*], and justly [*dikaiōs*] so. But now on this day here ¹²⁸⁴ there is the groaning of lamentation, there is aberration [*atē*], there is death, there is shame; of all the evil things ¹²⁸⁵ that can be named, all of them, not one is missing.

Chorus

And does the sufferer have any respite from evil now?

Second Messenger

He cries for some one to unbar the gates and show to all the Kadmeians his father's slayer, his mother's—the words must not pass my lips— **1290** in order to banish himself from the land and not to remain in the palace under the curse that he himself pronounced. And yet he lacks strength, and one to guide his steps, for the anguish is more than he can bear. He will soon show this to you: look, the bars of the gates are withdrawn, **1295** and soon you will behold a sight which even he who abhors it must pity.

Oedipus enters, dripping with gore.

Chorus

O dread suffering [*pathos*] for men to see, O most dreadful of all that I have set my eyes on! Unhappy one, what madness has come upon you? **1300** What *daimōn*, with a leap of more than mortal range, has made your ill-fated destiny his prey? Alas, alas, you hapless man! I cannot even look on you, though there is much I desire to ask, much I desire to learn, **1305** much that draws my wistful gaze; with such a shuddering do you fill me!

Oedipus

Woe is me! Alas, alas, wretched that I am! Where, where am I carried in my misery? **1310** How is my voice swept abroad on the wings of the air? Oh, *daimōn*, how far you have sprung!

Chorus

To a dread place, dire in men's ears, dire in their sight.

Oedipus

Oh horror of darkness that enfolds me, unspeakable visitant, **1315** resistless, sped by a wind too fair! Oh me! and once again, Oh me! How my soul is pierced by the stab of these goads and by the memory of evils!

Chorus

No wonder that amidst these woes **1320** you endure sorrow [*penthos*] and bear double evils.

Oedipus

Ah, *philo*s, you still are steadfast in your care for me, you still have patience to tend the blind man! Ah me! **1325** Your presence is not hidden from me—no, blind though I am, nevertheless I know your voice full well.

Chorus

You who have done [*drân*] such terrible things, how could you bring yourself ¹³²⁸ to extinguish [*marainein*] your eyesight? Who among the superhuman powers [*daimones*] urged you on?

Oedipus

It was Apollo, dear ones [*philo*i], Apollo ¹³³⁰ who brought to fulfillment [*teleîn*] these evil, evil experiences [*pathos* plural] of mine. ¹³³¹⁻¹³³⁴ But no one with his own hand did the striking. I myself, did that, wretch that I am! Why was I to see, **1335** when eyesight showed me nothing sweet?

Chorus

These things were just as you say.

Oedipus

What, *philo*i, can I behold any more, what can I love, what greeting can touch my ear with joy? Hurry, *philo*i, **1340** lead me from this place, lead me away, the utterly lost, **1345** the thrice-accursed, the mortal most hated by heaven!

Chorus

Wretched alike for your misfortune and for your *noos* of it, would that I had never known you!

Oedipus

Perish the man, whoever he was, that freed me in the past years from the cruel shackle on my feet—a deed bringing no gratitude [*kharis*]! Had I died then, **1355** I would not have been so sore a grief [*akhos*] to my *philo*i and to my own self.

Chorus

I too would have it thus.

Oedipus

In this way I would not have come to shed my father's blood, or been known among men as the spouse of the woman from whom I was born. **1360** Now I am forsaken by the gods, son of a defiled mother, successor to the bed of the man who gave me my own wretched being; **1365** if there is a woe surpassing woe, it has become Oedipus' lot.

Chorus

I know not how I can say that you have counseled well; you would have been better dead than living and blind.

Oedipus

Don't tell me that things have not been best done in this way; **1370** give me counsel no more. If I had sight, I know not with what eyes I could even have looked on my father, when I came to the house of Hādēs, or on my miserable mother, since against both I have committed such crimes as hanging myself could not punish. **1375** But do you think that the sight of children, born as mine were, was lovely for me to look upon? No, no, never lovely to my eyes! No, neither was this city with its towering walls, nor the sacred statues of the *daimones*, since I, thrice wretched that I am—**1380** I, noblest of the sons of Thebes—have doomed myself to know these no more, by my own command that all should reject the impious one, the one whom the gods have revealed as unholy, a member of Laios' own family [*genos*]! After baring such a stain upon myself, **1385** was I to look with steady eyes on these people? Not in the least! Were there a way to choke the fount of hearing, I would not have hesitated to make a fast prison of this wretched frame, so that I should have known neither sight nor sound. **1390** It is sweet that our thought should dwell beyond the sphere of evils. Alas, Kithairon, why did you provide a shelter for me? When I was given to you, why did you not slay me straightaway, that I might never reveal to men whence I am born? Ah, Polybos, ah, Corinth, and you that was called the ancient house of my father, **1395** how fair-seeming was I your nursling, and what evils were festering underneath! Now I am found *kakos*, and born from evils [*kaka*]. You three roads, and you secret glen, you, thicket, and narrow way where three paths met— **1400** you who drank my father's blood from my own hands—do you remember, perhaps, what deeds I have performed in your sight, and then what fresh deeds I went on to do when I came here? O marriage ritual [*telos*], you gave me birth, and when you had brought me forth, **1405** you again bore children to your child, you created an incestuous kinship of fathers, brothers, sons, brides, wives, and mothers – all the foulest deeds that are wrought among men! But it is improper to name what it is improper to do—**1410** hurry, for the love of the gods, hide me somewhere beyond the land, or slay me, or cast me into the sea, where you will never behold me any longer! Approach—deign to lay your hands on a wretched man—listen and fear not: my woes can rest **1415** on no other mortal.

Chorus

But here is Creon in good time to plan and perform that which you request. He alone is left to guard the land in your place.

Oedipus

Ah me, what word [*epos*] will I speak to him? **1420** What claim to credence can be shown on my part? For in the past I have proved to be wholly *kakos* to him.

Creon enters.

Creon

I have not come to mock or reproach you with any past evils.

To the Attendants.

But you, if you no longer respect the children of men, **1425** revere at least the all-nurturing flame of our lord the Sun, and do not show so openly such a pollution as this, one which neither earth, nor holy rain, nor the light can welcome. Take him into the house as quickly as you can: it best accords with reverence that **1430** relations alone, members of the family, should see and hear these woes.

Oedipus

By the gods—since you have done a gentle violence to my prediction, coming as a most noble [*aristos*] man to me, a man most *kakos*—grant me a favor: I will speak for your own good, not mine.

Creon

1435 And what do you wish so eagerly to get from me?

Oedipus

Cast me out of this land with all speed, to a place where no mortal shall be found to greet me.

Creon

This I could have done, to be sure, except I craved first to learn from the god all my duty.

Oedipus

1440 But his behest has been set forth in full: to let me perish, the parricide, unholy one that I am.

Creon

Thus it was said. But since we have come to such a pass, it is better to learn clearly what should be done.

Oedipus

Will you, then, seek a response on behalf of such a wretch as I?

Creon

1445 Yes, for even you yourself will now surely put faith in the god.

Oedipus

Yes. And on you I lay this charge, to you I make this entreaty: give to the woman within such burial as you wish—you will properly render the last rites to your own. But never let this city of my father be condemned **1450** to have me dwelling within, as long as I live. No, allow me to live in the hills, where Kithairon, famed as mine, sits, which my mother and father, while they lived, fixed as my appointed tomb, so that I may die according to the decree of those who sought to slay me. **1455** And yet I

know this much, that neither sickness nor anything else can destroy me; for I would never have been saved [*sōzein*] from death, except in order to suffer some terrible evil. Let my fate [*moira*] go where it will. Regarding my children, Creon, I beg you to take no care of my sons: **1460** they are men, so they will never lack the means to live wherever they may be. My two girls, poor hapless ones—who never knew my table spread separately, or lacked their father’s presence, but always had a share of all that reached my hands— **1465** I implore you to take care of them. And, if you can, allow me to touch them with my hands, and to indulge my grief for these woes. Grant it, lord, grant it, noble in birth. Ah, if I could but once touch them with my hands, I would think that I had them **1470** just as when I had sight.

Antigone and Ismene are led in.

What’s this? By the gods, can it be my loved ones that I hear sobbing? Can Creon have taken pity on me and sent my children, my darlings? **1475** Am I right?

Creon

You are. I have brought this about, for I knew the joy which you have long had from them—the joy you now have.

Oedipus

Bless you, and for this errand may a *daimōn* prove a kinder guardian to you than it has to me. **1480** My children, where are you? Come, here, here to the hands of the one whose mother was your own, the hands that have made your father’s once bright eyes to be such orbs as these – he who, seeing nothing, inquiring [*historeîn*] not at all, **1485** became your father by her from whom he was born! For you also do I weep, though I cannot see you, when I think of the bitter life that men will make you live in days to come. To what company of the citizens will you go, to what festival, **1490** from which you will not return home in tears, instead of participating [*being a theōros*] in the festivities? But when you reach a ripe age for marriage, who shall he be, who shall be the man, my daughters, to hazard taking upon himself the reproaches **1495** that will certainly be baneful to my offspring and yours? What misery is lacking? Your father killed his own father, and begot you from the same place he himself was born! **1500** Such are the taunts that will be cast at you. And who then will you wed? The man does not live—no, it cannot be, my children, but you will wither in barren maidenhood. Son of Menoikeus, hear me: since you are the only father left to them—we, their parents, are both gone— **1505** do not allow them to wander poor and unwed, for they are your own relations, and do not abase them to the level of my woes. But pity them, seeing them deprived of everything at such an age, except for you. **1510** Promise, noble man, and touch them with your hand. To you, children, I would have given much advice [*parainesis*], if your *phrenes* were mature. But now pray that you may live where occasion allows, and that the life which is your lot may be happier than your father’s.

Creon

1515 Your grief has had a sufficient scope; pass into the house.

Oedipus

I must obey, though I do it in no way gladly.

Creon

Yes, for all things are good at the right time.

Oedipus

Do you know on what terms I will go?

Creon

You will tell me, and then I will know when I have heard them.

Oedipus

See that you send me to dwell outside this land.

Creon

You ask for what the god must give.

Oedipus

But to the gods I have become most hateful.

Creon

Then you will quickly get your wish.

Oedipus

So you consent?

Creon

It is not my way to say idly what I do not mean.

Oedipus

1520 Then it is time to lead me away.

Creon

Come, then, but let your children go.

Oedipus

No, do not take them from me!

Creon

Do not wish to be master in all things: the mastery which you did attain has not followed you through life.

They all exit into the palace.

Chorus

Inhabitants of our native Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus, **1525** who knew the riddles

[*ainigma* pl.] of great renown [*kleos*], and was a most mighty man. What citizen did not gaze on his fortune with envy? See into what a stormy sea of troubles he has come! Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the day of *telos*, we must call no mortal blessed [*olbios*] until **1530** he has crossed life's border without having suffered [*paskhein*] any pain.

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