

**SOPHOCLES'**  
**“OEDIPUS AT COLONOS”**  
Produced between 450BCE and 430BCE

TRANSLATED BY  
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**Dramatis Personae**

**Oedipus**

**Antigone**

**Ismene**

**Theseus**

**Creon**

**Polynices**

**Stranger**

**Messenger**

**Various Attendants**

**Chorus of Elders of Colonus**

---

*Day.*

*In the country, near a sacred grove. Some trees behind which Antigone and Oedipus may hide.*

*Two rocks with some distance between them.*

*A statue of the hero Colonus DSL*

*Enter Oedipus helped by his daughter, Antigone.*

*They are tired, unkempt, with torn and dirty clothes. Both with bare feet. A near empty beggar's sack hangs from Oedipus' shoulder.*

Oedipus:

Well tell me, Antigone, tell me, daughter of a blind old man, tell me, where are we? Whose land is this, my child? Who will it be today, I wonder? Who will come up to Oedipus the wanderer and offer him the usual pitiful gifts?

I ask only for little and I get even less! Still, it's enough for me. My suffering as well my age and my courage have taught me to be satisfied with that much.

Look around you, my child, see if you can find some place for me to sit down.

A place that a mortal is free to walk upon, or somewhere near some sacred grove. Take me there and let me sit for a while until we find out where we truly are.

We have come here as strangers, so we must talk with the local folks first and find out what we must do.

Antigone: *After looking around her*

Oedipus, my poor father! The city's walls seem quite far from here and this place, I think is some sacred ground or other. There are bay trees, olive trees and grave vines everywhere and I can hear among them the sweet music of the feathery nightingales.

Come this way, father and rest your tired limbs here, on this rough rock.

For someone your age, you have walked a long way, father.

**21**

Oedipus:

Ah, good. Help me seat down, then and... take care of me. Look after this blind man, my darling.

Antigone:

No need to tell me what to do any more, father, after such a long time!

*She helps Oedipus sit on the rock.*

Oedipus:

So, tell me, then. Where are we, Antigone?

Antigone:

Well, I know that we're in Athens but I don't know exactly what part of it.

Oedipus:

Yes, that's what all the people we came across on the road have told us.

Antigone:

Well, shall I go away and investigate?

Oedipus:

Yes, my darling. Find out if this a place people can live in.

Antigone:

People DO live here, father. *She peers into the distance.*

And there's no need for me to go anywhere. I can see a man coming this way.

**30**

Oedipus:

Did you say, coming this way, my child?

*Enter Stranger*

Antigone:

Yes, he's right here now. Talk to him, father. Ask the man what you want.

Oedipus:

Stranger, this girl here, who does the seeing for both of us, tells me that you are here, in front of me.

You're just in time, then to answer some of our questions.

Stranger: *Angrily*

Hold it! Before you even begin with your questions, get off that rock!

This is a sacred place here and it cannot not be polluted by mortal feet.

Oedipus:

Ah! What is this place and to which god is it devoted, friend?

Stranger:

It is a place that must not be violated by human contact.

This place belongs to the daughters of Earth and of Darkness, the most dire of all goddesses!

**41**

Oedipus:

By what name are they worshiped, friend? Tell me so that I may pray to them, please.

Stranger:

The folk here call them, Eumenides, "The Kind Ones Who See All" but people in other places have other names for them also.

Oedipus:

Well, I hope they will indeed receive a suppliant like me kindly, then, because I will not move from this seat!

Stranger:

What? What do you mean by that?

Oedipus:

This seat here, my friend is a sign, a sign sent to me by my Fate.

Stranger:

Well, in that case, I dare not throw you out of the city before I consult with the rest of the citizens.

Oedipus:

In Heaven's name, stranger, please don't treat me with scorn simply because I look like a beggar to you.

Come, please help me with my questions.

**51**

Stranger:

By all means. Ask me your question. I won't refuse you the answer.

Oedipus:

What country have we walked into?

Stranger:

Listen well, friend and I'll tell you all I know.

This whole place, here is sacred. Owned by the revered God Poseidon. He, together with the fire-bearing titan, Prometheus; and that spot there where your feet are is the bronze gate path to this country, it is the threshold of Athens.

*Indicating the statue behind Oedipus*

**60**

The neighbouring villages here boast that their land was the land of their great horseman, Colonus, whose statue is just there and they've named this town after him.

And that's the full story, my friend and we pay homage to this story, my friend, not only with words but with reverence.

Oedipus:

So, there are people living here?

Stranger:

Yes. They've taken their name from that God, there, Colonus.

Oedipus:

Is it a place that is ruled by a king or by the common folk?

Stranger:

This city is ruled by a king.

Oedipus:

And who is it that rules this country by word and deed?

Stranger:

His name is Theseus. The son of old king Aegeas.

**70**

Oedipus:

Could one of you good citizens go to the king for me?

Stranger:

To do what, give the king a message or try and persuade him to come here?

Oedipus:

To tell him that if he helps me just a little his reward will be great.

Stranger:

But what reward could a blind man offer a king?

Oedipus:

Blind, yes but my words will have eyes.

Stranger:

You know what stranger? Even though your appearance is that of a poor man, I can tell that your heart is that of a noble, so I'll help you not to make a faulty move, here.

All right, then, you stay here, where you are, right where I have first set eyes on you and I'll go back not to the city but to the town and talk to the folk there. They can decide whether you can stay or leave.

*Exit Stranger*

**81**

Oedipus:

Darling, has the stranger left?

Antigone:

Yes, father, he has so you can speak freely. I am the only one here.

Oedipus: *Praying*

Oh, great ladies! You with the fearsome eyes!

I pray to you, reverent ladies, since this seat, the first place I've come to in this country, belongs to you!

I beg you, reverent ladies, think kindly of Phoebus Apollo and of me. Because it was Phoebus who uttered his prophecies about my dreadful future and told me that this place here is where it will all end.

This place here, he said is where I will find a welcoming seat, and shelter, on this seat here, dreaded goddesses, this seat that belongs to you.

This place, the god told me, is where those who welcomed me will be rewarded and those who cast me out will be cursed.

Signs will come to me, he said, signs like an earthquake or thunder or lightning from Zeus.

**100**

I can recognise that this is your sign, my dreaded goddesses.

It was you who have guided me here to this grove otherwise how could this have been the first place that I, a sober man who never drinks, how could I have wandered here?

Why else could this sacred rough rock have been the first seat for me to rest?

Come, then, goddesses, fulfil Phoebus' sacred word, grant me an end to this misery I carry, bring an end to my life. That is, unless, of course, you think me too vile a creature for you to do that, I, a slave to misery, a misery greater than that of any other mortal.

Come, come, you gentle daughters of ancient Darkness!

Come, come, great Athens, city that carries the name of the great goddess, Pallas Athena! Come,

Athens, the greatest city of them all!

Have pity on this dishonoured ghost of a man called Oedipus, whose body is no longer that of the young brave man it once was.

**111**

Antigone:

Hush, father. There are some men approaching. Elders. They are examining the place you are sitting.

Oedipus:

I shall be silent, my daughter but hide me! Hide me in the trees, away from the road, so we can hear what they say. We need to hear their words so we may act carefully.

*They hide.*

*Enter the chorus of Elders from Colonus. They are searching all around looking for Oedipus.*

Chorus:

Look all around you, men!

Chorus:

Where is he?

Chorus:

Where is he hiding?

**120**

Chorus:

Impertinent man!

Chorus:

Look everywhere!

Chorus:

Search everywhere!

Chorus:

Scan your eyes over every inch of the place!

Chorus:

He must be a drifter, a wanderer, a foreigner!

Chorus:

Obviously not a local, otherwise he wouldn't have dared to step upon this sacred ground!

Chorus:

This ground belongs to the ladies with the dreaded eyes!

Chorus:

Whose name we utter with trembling jaws!

Chorus:

The ladies that we can only pass by with our heads lowered!

**130**

Chorus:

With our mouths tightly shut.

Chorus:

Silent!

Chorus:

Whispering prayers with deep reverence!

Chorus:

Now we're told someone came here showing no respect for the ladies at all!

Chorus:

But I looked everywhere around the holy precinct and I cannot see him at all!

*Oedipus and Antigone step out from their hiding place*

Oedipus:

It is I who have come here, friends. I whose ears are his eyes, as they say about the blind!

**140**

Chorus: *In horror*

Ah! A dreadful sound from a dreadful sight!

Oedipus:

Oh, no! I beg you, don't look upon me as you would a criminal!

Chorus:

Zeus, our protector! Who is this old man?

Oedipus:

Men! Guardians of this land, let me tell you who this old man here is.

This is an old man tortured by a terrible Fate!  
And here's the proof: Would I be moving about using someone else's eyes?  
*Indicating Antigone* Would I, once a great man, need such a tiny support now?

**150**

Chorus:

Were you born blind?

Chorus:

Were you blind at birth?

Chorus:

It looks like you've had a long and miserable life, old man!

Chorus:

Yes, but you're not infecting me with those curses of misery you've got!

Chorus:

Stand back! You've walked too far, too far into the sacred ground!

Chorus:

Don't step upon that grassy spot!

Chorus:

It's sacred!

Chorus:

It's silent!

**160**

Chorus:

It's where the water from the Spring and the honey flow into the one single bowl.

Chorus:

Step away from there, stranger!

Chorus:

Stop!

Chorus:

Careful!

Chorus:

Get back! Go away!

Chorus:

Go far away! Cover a great distance from here.

Chorus:

Can you hear me, you miserable beggar?

Chorus:

If you must speak to me then do so standing far from that sacred ground.

Chorus:

Speak only from where it's proper to speak. Until then, be silent!

**170**

Oedipus:

Antigone, what do you think we should do?

Antigone:

Father, we must do what the locals tell us. We must listen to them, obey their wishes.

Oedipus:

Then, take my hand, daughter.

Antigone: *Does so*

Here, I've got it.

Oedipus:

Strangers, do me no harm! I trust you. I shall move from here.

*Oedipus and Antigone move*

Chorus:

No, no, old man, you will be safe there. No one will take you away from your place of rest by force.

Oedipus:

Is this far enough?

Chorus:

A bit more this way.

**180**

Oedipus: *Struggling with his blindness*

Further still?

Chorus:

Girl, lead him this way. You can understand what we mean.

Antigone:

Come, father. Follow me. This way.

Follow me with your blind feet. Come where I lead you.

*(Four lines of text are missing here.)*

Chorus:

Courage, friend. You're a stranger in a foreign land, you poor man.

Chorus:

You must learn to hate what this city hates and to love what it loves.

Oedipus:

Come then, Antigone, take me to where one may talk and listen without injuring the sacred or warring against Fate.

*Antigone leads Oedipus gently to a rock at the edge of the sacred ground*

**192**

Chorus:

Just here! Yes. Now don't move past that rock.

Oedipus:

Like this?

Chorus:

Yes, your ears guide you well.

Oedipus:

Shall I seat down now?

Chorus:

Yes, that's right. Move a little to the right, to the edge of the rock. Yes, there. You can sit just there.

Antigone:

Hang on, father. Let me... gently, yes, move this way... small steps...

Oedipus:

Oh, dear me!

**200**

Antigone:

... put the weight of your aged body on your daughter's arm, father.

Oedipus:

Ah! This dreadful fate of mine!

*Oedipus finally seats down on the rock*

Chorus:

Now that you're sitting down, you poor suffering soul, tell us, who you are!

Chorus:

Such suffering! Why this ordeal?

Chorus:

Which is your homeland?

Oedipus:

Strangers... I... I am an exile... but don't...

Chorus:

Don't what? What is it you're afraid we might do?

**210**

Oedipus:

Strangers, do not ask any questions... do not ask any more about me!

Chorus:

Why not?

Oedipus:

My birth! My very conception was vile.

Chorus:

What? Tell us!

Oedipus: *Turning to Antigone*

Daughter, what shall I tell them?

Chorus:

Tell us, stranger, whose seed gave birth to you?

Chorus:

Who is your father?

Oedipus:  
Ah! Daughter what should I do now?  
Chorus:  
Come on, tell us! You've come this far!  
Oedipus:  
So, I must speak, then. It seems I have no way of hiding the truth.  
Chorus:  
Come, come! Stop wasting time. Tell us!

**220**

Oedipus:  
Have you heard of Laius' son?  
Chorus: *In horror*  
Ah! Laius' son!  
Oedipus:  
And of the race of Labdacus?  
Chorus:  
Oh, Zeus!  
Oedipus:  
And of the unhappy Oedipus?  
Chorus:  
Oedipus? Are you that man?  
Oedipus:  
Don't be afraid of anything I say to you.  
Chorus: *Horriified*  
Oh, no!  
Chorus:  
How dreadful!  
Chorus:  
Terrible!  
Oedipus:  
Oh, I am the most miserable of all men!  
Chorus:  
Shocking!  
Oedipus:  
Antigone, what's to follow now?  
Chorus:  
Get out! Get out of this country!  
Chorus:  
Leave! Go as far as you can. Far away from here.  
Oedipus:  
Your promises, men! What of your promises? Will you not fulfil your promises?

**228**

Chorus:  
Fate's anger does not fall upon those who seek justice for a wrong done to them.  
Chorus:  
One gains no benefit by adding one deception upon another. Only pain follows such an act.  
Chorus:  
So now, go! Go immediately. Leave that seat and get out of our country. I fear your stay here will add more misery to our city.  
Antigone:  
Gentle strangers! Kind strangers!  
I beg you!  
You have heard the stories of my aged father here but these are stories of deeds which he committed unwittingly yet you will not receive him.

**240**

But I beg you and beg you with my eyes open and raised up to your eyes, as if I were of your own blood, not with the eyes of a blind man for whom I make this appeal.  
Please find compassion in your heart for this tortured soul. Find it because we depend upon you as if you were gods.  
Come, strangers, give us this kindness, a kindness that we could never hope to have received from

anyone else.

**250**

By whatever is dear to you, strangers, by your, child, your wife, your possessions, your gods, I beg you!

Strangers, no matter where you look, you will never find a mortal who can escape the hunt of the gods.

Chorus:

Yes, yes, child! Child of poor Oedipus! We certainly feel for you, for you both.

Chorus:

We understand your misfortune and pity you for it but we're afraid of the anger of the gods. We are too afraid to say any more than what we have said already.

Oedipus:

What good is glory, then? What good is a fine reputation when both come from lies?

Athens, they say has both. Athens, they say, is the most god-fearing city. Athens, they say, can be the only city that can give refuge to a hunted man. To save him.

**260**

Where is this refuge then? Where is this safety?

You are raising me from this seat and you are driving me away, not because you are afraid of my deeds or of my sad form but only because you are afraid of my name!

Those deeds brought about my suffering.

If I must tell the tale then that would be a tale not about what I did to anyone else but about what my mother and father have done to me.

**270**

I know this very well: you are afraid not of what I have done but of what they have done.

So why do you think me evil? I have merely sought justice for the evil done to me. Even if I had known what I was doing, I could still not be called evil.

In any case, I have found myself in this situation not knowing what I was doing, whereas those who seek my destruction do so, with the full knowledge of what it is they are doing.

For this reason, kind strangers, I implore you, in Heaven's name, just as you have risen me from this seat, in the same way, save me!

**280**

Don't treat the gods you love with indifference, because the gods can see both, the mortals who respect them, as well as those who don't and there's never been an impious mortal who has escaped them.

Strangers, do not stain the good name of the goddess Athena by behaving impiously but do as you have pledged to do with this poor suppliant. Give him safe refuge and don't mock his ugly appearance.

I have arrived here a pure and god-respecting man with good reward for the citizens of this city, so, when you bring your leader here, your king, whoever that is, he will hear and learn everything there is to hear and know. Until then, strangers, don't be cruel to me.

**292**

Chorus:

We should indeed, respect all your thoughts, friend because these were not words uttered lightly.

Chorus:

As for myself, I think we should leave this decision to the rulers of this land.

Oedipus:

Where, then, is the ruler of this city, my friends?

Chorus:

He is in the city of his fathers but the messenger who brought us here has already gone to fetch him.

**299**

Oedipus:

Do you think he'd care enough for a blind man to come and see him in person?

Chorus:

Of course he'd care! When he hears who you are, old stranger, he will certainly come.

Oedipus:

Who'll take the message to him?

Chorus:

The distance might be great but the travellers spread the news quickly. The moment our King hears of your plight he'll come here. Be certain of that, Oedipus.

Chorus:

Your name, is well known to all of us, old man, so that when he hears about you, even if he is asleep and moves about with difficulty, he'll still rush to come here.



Oedipus:

For the sake of his country's happiness and for my happiness, as well, I hope he does come.

**310**

Antigone: *Sees someone in the distance*

Oh, Zeus! What should I say about this, father? What am I to think?

Oedipus:

What is it, my child? What is it, Antigone?

Antigone:

I see a woman, father. A woman, riding a horse. An Aetnian mule.

She's wearing a Thessalian straw hat which hides her face.

Zeus! I don't know if... is it her? No... I... don't know if it's... Heavens, father, I think I'm losing my mind... one minute I think it is her and the next minute I don't... I don't know what to think, poor woman...

Oh, no! It can be no one else, father! The closer she gets the more she smiles at me... Father, that can only be our Ismene!

**321**

Oedipus:

What? What did you say, darling?

Antigone:

I said, father, that I can see your daughter in the distance. My sister... and here you are, now you can hear and recognise her by her own voice!

*Enter Ismene accompanied by a servant*

Ismene:

Father!

Sister!

Double the joy of uttering these two words!

Trying to find you was so painful yet more painful still is the sight of you!

Oedipus:

Child, is it really you?

Ismene:

Oh, father! Oh, my dear, dear father! What a sorry sight you are!

Oedipus:

Is it really you, Ismene? Have really come to see us?

Ismene:

Yes, father and it wasn't at all easy for me.

Oedipus:

Come, darling, come, give me a hug.

Ismene:

A hug for both of you!

**330**

Oedipus:

Oh, my child! Blood of my blood!

Ismene:

Oh, what an unfortunate lot of lives!

Oedipus:

You mean, Antigone's and mine?

Ismene:

Yes, father and I add mine, as well.

Oedipus:

Darling, what made you come here?

Ismene:

I was worried about you, father.

Oedipus:

Worried? Because you've missed me, daughter?

Ismene:

Yes, father, because I've missed you and because I have some news for you which I, alone and my only faithful servant here can give you.

Oedipus:

You, alone? But where are your brothers? They are young men and they should be taking on this burden.

Ismene:

They have their own troubles, father. Things are difficult for them also.

Oedipus:

Oh, I think those two have taken up the Egyptian ways. Fully. They've taken up the Egyptian ways in both, their life styles as well as in their thinking.

**339**

There, in Egypt, the males sit at home working the loom while their women go out, trying to provide for the family. It's the same thing with you, my child. My sons, who ought to be performing the work of men, sit at home looking after the house, like young girls, while you two take on the duties of looking after your poor father and his miserable pains.

Antigone, here, the moment her body grew out of childhood, follows me wherever I drag my aged bones, guiding me everywhere.

**350**

With bare feet and hungry, often wandering through wild forests, battered by storms and by the scorching sun, the poor soul, rejects the comforts of a hearth just so that her old father will have his food.

And you, too, my darling Ismene. You came to me, back then, slipping through the Cadmeian men to tell me what the oracles had prophesied about me and then, when I was exiled from my country, you stayed there, faithful to your father.

But now, Ismene, what news do you have for me? What made you rush over here?

I can tell it's something awful, something that I should be worried about.

**361**

Ismene:

Oh, father!

I won't tell you about the trouble I went through just to find out where you were! Where you were hiding!

I don't want to suffer that pain a second time, father first time when I went through it and then now when I'm telling you about it.

No, I came to tell you about the dreadful problems faced by your two ill-fated sons.

At first, father, they thought about the ancient curse and misery that your family has suffered and so, both of them agreed to avoid polluting the city by leaving your throne to Creon.

**371**

But now, moved by some god or other, or by their own twisted minds, these thrice-miserable men, decided to fight for that throne and for the royal power it wields.

The younger one is standing fast against the first born, Polynices, whom he has sent into exile.

But Polynices -so all the Thebans say- has gone to Argos and got himself married there. Then he made many friends who are prepared to pick up arms and fight for him against Thebes.

**380**

Argos, he's convinced them, will either conquer Thebes honourably or else gain divine glory by the battle!

Father, these aren't idle words cast at the wind but deeds! Deeds of terror!

I wish I knew when the gods would finally take pity on your misery.

Oedipus:

Did you actually think, daughter, that there was some hope that the gods would ever bother with me enough to, perhaps one day free me from my misery?

Ismene:

Yes, father, I did. I believe the latest prophesies are correct.

Oedipus:

The latest prophesies, Ismene? What do they say about me?

Ismene:

They say, father, that the Thebans would look for you one day. Alive or dead they'll seek you out so as to save their own lives.

**391**

Oedipus:

But who could hope to save his life from a man like me?

Ismene:

What they say is that they will all be reliant upon your own power.

Oedipus:

Now? Now they will be reliant on my power? Look at me! Now that I'm almost dead? Now they think I am powerful?

Ismene:

Yes father, now because it is now that the gods are giving you strength, after they had first destroyed you.

Oedipus:

But what a dreadful thing it is, to give strength to an old man and to have it taken away from him when he is young.

Ismene:

Still, keep that in mind, father because it will not be long before Creon will be here and he'll be after you.

Oedipus:

After me, daughter? Why? Tell me.

Ismene:

Father, they want to plant you there, just a little outside Thebes, like a symbol that guards their city. Close enough for them to reach you, to control you, without you being inside their border.

**401**

Oedipus:

But what good will I be to them from outside their city?

Ismene:

They are afraid that if your tomb suffers some violation it will cause them great disaster.

Oedipus:

That's something one can work out for himself, without any help from a god.

Ismene:

And that's why, father, they want to put you somewhere within their reach; so that you won't be able to do as you please.

Oedipus:

So, they will cover my body with Theban soil, then?

Ismene:

No, father because the law prohibits that. You have spilled blood.

Oedipus:

In that case they'll never get me!

Ismene:

This will bring disaster to Thebes one day.

**410**

Oedipus:

Under what circumstances, darling?

Ismene:

Through your own anger, father, when the Thebans will appear before your tomb.

Oedipus:

Who told you all this, Ismene?

Ismene:

Some Theban men who have visited Apollo's temple, at Delphi.

Oedipus:

So, Apollo said all this about me?

Ismene:

Yes, father, that's what those men said when they had come back to Thebes.

Oedipus:

Do either of my sons know about this?

Ismene:

Yes, father. They both do. They're fully aware of the oracle's prophesy.

Oedipus:

So, they heard this about me and yet the miserable creatures put their love for the crown above their love for me!

**420**

Ismene:

It's sad to accept such a thing, father, I know, yet I must.

Oedipus:

How I wish the gods would let the hatred of these two against each other, go on unabated!

How I wish the gods would grant me the choice of the outcome of this battle, this battle that brought these sons of mine to raise their spears against each other!

Then I'd have the one who now holds the sceptre and the throne be stripped of them both and the other

one, the one who's exiled now, never to be able to return!

Worthless sons! They have not come to help their father when he was being thrown out of his home in dishonour. No, they have not tried to keep their poor father there.

With their consent I was thrown out of my country and with their consent I was proclaimed an exile!

**430**

Was that a favour that the city had granted me back then? Was it my wish, that I be exiled?

No! No, that was no favour to me; because that day, that very day when my anger and sorrow was at its highest, when my very soul was boiling within me, that day I had begged the people to have me stoned to death. So deep was my despair.

But no one came to help me.

Then, after a while, my pain and my despair have softened a little and I got to realise that, in my anger, I had asked for a punishment much too severe for my deeds; and it was then, and only then and after such a long time, did the city force me into exile.

**440**

It was then that my two sons could have stepped up to help their poor father. But they had refused. One little word from them could have averted this harsh punishment. Just one! But they refused to help and left me to wander the earth for ever, a poor, wretched foreigner.

I live and gain daily sustenance, a safe place to stay and a sense of family, only because of these two young girls who, so far as their nature allows, do all they can for me.

But those two – those two men, cared more for the throne and the sceptre, the power to rule their country, then they did for their father's welfare. So they won't be getting any help from me.

**450**

They will not have me as an ally and nor will the leaders of Thebes help them.

I know all this because of the prophesies this girl told me (*Indicating Ismene*) and from interpreting all those ancient oracles which Apollo is now, finally, bringing to pass.

So let them! Let them send anyone they want to come and get me. Any powerful leader, even Creon himself. Because, if you, my friends are willing to protect me, as well as these most revered goddesses of your precinct, you will grant your city a great saviour and you will cause great trouble for your enemies.

**461**

Chorus:

Oedipus, you and your daughters here certainly deserve our sympathy and since you wish to be the protector of our country, let me give you some helpful advice.

Oedipus:

My dear friend, speak! I am ready to listen to everything you say.

Chorus:

First, Oedipus, you must purify yourself from the sin you've committed in walking upon these holy grounds. These grounds belong to the goddesses.

Oedipus:

How may I do that, my friend? Tell me.

Chorus:

Firstly, go the immortal stream and with pure hands bring here some of the sacred water.

**471**

Oedipus:

And once I bring this sacred water here, what then?

Chorus:

You will find some bowls around here, made by skilled craftsmen. Cover their tops and their handles on both sides with crowns.

Oedipus:

Crowns made of what? Branches or cloths of wool or with some other material?

Chorus:

With fleece that you must shear from a young lamb.

Oedipus:

I shall do that. What then? How will I end the ceremony?

Chorus:

Then you must pour your libations while facing the first rays of Dawn.

Oedipus:

Pour them from those bowls you've just mentioned?

Chorus:

Yes. Empty the first two in three separate streams but the third one, pour it all out in one go.

**480**

Oedipus:

This third bowl, what shall I fill it with?

Chorus:

You must fill the third bowl with honey and water but add no wine with it.

Oedipus:

And then what? What must I do after the dark, leaf-covered land has received this offering, what then?

Chorus:

Then you must place three bunches of nine twigs of an olive tree and say these prayers...

Oedipus:

Ah! I need to hear these word. It's very important.

Chorus:

Ask of them that since they are called "The Kindly Ones," to receive you, their suppliant, kindly and to protect you. Ask this yourself or through someone else perhaps speaking on your behalf using a soft, not loud voice. Then simply leave without turning round.

**491**

Once you've done this, stranger, I'll be able to support you with absolute confidence but, if you don't this, I'd be very afraid for you.

Oedipus: *To his daughters*

Darlings did you hear what these friends have said? They are locals...

Ismene:

We have, father, so tell us now what we should do.

Oedipus:

I can't go and perform these deeds, my daughters!

I am afflicted by two misfortunes: I have neither the strength nor the sight. Let one of you two go and perform this ceremony. I believe, a good, pure soul can purify millions.

**500**

But you must hurry, girls. Go quickly and don't leave here alone. My body can't manage without someone beside it to guide it along.

Ismene:

I'll go and perform the ceremony father but I still need to know where it is I must go.

Chorus:

Go that way, young lady. There, just beyond the forest. There's a man there who can help you with anything you need.

Ismene:

I'll go. Antigone, you stay here and take care of our father. One cannot consider it a chore to help one's father.

*Exit Ismene*

**510**

Chorus:

Stranger, I know it's a terrible thing to remind oneself of a wound that's been asleep for so long but I'd still like to know about...

Oedipus:

About what, my friend?

Chorus:

About that dreadful incurable suffering you had to endure.

Oedipus:

Oh, friends! Please, obey the rules of hospitality and be merciful! Do not make me open up that wound again!

Chorus:

I'm asking because your story, stranger, is constantly talked about. I'd like to hear it from you, as it truly happened.

Oedipus:

Oh, Lord!

Chorus:

Please do! I beg you!

Oedipus:

Oh, Zeus, help me!

**520**

Chorus:

Come, stranger, do as I ask. I have done all you've asked of me.

Oedipus:

I have suffered all that I have suffered, my friends -let the gods be witness to this! I have suffered things that were out of my hands. The fault is not mine! I have done nothing of my own free will!

Chorus:

What was the cause of your suffering, then?

Oedipus:

The city had me bound to a cursed bed and to a disastrous marriage, without my knowledge.

Chorus:

I am told it was your own mother who shared your marital bed. Is that right?

Oedipus: *Screams in agony*

Ah! What deadly utterance it is to hear it! Ah! These two girls sprung from that marriage.

Chorus:

Is that true?

Oedipus:

Two daughters, two curses!

Chorus:

By Zeus!

Oedipus:

Born into the light through my own mother's labour pains.

Chorus:

So, they're your daughters, as well as...

Oedipus:

Yes, yes, they are also sisters to their father!

Chorus:

Shocking!

Oedipus:

Evil upon evil, curse upon curse came back upon me!

Chorus:

You have suffered...

Oedipus:

I have suffered things that cannot be forgotten, yes!

Chorus:

Have you committed –

Oedipus: *Interrupts angrily*

I have committed nothing!

Chorus: *Surprised*

But how do you mean?

**540**

Oedipus:

My marriage to the queen was a gift the city had offered me for doing it a favour. A gift I wish I, a miserable man, have never accepted.

Chorus:

Poor soul! What happened then? They say you've murdered –

Oedipus: *Interrupts*

What? What is it you want to know, really?

Chorus:

Have you murdered your father?

Oedipus: *Screams with pain again*

Ah! You have opened a second wound! One wound upon another!

Chorus:

Have you killed –

Oedipus:

I have but... there is something...

Chorus:

What?

Oedipus:

There is something about that act that redeems me.

Chorus:

What could that be?

Oedipus:

Let me explain. I have killed, yes! I have destroyed others, yes! But I did it in total ignorance of the deed. The man I've killed wanted to kill me. I am innocent in the eyes of the law.

*Enter Theseus*

Chorus:

Ah! Here's the king! Theseus, the son of Aegeus. You have asked for him and he has answered your summons.

**551**

Theseus:

Ah, Oedipus, Laius' son! I've heard from many and for a long time now about the brutal loss of your eyes. From that and from the description folks gave me of you on my way here, I recognise you. Your tormented face, Oedipus and your old clothes, confirm your identity.

My heart goes out to you and I ask you, what would you like me and the city to do for you and for your unfortunate companion. Ask, Oedipus and I can assure you, it would have to be some dreadful request for me to turn my back to it.

**560**

Tell me, Oedipus, because I cannot forget that I, too was raised in exile, just like you and that I, too, struggled hard against perilous odds to survive. Odds that no other man had to deal with. Nor can I forget that I, too, am a mortal and not a god and therefore have no greater rights to the light of another day than you do; so tell me because I cannot refuse to help another exile like you.

**569**

Oedipus:

Theseus, your nobility is clear from your few words and it gives me the courage to address you also with just as few words.

You have said everything relating my identity, my parents and my country and so, there's little left for me to add other than to speak my wish and that'll be the end of the discussion.

Theseus:

Well then, tell it to me, now, Oedipus, so that I may know it.

Oedipus:

I have come here, Theseus, to offer you a gift. This wretched body of mine might not look like it's worth much, Theseus but it will profit you far more than good looks ever could.

Theseus:

Profit? In what way do you think we might profit from your offer?

**580**

Oedipus:

You will find that out soon... I won't tell you now.

Theseus:

Indeed? How soon will we find this out?

Oedipus:

After I die... after you have buried me.

Theseus:

An odd request, Oedipus. It refers to the end of your life. Have you forgotten what comes before that or do you simply ignore it?

Oedipus:

Yes, Theseus, I ignore it all because it is all contained within my request.

Theseus:

This is a small request.

Oedipus:

Ah, but beware, Theseus! The effort required to provide it will not be small.

Theseus:

Is this because of your sons or something to do with me?

Oedipus:

My sons will come and try to force me to go back there.

**590**

Theseus:

But if they are willing to take you with them... it's not right that you should stay in exile for ever.

Oedipus:

Willing? When I was willing to stay there, they were not!

Theseus:

You're a foolish man, Oedipus! Anger is of no help to someone who's in trouble.

Oedipus:

Counsel me only after you have heard my full story, Theseus.

Theseus:

Yes, Oedipus. I should not have spoken before I had all the facts. Tell me the full story.

Oedipus:

Oh, I have suffered much, Theseus... One unbearable horror after another.

Theseus:

Are you talking about the ancient curse of your family?

Oedipus:

No, not only I, Theseus! The whole of Greece is talking about that curse.

**599**

Theseus:

This horror that you must endure, Oedipus... what is this horror that is beyond human endurance?

Oedipus:

Let me explain it to you, Theseus.

My own sons, Theseus, have exiled me from my country and will not let me return because I have killed my father.

Theseus:

Well then, how can they call you back and have you exiled at the same time?

Oedipus:

God's word will order them to take me back.

Theseus:

A prophesy? What prophesy are they afraid of?

Oedipus:

The one that says they will be conquered by this land, here, your own country.

Theseus:

But what will cause this enmity between my land and theirs?

Oedipus:

Ah, my dear friend! Aegeus' son, Theseus!

Only the gods are free from old age and death. Everything else is in the hands of almighty Time!

Time, Theseus!

Time turns all things upside-down!

**610**

A country's strength withers, so does a man's body. Trust withers and mistrust flourishes!

Love dies between friends as well as between cities.

Love comes readily between people one day but then, the next day, it turns into hatred and the day after that, it turns back into love again!

And so, my friend, if things look pleasant between this country and Thebes, Time, Endless Time, in his endless path will bring about endless unbearable nights, nights filled with clashing spears, nights that will, for petty reasons, destroy what pleasant peace treaties you have signed between you.

And if Zeus will still be Zeus and his son, Apollo, does speak the truth, then, when that war breaks out, this body of mine, which will by then be dead and still and cold beneath the soil, this body will drink their warm blood!

But it is no good for me to utter words that should stay unuttered, so let me end with the words I have already uttered and let you keep your promise to me.

Do that, Theseus and you'll never be able to say that you have given refuge to Oedipus in your own land but was never rewarded for it... that is, if the gods have not deceived me!

**629**

Chorus:

King Theseus, this man has earlier promised to do all this for our city and even more.

Theseus: *To Chorus*

Who could ignore the friendship of such a man? To begin with, he is here, seeking refuge in the hearth of an ally, something that cannot be refused. Then he has come to us invoking the help of the gods of our land and he's also offering us and me, a substantial reward. I have great respect for all these things and so I could never reject his request. No, I shall allow him to live here, among us as a citizen of the city for as long as he wants. If the stranger likes it here, I will appoint you as his guardian but –

Oedipus, if you like you can come with me now. You may chose either of the two options. I will agree with you either way.



**642**

Oedipus:

Dear Zeus, be generous to such men as this!

Theseus:

What would you like to do, then, Oedipus? Would you like to come with me to my palace?

Oedipus:

I would, if it were possible, Theseus but this here is the place that...

Theseus:

What about this place? Don't be afraid, tell me, I won't disallow you.

Oedipus:

This is the place where I shall defeat those who have exiled me.

Theseus:

Ah, well, then! It seems your presence here is, indeed, a great gift for us!

Oedipus:

Yes, Theseus, that is if you keep all your promises.

Theseus:

Have no fear, Oedipus. I shall not betray you.

**650**

Oedipus:

And I, Theseus, do not want to bind you to an oath, like vulgar men do!

Theseus:

My word is all the assurance you'll need.

Oedipus:

So, tell me, now, Theseus. How will you go about this?

Theseus:

Tell me your biggest concern.

Oedipus:

Some men will come here who...

Theseus:

Don't worry about them. *Indicating the chorus* These men here will take care of them.

Oedipus:

But listen, Theseus. Be careful when you leave here –

Theseus:

No need to tell me what I must do, Oedipus.

Oedipus:

Fear makes it necessary that I do.

Theseus:

Don't concern yourself, Oedipus. My heart feels no such fear.

Oedipus:

Yes, yes, Theseus but you have no idea of the sorts of things they're threatening to do.

Theseus:

I know one thing for certain. No one can remove you from here without my permission. Anger makes people make many empty threats but when that anger subsides, those threats disappear. So as for those who threatened to abduct you... they'll have a wide and turbulent ocean to sail through for it.

So, Oedipus, have courage. I suggest that since Apollo himself has decreed it, even without my promises, you'd still be safe. Have no fear, Oedipus. My name alone will protect you from any trouble.

**668**

Chorus:

Stranger, you have come to Colonus, the finest, brightest land of them all, a land proud of its horses, a land where the melancholy nightingale sings its sad melodies from its home, the soft, green mantle of the soil, the wine dark vine and the sacred grounds of Dionysus, a soil untrodden by mortals.

Chorus:

This is a land rich in leaf and fruit, a land untouched by the harsh rays of the sun and by the bitter blasts of winter.

This is the land where Dionysus, the frenzied dancer, always comes to meet with the maenads, his divine nurses.

**681**

Chorus:

And every morning, here, the narcissus, with its abundance of blossoms, ancient crown of our two grand divinities, Demeter and Persephone, is nourished by Heaven's dew.

Chorus:

This is the land where Demeter's favourite blossom, the golden crocus, sparkles and where the sleepless fountains never slow their urge to feed the streams of Kephisus. Their sparkling, unblemished waters rush and whirl constantly over the broad-breasted earth to nourish her and help her bear fruit.

Chorus:

And neither do the Muses with their choruses, nor Aphrodite of the golden reins ever forget to visit this heaven-loved land.

This is the land where something wondrous grows, something unheard of elsewhere. Not in the land of Asia nor on that great Dorian Island of Pelops.

**699**

Chorus:

It is a tree, self-born, self grown, unaided my men's hands, a tree of terror to our enemies and their spears, a tree that grows best upon this very land!

It is the gray-leaved olive tree, a tree that nurtures our youth, a tree that no youth nor aged citizen can damage or destroy because it's cared for and protected by ever-watching eyes of Zeus Morios and Athena of the gray eyes.

Chorus:

And there's one more thing that I can proudly announce about this land, our motherland! It is a gift from our great god, a splendid gift, a gift that Athens holds with high pride: Her marvellous horses, her excellent colts, her magnificent sea!

Chorus:

Oh, son of Kronos! Oh, Lord Poseidon! It was you who first raised this land to such a glory. It was you who brought to its roads the bridle, the tamer of horses.

Chorus:

And it was you who also taught the skilful oarsmen how to ply their agile sea-blades across the salty foam, pursuing the hundred-footed neraids!

**720**

*Antigone: She sees Creon and his escort in the distance*

Athens! Land that has been praised most highly with songs! This is the moment now that you must show that those words of glory are true!

Oedipus:

What's happening now, my child? What is it?

Antigone:

I see Creon coming towards us father! Creon and his escort.

Oedipus:

Dear elders! This is the moment I need you to save me!

Chorus:

Courage, Oedipus.

Chorus:

We are here, with you, Oedipus!

Chorus:

I might be an old man but the strength of the city has not yet waned.

*Enter Creon with his escort. Creon is an old man.*

*All are armed.*

Creon:

Men, elders noble citizens of this glorious city, I can see that my sudden arrival has brought some fear to your eyes.

**731**

Don't let it concern you and don't rush to utter hostile words because my purpose is not hostile. I am an old man, as you can see and I know full well that I have come to a city that has no equal in strength in the whole of Greece.

No, friends, I have come here to see if I can persuade this old man here to come back with me to the land of the Cadmeans.

I wasn't sent to perform this task by one man only but by the whole city. I am, you see, a relative of his and so it is for me to grieve his misfortune more than anyone else in the city.

*Turning to Oedipus*

**740**

Come, you poor, tortured soul!

Come, listen to me and come back home. The people of Thebes are quite rightly asking for you,

Oedipus and I more than all the others, ask you to come back. I'd be the worst of men if I didn't feel pain, seeing you in the grips of this dreadful suffering of yours. You are an exile, Oedipus, a drifter, wandering through foreign lands with the most meagre support, this young girl!

**749**

Look at her! I've never imagined the poor, unfortunate thing would have fallen to such a degree of despair, always worrying about your body and soul! Such poverty at such a young age! Unwed and at the mercy of any man who happened to see her.

What a disgrace, Oedipus! A terrible disgrace, I say, Oedipus! A disgrace for me as well as for you and for our whole family. An open and obvious shame!

We cannot hide from it, Oedipus, so in the name of our gods, please listen to me! Come back with me to Thebes, to the homes of our family.

Say your farewell to this city and show your gratitude to its people, they deserve it but your own city deserves even more respect from you, Oedipus because it was the city that nursed you and raised you.

**761**

Oedipus:

Yet once more!

Impudent man!

No matter how callous the deed, you will still perform it and you will use every excuse and every sly means by which to justify it. You're trying a second time, then? A second time to lure me into your net, a net that is filled with pain for me.

There was a time when my private suffering and despair was so great that I had asked you to exile me, to send me away from Thebes! You had refused to grant me that request.

Then, later, when my despair and anger at myself had softened, I had asked you to let me return to my home but yet again you had refused.

**770**

No, you've pushed me out of my city and home and sent me off into exile. Where was all this kinship care then? This care you are now talking about?

And here we are again!

Here you see how kindly this city and these people are treating me, just like one of their own citizens and so, with bitter words wrapped in a sweet voice, you are trying to take me away from them!

**780**

How could you even consider forcing your love upon someone who abhors it, Creon?

It's just like when you beg someone for a favour or for some help but he will not grant you anything you ask of him and then, later, when you're bloated with all the things you had begged him for, he comes to you and offers them to you. That sort of kindness is no kindness at all! That sort of kindness would be useless.

That's exactly what you're doing now. You're offering me kindness that is not kindness at all. The words are good but the deed is not and I shall make it clear to these men that you are a liar.

You've come to take me, Creon, not so that I may go back to my home but so that you can plant me somewhere near the border of Thebes hoping to avoid what harm Athens might bring upon that city.

But, no, that won't happen. What will happen is this: My shade remaining in Thebes, there, among you all and cursing you for ever! As for my sons, their inheritance from me will be a plot of Theban land, no bigger than that needed for their grave.

**790**

I understand Thebe's future far better than you do, Creon! Far better, Creon because I have been informed by true prophets: Phoebus Apollo and Zeus his father!

You've come to us with a sly tongue, Creon! A sly tongue and a well trained mouth but the more you speak, the greater the harm you'll cause to yourself. Harm, not benefit!

Leave then! Go, since I know very well that I will not be able to convince you.

Leave Creon and let me stay here. Let me live here, in Athens. I know it won't be a bad life even for people like us. We will like it here.

**800**

Creon:

Which of us do you think will suffer the most from what you're saying, Oedipus, you or me?

Oedipus:

It will be a pleasure to see you convincing neither me nor these men here.

Creon:

Poor old man! It seems long life has not brought you wisdom. Will you go on like this, shaming your old age?

Oedipus:

You have a mighty tongue, Creon! But I know no virtuous mortal whose every single word is right.

Creon:

It's not the length of the speech that matters but whether it's appropriate.

Oedipus:

So do that, then, Creon, make a short speech and make it appropriate!

**810**

Creon:

Appropriate? For a mind like yours?

Oedipus:

Go, Creon! I'm telling you on behalf of myself as well of these men here, go!

This is the place where I will live, so don't hang around here spying on me!

Creon: *To the Chorus*

You, men! Be my witness!

I'll have no more to do with him. The words he has uttered will come back to hurt him one day, when he ends up within my grasp.

Oedipus:

Is that right? Who could possibly take me against the will of my friends here?

Creon:

I swear, Oedipus! Take you or not, you'll still suffer!

Oedipus:

A threat? Is that a threat I hear from you, Creon? A threat to do what, exactly?

Creon:

A threat and a deed, Oedipus. I have already captured one of your daughters and soon I'll grab the other!

**820**

Oedipus:

Ah, no!

Creon:

I'll give a real reason for crying soon!

Oedipus:

Have you really taken my daughter?

Creon:

Yes and I'll soon take this other one as well.

Oedipus:

Friends, hosts! What will you do? Will you betray me? Will you not send this disrespectful man away from this land?

Chorus:

Stranger, leave immediately! Go! Your past deeds as well as those you're committing now are unjust!

Creon: *To his escort*

Now, men! Take her now! Seize her if she's not willing to come.

Antigone:

No! Gods, men, help me! Help me escape!

Chorus:

Stranger, what are you up to?

**830**

Creon:

Don't worry. I won't lay a finger on this man. Just his daughter! She belongs to me! I am the head of this family!

Oedipus:

Men, lords of Athens!

Chorus:

Stranger, what you're doing is not proper!

Creon:

No, what I'm doing is quite proper!

Chorus:

How can you say that?

Creon:

I am taking away people who belong to me.

Oedipus:  
Oh, citizens of Athens!  
Chorus:  
Stranger, no! Stop that!  
Chorus:  
Let her go!  
Chorus:  
Let her go or you'll get to feel the might of my arms!  
Creon:  
Back! Get back, you!  
Chorus:  
Not if you'll go on like this!  
Creon:  
You touch me and you'll be fighting against Thebes!  
Oedipus:  
Ah! Didn't I say this would happen?  
Chorus:  
Let go of her this minute!  
Creon:  
Give your orders to those who serve you!  
**840**  
Chorus:  
I'm telling you: Let her go!  
Creon:  
And I'm telling you: Go away!  
Chorus: *To the audience who take the role of citizens of Colonus*  
This way, friends!  
Chorus:  
Come this way, men! Men of Colonus!  
Chorus:  
Help us! Our city is being attacked!  
Chorus:  
Come here and help us save our city from violence and dishonour!  
*Creon's men seize Antigone*  
Antigone:  
Ah! They've taken me! They're dragging me away! Friends, my friends, help me!  
Oedipus:  
Daughter, where are you?  
Antigone:  
They're dragging me away by force, father!  
Oedipus:  
Give me your hand, darling!  
Antigone:  
I can't father. They are too strong for me.  
Creon: *To his men*  
Get her out of here!  
Oedipus:  
O, I am lost! I am lost!  
Creon:  
There go your walking sticks, Oedipus! You'll walk no further! No longer!  
**851**  
You want to gain a victory over your own city and your own fellow country men! Well, then, since I am their king, I'll do as they tell me!  
Enjoy your victory, now Oedipus!  
Because I know, in time, you'll realise that your actions never were nor are they now, right! They were the acts of a man in the grips of anger and your anger, Oedipus, will be your very destruction!  
Chorus: *They seize Creon*  
Stop right there, stranger!  
Creon:  
Don't you touch me! Let me go!

Chorus:

No! You've taken our two girls!

Creon: *Indicating Oedipus*

Then your city will have to pay an even greater price because the two girls are not the only ones I'll take.

**860**

Chorus:

What do you mean? What are you up to now?

Creon:

I'll grab that man, there, as well!

Chorus:

Bold words, those!

Creon:

Words that will become deeds right now... that is... *Mockingly looks around to indicate Theseus' absence from the scene*... that is, unless of course, your brave king can stop me!

Oedipus:

Despicable tongue! Will you truly try and take me?

Creon:

Silence, you!

Oedipus:

Ah! I beg these silent goddesses here to let me utter yet this one more curse to you, you vile man!

You have taken away by force my beloved Antigone, my one remaining eye. I've lost her just as I have lost my other two eyes!

So, Creon, I beg the all-seeing Sun to see that your old age and the old age of your whole family ends just as mine ends!

**871**

Creon:

Do you see this, citizens of Colonus? Do you see it?

Oedipus:

They do, they do! They see us both, Creon!

And they see, too, that though you've made me suffer by deed, I am defending myself only by word.

Creon:

No! I will not check my anger any longer!

I will take this man away, even if I must do it with my own hands and even though I am but an old man!

Oedipus:

Save me!

Chorus:

What a disgraceful purpose brought you here, stranger! To perform such dreadful acts!

Creon:

Yes, I think I shall perform them!

Chorus:

Then, by Zeus, Colonus, is no longer a city!

Creon:

Justice will help even a small man vanquish a great one.

Oedipus:

Ah, the horror of his words!

Chorus:

By Zeus! He will not accomplish this deed!

Creon:

Zeus knows if I will accomplish it or not. You don't.

Chorus:

Oh! The insolence!

Creon:

Perhaps but you will still have to deal with it.

Chorus: *To the audience as citizens of Colonus*

Come, people of Colonus!

Chorus:

Lords of the land, come now! Hurry!

Chorus:

Come and stop these men!

Chorus:

They've gone beyond all bounds!

*Enter Theseus with his men, their sword drawn.*

Theseus:

What is all this noise? What's going on here?

What's frightening you so much? I was conducting a sacrifice of oxen to Poseidon, god of the sea and protector of our city when you interrupted me with all your shouting! Tell me! Tell me so that I know why I had to stop the sacrifice and rush over here! I ran faster than my feet could endure!

**891**

Oedipus:

Ah, Theseus, my dear friend. I know your voice. I have just suffered unspeakable horror from this man, here!

Theseus:

Horror? What? Who made you suffer it, Oedipus? Tell me!

Oedipus:

This man you see here, Creon. He has taken away my two daughters.

Theseus:

What? Who did you say?

Oedipus:

You've heard me, Theseus. You've heard what he did to me.

Theseus: *To his men*

One of you men, quickly run back to those altars and tell all the people there to abandon the sacrifices and rush, by horse or foot, to the intersection of the two highways. They must stop the girls before they go through it.

**901**

Otherwise this violent man will make a fool out of me.

Go! Hurry! Do as I tell you!

*Exit one of the men*

*Turning to Creon*

As for you, if I were as angry as you deserve, you wouldn't be escaping my hands without being seriously hurt.

But you'll get justice according to your very own laws. Yours and no one else's!

You won't be leaving this country until you bring these girls here, before my eyes.

**911**

Your deeds shame us all: me, your family, as well as your country.

You've come here, to a city that lives by the rule of Justice and law and you have trampled upon these rules, dismissed its authority and then you rush about and grab whatever you like by force.

Obviously, you are of the view that this city is bereft of men or freedom and that I am of no account!

Still, Thebes cannot be blamed for your bad upbringing.

**920**

They don't raise evil men in Thebes, I know that! That's not their way; and they wouldn't be congratulating you for stealing my own possessions and the possessions of the gods here, violently abducting poor people who have come here seeking our hospitality.

It's certainly not something I'd ever do! I'd never enter your city, even with all Justice on my side, just so as to drag people away, as you did without the consent of your king, whoever that might be. I would know full well how a stranger ought to behave in other people's land.

**930**

But you, you are an insult to your own city, a city that has in no way earned that insult. It seems your advanced years have not only made you old but they have also stripped you of any sense.

So, I've told you before and I'll tell you again now: Tell one of your men to go and bring back those girls right now, or else you'll be forced to become one of our citizens here – permanently!

That's what I think and that's what I say!

Chorus:

You see the point you've reached, stranger?

Chorus:

You've come from an honest stock but your deeds show you to be an evil man!

**939**

Creon:

No, Theseus, I didn't say that Colonus is bereft of men, nor were any of my actions thoughtless, as you say. I know full well, however that your citizens don't love any of my relations that much that they'd be prepared to keep them here against my will.

And I am also well aware that these folk would not accept on their land a man who killed his father, a sacrilegious man, burdened by an unholy marriage, complete with children. I also know that this city is counselled by the wisdom of the Council at Hill of Ares and that this Council would never allow such wanderers as this man here to live in its city.

**950**

It was on all this knowledge that I've based my deed of seizing this man. Even so, I would not have done the deed had he not also cast harsh curses upon me and upon my generation; so I responded with anger and with that deed. Anger, Theseus, feels no old age; only death extinguishes anger and the dead feel no pain.

Now that you've heard all this you may act as you will. In any case, it matters not whether I have justice on my side or not. Here, I am, alone and powerless but do not forget, one day I will respond to these actions of yours that you are committing this day.

**960**

Oedipus:

Shameful, vulgar man! Whose old age do you think you're insulting, mine or yours?

You've clogged your mouth with my misfortunes! The murder and marriage you spoke of were misfortunes I've suffered unwittingly. They fell upon me by the will of the gods, perhaps because they held some long-standing anger against my predecessors. So far as these crimes are concerned, you will not find a single fault in me. I did not commit any crime against either myself or against my family.

**969**

My father was told by the oracle that he would die by the hand of his children before I was even born, so how could you blame me for his murder? How could you justly blame me for that murder when at that stage I was neither yet begotten by a father nor born by a mother?

So, then, eventually I was born and one day, I was quarrelling with someone whom I'd never met before. I had come to blows with my father, whom I've killed. I had no idea what I was doing and to whom so how could you blame me for his death?

**980**

As for my marriage to my mother! Do you not feel any shame in forcing me to talk about it, seeing she was your sister?

And this is how it happened –no, I shall not stay silent now! No, your insulting mouth went too far for that!

Yes, Jokasta had given birth to me, it's true! Fate was dreadful to me and to her in that respect but neither of us knew that and, to my great shame, she bore two more children for me but, unlike your talk, unlike the vile disrespect you've shown for her and for me, which was deliberate, this marriage and this explanation I give of that event was not deliberate.

**990**

But no one, not a single person will lay the blame for that marriage on me nor also for the murder of my father, which you so often and so bitterly throw at my face!

Answer me this single question, Creon: If suddenly someone appeared before you, intent on killing you, would you –you, the righteous one!– just stand there asking him if he was your father or would you simply attack as soon as you could?

I suggest that if you valued your life at all, you'd be attacking rather than asking questions to work out if you were doing the right thing or not.

That's the sort of situation the gods had dragged me into and I'm certain that if my father were alive today, he'd be agreeing with me.

**1000**

But you, who's totally in the wrong, you simply utter whatever comes into your mouth, thinking it to be true and right, not caring at all if it is something that ought to be kept a secret. That's why you make these accusations against me, out in the open, in front of these people.

It makes you happy to make flattering remarks to Theseus, to his face and to give great praises to Athens and her leaders but in all of your great words you forget that if there is one city in Hellas that knows how to honour her gods, it is this one, Theseus' city, Athens and she is the best at that. Yes, this is the city whose suppliant you wanted to drag away. Me, an old man, upon whom you dared lay a violent hand and whose daughters you dared steal.

**1010**

And this is why, I now pray to these goddesses to come and help me, to be my allies, so you may find out just what sort of men guard this city!



Chorus:

Lord, Theseus, the stranger is a good man. He has suffered great misfortune and he is worthy of our help.

Theseus:

Enough words! The abductors have run away and we, the victims are standing here talking!

Creon:

So what orders do you give to a helpless old man like me?

**1019**

Theseus:

You go first! I'll follow you. If you're holding our girls somewhere around these precincts then you will show me where they are. And don't worry about the abductors running away from us. My friends would have rushed after them and they won't be thanking the gods for escaping from this land unhurt. Go on, then! Lead and think about the fact that you were seized while you were seizing. Fate has snared you in the nets of your own making.

Gains made by deception will never be kept.

None of your accomplices will be there to help you this time!

**1030**

Oh, I know you have them! I know you wouldn't dare attempt this brazen outrage of yours all on your own and without the help of men and weapons.

I must certainly be very careful about that. I have no wish to let one man hurt this whole city.

Do you understand what I mean or have you dismissed my words in the same way you've dismissed all arguments against your foolishness when you were planning it?

Creon:

Here, on your own land, you can say anything you like and I won't argue with you; but once I get home, to my own land, I, too can work out what we must do!

**1039**

Theseus:

By all means, make your threats but move!

Oedipus, you stay here and rest assured that unless death finds me first, I will not rest until I bring your daughters back to you.

Oedipus:

My blessings, Theseus! For your generous heart and for your honourable offer of help.

*Exit Theseus and his men following Creon.*

Chorus:

Oh, how I wish!

How I wish I were there!

There in the clamour of the bronze spears in combat!

There, where the enemy turns about and readies for the war!

Chorus:

There, by Apollo's beloved shore...

**1050**

Chorus:

...or by the torch-lit shore where these revered goddesses oversee the sacred mysteries of the mortals whose tongues the priests of Eleusis seal with a golden key.

Chorus:

There, I believe our king...

Chorus:

...a king who shuns no war...

Chorus:

...will sing out the call of victory, the two virgin sisters freed!

**1059**

Chorus:

Or perhaps they've turned West towards the snow peaked mountain...

Chorus:

...turned from the pastures of Oea's precinct, charging away upon their steeds, or upon their winged chariots.

Chorus:

But the enemy will be captured!

The Athenians are fierce in battle and we, children of Colonus, Theseus' men, are terrible in strength!

**1068**

Chorus:

Look there! Everywhere the bridles and the bits are flashing and the cavalry is charging, in honour of Athena, the goddess, protector of the horse and Poseidon, god of the sea, Rhea's son, who girdles the earth.

Chorus:

Are they fighting now or are they just getting ready?

Something in my heart is telling me that the ordeal is over for those girls. The awful suffering delivered upon them by their family will soon subside.

Chorus:

Zeus will act! Zeus will act! Zeus will act!

**1080**

Chorus:

Zeus will bring us victory. My heart knows it. My heart declares it: victory will be ours!

Chorus:

Oh, how I wish!

How I wish I were a dove!

How I wish the swift winds lifted my strong wings high above the clouds!

High, high above the battle ground, for my eyes to see the battle unfold.

**1090**

Chorus:

Chief of all the gods, Zeus who sees all and you, too, reverent goddess, Palas Athena, his daughter!

Grant victory to the guardians of this city! Let their ambush succeed!

Chorus:

Let them capture their prey and grant them victory!

Chorus:

Come also hunter Apollo and you, too, Artemis, his sister with your brightly speckled deer, swift of foot!

Chorus:

Come and help our land and us, its people!

*Chorus looks into the distance*

Chorus: *To Oedipus*

Aha! Dear stranger, tortured soul! You can't say your guardian gives false promises!

There! I can see your daughters being returned to you by their attendants.

Oedipus:

Where? Where are they? What are you telling me?

*Enter Theseus followed by Antigone, Ismene and attendants.*

**1100**

Antigone:

Oh, father! Dear father, if only some god gave you sight to see the man who brought us back here to you!

Oedipus:

Darling child, are both of you here?

Antigone:

Yes, father. Saved by the hands of Theseus here and of his men.

Oedipus:

Come, my darlings, come and let me embrace you, a hope I had lost.

Antigone:

Here, father. It was our hope as well!

Oedipus:

Where are you my girls, where are you?

*Antigone and Ismene embrace Oedipus*

Antigone:

Here we are, father. Both of us.

Oedipus:

Oh, my dear, dear children!

Antigone:

Children are always dear to their parents.

Oedipus:

A man's children, a man's support!

Antigone:  
Sad support to a sad man.

**1110**

Oedipus:

Here, I have all that is dear to me. Death, now that you stand next to me, will not be a thing too harsh to endure.

Come, girls, come close to me, one on each side of me, help this desperate old man rest, my daughters, help him rest from his terrible ordeals.

Come, tell me in a few words girls what happened to you. For girls of your age, just a few words will suffice.

Antigone:

Few words indeed from me father. What I have to say is only that you must talk to this man here. The deed is his, father.

**1119**

Oedipus: *Apologetically*

Ah, forgive me, my friend! Please forgive me for talking with my daughters for so long before I turned to you. My hope of ever seeing them again was totally lost.

But, believe me, Theseus, I know full well, that the joy I got from being with them right now is a joy that I owe to no one else but you. You, alone and no other man have rescued these girls. I ask the gods, my friend, to grant you everything that I wish for you and for this city to have.

Of all the mortals on earth, it is here that I have found people who are respectful of the gods, who are just and who speak no lies.

And I fully understand the meaning of what I am saying Theseus, when I say that all that I have, I have because of you and because of no other mortal.

**1130**

Let me have your right hand, King! Let me touch it and let me kiss your face, if that is proper.

*Moves towards Theseus but stops suddenly.*

Ah, but no! What am I saying? I, a miserable soul, asking to touch you, Theseus! Me, a man in whom every form of pollution has thrived?

No, no, Lord Theseus! I will not allow this even if you did permit it! Let only those who have endured my lot share in its misery.

Stand where you are, my friend and from there, accept my thanks. My thanks and my prayer that you'll go on treating me in the future just as you have done for me so far: with justice.

**1139**

Theseus:

No, Oedipus, I'm not at all surprised that you've talked with your daughters for that long and with such joy at seeing them, nor am I surprised that you spoke to them before you spoke to me.

Such things don't bother me, Oedipus. Here, we don't try to brighten our lives with words but with deeds. The proof for that is in your hands, old man. I have made you promises and in none of those promises have I misled you. The girls are here, as I have promised you, alive and unhurt from all those threats made against them.

As for the battle, old man, and how we got our victory, why let me gloat about it when you'll no doubt hear all the details from your daughters?

**1150**

But let me know what you think about this strange word I've heard on my way here.

Just a few words really but odd nonetheless and worthy of your attention because people should dismiss nothing lightly.

Oedipus:

What is it, Theseus, son of Aegeas? Tell me because I've heard nothing here.

Theseus:

I'm told that a relation of yours, though not a citizen of your city, went to Poseidon's altar, where I was sacrificing earlier and he's there now, praying to the god.

**1160**

Oedipus:

Where's he from? What is it he's praying for?

Theseus:

I don't know. The only thing I'm told is that he wants a brief word with you. Nothing important, they said.

Oedipus:

A brief word? What sort of word? If he's praying to Poseidon then the matter is not unimportant.

Theseus:

He said he just wants to have a word with you alone and then to be allowed to leave safely.

Oedipus:

I wonder who that man can be? Praying to Poseidon...

Theseus:

Do you think you might have some relative in Argos who came here asking you for some small favour from you?

Oedipus: *Suddenly discovers the answer*

Ah! Stop right there, my friend! Stop right there!

Theseus:

Why, what's up, Oedipus?

Oedipus:

Don't ask! Don't ask, my friend!

**1170**

Theseus:

What is it, tell me!

Oedipus:

I know! I know who Poseidon's suppliant is. I've worked it out from the few words I've just heard.

Theseus:

Well, who is it? What wrong will I find in him?

Oedipus:

King Theseus, that is my most hated son. His words would pain me more than the words of any other man!

Theseus:

But why not just listen? No need for you to do as he says, if you don't want to.

Why should that be painful to you?

Oedipus:

There is nothing more dreadful to me, his own father, than his voice, Theseus.

Please, do not force me to give in to his request.

**1179**

Theseus:

But think about the fact that he's praying to Poseidon, Oedipus. Perhaps you ought to consider the possibility of offending the god.

Antigone:

Father, listen to me. I know I am young but do listen to my advice.

Let the king do as his heart and the god dictate, let him do as he pleases.

For my sake and for the sake of my sister, let our brother come here. Nothing of what he'll say will force you to change your mind about anything. Of that I am certain.

What harm can there be in just listening to him? In fact, it's through words that evil plans are exposed.

You are his father so even if he had committed the gravest of crimes against you, it would still be unforgivable for you to repay one evil deed for another.

**1189**

Let him come, father.

Many fathers have nasty and quick-tempered sons. But these men can have their nature softened by the gentle advice and by their friends' sweet charm.

Think about your own past, father. Not your present troubles but those you had to endure in the past – from your father and your mother. Think of them father and I'm certain, that you'll realise, that a bad temper brings about a bad end.

**1200**

The proof you carry of that, father isn't trivial. You have lost the sight of your eyes.

So, relent. It's not proper to make those who wish you well, beg you. Nor is it proper for someone to neglect to show thanks for the kindness he has received.

Oedipus:

Your words, my daughter have won you a heavy victory! So be it. We'll do as you please. *Turning to Theseus* But, my friend, if this man must come, then let not one of us be taken against our wishes.

Theseus:

No need to repeat yourself on that score, old man.

I don't like boasting but I can assure you that if the gods keep me safe then you'll be safe as well.

*Exit Theseus.*

**1211**

Chorus:

It is obvious to me that those who shun moderation and want a longer life are fools.

Chorus:

The days of an overly long life are filled with pain.

Chorus:

Happiness eludes those who want to hang on to life longer than what the fates have allotted for them and in the end...

Chorus:

...the same attendant awaits him: Hades! Hades waits upon us all!

Chorus:

No ceremony, no wedding songs, no dances and no songs...

Chorus:

Just death! The end of us all is death.

Chorus:

The best would be not to be born at all.

Chorus:

But then, if he is born, the next best thing for him would be to try and return to where he came from...

Chorus:

...in the quickest possible time!

Chorus:

While youth and its careless mind lasts, no thought is given to what pain, what misery will, most certainly, follow.

Chorus:

Murder, mayhem, quarrels, wars will come before the inescapable end...

Chorus:

The hateful old age, frailty, loneliness, desolation and...

Chorus:

...your own misery's neighbour, is even more misery.

Chorus:

And so, Oedipus like us, is old. Unhappy Oedipus! Bashed about like a reef facing north...

Chorus:

Bashed about on all sides by tempests of all sorts.

Chorus:

Never ending rain and wind crash over his head...

Chorus:

...fierce waves crash over him.

Chorus:

Now from West...

Chorus:

Now from the East...

Chorus:

Some during the midday's light...

Chorus:

Some from the mountainous North...

Chorus:

...which the deep night darkens.

**1249**

Antigone:

Ah, here he is, father. The stranger is coming here. He is alone and his eyes are filled with tears.

Oedipus:

What stranger?

*Enter Polynices*

Antigone:

The man we've been talking about, father. It's Polynices himself! He's right here!

Polynices:

Oh! My poor sisters! My poor father!

Oh! Shall I lament my own misery or the misery that's in front of me?

Oh, my poor father! Here, with you two, in exile! Thrown out of your land and home, your clothes are no more than rags, the filthy grime is ageing upon your ageing body; it made its home upon it and it's

eating away at your flesh.

**1261**

And look at your hair! So dishevelled! The breeze sweeps it this way and that and your face! Poor face, bereft of sight.

*Feels Oedipus' empty food sack*

Ha! And all this, I see, is a perfect match for the meagre crust you're carrying in this sack to feed your poor belly!

And I, I the miserable fool that I am, have only just now –too late!- have heard of all this!

No, father, no need to hear this from anyone else but me! I admit it, I am the worst man on earth for having neglected you so badly! All this is my own fault.

But, father, Zeus' throne is shared by the goddess Compassion herself and acts upon all his actions. Let her act upon you, as well, father because all my faults have their cure and they will not multiply...

**1271**

You are silent father, why? Say something to me!

*Oedipus angrily turns away from Polynices*

Why are you turning away from me?

Talk to me, father! Come, father, will you send me away scorned like this, without even telling me why you're angry?

Come, sisters! You are his daughters. Speak with him. Try to make his stubborn lips say something. I have come to him as a suppliant of this god here *Indicating the statue of Colonus* and yet he's sending me away scorned and without a word.

**1280**

Antigone:

Tell him yourself what you need, you poor man! Explain to him what brought you here, Polynices.

Words, if there are enough of them, will draw out either anger or joy, or understanding and they will make even the most stubborn mouths speak.

Polynices:

Your advice is good, Antigone. Yes, I will speak and I will tell him what I want but first, let me ask the god to help me. The god Poseidon from whose altar the king of this land has taken me and told me to come here. Theseus has granted me the right to speak to my father and he also granted me a safe return home. I hope you'll see to it, strangers –and you, too, father and you, my sisters, that the king's wishes are followed.

**1290**

But, now father, let me tell you why I came here.

Father, I have been driven into exile from my own land because I dared claim the throne of my country and all its authority! Father, I did so because I was the first born!

My brother, Eteocles, however, who is the younger of us two, drove me off the land, not after winning a fair fight with words or with arms or deeds but after persuading the whole city to do so. This, I believe, is a consequence of your family's curse because I heard this much from prophets.

**1301**

And so I went to Argos and there I made Adrastus, its King, my father-in-law. I gathered all the famous fighters of the Apian Peloponnese and made an army of seven companies, sworn to use their spears against Thebes. To fight the Thebans and drive out of that city all those who have driven me out. We'll either do that or we'll die with full honour on my side.

But now! Now father, why have I come here to you?

I have come to you, father, so that I may ask for your help. To help me, father and my seven armies whose seven spear masters have surrounded the plains of Thebes.

Amphiaras is one of them. Expert at the spear and at divining through birds. Tydeus of Aetolia is there also, Oeneus' son. The Argive Eteocles and Hippomedon who was sent there by his father, Talaus. Then there's also Capaneus who swore he'll burn down the whole city of Thebes on his own.

**1320**

Parthenopaeus, is also standing ready. He is the Arcadian, who earned his name because his swift-footed mother, the wild and untamed amazon, Atalanta, stayed a virgin for so many years before his birth. He is our sixth spear man.

Then, finally, come I, the seventh spear, your own son, father. Or, if not your son, then the son of an evil Fate, though I am known by all as your son.

I, father, am the leader of that fearless army of Argives and I and all those Argives beg you and swear by your daughters' life and by your own life, to put aside your heavy anger against me, now that I've made a move against my brother, a move to get my due justice. He has exiled me and he has stolen from me my birthplace.

**1331**

Be on our side, father because, if you believe in oracles then what they say is that the side that you join will be the side that will gain the victory of the battle.

So, father, in the name of our fountains and of the gods our family shares, I beg you: soften your heart and do as I say. Our fortunes are identical. You and I both, are strangers here, beggars, both of us, earning our roof by flattering strangers, while he, my brother, the tyrant, lives in the palace enjoying himself by mocking both of us!

Intolerable!

**1340**

Father, take our side and then it will be little trouble for me to have him crushed! I'll have him thrown out of the palace, driven off the land and then I'll bring you in there, to your rightful place, to your own home and mine.

If you help me, father, if you stand by me, I can certainly boast that I can achieve this goal; if not, then I doubt I'll have the strength to survive it.

Chorus:

Oedipus, say what you think is right to say to this man and then let him go.

The king, who's sent him here to you, asked only this much of you!

Oedipus:

Lords and guardians of Colonus! Had King Theseus not thought it right for this man to come here and speak to me, this man would not have even as much as heard my voice!

**1350**

But, never mind! Now that he is here, let him leave this place having had the pleasure of hearing it, though, he won't be hearing anything that will make him at all happy!

You're a nasty man, Polynices!

When you, yourself, held the regal sceptre and the throne, the ones that your brother is holding now, in Thebes, you had decided to drive me out! Out of my land, out of my city! Me, your own father!

These rags that I'm wearing now, these rags that you say made you cry to see me wearing, are the result of your doing. You cry not because I am wearing these rags but because suddenly you found yourself having to deal with the same load of misery as I do!

**1360**

There is no point in crying any more Polynices!

No, I have to live with this and tolerate it until my life's very end.

I have to live with this, knowing that you were the cause of it.

You, who brought me down!

You, who drove me from my home!

You, who made a wondering beggar out of me, begging for my daily crust!

If I did not have these two daughters, here, your actions would have killed me.

It is they and not you who are looking after me, they who nurse me, they who take on the man's role of protecting, while you take on that of a woman.

You two men, you are not my sons! No, you are someone else's sons.

**1370**

The eyes of the gods are watching you right now and they'll be watching even more closely the moment your spearmen march towards Thebes.

You'll never take that city! Never!

Both of you, you and your brother, will fall and die before that happens. Destroyed by polluted blood.

I have cursed you in the past and I'm calling on these curses again now.

Come, curses!

Come and help me now!

Come, curses!

Come and fight on my side!

Teach these men to respect their parents!

Teach them to respect their father even if he is blind!

These girls here did not behave as you two did.

**1380**

Well then! If Justice still has sway, if she still sits by Zeus' throne, just as the ancient laws say, then these curses of mine will overrule your prayers and your thrones, so leave!

Go now!

I spit upon you! I reject you as a son! Vilest of the vile!

And I hurl these here curses upon you:

May your spear never conquer the land of your birth!

May your feet never return to the meadows of Argos!  
May you be killed by your brother's hand and may you kill him, in return, for driving you out of Argos!

Those are my curses!

And now!

**1390**

Now, I call upon Tartarus' gruesome darkness to swallow you and deliver you into your new paternal home!

And upon these holy goddesses!

And upon the killer god, Ares, who set alight these fires of war inside your hearts.

Go now! Go and tell the Cadmeians and all those trusted allies of yours what you have just heard! Tell them all what sort of gifts Oedipus has given to his two sons!

Chorus:

Your journey here, Polynices is as shameful and will be your journey away.

Go now! Leave as quickly as you can!

Polynices:

What a miserable disaster!

My journey was a disaster!

All my hopes, a disaster!

My brave men, disastrously betrayed!

Our march from Argos will end in disaster!

And I can say nothing of this to my allies! I cannot turn them back! I cannot hold back their destruction! I must stay silent until the very end!

*To Antigone and Ismene*

Dear sisters! Daughters of this man! You've heard the cruel curses he hurled at me!

**1409**

I beg you, my dear sisters, if these curses come true and you have returned to Thebes by then, please do not let my corpse be dishonoured but please, do bury it, in a tomb with all its due rites.

Do that, my sisters and to the praises you've already earned by caring for this man, will be added even more and even greater ones given to you by the dead for the care you've given to my corpse.

Antigone:

Polynices, listen to me, please!

Polynices:

What is it, my darling Antigone? Tell me!

Antigone:

Polynices, turn your army back. Take them back to Argos. Don't try and destroy Thebes and you in the process.

Polynices:

No, Antigone. It will be seen as cowardice and I'll never be able to lead an army ever again.

**1420**

Antigone:

Again? Again, my brother? Why would you get so angry ever again? What can you gain by ruining your own country?

Polynices:

Antigone, for a man, cowardice is most shameful and it is even more so for me because I shall be mocked by my younger brother.

Antigone:

But can't you see that what you are doing is fulfilling our father's very prophecies? Both of you will die on the same battle field at each other's hands!

Polynices:

So he says! That is clearly his wish. But need we fulfil it?

Antigone:

Oh, no! But who on earth will go with you if they hear what this man has prophesied?

Polynices:

No one will know about his little prophecies. I'll tell no one!

The duty of a good general is to report the good news and omit the bad.

**1431**

Antigone:

So then! You've made up your mind, you poor child!



Polynices:

I have, sister, so don't hold me back.

I have a job to do and it is to make sure that this march of my allies goes ahead, even though my own father and his curses have turned it into a disaster.

But as for you two sisters of mine, if you fulfil my wishes when I die, may Zeus give you a good life. It is only in death that you can help me.

But now, let me go. Fare well, both of you. This is the last you'll see of me alive.

Antigone:

Oh, my poor brother!

Polynices:

Don't feel sad for me, Antigone!

**1439**

Antigone:

Darling brother! Who would not feel sad for you when you're heading for certain death?

Polynices:

Death will come if death must come!

Antigone:

Polynices, don't say that! Listen to me!

Polynices:

Antigone, you're wasting your time trying to persuade me.

Antigone:

O, my brother! What shall I do without you?

Polynices:

The gods declare our paths. They make us take this path or some other. As for you two, I ask the gods that your lives will be free of trouble. The whole world knows you deserve none!

*Exit Polynices*

*Clouds gather. The stage darkens ominously. The chorus notices the change.*

Chorus:

New evils! A new heavy procession of evils is visiting us from this blind old stranger.

**1450**

Chorus:

Perhaps his days end here and now.

Nothing that Fate wills ever goes unaccomplished.

Chorus:

Time makes sure of that. He watches and watches...

Chorus:

...over all of us. Crashing some to the ground one day and raising others to the heavens the next!

*A mighty clap of thunder*

Chorus:

Ah! The sky shrieks!

Chorus:

Oh, Zeus!

*Thunder, lightning,*

*Rising winds.*

Oedipus:

My daughters, my darlings!

If there's anyone here, let him go and fetch Theseus, the most virtuous of all men!

Antigone:

Why father? Why do you want Theseus brought here?

**1460**

Oedipus:

The thunder, my child! Zeus has shot it down to me.

It's time for me to go to Hades, my darlings!

Quickly! Hurry! Someone fetch the king! Hurry!

*Another loud crash of rolling thunder and lightning.*

Chorus:

Ah! See that?

Chorus:

Hear that?

Chorus:  
Zeus roars again! Endless thunder! Unspeakable!  
Chorus:  
The horror stood straight the hair on my head!  
Chorus:  
Fear tears at my soul!  
*More thunder and lightning*  
Chorus:  
Again, the sky is ablaze!  
Chorus:  
What terror will this blaze bring?  
**1470**  
Chorus:  
Fear chills my heart!  
Chorus:  
Such fire comes not without some dire disaster!  
Chorus:  
Oh, great heavens! Oh Zeus!  
Oedipus:  
It's here, my daughters!  
It's here! God's will is being fulfilled this moment!  
I cannot escape it!  
Antigone:  
How do you now that father? What signs do you see?  
Oedipus:  
I know, Antigone! I know it well!  
Someone please hurry! Go quickly and bring the king here!  
*Thunder and lightning*  
Chorus:  
Again! Again the roaring thunder comes!  
Chorus:  
It's all around us! O Zeus be merciful!  
Chorus:  
Lord Zeus, if you are to send us, earthly mortals, some dark disaster, do it mercifully!  
Chorus:  
Gods, be merciful! If this man is hated by the gods, let not the kindness I've shown him bring me a dire punishment!  
Chorus:  
Zeus, be merciful!  
Oedipus:  
Darlings, is Theseus here yet?  
Will he come before I am finished?  
Will he come before I lose my wits?  
Antigone:  
What is it, father? What secret do you wish to tell him?  
**1489**  
Oedipus:  
I have promised him a return to his kindness. I want to fulfil that promise.  
Chorus: *Rushing about the stage calling out to Theseus.*  
Theseus! Theseus, my son come here!  
Chorus:  
Theseus! Come my son!  
Hurry, Theseus, wherever you are!  
Chorus:  
Leave Poseidon's temple now!  
*Thunder and lightning*  
Chorus:  
Hold off your sacred ceremonies, Theseus!  
Chorus:  
Hold off the slaughter of the oxen and come here!

Chorus:

The stranger is calling for you, Theseus!

Chorus:

He wants to repay you and the city for the kindness he has received.

*Thunder and lightning*

Chorus:

Hurry, my king! Come quickly!

*Theseus rushes in*

**1500**

Theseus:

What is it? What's all this shouting?

It is ringing throughout the land. Your shouts and the shouts of the stranger.

What is it? Zeus' thunder? Has it been raining? Was there some hail, perhaps?

When Zeus sends such awful weather, no one can tell what he wants!

Oedipus:

Oh, my king! My king! You've come at the very hour when my heart needed you the most! The gods did well for both of us to bring you here just now.

Theseus:

What is it, son of Laius? What happened?

Oedipus:

Theseus, the end has come for me and I do not want to leave before I make good my promises to you and to this city.

**1510**

Theseus:

The end? What signs announced this?

Oedipus:

The gods themselves, Theseus! They are the heralds who announced it.

Not one sign is false. Everything is as it was proclaimed.

Theseus:

And what are these signs, Oedipus?

Oedipus:

The endless thunder, the lightning, the flashing arrows shot by the unconquerable hand!

Theseus:

I believe you, Oedipus.

You have prophesied much and it has all come true.

Tell me now, what I must do.

*During Oedipus' speech the sky slowly clears and brightens until line 1549 when Oedipus addresses the sun.*

**1518**

Oedipus:

Son of Aegeus, let me tell you what's ahead for your city.

Immutable things that time cannot affect.

Theseus, in a few minutes, I will take you to the place where I must die. No one's hand will be on my shoulder guiding my steps; but I want you to promise me that the place of my death and its surrounds will remain secret. Promise me that you'll tell no one where it is because, Theseus, that place is the place that will, for ever, be a greater defence against your enemies than all the shields and all the spears that you can hire from your allies.

There, you, alone, will learn of things that must never be spoken. Things that I will not reveal to these citizens nor even to my daughters, even though I love them dearly.

**1530**

You, too, must keep these things unsaid and reveal them only during your final days to the man who you think is the best in the land and he, in turn, must do likewise to his successor and so on into the future.

That way this city will never be destroyed by the Thebans, those descendants of the dragon-born.

Often, even the best governed cities, Theseus, fall into arrogant ways but the gods, the gods, though they might be slow, they will eventually see well those who scorn divine laws and have turned to the ways of madmen. Let that never happen to you, my dear child, Theseus!

But I'm telling you things that you already know, Theseus, so let's not waste any more time.

**1540**

Let us go to the place now. The gods are urging me.

Daughters follow me. This time I will be your guide, just as you were your father's guide before.  
Come daughters but do not touch me. Let me find the sacred ground of my tomb by myself, the soil  
where Fate has decreed that the body of this man must hide.  
This way! Come, this way! This is the way Hermes, the god who escorts the souls of the dead and  
Persephone the goddess of the underworld are telling me to go.

**1549**

*Addressing the sun*

Oh, sun! Lightless light! You were my eyes once but now, now this body of mine, feels your touch for  
the final time! Now, I am crawling towards Hades where I can hide the last vestiges of my life.

*To Theseus*

But you, most friendly stranger! May the gods give you and your city and all your attendants their  
blessings and in those blessings remember me so that they stay with you for ever.

*Exit Oedipus, Theseus and the two sisters.*

Chorus:

Oh, Hades, Hades!

Chorus:

Aidoneus, Aidoneus!

Chorus:

Lord of the world of the eternal darkness!

**1560**

Chorus:

If it is proper for me to do so then let me call upon you and upon the unseeable goddess, Persephone...

Chorus:

...with all due respect and reverence!

Chorus:

Let us ask you to let this stranger arrive at the dark meadows of the underworld and to the halls of the  
Styx, free of deep-groaning pains and of unbearable torture.

Chorus:

He had suffered much, Lord, through no fault of his own and a just god must now restore him.

Chorus:

Oh, goddesses of the earth!

Chorus:

Demeter!

Chorus:

Persephone!

**1570**

Chorus:

And you, too, body of an indomitable beast!

Chorus:

Cerberus!

Chorus:

They say you have your bed in a cave by the side of Hades' great gate.

Chorus:

A howling guard for Hades!

Chorus:

Son of Earth and Tartarus!

Chorus:

Of you I ask that this stranger be allowed to enter easily through those gates to the eternal meadows of  
the dead.

Chorus:

I pray to you, bearer of eternal sleep to all!

*Enter Messenger*

**1579**

Messenger:

Men of the city, let me be brief with this announcement: Oedipus is dead!

But, gentlemen, I cannot be brief in telling how that happened. Neither the words nor the deeds will  
allow brevity in this.

Chorus:

So the poor man is dead?

Messenger:

You may be certain of it. The man lives no more!

Chorus:

Tell us how he died.

Chorus:

Have the gods given him a painless and easy death?

Messenger:

That is a wondrous mystery!

You were here and you saw him when he left with your eyes.

You saw how he walked away all by himself, with no one to guide his steps. All of his friends followed behind him as he led the way.

**1590**

But when he came to the edge, to the threshold of the abyss, to the steps that are made of bronze, he stopped at one of the many crossroads, near that deep fountain where the pact of eternal friendship between Theseus and Perithus is written.

He stopped there and there, between that fountain and the Thorician rock, he sat down on the earth, near a hollow wild pear tree and a tomb stone. He took off his filthy clothes and called out to his daughters to bring him water from a nearby running stream, to purify himself with and to conduct libations.

**1600**

The girls ran off to the lush hill of Demeter close by and hurriedly did as their father told them and when they came back they bathed him and dressed him as dictated by the holy custom.

And when Oedipus was satisfied and had all of his needs met, Zeus of the earth gave out a thunder that made the girls shudder with fear. They fell at his knees and cried bitterly and beat their breasts relentlessly.

**1610**

When Oedipus saw them like this and heard their pitiful groans, he took them into his arms and said to them, "Come, my darlings. This is your father's last day. My life has come to its end and so you won't have this heavy burden of caring for me any longer. I know just how heavy that burden was, my daughters but let me ease that burden with just these few words: No one on earth has loved you as much as your father has! Ah, but, my darlings, you will lose him soon and you will be orphans for the rest of your lives!"

**1620**

In this tight embrace all three of them sobbed for a while and then, when they stopped crying and they stood there silently, a terrible voice came out of nowhere and from everywhere, a voice that stood straight the hair on the girls' head.

God's voice called out loudly and often, "Oedipus! Oedipus! You are wasting time! What is the point of waiting any longer? Come! You have wasted too much time already!"

**1630**

When Oedipus heard god's call he asked that Theseus approach and when that happened, Oedipus said to him, "my dear friend, give your hand of ancient trust to my daughters and you, my girls, give him your hand and Theseus, promise me that you will never wish to betray them and that you will do what you think is best for them always."

Noble Theseus held back his tears and swore an oath to Oedipus that he would do as the stranger wished.

**1640**

Oedipus then stretched out his blind hands to his daughters and said, "My dears, it's now time for you to show courage. Leave this place so that you will not be able to see or hear things that should not be seen nor heard. Go now, my girls. Theseus, you stay and hear what is about to happen."

These are the last words we all heard from him and then, with tears in our eyes and with sighs, we followed the girls away from the place.

**1650**

We left but after a short while we turned our heads back and saw that the stranger had disappeared. Theseus was standing there alone and petrified, covering his eyes with his hands as if he had just seen a most horrifying, unbearable vision. A moment later, though, we see Theseus falling to his knees and praying with words addressed to both, the earth as well to Olympus, the home of the gods.

No mortal except Theseus can tell us how that man vanished.

**1660**

No blazing thunderbolt was sent by Zeus and no sea storm came rushing to sweep him away.

Perhaps some messenger from god had come for him or maybe the very foundations of the earth, the

kingdom of the dead, had kindly opened up for him, to receive him gently so he wouldn't feel any pain. Because Oedipus died without the groans of pain that usually come with terrible diseases. Mortals, in fact, would think his death to have come by some benign miracle.

If anyone thinks my words are those of a fool then so be it. I shall not beg for his indulgence.

Chorus:

So, where are his daughters and all his friends who went with him?

*Sounds of lamentation within.*

Messenger:

Not far. I can hear their crying approaching us.

*Enter Antigone and Ismene crying*

**1670**

Antigone:

Ah! Ah!

Now we must mourn more than we've ever mourned before!

The god-cursed blood that floods our veins, poor souls, two sisters, victims of their father's fate!

Yet that's not all!

We loved and born the pain of constant care for him.

Yet now, now we must mourn for seeing things unbearable to see, impossible to utter!

Chorus:

What is it, girls?

Antigone:

We can only guess!

Chorus:

Has he gone, girls?

**1679**

Antigone:

Gone, yes! Gone the way one might well wish to go.

The best way possible.

No wars claimed him, no sea snatched him but the wide meadows opened up and the invisible fate of death swallowed him.

Ah! Ah! Poor souls the both of us!

Black darkness, deadly darkness now spreads over our eyes, my poor sister!

Where now?

To what distant lands, upon what tormenting seas, must we now wander?

What bitter pains must we endure in order to survive?

**1689**

Ismene:

I don't know, Antigone!

How I wish murderous Hades came to take me, too!

Miserable soul! I could then share in my old father's fate.

Life ahead is life unliveable!

Chorus:

Dear girls!

Chorus:

Best sisters in the world!

Chorus:

We must all endure the will of the Heavens.

Chorus:

Why burn your hearts in this way?

Chorus:

Fate has not dealt you such a terrible path.

**1697**

Antigone:

There's misery even in the loss of misery.

The misery I felt when I had the poor man in my arms is no more. That misery I loved!

Oh father!

Oh, my darling father!

You're clothed now in the eternal darkness of the world below.

Never, father! Never will I, never will either of us, stop loving you!

Chorus:

He did...

Antigone:

...he did what pleased him.

Chorus:

What was it?

Antigone:

He died in a foreign land, a thing that pleased him.

His bed will always be under a cool shade.

He has not left this world unmourned!

Unmourned, my father!

Oh, father! Tears flood my eyes and I don't know how to soften the pain.

Ah, father! You wanted to die in a foreign land, alone, forsaken!

Oh father!

**1715**

Ismene:

Oh, father!

Oh, poor sister!

Without him now what Fate is in store for us?

*(Two lines are missing here)*

**1720**

Chorus:

But girls! Since his death was a happy one, why grieve so deeply?

Chorus:

No mortal's life is free of troubles.

Antigone: *To Ismene*

Come, darling sister, let's hurry back!

Ismene:

Where to, Antigone?

Antigone:

I have a great need to see...

Ismene:

To see what, darling?

Antigone:

To see his earthly home.

Ismene:

Whose earthly home?

Antigone:

Our dear father's, Ismene! Oh, I can't bear this pain!

Ismene:

But it isn't proper, Antigone. Can't you see?

**1730**

Antigone:

What's wrong, Ismene? Why are you going against me?

Ismene:

Because, you see...

Antigone:

Again? Why are you doing this to me?

Ismene:

Because he was died without a burial, Antigone, without anyone seeing him die!

Antigone:

Come! Come! Take me to that place and kill me there as well!

*(A line split by the two sisters is missing here)*

Ismene:

Ah, no! dear sister no!

How will I be able to live without you, as well, my darling sister?

Chorus:

Dear girls, don't be afraid!

Chorus:

Don't be afraid of anything!

Antigone:  
But where can I seek refuge?

Chorus:  
You know already where.

Antigone:  
I know what?

**1740**

Chorus:  
You know already that this place here will give you the refuge you seek.

Antigone:  
I have a feeling that...

Chorus:  
What? What's in your mind?

Antigone:  
I have a feeling that we should go back to our country but I'm not sure how.

Chorus:  
Don't even think such a thing.

Antigone:  
We're in the grips of misery!

Chorus:  
You always were, my children.

Antigone:  
It was awful then, it is dreadful now.

Chorus:  
You are indeed surrounded by an ocean of misery, girls!

Antigone:  
An ocean, yes!

Chorus:  
I agree.

Antigone:  
Oh god! Oh god! Where can we, miserable wretches go now? Where will we find some hope?

*Enter Theseus*

**1751**

Theseus:  
Dear girls, end your mourning now, please because it isn't proper to mourn for someone whose death was a sweet escape from pain. The gods will be angry.

Antigone:  
Son of Aegeas, we beg of you!

Theseus:  
What is it, what would you like me to do?

Antigone:  
We need to see our father's tomb, Theseus. With our own eyes.

Theseus:  
You can't go there. I cannot permit you.

Antigone:  
What do you mean, Lord Theseus?

**1760**

Theseus:  
Girls, Oedipus himself has ordered this. He has ordered me to never go back to that place and to tell no mortal of the whereabouts of his sacred tomb. This, he said would ensure that my country stays safe from enemy attacks.

My own words and oath were heard by Zeus himself, who hears everything.

Antigone:  
If that was his wish then we'll abide by it.

But, Theseus, take us back to ancient Thebes so we may try and avert the slaughter of our brothers.

Theseus:  
That I shall do and I shall do whatever you wish, for your sakes and for the sake of the man who only just descended into the underworld.  
On this obligation, I will do the best I can.



1777

Chorus:

Mourn no more, you two and never cry again!

Chorus:

This man will fulfill all his promises.

*Exit all*

**END OF  
SOPHOCLES'  
"OEDIPUS AT COLONUS"**

Note: Readers might wish to also read Seneca's "Oedipus" Translated by F.J. Miller [here](#)