

Seven Tragedies of Sophocles

Oedipus the King

Translated in verse by Robin Bond (2014)
University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

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Oedipus the King

Dramatis Personae

Oedipus

Priest

Creon

Chorus of Theban Elders

Teiresias

Jocasta

Messenger from Corinth

Slave of Laius

Messenger from the House

Oedipus

My children, most recent brood of ancient Cadmus' line,
what is it that you want that you have settled here,
these suppliant branches in your hands?
The city is filled alike with the smoke of sacrifice,
the din of hymns and cries of misery;
not thinking it right to learn these things
at second hand, my children, I have come myself,
I, Oedipus, whose fame is on the lips of all mankind.

Now speak, old man, since you are the natural
spokesman for these folk: are you gathered in dread
or need? I am more than willing to help
in any way I can. I would be hard of heart indeed,
were I not moved to pity by such a gathering as this.

Priest

Lord Oedipus, master of this, my land, observe
our varied ages as we group in supplication by
your altars here, some not yet strong enough
to venture far in flight, some burdened with age,
some priests, as I of Zeus, and others picked
to represent our youth; another group has sat
in supplication in the market place beside
Athene's double altar and Ismenus' flame of prophecy.

For, as you see yourself, the city is all at sea
and can no longer lift her head above
the surge and chop of the fatal waves,
while the fruit of the land is blighted in the bud,
and blighted too are the browsing herds and all
still-born the product of our women's birthing pain.
A god of fire swooped down to press a deadly plague
upon the town and void the home of Cadmus -
and Hell's black halls are rich with cries of grief and pain.

We do not sit as suppliants because we think
of you as equal to the gods, but as the first of men
in dealing with life's chances and in commerce with
the gods. For you released us from the tax we paid
the cruel Sphinx, when you arrived in Cadmus' land,
and, though you knew no more than any other man,
had not been schooled by us, yet still you saved
our lives, thanks, as men think and say, to help from god.

Since all mankind respects the might and intellect
of Oedipus we come to you as suppliants to seek
some comfort, whether your knowledge comes
from oracles divine or from some mortal man.
For I have seen that the plans of men are most

effective when their authors have experience of life.
 Come, most noble of men, and put the state to rights,
 come, save your reputation too, since now this land
 names you its saviour for your former services;
 and do not let our memory of your rule be that
 you did restore the state only to let it later fall - 50
 no, stabilise the state on firm foundations now!
 The signs were favourable before for you, when you
 restored our luck, and so now too attempt the same.
 For if you would choose to exercise a sovereign's rule,
 it is better that you have a population to command,
 since ships and citadels are nothing worth without
 the men who dwell within as crew or citizens.

Oe. I pity you, my children, and I know well why you
 have come and what you want. I know too well
 your sickness, but even in that sickness there is 60
 not one of you whose sickness matches mine!
 Your pains are individual, affecting each of you
 as individuals and no one else; my heart is sick
 with grief alike for you and me and for the state itself!
 You have not wakened me as from some idle sleep,
 but rather know that I have shed a multitude
 of tears while I explored a multitude of schemes.
 The only plan for safety that my care and thought
 could find I set in train: for I despatched my wife's 70
 own brother, Creon, Menoeceus's son, to Delphi and
 Apollo's oracle to learn from there by what decree
 or course of action I might save the town.
 The lapse of time since his departure there
 already irks me as to what he does; for he has been
 away far longer than is needful or appropriate.
 But when he comes, why then I would indeed
 be negligent did I not do all that the god reveals.

Pr. Your words are opportune! These men have just
 now signalled me that Creon is hastening here...

Oe. Apollo, lord, I pray he comes to us with luck 80
 and saving grace as bright as is his countenance!

Pr. His news is good, it seems - for otherwise he would
 not come with his head all garlanded with fruitful bay.

Oe. We soon shall know! He is now close enough to hear.
 My kinsman, prince, Menoeceus' son, what kind
 of news have you come to bring us from the god?

Creon The news is good. All our ill luck, I say, will be reversed,
 and changed to good... if things are done aright.

Oe. What kind of talk is this? Your present words, such as
they are, bring neither confidence nor dread. 90

Cr. If you are ready to hear with these men standing by,
then I am ready to speak - or else to go inside.

Oe. Broadcast to all! The grief I bear for these outweighs
by far the care I have for my own very soul!

Cr. Allow me then to speak the message of the god.
Lord Phoebus gave me clear advice that we
must banish the source of this pollution on the land
and nurture it incurable within the land no more.

Oe. By what due process? What is the nature of our guilt?

Cr. We must drive out a murderer or answer blood 100
with blood to purge the blood that storms the state.

Oe. What kind of man was it that suffered such a fate?

Cr. Once Laius was our ruler in this land, my lord,
before you took control of our affairs of state.

Oe. I know him by repute, but never yet have seen the man.

Cr. The god declares that we must actively avenge
ourselves on those who killed this man.

Oe. Wherever can they be? It will be difficult
to find the traces of this ancient crime.

Cr. He said they were in Thebes. That which is sought, 110
that will be found; that which is not escapes.

Oe. Did Laius meet his death inside at home
or in his fields or in some foreign land?

Cr. He had said when he left he would consult
the oracle, but, once gone, he never did come home.

Oe. Did no one even bring the news or see the crime,
no companion to give us useful information?

Cr. No, all were killed except for one who fled in fear
and he was totally confused except for one detail.

Oe. What detail? A single clue might lead to many more, 120
if only we seize hold of it as the meagre start of hope.

Cr. He said a gang of bandits surprised and killed the king -
not one man alone, but an overpowering force.

Oe. How could any bandit have ever been so bold, unless
some business had been done with bribes in Thebes?

Cr. That did occur to us, but no one could be found
to investigate his death... in those troubled times.

Oe. What kind of troubled times could ever stop
investigation of the murder of a king?

Cr. The Sphinx and her riddling songs induced neglect 130
of mysteries in favour of more immediate needs.

Oe. Well, I will open up this case once more from scratch.

Apollo's words are worthy of the god and worthily
have you drawn our attention to the dead man's plight;
and so you all will see that I shall join with you to gain
just vengeance - both on the god's and on this land's behalf!

And I myself, for my own sake and not as for
some distant friends, shall dissipate this stench.

For whoever it was that killed this man may well
be so inclined to lift his vengeful hands also to me.

140

In laying Laius' ghost I will also benefit myself.

But quickly as you may, my children, get up
from off these steps and raise the suppliant boughs,
and let some messenger convene the folk

of Cadmus so they may know all that I do; for (with
the god's help) we shall either prove successful - or fail.

Pr. My children, rise! This man has promised us
the object of our prayers and of our journey here.

Apollo, that sent these oracles to us, come now as well
yourself as saviour to cure at the last this plague.

150

Chorus

str.a.

Kind word of Zeus, what message do you bring
to glorious Thebes from Delphi, rich in gold?
Suspenseful terror shakes my soul with dread, Apollo, lord
of Delos, healer, object of men's frenzied cries,
enclosed in awe. What new, or what recurring plague,
will you fulfil for us once more in time's full sphere?
Speak to me, immortal voice, the child of golden Hope.

ant.a.

First I call on you, Athena, daughter immortal of Zeus,
next on your sister, Artemis, who guards the land,
who sits in fame upon her central throne within the agora,
and on Apollo too, that fires shafts from afar, that you
may prove a triple barrier to death for us, may come now too -
as you have come before to ward disaster from the town -
to drive the flame of pestilence in exile from the land.

160

str.b.

Ah, countless are the ills that I endure!
The city and its folk are hard beset with plague
beyond my wit to find a shield to ward it off.
There is no fruitful increase from the splendid earth,
nor are our womenfolk with children blessed
as they rise from the strident birthing pang.
Successive are the ghosts that one may see in flight,
sped swifter than the all consuming flames, birdlike

170

But as things are, although I was not then enrolled a citizen
 myself, I now address you all as fellow citizens of Thebes:
 whoever of you has sure knowledge of the man
 by whom King Laius, son of Labdacus, was killed,
 I bid you pass all information such as this to me;
 and if a man is guilty and afraid, he should confess
 and rid his path of fear. For he will suffer nothing more
 severe than banishment, shall leave the land unscathed.
 Again, should any man have knowledge of some foreign
 murderer, let him speak out; for I will make it worth
 his while and he shall also win my gratitude. 230
 But yet again, should you be silent, striving so
 to ward my word's impact away from loved one or
 yourself, that man I do forbid this land, whatever his
 condition, make him exile him from this place where I hold sway
 and throne and I decree that neither shall he be received
 by any man, nor spoken to by any man, nor yet
 shall any share with him in prayer nor sacrifice
 to gods, nor grant him part of any cleansing rite. 240
 All must drive him from your homes even as the bane
 he is to us, and as Apollo's Delphic oracle
 divine has but just now made clear to me.
 My words reveal me then as ally of the god
 and also of the man now dead; my solemn curse
 is that the murderer, be he an unknown renegade
 or one of many, should grind away his life in misery.
 This curse now on myself: for should this man
 share house and hearth with me and so
 be known to me, my griefs must also match 250
 the imprecations just now made articulate.
 I solemnly enjoin that you should bring all this
 to pass both for my own and for Apollo's sake
 and for this land that is so barren and accursed of god.
 For had this business not been driven by the gods,
 you would have taken every step to clear the stain
 caused by the death of such a noble man, your king,
 and searched the matter out. However, I have now
 inherited the power he used to hold before,
 and occupy his bed and seed his wife, would share, 260
 his children's care with mine, had he been fortunate
 enough to breed, if unkind fate had not denied him sons.
 Now that same fate has swooped upon his head
 and I, because of all these things, shall be his champion,
 as if he were in fact my father, and I will leave no stone

unturned in seeking to lay hands upon the murderer -
 fulfilling so my debt to Laius, son of Labdacus, the son
 of Polydorus, son of ancient Cadmus and of Agenor.
 And as for those who disobey my words, I pray
 the gods to render barren both their land 270
 and wives, that they might be destroyed by both
 this present pestilence and one more grievous still;
 As for the rest of you, you citizens of Thebes, that find
 my words agreeable, may Justice fight for you - as well,
 may all the other gods be with us evermore in kindness.
Ch. Since you, my lord, have put me under oath, so shall I speak:
 I did not kill the king, nor can I indicate the one who did.
 It is Apollo's task, who sent this word to us, to search
 and tell who did the crime, whoever he might be.
Oe. Your words are just. To force the hand of gods against 280
 their will is not, however, possible for any mortal man.
Ch. There is a second plan occurs to me, if I might speak.
Oe. Do not withhold a third plan, even, should such occur to you.
Ch. I know a lordly man, Teiresias, who has a special share
 in lord Apollo's visionary sight, from whom, my king,
 a man investigating crime might learn the truth.
Oe. I have already taken care of that contingency.
 From the time I heard the oracle that Creon brought,
 I have sent two men and am amazed he is not yet here.
Ch. The rumours that were current long ago are muted now. 290
Oe. And what were they? I shall examine each and every clue.
Ch. It is said that Laius died at the hands of highwaymen.
Oe. I heard that too; the witness, though, has disappeared.
Ch. No guilty man who has the barest modicum of dread
 would stay in Thebes on hearing curses such yours.
Oe. They hold no terror for the hardened criminal.
Ch. But here is the man to find him out. These men
 escort Teiresias at last, Apollo's holy priest, in whom
 alone of all mankind the gods have planted truth.
Oe. Teiresias, you know all things, the things that might be taught 300
 and things forbidden, heavenly things and things that creep
 upon the earth, and so, blind though you are, you sense
 our city's plight and its disease; in you alone we find
 a man to stand as our protector and our guardian.
 For Phoebus has sent word to us in answer to our plea -
 in case you have not heard of this from messengers -
 that freedom from this pestilence will only come, if we
 with certainty identify the men who murdered Laius
 and kill them too, or send them exiled from the land.

Do not therefore begrudge us any means, bird cry derived 310
or from your other arts of prophecy, but rather save
yourself and save your city, save me too and all
that is polluted by King Laius' death; for we are in
your hands and humankind's most noble task
is helping others in so far as wit and skill allow.

Teiresias How terrible is knowledge where it profits not
the one who knows. I knew this well, but it escaped
me; for I would not otherwise be here.

Oe. But what is this? How sad your coming here!

Tei. Please, send me home! Easiest it is by far for you 320
to bear your fate and me bear mine, if you obey.

Oe. You speak words out of keeping and unfriendly to the state
which reared you, by refusing to interpret Phoebus' will.

Tei. I see that what you say is far from opportune and hold
my peace to obviate the risk of suffering the same.

Oe. No, by the gods, you will not turn away from us, if you
have knowledge and we all kneel in supplication here.

Tei. Yes, fools, all of you! I never shall reveal the cause
of my distress, yes, my distress I call it, hardly yours.

Oe. I cannot believe you will not speak of what you know. 330
Is it in your mind to give us up, destroy the state?

Tei. I will neither cause myself distress nor you. So why persist
in fruitless questions? There is nothing to be got from me.

Oe. You still refuse to speak? This is an outrage!
You would provoke a very stone! Is it then
impossible to reach you, come to terms with you?

Tei. You criticise my temper, but do not know
your own domestic situation, and so I am reviled.

Oe. Who would not be furious when hearing how
your words do hold our city state in such contempt? 340

Tei. Things fated come to pass, even should I hide them now.

Oe. If fate is fixed, then why not tell me what it is?

Tei. I do not choose to tell you more. Therefore, indulge
your rage in bitterest anger, if that be your wish.

Oe. Indeed, I am enraged and shall hold nothing back,
therefore, of what I now perceive. For know that I
believe you did conspire to plan and execute the crime
by proxy. Had you by chance been blessed with sight
I would have said the doing of the deed was yours alone.

Tei. So much for your 'perception'! Let me tell you then: 350
stand by the proclamation which you made today
and never henceforth dare address yourself to me
or to these men. You are yourself the land's pollution.

Oe. How dare you make outrageous accusations such as this? Where shall you flee their consequence?

Tei. I am already safe. The truth secures my strong defence.

Oe. Whose 'truth' informs you? For it came not from your art.

Tei. Yours! You provoked my words, unwilling though I was.

Oe. What words? Repeat yourself that I may understand the more.

Tei. You did not understand before? Or is this further provocation? 360

Oe. No, I did not fully grasp your sense before. So speak again.

Tei. I say you are the murderer of him whose murderer you seek.

Oe. No pleasure shall you win, repeating charges foul as these!

Tei. Shall I speak further then to rouse your anger more?

Oe. As much as pleases you, since all you say is false.

Tei. I say that you are unaware of how you live in deepest shame with those most dear to you, do not perceive your fate.

Oe. These constant charges bring but scant delight, you'll find.

Tei. In fact they do, if there is any strength in truth.

Oe. There is except in yours! There is no truth in you, 370 since you are blind and deaf and dumb and mad!

Tei. I pity you despite these taunts you hurl which soon in turn the entire populace will hurl at you.

Oe. Your life is one eternal night and so you cannot do me harm or any man that sees the light of day.

Tei. Your fate will crush you anyway without my help; Apollo is sufficient in whose care its execution lies.

Oe. Did Creon fabricate these charges or are they yours alone?

Tei. Creon is no threat to you! You are a plague upon yourself.

Oe. Ah, wealth and kingship, skill outreaching skill 380 in all of life's rich tapestry of rivalries, how great the envy which you breed and keep in store, if for the sake of this dominion in the state, entrusted, gifted by the state to me, unasked by me, the trusty Creon secretly assails me, seeks to throw me out by bribing such a scheming quack as this, whose sight is only sharp identifying gain, whose 'art' of prophecy is, however, blind.

Tei. Come, tell me, pray, where has your art proved true. 390

Oe. How was it you produced no song to solve her riddle for the people when the watchdog sphinx was here? And yet that riddle did demand a seer's skills to explicate, far more than those of some mere passer by! The skill you had was shown in fact to come from neither gods nor birds; but I came, yes, "Know Nothing" Oedipus and put a stop to her, with native wit victorious and nothing owed to birds;

and yet it is your aim to throw him out,
 thinking to stand close by to Creon's throne. 400

It seems to me both you and your accomplice will regret
 your plans to purge me from the land; were it not that you
 seemed old your pain would have proved your foolishness.

Ch. This man's words as well as yours, it seems to us,
 lord Oedipus, were likely said, inspired by rage.
 Behaviour such as this is not required, but rather we
 must think how best we might fulfil Apollo's prophecy.

Tei. Although you are the king, my right to answer back
 on equal terms must needs be recognised; for I am capable.
 I do not live my life as slave to you but Loxias; 410
 so I shall not be written down as one of Creon's minions.
 Hear me now, since you have taunted me with being blind;
 you have your sight, but do not see the evil you are in,
 nor where you live nor yet with whom you live.
 Who were your parents? Do you know? All unawares
 an enemy you are to kin above, below the earth;
 the twofold curse of mother and father both one day
 will drive your injured feet in exile from this land,
 since you see nothing now, but darkness only then.
 What place will not be harbour to your cries, what part 420
 of Mount Cithaeron will not echo soon in sympathy,
 when you shall understand the import of the marriage song
 which falsely welcomed you within, safe haven found?
 You have no understanding of the host of other ills
 which will betray the fate your children share with you.
 So pour your gross abuse on Creon and the message I
 have brought; for there is no other man who shall
 be crushed by such a cruel fate as yours.

Oe. Shall I endure abuse from such a man as this?
 Damn you to Hell! Begone and swiftly! Never more 430
 return when once you abandon, leave this house.

Tei. I would not have come had you not summoned me.

Oe. If I had known that you would spout such foolishness
 I would scarce have called you to my home.

Tei. I am by nature what I am - a fool in your opinion,
 but wise in your parents' eyes that gave you birth.

Oe. What parents? Wait! Parents? What parents did I have?

Tei. This very day will give you birth and bring you death.

Oe. Your every word is cryptic and designed to mystify.

Tei. And are you not the best of men at solving mysteries? 440

Oe. You taunt me with the gifts in which you will find me great.

Tei. But fate has ruined you despite your gifts.

Oe. So long as I have saved the state I do not care.
Tei. Then I shall go. Come, slave, and guide my steps.
Oe. Yes, guide his steps away! Your presence here distracts
 and hinders me; once gone you cannot pain me more.
Tei. When I have had my say, then I shall go, but not because
 I fear your frown; you have no way to do me harm.
 This is my message then: the very man for whom
 your search has long been set, whom you proclaim 450
 the murderer of Laius and whom you rail against,
 that man is here, in theory a foreigner in residence,
 in fact he will emerge a true born son of Thebes,
 but gain no pleasure from that happenstance.
 For blindness will be his, not sight, and poverty
 for wealth, with but a staff to read his exiled path.
 Revealed as brother, father both to those same children who
 share house and home with him, as son and husband both
 to her that gave him birth, his mother, and revealed
 his father's murderer and sharer of his father's marriage bed. 460
 Now go inside and think on this, and if you find I lie,
 then say indeed that I am ignorant of prophecy!

First Stasimon

Ch. Who is the man who did the deed unspeakable, his hands **str.a.**
 all blood, according to the oracles divine of Delphi's crag?
 Time for him to race in flight,
 his foot more quick and strong
 than horses swift as storms.
 For the son of Zeus is leaping upon him
 armed with fire and thunderbolt, 470
 his hounds, the Furies,
 tireless in the chase.

From Parnassus' gleaming snows the recent message shone, **ant.a**
 to track the unknown killer down by every means.
 He roams beneath the forest wild,
 above the caves
 and rocks, bull-wild,
 a footsore man, alone and joyless,
 his wish to shun the earthborn 480
 Delphic prophecy that ever swarms
 about his living flesh.

Dread, dread the confusion aroused by the watcher of birds; **str.a.**

	I cannot approve his claims nor can I deny them, am lost myself for words, and shudder with blind foreboding for what is to come from the past.	485
	For never before, nor yet until now have I heard of a quarrel between our royal house, the Labdacids, of Thebes and that of Polybus, the which might serve for me to test this public accusation laid on Oedipus, and be an ally to the Labdacids in solving Laius' death.	495
	Both Zeus and Apollo have full knowledge of human affairs. There is no certain proof, however, that any mortal man is more of a prophet than I, though one man may surpass another's skill.	ant.a. 500
	But never ever shall I side with those who would denounce our king, until I see their accusations proved. For once before the winged Sphinx advanced against him and he was seen to be wise and, by that test, the saviour of the state. And so he never shall win evil word from me.	510
Cr.	My fellow citizens, I hear that Oedipus the King is making dreadful accusations and so I here present myself in righteous indignation. If you can find that I have caused him any hurt in this our time of trial, either by my words or deeds, why then I have no further wish to live the normal span of years, if carry the stain of your verdict I must. This charge is not a single spy, but brings its greatest hurt if I have gained the name of public enemy in the mouths of kith and kin.	520
Ch.	Perhaps the charges which he made against you sprang rather from his rage than reasoned thought.	
Cr.	Then what I hear is true that he is quite convinced the prophet spoke false oracles because of my complicity?	
Ch.	He did say that. I do not know if that is what he meant.	
Cr.	And did he make this accusation against me straight-faced, in full control of all his faculties?	
Ch.	I do not know. I do not watch the doings of the great. But now the man himself emerges from the house.	530
Oe.	You there! How have you dared come here? Have you then so much nerve as to approach my house, although convicted clearly as King Laius' murderer, and one who clearly seeks to rob me of my throne? Come, tell me, by the gods, what cowardice, stupidity you saw in me that prompted you to plot this crime!	

You thought perhaps I would not see your secret threat
 approaching, or that if I saw it would not ward it off?

To undertake to hunt my throne away without 540
 the people's help or help of friends is foolishness indeed,
 when tyrannies are won with wealth and popular support.

Cr. Observe my lips and listen in your turn to my reply
 that you may make your judgement well informed.

Oe. You are a clever speaker, but I am proven quite unskilled
 in reading you; for I have found you base and treacherous.

Cr. First hear how I might give an explanation of this charge.

Oe. I charge you but to demonstrate your innocence.

Cr. If you believe that stubbornness bereft of sense 550
 is something to be desired, you are a fool.

Oe. If you believe a guilty kinsman can escape
 his just deserts, why then you are a fool yourself.

Cr. Agreed, and what you say is just, but tell me please
 the nature of the wrong you claim I've done to you.

Oe. Did you or did you not advise that I should send
 to summon here that so called holy man.

Cr. I did and still I am at one with that advice.

Oe. And how much time has passed since Laius...

Cr. ...since Laius what? I do not follow you...

Oe. ...since Laius disappeared, was lost to deadly violence? 560

Cr. The sum of many long years has intervened.

Oe. And did the prophet practise then his art also?

Cr. His reputation as a man of wisdom was as now it is.

Oe. Did he make any mention of me then?

Cr. No, not, at least, when I was by his side.

Oe. And did you not investigate the homicide?

Cr. Of course we held enquiries, but had no success.

Oe. How was it that at that time this prophet made no sound?

Cr. I do not know and when I do not know I hold my peace.

Oe. There is one thing you know, and, knowing, could reveal. 570

Cr. And what is that? For I will freely tell you what I know.

Oe. The fact that, had the prophet not been in your confidence,
 he never would have laid the death of Laius at my door.

Cr. If that is what he says, you have it at first hand, but the little
 I know from you is matched by what you know from me.

Oe. Ask what you like; yet I will not be proven murderer.

Cr. Why, then, is it not true you have taken my sister to wife?

Oe. Of course! For why should I deny the obvious?

Cr. And both of you have equal share in governing the land?

Oe. She has from me all things that she desires. 580

Cr. And am I not counted an equal third with the both of you?

Oe. Indeed you are and still you prove a treacherous friend.
 Cr. But think on this and you will find you side with me.
 Consider first: can you imagine any man would choose
 to rule, with all of rule's anxieties, in preference
 to sleeping peacefully, while wielding equal power?
 My nature is not such that I desire to be myself
 the king, so long as I can live the kingly life, and nor
 would any other man that had a modicum of sense.
 I now win everything from you without anxiety; 590
 as ruler I would face too many thankless tasks.
 How then could kingship be a sweeter state
 than my dynastic influence without responsibility?
 I am not as yet sufficiently deranged myself that I
 should want things other than bring profit without pain.
 Undiluted happiness is mine and all men gladly greet
 me now, while those who need your favour curry mine;
 for all of their success depends on that.
 How then should I exchange my situation?
 No right thinking mind could ever be so crazed. 600
 Desire for dominance lives not within my soul, nor would
 I ever dare to be complicit with the murderer.
 Go to the oracle at Delphi and put me to the test
 by learning if the message that I brought was accurate.
 If then you find that I have plotted with Teiresias,
 why take, convict and kill me with a double vote;
 my verdict will be consonant with yours,
 but don't assume my guilt without clear evidence.
 For it is neither just or right to think mistakenly
 bad men are good or that good men are bad. 610
 I say for a man to drive away a true and noble friend
 is like rejecting his own life force most dear to him.
 In time you will discover that these things are surely so,
 since time alone reveals the man that is just, whereas
 you might identify a villain in the space of a single day.
 Ch. He has spoken well, my lord, so far as a prudent man
 might judge. Conclusions that are hasty are not sound.
 Oe. Whenever people swiftly plot and move against me,
 then I am duty bound swiftly to counter them myself.
 If I remain inactive, wait for him, his work will be 620
 already done while I have missed my chance.
 Cr. What is that you want? To drive me exiled from the land?
 Oe. Oh no, it is your death I want and not your banishment,
 that you may demonstrate the price of treachery.
 Cr. You speak as one that will not yield to argument.

Oe. Because you have no proof that you are free of guilt.
 Cr. I clearly see that you are mad.
 Oe. For my part, I think not!
 Cr. You ought to look at my part too.
 Oe. But you are vile!
 Cr. What if you are mistaken?
 Oe. Still, I have to rule.
 Cr. Not when your rule is wrong.
 Oe. Oh, city of Thebes!
 Cr. I have a share in this city too. It is not yours alone. 630
 Ch. Please, stop, my lords! I see Jocasta coming from the house,
 and opportunely too, I think, since in her presence here
 and with her help this quarrel should be soothed.

Jocasta Why have you raised this mindless din of tongues ,
 you foolish men? And are you not ashamed, the land
 in sickness, so to stir your private grievances?
 Pray, go inside the house - and, Creon, you go home,
 and do not magnify this nothing to a greater grief.

Cr. My sister, Oedipus, your husband has adjudged it right
 to set for me a choice of ills to undertake, since he will drive 640
 me from my native land or else will take and murder me.

Oe. Exactly so, since I have found him out
 in undertaking evil plots against my life.

Cr. Now may I never prosper, rather die accursed, if I
 have ever done a single thing that you accuse me of.

Jo. Believe him, Oedipus, I pray you, by the gods,
 respect his god-sworn oath especially, and have respect
 for me as well and for these men here present now.

Kommos
str. a.

Ch. Consent and gladly, lord, be wise, I beg of you. 649
 Oe. To what do you wish that I should submit?
 Ch. To respecting him who never was a fool, and who is now
 empowered by his oath.
 Oe. And do you know the meaning of your plea?
 Ch. We do.
 Oe. Explain its meaning then.
 Ch. You never must dishonour and accuse 656
 on faulty evidence a friend who risks a curse.
 Oe. Now know this well that when you seek from me
 this thing, you seek my death or exile from the land.

str. b.

Ch.	By Helios, of all the gods the champion, I swear that I would godless, friendless die most bitterly, if that was my intent. But my home and land are withering, and this consumes my soul, and my distress will be compounded if you shall inflict fresh ills inspired by mutual dissent.	660
Oe.	Then let him go, yes, even if I am condemned to certain death, or exile in dishonour from the land. It is your words, not his, that move me to compassion. He shall be the object of my hate wherever he may be.	670
Cr.	Betrayed you are as full of hate when yielding, even as when too far gone in rage, you are too full of spite. Such natures torture most themselves and rightly so.	
Oe.	Then leave me to myself and go!	
Cr.	Yes, I will go. You I have found ignorant, but these have found me just.	
 ant. a.		
Ch.	My lady, why hesitate to take your husband in the house?	
Jo.	I will when I know what has come to pass.	680
Ch.	Blind accusations have been made, on supposition based; injustice rankles.	
Jo.	On both their sides?	
Ch.	Indeed.	
Jo.	What words were said?	
Ch.	I am convinced, with strife enough within the land, that this matter should rest where it is.	
Oe.	You see where you have come, in spite of all your good intent, by seeking to relax, make blunt my rage?	
 ant. b.		
Ch.	My lord, I have said it and said it again and again- be sure I would seem mad, appear bereft of sense, if ever I removed myself from your protection, when you have set our dear benighted land to rights, both in times past, and will again our present saviour be.	689
Jo.	By all the gods, teach also me, my lord, the reason why you have conceived so great and firm a rage.	
Oe.	I will. For you I hold in more regard than these; the reason is your brother and his plots against me.	700
Jo.	And can you tell me clearly who provoked this strife?	
Oe.	He claims that I stand guilty of King Laius' death.	
Jo.	Speaks he first hand, or from some other source?	

Oe. He sent some wretched prophet here to lay the charge,
while he himself keeps free his mouth from blame.

Jo. Why, then, emancipate yourself from charges such
as these and hear me out and understand
no mortal man can share in divination.
I will reveal the simple proof of this. 710

An oracle came to Laius once, not from Apollo sent
himself, but rather from his minions, to this effect-
that it would be his fate to die at the hands
of any son that should be born from me by him.
But Laius died, according to report at least, at the hands
of foreign brigands, at the place where three roads meet;
as for our son he was but three days old when Laius
pinned his feet together tightly, had him hurled
by other hands onto a trackless mountain side.
Apollo then did not ensure that the boy should be 720
his father's murderer, and nor did Laius die,
as was his dreadful fear, at the hands of a son;
such were the solemn messages prescribed by 'prophecy'.
You have no part in them. Should a god lack or seek
for any thing, he will readily make it known himself .

Oe. That... what I heard just now, my wife... inspires
a tumult in my heart and sets my mind to wandering.

Jo. What is this care you say torments your heart?

Oe. I thought that what I heard you say was this,
that Laius was cut down at a place where three roads met. 730

Jo. That was the story, yes, and the story has currency still.

Oe. And where is the spot wherein this crime took place?

Jo. The land is called Phocis, and the branching road
leads to the self-same place from Delphi and from Daulia.

Oe. And what is the time that has passed since then?

Jo. The murder was announced in the town but just
before you appeared to claim control of the land.

Oe. O Zeus, what is it that you have in mind to do to me?

Jo. What is it, Oedipus, that weighs so on your soul?

Oe. No questions yet! But tell me first what kind 740
of man King Laius was and at what stage of life.

Jo. A big man, touched but recently with white about the head,
while in appearance not much different from you.

Oe. Then I am wretch indeed! I have it seems in ignorance
hurled dreadful curses at myself upon this very day.

Jo. What do you mean? I tremble to look at you, my lord.

Oe. There is dread in my heart that the sight of the prophet is true;
tell me, though, one thing more, that more may be revealed.

Jo. Again I tremble, but will answer whatever you ask.
 Oe. Did he travel escorted by few, or did he have hoplites 750
 in plenty beside him, befitting a man who is king?
 Jo. His party totalled five in all and there was
 a herald with them, while Laius rode in a single cart.
 Oe. Oh, yes, yes that is clear enough... Who was
 it then who told you all of this, my queen?
 Jo. A slave who escaped alone and came back home.
 Oe. And is this slave now present in the house?
 Jo. Why, no; for when he returned and saw
 you holding power with Laius dead and gone,
 he came to me and clasped my hand and begged 760
 me send him to the fields and grazing flocks that he
 might be as far as may be out of sight of Thebes.
 And so I sent him there. He was a worthy slave,
 deserving to win just such a prize and more.
 Oe. How might we summon him back with all despatch?
 Jo. Quite easily. But what would be your aim in that?
 Oe. I fear that I have said already far too much, my wife,
 and because of that 'too much' I wish to see him now.
 Jo. For his part, he will come: but as for me, my lord, why, I
 am worthy too to learn the cause of your distress. 770
 Oe. I shall not keep it from you, far gone in worry though
 I am. For who means more to me that I should rather tell,
 while undergoing chances such as these?
 My father was Corinthian, King Polybus by name,
 my mother Merope, a Dorian, while I was held
 in highest honour there among the citizens, until
 such chance befell that I might well have wondered at,
 but not perhaps of weight enough to justify my rage.
 A man well gone in drinking at a feast claimed
 in his wine that I was not my father's proper son. 780
 For all that day I scarce contained myself, far gone
 in anger as I was, but on the next I visited
 my parents, cross-examined them. They were
 enraged at the man that had let fly this taunt.
 So I was pleased at their response, but still
 the jibe irked ceaselessly and word spread far
 and wide. Unbeknown to my parents I went
 to Delphi then, but Phoebus sent me disappointed
 on my way, revealing in his answer rather things
 of dread and doom, ill boding things, and prophesied 790
 I would commingle in my mother's bed and so
 reveal a race impossible for men to look upon,

and also would become my spawning father's murderer.
 And when I heard these things I navigated by
 the stars and fled the land of Corinth for all time,
 to a place where I could never see my prophecy
 fulfilled to be a source of shame and spite to me.
 I hurried on my way and reached the spot
 at which you say this king of yours was killed.
 To you, my wife, I will reveal the truth. As I came
 close by this triple meeting of the roads upon my route,
 at just that spot a herald and a man, embarked,
 like you said, in a horse-drawn cart confronted me;
 then both the herald and the older man himself
 attempted forcibly to drive me from the road.
 I struck in anger at the driver as he strove to push
 me sideways; when the old man spotted this,
 he watched until he saw my head in range, then swung
 at it a downwards blow with the double-pointed goad.
 He more than paid for that! I struck him smartly with
 the staff clutched in my hand and tumbled him back
 from the chariot's midst, straight down to the ground;
 and then I killed them, all. So, if there is
 some link between this stranger and with Laius, why,
 what man is there alive today more pitiful than I,
 what man is there more hated by the gods than I?
 For no man, neither fellow citizen nor foreigner
 may now receive me in his home, nor speak to me,
 but each must drive me from his house - and it is I
 and I alone have made me subject to this curse.
 The very hands that brought about King Laius' death
 pollute his marriage bed. Was not my birth accursed?
 It was entirely foul, unholy, if I must flee and may
 not, in my flight, take comfort in the sight of friends,
 nor even tread my native soil, or else must yoke
 with mother in a marriage bed and kill my father,
 Polybus, who gave me life and nurtured me.
 If a man were to judge these things the work
 of a cruel god, his finding would, I think, be right!
 I pray, most holy, reverend deities, that I
 may never see that day fulfilled, but rather I
 might shun the ways of men, unseen, before
 I see myself such shame and such disaster reach for me.
Ch. I shudder at your words, my lord; but still hold fast
 to hope until you can interrogate the witness.
Oe. What little hope I have rests with this man

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830

alone, this herdsman whom I must await.

Jo. But when he comes what would you have of him?

Oe. I will explain to you; for if his words are found to be compatible with yours, I might escape disaster. 840

Jo. What was it that you heard was so significant?

Oe. You said that it was brigands that murdered the king, according to the story this man told. So if in this respect his story stays the same, then Laius was not killed by me; for one man cannot be the same as many men. However, if he says it was a single traveller, why clearly then this crime inclines to me.

Jo. Be well assured his story was as I revealed it, nor is it possible he should reject and change it now. 850
The city heard him say these things, not I alone. But even if he deviates from what he said before, it does not seem that Laius' death was 'properly' fulfilled in any sense, since Loxias expressly said that it was fated that my son would murder him. And yet it never was that poor soul that killed him; for he himself had perished long before. So much for prophecy! For my part neither now nor in the future shall I look to it at all.

Oe. You reasoning is sound. But nevertheless be sure to send a man to bring this servant quickly here! 860

Jo. I will and speedily... but let us go inside the house. For there is nothing that I would not do to pleasure you.

Ch.

str. a. May fate ensure that I maintain
my reputation as a man of sound advice
and common sense
according to the laws sublime,
revealed on high and fathered by lord Zeus
alone, no mortal nature of men
begetting them,
nor ever prone to secret slumbering. 870
The god is great in them and grows not old.

ant. a. Tyrants are bred from arrogance,
yes, arrogance which, when overfilled to no
purpose, ascends to the steep
crest, far beyond what is healthy or right,
to be plunged to necessity's deep,
feet scrabbling in vain for a hold.

But the spirit of zeal that serves
the state well, that I pray that the god will for ever maintain. 880
I shall never cease from holding the god our protector.

str. b. But if a man's speech or his life smacks of hybris,
unfearful of god, not even respecting
the homes of the gods,
may a fate that is evil convict him,
as a fatal reward for his pride,
unless he shall temper with justice his gains,
and keep himself free of pollution, 890
not touching such things as should not be touched.
What man will ever boast he can ward from his soul
the bolts of god?
For if such acts as these are honoured,
why should I dance the sacred dance?

ant. b. No more shall I go in reverence to the earth's central shrine,
nor even to Abae's holy site, 900
nor even to Olympia,
unless these oracles prove manifest,
for all men's eyes to see.
Zeus, omnipotent lord, if this your title is true,
may never this matter escape you, nor yet your rule never ending.
The oracles long ago spoken of Laius the king
are already fading and men set them at naught,
while Apollo himself is no more distinguished
with honours and all that is godly corrodes. 910

Jo. The thought has come to me, lords of the land,
that I approach our gods in their temples here,
with offerings of incense in my hands and wreaths.
For Oedipus lifts his passions and his heart too high
with manifold anxieties; nor does he, as might well a man
of sense, interpret these new signs in the light of past
events, but is the prey of any man who preaches dread.
Since, therefore, my counsel does no good, I come
as suppliant to you, Apollo, Wolf God, pressing so
my suit, since you are most concerned in this, 920
that you may offer us some cleansing ease.
For we all shrink in horror when we see that man,
our vessel's helmsman, stricken with despair.

Messenger

My friends, might I enquire from one of you
where is the house of Oedipus the King?
Or better, tell me if you know his whereabouts.

Ch. This, stranger, is his house and he is himself within.
This lady here is wife to him and mother of his family.

Me. May happiness be ever hers and may she ever be
in happiness with him as his perfected queen. 930

Jo. Likewise I wish you joy, my friend. Your courtesy
deserves its due. But tell me what it is you want
that you have come and what your message is.

Me. One of benefits to you, your husband and the house.

Jo. What kind of benefits? From whom have you come?

Me. From Corinth. The message that I bring perhaps you may
take pleasure in; I'm sure you will, in fact, although...

Jo. What news could harbour such an ambiguity?

Me. The people of the land would make your Oedipus
the king of Corinth, according to the proclamation made. 940

Jo. What means this? Is Polybus no longer ruler there?

Me. Why, no! Death holds him firm within the tomb.

Jo. Then old man Polybus is dead, you say?

Me. If this is not the truth I tell, why, I deserve to die.

Jo. You, slave, go, quickly as you can, to tell
your master this! O oracles of gods,
where are you now? This was the man that Oedipus
once fled through dread of killing him, and now
he's dead at fortune's hand and not through him!

Oe. My wife, my own dear, dear Jocasta, 950
why did you send to the house for me?

Jo. But listen to this man and when you have,
consider then the standing of the oracles of god.

Oe. Who is this man and what has he to say to me?

Jo. He has come from Corinth to say that Polybus,
your father, is no more, has passed away.

Oe. Your message, friend? Give me the word yourself.

Me. If this is what I first must needs articulate, why know,
and know it well, that he is dead and gone.

Oe. By plots or visitation of disease? 960

Me. Small things may serve to tip old age to sleep.

Oe. The poor man died, it seems, of some disease?

Me. He did, but also of old age and ages lived.

Oe. Ah, then, my wife, wherefore should any man
respect Apollo's oracles and hearth, or birds
that scream in the sky - on whose authority
I was condemned to kill my father? And he

lies hid beneath the earth, while I am here,
 quite innocent? Unless he died because he yearned
 so much for me - and so he died because of me. 970
 No, Polybus lies dead in Hades' halls and he
 has taken with him all these worthless oracles!
Jo. Did I not tell you all of this before?
Oe. You did, but I was quite distracted by my dread.
Jo. But now you need not take to heart a word of it.
Oe. But must I shrink in fear still from my mother's bed?
Jo. What things precisely should one fear, when all of life
 is slave to chance and no one man has clarity of sight?
 The safest course is to live one's life as best one may.
 And as for you, you must not fear a mother's bed; 980
 for many men have dreamed before of sleeping with
 their mothers. Men most easily endure their lot
 in life, if they ignore such dreams as these.
Oe. All you say I would find comforting indeed, were not
 my mother still alive, but as she is, why then, despite
 your good advice, I cannot but be full of dread.
Jo. Your father's death though is significant in this respect.
Oe. It is indeed, but fear nags still of the one who lives.
Me. Who might this woman be of whom you are afraid?
Oe. The consort of Polybus, old man, Queen Merope. 990
Me. What is it about her that causes you to fear?
Oe. A terrible prediction, friend, sent on us by the gods.
Me. Can it be spoken of, or is it forbidden for others to know?
Oe. It is common knowledge now that Loxias once said
 that I must couple with my mother and also bring about
 with my own hands the fatal spilling of my father's blood.
 So this is the reason why for these long years
 I have left my home in Corinth far behind; the move
 was fortunate, although to see a parent's face is very sweet.
Me. In dread of this you kept yourself in exile from your home? 1000
Oe. I had no wish to be my father's murderer, old man.
Me. Why then, my lord, there is no reason why I should
 not free you from that terror, since I came in friendliness!
Oe. If but you could you would receive a fair reward from me.
Me. It was in part at least on that account I came, that I
 myself might profit somewhat from your coming home.
Oe. But I will never go to the place where my parents are.
Me. My son, it's pretty clear that you are ill informed.
Oe. How so? Pray teach me what you mean, old man.
Me. If on this account you hesitate to make a journey home. 1010
Oe. I hesitate in fear Apollo's words are proven to be true.

Me. In case you win pollution from your parents' fate?
Oe. Precisely so, old man; this is my ever present dread.
Me. And still you do not realise your dread is quite unjustified?
Oe. How can that be, if in fact I am my parents' child?
Me. Because King Polybus was not a factor in your genesis.
Oe. What do you mean? It was not Polybus engendered me?
Me. He was no more nor less your father than was I.
Oe. No more nor less than you that are no kin to me at all?
Me. No, neither he nor I were there at your begetting. 1020
Oe. But why then did he name me his son and heir?
Me. He received you as a gift, you see, from these my hands.
Oe. And yet in spite of that his love for me grew great?
Me. His former childlessness was instrumental there.
Oe. Did you purchase me, or did chance put me in your way?
Me. I found you in Cithaeron's tortured clefts.
Oe. What was the reason that you journeyed in that place?
Me. I used to stand and guard the mountain flocks.
Oe. You were a wandering, hireling shepherd then?
Me. But still the cause of your salvation at that time, my child. 1030
Oe. What pain was mine when you took me in your arms?
Me. Your injured ankles may bear mute testament to that.
Oe. Why speak of that longstanding source of pain?
Me. I freed the bolts that pierced and pinned your feet.
Oe. I've borne that shameful stigma from my childhood up.
Me. And so it was this chance that gave to you your name.
Oe. Was this my mother's or my father's work? I pray you, speak!
Me. I cannot tell. He better knows than I who gave you me.
Oe. You had me from another then and not by chance alone?
Me. No, not by chance - another shepherd gave you me. 1040
Oe. And who was he? Can you identify this man?
Me. He was one of Laius' herdsman, it was said.
Oe. The man who once was ruler of this land?
Me. Precisely so - he was a shepherd to the king.
Oe. And is this shepherd still alive that I might see him?
Me. You fellow citizens of his should best know that.
Oe. Do any of you have knowledge of this man
of whom he speaks, this shepherd, or have you seen
him, either in the fields or hereabouts within the town?
If so, speak, since it is crucial now for this to be revealed. 1050
Ch. I do believe he is no other than the countryman
you have already sought to see. Jocasta, though,
would be best qualified to speak of this.
Oe. Jocasta, do you know whether the man I just
now summoned is, in fact, the one he means?

Jo. Why talk of him? Do not concern yourself!
 Do not waste your time on this man's blathering.

Oe. It would not be a waste of time if I could only seize
 such clues as might illuminate my lineage.

Jo. For the god's sake, if you care at all for your life here 1060
 do not pursue this search. I am heartsick enough!

Oe. You need not be afraid, since even if my mother proves
 a slave and hers and hers and I, your birth is noble still.

Jo. But still, be swayed by me, I beg of you, and do not do this thing.

Oe. You never will dissuade me from uncovering the truth.

Jo. Not even if my pleas are moved by your best interests?

Oe. Your care for my best interests grows tedious.

Jo. Poor wretch, I pray you never learn your mother's name.

Oe. Let someone go to bring this herdsman here,
 and let this woman glory in her wealthy birth. 1070

Jo. Poor wretch, I grieve, I grieve for you... for these are all
 the words that I can find for you, and never, ever more!

Ch. Why has she fled, your wife, lord Oedipus,
 shot through with grief? I am afraid that from
 this sudden calm some storm of ills will break.

Oe. Let break what will! Still I would wish to learn
 my lineage, however meagre it may prove to be.
 This woman, though, has such a high opinion
 of herself, she feels ashamed, perhaps, by my low birth.
 Myself I count as Fortune's child and I shall feel 1080
 no shame so long as Fortune smiles on me.
 For I was born of her; and the passing sibling months,
 her children too, define me now as humble, now as great.
 Such is my ancestry and true to such I ever will
 remain, and so I will pursue the secret of my birth.

Ch. **strophe**

If I possess the gift of reading prophecy,
 then by Olympus' vast extent 1090
 I swear, Cithaeron, you will know,
 no later than tomorrow's circled moon,
 that Oedipus is fellow citizen to you, and lauds
 you as his mother and his nurse.
 And so our dance will honour you, for you are pleasing to our lord.
 Ensure, Apollo, this is for the best.

antistrophe

Which of the long-lived Nymphs, gave birth to you,

my son,
 by keeping company with Pan, the mountain wanderer? 1100
 Or was it one of Loxias's mistresses? For upland fields
 are also dear to him! Perhaps Lord Hermes of Cyllene,
 or Dionysus, dweller on the topmost peaks,
 received you from some Nymph, a new-born gift,
 on Helicon, where most of all he shares his joy with them.

Oe. I do believe I see the herdsman whom we seek, my friends, 1110
 if I might so surmise, who never met and have no knowledge
 of the man. The man is of an age with this Corinthian,
 and they are both advanced in years... while those that are
 escorting him I recognise as members of my household here
 in Thebes; it may well be that you outstrip me in my guess,
 since you have prior knowledge of this herdsman here.

Ch. Be well assured, I recognise the man. He was the one
 that Laius trusted most of all who were his shepherds then.

Oe. My first enquiry is to you, my Corinthian friend.
 Is this the man you mean?

Me. You see the very man. 1120

Oe. You there, old man, come look me in the face
 and answer what I ask: were you once Laius' slave?

Herdsman
 I was, but not one bought, but reared within the house.

Oe. What kind of work was your concern, what livelihood?

He. For the most part of my life I followed his flocks.

Oe. And in what places were you mostly resident?

He. Why on Cithaeron mostly and the regions thereabouts.

Oe. Do you recognise this man from knowing him in that place?

He. What was his business there? Whom do you mean?

Oe. This man here...have you met with him before? 1130

He. Not so that I could promptly swear to it from memory.

Me. There's no surprise in that, my lord, but I'll
 refresh his failing memory. For I am quite
 convinced he will recall the time when he and I
 were neighbours on Cithaeron, him with two
 herds, me with one, for three full years
 from spring until the months of autumn time.
 Then for the winter I would drive my flocks
 to their own folds and he his in turn to Laius' stalls.
 Is not this just what we did in very truth? 1140

He. Yes, what you say is true, although so very long ago.

Me. Come, tell me now, do you remember giving me
 a child that I might rear him as my foster son?

He. What's that? Why question me on that account?
Me. This man, my friend, was once that baby boy!
He. God damn you, man, and hold your peace!
Oe. Do not abuse the messenger, old man!
Your manners needs correction more than his.
He. In what particular am I remiss, my lord?
Oe. In not speaking of the boy of whom he asks. 1150
He. He speaks in ignorance, his energy misspent.
Oe. You will speak freely or constrained by pain.
He. By all the gods, you would not hurt a poor old man.
Oe. You, quickly, twist his hands behind his back.
He. For what, my poor dear boy? What must you know?
Oe. Did you give the child to this man who questions you?
He. I did, and would that I had died that day!
Oe. You may yet come to that unless you tell the truth.
He. My death is much more likely, if in fact I speak.
Oe. This fellow is intent, it seems, to waste my time. 1160
He. No, no, my lord! I confessed before I gave it him.
Oe. Where did you get it from? The house or somewhere else?
He. It was not mine... I had it from another's hand.
Oe. A citizen of Thebes? And from what house?
He. By all the gods, my lord, I beg you, ask no more!
Oe. You are a dead man, if I need to ask again.
He. He was a child from Laius' house.
Oe. A slave, or was he born of Laius' line?
He. So it comes at last, the thing too terrible to speak...
Oe. Too terrible to hear, but yet it must be heard. 1170
He. It was said the child was Laius' own, but his wife
inside could tell you best of how that was.
Oe. It was her that gave the child to you? **He.** It was, my lord.
Oe. With what intent? **He.** That I might kill the boy.
Oe. A mother could bear to do that? **He.** She was afraid of oracles.
Oe. What kind? **He.** They said the boy would kill his sire.
Oe. How came you then to pass the child to this old man?
He. I pitied him, my lord, and thought my friend would take
the child elsewhere, to where he lived himself, and so
this man preserved you for the worst of fates. For if 1180
you are that child, then know that you are damned.
Oe. All true, all true! It has all turned out to be true.
Now, holy light of day, this is the last I look on you.
I am proven son of those forbidden, cohabiter with those
forbidden, murderer of a man it was not lawful to kill.

Chorus

str. a. I mourn the generations of men
whose lives are mere nothings, I think.
For what man wins more
than the semblance of luck, 1190
and after the semblance,
his life is eclipsed?
I have your example before me,
your fate and your fortune to warn me, sad king,
I must not call anything blessed that is man's.

ant. a. This man's aim surpassed
all limit, won him wealth and happiness supreme,
lord Zeus, and he destroyed
the virgin Sphinx,
hook-clawed and riddling, 1200
arose our land's strong bastion 'gainst death;
and from that time is called
our king and honoured most of all within this mighty land
of Thebes he rules.

str. b. But now whose name is heard more pitiful?
Who more victim now to savage plague
and toil, his life reversed?
I mourn the fame and life of Oedipus,
for whom as child and man 1208
the same great haven gave delight, the marriage bed.
How could the furrow that your father ploughed
endure your weight, you wretch,
in so deep silence for so long?

ant. b. All seeing time has found you out to your distress;
the marriage that made partners of father and son
time punishes now at the last. 1215
Ah, child of Laius, how I do wish
I had never seen you!
My cries of grief flood from my lips
as might a song for the dead. For the truth of it is
that I owed you my life,
but owe to you now this blindness of tears.

Second Messenger

Men honoured ever most within this land,
such things you will hear and look upon
as will lay grief's burden on your souls, if still

you have a native Theban love for the house
 of Labdacus. For I do not think that Ister's flood
 nor Phasis' could wash clean and purify this house
 of its hidden crime, to come soon to light
 as consciously done. And hurts revealed 1230
 as self inflicted do ever cause severest pain.

Ch. The griefs we learned before were such as could
 not fail to cause us pain. Have you some further news?

S.M. The briefest way to tell and learn the tale
 is this: our lady, Queen Jocasta, now lies dead.

Ch. Poor wretched lady! What was the cause for this?

S.M. She killed herself. The sharpest pain of what
 was done escapes you, though, because you were
 not witnesses, but in so far as memory serves
 you will learn from me of that poor lady's sufferings. 1240
 When she had fled inside the house, quite stormed
 by emotion, she hurried straight to her marriage bed,
 hands locked to her scalp and tearing her hair;
 then once inside the room she slammed the doors
 behind her back and calls on Laius, dead so long ago,
 her mind on the son born also long ago, at whose
 hands Laius died, and so left her to breed
 accursed offspring of her own by his.
 She cursed aloud the marriage which had birthed
 a husband from a husband, children from a child. 1250
 How next she met her end I do not know;
 for Oedipus burst in, roaring, did not let
 us look upon her final act of suffering,
 but rather his frenzy now compelled our gaze.
 Back and forth he goes and asks us for a sword,
 asks where his wife, no wife might be, the mother whose
 one womb had borne both him and birthed his sons.
 Some god it was directed him in his madness then;
 for none of us mere mortals who were present did.

He gave a dreadful cry and as if led he hurled himself 1260
 at the double doors and forced the bolts to bend
 and burst from their sockets, then stumbled into the room.
 And there he saw his wife, hanged by the neck,
 suspended in a swinging noose of twisted cords.
 The sight dredged from the wretch a fearful cry,
 as he eased her from the choking noose and laid
 her on the ground...what followed was a dreadful sight.
 For snatching up the golden pins which clasped
 her gown about the corpse, he raised them up

and then struck down and through his open eyes, 1270
and cried that they would never more behold
himself nor yet the consequences of his crime,
but in perpetual darkness he would see the ones
that he should not have seen and would not know
the ones that he had longed to see; and so he cursed as more
and more he lifted up his hands to strike his eyes.
At every blow the blood gushed down to clot and stain
his beard with no thin, sluggish stream of gore, but at each
strike black rain gushed hailstorms and gout of blood.
These ills have sprung from a double source to curse 1280
in turn with mingled suffering this woman and this man.
Their fortune once was high and in that past
was justly so, but now on this one day they share
in lamentation, madness, death and shame,
share all the evils men can name bar none.

Ch. And is the poor man's pain as bitter still?
S.M. He roars for someone to open the palace gates and show
to all the citizens of Thebes the parricide, turned matricide,
and, mouthing curses I may not repeat, demands that he
be exiled from the land, in keeping with his curse, that he 1290
might stay no longer in this house of curses and of doom.
But he is weakened now and needs some one to guide
his steps; for his pain is greater than he well can bear.
Yet he will show himself to you. The palace gates
are now unbarred and soon a vision will assail your eyes
that will inspire your horror and your pity both.

Ch. It is terrible to look upon the sufferings of men,
and of all the human grief that I have seen this is
most terrible. What was the madness that assailed
you, Oedipus? Which of the gods has leaped 1300
with such unprecedented spite upon your life?
I grieve, I grieve for you!
And yet I cannot dare to look at you, although I wish
to ask you many things, to learn so many things,
to ponder many things;
such is the horror you inspire in me.

Oe. Agh! Agh!
I grieve for my wretchedness,
Where in the world can I go in my pain?
Where will my cries be borne on the wind? 1310
Where leaps now my fate?

Ch. Places of dread that should not be seen and should not be heard.

str. a.
Oe. The darkness!
 Apotropaic of friendship! Unspeakable, it comes;
 untamed and lavish on the breath of a breeze.
 I grieve.
 I grieve and grieve again! The sting of these goads has pierced
 me with the memories of grief.

Ch. In this time of grief and woe it is no wonder
 you should feel a double blow, endure a double pain. 1320

ant. a.
Oe. Ah, my friend,
 constant still you stand by me. For still
 you wait to tend me in my dark.
 Agh! Agh!
 For you are not unknown to me.
 I clearly recognise your voice, though blind.

Ch. What dreadful deeds! How dared you put out the light
 of your eyes in this way? Which god was it drove you?

str. b.
Oe. Apollo, my friends, Apollo it was that accomplished
 my fate, a fate compounded of pain and of crime. 1330
 For none other's hand has struck me save mine.
 What need have I for eyes,
 for whom there would be nothing sweet for them to see?

Ch. Things stood even as you say they did.

Oe. What then is left for me to see?
 To love? What words are left to hear
 and bring me comfort still, my friends?
 Drive me, drive me into exile quickly as you may, 1340
 my friends, who am a mortal threat,
 and execrated, hated by the gods the most
 of all mankind.

Ch. I pity you both for your fate and for your knowing it,
 and so I would that I had never heard of you.

ant. b.
Oe. I would that he might die, whatever man he was,
 who freed me from the cruel, biting shackle on my feet, 1350
 snatched me from death - false kindness this,
 for had I died, I could not now have come
 to be the bane I have to friends, and even to myself alike.

Ch. I also share this self same wish.
Oe. And neither would I then have come to be
my father's murderer, nor yet be called by men
the groom of her that gave me birth.
But now I am abandoned by the gods, unholy child, 1360
both son and heir to the wretched bed of him that fathered me.
If there can be a fate of fates most heinous and unparalleled,
then Oedipus has suffered it.

Ch. I do not know that I can say that I approve this punishment;
for it were better far to live no more than live a blind man.

Oe. I do not need advice from you that claims to teach 1370
that what is done is not done by me for the best.
For I do not know with what expression I
could ever look upon my father, when I came
to Hades' halls, nor yet on my poor mother's face,
on both of whom crimes worse than capital
were done by me. And could the sight
of children born as mine were born be something I
would ever wish to look upon? Not ever, I think,
by eyes such as my own; nor could the sight of town,
of city walls, of sacred images of gods... of all of which
I have despoiled myself, yes I, the most distinguished son 1380
of Thebes, who now demand in turn the citizens
should drive me out as one unclean and shown
by gods to be anathema and yet of Laius' line.
And when I ponder in my mind on such disgrace,
how then should I confront these men with level gaze?
It is not possible; and if there was a way to choke
the spring of hearing through my ears, why I would not
hold back from sealing up this miserable corpse,
to render it both blind and deaf; for it is sweet indeed 1390
for our soul to dwell beyond the memory of grief.
Cithaeron, why did you welcome me? Why not take
and kill me straight away? For then I never would
have shown myself to men, revealed my birth.
O Polybus, and Corinth and the home I used to call
my own so long ago, in me you reared a son
that promised well, but yet what evils then lay hid;
I am myself discovered evil now, spawned of the same.
Three roads I recall and a valley hidden, a copse
of trees, and the narrow place where the three roads met,
the place which drank my father's blood as a gift from my 1400
own hands - does it remember anything of me,

the services I rendered it, this place, remember what
 I did again when I came here? The marriages,
 twin marriages that gave me life and, having done
 so, then received my seed, thus spawning fathers, sons
 and brothers indiscriminate, blood kin to kin of blood,
 brides, wives and mothers, all incestuous,
 perverse abominations in the eyes of men...
 but it is not right to speak of things it is not right to do.
 As quickly as you can, I pray you, hide me away 1410
 outside the town, or kill me, throw me into the sea
 where nevermore will you set eyes on me again.
 Come, lay your hands in judgement on this feeble man;
 obey me, have no fear; the evils that are mine are mine
 and mine alone and no man else can bear them in my stead.

Ch. See, Creon is now present here and comes in time to deal
 with your demands, to act and plan on your behalf, since he
 alone is left as guardian of the land in place of you.

Oe. What plea can I possibly make to him? And why 1420
 should he or anybody give me credence now? For in
 the past all that I said in his despite proved false.

Cr. I have not come to mock you, Oedipus, nor yet
 as one to make reproach for insults past received.
 If you people lack respect for human sensibilities,
 respect at least the light of Helios that nurtures all and be
 ashamed to show unveiled pollution such as this,
 which neither earth nor heavenly rain nor light will host,
 but take him in the house as quickly as you can;
 The best and most appropriate course in terms of piety 1430
 is if his kin and kin alone observe and hear a kinsman's woe.

Oe. By the gods, since you have disabused me of my dread,
 and have come as the best of men to me the worst, attend
 me briefly - I shall speak not for my benefit but yours.

Cr. What is the object of this abject flattery?

Oe. Hurl me from this land as quickly as you can,
 away from prying eyes and mortal tongues.

Cr. Know well I would have acted so, had not I wished
 to learn from Apollo first what should be done.

Oe. But Apollo's word has been revealed in full before: 1440
 destroy me for the curse and parricide I am!

Cr. Those were his words before, but in our present plight
 I think it better to know precisely what to do.

Oe. And you will seek advice on what to do with *me* ?

Cr. I will, since even you will now give credit to the god.

Oe. Why then on you I lay this charge, make this request:

provide as you see fit a tomb for the woman who lies
 within; I know you will see to your own just as you should.
 While I yet live I would not wish my father's city here
 to be condemned to win me as a citizen, so rather let 1450
 me dwell amid the mountain range, Cithaeron, now
 notorious because of me, which mother and father while still
 they lived, determined as my proper tomb, that I might die
 according to the will of those who once did wish me dead.
 And yet I am convinced of this at least: no mere disease
 or simple fate will undo me; I was not saved from death
 before, were I not to be kept safe for some dread ill;
 my fate, whatever it may be, why, let it come;
 as for my sons, you need not, Creon, worry overmuch
 for them; for they are men and so will never lack 1460
 the wherewithal for life wherever they may be.
 as for my daughters, poor, weak creatures that they are,
 for whom a place was always set at table, who dined
 always with me and kept their father company
 and always had a share of everything I touched...
 Take care of them for me, and, most of all, please let
 me touch them by the hand and share my tears with them.
 Please, please, my lord!
 Please, show your noble heart! But let me touch them and
 I might imagine then I held them as when I had sight. 1470

What's this?

By the gods, is this the sound of my two
 dear daughters weeping? Has Creon pitied me
 and sent to me my darling little ones?

Can this be so?

Cr. It is. I was the one to authorise their presence here, because
 I would renew the pleasure that you always had in them.

Oe. I thank you for it and in repayment for your bringing them
 I would a kinder god may watch your fate than has watched mine. 1480
 My children, where, where are you? Come to me, come
 into your brother's, father's hands, my hands,
 which have contrived that you should see
 your father in this state, his once bright eyes now dulled,
 your father, who, my children, has been proved to have
 begotten you in blind, incurious ignorance...where he himself...
 I weep for the two of you as well... for see you I can not...
 although I clearly see the bitter future that is yours,
 the kind of life that men will make you lead.
 Where will you go to keep the company of citizens?

What festivals will you attend where you will not
 flee home in floods of tears instead of celebration? 1490
 And when you come to your maturity, the time
 to wed, what man will there be, my little ones, who
 will risk to win the kind of insults which will blight
 the lives of you, my children, and your offspring too?
 What face of grief is absent here? Your father killed
 his father, ploughed and impregnated her from whom
 he had himself been born and got himself
 you children where his very nature had been formed.
 Such insults will be yours; who then will marry you? 1500
 There is no man who will, my children, and it
 is plain that you must wither, barren and unwed.
 Menoeceus' son, since you are the only father left
 them now... for we that gave them life are both
 destroyed... do not endure to see these children
 that are your kin as unwed vagrant mendicants,
 nor yet reduce them to a fate to equal mine.
 Pity them rather, young as they are and bereft,
 as you see, of all save what you share with them.
 Clasp hands, my noble friend, to seal your word. 1510
 For you, my children, I would have so much advice,
 were you of an age to learn from it, but as it is, I would
 this were your prayer: live as the opportunity allows,
 and win yourselves a life that is better than your sire's.
 Cr. You have had sufficient time for tears; go now within.
 Oe. I must obey you even if it rankles.
 Cr. All good things
 are changed in time.
 Oe. What are my terms of exile?
 Cr. Tell them me yourself
 that I might know them.
 Oe. Be sure to send me far outside the land.
 Cr. That which
 you ask is in the gift of gods.
 Oe. But I am become anathema to them.
 Cr. Then they will
 swiftly grant your wish.
 Oe. I have your promise then?
 Cr. I am not a man to give
 my word and then forswear myself. 1520
 Oe. So drive me from this place at once.
 Cr. Make haste
 and let your children go.

Oe. No, no! Leave them at least with me!

Cr. Do not desire

to have your way in everything.

For the power you used to wield has now deserted you.

Ch. You citizens of Thebes, observe this man, this Oedipus,
who solved the famous riddle and became our king,
on whose good fortune no man looked and envied not;
observe the stormy trough of fortune he has plumbed.
Call no man fortunate until his final day has come
before his eyes, until he gains the winning post
and end of life unscathed by grief and pain.

1530